

Community Highways Volunteering Scheme - FAQs

Responsibility of Highway issues

- 1. The County Council has a statutory responsibility for the maintenance of all ROW. This scheme appears to be passing this responsibility to volunteers. Is there any suggestion that the County Council no longer has this statutory responsibility?**

The community volunteer scheme is the result of work carried out by a Member Working Group that looked at the County Council's approach to highway maintenance.

Using the successful winter volunteer scheme as a template, the highway volunteer scheme seeks to enable local communities to carry out small scale improvements in their area within a supportive framework. The works listed in the pack are works that a number of communities already carry out and are areas that, unless posing a safety issue, the County Council would not ordinarily get round to due to current resourcing pressures (staff and budgets).

Those Members on the working group felt that the County Council should be encouraging those members of the public that wished to undertake works that could have a positive effect on the local community. Local Highway Officers regularly get approached by parish council asking if they could carry out small scale improvements and it is hoped that the volunteer scheme will help to facilitate this in a safe and coordinated manner.

Please be reassured you that we are not looking to absolve ourselves of our responsibility as Highway Authority, rather we are looking to support communities where there is a desire to get involved in the upkeep of their local area.

- 2. Please can you clarify what your statutory duty is in respect of each of these activities and the intervention level you have set where action must take place?**

Our statutory duty for the four activities outlined in the information pack is that we, as Highway Authority, would intervene if a sign, vegetation, or any other highway issue, is causing a safety hazard. This would be assessed by a local officer and actioned accordingly. If members of the public or Parishes believe there is a safety concern, this should to be reported to us via our online reporting tool: <https://highwaysreporting.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/>.

Our intervention levels for all highway defects can be found at the following link: http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/info/20006/travel_roads_and_parking/66/transport_plans_and_policies/4

- 3. Would you confirm the role (if any) that the Parish Council would be required to take (other than adopting the scheme and completing the application form).**

There is no 'role' as such for the Parish Council, the purpose of this scheme is to let Parishes know that they are more than welcome to participate in these activities within their local area.

There is no requirement for a specific number of hours to be worked as part of this scheme either, just as and when work is needed.

4. If Parish Councils sign up to the lower priority tasks as detailed in the information pack, does this ensure that the Highways Service will be more readily available to help the community deal with the problems that are outside of their remit?

The County Council is currently under increasing pressure with regards to staffing levels and budgets. Any help volunteers can provide will be very much appreciated and will help to ease these pressures, however we will remain to prioritise highways works and the activities highlighted in the information pack are areas we have identified as low priority.

If volunteers notice any additional highways defects, these should be reported to us via the online reporting tool and will be actioned accordingly.

5. Once signed up do Parishes and Community Groups become solely responsible for the maintenance work on a given area that they have worked on, or do these activities remain the low priority tasks under Highways' responsibility, which the Parish Council's volunteers are just helping with as and when they can.

The Community Highways Volunteering Scheme is simply a framework for small scale works on the highways within the boundaries of villages. This is to help the Council when budget and resource pressures are high. As Highway Authority, the Council remains responsible for all works on Cambridgeshire Highways, despite assistance from volunteers. Therefore these activities remain the low priority of the Highways Service.

If volunteers assist we do not expect to pass the responsibility of this work on to those volunteers. We are simply reaching out to members of the public who would like to be involved in the upkeep of their local area. If larger works are required or there are safety concerns, the Highways Authority will still inspect the issue/s and action these accordingly.

6. Should local community groups and Parish Councils sign up to the scheme, do they become responsible for any issues or accidents that may occur as a result of any voluntary work they have undertaken on your behalf?

The County Council will indemnify volunteers in respect of any claims for loss or damage caused as a result of undertaking approved activities at approved locations and holds appropriate insurance cover to protect the interests of the volunteers and the Council itself. This indemnity will not operate in circumstances where any loss or damage was caused as a result of deliberate, unlawful or illegal actions on the part of the volunteer.

We ask for all volunteers to read the information pack and attend an introductory visit from a County Council Highways Officer to ensure all works are fully understood, including all health and safety aspects. In addition to this we also ask all each volunteer to record the work they do.

Support from the Council

- 1. Do you have an email poster, information sheet that we may be able to include in our village magazine?**

Unfortunately we do not have any posters or information sheets available. However we would encourage community groups and Parish Councils to include the volunteering scheme in their local newsletters and magazines.

