

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL RIGHTS OF WAY AND ACCESS GROUP NEWSLETTER

Issue 4 - Summer 2010

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Welcome

Welcome to the 4th edition of our newsletter for Parish Councils. This edition is packed with news from around the county on the great work being undertaken to improve public access to our towns and countryside.

Much has happened since the last edition in February 2010, including an unwelcome budget cut, which has resulted in the end of the long-running Parish Paths Partnership (P3). However, we're confident that by continuing to work successfully in partnership with parish councils a big difference can be made with relatively small amounts of money to the walking, cycling and horse riding public of Buckinghamshire.

Thank you to those who have submitted articles. It illustrates the variety of work happening around the parishes and within the county Rights of Way Team. Please do get in touch if you have any questions you'd like answered or ideas for future editions.

Email us with your comments to: row@buckscc.gov.uk

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‘On the ground’

The Rights of Way team has recently been involved in securing improvements to the footpath network in Lane End (Path 47). The opportunity arose when a local resident kindly paid for 4 new gates as part of the Chiltern Society’s donate-a-gate scheme.

A total of 8 stiles were removed on the beautiful Wormsley Estate around Turville, Stokenchurch and Ibstone Parishes, replaced with wooden kissing gates donated by the public.

The top two photos show new gates on footpath 47 Lane End (Grid Ref: SU775930) The bottom two photos show before & after at Wormsley Estate, footpath 16A (Grid Ref: SU749924)



BEFORE

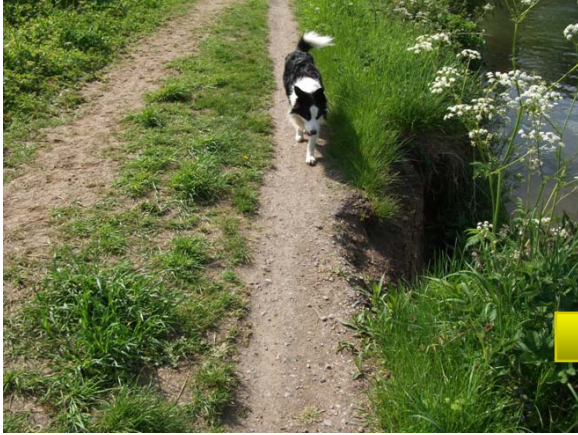


AFTER



Erosion holes on the Thames Path are an on-going maintenance problem. These two photos illustrate the problem and the soft engineering solution using coir logs stacked on the bank side.

BEFORE



AFTER



Claiming a Right of Way

Have you been walking a route for more than 20 years?

Here we provide some background advice on making a claim for a Rights of Way.

The countryside is crossed by a vast network of public footpaths, bridleways, byways and now 'restricted byways', which are recorded on a legal document called the definitive map. Most were registered following the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949, but some have been recorded after that date because people have walked a particular route for over 20 years. The legislation we currently use for these '20-year' claims is the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

Sometimes the stimulus for making a footpath claim is when a locked gate, fence or a sign is erected by a landowner, which 'challenges' the public walking a particular route. However, it is also possible to make a claim for a public footpath (or any other public Right of Way) even if your rights haven't been brought into question. The benefit of making a claim in either of these circumstances is that the route is secured for future generations to enjoy in the knowledge that the highway authority (Buckinghamshire County Council) has a duty to assert and protect the right of the public to use that route in the future.

If you are considering making a claim it is important to consider the following points:

1. Have you been using the route unopposed for a continuous period of 20 years? This means that the landowner has not challenged you in any way and you have not walked past a sign, such as 'private' or 'no public access'. In addition, the path must be available for the public at large, that is you should not be a tenant of the land or have express personal permission from the landowner.
2. Is the route you have been walking on one particular line? It is no good making a claim, for example, in a woodland if you generally walk 'all over the place'. A claim should be for a linear route.
3. Do you have cartographic or other documentary evidence? It is also possible to submit documentary evidence to strengthen your claim. For example, the route might be marked on old tithe maps. These can be accessed at the 'Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies' which is the County Archives and Local Studies Library for Buckinghamshire, based at County Hall in Aylesbury.
4. How many people do you know that walk the route? A claim is strengthened by the number of people (or witnesses) willing to make a formal declaration. Each individual would have to fill out and sign a form to say they had used the route. Sometimes it is a good idea to raise the issue with the Parish Council, which brings the case to a larger number of people.

