

Dear Mr McWilliam,

As you may have heard, the Ramblers is launching a project called the Big Pathwatch on 13 July. The Big Pathwatch is an initiative aimed at motivating communities to survey our rights of way network—footpaths, bridleways and byways—in England and Wales, and then to report their findings, both good and bad, via our purpose-built app or our website. Once the survey closes later in the year, we aim to produce the first comprehensive nationwide analysis of the condition of our paths.

We would be very grateful if you could share information about this project with the Chair and members of the Leicestershire Local Access Forum.

We understand that councils are facing reductions to their funding and many have cut their rights of way budgets as a consequence. Ramblers members tell us they are increasingly concerned that some of our path network is falling into disrepair and some paths are even becoming un-walkable. We also know that some councils are continuing to support their rights of way network well, finding innovative ways of working with our volunteers to ensure this statutory responsibility is met. The picture is mixed.

The Ramblers want to work with councils to find cost-effective solutions to maintain our path network. The results of the Big Pathwatch will help us identify areas which are in good repair and find good practice. It will also help us find out which maintenance issues cause walkers the most difficulty, which should help councils prioritise reported problems. Additionally, the project should increase our understanding of the impact of our volunteer path maintenance teams. Ramblers volunteers already clear and maintain paths in nearly every highway authority across England and Wales and we are looking at how to build on this work where it is most needed.

More broadly, the Big Pathwatch will help us celebrate our path network and show its value, as well as help improve the health of our communities by encouraging more people to get outside and enjoy our beautiful country.

We very much hope that the Leicestershire Local Access Forum will take part in the Big Pathwatch when it launches. We would also be very keen to hear:

- Why your community values the path network and how you use it.
- What impact cuts to path budgets have had on your community.
- Examples of councils managing the path network cost effectively.

Please find below some more information about the Big Pathwatch which you may want to use in any communications you have.

Please do not hesitate to contact my colleague Lizzie Flew at campaign@ramblers.org.uk if you have any questions or to share your thoughts about the project.

With best regards,

Benedict

Benedict Southworth
Chief Executive
The Ramblers

What is the Big Pathwatch?

The Big Pathwatch is an exciting new project from the Ramblers which aims to get walkers to survey all the rights of way—footpaths, bridleways and byways—in England and Wales to find out whether they are open and walkable - and where the best bits are! We'd like you to strap on your walking boots, download the Big Pathwatch app - or grab a pen and paper - and inspect our rights of way.

How can people get involved in the Big Pathwatch?

It's easy to take part in the Big Pathwatch:

- 1) From 13 July, visit: www.ramblers.org.uk/BigPathwatch
- 2) Download the free app
- 3) Choose your grid square
- 4) Walk every path in the grid square and use the app to tell us what you find

Don't have a smartphone? No problem – you'll be able to print off a survey card, complete it and upload the results to our website.