

Belchamp Public Rights of Way Group

Report for the Annual Parish Assemblies - 2026

As I sit here starting this report, I look out onto a grey, gloomy day, but at the moment it isn't raining. That said, rain rather than frost, has been a feature of this winter and walking on the footpaths in our area has meant footwear rapidly looking more like moon boots as the clay soil sticks to the soles and makes lifting each foot more like having weights attached than just walking. A consequence of this has been a period of inactivity as far as footpath work parties are concerned.

However, the weather hasn't prevented cutting vegetation back around some of the waymarker posts. Winter is obviously the best time to do this and hopefully when the vegetation grows again, the posts will still be visible.

It is a fact that we have undertaken more brush cutting in terms of hours spent than replacing way marker posts or indeed bridge building, but given that we don't have set rules for how we apportion volunteer time, brush cutting counts just as much as other activities. Each year about this time, Essex Highways ask me to say where brush cutting will be necessary in the future. The truth is, I wish I knew! During the last growing season we have responded to the footpaths and bridleways that we have identified as needing attention and also when advised by local people. But just because we cut such and such footpath this year, doesn't necessarily mean it will need cutting next year. Added to this variable is the fact that Essex have a cutting schedule that they undertake with far bigger and more powerful equipment than our hand-held brush cutter. But they don't advise me which paths/bridleways they are going to cut or when. Consequently advising where the grass will need cutting is far from being a science.

What I will say on this matter though, is that I estimate we have cut in the region of 3 to 4 miles of overgrown grass on the footpaths in the last year.

In July we undertook work on the northern edge of our patch on the border with Clare, where we reinstated way marker posts and cleared really thick vegetation from one post that had 'disappeared' but was still in situ. Unfortunately, despite giving careful consideration to the siting of one post in this area (carefully positioning the post to avoid it being in the way of turning agricultural machinery), it has been knocked out of the ground. If a post is needing to be more visible than normal to walkers or farmers, I paint 2 white bands on the upper portion of the post to make it more obvious. I have prepared 2 posts painted as such that will be positioned appropriately.

I am aware of several posts that need either replacing or repositioning and these will be addressed this season. As far as I know, we are not in need of any footbridges, so the forthcoming year should be straightforward as far as work parties are concerned.

As always I never take the time given by the volunteers for granted. The support Essex Highways give is also a great benefit to us locally and hopefully this will continue even though the structure at County level is so dramatically changing.

Peter Hesketh

Footpath Warden & P3 Representative

1 March 2026