

Dereham Walkers are Welcome Annual Report 2016



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1 Introduction

- 1.1 In June 2016, Dereham became the fourth town in Norfolk to secure *Walkers are Welcome* status. *Walkers are Welcome* is a national charity, whose aims are to encourage and support towns and villages to
- be attractive destinations for walkers with top quality information on local walks,
 - offer local people and visitors excellent walking opportunities within their areas,
 - ensure that footpaths and facilities for walkers are maintained, improved and well signposted,
 - contribute to local tourism plans and regeneration strategies,
 - promote the health benefits of walking and increase participation, and
 - encourage the use of public transport.
- 1.2 To secure this status, Dereham had to do the following.
- 1 Demonstrate popular local support
 - 2 Gain formal endorsement from the local council
 - 3 Indicate a commitment to ensure that the local public path network will be maintained in good condition
 - 4 Ensure adequate marketing of *Walkers are Welcome* status
 - 5 Show how use of public transport will be encouraged
 - 6 Demonstrate how we will ensure that *Walkers are Welcome* status is maintained in future
- 1.3 To take this forward, a small committee was established in November 2015. This group included the Footpath Warden for Dereham Town Council, whose work had already resulted in meeting many of the above criteria.
- 1.4 How we met those criteria is set out in our application documents (available at <http://www.DerehamWaW.org.uk/docs/application.pdf>). This report sets out what we have done since accreditation and what we plan to do in 2017. The content and format have been chosen to match the formal return we will make to the national *Walkers are Welcome* organisation.



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2 Local support



Even before formal accreditation we had established close relationships with Dereham Antiquarian Society, Dereham Windmill, Mid-Norfolk Railway and St Nicholas Church; in May we joined with them to form *Visit Dereham*, issuing a promotional leaflet with *Dereham Walkers are Welcome* featured. *Visit Dereham* continues to develop, and hopes to form wider links in 2017.

During the year we have also worked with Dereham Town Council, Natural England, Norfolk County Council, Norfolk Wildlife Trust and The Ramblers (Norfolk), all concerning path maintenance issues (reported below).

We have also had support from our MP (George Freeman) and a number of local Dereham stores (Jollyes Pet Food Superstore, M&S, McDonalds and Morrisons): all of these donated prizes to a raffle we ran after one of our walks.

3 Formal endorsement

Norfolk County Council, Breckland District Council and Dereham Town Council all provided statements of support in our application.

Dereham also provides a councillor member (Kate Millbank) of our committee, and close contact with the Town Council is maintained both through this representation and by virtue of the voluntary Footpath Warden (Ken Hawkins) being a member of the WaW committee, reporting on matters to each meeting of the Heritage and Open Spaces Committee. This involvement has enabled input on planning applications affecting the footpath network in the town, in addition to the many more routine matters of path maintenance and usage. Our own website (<http://www.DerehamWaW.org.uk>) has a link to the Town Council website, and their site has a page on footpath issues, including a link to back to *Dereham Walkers are Welcome*.

4 Maintenance of local path network

The *Walkers are Welcome* committee includes Ken Hawkins who is the volunteer Footpath Warden for the Town Council: he walks all of the rights of way in the town several times a year and reports to every meeting of the Council's Heritage and Open Spaces Committee. While major problems are reported to Norfolk County Council, the Footpath Warden, with the assistance of Catherine Hawkins, has undertaken a wide range of maintenance tasks, using secateurs, saws, shears and a hedge trimmer (all supplied by the Town Council), with the occasional use by another committee member (Tim Birt) of a chain saw. Although this



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work has been undertaken since before *Dereham Walkers are Welcome* was established, we also started tracking time spent from June: using the Norfolk County Council rate of £20 per hour, we estimate that some 93 hours of work has been done, with a value of £1866, plus a further 23 hours spent in monitoring time, valued at £385 - a total value well in excess of £2000 in the space of half a year!



In June, we secured the help of The Ramblers (Norfolk) in using their brush cutter to clear a couple of badly overgrown paths; this work was then featured on their website. Through these connections with The Ramblers, we were also able to liaise with Norfolk County Council regarding their contracted cutting programme as it affected paths in the town, offering suggestions as to which paths should be included.

