

Footpath Report for Newton Poppleford & Harpford Parish for Annual Parish meeting.

It has been a busy year for footpath work this year. All the usual general maintenance continued unabated during the growing season, but additionally this year a lot of work has been done to claim several paths which are not Rights of Way under the Devon County Council's review of the Rights of Way in our parish. Several paths were offered to DCC for consideration as ROW's and the first one, a path from Lynchhead on the Venn Ottery Road to the Unclassified County Road between Southerton and Venn Ottery, came up for discussion at the quarterly committee meeting at County Hall on 9th March. I as well as Councillor Jess Bailey personally addressed the meeting to promote our claim which the committee unanimously carried at the subsequent vote. This unfortunately is not the final hurdle as landowners or others can appeal against the committee decision and have a six-month window to lodge any objections.

A further claim for a Right of Way from the village car park to the main A3052 by the side of the parish church is in an advanced state and will probably be considered by the committee at their meeting this coming June. I again hope to make a personal representation.

In addition to these and other routes coming up as part of the review, I pursued another footpath claim for Moor Lane in Southerton when during the first Covid lockdown, walkers of this path which was not a Right of Way but was in regular public use, were challenged by an adjacent landowner as to their right to use the path. The lengthy procedure resulting from this finally concluded at the end of March this year when appropriate signage was installed to make it an official Right of Way.

Footpath 1 which runs from the Toll House to School Lane was improved along the section from King Alfred Way for about 50 metres when a solution to the large oak tree growing in the middle of the path was finally resolved. Devon County Council acquired a short section of land from a landowner to enable the path to locally widened to allow free access beside the tree. The path had to be locally widened for this task, and it is hoped that this improved section can be continued along the entire length to School Lane. A sum of money has been set aside for this purpose, but before any work can proceed there are a few issues with the route and condition of the path to be resolved. I have been negotiating with the DCC warden on this matter, but progress has been painfully slow. It is hoped that this work can finally be completed this year, but it all depends on DCC getting to grips with the outstanding issues.

Footpath 3 which is the path on the north side of the High Street which runs from the Venn Ottery Road to Back Lane, has three outstanding problems which it is hoped can all be sorted out this year. The most serious problem is the section of path in the vicinity of the recreation ground which has been patched up at least twice in recent years, but has now partially collapsed where the large rocks there have fallen into the Brook. DCC have taken it upon themselves to address this and a quote has been obtained from a local contractor to tackle the work which was hoped to have been started in the last financial year. Because the status of the Back Brook may have changed to that of a river, it was established that the Environment Agency may need to give approval before any work could commence. The logistics are still being sorted out.

On the same path in the vicinity of Chestnut Way there is a similar problem on a collapsing river bank. This section of path comes under the control of East Devon District Council and they have promised that this work would be put onto the agenda, but now some one year later, the problem is still to be addressed.

The third issue is the section of path which at the western end was improved a couple of years ago by the laying of scalplings to alleviate the muddy section during the winter months. That project

though successful needs some further work in the centre section where flooding takes place during times of heavy rain. It is hoped that further material can be obtained later this year to improve the situation.

The long running saga of the Red Bridge which carries footpath 16 over the river Otter has hopefully had some movement this year. Villagers had been frustrated by the lack of action from DCC to take the provision of a new structure seriously and it was feared that the existing bridge would become unusable before a replacement had even been agreed. The Parish Chairman convened a meeting with concerned parishioners that had resulted in dialogue with the landowner and constructive action is now awaited to solve this now urgent problem.

In the early part of this year, Ian Kimber, a regular footpath user who lives in the village, came forward to ask if he could help with the maintenance of the parish footpaths. His offer of assistance was gratefully accepted and he has already been involved in a number of maintenance repairs.

Ted Swan

Honorary parish footpath warden