

Weston under Penyard – Programmes of Work for Lengthsman and Prow Maintenance

FUNDS CURRENTLY AVAILABLE FOR LENGTHSMAN AND PROW MAINTENANCE

With nine months gone this year, only £665 (13%) had been spent out of a combined budget of £5,207 for the Lengthsman and PROW maintenance schemes.

Over the past three years 2016 to 2019 the funding allocated for lengthsman and PROW maintenance has been significantly underspent. It is not possible to define the precise amounts, since the itemised accounts of expenditure against budget for the previous two years have not been published. Based on the information available it is conservatively estimated that a total of over £9,000, raised from residents for Lengthsman and PROW maintenance, is currently sitting idle in the PC bank account.

Proposals are made below to start rectifying this problem.

LENGTHSMAN

According to the Budget Update December 2018, funds of £3,000 should be spend this year, whereas only £665 had been spent with 3 months remaining. In January it was suggested to the Chair that the parish council should take urgent steps to maximise any useful work that can be undertaken by the Lengthsman before the year end.

Maintenance on the A40

Herefordshire Council (HC) is responsible for the “lengthsman” type of maintenance along the A40 through our parish. It is believed that they have not done this for some years and that the work is long overdue. If the PC was to pay their lengthsman to do this work the residents would be paying twice, through county rates and through the parish precept. Furthermore, HC has advised that the lengthsman is not permitted to work on the A40. It is therefore suggested that the PC send a letter to HC requesting that they carry out specific scopes of work along the A40, mainly comprising road-edge gutter sweeping and pavement clearance. Gutter sweeping helps to keep the drains clear and allows motorists to see the white lines. The pavements throughout the parish along the A40 are obstructed by years of creeping vegetation and soil, reducing the effective pavement width to as little as 15 inches in places and forcing pedestrians and wheelchair users to the edge of the pavement next to the ever-increasing traffic.

Employment of Lengthsman

Since extensive parish funds are available, the employment of a second lengthsman could be considered if the programme of work is beyond the capacity of Mr Reed. The PC received a presentation from “Terry Griffiths Contracts” on 6th June 2016 and they should reconsider his proposal if additional capacity is required.

Apparently, HC will not allow the lengthsman to work on A and B class roads and that he needs training before working on any of the parish U and C roads. As noted above, the A40 (our only A-road) is HC’s responsibility anyway. Regarding B roads, only a small section of the B4224 (outside Castrees Garden Centre) affects the parish and possibly only on one side, since the road forms our parish boundary. For the U and C roads it is to be hoped that Mr Reed has completed this training by now, but if not, then maybe the PC should employ a lengthsman who has already completed the training.

Programme of Work

The PC may already have a work programme available, but all areas of the parish could be walked/driven to identify those areas needing attention that fall under the Lengthsman’s remit.

Weston under Penyard – Programmes of Work for Lengthsman and Prow Maintenance

Specifically, the PC is requested to arrange for the Lengthsman to carry out maintenance over the full lengths of School Lane and Mill Orchard This was originally requested formally to the PC on 2nd September 2017, but no apparent action was taken.

If the PC should conclude that the funds allocated for Lengthsman work in recent annual budgets has been in excess of the funds actually required, then they should reconsider their budget for 2019-20.

MAINTENANCE OF PROW FOOTPATHS

Compared to earlier years there is no doubt that in the past three years the parish council has made progress in the maintenance of PROW footpaths and continues to do so, but the continuing lack of expenditure proves that a lot more can be achieved.

The current year is the last in which the PC is eligible to claim financial support from HC under the P3 Partnership Scheme and it is therefore even more important that they undertake enough work to allow them to claim the full £1,175 from HC. The PC budget for PROW work in 2018-19 is £2,207 but, according to the Budget Update report for December, nothing has been spent with only three months remaining.

This is the third consecutive year in which the PC has underspent their PROW budget. This is hard to understand since on 7th November 2016 they agreed a long-term Maintenance Plan with major scopes of work having an estimated cost of up to £20,000. This Plan is attached below for ease of reference, since it is missing from the website.

For many years Herefordshire County has promoted and funded walking routes designated as “Walks Without Stiles”. Herefordshire Council/Balfour Beatty now issues only gates for parishes to replace their stiles. In 2016 there were 59 ancient wooden stiles in the parish, and it is understood that none of these have yet been replaced by gates to date.

