

Footpath Officers Report

You would have already seen my email to you all giving my new FP Officers email address and the reasons I requested it? FPOfficer@kingsland-pc.gov.uk

Now that I am using it, I have recently contacted the editor of Kingsland News to introduce myself and ask if he will publish a few notes on FP issues as and when required – he has kindly agreed to do so. I intend to include the email address in the hope that parishioners will contact me with observations, suggestions, complaints and, hopefully, offers of help.

Having set out the scale of the problem with our FPs in my presentation before the summer break, I think the next step on improving our FPs is to initially focus on three things:

Safety, Accessibility and Convenience – The last of these is obviously subjective, what is convenient for some people will likely be inconvenient for others. But we need to start somewhere.

There is a definite need to follow a logical sequence to improve the overall standard of our PROW, there is no point clearing paths to nowhere or fixing stiles leading to damaged bridges which block further progress. Additionally, standing crops have made walking PROW extremely difficult this year, although with the change of season this has obviously become less of an issue of late and will be ameliorated in the future.

My intention is to initially concentrate on the much-used paths around the area of the Church. That is not to say that other paths leading from North Road, such as KL24 & KL28 will be ignored, we just need to start somewhere and it seems to me the routes near the Church are the most often used, probably because they are the easiest to walk. Eventually we will be able to move further afield.

Key to improvement across our estate is the engagement between landowners, the Parish Council and volunteer parishioners. Without even one aspect of this three-sided equation playing its part, achieving any level of success in making the paths safer and accessible to all will be much more difficult. Through the Kingsland News I will try and interest volunteers, some people have already expressed an interest in helping, and I hope for your support as parish councillors as well.

You may have already noticed that I am a firm believer in a picture painting a thousand words. These photographs are illustrative of some of the issues we face and do not represent all that needs looking at.

Of the three rows of photos - shown on page three - top row is about **Accessibility**, the second **Safety** and the third a mix of both. The third strand '**Convenience**' is covered by the locations covered.

KL1 Parallel to North Road – Accessibility.

The entire length of KL1 can be walked using gates which in theory means it is quite accessible. However, more, or less halfway long there is a stile which for some will prove an insurmountable obstacle.

KL2 Cobnash Road Crossing – Safety.

This is a 40mph road, the Traffic Management Working Group will doubtless confirm some vehicles travel much faster. The stile on the Southern side is rickety and close to the road meaning walkers, possibly with children or dogs, are exposed to the traffic while they clamber over it. The metal field gate is hard to maneuver and sometimes securely tied shut to the dilapidated fence post.

KL3 Parallel to Old Railway Line – Convenience.

This route is useful for avoiding the B4360 until crossing at Waterloo Mill. The first picture is self-explanatory. The second illustrates difficulties faced when walking, and the third what happens when there is no 'dog chute' and the barrier of a stile rather than a more accessible gate.

These are all examples of issues that should, given the goodwill of landowners, be fairly easy to rectify. To assist with this, from a Parish Council perspective, due to a lack of expenditure last year and this so far, there is some money in the budget to make a start.

This funding won't stretch forever but when combined with well-intentioned cooperation from the farming community, such as allowing, and perhaps paying for, upgrading stiles to gates, and reinstating FPs across fields within the statutory 28 days of planting new crops, these measures alone will go a long way to solving the majority of problems we now have.

As the 'new boy' both in the village and on the parish council, I would specifically ask for guidance from you all on contacting various landowners; be that in person, on the phone or via email, in order that I can firstly reassure them I am not some sort of 'Revolutionary Rambler' and secondly to explain that I only want to assist as many people as possible to enjoy the lovely countryside we are fortunate to have around Kingsland.

Inaccessible FP bridges.

Relevant to us are the 3 bridge closures, only one of which is published on the HC website, the one on our footpath KL6A leading across the Lugg to Eyton. It was originally closed in Nov 2022 for 6 months, subsequently that was then extended by a further 12 months until May 2023, and then again until May next year.

Of the other two closed bridges, not published on HC website, one is across Pinsley Brook near to Cholstrey. This closure should not affect walkers using KL4 towards Cholstrey if subsequently they are going north on to KL6, although an order posted at Waterloo Mill states that the footpath is closed until at least April 2025.

What will prevent further progress on KL6 is the downed bridge across Blue Ditch in the fields just south of the Lugg.

If all that sounds complicated, I apologise. The message to take away from this is that extensions to footpath closures, be it for broken bridges or not, must be granted by the relevant Secretary of State empowered to do so. Conceivably these extensions could go on indefinitely at the request of Hereford Council, and clearly do nothing to help us achieve the aim of a longer distance circular walks.

Perhaps a letter asking our MP to look into this matter may help focus HC on making the necessary repairs to the bridges.

Afternote: It is appreciated that the engineering standard for bridge repairs has changed and is delaying remedial works, given the bridges have been closed for a number of years now this will hopefully be progressed soon.

Although reinstating all three bridges would be ideal, we only need one of them rebuilt in the short term. Depending on the view of the PC this may be quicker to achieve by using the self-funding Community Commissioning Model?

Tomorrow I will be going to the Council Offices at Plough Lane to meet with the HC Enforcement Officer and North Herefordshire's PROW Inspection Officer. My main aim will be to understand how they work and the constraints they are under and, pun intended, to try to build bridges with them and foster a stronger working relationship in the hope we can move forward across the piece.

Pictures on next page.

Afternote:

This plan was supported by the parish council subject to the agreement of landowners.
The remaining PROW budget for the year is £3,690.00



KL1 Parallel to North Road



KL2 Cobnash Road Crossing



KL3 Parallel to Old Railway Track