

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL RIGHTS OF WAY AND ACCESS GROUP NEWSLETTER

Issue 6 - Autumn 2011

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Welcome

Welcome to the 6th edition of our newsletter for Parish Councils. The feedback we have received to previous editions was extremely positive and you have welcomed the contact and information from us.

In this edition we have articles from both Rights of Way and Historic & Natural Environment Teams. It is hoped to highlight that access to and appreciation of nature and the historic environment plays an important part in enhancing the overall countryside experience and promotes a general feeling of wellbeing.

Budget pressures continue to give concern and there have been reductions in staffing and a period of significant change will continue with a major service reorganisation due to take effect from 1st April 2012. Thank you to those that continue to show strong support for the work we do, highlighting the importance you place on good access to the countryside and its importance to the local economy and health agenda in the county.

May we take this opportunity to say thank you and to reiterate the value that you and other partners, such as the Chiltern Society, The Ramblers, The Chilterns' Conservation Board and National Trust bring to our work. It is greatly appreciated.

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A great success for the Little Marlow Country Park

A new permissive path was officially opened on a gloriously sunny Saturday 4th June at Little Marlow Lakes Country Park. The rights of way team contacted the two landowners to agree permission to use the route that weaves across their land and alongside the lakes. The path forms part of a circular walking route from either Marlow or Bourne End and connects the Thames Path with the bridge and public footpath over the A404. It will be called 'The Spinney'. The County Council installed two new footbridges and local volunteers agreed to maintain the path when it becomes overgrown.



Dignitaries attending the opening included in the photo are from left to right, David Watson (BCC and Wycombe DC Councillor), Verity West (Chairman, Little Marlow Lakes Country Park Community Partnership), Richard Mash (landowner), Dallas Banfield (Chairman, Little Marlow Parish Council), Valerie Brownridge (Secretary, LMLCPCP), Rob Marsh (Harleyford Estates [hidden]), Jocelyn Towns (Mayor of Marlow) and Richard Boas (Chiltern Society).

Little Marlow Lakes Country Park Community Partnership Chairman, Verity West said: "The country park project has been in the planning for many years and today is an important milestone as the two landowners have worked together to the benefit of the public."

The area is well worth a visit as it includes seven lakes including opportunities for bird watching at the Spade Oak Lake Nature Reserve, fishing on the Marlow Angling Club Lake, walks next to the River Thames and a disabled access route from Spade Oak Lane to Little Marlow.



Richard Mash (left) and Rob Marsh (Harleyford Estate) cut the ribbon, with Dallas Banfield (Chairman Little Marlow Parish Council) looking on.

Bledlow Focus ...

... Maintaining the network and protecting our wildlife

The maintenance team was given a tricky challenge after local horse riders reported being unable to negotiate deep vehicle ruts along Old Oddley Lane, between the Upper Icknield Way and Oddley Lane, with a deep hole appearing in the path.

With no formal surface, the route had become vulnerable to damage and erosion in wet conditions from 4x4 vehicles. However, upon inspection by the Area Officer, Claire Tranter, an extensive, live badger set was found with a collapsed tunnel roof, perhaps under the weight of vehicles. Discussions commenced with Natural England on how to repair the lane, but at the same time minimise disturbance or damage to the badger sett. Formal permission was sought under the Protection of Badgers Act 1992 and a licence was issued by Natural England to undertake the works.

Our contractor laid a 1m² steel plate over the badger tunnel and covered it with a terram geotextile matting to provide a one-way drainage system, then topped it with road planings. Along the remainder of the lane, the rutts were filled with Type 1 road stone, then overlain with a terram matting and more road planings.

The contractors were regularly approached by local walkers to thank them for their work. There had been much local concern that the route would be further damaged by vehicles, but by improving the route, it is less of an attraction to off-road vehicle users.



Before



After

Riverbank protection along Bledlow footpath

Following reports that Footpath 28 was losing some of its traditional width, we concluded that the stream alongside was causing erosion to its banks. The Maintenance Team set about arranging repairs to the riverbank with wooden uprights, horizontal panelling, which was then backfilled with terram and hardcore.



