



# Maintenance & Inspections Strategy:

## Public Rights of Way (PRoW)

April 2022



Essex County Council

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# Maintenance & Inspections Strategy:

## Public Rights of Way

### 1.1. Introduction

The Essex County Council (ECC) Public Rights of Way (PRoW) Maintenance and Inspections Strategy has been fundamentally reviewed with PRoW officers, the inspection team and other practitioners to take account of the recommendations and best practice set out in the October 2016 “Well-managed Highway Infrastructure: A Code of Practice”.

The Code of Practice is designed to promote the adoption of an integrated asset management approach to highway infrastructure based on the establishment of local levels of service through risk-based assessment.

This document supports the overarching ECC Highways Maintenance Policy. It sets out and describes the service levels relating to our risk-based approach to managing how it organises, inspects and maintains the PRoW network it is responsible for.

Alongside this strategy will be supporting documents that set down the process and procedures to be operated.

This strategy covers the following key areas:

- Network Hierarchy
- Inspections
- Defect Investigatory levels
- Items for Inspection
- Defect Assessments
- Response times

### 1.2. Network Hierarchies

In 2022 a functional route hierarchy was implemented across the Essex Public Rights of Way network. This organised the Public Rights of Way that ECC Highways are responsible for into three hierarchies: the Primary network (PW1), Secondary network (PW2) and the Tertiary network (PW3). These routes created a network that better reflected the usage of the Public Rights of Way in Essex, which allow us to prioritise our maintenance and network decisions with greater accuracy and ensure a better flow and experience for the user.

Overleaf is a table outlining the rationale behind the makeup of each hierarchy.

	<b>Essex PRow Hierarchy</b>	<b>Category Name</b>	<b>Essex Description</b>	<b>Essex Example</b>
High footfall	PW1	Primary network	ECC Public Rights of Way Promoted routes. High Usage PRowS linking to high value countryside and leisure opportunities.	The Essex Way or Footpath 42 Herongate and Ingrave, a PRow providing access to Thorndon Country Park
	PW2	Secondary Network	High and Medium usage PRowS that link local access urban footways, feed into local shopping centres, railway stations, bus stations, schools, hospitals, public gardens, sports centres, and other public spaces, etc.	Bridleway 30 Danbury, a route through Danbury Common or or Bridleway 24 Writtle, a well-used cycle path into the city
Low footfall	PW3	Tertiary Network	Routes associated with low usage through rural areas.	Footpath 54 Galleywood, a path alongside arable fields or or Bridleway 47 Stock, a quiet tree-lined track

### **1.3. PRow Inspections – Strategy and Service Levels**

#### **1.3.1. General Principles for completion of PRow Inspections**

The Council shall carry out inspections using trained personnel in the manner deemed appropriate for the particular inspection route. The safety of the PRow Officer will always be of paramount consideration in determining the method of inspection.

Inspections of PRow will consider the public rights associated with the route, identify defects and record asset condition information. In the event of severe weather e.g. snow, or emergency conditions that effect business continuity like outbreaks of illness and disease the inspections may be suspended at the decision of senior management.

PRow which are in urban areas which have a mettalled surface and have urban character will be inspected and maintained under the Maintenance and Inspections Strategy: Carriageway Footway and Cycleway as if they were a footway.

### 1.3.2. Condition Inspection Frequency

Inspections will be undertaken on an annual basis for PW1 routes. Thereafter, inspections will be prioritised as resources permit to the remainder of the network. The PRow team are responsible for inspecting structures with a length of 8m or less.

The programme will need to remain flexible due to sickness or other unforeseen events.

### 1.3.3. Ad Hoc Inspections

In addition to the condition inspections, the Council receives reports and enquiries regarding its PRow assets, including a system to receive reports or enquiries of an emergency nature out of hours.

An enquiry is not considered to be a defect meeting the investigatory levels until it has been assessed by an Officer and until that time remains a query from the public.

On receipt of the report the unconfirmed defect will be triaged, based on the information received, and assigned one of the following two categories:

Urgent	Urgent enquiries will be assessed within 5 working days. *
Standard	The aim is to have an average assessment time of 56 days including site visit if required.*

*\*During periods of high demand such as after severe weather, it may not be possible to comply with these response times.*

Enquiries assessed as being non-safety related may be assigned for inspection through the condition inspection programme.

## 1.4. Items to be inspected and their Investigatory Levels

The main purpose of condition and ad hoc inspections is to identify defects that are likely to be a potential hazard or inconvenience to the highway user. The inspection is also used to identify non-safety defects that have an impact on long term serviceability and sustainability of the highway asset.

Assessing and then recording every minor defect or blemish on the PRow network would not be reasonable or practical. Therefore the common items to be assessed during an inspection and the corresponding investigatory levels are set out below. All defects that meet or exceed the investigatory levels on PRow maintainable at public expense shall be recorded.

