

LONG STRATTON FOOTPATH WARDEN'S REPORT for APRIL 2020

I made a point of inspecting all the Long Stratton paths in the first half of March, before Spring growth becomes rampant (even so, I had many occasions to use my trusty secateurs). As it happens, this meant I was just ahead of the coronavirus outbreak.

FP1 Incredibly, an exit gate and finger post has been installed on the A140 following the building of the roundabout at the Hempnall crossroads. The line of the path runs from the A140 about 100 yards down from the roundabout to the Hempnall Road. While I know I should laud this to the sky, to be honest, this route does not really have any value as a footpath as at the A140 end there are no other footpaths anywhere remotely near. You would be foolhardy to attempt it. Unless there are plans to create a new network that I know nothing about, of course. Even then you'd have to cross the A140.

FP2 North from Hempnall Rd. I cleared growth from round the new stile. The gate is almost always open but I make sure the stile is useable for the rare occasion the gate is closed. Signage has now been placed at the bridge leading to Morningthorpe FP1.

FP3 (between Church Lane and Hempnall Rd) The path has become VERY badly churned up by tractors etc at the Church Road end. (The far end was repaired last year). After rain it is virtually impassable without wellingtons.

FP 4 The finger post at junction with FP3 is at a rakish angle but firm in the ground and visible; I have become quite fond of it. I cleared away a lot of growth at the plank bridge.

FP5 (A short length between Church Lane and Norwich Road cutting off the corner). Looks good; the farmer has left a full metre of field edge.

FP6 (from FP7 to St Michael's Church). The stile has been repaired following my last report but is only just about satisfactory. It is now just quite awkward to use rather than actually dangerous. I cut back overhanging twiggy bits and young nettles.

FP7 (Churchfields estate to Rhees Green) I have cut back the brambles and twigs at the Church Farm end. Hopefully that will last until summer. There is 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.

FP8 (A140 towards Picton Rd) Good path. Have trimmed back hedge at the plank bridge before it encroaches.

FP12 Tarmac between A140 and St Michael's Rd.

FP13 (From Edge's Lane to Rhees Green) Good path, nicely cut.

FP14 (Rhees Green eastwards towards Morningthorpe) Good field edge path to plank bridge and superb cut path 2 metres wide through rape field to the Hollies on Norwich Road. Well done, farmer, much appreciated. Finger post missing at that end.

FP15 (Star Lane to Hall Rd) Good well-used path. Tree down just after Star Lane after storm at beginning of March which I notified to Highway, later cleared quite quickly.

FP16 (from FP15 to Mill Rd) Good field edge path. Cleared quite a lot of growth (both hedge and brambles) at the stile.

FP17 (from Mill Rd going east) Good path along field edge, then a rolled path has been replaced through crop.

FP18 After the right turn from FP17, the field edge path is well-trodden, which I take as a personal triumph as almost nobody used it before I put in the sign last year. However, the plank bridge still has not been replaced and is getting more rotten. (I reported this last Spring and met with Fiona from Highways last June at the site where she agreed it needed replacing.) I chased this up and was informed it is in the queue but "Highways are the priority". I trimmed back growth on the hedge side and the field edge path is easy to the stile on Mill Road.

FP19 The finger post at Hall Road has been uprooted and damaged. The path through crop has not been replaced and also the white post in the middle to mark where the path makes a turn has disappeared.

FP20 (A140 opp. Parker's Lane to Hayton Lane) Good field edge path.

FP21 (Parker's Lane to Wood Green) Path not replaced but indicated by tyre tracks. Wheat crop still tiny so usable, but will monitor.

FP22 (Mill Rd to RB23 at Wood Green) Ploughed field; temporary footpath replaced along its length by tyre marks. Finger post has been uprooted and damaged in a similar way to FP 19. I have balanced it against the hedge.

RB23 (Wood Green to Mill Road past Mayfields Farm) Good path looked after by Trails.

FP24 (Wood Green to Morningthorpe). Field edge path not in good condition. This is because it is not in the cutting schedule so when weed growth gets tall people walk at edge of crop so growth does not get trodden down. I am asking a mower-owning acquaintance I made at the Forum for help on this. It also needs a secondary marker where path changes direction to go through crop. I have asked for this before...

FP25 (part of Boudicca's Way from Parker's Lane through Tyrrel's Wood). Inspected on Marc 12th when was seriously muddy and churned by farm vehicles at Parker's Lane end and completely impassable 200 yards further up

FP 26 (Parker's Lane winding through nearly to A140). Field edge usable but when path turns west it disappears. It has not been replaced or indicated and I wandered off course until spied marker at next field where farmer has sprayed path 2 metres through rape and 1 metre through wheat (this is best practice). Where the true path is blocked at the kennels, he has kindly left a good metre at edge of his field so one can fairly easily exit onto A140. It is hoped this path can officially be diverted with advent of the Bypass.

FP27 This path is in 3 sections. A field edge path from Hayton's Lane which is rough but quite easy to use, a path from A140 to the boundary with next field which has been nicely cut to the regulation width, and a middle section which has not been replaced, obviously a different farmer. At present this crop is very low and sparse but last year it was not replaced despite my complaint and spoils an otherwise pleasant route. I thought I'd wait a month, check, and then report before crop gets too high.

ACTIONS TAKEN

Defects reported to Highways

1. Surface damage at FP 3
2. Finger post missing at FP4 work agreed
3. Chase up FP18 plank bridge work agreed but held in queue
4. Finger post missing FP 19 work agreed
5. FP19 Path not replaced
6. FP22 Finger post damaged work agreed
7. FP24 Finger post missing at Anson Road end (technically this end is Morningthorpe)
work agreed

I also attended the Parish Paths Seminar organised by Norfolk Local Access Forum at Thompson Community Hall. It was very well attended. It was quite useful for me but my impression is that it was mainly aimed at Parish Councillors who they hoped they could interest in becoming more proactive in making rights of way easy and enjoyable to use, and to identify land where they might persuade the landowner to make a permissive path available. Appointing a Footpath Warden was the first step so Long Stratton scored there! There was a questionnaire asking things like how much money the parish would be prepared to set aside and investigating permissive paths, etc Apparently, Norfolk is not as well off for footpaths as many counties e.g. 2,400 in Norfolk, 6,000+ in North Yorkshire (can't remember now if miles or kilometres but the ratio is the same anyway. Obviously, I was not qualified to answer this.

They also emphasised that – and I quote from the accompanying booklet – **“Parish Councils can undertake the maintenance of any public footpath or bridleway in the parish. This means the cutting back of surface vegetation and surface repairs.”** So although PCs have no specific duties for rights of way, they have “many powers they can choose to exercise to improve their local paths. Additionally, the power of wellbeing provides town and parish councils with a general power to spend on any activity which adds to the wellbeing of its community.”

I did also make a useful contact from Gt Moulton who has a heavy duty mower and would be prepared to help, though I imagine all this sort of thing will have to be put on ice for the time being.

One more thing. Most of “my” farmers are really good about replacing paths through their crops. Last year I was talking to a lady who mentioned that a local farmer, though replacing his path as he should, had complained it was a waste as he didn’t think anyone used it. As it happened, I had not only just walked down it, I had met a couple coming the other way. I thought it would be nice to write to these farmers and say how appreciated it was to find the PROW replaced. However, when I went to South Norfolk House to try and obtain names and addresses, these were not allowed to be given out, no doubt quite correctly. I wonder if it is within the Council’s power to obtain this information, and, if in agreement, facilitate this? Everyone likes to be thanked.

Bonnie Wade

Long Stratton Footpath Warden

March 2020