Before (left) After (Right)

Along the route it was discovered that a native black poplar, one of Britain's rarest trees, had bent across the footpath leaving a tight squeeze of only 18 inches for walkers. Realising the sensitivity of removing the tree we sought the opinion of our own Natural Environment Team and those of the local community, before taking action. Following further consultation with Bledlow Parish Council, County Councillor Paul Rogerson and Lord Carrington, the landowner, the need for the tree's removal was agreed and three new black poplar saplings were planted.



Simply Walk

Simply Walk in Buckinghamshire continues to grow and develop across the county, with a total of 1,621 people walking during the first 6 months of 2011 on over 50 walks (mostly weekly) throughout the county. This equates to 13,613 people attending a walk along Buckinghamshire's footpaths, led by over 170 volunteer walk leaders. Visit the website to download a walks programme: [Simply walk programme](#)

If any parish councils wish to have figures for their own area, Fiona, the Simply Walk Coordinator, would be happy to provide them.

Recently new walks have been launched in Gerrards Cross, Denham Garden Village, Iver and Castlefield (High Wycombe), plus a number of 'Buggy Walks' via the Sure Start Children's Centres.

Lack of funding is always an issue as 'money in does not equal' costs out! Voluntary donations have been invited from walkers via the walk programme and newsletter, resulting in contributions totalling £1300 during 2011. Some parish councils (with Downley setting the trend) have donated funds where Simply Walk is active in their area:

- ✿ Downley Parish Council: £500
- ✿ Chalfont St Giles Parish Council £100
- ✿ Stokenchurch Parish Council £50
- ✿ Chalfont St Peter Parish Council - £500
- ✿ Princes Risborough Town Council - £100

It is hoped and anticipated that more parish councils will follow suit during 2011/12 as Simply Walk offers fantastic value for money and is a shining example of the Big Society at work.

The scheme is always in need of more volunteer walk leaders and helpers in all parts of the county. Regular and free training sessions are held which include optional first aid training.

For more information on any aspect of Simply Walk, please contact Fiona Broadbent on 01494 474367 email: simplywalks@buckscc.gov.uk



Gerrards Cross Simply Walk Launch

A new future for Quarrendon Leas, Aylesbury

Buckinghamshire's largest archaeological monument lies only a short walk from Aylesbury in open countryside north of the River Thames. The site contains a large ancient monument comprising earthworks of a medieval settlement, a ruined church, and the site of Sir Henry Lee's Tudor mansion, water gardens and rabbit warrens. This is one of the best preserved deserted medieval villages in England and one of the finest examples of an abandoned Tudor water garden. There are also attractive water meadows and hedgerows with rare black poplar pollards and a wealth of other wildlife. Today over 3,000 new homes are being built on either side of Quarrendon Leas so a new future must be found for this special place.

At present, Quarrendon Leas is privately owned, so the remains can only be seen from a footpath which crosses the site from the A41 to the A413, but there are plans to transfer ownership to the Buckinghamshire Conservation Trust, a new charity set up by the County Council. The Trust is working with local councils, the Berryfields Development Consortium, English Heritage and other partners to conserve the site, improve access and interpretation, and create a much-needed new public green space. A surfaced path has been built to link Quarrendon Leas to the Berryfields development area.

A range of environmental surveys have been completed and the ruined church has been recorded by volunteers from the Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society and classes from Aylesbury Vale Academy secondary school have toured the site. The next priority will be to conserve the crumbling ruin of St. Peter's Church. Once the land has transferred further access improvements are planned. More information about the history of the site and a guided walk leaflet can be found on the County Council's website.

http://www.buckscc.gov.uk/bcc/archaeology/Quarrendon_Leas.page

Sandy Kidd, County Archaeologist



←
*Volunteers
recording the
ruined church*

New gates – and battery power – opens access to Ivinghoe Beacon

One of the great pleasures in my job is meeting, learning from and being inspired by people that have a disability. They often have an energy, drive and determination to overcome their situation and not let it get in the way of their enjoyment of the countryside. In return, I hope I can make our footpaths and bridleways more accessible for them, for mums with pushchairs, for my elderly mum with dicky hips, and for able-bodied walkers too. In physical terms this can often be surprisingly easy - remove a stile, replace a V-shaped kissing gate, install a ramp onto a bridge, or put a surface down over one which was previously difficult. However, overcoming the barriers and fears of some landowners can be frustrating.

