

Parish Council Meeting 10th January 2023

Footpath Officers Report

Since my last report at the very end of November it has been a relatively quiet time as far as PROW is concerned. The holiday season, and the wet weather making it difficult underfoot, has meant I have not walked our PROW as much as I would have liked. When I have been able to however, I have been out with my pruning saw and clippers and cleared a little storm damage here and there.

What I have been doing is engaging with others. Hopefully you would have all seen my article in the January Kingsland News – deferred from the December issue – in which I was given a generous amount of space to lay out my thoughts and ideas moving forward. You would have noted I asked for people to get in touch should they be interested in either walking the PROW regularly, and reporting issues, or assisting with maintenance and clearance where required. I am pleased to say that several people have already done so.

I wrote to thank them and now have a small collection of names for the spring when I will invite them, and anyone else who wishes to come along, to walk a few of our paths. In addition to those who volunteered to help with light maintenance, a fellow FPO from a neighbouring parish has offered his skills to assist with slightly heavier tasks, at cost, when it is felt an overkill to engage a commercial contractor.

I have had contact with the 'Leominster Walkers are Welcome' group who are a voluntary organisation working with the Tourist Information Centre. They aim to promote Leominster, walking is a recognised part of the town's tourism offer, as an attractive walking destination. This will enable the town to register on the national Walkers are Welcome website. Leaflets on circular walks have been published and planning is ongoing to introduce leaflets on 'Bus Walks'. This would involve a walker getting a bus from Leominster Bus Station to one of the villages and walking back to town, or vice versa. Obvious reasons to walk to Kingsland include it being a reasonably short walk from Leominster and we have several establishments selling refreshments. The Church may well benefit from additional visitors. Key to this initiative is landowners maintaining the PROW accordingly.

While premature at this stage, I have also been approaching manufacturers for prices for stock proof galvanised kissing gates and self-closing pedestrian gates.

As an aside I note, with a tinge of envy and a degree of embarrassment as a Councillor, that Eardisland, are now instigating a project to renew and modify gates, stiles and pathways to make it possible for the disabled and those less able to access the countryside, in organised and pre-planned groups, with the aim to promote physical fitness and mental well being.

Finally, information has been circulated on the role of FPOs. It lay out the guidelines HC expect volunteer FP Officers to abide by, and what tasks we can undertake. It is quite proscriptive, and I would ask you to take look at it. (Attached)

PARISH FOOTPATH OFFICERS [PFO] GUIDELINES

1. Parish Footpath Officers (PFOs) are representatives of the Parish Council and Herefordshire Council, The PFOs should be diplomatic and unbiased at all times. The essence of the job is co-operation. Conflict with landowners and Public Rights of Way users must be avoided. If such a situation is likely to arise the PFO should withdraw and report to the Public Rights of Way Team.
2. You will be given official Parish Council /Herefordshire Council authorisation letter and will be directly responsible to the Public rights of Way team.
3. PFOs will have to differentiate between Parish Council and Herefordshire Council responsibility and landowner responsibility, for example with regard to the maintenance of gates and stiles, obstructions, and overgrowth from hedgerows, trees etc.
4. The PRoW Inspector may request a PFO to undertake inspections and/or liaise with landowners within the parish or parishes they are responsible for.
5. You are encouraged to investigate and seek to resolve problems on your own initiative and paths should be inspected on a regular basis. Many complaints or defects can be resolved through immediate and/or direct action by the PFO. Others should be redirected to the PRoW team.
6. PFOs are authorised to undertake waymarking of routes. On no account should waymarkers be given to anyone else. PFOs may carry out minor maintenance, for example clearing growth from around stiles, gates and signposts.
7. PFOs are encouraged to advise the PRoW Team on problems in their areas that they are not able to resolve themselves, and in particular to seek advice or guidance on any matter they are not sure of. There are laws pertaining to Public Rights of Way, some of which are complex and it is important that all legalities are adhered to. The Highways Act 1980 is the primary legislation under which the PRoW network is maintained.
8. You will not enter into written correspondence with landowners in any event or make any verbal agreement without first consulting the PRoW team.
9. PFOs are expected to attend ongoing training meetings from time to time. Such meetings will give guidance on Public rights of Way law, installation of stiles and gates, way marking, land owner responsibilities, etc. Day to day advice is always readily available from the PROW Team and PFOs are encouraged to seek advice where necessary, either by phone or email.
10. The role only concerns Public Rights of Way as shown on the current Definitive Map.