

TARPORLEY FOOTPATHS IN DECEMBER 2016 AND JANUARY 2017

REPORT BY DAVID PRESS, PARISH COUNCIL FOOTPATH WARDEN

INTRODUCTION

In November/December 2016 and January this year I have walked all the Tarporley paths to audit the condition of our rights of way and identify changes since my last audit in December 2015/January 2016. I have also looked at several footways which are not public rights of way.

This report:

- ☒ summarises the overall condition of paths and notes developments since my last annual report in January 2016
- ☒ records my findings for each path
- ☒ Makes recommendations for decisions and actions

SUMMARY OF OVERALL CONDITION AND ACTION DURING THE LAST YEAR

The sign on the Sandstone Trail showing the FP18 route into Tarporley now proudly says, "Tarporley". The drainage work that the PROW Officer and I did on the path has also succeeded in making this a very pleasant route.

Nearly all our paths are signposted. The path from the A49 onto the golf course is the only exception and I've also highlighted a missing sign outside of the Parish at Saplings Lane. However several signs, detailed in the report, are rotting, leaning and overgrown. We should ask CWAC to rectify them.

We have paid for 10 metal kissing gates and one wooden kissing gate which are being stored for us at the Cheshire West and Chester supplier's yard. We will also have the use of a recycled kissing gate from FP7 which is redundant and planned for removal. We have permission for FP4, FP17 and FP6 to install gates using the wooden one and seven metal gates. We therefore have four metal kissing gates to use and I recommend that we seek to use them on routes where the landowners are most amenable. On some routes which we had hoped to install gates the landowner has refused permission. At one of the locations (FP2) the Cheshire West and Chester Council have, in accordance with their current policies, fully funded the replacement of a rotten stile with a new stile. I suggest that we should lobby CWAC to change this policy, so that we can at least use funding as an incentive to replace stiles with gates.

No paths are currently overgrown and a couple of the usual culprits (FP8, FP23) have been better at reinstating the paths this year, possibly as a result of increased vigilance and action by the PROW Officer. During the year FP3 had a crop without any reinstatement and I will try and inspect the path again at the relevant time of year.

Whilst most of the year has passed with no progress on the improvements we looked for at the golf courses I've recently met with the Greenkeeper and the PROW officer and I am hopeful that we will achieve the changes we seek: routing of the public rights of way, signposting, removing/replacing stiles with gates and providing some permissive routes.

The landowner had said that she was not opposed to opening a route through the A49 underpass and to approach her again when the David Wilson Homes development was completed. Now that the southern end of the development is well advanced I suggest that we make that approach.

REPORT ON EACH PATH

FP 1 from Captains Walk to junction with Tiverton FP21 (south of Birch Heath and west of by-pass)

This path is in reasonably good order and the steps at the bypass have been well maintained.

The stile on the Tarporley side of the bypass was redundant and has been removed with the landowner's permission. The landowner has a track record of being amenable to removing stiles and her permission could be sought to install gates on the rest of the route.

The route is temporarily diverted around the edge of the David Wilson Homes development.

A resident has complained recently about the muddiness of Captains Walk. Whilst it is not extremely muddy the surface has been treated in the past and that treatment is now degraded. Once the David Wilson Homes development is occupied it would make sense to treat Captain's Walk as an urban path since it should be the main pedestrian route from most of the new development into the village. Maybe David Wilson Homes could be asked to surface the path as part of their completion of the development.

FP 2 from St Helen's churchyard to Birch Heath Road/Redhill (between Redhill cottages and Redhill farm)

The path is in good condition and the steps at the bypass have been well maintained.

The wooden sign near the Lych gate is fairly rotten.

A resident has complained about the muddiness of the path alongside the churchyard, but in my view this is not an issue. The path leads into the countryside and for a rural walk it's not very muddy at all. We identified this route as a candidate for replacing stiles with gates. However the landowner of several of the stiles has withheld his permission. Furthermore, a stile that was in disrepair has recently been replaced with a new stile. In accordance with Cheshire West and Chester Council's current policy this was done wholly at the Council's expense. The landowner is actually responsible for the repair of the stile, and the 100% funding by the Council is discretionary. In this way the Council ensures that all stiles are to an acceptable standard. However, it could provide an incentive to landowners to switch to gates if they were wholly funded but stiles were not. I propose that the Parish Council call upon CWAC to change its policy to only 100% funding gates.

At the junction with Redhill the sign is badly leaning.

Following the route from Redhill there are two redundant stiles and then the next stile is getting overgrown with ivy and the stile next to this one is showing signs of rotting.

FP 3 from car park behind Rising Sun to west of the Sandstone trail and junction with Iddinshall FP1/FP2

Most of the path is in good condition and the steps at the bypass well maintained.

As with last year, the section of the path to the east of the Sandstone Trail was extremely wet in December and the gateway which is used by cattle was difficult to walk with very deep mud.

As is frequently the case, the path headed north west beyond the Sandstone Trail toward Iddinshall has been planted without any reinstatement, but in December the crop was long harvested and ground perfectly ok to walk.

