

EPC Footpaths informal group

Meeting #1, held at 4 The Green, NN13 5SQ, 9.30 – 11.00am, Monday 8th April 2024

Present: Cathy Knott (EPC Clerk), Jean Morgan (EPC), Guy Moody (Evenley Footpaths warden), Charles Reader (EPC).

1. Purpose of meeting/group:

To consider accessibility of Public Rights of Way (footpaths, bridleways, byways etc) across the Parish of Evenley; to encourage parish residents, other users and landowners to work together to improve accessibility, including surface condition of footpaths etc; to work with adjoining councils if appropriate to promote use and maintenance of PRow.

Note: Accessibility includes condition of surfaces – drainage, condition of surface, removing obstructions etc, as well as gates/stiles.

2. Background:

CK had asked local people for feedback regarding footpaths in the Parish: 5 responses were received, 3 concerned about the **“muddy path at the back of EWG where it crosses the stream,”** one about bridleways and one suggesting setting up a working party, installing new gates & signs and liaison with local farmers and landowners.

Other areas of concern are

Puddleduck (wetter since water level raised at nearby pond);

Line of footpath alongside EWG (runs across boggy area, which is not the original line as on Definitive Map);

Condition of Mill Lane north of EWG service entrance (deep, wide potholes).

3. Discussion points:

Muddy footpaths;

Apparently unnecessary gates/stiles etc (good practice to remove these if possible).

At Stowe (National Trust), footpaths are regularly covered with bark/woodchip, which helps keep them passable even in wettish areas, although this is labour intensive.

It was noted that rainfall so far in 2024 has been way above seasonal average, which will inevitably result in extremely muddy conditions.

Loss of bridleways? (CK to contact KL who made this point in response to consultation).

Landowners urge walkers to stick to the line of the Right of Way – this is often to protect indigenous species and gamebirds nesting in hedgerows.

4. Actions proposed (for discussion at the next parish council meeting):

- **Working party for Puddleduck?** This could be a test for woodchip/bark surface, with residents helping to spread material. The path is well-used, and close to the village. Both ends are accessible for delivery of materials. Also consider removal of gates at each end.
- **Contact EWG re line of path alongside the southern boundary** – path should run along the boundary of EWG, and this could avoid the boggy area. Also relocate kissing gate (see below).
- **Small footbridge over river near Mill Lane** – consider replacing stile with kissing gate from near EWG.
- **Contact EWG and BTC regarding supply of woodchip etc**
- **Mill Lane** – issues can be reported on FixMyStreet
- **Communicating with residents and landowners** –
 - Walkers need to respect footpaths and verges (otherwise they are trespassing)
 - Walkers should expect mud, and wear appropriate footwear
 - Dogs should be kept under control (respect hedgerows as can disturb nesting birds and other wildlife)
 - Riders should respect footpaths and highway verges as can be damaged and then impassable for pedestrians
 - Acknowledge that in general landowners keep footpaths in acceptable condition and work with EPC on gates, stiles etc
 - Signage – notify EPC/GM if this can be improved, as spare signs are available.

JM 22.04.24

Formal definitions etc:

<https://www.gov.uk/right-of-way-open-access-land/use-public-rights-of-way>

Use public rights of way

You can walk on all public rights of way.

Some public rights of way are also open to horse riders, cyclists or motorists.

You can use:

- footpaths - for walking, running, mobility scooters or powered wheelchairs
- bridleways - for walking, horse riding, bicycles, mobility scooters or powered wheelchairs
- restricted byways - for any transport without a motor and mobility scooters or powered wheelchairs
- byways open to all traffic - for any kind of transport, including cars (but they're mainly used by walkers, cyclists and horse riders)