An application form and guidance notes are available from the Rights of Way section of the County Council's website. Under 'Rights of Way' > 'mapping the network' > 'making changes to the definitive map'. The form is at the bottom of the page called, 'Application form for a modification order and guidance note' In any case, please speak to a member of our Definitive Map Team on 01296 382171 for further information.

‘Walk your Local Paths’ initiative

The County Council first contacted Parish Councils by letter in November 2009 introducing the ‘Walk your Local Paths Initiative’. This letter stressed the importance of ensuring that the Rights of Way network across the Bucks countryside remained free of obstruction and available for everyone to enjoy.

The letter outlined that resources are becoming less available and partnership working is the best way forward to keep the network in good condition. Westcott Parish Council discussed the initiative at its December meeting and, as it has always been keen to keep its local paths available for use and has worked with the County Council to achieve this over the past twenty or so years (the Parish Paths Partnership Scheme - P3), decided to take the project forward. It planned to issue a local newsletter in January and agreed to include an item asking for volunteers to walk and survey all the paths in the parish. There was a limited response, but as a number of Parish Councillors were also keen to be involved, it was decided to go ahead.

A meeting was arranged for a Saturday in April to which all those interested were invited. This took place on a lovely spring morning at the Cricket Club pavilion, an ideal place to consider countryside issues. The County Council had already provided detailed maps and survey forms and people had an interesting discussion on who would do what. One or two agreed to survey paths that they regularly walk whilst others were more interested in walking in new areas beyond the village limits. Some people decided to go off straight away and walk that same morning whilst others wanted to spread their walks over a period of time.

After about three weeks, all the reports were returned to the Clerk – a 100% coverage. These are now being collated for return to the County Council, but the first impression is that generally the paths are in good condition and hopefully the few faults found will be addressed. A couple of anomalies were found and these are being investigated now as a separate issue.

The feedback from the walkers was that they enjoyed the experience and felt they were doing something useful which would benefit the local community and others beyond. It also shows that better results can be achieved by partnership working and would recommend that other parishes who have not yet done so, will take up the ‘Walk your Local Paths Initiative’.

*Alan Lambourne
Clerk to Westcott Parish Council*

Accessible Ashley Green

John Toovey, footpaths representative for Ashley Green Parish, summarises his now decade-long work to become a stile-free parish.

Ashley Green Parish has about 27km (16.78 miles) of footpaths and bridleways. The Parish Council has worked continuously since the late 1990s with the County Council's Rights of Way team to improve access for more people of all ages and abilities as well as for dog walkers. The main focus has been on removing stiles, usually for the Parish to replace them with kissing or self-closing gates and most of these were supplied by the County Council, with a few by landowners.

This has opened up the Parish countryside, extending opportunities for exercise to appreciate and understand the local landscape of open fields, woodlands and hedgerows and their flora and fauna. As well as residents and visitors, the Parish footpaths attract social and educational groups, such as those undertaking the Duke of Edinburgh's Award.

To date, 75 stiles have been removed or replaced and this year a further 10 are planned by the Parish with the help of grants from the County Council and a successful application to the Chilterns Conservation Board's 'Sustainable Development Fund'. As a result, unimpeded walking will soon be possible from Whelpley Hill in the east to Hockeridge Wood in the west and down to Chesham Vale, as well as linking up with adjoining path networks from the towns of Chesham and Berkhamsted.

Over the coming years our aim is to become a completely stile-free Parish and with continued partnership working we hope this can be realised.



Simply Walk

Simply Walk is invaluable for community spirit, bringing people together, tackling isolation and providing a healthy and fun way for people to make new friends in their own neighbourhood. Simply Walk has increased year-on-year since it began in 2002 and now has 52 walks throughout Buckinghamshire, attracting over 500 walkers each week. The walks are led by trained volunteers and are free to participants.