We have established a relationship with Norfolk Wildlife Trust, through whose recently acquired land one of the public footpaths runs. The path at one point crosses a very wet and muddy half ditch. The crossing is on a sleeper built bridge, but the muddiness extended beyond each end of the sleepers: NWT arranged to build up hard core at each end, making the bridge much more convenient (and safe) to use after wet weather.

This same path also features a gate at one point, which had twice been vandalised; by agreement with an officer of Norfolk County Council, the gate was fixed in a more robust manner which has so far resisted further damage. (In response to our requests, the same officer also cut back a tree which was growing out diagonally over the path, thus making walking easier.)

On the opposite side of the town, two footpaths have long been difficult to use. One passes through the garden of a private house, then enters a field; half way across the field, it is joined by a second path. The two paths together form a link to a restricted byway (which can be accessed by another route), but have not in recent years been made available across the field - for some time, the field had been used to hold horses, and these had been contained by electric fences without provision for walkers to cross. This year, the field was put to arable crops, and all fences removed, though the course of the paths was still not marked. Through the Footpath Warden, we have confirmed with the householder that he is happy for people to use the path through his garden, and via the Town Clerk are contacting the farmer to secure marking of the route across the field. By coincidence, a contact with the Norfolk County Council Highways Officer for the town has resulted in an undertaking to add this to their work schedule.



A further piece of work, again in conjunction with The Ramblers, has been the replacement of worn and broken wire netting on a well used path to the town.

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We had also been concerned for some time about the lack of proper public access to Badley Moor, a Common subject to s193 of the Law of Property Act 1925. A disagreement between the landowner and members of the public had been addressed by the landowner with the erection of a stile to enable public access to the Common. This was, however, not seen as best practice, and complaints continued, resulting in the continuing involvement of the Town Council and Natural England. Following an on site meeting at which the Footpath Warden was present, an agreement in principle was reached to replace the stile by a gate to an agreed specification, thus meeting current standards for access. Funding is in course of being agreed at present.



Also through the Footpath Warden, representations have been made to Breckland District Council regarding a number of planning applications which had impact on current or potential rights of way in the town; in one case, this has included presence at a meeting with the developer to discuss a major development through which run a number of routes currently being claimed as restricted byways.

A further recent development has been a link with The Conservation Volunteers in Norfolk. Plans are being made for TCV to clear a number of stumps in the surface of a restricted byway, which we presume have been left over from long past clearance attempts, but now present a significant tripping hazard, especially when the grass has grown up and hidden them. It seems possible also that TCV can help with a short 10 metre length (again of a restricted byway) where the path runs in a narrow gap between a thick and thorny hedge and a steep sided ditch (which we believe has been dug into the surface of the path): we probably can't change the ditch, but it may be possible to cut back the hedge and then improve the path surface.

A desire to take things a step further has been embodied in proposals for a set of 'projects' which would improve the walking environment: these include a number of trods (informal footways to be built along short sections of road

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currently without them, linking the ends of public rights of way emerging on to the road), surface improvements in a few very muddy areas (including an extension to a boardwalk), seeking landowner permission to use field edges as permissive paths, and (in one case) seeking a new path to help link two footpaths which currently require a lengthy walk along an unwelcoming road without a footway. The initial report has been noted by the Town Council, but needs much more detailed work.

5 Marketing

Our formal launch took place on 25 June, with speeches and a cake at the offices of Breckland District Council; those present included representatives or messages of support from Dereham Town Council, Breckland District Council, Norfolk County Council and our MP; also The Ramblers, Open Spaces Society, Cromer Walkers are Welcome, Dereham Antiquarian Society, Mid-Norfolk Railway and Dereham Windmill. The launch was followed by a short walk for all who wanted to sample some of the town's path network. All of this secured press (and website) coverage not only from the local *Dereham Times*, but also the regional *Eastern Daily Press*. The event also secured a press release from the Open Spaces Society, and a blog entry from The Ramblers (Norfolk).



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Even prior to this event, we had been working to establish our profile. One of our committee members (Ken Hawkins) was also a member of Norfolk Local Access Forum, and had secured agreement to arrange a conference for parish representatives about footpath issues. Under the title *Parish Paths Seminar*, this took place on 13 June, and was held in Dereham. Our member (supported by the Dereham Town Clerk Tony Needham) made a presentation on Footpath Wardens at the Seminar, and also arranged for a session on *Walkers are Welcome*, led by Don Davenport from Cromer WaW and Hilary Cox, Walking and Cycling Champion for Norfolk County Council. We had by then received the National WaW banner and were able to display it at the seminar.