All Local Authorities and UK bodies supporting the use of footpaths are aware that stiles are a hindrance for walkers and a potential danger to the public and that they need to be replaced by gates. The recent Herefordshire County has just published its Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2017 - 2027 which seeks to improve access to the footpath network, including the removal of stiles and upgrading of gates.

Herefordshire Council has adopted the principle of replacing each stile with a gate and replacing each kissing gate with a pedestrian or fully accessible gate. Herefordshire Council will, as far as budgets allow, offer to supply and install a gate if it replaces a faulty stile, remove a faulty stile or gate if it leaves a gap, install a cross step, or carry out any other work that is regarded as access improvement, at no expense to the landowner. If the landowner does not wish to have access improved, HC will request the landowner to undertake the work himself.

In practice the maintenance responsibility has been complicated by the P3 Partnership Scheme, but the parish has been able to claim funds from HC over the past years and has also raised large sums of money for PROW maintenance through the precept funding. The parish is therefore able to undertake significant improvements using the funds already received.

Weston under Penyard – Programmes of Work for Lengthsman and Prow Maintenance

The current policy in Herefordshire should be clarified, but even if HC/BB issue some free gates they may not provide them in enough numbers to match the proactive approach needed by the PC. Once this is clarified the PC can then decide on a work programme for gates, costed to include both purchase and installation costs.

The approved 2016 Maintenance Plan should be revisited and a programme of accelerated work through to 31. March 2019 should be implemented urgently.

Landowners need to be approached in a positive manner to gain their approval for the installation of the gates and to confirm the number that can be installed.

Category 1 Maintenance

An easy way to rapidly advance the Category 1 items of the Maintenance Plan (Main Footpaths) is to immediately purchase a significant quantity of pedestrian gates for installation during the current and the next financial year.

The Maintenance Plan identified two main footpath routes in need of replacement gates, and these can be addressed as the priority.

From WUP village to Pontshill and Frogmore

Approximately 10 new gates are identified on this route.

From WUP to Hildersley via Kingstone

15 new gates are identified on this route

From St Lawrence's Church to the Recreation Ground (WP11)

This route was not highlighted in the Maintenance Plan but is worthy of urgent consideration. It is a short but popular route with two pedestrian gates and a single wooden stile in between them. The replacement of this single stile would immediately create a "Walk Without Stiles" of great benefit to residents, particularly the elderly and those walking dogs.

The total number of new gates for the above three routes is approximately 26, with a purchase cost of about £5,5012 (at the 2016 unit-rate of £212 per kit). New gates should always be steel (with 25 years guarantee). They must be gravity self-closing with a latch, to ensure that they cannot be left in the open position, as long as they are installed correctly. The more expensive and less accessible kissing gates should not normally be required.

Weston under Penyard – Programmes of Work for Lengthsman and Prow Maintenance



Steel Self Closing Gate

Category 2 Maintenance

Category 2 items of the Maintenance Plan can also be targeted (Difficult and Potentially Dangerous Footpaths).

Based on inspection of footpaths during January and February 2019 the following **urgent work** is still outstanding from 2016:

Feature Number	Existing Condition	Action
WP2/4	Three planks laid across a stream are now rotten and broken.	Replace with a simple bridge. No gate required.
WP2/3	Below this stile is a steep bank leading down to the stream. The steps, formed from timber planks, are now in a poor condition and the footpath is very difficult to use.	Replace the broken and missing steps.
WP2/6	Plastic sheath covering barbed on top of stile is split.	Replace plastic sheath.
WP3/1	A stile and a wooden fence nailed together making it difficult to use. Big drop on the road side. Adjacent field gate locked and not an option.	Replace with a steel self-closing latched gate.
WP4/1	Really an overgrown wooden fence, not a stile.	Replace with a steel self-closing latched gate. May have been already actioned
WP4/3	Loose and very dangerous planks and stile over stream.	Replace with a bridge and single steel self-closing latched gate (NOT a wooden stile!). May have been already actioned.
WP10/7	Stile loose and no usable cross step. Almost impossible to climb over. Adjacent field gate misaligned and not an option.	Replace with a steel self-closing latched gate.
WP11/8	Very old steel kissing gate is jammed and overgrown.	Clear vegetation and free up gate or replace with new steel gate.
WP13/4	Complex stile with additional obstructing timbers and no cross step.	Replace stile with a steel self-closing latched gate.
RR6/4	Modern steel kissing gate with jammed latch	Adjust posts to free latch