At Cheshire West's initiative and cost the stile ladder through the tree is planned for removal because it is no longer safe and the steel and wooden gate beside it will be

replaced with a proper kissing gate. The next stile on the route headed toward Iddinshall and the Sandstone Trail (asset 289/158) is in a poor state and should be replaced (ideally with a gate). The next stile is redundant because the field gate is always open. The next field boundary has a kissing gate followed by a stile (asset 289/155) which is in a very poor condition and replacement with a gate would be ideal.

FP 4 from High Street next to The Close to the junction with the branch of restricted bridleway 5 which loops around cottages on Back Lanes west of by pass.

This path is in good condition and the short length on the west of the bypass seems to have been kept clear of vegetation once again this year.

The wooden sign on the north west side of the bypass is badly rotten.

The PROW officer obtained permission from the landowner to replace stiles with gates on this route in 2015. We were originally going to do the work with volunteer labour but it will now be done by CWAC contractors with CWAC bridges and two of our stock of gates.

A member of the public has complained about the muddiness of the path. The route to the Silver Band hut has been laid with stone in the past, but I don't consider this a priority. Maybe when the Daffodil field development takes place the developer could be asked to upgrade this path.

RB 5 Moss Lane from south east of roundabout on A51/A49 on SE side of by-pass to North of Moss Cottage and junction with FP3 (and also semi-circular loop of Back lanes NW side of by-pass)

This restricted bridleway has two routes: one directly from the roundabout to Moss Cottage and the other following back lanes and looping around Cromwell cottage on the north west side of the by-pass.

This route seems to have been kept clear this year. The 5 bar metal gate leading from Moss Lane to cross the bypass is off its hinges, lying on the ground and obstructing the route.

FP 6 A51 opposite Rode Street Farm following the Sandstone Trail route south to junction with Tiverton FP 13 (a few fields north of Crib Lane/Pudding Lane junction)

The route is generally in good condition, but extremely muddy in late December.

The sign at the A51 is in very poor condition.

The landowner has given permission to replace the four stiles with kissing gates from the A51 south to FP18. The order has been issued to the contractor and our stock of gates will be used.

FP 7 from A51 next to Rode Street Farm following the Sandstone Trail route north to junction with Utkinton FP11

A gate in gate has been installed at the junction with the A51. It creates an awkward barrier, and I would not recommend this solution on our network. The first kissing gate is redundant and is being removed and stored for use elsewhere on our network.

FP 8 from A51 NW of roundabout to Utkinton Road between bridge over By-pass and Heath Green

This year when the field has been ploughed and planted the path has been reinstated.

It's disappointing that the landowner has not been persuaded to have a metal gate instead of the stile at Utkinton Road.

At the A51/Rode Street the hedge needs cutting back to provide adequate access to the path. The sign is loose and leaning badly.

RB 9 From SE of roundabout on A51 following south side of By-pass to Utkinton Road

The path is currently in good order and has been maintained in terms of vegetation during the year. The sign at the A51 is leaning over.

FP 10 from Utkinton Road between Rose Mount Farm and Newlands to Oswalds way, junction with FP 11 and on to Heath Green

The second gate headed from Heath Green toward the village is on top of a very steep ramp. The PROW has asked for the CWAC contractor to quote for work to build a ramp. The landowner gave her permission in 2015 subject to her approval to the specific plan. The CWAC contractor should provide a proposal.

The section of path from Oswalds Way to the Blythings has been inspected by the PROW officer and been the subject of discussions with Abigail Webb and the residents. The CWAC contractor will provide a quote for works to deal with the dangerous change of levels and adverse camber. The residents have also suggested an alternative solution involving a very small diversion.

The section of path from Utkinton Road to The Blythings is very narrow even though it looks as if the hedge has been cut to some extent. The problem is exacerbated by the leaning concrete post. Maybe the owner could be asked to remove it.

FP 11 from Forest Road opposite Woodlands Way to junction with FP 10 at north east end of Oswalds Way

The Parish Council laid stone on the path in 2015, but there was insufficient stone to complete the job. It's been quite successful and the residents have discussed with Abigail Webb proposals to complete the job.

FP 12 from Forest Road (south of Forest House) to Park Road

This is in fair condition although I believe it's a little while since its grit surface was renewed and it's often fairly muddy.

FP13 from Park Road to Cobblers Cross

This is a very well used path and in good order, although it gets very muddy after rain.

FP 14 from High Street beside entrance to British Legion to Oathills Close and then following roads (Oathill Drive/Churchill Drive) to Eaton Road

The path is OK, except there have been some complaints about failed lights and some attention needed to the hedge.

FP 15 from Tilstone Lane (the lane between Eaton Road and the A51) to Wettenhall brook where it becomes a Tilstone Fearnal path

Although muddy the path is distinct and unobstructed. The sign at the junction with the lane is still overgrown by the hedge – I obviously didn't get out here with secateurs!

When I walked in December the field gate was closed and the stile therefore no longer redundant.

FP 16 from Birch Heath by Birch Heath Farm north to FP2

During the year the PROW officer and I installed a new marker post halfway along this path. The landowner said that it may have had some impact on keeping people to the correct route.

