

Parish Footpath Officers Report September 2024

1. I was copied in to the email that was sent to Parish Councillors regarding the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan for the county (LCWIP). I have looked at this and from what I can see the plans for walking or cycling routes do not come anywhere near Little Birch so I don't think it's relevant to us at this stage. But I will be joining the teams meeting on 17th September just to see if any more information comes out and will pass it on to you.
2. With being away on holiday and then with visitors there's been some periods during the summer where I have not been able to do as much as I would have liked, but I have managed to keep Ruff Lane open, also cleared LB 21 several times and the bottom end of LB 23 where it crosses the Wrigglebrook. I also cleared the part of the Herefordshire Way west of Church Farm that was totally overgrown and you might have seen the video I put on Facebook.
3. Following the Councils Footpath Inspectors meeting with the landowner from Church Farm and their subsequent discussion as to what could be done, I have inspected this on several occasions and no work has yet been done to rectify the drainage problem. I have referred this back to the inspector and wait to see what action she wants to take.
4. At the last meeting we discussed crops being planted and taking over the footpath we decided to write to one of the landowners regarding LB 22 (did we get a reply?) this path is now accessible but I think it's more because it has been persistently walked rather than anything that landowner has done. Crops growing across the footpaths are a big problem on other some other footpaths, LB 23 has maze growing in the field, it's like trying to walk through a jungle to get to the other side of the field, LB 26 as has barley growing in the field with no provision for the footpath.
5. As you will have seen we have been awarded a grant from the council. This is brilliant and will mean we can make some much-needed repairs and improvements to our Footpaths. Unfortunately for a reason not known to us we have been offered £1000 less than we asked for, I feel we need to query this with the officers. Also, I was very disappointed to discover that in the spreadsheet I used to apply for the grant the total had been added up wrongly which also means we have applied for less money than I intended. I would also like to query this with the officers and explain my mistake. Now that we have been offered the money we need to try and work out how to spend it. It looks from initial information that Councils that are part of the lengthsman scheme will need to do the work and pay for the materials and then will be reimbursed by the Herefordshire Council. I also need to speak to all of the land owners and explain my proposals and get their permission to carry the work. Your help in identifying the landowners would be appreciated.
6. Aconbury Parish have also been awarded a grant to replace some stiles with gates. As they are not part of the lengthsman's scheme they will have to apply for this in a different way to Little Birch.
7. The footpaths in Little Birch are an important amenity for the local community, as far as I know the Parish Council have never had a budget that could be used for their upkeep. Would it be possible for the Council to allocate a budget of £1000 a year to the upkeep of footpaths. Having talked to other Parish Footpath Officers, this is the practice in other local parishes. This money could then perhaps be used to bring in a team to do some footpath clearing at certain times of the year, as you might have seen they did in Much Birch recently.
8. I have planned two walks for the next couple of months the first on 29th September will be from the village hall to Aconbury Church and back, the church to be unlocked so we can have a look round the inside. I am also trying to find someone who could give us a short talk about the history of the Church and Priory.
On 13th October we have a walk in Aconbury Wood led by a Mike Stroud of the Herefordshire Fungus Survey Group.

Chris Fowler

Little Birch Footpath Officer