

Easton Royal Parish Council

Rights of Way Report – August 2020

Generally, the Rights of Way around the village remain in good order. I am very grateful to the team of Wardens who are working hard to keep the paths open and passable. Paul Narizzano on Cross Lane, Lloyd Cockbain for mowing the field boundary path in Ram Alley; Chris Needham Bennett has kindly joined the team and has worked very hard at keeping Green Lane (EROY 22) open.

My thanks also go to David Butler from East Wick Farm, Wootton Rivers, for keeping his field boundary paths in excellent condition, and to Hew Helps for mowing the paths close to the village. I expect to mow the bridleways on the North side of the village in the next week.

Some repairs are needed on the hunt gates where hanging posts have moved and are no longer closing properly. I intend to arrange a working party to adjust the closing catches and reposition the posts where possible.

Bridleway EROY 22, (Green Lane) - the track surface sustained damage from the Rough and Tumble Run in January. Soil erosion caused by 600 runners passing over the track twice in one day after an exceptionally wet winter, has resulted in mud and soil being washed away. The track surface has been reduced by more than a foot in some places and several tons of sand and soil have been washed to the bottom of the track. The surface eventually dried out in April, having been almost impassable and unsafe to walk for four months.

We initiated meetings with all the interested parties, including Milton Lilbourne PC, and the race organisers. Stephen Leonard and Alison Rasey, the current Wiltshire Council Rights of Way Officers, also viewed the track condition. We are hopeful that in future, Wiltshire Council will allow the use of this track for running races only when the ground conditions are favourable, the fragile surface being unsuitable for such overuse in wet conditions. It would be useful to have assurances from both Wiltshire Council and the Running Clubs that they will repair the surface damage which will remain for the long term, without expensive remedial repairs.

Use of Harris Lane by Farm Vehicles:

An issue has arisen because farm vehicles from DePass Farms have started to make regular use of Harris Lane to access their fields; their main field accesses still exist. DePass Farms are claiming a private right to use the track; no evidence to support this has been forthcoming.

The extensive restoration project undertaken by Wiltshire Council a few years ago upgraded the surface of Harris Lane from its previous constantly muddy and

waterlogged state (of at least the past 50 years), to a clean, dry and hard surface. Harris Lane is now well used and enjoyed by Villagers, walkers and horse riders and is one of the Village's main assets. On a less positive note, the excellent surface has made possible the use of the track by vehicles, hence the renewed use by dePass Farms. As a designated bridleway, this is an offence under the Highways Act, except where private access rights are granted.

The investment by Wiltshire Council was a once in a lifetime occurrence, for which we were very fortunate to qualify. At the project's inception it was made clear to the Parish Council by Paul Millard, the then Wiltshire Council's Rights of Way Officer, that the repaired surface would not withstand vehicle use and would degenerate to ponding and pot-holes again if used in this way. In its original condition it was not possible to drive a vehicle along Harris Lane.

A four-wheel drive vehicle has also been accessing bridleway EROY 22 at the Bruce Arms. The posts installed by Paul Millard to discourage such illegal vehicle use have now been removed three times and the vehicle has been driven over the bank to get between the concreted post in the centre of the track and the Highways Agency's "No Vehicle Access" sign. I have requested Stephen Leonard to advise on any further action we can take to prevent this, and to supply a concrete or recycled plastic post which can be concreted into place.

There is little chance of any further funds becoming available should the surfaces of either of these tracks need repair in the future.

It would be useful for the Parish Council to take a view on this; meanwhile we will continue to seek a resolution to the problem.

Beverley Helps

Rights of Way

Easton Royal Parish Council.