Luckily we have the National Trust. Not only do they dedicate their land as 'open access', but the staff at Ashridge have a very positive attitude to disabled access, while still managing sheep...



←↑
*Gavin Caspersz,
Buckinghamshire
Local Access
Forum, atop
Ivinghoe Beacon
(left) and scaling
the rear slope from
Bedfordshire
(above)*

... and cattle on its superb areas of chalk grassland. Around the Bridgewater Monument they provide excellent surfaces through the woodlands, maps of accessible walks and offer a mobility scooter for hire on which to enjoy these routes. More recently, they have consented to the County Council installing sixteen new wooden pedestrian gates on footpaths around Ivinghoe Beacon and at Steps Hill open access land, to create two circular walks accessible for off-road mobility scooters.

To help me survey the structures that needed replacing, I was helped by Gavin Caspersz from The Buckinghamshire Local Access Forum. He has a severe spinal injury following a horse riding accident, and inherent pain accompanying the disability, but his love for discovering and exploring the countryside is undiminished.

We should, of course, recognise that this work is not about 'urbanising' the countryside, but often simply removing barriers wherever we can to enable easier access for everyone. In turn, with more information in hand, this allows those with disabilities – and not just those in wheelchairs or mobility scooters – to make more informed decisions about accessing the countryside.

Financing the new gate project has been aided by a generous donation from The Chiltern Society's Donate-a-Gate scheme. It is hoped that during these austerity years we can continue to make improvements and open up our rights of way for all legitimate users, while acknowledging and addressing the concerns that might result from a cyclist, horse rider or motorcyclist gaining entry. In my view, it is a small price to enable those with limited mobility to access more of our beautiful county.

A leaflet about the walks at Ashridge is available on the Chilterns' Conservation Board's website and further details on the Donate-a-Gate scheme are available from the Chiltern Society.

Jonathan Clark



New life to a claimed Footpath at Deangarden Wood, Wycombe Marsh

In May 2008, an application was submitted to the County Council to modify the Definitive Map and Statement by adding new footpaths at Deangarden Wood, behind Deangarden Rise, Wycombe Marsh. The application was a resubmission of a previous application made in 1998.

The 1998 application was refused because it was believed the landowner had shown a lack of intention to dedicate the routes as public footpath. During the relevant 20-year period the landowner had sent out letters to some of the properties abutting the land. The letters stated the land was private property and the landowner was not prepared to allow trespass. The Secretary of State believed this to be sufficient enough to show a lack of intention to dedicate the routes as public footpaths.

The 2008 application was resubmitted in light of the judgement of the House of Lords in the Godmanchester case, which provided clarity as to what constitutes sufficient evidence of a landowner's intention not to dedicate a route as public right of way. As a matter of law the Lords found that where the public has used a route as a footpath, as of right, for a relevant 20-year period, an individual (landowner) must prove that, during that 20 year period, he not only had an intention not to dedicate the route as a public footpath, but brought that intention to the notice of the public who might use the way.

The 2008 application has therefore been accepted by the County Council and an Order to modify the Definitive Map and Statement made in 2010. The County Council has received objections to the Order and as a result will need to be determined by the Secretary of State. A public inquiry will be held at Flackwell Heath Community Centre on 8 November 2011, where everyone is welcome to attend.

Helen Beevers, Definitive Map Officer



Seeking out the Hollow Ways of Buckinghamshire

It's humbling to think of generations of feet, cart wheels, sheep and cattle hooves travelling along and carving out some of the routes that weave their way across the countryside, and making up our modern rights of way network. Down many of the hills and chalk escarpments they are called hollow ways, where mini u-shaped valleys have been created. I wanted to learn more about their history and plant life and discover for myself some routes on the ground.

The earliest reference to hollow ways appears to be from Anglo Saxon charters, referring to tracks such as *paeth* and *weg* (path and way), describing them more explicitly as *holanweg*: a road hollowed out by the passage of people and animals. Gilbert White, the 18th century naturalist wrote, '*These roads, running through the malm lands, are, by the traffic of ages, and the fretting of water, worn down through the stratum of our freestone...so that they look more like water-courses than roads*'.