Weston under Penyard – Programmes of Work for Lengthsman and Prow Maintenance

WP15/3	Badly broken wooden stile with no cross step.	Replace stile with a steel self-closing latched gate.
WP15/4	Wooden stile. Difficult to climb since it is very loose.	Replace stile with a steel self-closing latched gate.
WP16/2	Remains of wooden steps up steep railway embankment. Extremely dangerous due to potential tripping risk and potential for severe injury by falling onto the remaining obstructions, including protruding steel pegs. No handrail remaining.	Remove all obstructions and rebuild steps and handrail.
WP16/5	This is really a high bar fence with barbed wire across the top, rather than a stile.	Replace with a steel self-closing latched gate.
WP18/2	Loose wooden stile with no cross step.	Replace stile with a steel self-closing latched gate.
WP18/5	Old timber field gate. Difficult to use due to double chain fastening system. Walkers are likely to think that the gate is padlocked closed and may climb over the gate or be prevented from using this footpath.	Fit a latch system to gate or a single loop from gate to post.
WP19/1	Field gate dropped on hinges, making it difficult to bolt closed. If the gate was left unbolted it could swing outwards across the road, causing a significant RTA risk on the very fast stretch of the B4224. No stile and no space for a new pedestrian gate.	Adjust gate so that it can be easily secured Ensure that it cannot possibly swing into the road.
WP22/5	Wooden field gate with jammed latch	Adjust gate hinge to realign latch.
WP23/5	Newly installed wooden gate, not self-closing.	Adjust or modify gate so that it self closes.
WP25/2	Wooden gate with broken top hinge.	Repair or remove gate since it seems to serve no useful purpose at this location.
WP25/3	Steel field gate – difficult to open/close and to operate the securing chain.	Adjust gate so that it opens freely and fit a simple latch or securing mechanism.
WP26/3	Very high and difficult stile with no cross step.	Replace stile with a steel self-closing latched gate.

Other Maintenance

As identified in the 2016 Maintenance Plan there is a need for many new signposts and plastic waymarkers, the purchase cost of which is only £15 and £3 respectively. It should be very easy to undertake an installation programme for signs on all footpaths throughout the parish.

A lot of other work is also required to improve access to the parish footpaths.

REQUESTS TO PARISH COUNCIL

- 1. Will the Parish Council please arrange urgent Lengthsman work in the year 2018-19 so that the allocated budget of £3,000 is fully utilised?**
- 2. Will the Parish Council please arrange urgent PROW maintenance in the year 2018-19 so that the allocated budget of £2,207 is fully utilised and the P3 funding of £1,175 recovered from Herefordshire Council?**
- 3. Will the Parish Council please arrange for the Lengthsman to clear the gutters in School Lane and Mill Orchard?**
- 4. Will the Parish Council please take urgent action to accelerate the maintenance and access improvements on PROWs as agreed in the 2016 Maintenance Plan and as further updated in this communication, particularly for the purchase and installation of gates to replace stiles?**
- 5. Will the Parish Council please put pressure on Herefordshire Council to clear the pavements and road gutters on the A40?**

John Smart
26th February 2019

APPENDIX – Maintenance Plan proposed and approved by the Parish Council on 7th November 2016.

To Weston under Penyard Parish Council

Proposed Maintenance Plan for Public Rights of Way (PROW)

This document supersedes the documents issued to the Parish Council for the October 2016 meeting.

Summary

There are approximately 15 miles of footpaths (PROW) in the parish. A detailed Baseline Survey of all 29 footpaths has now been completed and a report submitted. From this it is clear that hardly any replacement of old stiles and gates has been undertaken in recent years and that an extensive programme of work is required to bring the footpaths network up to a reasonable standard.

Long Term Objectives

A key UK Government policy, expressed through the Countryside Commission, is to create better accessibility to footpaths for people of varying physical abilities. In addition to the condition of the paths themselves it is often the boundary features which define the degree of accessibility. In particular 81% of the boundary features in the parish are stiles and this excludes less able walkers from enjoying healthy exercise in the countryside.

