

1 Introduction

Cllr Songhurst raised the matter if the condition of a number of the footpaths in the Parish at the Council's meeting on the 18th May 2020. Councillors were subsequently invited to attend a virtual meeting with officers of Wiltshire Council's Access to the Countryside team to discuss the issue.

2 The Meeting

Cllrs Jones, Cook, Rees, French, Songhurst and Maddicks attended a Zoom meeting with Alison Rasey, who together with Stephen Leonard are the Countryside Access officers for the north of Wiltshire County.

3 Issues raised

3.1 Who is responsible for what?

Wiltshire Council for the surface of the path, landowners for overhanging vegetation, stiles etc however there is some overlap, and, in many areas, volunteers carry out work to keep paths clear and make improvements and repairs to stiles etc.

Education of users may be beneficial in some areas if problems are identified, particularly if landowners are experiencing problems with crops or livestock.

Any problems with routes having been blocked by landowners will be dealt with by Wiltshire Council, however the Parish can be very useful in identifying ownership and negotiating areas where improvements are sought. Guides for landowners are available

3.2 Grants

There are grants available to the Council from Area Board for upgrading paths for example putting in kissing gates instead of stiles. These grants are available up to £1000 or if the Council can provide funding up to 50% match funding. The cost of a disabled access kissing gate is approximately £500. Landowners can also claim up to 25% back from Wiltshire Council for improvements.

3.3 Signage

The provision of way marking is normally done by Wiltshire Council to ensure that it is correct. However, promotion of routes and any interpretation of the sites along them is something that Parish Councils can do under their Tourism powers with the correct permissions.

3.4 What can the paths be used for?

There is a hierarchy of paths that is explained by the following information from the ordnance survey:

Footpath



Driveway access to the path is not permitted. The path is a public highway and must be kept clear of any obstructions.



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These are the only types of traffic that are permitted on the path. All other traffic is prohibited. Restricted byway



On the side of the path, there is a green dot. This indicates a point of interest or a specific location. You are permitted to use the path.

3.5 Volunteers, best practice and training

A number of Council's particularly in the south of the County have good volunteer schemes running to help keep paths well maintained. Wiltshire Council has a toolkit to help with the setting up of groups. Wiltshire Council are also able to provide training to volunteers before they start work.

4 Next Steps

The first step in providing improvements to the Parish's Rights of Way network would be to create an audit of the current paths. This will seek to identify any barriers, repairs required or vegetation to be removed and may also report on general condition, ease of use and waymarking. This process could also be used to identify areas where landowners are experiencing problems with walkers not sticking to paths and to map the permissive paths that landowners have in operation that link or complement the rights of way network.

Recommendation: That the Council approves the creation of a Rights of Way Working Group to progress work on this project with its first task being to recruit of a team of volunteers and to carry out an audit of the Parishes' paths.