**Parish footpath officers report December 2024**

1. At last we’ve got some gates from the council, Bob Mason collected five gates that he will install around his farm. I’m not sure when the rest of the gates will arrive, but I have chased to see if they can give me a date. I went to the recent LAF meeting, at the meeting Councillor Price stated that we would not be held to the April deadline to have the gates installed.

 I have now spoken to Pat Egerton from Bigglestone Farm. She’s happy with the installation of 3 self -closing gates but said she didn’t have anybody that could install them. So this might be a job for some of the volunteers that have offered to help me.

 I still have not had a conversation with Kate and John Dillon at Castle Nibole to discuss the kissing gates that have been granted for the footpaths on their land.

I have spoken to Nicola Snell from Hergest they would like to keep the stiles on either side of their small field near their house but would like a self-closing gate on the lane. I tried to persuade her that I was really trying to improve the accessibility, but this didn’t sway her opinion.

As I explained at previous meetings, I’m doing my best to encourage landowners to install gates themselves but I have 7 volunteers who would be prepared to help as and when needed.

1. Over the last month with some help, I have moved the two metal gates that were blocking part of the path at the top of LB 21 which has now made it more accessible. I’ve also cleared an old footpath in Aconbury Wood, because of a fallen tree the path had been inaccessible and a detour had been made by walkers, but the Duchy recently removed the fallen tree, but it was still very overgrown. This is now being removed and the path can be walked as it was in the past.

With all the recent heavy rain LB 21 has been further eroded by the water draining from the land drain this has destroyed a lot of the base of the path making it very difficult to walk. I have re-reported this to the council’s footpath inspector who is going to speak to the landowner again to hopefully come up with a solution.

1. Further to our discussion last month about a noticeboard on the outside wall of the village hall I have found out some prices of ready-made noticeboards they range from £1200-£1600. Steve Coles has also spoken to his friend who has suggested that he could perhaps make us a noticeboard. I will be exploring the possibilities of this with him in the next few days. It was suggested by Toni Fagan that we apply for a grant to fund the noticeboard. Neil has set up an account which is ready when we decide which route we want to go down.

I have managed to obtain two A3 maps from the council of Aconbury, Little Birch, and Much Birch that could be used on the noticeboard. I am also hopeful that these maps might be useful to Jenny Bartlett a community artist and former cartographer who I hope can produce a map of the 3 parishes with graphical pictures of some of the local landmarks, and walking routes.

1. We have had another Local PFO’s meeting, which was attended by 7 PFO’s, Councillor Toni Fagan, Ceri

 Belli PROW Footpath Inspector and a rep from the Ramblers Association. Although he was not able to attend we heard from the PROW Volunteer Coordinator, that PFO’s will be receiving a handbook before Christmas, that there will be an Induction Meeting in January and Training with the Duchy to install gates in February.

1. Myself and David Irwin Much Birch PFO are planning a Christmas Walk on Sunday, the 29th December from Little Birch probably finishing at the pub in Little Dewchurch.

Chris Fowler

Little Birch Footpath Officer