During 2015, when plans for securing *Walkers are Welcome* accreditation were still being formulated, the Footpath Warden had worked with the Town Council to get funding for a pack of *Dereham Walks* guides which he had written. 3000 copies were printed and distributed around the town, as well as being put onto the Town Council website. All made reference to the plan to apply for Walkers are Welcome accreditation: once we had received this, we added a sticker to all of the packs to note that this had now been secured.

To build on the launch (and to raise money!), committee members Dorothy and Martin

Sneesby agreed to hold a garden party early in October, the end point of a walk. We arranged a shorter (one hour) and a longer (2-3 hour) walk, and attracted 20+ people (and a good complement of dogs) to the short walk, and 9 to the longer walk. This also secured local press coverage, including advertising our next venture - three walks as part of Norfolk County Council's Walking & Cycling Festival. Two of these walks used the Mid-Norfolk Railway:



we sold tickets for a 'free' drink at Dereham Station and a 20 minute train ride, followed by a walk back to town across the fields. These drew in about 20 people each. Our third walk was a more traditional walk round the paths to the north of the town, and attracted 7 people.

We have now reached a decision to arrange a walk in each public holiday period, and try to do something a little different from what other walking groups do. To start 2017, we have planned a New Year's Day Bolo Rei walk - a 2-3 hour walk ending with tea/coffee and cake at *New Flavours*, a Portuguese café in the town. The year ended with 35 bookings for this walk.

Dereham walks - general leaflet



There are many places to walk in Dereham, including public streets, parks and open spaces. This leaflet is mainly about Dereham's 33 public rights of way - paths and tracks which everyone can use by right.

How to use this guide

There are four suggested walks in this pack, each with its own map. In total, they cover almost every public right of way within the town (four are currently partly or wholly inaccessible - Footpaths 6, 7 and 9, and Restricted Byway 3). The directions and maps refer to the rights of way by their official numbers, though you won't see these on the signs anywhere. The walks have been carefully checked to make sure the directions are clear, and every effort has been made to ensure that all information is correct at the time of writing, but things can change, so you are urged to make your own judgements - do not follow the directions without thought.

[Note: The main directions are shown in ordinary type; notes in italics give additional information but are not part of the walk.]

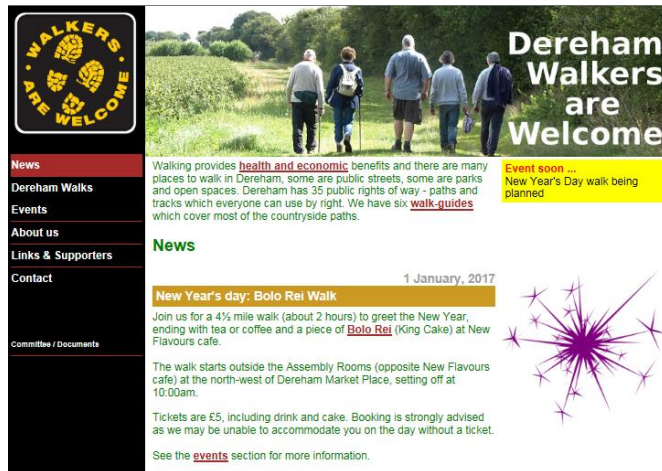
While the walks have been devised to provide an interesting experience, you are also encouraged to link them together and make your own walks. All of the walks start from the town centre, but in addition, there is overlap between Walks 1 and 2, Walks 2 and 3, and Walks 3 and 4 - or you could join them all into one mammoth full day circular tour of the town.

Edition 1, July 2015



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During the year, WaW committee member Tim Birt has set up and steadily extended our website (<http://www.DerehamWaW.org.uk>). There are now pages of news, planned and past events, aims and activities, supporters and



links, and of course our pack of walks - now extended by two additional routes developed by Jean Stratford and using the Mid-Norfolk Railway on a 'ride and walk' basis. Our Constitution and information about committee decisions, plus the Footpath Warden's reports are also available to download. In this development, we have also arranged to put links to three local B&Bs, in return

for their including us on their websites. The same arrangement is being planned in regard to a *Walkers are Welcome* entry in the local Residents' Guide.