Simply Walk and Community Police Officers join forces to start another new walk in Waddesdon

Following the success of the Hambleden walk, in partnership with PCSO Sarah Turner from Marlow, a second walk has been set up with PCSO Antony Hurd, in Waddesdon on 21st April 2010. If you'd like to take part in this, or any other walk, please phone Fiona Broadbent on 01494 465367.

Walk Wycombe Event – Saturday 8th May

One of the first jobs for Wycombe's new Conservative MP Steve Baker, was to launch a scheme aimed at encouraging residents of Wycombe to leave their cars at home and walk more. Simply Walk had a stand in the Eden Centre, supported by many volunteer walk leaders and led a walk featuring a the new pocket sized map. High Wycombe town mayor Julie Pritchard and Val Letheren, Cabinet member for Transport were also present to support the launch. If you'd like a pocket map please call Tanveer Ghani on 01296 387119.



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Funding

Judging by the fabulous feedback we receive from your parishioners, Simply Walk provides a wealth of benefits including health, companionship and community spirit for everyone involved in it; both the walkers and volunteer walk leaders. However, the scheme needs more funding in order to continue and is currently looking at ways to achieve this. One idea being considered is to request voluntary donations from participants. Alternatively, if any Parish Councils have available funds which they feel they could contribute to keep Simply Walk running in their area please contact Fiona Broadbent, Health Walks Coordinator on 01494 475367. Email: simplywalks@buckscc.gov.uk

Simply Walk.



....your way to better health

Moorend Common Open Access improvements

Katy Dunn, volunteer warden at Moorend Common, describes the delights to be experienced on open access land at Lane End and their attempt to balance public access improvements with conservation and local residents.

Managing any piece of land where the public have access is a balancing act between conservation and amenity. At Moorend Common (between Lane End and Frieth) we have the added factor that it is a SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest) and one of the most species-rich commons in the Chilterns.

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Children playing on Moorend Common, Lane End ©

As voluntary wardens our aim is to conserve Moorend Common for future generations while ensuring our own generation can enjoy it. The health and wellbeing of the Common, with its precious orchids, rare plants and wildlife population are our priority, but Moorend is not a museum exhibit to look at and not touch. It's a brilliant place to wander round, walk the dog, spot wildlife or have a picnic. We need to help and encourage people to enjoy the Common – after all, if no-one knows it's there, how can we expect people to care about it in the future?

Whilst the restoration project on the acid grassland meadows, the specialist plant and wildlife surveys and the general maintenance continues in the background, we're upgrading footpaths with the help of volunteers to encourage individuals and groups such as Simply Walk, schoolchildren and Day Centres to enjoy the place. We're also thinking about ways to increase parking without encroaching on the Common, building boardwalks across marshy areas and creating new bridleways.

Needless to say, these initiatives are not always welcomed by all. Change is always unsettling and inviting more people to share an unspoilt gem of a site upsets some. However, we've been really encouraged to see new riders and cyclists using the new bridleway and also less-able walkers making the most of a woodland track that doesn't suck your boots off! Also, call me smug, but I cannot deny that it has pleased me no end to see the very people who objected to the bridleway now using it as a preferred route across the Common. Sometimes the smallest victories are the sweetest!

Buckingham Canal Restoration

A project which will have great recreation and access benefits is the proposed restoration of the 200 year old Buckingham Canal. This is being led by the Buckingham Canal Society who have drafted a prospectus outlining their exciting plans to reopen the Buckingham Arm of the Grand Union Canal from Cosgrove and Old Stratford, near Milton Keynes.

Their proposal is to restore, as far as possible, on the original line of the canal closed down in the 1960s. It will open up attractive recreation and environmentally-friendly business opportunities throughout the parishes of Buckingham, Maids Morton, Foscot, Leckhampstead, Thornton and Beachampton and has already been discussed at the County Council's Buckingham Local Area Forum.

