

Area Footpaths Subcommittee report

*Roger Bangs, Phil Escritt, Lesley Abbiss, Anne Conchie, Libby Martin, Colin Knight
(District and Borough Footpath Secretaries)*

Our year began with the untimely death of Mark Westley, our Area Footpaths Secretary for many years (see *Stile*, June 2025).

Having no substitute for Mark, our only way to replace his expertise was to work together as a team to pool our knowledge and share the load. Two new District Footpaths Secretaries—Lesley Abbiss in East Herts and Anne Conchie in North Herts—are doing great work. The focus has been on recruiting new parish volunteers and providing training for new and existing Footpath Wardens. Our numbers dropped away to begin with, but there are now 53 volunteers covering most of Hertfordshire. A team of eight St Albans & District Footpaths Society volunteers are working closely with us. We still need a lot more help, particularly in East Herts District—see the list of vacancies on page 15.

As well as checking the current condition of paths, we are continuing to fight to protect rights of way, including against the new threats of solar farms and data centres. If you know of a development near where you live that could affect footpaths, please send us an email (see below). We don't always get notified. Development can be an opportunity to improve the Rights of Way network, as we hope to do near Potters Bar data centre.

The reorganisation of Hertfordshire County Council into two, three or four Unitary Authorities hangs over us. Our existing footpaths support structure mirrors the current county structure, with a Footpath Officer for each District or Borough. However it changes, the result will be fewer, larger units—two, three or four new counties. Will these be served by the existing Herts CRoW team, or will that too be split up? The Ramblers' proposed change in governance structure is another uncertainty ahead.

For now, we are continuing with our present structure, with a team acting as 'Area Footpaths Secretary'. This cooperative way of working could well make us stronger in the long run. Please come and join us! Contact:

hnmareafootpaths@gmail.com