

DISCOVERING STROUD'S LOST WAYS – ACTION PLAN

SIGNPOSTING & WAYMARKING

RECOMMENDATION 1: That a full and detailed schedule of new signposting is drawn-up, in the late summer at the same time as the re-survey for vegetation. That a locally-distinctive design, using natural materials, is agreed for countryside routes. Where appropriate, destinations and distances are included on all signs with information of linkage destinations as well. This work can be carried out by GCC, but the town council may wish to add its own funding to ensure a better quality.

ACTION: Highway authorities have a duty to put up signposts at all junctions of footpaths, bridleways and byways with metalled roads. The signs must show whether a path is a footpath, bridleway or byway and may also show other information such as destination and distance. At our initial meeting with GCC they said that adding distances and destinations to signs had an extra cost that they could not afford and alternative designs has a significant extra cost. Considering the number of signs required, it is considered better to 'just get on with it'. The resurvey contains a detailed schedule of new signposting that is needed. This can be now passed onto GCC with a request that the work is completed with immediate effect.

RECOMMENDATION 2: That a full and detailed schedule of improved way marking is drawn-up for all the identified PROW and GCC is asked to work with landowners to ensure it is implemented. This is also done in the late summer, at the same time as the re-survey for vegetation.

ACTION: Way marking is a means of indicating the line or direction of a path away from metalled roads, at points where it may be difficult to follow. The county council states that it 'will provide plastic waymark discs where it is satisfied that the work can be done well.' During the resurvey, around 40 way marking signs were added by the surveyor. The resurvey report contains a full schedule of those routes where way marking remains in issue. In many of these cases the installation of way marking involved creating new posts on which to put them (requiring consultation with the landowner) or adding plates to existing finger posts. This can now be passed onto GCC with a request that the work is completed with immediate effect.

STILES, GATES AND BRIDGES

RECOMMENDATION 3: That a full and detailed schedule of improvements to stiles and gates highlighted in the tables above is drawn up with GCC and that all landowners are encouraged to make the necessary improvements up to modern standards. This is also done in the late summer, at the same time as the re-survey for vegetation.

ACTION: Maintaining these is primarily the owner's responsibility, but the highway authority must, in certain cases, contribute 25% of the cost if asked and may contribute more if it wishes. If stiles and gates are not kept in proper repair, the authority can, after 14 days' notice, do the job itself and send the bill to the owner.

The resurvey reports 17 stiles and gates in need of urgent repair and 11 in need of medium term repairs. The list will be passed onto GCC with a request that all stiles and gates are brought up to standard. However getting such work done, and especially forcing landowners to pay for it may be more difficult. Using more forceful pressure as outlined above may provide problems in working with landowners to complete other parts of this strategy. It is therefore suggested that the town council provides part-funding to help persuade landowners to carry out such work as a priority. This could be on the basis of 50% of the cost for work up to £500 and 25% for work over £1000. This to be in addition to GCC's 25%. The aim would be to carry out 3 improvements per year from the high priority list and one from the medium term list. Therefore all the high priority work will be completed within six years.

There are four bridges that need minor improvements. The most important of these is the one on ZST 57/2 in the Trinity ward.

BLOCKED PATHS

RECOMMENDATION 5: To work with the PROW team to investigate all such problems and ensure that no PROW in Stroud are blocked and that people can use the network fully and freely.

This overlaps to some extent with the recommendations from the stiles and gates section and the 'difficult to use' sections, as some of the routes are 'blocked' by virtue of the fact that gates are padlocked and the route is impassable. Several of the routes identified under this section in the initial report have been moved to other

sections as the problems could be overcome by improved signposting/way marking. The blocked routes remaining unsolved are as follows:

HIGH PRIORITY

- Archway School hockey pitch (28/1) – blocked due to builders work – request made to GCC already!!!
- Canal at Wallbridge: closed due to sewer problems and subject of a ‘temporary’ diversion order.
- Farmhill Crescent to Park Farm (30/2/3) – blocked by virtue of a padlocked gate at the Crescent
- Callowell Farm to Barrowfield (33/2) – blocked due to a locked gate at the farm.
- Horns Farm to Wasa Wasa (47/1) – the upper end of this route is impassable due to the wet ground and steep slope – a diversion is recommended.

LOW PRIORITY

- Keats Gardens (off 69/1) – This path goes through someone’s house! It looks as if a diversion order was never made when the houses were built. GCC has agreed to approach SDC to get them to make an application, as it is believed to be council housing. We would wish this to be a diversion order instead of an extinguishment so that a fresh PROW can be provided lower down the route in Bryon Drive.
- Two small path segments off of Paganhill Lane – the historical significance of this has been clarified. The two routes literally run up a grass bank for no more than 3 metres. And due to the cost of getting this bit extinguished, it is not considered worth doing.
- There is a short segment running between 50/5 and 51/2 in the Heavens that is completely blocked by vegetation. However there is an easy alternative a few metres away that is heavily used.

INCOMPLETE MAPPING OF ROUTE ON MASTERPLAN

RECOMMENDATION 6: To work with the PROW team to investigate the mapping errors and to implement the necessary changes to ensure that the correct routes are shown.

ACTION: this was discussed at our initial meeting with GCC and copies of the definitive statements were produced which showed that all the routes were mapped as per the statement. Hence this part is now being considered under the title of Incomplete mapping. Clarifications were sought on some of the routes listed below. Several others require further investigation to see if the unmapped elements are actually on official highways anyway – if not extensions should be sought.