A study by the Buckinghamshire County Archaeology Service describes 'grids' of track ways - 'axial droveways' - that evolved along and across the hills between Chesham and Wendover. Although extremely difficult to date, it was thought that some are medieval, Anglo Saxon or even Prehistoric in origin. Most of the routes in the study area formed significant historic landscape features, adding to the special character and appearance of the area. They have evolved through the landscape as routes used to move animals between lowland (Aylesbury Vale) and upland (Chiltern Hills) grazing on commons and wood-pastures. It's interesting to think of these lanes being inadvertently created by people linking communities or farmers rotating pasture for their stock.



←
The Ridgeway
through
Wendover
Woods

Hogtrough
Lane
↓



The two routes I chose to walk formed two sides of this grid pattern: Hogtrough Lane, from Kings Ash to Wendover; and The Ridgeway through Wendover Woods. As I walked down these darkened tunnels, both bridleways, it was difficult not to feel the weight of history around me. Banks of earth loomed high above my head, an avenue of once-coppiced hazels. Further on, thick trucks of oak, ash and beech lined either side, meeting in a dense leafy arch, their roots creating habitats for ferns, mice and insects. On the showery day of my visit a stream of water trickled along the path base, forming another obvious method of erosion. At intervals, fallen trees allowed more light through the tangled canopy into the cool and dim atmosphere, creating an abundance of life on the woodland floor, including violets, enchanter's nightshade, herb robert and lords & ladies.

Currently, the recording of hollow ways is patchy, but they are included on the County Historic Environment Record as a heritage asset and so will have protection in the planning process. For me, they are wonderful features of our landscape. Like feet wearing down steps to a church altar, or the many hands that smooth the end of a church pew, hollow ways are created by generations of walkers, which is where their beauty lies.

Jonathan Clark

Area Officer Profile – Rosie Taylor

How long have you been working in the Rights of Way team?

I have been working in the Rights of way team for 3 years and 5 months

What's the most enjoyable parts of your job?

Walking on a sunny day in the middle of nowhere enjoying the peace and quiet... until you find a problem!

What's the most frustrating part of your job?

It has to be landowners that won't co operate even though most of the time we are trying to help them out.

What's been your greatest achievement in the past 12 months?

Nearly achieving 'stile free' status in the Parish of Chepping Wycombe.

What's your main interest outside work?

I have lots of interests outside of work. I do love walking the dogs to the local pub on a Sunday lunchtime, but I also love shopping!

What's your favourite walk in Buckinghamshire?

The Marlow circular walk is one of my favourites as there's lots of lovely things to see.

What's your favourite view?

From the Ibstone Windmill looking down onto Turville village and the surrounding hills.



Rights of Way & Access Group –Our Aims in Brief

With 3300km of public rights of way network in Buckinghamshire, this is what we do...

- ✿ We hold a Definitive Map and Statement of all known public rights of way.
- ✿ We have powers to make changes to the network.
- ✿ We have a duty to maintain all public rights of way, and as far as possible to prevent their obstruction. To do this as efficiently as possible, a Problem Management Matrix has been developed to prioritise issues on paths according to the nature of the problem and its location. This can be viewed on our website, together with details of all path issues that we are aware of.
- ✿ We make strategic improvements to the network, and these are implemented where resources are available and agreements can be reached with landowners.
- ✿ We work in partnership with local communities and Parish Councils to identify improvements to the rights of way network.
- ✿ We aim to deliver access for everyone, targeting improvements to specific routes so that they are easier to use, removing barriers and obstacles to provide least restrictive access.
- ✿ We publicise and promote access to the Buckinghamshire countryside, providing information about the location of routes.
- ✿ We aim to ensure that all public rights of way are easy to follow by providing adequate signposting and way marking of all routes.
- ✿ We lead regular walks, mainly on public rights of way, through the Simply Walk programme.

More details on any of the information provided can be found on our web page at:

www.buckscc.gov.uk/rights_of_way

