

## LONG STRATTON FOOTPATH WARDEN'S REPORT FEBRUARY 2024

All Long Stratton's paths were inspected during the last week of January and the first week of February. If I found any faults that I could not deal with, I notified Highways Footpath division via my website account.

Obviously, several of our paths are going to be severely impacted by the building of the Bypass. There are plans to integrate them but while work is in progress I'm afraid we will have to grit our teeth and bear it.

FP1 (Hempnall Rd to A140) This footpath doesn't really go anywhere but I checked it all the same. You can't see it on the ground, presumably because nobody uses it but just head straight across towards the A140. You have to negotiate a small stream halfway. I cleared the dead remains of tall perennial weeds growing both sides of the gate.

FP2 (North from Hempnall Rd) This path heads north before swinging round on grass to the right to cross a small bridge into the parish of Morningthorpe. It goes through a wide gate which is usually open but the actual FP is supposed to cross a stile. The stile was repaired a couple of years ago but is now inaccessible because of growth of sedge, a small tree now encroaching and the activity of an energetic mole that has thrown up hills and created a deep hole. I went armed with my trusty secateurs but would have needed a spade, loppers and shears to cope, so either the landowner will have to clear it or allow permanent access through the gate. (When the stile was dangerous he chose to repair it rather than allow gate access.)

FP3 (between Church Lane and Hempnall Rd) This path has had deep and extensive pools of water in the early part of the year or after heavy rain because of use by agricultural vehicles.. It looks as if a bit of work has been done to fill the worst of the ruts but still not very good at both ends. However, it is not impassible and is mostly nice to wander down.

FP 4 (east from FP3) Grassy path leading over plank bridge to field path to Morningthorpe. All OK

FP5 (A short length between Church Lane and Norwich Road cutting off the corner). In good condition.

FP6 (from FP7 to St Michael's Church. All in good order. The stile has been improved but the cross bar is beginning to get a little bit wobbly so needs watching.

FP7 (Churchfields estate to Rhees Green near junction with Church Lane) . Good one metre wide path. I cleared hanging brambles which were not yet a menace but soon would be. A stitch in time saves nine. *Note to self: remember to take gardening gloves next time!*

FP8 (A140 towards Picton Rd) Good grass path.

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

FP13 (From Edge's Lane to Rhees Green) Nice clear path although the FP sign has still not been replaced at Edge's Lane. These things take time to filter into the works schedule and the loss of 2020 due to the pandemic led to huge backlogs. Complaints I made during 2020 and 2021 were only filtering through in the second half of 2023!

FP14 (Rhees Green eastwards towards Morningthorpe) . Good field edge path once you've tip-toed through thick churned up mud of the first few yards.

FP15 (Star Lane to Hall Rd) Always a well-used path, though the mud seems to take a long time to dry out in the first half. Better when you get to the field and the path is nice and clear. The finger post at the Hall Road end has not yet been replaced. I'm wondering if they're waiting until after the bypass works.

FP16 (from FP15 to Mill Rd) Good field edge path. Regarding the leaning stile which Highways wrote to the landowner about last year, I think it is slightly more upright but it is still very difficult to use. The crossing step is so high that even I (of average height) have a job to get my foot up to it. A shorter person needs help and anyone less than perfectly fit should not attempt it. I would say this is the most awkward stile in Norfolk (or possibly anywhere). Last Monday this stile lay across the route of a group of 13 walkers. 4 walkers refused to attempt it and walked back by road. The other 9 had varying degrees of difficulty and all agreed it needs the addition of a SECOND, LOWER STEP and an UPRIGHT to grip, particularly as one side is very close to the bank of a stream. Lose your footing and you could easily slide down. NCC guidance is that a stile should be "reasonably easy to use". I again cut back the blackthorn and brambles that try to grow out across it.

FP17 (from Mill Lane going east) Good path but the fingerpost has been uprooted. I propped it against a tree some time ago but it needs re-planting.

FP18 (right turn from FP17 to Mill Rd) Nice walking long grassy field edge path, then our new footbridge. The stile beyond is still firm but continues to deteriorate. I'll continue to monitor.

FP19 (Hall Rd to Wood Green) Quite hard to see the way as path is not indicated on the ground. There used to be a white post marking the change of direction midway which you could focus on but this has vanished.

FP20 (A140 opp. Parker's Lane to Haynton's Lane). Excellent wide path, well used. The fingerpost at the A140 end was listing at a rakish angle but was still reasonably anchored. I solved the problem by collecting some flints, holding the post upright and wedging the stones into the resultant space as above.

FP21 (Parker's Lane to Wood Green) Path to hedge well-indicated by the new fingerpost. Ground has not yet been ploughed so easy going. Next section between field edge and hedge is always grassy and pleasant. Midway fingerpost a bit loose again: re-wedged it with flints. Last section going through young crop harder to see – can just make out fingerpost at far end. The path will need re-instating soon as the crop grows.

FP22 (Mill Rd to RB23 at Wood Green) The line of the path is not clear but just head straight across. The fingerpost in the hedge looks more and more forlorn so I think I'll ask for that to be properly installed again.

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

FP24 (Wood Green to Morningthorpe). This year the path has been ploughed very close to the field edge path so although passable at the moment I anticipate nettles, etc, will soon render the path unusable. Highways will only put in the cutting schedule if we swap with another path which is a non-starter.

FP25 (part of Boudicca's Way from Parker's Lane through Tyrrel's Wood). Very muddy in parts and one place across a watery muddy ditch not for anyone without good balance, followed by two tree trunks across the path, but otherwise pleasant.

FP 26 (Parker's Lane winding through nearly to A140) . The section beside field from Parker's Lane is grassy and easy to use at the moment. If enough people use it, it will keep down the growth of tall weeds. Unfortunately, the good news stops there. The waymarker to show when to turn right across the field is in the ditch and if you don't know where to go you've basically had it, The farmer has marked the way with tyre prints but they are very faint and you have to know exactly where to scan to locate them. After the ditch is crossed, you come to a field of young rape with no path through. I got through this but could not see a way through the last part and gave up, walked straight on and climbed over the ditch to the A140. The new bypass will cut through this area but some months to go yet, so no excuse to let it just go in my opinion. At least the bypass has included plans to divert the route of this path and provide a proper exit as the official one has been blocked for many years.

FP27 (from A140 opposite the kennels to Hayton's Lane 200 yards short of Wacton Common) The fingerpost at the A140 end is in the ditch. At the far end of this section of the path the waymarker post is rotted and lies on the ground. The next section is across a field to a large tree but the field was deep ploughed more than 2 weeks ago and the path not reinstated. I stumbled across this nightmare rather than retrace a mile and only survived because I've got good boots and good balance. Please don't try it. The final section to Haynton's Lane along a field edge is actually OK. The repeater post I'd wedged with stones a while back as described at FP20 is still upright so it clearly works, certainly in the short term.

## SUMMARY OF ACTIONS TAKEN

Reported to Highways

1. Missing fingerpost at Hall Road end of FP15 reported 2022 still not replaced
2. Stile on FP2
3. Missing Fingerpost at FP13 (Edges Lane)
4. Missing Fingerpost at FP27 (A140)
5. Missing repeater post at FP27
6. Stile FP16
7. Uprooted Fingerpost at FP17
8. Missing Fingerpost at FP19 Hall Rd

9. Uprooted Fingerpost at FP22
10. Missing repeater post (in ditch) at FP26
11. No path through rape field

Dealt with myself:

Cutting back growth at various sites (FPs

Wedging fingerposts at FPs20 and 21

Bonnie Wade, Long Stratton Voluntary Footpath Warden