

Footpath Warden report for meeting 24 October 2017

1 Footpaths update and specific path issues

Since the February 2017 meeting, I have again walked all of the rights of way in the town, mostly with Catherine Hawkins.

The major regular actions we have undertaken are trimming nettles and brambles from the surface of paths, and pruning back bush and tree growth from the sides; much of this has been done with the equipment supplied by the Town Council (hedgetrimmer, saw, long arm shears), but we have also called on help from The Ramblers and The Conservation Volunteers, as detailed below.

Specific work is listed below, which includes places where representations have been made to Norfolk County Council (NCC) as Highway Authority responsible for public rights of way.

- FP1a - After a couple of years when the path across the field has been kept clear, the landholder has not cleared the path this year; the problem has been limited as the crop has been winter wheat, but it has been disappointing that NCC has chosen not to pursue this.
- FP2 northern section - This field edge path has been difficult for many years (photo), in spite of being on the NCC cutting programme; I have made direct representations to NCC's Countryside Access Officer (CAO) who has promised to meet the landowner.
- FP2 southern section - This is a cross field path, with a long history of not being fully made good after planting the crop; some effort has been made, but larger crops have obstructed the path. The CAO is taking this up.
- RB3 - This path is currently unavailable, having been unlawfully ploughed out for some years. NCC has been reluctant to take action, as one end joins a track which has not been recognised as a right of way. I have now started pressing the CAO for action on this, in anticipation of that track soon being designated a Restricted Byway.
- FP6 east and FP7 - These two paths run from Etling Green to join RB28, but had been unavailable for some time. At my pressing, NCC erected a fingerpost on RB28 where FP7 leaves it, and the landowner has been clearly marking the route of the path across the field (photo). Waymarking is still needed at Etling Green.
- FP10 - At my request, a fingerpost has been erected at the Norwich Road end.
- FP12a - NCC has erected a fingerpost at Shipdham Road.
- FP14 - Following clearance by NCC's contractor of the legal line of the path along the school fence, we have worked on the path a number of times to keep the nettles down (including The Ramblers' brushcutter). NCC also erected fingerposts at two points along the route, and I have added some waymarking disks. The main issue here now is the litter along the path (photo), much of it apparently coming from St Nicholas Junior School.



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- FP14a - Plans to fill the scouring of the path near to Stone Road, where floodwater from the road has eroded the ground, have been suspended as the problem has receded during the summer. Consents will probably be needed from Natural England as this path leads to Scarning Fen SSSI.
- FP17 - NCC has erected a fingerpost at Cowper Road. I assume it has also been NCC that has glued waymark disks to the bus shelter where the path enters the Market Place.
- FP18 - I have put in waymark disks where this path meets FP34.
- FP19 - NCC has erected a fingerpost at Gressenhall Road.
- FP23 - a fingerpost put in by NCC at Northall Green Road has been broken off, and I am waiting for it to be replaced.
- FP25 - This path has had two visits from The Ramblers' brushcutter, as well as treatment from the strimmer provided by the Town Council.
- RB27 - Two recent visits have shown the gate at the north end of this Restricted Byway to have been locked across the path, which is unlawful. NCC reported a couple of years ago that they had been told this would be done only if unwelcome 4x4 drivers were encroaching on the land, but this seems not to have been the case on my visits. A report to NCC has, so far, met with an undertaking to 'monitor' the situation, though I doubt this is in any way proactive. On the positive side, NCC installed a waymark where the track entered the trees near The Neatherd, and I put one up at the north end to confirm it was a Restricted Byway.
- RB28 - As well as the routine clearance of nettles and brambles along this route, a couple of fallen trees have been removed, but the major work was done in conjunction with The Conservation Volunteers, who spent a session digging out tree roots in the path which provided a hidden tripping hazard.
- RB30 - This is another route requiring regular attention to the nettles and bush, and tree growth which narrows the path and reduced its height. The major problem, however, was with a 20m section of path near Swanton Road where although legally a Restricted Byway, the path was barely wide enough to allow people to walk between a thorn hedge and a deep and steep sided ditch; to make matters work, the path sloped across its width - into the ditch. Another session from The Conservation Volunteers (with due permission from the landowner) has cut the hedge well back and enabled us to flatten the path, making it safe to walk (before and after photos).



