

Public Rights of Way management priorities



A main aim of East Sussex County Council's (ESCC's) Rights of Way Team is to protect and maintain footpaths, bridleways and byways. However, as there are over 2,000 miles of Rights of Way in the County, it is vital that we prioritise our work and deal with the most urgent public reports first. This note gives a brief outline of how the Rights of Way Team prioritises reports from the public.

Why does the Rights of Way Team need to prioritise public reports?

The Rights of Way network in East Sussex is approximately the same length as the road network. Table 1 (below) shows how many assets (stiles, gates, signposts, steps and bridges) currently exist on the Rights of Way network. This table is based on a rolling survey of the network which covers the whole county in three years. Please note that this table does not include other obstructions which may affect access.

Type of asset	Total number on Rights of Way in East Sussex*
Bridge	2,655
Gate	4,523
Steps	1,046
Stile	6,053
Signpost/waymarks	10,040

**Based on 2010/11 survey*

Managing such a large number of assets needs a prioritised approach. For example, the maintenance of stiles and gates is a landowner's responsibility so the County Council must first trace them to request repairs. Once a landowner has been contacted, the subsequent legal processes necessary to obtain repairs can then take a further 3 months.

We also aim to carry out work that benefits the largest number of path users and protects public safety as a priority.

How does the Rights of Way Team prioritise public reports?

When a report is received from the public, the Rights of Way Officer will assess how quickly a definite response is needed from ESCC. The Rights of Way Priority Statement (see Chart 1 below) details how public reports are prioritised. In summary, dangerous problems on the most popular paths are given the highest priority for inspection and resolution. (For example, a fallen tree hanging over a town-centre route to school.) Total path obstructions, where no alternative route is available, are also usually given a high priority, particularly on well-used or potentially useful paths.

At the other end of the scale, inconveniences (for example, minor problems where no risk is caused to the public) are regarded as a lower priority. This is especially the case where a suitable alternative route around the problem is available or if the path is not well-used due to its location in the Rights of Way network.

Low priority problems may range from minor overgrowth, a lack of waymarking or a historical problem that does not affect access – for example, a bridge in a slightly incorrect location.

The Rights of Way Priority Statement was formally adopted by the County Council in 2007 following consultation with the East Sussex Local Access Forum – an independent group which provides expert advice on countryside access issues.

How do we deal with high priority problems?

If we receive a report where public safety may be at risk, we will aim to inspect the path urgently. We will also look to resolve or remove any hazards as soon as possible so that the path can be used safely. In some cases, we may need to temporarily close the path to the public until safety issues are resolved.

Where a path is reported as being newly obstructed, we will refer to our network survey records and, if necessary, inspect as soon as possible. If there is no easy alternative route available to the public, then we will look to remove obstructions from the path – generally within 3-6 months of the first report. Please bear in mind that this timescale can vary due to legal processes.

How do we deal with lower priority problems?

Where a problem does not cause an immediate hazard or total obstruction to path users, any reports from the public are added to a database. This database allows us to record lower priority problems so that they can be resolved when the opportunity arises.

Reports of paths affected by cropping and ploughing

During the growing season, the Rights of Way Team receives more reports of cropped and ploughed paths than it can investigate and resolve. So, when a report of cropping or ploughing is received, it is added to our database. We then use these records to prioritise action against the most regular and persistent offenders.

Whilst we may not immediately respond to a report of cropping or ploughing, this information report still provides useful evidence that may allow action to be taken in the future.

Unavailable paths

Around 1% of the Rights of Way network in East Sussex is classified as 'unavailable.' Paths in this category have usually been historically obstructed by major issues (such as buildings or developments) or are affected by legal map problems. For example, a path finishing at a parish boundary with no continuation.

Due to the complexity of the problems affecting unavailable paths, reports relating to them are treated on a case by case basis and are not prioritised using the Rights of Way Priority Statement. For more information regarding unavailable paths, please contact the Rights of Way Team.

What happens when I report a problem?

At the time of your initial report, if it is a high priority, the Rights of Way Officer will try to give you an approximate timescale for inspection and resolution. If the problem is a lower priority and we will not be taking immediate action, then the Officer will explain why.