A new canal would also provide great benefits to the natural environment in terms of new habitats for many species; drainage and flood relief on the north side of the Ouse Valley; and heritage benefits in the restoration of old bridges and the Cattleford aqueduct.

In access terms there is a public footpath in place along the south side of the disused canal throughout Buckinghamshire, all the way from Buckingham town centre to Thornton village. A newly restored canal would greatly add to the attractiveness of this path and the Ouse Valley Way promoted route which follows the line of the old canal for much of its route from Buckingham to Thornton. A newly restored canal would potentially have great benefits for providing opportunities to invest in better path surfaces. It would certainly complement and possibly be adopted as part of the National Cycle Network, linking Milton Keynes (Route 70) with Buckingham (Route 6) and would have massive benefits for walking and cycling within Buckingham town itself.

For more information go to www.buckinghamcanal.org.uk/



Maids Morton Footpath 8 forms the tow path running alongside the disused arm of the Buckingham Canal.

Work of Watermead Parish Council

Many Parish Councils own and manage land for the benefit of the community: as common land, parkland, playing fields, village greens, allotments or woodlands. Watermead Parish Council were keen to link the new Weedon Hill housing development with Kestral Way, Watermead on land they own around the dome-shaped ski-slope off the A413 Buckingham Road.

After contacting the Rights of Way section, we advised them that as landowner they were able to enter into a simple Public Path Creation agreement with the County Council to dedicate a public Right of Way, in this case a new bridleway.

The new route will provide a fantastic sustainable transport corridor for walking, horse riding and cycling. More strategically, it provides a further 'link in the chain' towards the council's vision of a circular bridleway around Aylesbury and more specifically along the major development areas in the north and east of the town.

Once the path is dedicated, the next steps will be to provide a new bridge over the River Thames and a Pegasus crossing over the A413, next to the blue '96.2FM' travel information sign. It is then hoped to investigate links to Berton Village.

Under section 25 of the Highways Act 1980 any landowner can dedicate a public Right of Way. It therefore provides Parish Council's with a great opportunity to dedicate new access on their land, secure for future generations. If you would like more information, please contact the Rights of Way section on 01296 387695.



The (unfinished) access link through Weedon Hill

Site of the River Thames crossing at Watermead



Great Gap circular canal walk

Jackie Wesley, Area Coordinator for Great Brickhill, Wing & Ivinghoe local community area for Buckinghamshire County Council, describes how she has managed a project to create a new footpath in Ivinghoe.

The 'Great Gap footpath link', shortly to open in September 2010, has been formally dedicated as a public right of way by a private landowner and represents 870 metres of new public footpath.

This was one of the two schemes taken forward by the Great Brickhill, Wing & Ivinghoe Local Area Forum using the 'Local Priorities' budget. Just £3,000 kick-started the project, that sees the creation of a superb footpath linking Ivinghoe village to the Grand Union Canal, allowing residents in the hamlet of Great Gap to access safely the local amenities in Ivinghoe without using a car.

This was a partnership project between Buckinghamshire County Council's Locality Services (leading on the project) with support and resources from the Rights of Way Team, Ivinghoe Parish Council, County Councillor Avril Davies, Aylesbury Vale District Council's 'Community Chest' and the Big Lottery fund.

Part of the funding was used to compensate the landowner for having a new footpath on his land. The council was able to create a new legally defined footpath using the Highways Act 1980, section 25 – 'Creation of footpath, bridleway or restricted byway by agreement'.

The second phase of this work will be to secure the final 200 metres to the canal towpath. This will create a flat, 6km, circular walk suitable for all users, including those in mobility scooters. It will also assist local businesses by enabling canal users and other visitors to walk to amenities in Ivinghoe.



The Great Gap path running alongside the B488 Station Road, Ivinghoe, LU7 9EA

The importance of this project to the local community was demonstrated by the willingness of many residents and local community groups to support this project, meeting a need identified by the local community since the 1960s!

A comprehensive Buckinghamshire Open Access survey



Open Access Symbol

John Esslemont, volunteering on behalf of the Ramblers' Association, has done sterling work last summer and throughout the harsh winter surveying the current state of open access land in the county. Here he describes his work.

