

Community Access Warden report for the Heritage and Open Spaces Committee meeting on 24 January 2023



Many of the activities described in this report have drawn extensively on the support of colleagues within Dereham Walkers are Welcome. The following abbreviations are used:

FP - Footpath; BR - Bridleway; RB - Restricted Byway; NCC - Norfolk County Council; BDC - Breckland District Council
DTC - Dereham Town Council; PRoW - Public Rights of Way; WaW - Walkers are Welcome

Requested action

1 General report - led walks

Since October, WaW short walks have continued on the first Friday of every month and are planned to do so through 2023. We also held longer walks on 2 December, and our usual New Year's Day walk. We have a programme planned for the year ahead.

to note

2 Path issues

In this update, reference is made where applicable to Frances Salway (NCC Countryside Access Officer) and Adam Hinchliffe (Norfolk Trails).

- 1 **FP2** - On 16 November 2022, Frances Salway told me "I have phoned and left a message for [the landowner] to contact me, and there has been no response, and on further attempts to phone, there has been no answer and no facility to leave a message. As you are aware, previous written correspondence has not received a response. I will try calling again next week." I enquired what action was possible if this continued, and Frances replied "Our only other option would be to take direct action to remove the crop, however there is a cost involved and no guarantee that we will be able to recover this costs. This is a material consideration given our limited budget."

DTC to press NCC for action

- 2 **RB3** - I am not aware of any progress being made in regard to this path. I note that a year ago, Tony wrote to Phillip Duigan and Will Richmond, saying "You might want to mention to Norfolk County Council that the mood of the meeting last night was that the obstruction of RB3 has gone on for long enough and the County should not be acting reasonably towards the land owner, with reference to R v Surrey County Council ex parte Send parish Council." On 16 November 2022, Frances Salway told me "[RB3] is required to cross the drain that bisects the route approximately 20m from FP26. There is a structure recorded on the 1905 OS map at this location so NCC would be responsible for its installation. ... [I]n installation of a culvert would be the most economical option, but that would require the landowner's permission which is unlikely to be forthcoming. ... [T]he likely cost of installation of a

DTC to press NCC for action

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structure to accommodate the designated use of the route [is] circa £8k to £10k, and both Members present were of the opinion that this would not be the best use of our limited budget. We would not be able to enforce the line of the RB currently, as the structure is required. That is why I was attempting to contact the landowner and establish some form of communication to try and progress this matter.”

- 3 **FP14** - I have been waiting for suitable weather to clear the residual nettle growth and, if possible, the fallen tree on this path. *to note*
- 4 **FP14a** - I await progress on this by NCC to repair/replace the damaged boardwalk. *await NCC*
- 5 **FP19, 20** - An order has been made to close these paths (and Hoe FP1 and FP6) from 24 January to 11 April. This stated to be ‘to facilitate PROW resurfacing works’; I believe this to be in connection with developing this route as a Jubilee Walk (also being promoted for cycling). I remain of the view that this project has not been effectively thought through and will end with a second rate result. Along with Carolyn Coleman of about Dereham, I have met Helen Terry from NCC regarding where in Dereham the route will start and where information signage is to be placed. *to note*
- 6 **FP26** (Dumping Green) - This lengthy path is a track throughout, though its public status is as a footpath only. The end lengths are fairly well surfaced and are both used for access to property; the central section provides farmland access and is used by tractors and 4x4s, which, because of the wet nature of the path, cut the surface very badly and make it difficult to use for a large part of the year. I wonder whether there might be a way of getting landowner agreement to make (and then not drive over) something of a walking route to one side of the main track. *DTC to consider supporting exploration of this approach*
- 7 **FP34** - The element of this path that runs alongside the stream is subject to muddiness caused by run off from the water meadow. A small channel and bridge (which used to be a couple of sleepers) has been constructed over one area, and I have proposed that this be repeated in 2 or 3 other areas; Adam Hinchliffe advised me in November that this “requires additional approvals etc even for simple bridges in places. I believe the Environment Agency had said they intended to put in a culvert at the worst point which would allow the water the (sic) move from the fen to the river without affecting the path. Currently this has not happened and I have not heard of any progress on this front.” He added “Following the boardwalk work, the contractors scraped the flood bank, just enough to level it but they wanted to leave the grass in so that it would re-grow quicker in the spring. Hopefully *to note*

Requested action

levelling the surface will provide a minor short term fix. We also spoke to them on site and discussed what would be required on the bank, culverts topped with some aggregate seems the most likely approach so vehicles can still travel over the bank for maintenance as necessary. Hopefully this may be a project we can bring forward to improve this whole section of FP34 in the future.”

8 RB32 (Shillings Lane) - I believe that work is currently under way to make the agreed surface improvements. I await seeing whether the result is suitable for horse riders and carriage drivers, both legally able to use this route. The impact on the Etling Green end (where the developer appears to have encroached on the Byway with an earth bank on which a hedge has been planted) remains to be seen.

to note

9 RB36, 37 - A closure order has been made to 1 May 2023. I understand that NCC has used, or will use, this closure to remove the large tyres blocking the path and to deal with the vegetation growth (mainly on the section from the A47 overbridge to Greens Road), while Orbit are pursuing their development. I understood from Frances Salway that the whole lengths specified in the Order would not all need to be closed all the time, so met with Orbit staff to ask if information about what might be open and when, could be made available to help people and groups who would want to use the paths. I had thought that this was agreed (accepting that any plans advised would be open to change), but have received no information since.

update awaited.

10 New path to be dedicated to link RB39 with Hurn Road - No change since last meeting, apart from the appearance of a small number of wooden posts which I assume mark the boundary of Store Easy land. If this is the case, there could be opportunity to make progress; the main needs would be twofold - (1) to get the path formally registered as a right of way, and (2) to make surface improvements (addressing a section of stony but uneven ground and levelling a section to remove the likelihood of tripping).

DTC to pursue discussions with the landowner and BDC at the earliest opportunity

3 Other work

3.1 In association with aboutDereham and Dereham Heritage Trust, Dereham Walkers are Welcome has prepared a leaflet outlining a walk round the town, taking in all the new Wayfinding signs. We are now exploring publication options. (This will join 3 other town walks prepared jointly with Dereham Heritage Trust, run last year as led walks during the Heritage Open Days period and to be prepared as booklets for sale.)

Requested action

3.2 I am pleased to report that Dereham Walkers are Welcome has been re-accredited for a further year. Our mentor's overall summary was:

It is really pleasing to see the scope and scale of progress achieved by DerehamWaW. There is so much good stuff happening it is hard to know what to highlight! Of particular note is the activity across the community, and the involvement with a range of other community organisations. There are lots of common-sense, practical, initiatives, and it is good to see a lot of this activity quantified eg the amount of effort that goes into footpath monitoring and maintenance, the number of people on the emailing list, the number of website visits etc. The marketing activity has used a range of media and this can only enhance coverage. In all, exemplary activity under all the WaW headings.

Ken Hawkins, Community Access Warden, Dereham Town Council

15 January 2023