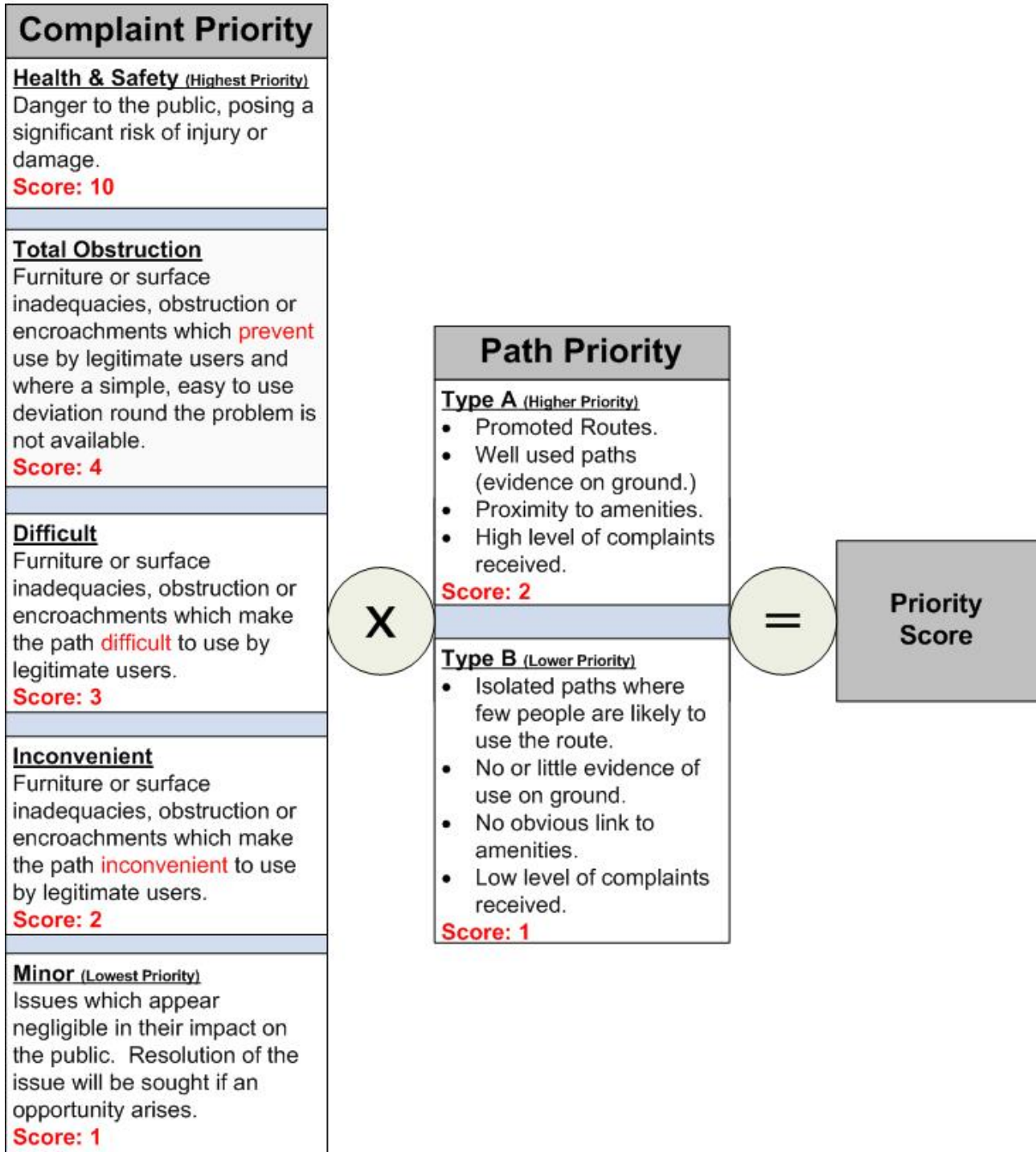
How can I report a problem or find out more about Rights of Way Priorities?

Contact the Rights of Way Team on tel: 0345 608193 or email: rightsofway@eastsussex.gov.uk or report a problem using our Fault Reporting system:

eastsussex.gov.uk/contactus/reportaproblem/streetproblem.htm

Chart 1 – Rights of Way Priority Statement

Rights of Way Priority Statement



How to calculate the Priority Score for a Rights of Way issue.

1. Choose a Complaint Priority which best fits the issue.
2. Choose a Path Priority which best fits the Right of Way on which the issue is situated.
3. Multiply the relevant Complaint Priority and Path Priority Scores. The result is the Priority Score.

Note: Officers retain the discretion to deal with issues regardless of the above prioritisation.