The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 introduced a statutory right for the public to walk where they wish on certain types of access land, with some restrictions. In the case of Buckinghamshire the affected land is mainly registered common, with a few areas of chalk downland and some woodland voluntarily dedicated as access land by the Forestry Commission.

For public access to reach its full potential, the public need to be aware of their rights and where they can be exercised. Access land is shown on recent Ordnance Survey Explorer maps with an orange boundary and tint, but Natural England has also agreed a format for access land signage for display on site at entry points. (see symbol above)

On behalf of the Ramblers' Association I undertook a survey of all 157 areas of access land in the county (except some very small commons) between April 2009 and February 2010 – I might possibly have finished earlier but for the snow! It was very much a case of combining business with pleasure, particularly in the south of the county. I was able to link a dozen or more sites into longer walks, often starting from home. However, as I moved further north, where access land is more sparse, there was more driving and less walking involved.

Most commons and some of the chalk downland (such as Coombe Hill, Grid Ref : SP848067) allowed public access even before the Act. To me, the jewel in the crown of 'new' access land is Beacon Hill, above Ellesborough. Another extensive and attractive area of chalk downland not previously accessible, even by footpath, is on the southern slopes of Bledlow Ridge (Grid Ref : SU811959).

My survey revealed that only 6 of the 157 areas had access land signs at all entry points. Additionally, some access land is, in practice, inaccessible, either because there are no adjacent rights of way or because it is securely fenced off.



Open Access land at Coombe Hill Monument, Wendover

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It is true that much of our registered common land had been well walked even before the legislation gave such usage on a statutory basis and in harsh economic times erecting signs may not be seen as a high priority. Nevertheless, I believe there may be a role (with a health benefit) for parish councils, in association with the County Council, in educating the public about their new rights and where they can be exercised. Parish Councils might also be able to persuade landowners to facilitate access to currently inaccessible access land.

*John Esslemont
Chairman, Buckinghamshire Milton Keynes and West Middlesex Area
Ramblers' Association*

Promotion of paths in your Parish

The Rights of Way Team has been working on promotional material with various Buckinghamshire parish councils to promote the footpath, bridleway and byway network in their area.

Oving Parish Council has successfully completed a display panel of their village rights of way network, while work is currently under way to produce display panels for **Edlesborough** and **Farmham Royal** parishes.

The internet is now an essential part of our life and much more information is becoming available online. The rights of way network is no exception. **Great & Little Kimble, Tingewick, Mursley and Stoke Mandeville** are putting footpath, bridleway and byway information on their parish website. Recently, **Stoke Mandeville** Parish has been renewing its parish walking leaflet, which, it is hoped, will be available online. It is great to see so many parishes keen to promote their rights of way network.

If you would like to produce any promotional material involving our maps, please get in touch. However, please note, that depending on the type of work, there may be a small charge.



Oving Parish Council display board

Area Officer Profile - James Mawson



How long have you been working in the Rights of Way team?
Chipping away at the coal face for 5 years

What's the most enjoyable parts of your job?
There are not many jobs that include walking through the Chilterns as part of the job description. I consider myself very lucky!

What's the most frustrating part of your job?
Dealing with selfish attitudes.

What's been your greatest achievement in the past 12 months?
Removing a stile in Great Kimble enabling an elderly lady to walk along the path opposite her house. She couldn't climb the stile, so hadn't been able to use the route for 12 years.

What's your main interest outside work?
Pigs and chickens...can I include a shameless plug for our rare breed pork and free range chickens? Anyone interested please get in touch.

What's your favourite walk in Buckinghamshire?
Along the Ridgeway from Princes Risborough and then down to the King Arms in Tring. I realise this runs into Hertfordshire, but the ale is worth leaving the county!

What's your favourite view?
My wife – however I'm not sure she'd appreciate me labelling her as something I need to view from a distance! (Ed note: newly married!!)

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

Alternatively contact us on 01296 382171 or e-mail row@buckscc.gov.uk