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- RB31 - This is the path which requires more attention than any other, and has had plenty of visits from us, as well as three from The Ramblers' brushcutter.
- RB32 - NCC has reinstated a fingerpost where this path leaves The Neatherd.
- FP34 - NCC has erected a fingerpost at the sewage works entrance, and I have put in a waymark disk where it meets FP18.



A summary of outstanding issues is given below (my classifications).

footpath issues		current number and %		February 2017	
1	legal minimum not met	5	8.9%	8	13.8%
2	significant improvement needed	7	12.5%	10	17.2%
3	improvement welcome	8	14.3%	15	25.9%
4	for future action	4	7.1%	5	8.6%
5	no action needed	32	57.1%	20	34.5%
	total	56	100.0%	58	100.0%

As can be seen, the number of issues where improvement is needed, rather than merely welcome, has fallen from 18 to 12.

Using the NCC formula for assessing the value of work undertaken by volunteers (£20 per hour), the value of work done from 14 February 2017 (the last report) was £2890 - details below. Monitoring is calculated as time spent, regardless of the number of people; work done is calculated as person-hours.

Work and monitoring per hour @ £ 20

From	26 February 2017		
To	8 October 2017		
Work done	109.55	hours,	value £ 2198.33
Monitoring	34.35	hours,	value £ 691.67
Total	144.30	hours,	value £ 2890.00

The total since I started tracking this (June 2016) is £3827.33 in work, plus £1300.34 monitoring, £5127.67 altogether.

2 Claims for paths not currently recognised as rights of way

The claims for Cherry Lane, Hall Lane and connecting tracks attracted little opposition - the main objections being from The Ramblers and the Town Council regarding the limited widths proposed for some of them in the orders made by NCC. It is anticipated that these will be resolved by written representations.

3 Neatherd Moor and Etling Green

Once the process for confirming/reviewing byelaws regarding Neatherd Moor and Etling Green is agreed with/by Breckland District Council and being implemented, there will be need to consider whether RBs 28, 32 and 33 should be promoted as restricted byways (they are currently suitable only for walkers, cyclists and horse

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riders).

4 Badley Moor

It was disappointing to see and hear the proceedings at the recent Town Council meeting, and the decision then made to allow a further space of time for the kissing gate to be installed. I would suggest that the Council write formally (with signed receipt of delivery) to Mr Anema, confirming, and requiring him to confirm, the understanding then made, repeating (if the Council so desires) the offer to install the gate for him and under his supervision, and requesting that he open the field gate for such periods as he is not keeping stock on the Moor.

5 Walkers are Welcome

Linda Goreham has attended most of the meetings of Walkers are Welcome and can give her views on proceedings. Minutes of meetings are sent to Tony and can be obtained from him or me.

Since February we have

- presented our Annual Report to the public meeting on 8 June
- run further public walks with various partners: on 15 April (Dereham Windmill), 29 May (Konec), 28 August (Yaxham Waters) and 1 October (a garden party). Our last walk for 2017 is in liaison with the Mid-Norfolk Railway on 25 October.
- worked to extend the pack of 4 initial walks to 14 (3 further walks starting in Dereham but crossing the boundary, plus 7 'ride out, walk back' routes, 3 using the Mid-Norfolk Railway and 4 using Konec buses). The costs of producing 3000 packs is over £2000; we are grateful for the £750 promised by the Council, and anticipate securing the balance through Tesco's *Bags of Help* fund. All being well, the packs can go into production late this year and be available early in 2018 at the latest. The Committee is asked to approve the leaflets for production. (The two general leaflets are sent with this report, while the 14 walks will be brought to the meeting.)

**Ken Hawkins, Footpath Warden, Dereham Town Council
19 October 2017**