Important advice is provided in the British Standard 5709 (2006)¹ for gaps, gates and stiles which states:

"Regarding the type of equipment to be used the standard says that in the absence of explicitly identified counter reasons the following structures should be used in this order of preference:

Gap - Gate - Kissing Gate - Stile."

The Countryside Commission² and Herefordshire Council³ also apply the same principle.

Long Term Objectives

The Parish Council should adopt a long-term policy to replace the old wooden stiles and other obstructive features with steel gates which meet the needs of landowners and comply with British Standard 5709 (2006). This will greatly improve access and will reduce the expenditure on routine maintenance as a result of the better-quality equipment.

Ongoing Maintenance

As far as possible funds should be spent on the purchase of steel gates. Because of the relatively high capital cost of this new equipment it is suggested that routine maintenance and installation of new equipment should be undertaken by landowners and volunteers whenever possible. The use of the Lengthsman should be limited to key activities that cannot be undertaken by others, thereby saving the funds for the purchase of new equipment.

¹ <http://www.pittecroft.org.uk/5709.pdf>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-countryside-code/the-countryside-code>

³ <https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/transport-and-highways/footpaths-byways-and-bridleways/rights-and-responsibilities>

Weston under Penyard – Programmes of Work for Lengthsman and Prow Maintenance

Herefordshire Council states that landowners are generally responsible for gates and stiles on a public right of way and that landowners must ensure that walkers can use them without difficulty. In view of their P3 agreement the Parish Council should confirm that this still applies in the parish and that landowners will be requested to respond in accordance with their responsibilities.

The clearing of undergrowth does not require a high skill level and should be the capabilities of volunteers. It is suggested that, in liaison with the Footpaths Officer, interested residents should "Adopt A Footpath" and take the responsibility to keep the footpaths clear and report on their condition on a long-term basis.

Maintenance Priorities

Because funds are expected to be limited it is important to undertake the work on a planned priority basis rather than by response to ad hoc requests. In order to determine the priorities a few basic questions should be considered:

1. Which are the main footpaths most likely to be used by walkers?
2. Where are the greatest risks of injury to walkers?
3. Which footpaths are unusable?
4. Where can improvements be made at minimum cost to the parish council?

It is suggested that these four categories should be taken as the priority:

Category	Description	Numbers	Comment
1	Main Footpaths		
	From WUP village over Penyard Hill towards Ross on Wye	WP14A RR6	Minimal work is expected to be required.
	From WUP village towards Pontshill and Frogmore	WP11 WP11A WP12 WP13 WP14B	There are approximately 10 stiles or gates to be repaired or replaced (to be defined on completion of survey).
	From WUP towards Hildersley via Kingstone	WP22 WP23 WP24 WP25	There are 12 stiles to be repaired or replaced.
2	Difficult and Potentially Dangerous Footpaths	At any location throughout the parish	The difficulties and dangers are normally caused by the boundary features, rather than the paths themselves. Risk assessments should be based on the likelihood of an incident and the severity of the incident, should one occur.
3	Unusable Footpaths	Various	Includes footpaths that are impassable due to vegetation, can only be accessed by

Weston under Penyard – Programmes of Work for Lengthsman and Prow Maintenance

			WP7 WP15 WP19 WP23 WP27 WP31 WP32	climbing over gates, or cannot be safely walked. WP7, WP31 and WP32 have probably not been used in a long time and there may be little value in maintaining these.
4	Low cost improvements	At any location throughout the parish		Some maintenance can be carried out by landowners and volunteers at minimum costs to the parish.

Note: The above categories are not ranked since all are considered a priority.

Funding

The Parish Council (PC) has entered into a P3 agreement with Herefordshire Council in which the PC undertakes its own maintenance of the footpaths with the support of an annual fixed sum provided by HC. Apparently, from March 2019 all HC funding will cease and will have to be provided by the PC.

The Parish Council should clarify the outstanding amounts that are available for PROW work this financial year from HC P3 grant aid and from precept funding.

The Parish Council should adopt a financial plan to steadily increase the funding from precept funding of footpaths so that by 2019 onwards the total budget for footpaths is not less than the present level of funding.

Promoting the Value and Care of Footpaths

The Parish Council should raise the profile by creating maximum publicity to state their objectives in newspapers etc. This would help to identify volunteers and promote the initiative with landowners.

John Smart

23.October.2016

(As reviewed with Paul Marshall, Footpaths Officer, 21. Oct.2016)