

Otterton Footpath and Rights of Way Report for Spring 2020

General

1. Coronavirus restrictions have seen a much reduced number of people using the footpaths and rights of way. However, numbers are increasing. There are plenty of little used footpaths where one can count the number of fellow walkers on one hand. We are extremely lucky to be living in such a wonderful environment.
2. If you are not a regular walker but want to exercise outside then I suggest you purchase OS Explorer map 115 which has all the rights of way marked or the Budleigh Salterton & Otterton Walking Map which has more routes but be aware many of the additional paths are permissive and not all of them are maintained.
3. There is still a legacy of badly rutted County Roads (unpaved) as a result of the rain over the winter, not helped by some of the poor agricultural practices.
4. Spring is seeing brambles and other vegetation growing back. I am clearing some of the material intruding over the footpaths but it is a continuous battle. Residents are encouraged to carry a pair of secateurs to help trim the odd branch.

Major Issues

5. I have had a number of reports concerning aggressive and rude cyclists using the coastal footpath along the river and near Ladram. DCC have put up additional signs concerning social distancing. A polite word with cyclists often sorts out the problem. However, cycling on a footpath is a civil offence (that of trespass) so difficult to enforce.
6. Chockenhole Lane (track) 305 was badly flooded over the winter. Some remedial measures have been started but not completed. In particular the drainage grip has not been re-established resulting in the path being impassable when it rains.
7. Seven Stones Lane 23 has a lot of glass on it over a significant length due to wash out of the old capped tip half way down. It is impractical to pick up due to the volume so care is needed.
8. New Footpath posts. Roughly half the new posts have been in place for some time. Hopefully, the rest will be positioned once the lockdown restrictions are eased.

Minor Issues

9. DCC are dealing with the broken gate post to Watering Lane.
10. Dogs; When walking in the countryside or other areas where you're likely to come across cattle, sheep, horses and other animals, it is recommend keeping your dog on a lead. Be particularly wary of farm animals with their young. Please pick up. We are in the middle of the bird nesting season and ground nesting birds are particularly vulnerable to disturbance.

Trees

11. Virus infection to trees continues to be of concern. Residents are urged to buy plants and trees from a reputable source.

12. Recent Ash dieback research from Europe suggests that the population of hedgerow and non-woodland ash trees in Northern France is less severely affected by ash dieback than trees in woodlands. This is good news for Devon.
13. There are new UK import restrictions to prohibit the import of Coffea and Polygala plants, with very strict import requirements for others such as olive, almond, oleander, lavender and rosemary. This is to tackle the threat of the Xylella disease. New measures were also announced to address the import of Emerald Ash Borer and Plane wilt.
14. Rowse Tree Services inspected and carried out work last May 2019. I have the following (non professional) comments;
 - a. The Parish Council need to set aside a budget to replace the removed Cherry Tree (T1634) on the Green.
 - b. The report recommended that the Horse Chestnut (T1633) on the Green and the Elm (in the corner of Jubilee Playing Field) be re-inspected last summer. I do not know if this was done but both trees look OK to me.
 - c. The Parish Council need to budget for another inspection in 2021 and to pollard the Ash (T1638) in Jubilee Playing Field in 2021.
 - d. Stantyway Playing field was not inspected last year. I have had a walk around and am concerned with 4 trees;
 - d.i. There is a Cherry tree 20m in from the west gate that is leaning and has a significant amount of rot in the trunk. I think we should either pollard or remove in the Autumn.
 - d.ii. There are 3 Ash trees (same location) where a significant number of lower branches have not yet come into leaf – this may be due to late development (typical of ash) but needs another look later in the summer.

Iain Ure

May 2020