Item	Defect	Investigatory Level	Notes
Surface	<p>Line of path not marked on ground across arable crop and no visible waymarkers</p> <p>Surface ploughed and not marked after 14 days from first inspection</p> <p>Encroachment on width of path, but is still passable</p> <p>Linear ruts created by vehicular use</p> <p>A pothole or large depressions 200mm long and 200mm wide on natural or unbound surface and where there is no easy route around multiple similar defects</p> <p>A pothole &gt;100mm long and &gt;100mm wide on bituminous or other bound surface and where there is no easy route around multiple similar defects</p> <p>Animal activity causing a hazard and where there is no easy route around multiple similar defects</p>	<p>Defect present</p> <p>Defect present</p> <p>Where recorded width, historic width or legal minimum is compromised</p> <p>Deeper than 400mm for length of more than 30m, and leaving an available surface of less than 1.5m width</p> <p>&gt;200mm depth</p> <p>&gt;100mm depth</p> <p>Defect present</p>	<p>This would include crops not cut or sprayed off</p> <p>Encroachment from erosion, ploughing or fencing. This item is not for upgrowth or overgrowth.</p> <p>Parallel wheel ruts are accepted in unsurfaced vehicular highways</p> <p>Poaching by livestock or by usage, warrens, setts or dens etc</p>
Steps	<p>Missing sections</p> <p>Damaged or failing item causing a hazard to the user</p>	<p>Defect present</p> <p>Defect present</p>	
Bridge	<p>Damaged or failing item causing a hazard to the user</p>	<p>Defect present</p>	

Item	Defect	Investigatory Level	Notes
	Deck planks missing Whole item missing	Defect present Defect present	Note that this is missing legitimate structures, not where improvements are required to the network to install a bridge at a fording point or to install one that has never existed on the network or is not highway maintainable.
Boardwalk	Damaged or failing item causing a hazard to the user Missing sections	Defect present Defect present	
Handrail (to either bridge or slope or steps)	Damaged or unstable item (unrestrained movement when pressure is applied) causing a hazard to the user Item missing	Defect present Defect present	For bridge handrails, ditch depth over 1m Handrails are not a usual accompaniment to steps or slope on PW3
Vegetation upgrowth	Grass growth Dense nettles, thistles or other nuisance upgrowth for a length of over 10m Growth of shrubby vegetation within highway boundary – brambles, blackthorn	Height >450mm Defect present Defect present Defect present	On PW1 only Nuisance growth must be within the boundary of the highway and obstructing passage. Nuisance growth must be within the boundary of the highway and obstructing passage.
Vegetation side growth	Vegetation growth from beside highway restricts passage	Where known width, historic width or legal minimum is compromised	



Item	Defect	Investigatory Level	Notes
Drainage	Blocked or collapsed ditches or drainage systems, including culverts that are causing flooding or surface damage to highway	Defect present	
Flooding	Usage prevented by standing water at least ten working days after last significant rainfall	Defect present	
	Water flowing across highway (other than a ford) so as to prevent use at least ten working days after last significant rainfall	Defect present	
Pedestrian guard rails and barriers	Missing item causing a hazard to the user	Defect present	ECC responsibility
	Damaged or unstable item (unrestrained movement when pressure is applied)	Defect present	
Bollards	Missing item causing a hazard to the user	Defect present	
	Damaged or unstable (unrestrained movement when pressure is applied)	Defect present	
Trees within and beside highway	Unstable tree with danger of collapse onto highway	Defect present	
	Fallen tree obstructing clear passage	Defect present	
Fingerpost	Missing item	Defect present	
	Damaged or unstable item (unrestrained movement when pressure is applied)	Defect present	
	Item shows incorrect status	Defect present	

Item	Defect	Investigatory Level	Notes
Waymark post	Missing item causing a hazard to the user  Discs missing, faded or showing incorrect status or direction	At junction with other PRow or where inspector assesses it is necessary to identify the network	Officer to rectify on site
Obstruction	Permanent or temporary obstruction in the highway so as to prevent passage	Defect present	Reservoir or ponds, fly tips, buildings, hay bales, silage or manure, machinery or vehicles, fencing or walls etc.
Other hazards to the public	Anything else considered a hazard	Defect present	e.g. Entire width of path extremely muddy, intimidating animal
Stile	Does not meet appropriate standard  Unstable item causing a hazard to users	Defect present  Defect present	
Gate	Does not meet appropriate standard  Unstable item causing a hazard to users	Defect present  Defect present	

Where defects are caused by or the responsibility of a third party a defect will be recorded and the responsible party notified of our assessment and their responsibilities in rectifying the defect.

## 1.5. Defect Assessment

Defects that are going to be recorded shall be risk assessed during the inspection on a site specific basis. This allows other considerations that the Officer feels relevant to be factored into the risk assessment. This is used to determine the level of response. The general process and methodology to be applied by the Officer is set out below. Once a defect meets investigatory level, it is risk assessed. The risk shall be assessed in two parts; consequence and likelihood.

### 1.5.1. Consequence

The Officer will conduct an assessment which considers the most likely outcome if there is an interaction by a highway user with the defect.

