

## **Westbury sub Mendip Parish Footpath Report, April 2022.**

### **1) General comments:**

The Government claims that it places great emphasis on the benefits of walking, for health, both mental and physical, and Local Government is expected to play its part. There are more people than ever, walking in, around, and through the village.

There have been some improvements for walkers during the last year, through repairs to damaged or missing infrastructure on paths. Unfortunately the County Council Highway Authority was responsible for none of these improvements. It is their statutory duty to act so to ensure that the public can use the footpath network easily and safely. They were notified of many problems in the recommended manner – by logging specific defects on their database map. They failed to get broken gates and stiles repaired, even by instructing volunteers; some cases had been reported during the previous year. An almost standard response has been: *'remedial works were not considered necessary'*, even when failure to act could mean either a risk to a walker's safety, or an insurmountable obstacle. They also again failed to ensure that paths were restored after planting with crops, by reminding landowners to do their duty.

The repairs mentioned earlier were carried out locally, despite the Highway Authority's neglect. I do believe in voluntary assistance, and I hope to solve some of the outstanding problems during the coming year. Such work is enjoyable and a positive help to the community, and I welcome any offers of assistance. I will be happy to show how to report problems to the Highway Authority, but it is sadly clear that they are generally unwilling to act. I hope that the new Unitary Authority treats Rights of Way better in future, than Somerset County Council has traditionally done.

### **2) A footpath towards Easton.**

Following a generous donation of land by David Limond of Furlong Farm, and a verbal approval from Jonathan Alldis of the Church Commissioners (these are the two landowners concerned), a new permissive footpath now runs for over a quarter of a mile between Lodge Hill and Erlon Lane, on the line of the old railway, following the route proposed for the Strawberry Line multi-user path.

Volunteer work, spearheaded by the Westbury Tree Group, to plant more than 2000 trees along the route, and the building of a flight of steps into Erlon Lane, mean that we now have a new uninterrupted walking route nearly to Easton. Westbury residents are already using the path, and can enjoy a new circular walk including Erlon Lane, returning to the village by the southern footpath WS 13/30. This path can also be followed eastwards to enter Easton, but this is not the direct link between the two villages which we all hope will be achieved in time. The new permissive path is nevertheless a major improvement in walking opportunities for the village.

### **3) Rights of Way.**

Last year I was pleased to report the full opening of the important and central Court House Farm path, WS 13/1. The fingerpost at the start of this path, opposite the village shop, has since been repaired. Guy Timson, of Court House Farm, has kindly clarified the path by mowing it across his lawn.

Paths 13/2 and 13/3 lead on from it, beyond Court House Farm. 13/2 runs south-west, giving access over the railway line to Moor Lane and Long and Short Drovers; 13/3 goes westwards towards Rodney Stoke. Both paths had to be re-established yet again by walkers last year, through a maize crop, as was also necessary on land between Lodge Hill and the Sewage Works (now politely renamed the Westbury Water Recycling Centre). I have a verbal assurance from the Church Commissioners that they will instruct the land user (their tenant) to restore these paths in future, as the law requires. As I write, the paths are easily walkable, as ploughing has not yet taken place, and they are indicated by waymarked posts.

The crossing of WS 13/2 over the railway embankment was dangerous, and impossible for many to negotiate. There was no sign of any steps on the steep mud bank. Both kissing gates are marked as County Council property, and steps appear on their database map. The County, however, claimed that no work was needed, which was a ludicrous response. Two new flights of steps have recently been installed by voluntary work and at voluntary expense, so that this crossing is now easy and safe to use, for the first time in decades.

#### **4) Signs.**

I have been told by the County Rights of Way officer, that broken finger posts are being repaired by fixing waymarks rather than replacement fingers, as a matter of policy. This is sad, and the reason will be cost. Damage to these fingerposts tends to be caused either by deliberate vandalism (as with the posts above Deer Leap, reported last year), or by careless trimming of hedges by contractors using a flail (as at Moor Lane, and elsewhere).

#### **5) The Roughmoor Lane proposals.**

By sending several letters, and through discussion at the recent Consultation on the Roughmoor Lane development, I pressed the Church Commissioners to revise their proposals to take proper account of Rights of Way, which pass close by the proposed development. Initially they had not even been shown on the plan. Their agents Lichfields modified their plan to include both of the suggestions I had made for new paths linking the development to the existing path network. I urged their representative Jonathan Alldis to dedicate these links as permanent Rights of Way, but was unable at that time to persuade him of the advantages of this.

Signed,

Colin Booth,

Parish Paths Liaison Officer, Westbury sub Mendip.