A further initiative we have started has been to start discussion on getting *Walkers are Welcome* signs attached to road signs indicating entry to Dereham. We have got some costing details from Cromer WaW and plan to seek funding through a grant application. In the meantime, we need to open discussions with Norfolk County Council for permission to add signs to existing installations.

6 Public transport

Dereham is not on the national rail network, though it does have a connection through the heritage line Mid-Norfolk Railway. By its nature, this service is relatively infrequent and also seasonal. We have nevertheless listed it in the *Dereham Walks* packs as an enjoyable way to reach Dereham from Wymondham, where it connects to the national network.

The major bus services through Dereham are the First express bus X1 (Peterborough to Lowestoft), plus a host of local services provided by Konect (which also runs a Dereham to Norwich service). We have referenced all of these in our *Dereham Walks* guides, and have a meeting planned in 2017 with Konect to discuss possible sponsorship and further 'ride and walk' possibilities.

7 Governance

There has been a stable committee, working to an agreed constitution, from the start. We are planning to hold a public meeting in June 2017 to review the constitution and governance arrangements.

8 Funding

Dereham Town Council paid our provisional membership fee, and Norfolk County Council paid our full membership fee for the remainder of 2016 and for 2017.

One of our members - Sue Rothwell - organised a quiz: she was able to

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arrange for printing free of charge and a donated prize, so all moneys received came to us - £92.

Those attending the garden party were invited to make donations; we also ran a raffle using a range of donated prizes. These raised a further £90.

The Walking & Cycling Festival walks made £79 after paying the Mid-Norfolk Railway for the drinks and train tickets.

We have also received some £856 from the dissolution of the Dereham Society: this money is to be used specifically in regard to The Neatherd, a large area of open space close to the town, much used and equally well loved by many residents, and through which a couple of restricted byways and a



public footpath run. We are still considering how best this money could be used: it came originally from the Friends of Neatherd Moor, an organisation which was dissolved a long time ago, passing its funds to the Dereham Society, which has also now wound up.

9 Community advantages

As still a young organisation, we are not as yet able to identify evidence of ways in which WaW status is helping our community and our local economy - this will be a task for 2017.

10 National Walkers are Welcome

The national Newsletters from *Walkers are Welcome* have been circulated and considered by the committee as each one is issued. The October edition included a list of possible features to be used in local websites: we were pleased to find that we already met virtually all of them, and those we didn't weren't felt to be relevant to our situation.

We have included references to the national organisation - and its aims - on our website and wherever possible in press releases and other documents

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(like this report!).

Two of our committee members - Ken and Catherine Hawkins - also attended and took active parts in the 2016 Annual Get Together in Lincolnshire.

We have also maintained occasional contact with the national organisation from time to time, for example in preparing a response to the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee inquiry on Rural tourism in England.

11 Plans for 2017

Current plans for 2017 are

- Walks to be arranged from time to time, mainly at Public Holiday dates, each with some additional feature
- Work to explore possible links with other sections of the population (ie not white, middle class, of an age and without disability) with specific reference to
 - children, from about 5 upwards, via schools, Rainbow, Cubs, Guides, Scouts, etc
 - Dereham Access Group and Dementia Friendly Dereham
 - Health walkers (short walks)
 - Future walks and guides, such as a guide to all of Dereham's rights of way to encourage people to build their own routes, and a longer walk, perhaps around the town boundary
- Planning for our public meeting in June
- Preparing and submitting funding applications, especially for leaflets, WaW signage, membership costs, publicity materials, web costs, insurance
- Generating publicity through WaW stickers
- Linking with other current and developing Norfolk WaW villages/towns

12 Current committee membership

Current committee members, and their further connections, are as follows.

Tim Birt

Neil Cliff (U3A)

Catherine Hawkins (The Ramblers)

Ken Hawkins (Footpath Warden for Dereham Town Council, Open Spaces Society, The Ramblers, Visit Dereham)

Kate Millbank (Breckland District Council, Dereham Town Council)

Sue Rothwell (U3A)

Dorothy Sneesby (U3A, The Ramblers)

Martin Sneesby (The Ramblers)

Jean Stratford (Breckland Walkers' Trefoil Guild)

In addition, we maintain contact with Don Davenport (Cromer WaW), and staff at Breckland District Council (Stefan Clifford) and Norfolk County Council (Andrew Middleton and Helen Timson).

Ken Hawkins
10 January 2017

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<http://www.DerehamWaW.org.uk>

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