- 2. This seems to be asking Parish Council's and local community groups for a favour and offering nothing in return. Does the council provide anything to support this activity? I see they don't supply PPE, but would have hoped provide rubbish bags and take away branches, rubbish etc.**

We understand that many Parishes and local community groups are already doing lots of volunteering and the Council are grateful for all the hard work that is undertaken. The purpose of the Community Highways Volunteering Scheme is to put a framework around this and communicate to communities that they are welcome to part take in these activities.

Unfortunately we cannot provide any equipment or PPE. The four areas of work listed in the scheme documentation are small scale improvements that should not result in a huge amount of debris or rubbish. If a community or Parish Council requires larger scale improvements or works, we would advise them to report the issue through our online reporting tool and a Local Highway Officer will investigate the issue and arrange for works to be done if necessary.

- 3. Would you be prepared to come along a talk to residents if we held an open meeting?**

We will, where possible, attend local meetings, however we cannot guarantee or commit to this.

To register for the volunteering scheme, we ask each Parish Council or local community group to complete the registration form at the back of the information pack. As a result the relevant Local Highway Officer will be in touch to arrange an initial visit. Any questions you may have should be asked at this opportunity.

- 4. On page 3 of the information pack it states that it only applies to footways, footpaths and bridleways .Does this mean that it does not apply to Byways?**

The Community Highways Volunteering Scheme applies to all public highway within the local neighbourhood, therefore the scheme does apply to byways.

- 5. Most footpaths pass across privately owned farmland. The Land owners are responsible for the maintenance of these paths and the County Council has the authority to order that they do so if the paths are not kept clear to the laid down dimensions. Will the County Council make arrangements with the appropriate land owners if volunteers want to offer to clear across their land?**

Regarding privately owned land, we would advise local communities to liaise with their relevant Local Highway Officer who can offer advice and liaise with local farmers or land owners if needed. (If Parishes are unaware of their Local Highway Officer, they can email local.highways@cambridgeshire.gov.uk to find out).

What happens once I have registered?

- 1. Page 10 of the information pack suggests that all volunteers work must be approved. Who will give this approval and how will it be given?**

If a Parish or local community is interested in the scheme, we ask for them to email the registration form to local.highways@cambridgeshire.gov.uk to organise an initial site visit from their Local Highway Officer. This visit is to ensure all health and safety is fully understood and the works proposed are within the limits of this scheme. Parishes and local communities do not need formal approval as such, but do require this introduction meeting with the Local Highway Officer prior to any work.

- 2. Can we assume it's OK for volunteers to start undertaking work outlined in the park with immediate effect or do we need to wait for confirmation of registration?**

If a Parish Council or local community group is in regular contact with their Local Highways Officer and has built up a good knowledge of highway volunteering in the past we would be content for them to begin volunteering immediately, providing their Local Highway Officer has confirmed this.

However, if a Parish or Community Group is not in contact with their Local Highway Officer and has not taken part in any previous highways volunteering, we would advise you to wait until you have had your initial meeting with your County Council Local Highway Officer. This is to ensure we are happy all health and safety aspects are fully understood and provides the opportunity for volunteers to ask any questions they may have.

Financial

- 1. Presumably you must, by definition, have funding for the minimum statutory standard and so why is there no proposal to transfer this to any Parish wishing to supplement this minimum service level.**

In terms of funding, the Highways Service budget is divided by area and then devolved to our Local Highway Officers who look after a specific area of the county. It is the decision and responsibility of our Local Highway Officers as to what this budget is spent on, rather than us having specific budgets for each activity.

- 2. What savings are being put into the budget to reflect work which will be done by others on our behalf?**

Initially we are not expecting any savings to be made through this approach. The tasks identified for volunteers are areas of work that, unless a safety issue or part of a planned programme (e.g. grass cutting), that we are unlikely to carry out due to resource pressures. However should the volunteer scheme gather momentum, and local communities experience and confidence grows, then the aspiration is for other areas of work to be added to the list. It would be these as yet un-specified areas of work that really would generate savings and therefore be reflected in future budgets.

The idea was to get the scheme off the ground, monitor take up and its success, then review accordingly and hopefully increase the tasks that volunteers could become involved in. Thus having a positive effect on future budgets as well as community cohesion through small scale local improvements.