

LONG STRATTON FOOTPATH WARDEN'S REPORT MARCH 2021

After a very wet winter when footpaths became at best unpleasant and at worst impossible, I went out to inspect all my paths in the first week of March in a sustained onslaught. By then the mud and more or less solidified with only a few really bad sections. I don't expect to do too much in the way of trimming back so early in the year but I wanted to inspect for signs of damage, missing posts etc.

FP1 (Hempnall Rd to A140) See my remarks April 2020. Almost impossible to get across the water-filled ditch running through the middle on March 1 even though it had not rained for a week. Fortunately, who would want to? I could see no sign of walking activity over this very rough ground.

FP2 North from Hempnall Rd. Growth round stile no problem yet. Have made a note to check in 4 – 6 weeks time. clear when it starts growing. Rest of the path OK

FP3 (between Church Lane and Hempnall Rd) The path is badly churned up by tractors, etc at the Church Road end and there are a number of huge puddles in this area. I notice people have made themselves a path at the adjacent field's edge to get past. Earlier this year Highways said they are "monitoring the situation" so there's nothing more I can do. The far end is also beginning to deteriorate again but there is room to bypass the actual path on the grass at the side.

FP 4 (east from FP3) A lovely surprise for me – a brand new post has been put in at last laden with direction roundels. The poor old wonky post remains in the ditch, or, more accurately, suspended above it by dead weeds. I suppose it will eventually biodegrade. The path is nice and grassy leading over plank bridge to replaced field path to Morningthorpe.

FP5 (A short length between Church Lane and Norwich Road cutting off the corner). No problems

FP6 (from FP7 to St Michael's Church). Since my last report the stile has again been tweaked with a horizontal bar between the stile and the post bearing the direction disc. This has stopped it leaning over so dangerously and, while not perfect, is now easier to use.

FP7 (Churchfields estate to Rhees Green) . A well-used path round the field edge and there is a good rolled path where it crosses the field to the edge of the estate which as I said in my last report has been so well used this year it has really spread out sideways as people try to avoid the mud. I hope there hasn't been too much damage.

FP8 (A140 towards Picton Rd) Good grass path, still a bit muddy mid-section but drying now.

FP12 Tarmac between A140 and St Michael's Rd past car park.

FP13 (From Edge's Lane to Rhees Green) Excellent wide path, nicely rolled. The finger post at Rhees Green end has been replaced.

FP14 (Rhees Green eastwards towards Morningthorpe) Good field edge path to plank bridge
This path runs between two fields and is never ploughed up which is a huge benefit to walkers. I don't know if this is because the fields belong to two different farmers or just one responsible farmer. Actually, farmers are not supposed to plough over a footpath unless it "cannot reasonably be avoided" but most of them do as a matter of course.

FP15 (Star Lane to Hall Rd) A well-used path, of course, as it leads out from the very centre of Long Stratton. It does take a long time to dry out though, and this was by far the path in the worst condition (apart from Tyrrell's Wood), with wet gooey mud most of the way. Yet when it reached the field the path was a pleasure, nice and firm. The path diagonally across the field is marked by tyre tracks. There is a metal post to show where this starts (coming from the Hall Road end) but no direction disc. Am not sure how to fix one to metal but I'll have a go (superglue?); not everyone is aware that is the course of the path.

FP16 (from FP15 to Mill Rd) Good field edge path. I'm still not very happy about the lack of an upright at this stile into this field. It's quite tricky to get over unless you are quite fit. I conducted an impromptu poll among some walkers I met: The attitude ranged from "Not ideal but I'm used to it" to "I hate it" so I think I'll try and do something about it. The hand rail is down anyway. The hand rail on plank bridge is broken.

FP17 (from Mill Lane going east) Good grass path along field edge, then an easy to walk on rolled path through crop. I wish more farmers would replace the path like this instead of leaving walkers to tread it back every year (see comment FP14). It would be even better if he'd made it the recommended 2 metres wide for rape. (1 metre standard for other crops)

FP18 (right turn from FP17 to Mill Road) I am so pleased with this path. Since I put the direction marker in two years ago this field edge path has become really well used so when it crosses the next field a clear way lies along the field edge, really useful if you are coming from Mill Road as the exit through the hedge is quite well hidden until you get to it. The plank bridge has STILL not been replaced; it was put in the schedule in **June 2019** It's holding up but for how much longer? The undergrowth round the stile here and at the exit gets very dense and I gave it a preventative trim. Should be OK until mid-summer.

FP19 The path has been clearly delineated with tyres and is reasonably easy to traverse, certainly while the crop is short. A sturdy post with direction marker discs has been placed in the centre of the field where the path bends off so that is a benefit. (It used to be a small stick.) The finger post at the Wood Green end must have been damaged when the ditch was cleared as it is now only 70 degrees to the vertical instead of 90. However, it is still pointing in the right direction and seems very firm. (I think it is the concrete in which it is embedded that got shifted.)

FP20 (A140 opp. Parker's Lane to Haynton Lane) Should be a good field edge path but between A140 and first field boundary now hideously rutted by (I'm guessing) the hedge trimmer which must have gone up after heavy and prolonged rain. Extensive deep puddles. It's walkable but distressing to see.

FP21 (Parker's Lane to Wood Green) Path marked by white posts. Last section to Wood Green heavy going.

FP22 (Mill Rd to RB23 at Wood Green) Ploughed field; temporary footpath replaced along its length by tyre marks. The uprooted finger post reported 10 March 2020 has still not been replaced; I was informed it is in the schedule. I have "planted" it in the hedgerow where it is doing its job quite well, held up by brambles.

RB23 (Wood Green to Mill Road past Mayfields Farm). Good path

FP24 (Wood Green to Morningthorpe). Not walkable at the moment having been newly ploughed. I will monitor this but farmer usually replaces it. It really needs a waymarker where the path leaves the field edge. I have mentioned this before as a good idea in my naivety, thinking it might be taken up. This time I shall report it under missing sign and see what happens, but I won't hold my breath.

FP25 (part of Boudicca's Way from Parker's Lane through Tyrrel's Wood). Completely impassable at the moment (unless wearing wellies) and likely to remain so for some time. It is pretty well water-logged for long stretches not helped by deep ruts made by farm vehicles at Wood Green end and the passage of horses and bikes churning up the mud.

FP 26 (Parker's Lane winding through nearly to A140) First stretch along field edge OK, then across field marked with white sticks part way. There does not seem to be a crop, just weeds and "volunteers" so very overgrown and hard work to boundary. Faint path as far as kennels, where stops

FP27 This path is in 3 sections. The field edge grassy path from Hayton's Lane is O, but no path through the crop in second section to plank bridge or the third section, although here one can walk along tram line

ACTIONS TAKEN

Status of defects reported to Highways 2020

1. FP18 plank bridge work agreed but STILL in queue
2. FP22 Finger post damaged work agreed but still not carried out
3. FP24 Finger post missing at Anson Road end, Morningthorpe) work agreed, not yet carried out.

Defects reported since

1. Stile halfway along FP16 and broken handrail
2. Waymarker needed half way along FP24 where path leaves field edge
3. No path on FP 27

Defects put right:

1. The finger post missing at junction of FP3 and FP4 has now been replaced
2. The finger post on Hall Road for FP13 has been replaced
3. The stile on FP6 has been improved

I am continuing to liaise with NCC re Public Rights of Way and the Bypass and have recently been invited to comment on the re-routing of Long Stratton FP 26, which I did.

Bonnie Wade

Long Stratton Footpath Warden

March 2021