

Meopham & District Footpaths Group

Risk assessment for Group Walks

Introduction: Walking, as undertaken by M&DFG, is a low risk activity. Consideration has, nevertheless, been given to the potential risks and action taken to remove or reduce these perceived risks.

The approach has been to prevent accidents or injury and to provide assurance, without impacting upon the enjoyment and significant benefits emanating from the Group's activities.

Responsibility

Responsibility for ensuring reasonable attention to the health and safety of walkers with the Group rests with the Walks Leaders, the Walks Secretary and all members of M&DFG Committee.

Risks

There may be an expectation that the Group is entirely responsible for the walkers.

Action taken – the Group states in writing that participants on a walk do so at their own risk. This statement is on the published walks programme and on the signing-in sheet for every walk.

Walker does not know where they are to walk or how long the walk is and could join an unsuitable walk.

Action taken – Details of the route to be taken are described in the walks programme, together with the approximate length.

The walks may contain hazards unknown to the walk leader.

Action – no walks to be undertaken where hazardous situations are known which would contradict the health and safety of walkers. Whilst not compulsory the leader will be expected to have covered the walk beforehand.

Weather conditions may be very poor or may change during the course of the walk.

Action – the leader will use his/her personal knowledge and experience to judge whether the walk should go ahead. If necessary he may revise the walk if conditions require such action.

Slips and falls.

Action - Such risks can result from unsuitable equipment. Those joining the walk will be required to wear suitable footwear and clothing commensurate with the weather conditions.

The leader will slow the walk if necessary to allow a more careful attention to footing if conditions so dictate.

Health condition of walkers.

Action - Whilst there will be no requirement of a health condition statement, anyone who is clearly unfit for the particular walk will be refused by the leader.

Crossing Roads / Blind bends.

Action - The leader will choose what he/she considers the safest place to cross, avoiding blind bends whenever possible. He will call on others to assist in checking the traffic. The back marker will ensure everyone is safely across. N.B. walkers must accept responsibility for their own safety and be alert and cooperative with the leader and back marker.

The leader walks too fast and walkers cannot keep up.

Action - A back marker will be appointed on every walk unless it is a small group of, say, six. He/she will ensure that no one is left behind and will deal with any problems that may arise.

How will the leader and back-marker be identified to give assurance to the walkers?

Action - The leaders are identified in the walks programme but in any event the leader will introduce him/herself at the start of the walk, provide brief information on the route and introduce the back marker. The walks programme states: 'For your own safety, please stay behind the walk leader and in front of the back marker'. This statement will be reinforced on the walk if it becomes necessary.

Dogs on a walk may trip or inconvenience walkers or cause problems regarding farm animals.

Action - Dogs are only allowed on the walks if the leader allows them – as stated in the walks programme. In any event they are required to be kept on short leads at all times.

Unsafe or difficult to cross stiles may be on the route.

Action - The leader will have done his/her best to ensure the stiles are fit for purpose and the Group will carry out an annual review, as part of the Monitoring exercise, to ensure safety in liaison with the KCC.

Excessive vegetation may prevent access; cause inconvenience or minor injury to persons or their clothing.

Action - The leader may have already sought action by the Group, or KCC, to have such obstructions removed or have planned a suitable diversion.

Farm animals may be seen as a hazard.

Action - The leader will have regard to any potential danger and will take an alternative route if deemed in the interest of the walkers. Special care will be taken if there are cows and calves together in the field.

Despite all reasonable efforts to evaluate perceived risks that may harm people and controls being put in place, has the Group collectively or individually any safeguards.

Action - Circumstances and liability arising are impossible to predict. However, the Group has purchased insurance which provides protection within the limits of the policy cover. It relates primarily to Liability. No admission of liability must ever be given.

KJD

26. 3. 2015