The route is very muddy near the farm yard

FP 17 from junction with FP 2 behind St Helens to junction with FP 3/RB5 N of Moss Cottage

The PROW officer has obtained permission from the landowner to replace the two stiles with gates on this route and the work will be done with Parish Council stock of gates and CWAC contractors.

The route crosses diagonally across the field below the Old Rectory garden and is frequently very waterlogged. This may be the consequence of good drainage from the garden? Paths worn on the ground suggest that most people skirt the edge of the field rather than follow the right of way, presumably to avoid the boggy area. It would be an improvement to install some drainage where the right of way crosses the boggy area, especially with the improved accessibility of the route once gates are installed.

FP 18 from RB5 on Back Lane at west of By-pass to FP6 (Sandstone Trail)

This path is normally completely waterlogged so the PROW Officer and I spent a morning digging out the mud and creating a drainage channel. It has been very successful and is now a pleasant path to walk.

The sign at the junction with the Sandstone Trail has now been replaced with a finger post naming Tarporley as the destination.

FP 19 from FP3 behind the Rising Sun to FP4 behind the Silver Band

This path is in good order.

RB 20/Utkinton RB 10 from Heath Green to top of Forest Road /By-pass to
In good order, but during the year it would have benefited from some maintenance.

FP 21/ Rushton 30/32 from north end of Cobblers Cross through Portal Golf to Eaton Lane

The path is in good order. The Greenkeeper has granted permission to replace the stile by Eaton Lane with a gate.

In 2015 I met with the Director of Golf and the PROW officer to discuss the signing and diversion of routes across the golf course and the replacement of stiles by gates. We also proposed the creation of a few additional permissive routes, chiefly around the perimeter of the course. The Director's sickness absence has held up progress, but we recently met with the Greenkeeper and I am now optimistic of progress.

FP 22/Rushton FP31 from Cobblers Cross west of the hotel to the golf course and across the course past the 18th hole and then to Saplings Lane

The path is in good order. It needs signposting from Saplings Lane (not actually within our Parish boundary).

Also see comments for FP21 and with the Greenkeeper's permission the PROW officer has removed the stile on the border of the course at the top of the track headed to Saplings Lane

FP 23 & Tiverton FP14 from junction of FP1 (south of Birch Heath)/Tiverton FP24/26 to Nantwich Road south of the By-pass and north of Tiresford Farm. Whilst there has been a longstanding drainage problem where the path skirts the pond north of Tiresford Farm, after work was carried out a couple of years ago, the path is Ok although not perfect.

This year the path is clearly marked on the ground with the crop having been sprayed to maintain the route.

Hopefully the landowner will be persuaded to allow a route from Nantwich road around the bottom of the DWH development and under the by pass.

FP 26 Tiverton from Birch Heath toward Captains Walk.

The path has been well maintained in terms of vegetation, but on the day I walked some evidence of a motorbike having used the route and churned it up in places. I reported last year that there is no sign from the junction with Birch Heath road, and that the short stretch between the cottages on Birch Heath and the path is not shown on the definitive map. I have the paperwork required to claim the public right of way, but have not yet started the process.

Utkinton FP9 A49 Luddington Hill onto golf course.

I renewed my discussion about the need for a sign and possible diversion with the PROW officer and the Greenkeeper. There is a wooden sign lying on the ground, not visible from the road and not pointing anywhere.

Footway Torr Rise to Oathills Drive

There are two sections of footway: one runs alongside the allotments and the other a short section from the east end of Oathills Drive.

On the day I walked them both were reasonably clean and in good order.

Pram Path

Looks Ok

Footway Heath Green to Utkinton Road

This is signposted for the Delamere loop but its status is a part of the highway rather than a right of way.

It is in good condition but would have benefited from maintenance of undergrowth during the year. It was included in the programme for the previous year but was cut from this year's programme. The PROW officer tells me that it will be back on the programme next year.

New Community centre path

It is in good condition.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Parish Council:

1. Ask CWAC to rectify all the missing, leaning and rotten signs as detailed in this report.
2. Authorise the Footpath Warden to arrange installation of the Parish Council's remaining stock of gate wherever he can secure the landowner's permission.
3. Write to the landowner reminding her to consider dedicating a route through the underpass at the south of the DWH development, now that the relevant part of the development is almost complete.
4. Ask David Wilson Homes to surface Captains Walk on completion of that part of the development which links with the footpath.

5. Call upon CWAC to change its policy so that they only 100% fund kissing and pedestrian gates on Tarporley paths, leaving landowners to bear all the discretionary costs if they wish to retain a stile.
6. Ask the landowner to cut the hedge to ensure access to FP8 from the A51/Rode Street
7. Ask the landowner to remove the leaning concrete post on FP10 where the path enters the narrow section between hedges leading to Utkinton Road.
8. Discuss with landowner, PROW Officer, and possibly the owner of the Old Rectory, how to improve drainage on FP17.

David Press, Tarporley Parish Council Footpath Warden, January 2017