**Parish Footpath Officers Report February 2025**

1. **Damage and Repairs**: The strong winds and heavy rains over the last few months have caused a lot of problems to the footpaths, trees and bushes have come down causing blockages and rainwater has turned paths in to streams. One very large tree was blocking a path in Aconbury Wood. I bought this to the attention of the Duchy who have now had it removed. It was good to get this path cleared quickly as it is very popular for walkers.

I have inspected and cleared when necessary about 50% of the paths in Aconbury and Little Birch since Christmas. The water running off the fields has caused lots of damage to footpaths, a Railway Sleeper Bridge has been completely washed away where it crossed the Wigglebrook on the boundary of Much and Little Birch, LB 23 which is on Bigglestone Farm land. Fortunately the Much Birch PFO has been awarded a PROW grant to replace this bridge so hopefully this will materialise soon.

1. **Noticeboard**: As you will have seen from Neil‘s email we have now applied for a grant for a noticeboard to go on the outside village hall wall, hopefully this will be successful. I have had a conversation with Jenny Bartlett a Community Artist that Toni Fagan put me in touch with, she is very willing to help prepare a map of the local footpaths with sketches of local points of interest. But as she lives in Leominster, it’s not that easy to meet with her to start the process. I have also found a local person who often joins us on our walks who has worked as a graphic artist. I have a meeting arranged with him to discuss if how he can help with this project.

Do we know if the village Hall committee are happy with this idea?

1. **PROW Grant**: Since our last meeting there has been no progress on the new gates, Steve Organ the PROW Volunteers Coordinator has been off sick, nobody from PROW has taken over from him and there’s been no communication between the Council Officers and the parish footpath officers to tell us when there might be further deliveries of gates.
2. **Footpath Officers Priorities**: Having now been footpath officer for two years I feel I am getting a reasonable understanding of what the job involves. After our last Parish Council meeting I went away wondering whether, my priorities were the same as the parish councils. These being, to keep the footpaths open and cleared, to promote their use, and make them as accessible as possible. In my mind making them more accessible means replacing as many stiles as possible with kissing or self-closing gates. I got the impression that this was not in line with some councillors opinions. If this is the case then its shame we didn’t have this discussion when I was applying for the grant for the gates, if I’m trying to pursue something that’s not in line with your wishes then I need to be aware of that. Hopefully we can have a discussion about this at the meeting.

5. **Next Parish Walk**: Our next Parish walk is going to be on the 16th March.

Chris Fowler

Little Birch Footpath Officer