Examples of factors that an Officer will consider are:

- The impact of the defect upon people likely to use a PRow of this character including:
  - Whether it would prevent use
  - Whether it would be likely to present a significant safety risk
  - Whether it would be likely to present a significant impairment to the use of the PRow
- Any other circumstances that would increase the likely consequence of an interaction e.g. a trip defect located at the top of the steps

The likely consequence of an interaction by a highway user will be quantified by the Officer using their experience and judgement on a scale of 1 to 4.

### 1.5.2. Likelihood

The likelihood of a highway user interacting with the defect shall be quantified on a scale of 1 to 4.

Considerations will include the following;

- Its location in the highway
  - All users exercising their public rights on the highway
  - Other factors within the knowledge of the inspector
1. Very Low likelihood (up to 40% of users)
  2. Low likelihood (41 to 60% of users)
  3. Medium likelihood (61 to 80% of users)
  4. High likelihood (over 80% of users)

		Likelihood			
		Very Low (1) (up to 40%)	Low (2) (41-60%)	Medium (3) (61-80%)	High (4) (over 80%)
Consequence	Negligible (1)	1	2	3	4
	Minor (2)	2	4	6	8
	Noticeable (3)	3	6	9	12
	Serious (4)	4	8	12	16

### 1.5.3. Risk Factor Score

The risk factor is the combination of likelihood and consequence assessments multiplied together. This will produce a range of scores from 1 to 16. It is this score that identifies the seriousness of the risk and consequently the appropriate level of response.

The level of response can be correlated with the risk factor scores via the risk matrix below.

### 1.6. Defect Response Times

Defects will be defined as follows:

- Priority 1 and 2 defects are those that following risk assessment require a prioritised repair or make safe to ensure the safety of the highway user.
- Priority 3 and 4 defects are those that following risk assessment are of low risk and are considered to be defects that impact long term serviceability and sustainability of the highway asset. These defects will be addressed in a planned manner as resources permit.

Response time is defined as the time taken to effect a make safe or permanent repair from the time the defect is assessed on site by an Officer.

Primary PRow route		Secondary PRow route		Tertiary PRow route	
Priority response	Response Time	Priority response	Response Time	Priority response	Response Time
<b>S1</b> (score 16)	2 working days*	<b>S1</b> (score 16)	5 working days*	<b>S1</b> (score 16)	10 working days*
<b>S2</b> (scores 8-12)	20 working days	<b>S2</b> (scores 8-12)	40 working days	<b>S2</b> (scores 8-12)	40 working days
<b>S3</b> (scores 4-6)	Defect to be considered for repair as part of a planned maintenance programme	<b>S3</b> (scores 4-6)	Defect to be considered for repair as part of a planned maintenance programme	<b>S3</b> (scores 4-6)	Presumption not to undertake repair within a stated time period
<b>S4</b> (scores 1-3)	Presumption not to undertake repair within a stated time period	<b>S4</b> (scores 1-3)	Presumption not to undertake repair within a stated time period	<b>S4</b> (scores 1-3)	Presumption not to undertake repair within a stated time period

\* Where an S1 defect may require follow up treatment to affect a permanent repair, this will be undertaken as Priority 3 (S3) defect.

#### 1.6.1. Guidance and Monitoring

This type of assessment by its nature is subjective and therefore every PRow Officer attends regular training sessions. In addition there is an audit regime in place to check the quality and consistency of defect identification and recording. Other supporting documents contain information about how Officers undertake this function.

### **1.6.2. Exceptions**

There will be occasions where the Officer will be faced with exceptional situations or when having completed the defect assessment the Officer feels a higher priority is warranted. In such situations the Officer may use their discretion to increase the priority of a defect.

In these cases the Officer will record this increase on the notes relevant to the defect summarising their reasoning. Supporting evidence in the form of extra photographs, etc. may be linked or attached within the asset management system.

### **1.6.3. Recording of Inspections and Defects**

All inspections are to be electronically recorded with the following information.

- Date and time of inspection
- Identity of the lead Officer
- Type of inspection
- Identity of secondary Officer (if applicable)
- Notes of any issues or concerns noted by the Officer
- General photographs of the PRow that was inspected

Defects will be recorded with the following information.

- Date and time that the defect was recorded
- Identity of the Officer
- Description of the defect (including any measurements)
- Location of the defect
- The assessment scores and risk factor score
- The defect priority
- Photographs where available and appropriate

### **1.6.4. Performance Management**

In order to assess and manage the delivery the following measures and indicators will be recorded and assessed:

- Monitoring and reporting each year the level of missed inspections, split by cause
- Monitoring and reporting each month the level of defects being recorded, split by priority

The reports shall be maintained and presented as Condition Inspection Performance Measures.

### **1.6.5. Key Roles and Competencies**

There is a dedicated team responsible for undertaking PRow Condition Inspections and Ad Hoc Inspections in accordance with this Strategy. All members of the team will be assessed against the PRow Inspections Competency Framework to ensure they meet the minimum standards for their role.

The Competency Framework will set out the expected knowledge level against the relevant tasks or requirements for each role in the team.

This information is issued by:  
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