- 82 – Slad Road to Summer Street – PROW stops halfway down route (46/1)
- 100 – Mill Farm Drive to Park End – PROW stops before it reaches the highway (26/1)
- 74a – Castle Pitch – London Road – route should continue over Waitrose car park to link with other routes (98/1)
- 65 – Heavens to Thrupp Farm – Route goes nowhere – urgent review needed (56/2)
- 69 Canal path at Capel Mill – incorrectly mapped needs a review
- path from Bowbridge Lane to heavens - PROW stops short of a highway (50/1)
- PROW starts at the end of the path from the bottom of the old cemetery – unsure if the lane is a highway – causes confusion amongst walkers (54/1)

VEGETATION

RECOMMENDATION 7: That a follow-up condition survey of every PROW is carried out in late summer to evaluate problems of overgrown vegetation. This to be done in the late summer, at the same time as the detailed assessments on stiles, signposting and waymarking.

ACTION: The re-survey contains a full evaluation of the problems of maintaining paths due to overgrown vegetation. The results to be considered as part of a decision on whether to progress with recommendation 21.

GROUND CONDITIONS & LIGHTING

RECOMMENDATION 8: That further investigations are made into those PROW listed as having a lack of street lighting, to draw up a plan of improvements to improve community safety and the use of these routes. That lighting is carefully considered when new routes are added to the network.

RECOMMENDATION 9: That GCC is asked to visit the routes selected as having poor ground conditions, to see whether improvements, especially in terms of bridging, route diversions and steps, could be implemented.

ACTION: That full details of all 12 difficult to use routes as detailed in the resurvey are passed onto GCC with a request that improvements are made. That the five routes below are selected as priorities. That site visits are held with GCC in order to draw up an improvement plan for each in the next year, with possible funding from the

Footpath budget. A further two paths are to be selected in each of the following years so that all Stroud's PROWs are up to a useable standard within the next four years. Several routes were identified in the initial audit as possibly benefiting from additional street lighting. Is there a member able to visit any of these sites at night to bring back any recommendations?

YEAR ONE PRIORITY PATHS			
Route 52		Horns Farm to Wasa Wasa	Impassable due to steepness and waterlogged ground
Route 64 Route 50	Route 57b Route 55	Mud around stream - Bowbridge/Heavens	Hard and dangerous to walk, too steep and boggy ground by river

CREATION OF NEW PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY

RECOMMENDATION 10: That more detailed investigations are carried out into the 14 routes listed (below), to examine their suitability for claims to be made to make them official PROW. That the six most suitable are then submitted.

ACTION: At our initial meeting with GCC, there was little enthusiasm from them as to proceeding with any new path creation orders – unless there is an overwhelming public interest for doing so. However as the main reasons for this dislike of creating new paths seemed to be cost and the huge backlog of existing claims, I don't see that as a good enough reason not to proceed with this recommendation. It is therefore suggested that the need to get witness statements for the use of these routes is promoted through the next newsletter and the public event. Depending on the outcome we then select an initial two paths to proceed with a creation order in 2007.

Folly Lane

RECOMMENDATION 11: None of these are PROW and the council should consider whether it wishes to safeguard these in any way. Route numbers 18, 21, 20, 22, 25

ACTION: No action taken to date. The Church of the Later Day Saints is consulting on plans for a major development on this land. Does anyone wish to pursue this recommendation in light of these plans?

The Canal

RECOMMENDATION 12: With the uncertainty of the canal redevelopment, we would recommend that the following routes are converted to PROWs as a priority.

ACTION: There are ongoing consultations as regards the proposed route of the canal – the issue of the PROWs at Capel Mill was raised at a recent meeting on this section. Does anyone wish to pursue this recommendation in light of these plans?

Summer Street area

RECOMMENDATION 13: That the council supports the efforts to secure these three new routes, with funding if necessary.

ACTION: The council has already funded an initial study into the possible delivery of part of this recommendation – the report is to be presented at this same meeting. Funding could be part of the spending from next year's Footpath budget. This project is also contained within the bid for the Living Landscape initiative being headed by Stroud Valleys Project.

A RIGHTS OF WAY COMMITTEE

RECOMMENDATION 14: The town council should form a Rights of Way sub-committee and co-opt farmers, walkers and interested local people to gain the benefit of their knowledge and experience. They could help the council comment upon planning applications that affect public rights of way and diversion orders. Most importantly, they could help with annual surveys and help with delivering some of this report's other recommendations.

ACTION: This was sent back to this committee for further consideration by council – not sure why? If the committee agrees to go forward with this recommendation, appeals for interested members of the public could be made as part of the consultation process in the next newsletter and through our meeting with the ramblers group.

ANNUAL REVIEW - ONGOING SURVEYS

RECOMMENDATION 15: The town council, either through its own means or working with the new Rights Of Way Sub-committee, carry out a follow-up inspections of the existing PROW network to identify and rectify any problems. Ideally these should be undertaken in May/June and September/October.

RECOMMENDATION 16: The town council budgets for an annual review of this audit, to monitor the condition and usage levels of all the footpath routes within the parish.

ACTION: That the town council continues to fund a n annual resurvey of all the routes identified in the original footpath audit to be carried out in Sept/October and using the formats already created to allow for comparisons to be made. This to be funded from the 'Footpath' budget in 2007. Although if we are successful in forming a Footpath Working Group, volunteers may be able to be trained up to do the work in future years.

RUBBISH/GRAFFITI

RECOMMENDATION 17: Funding is provided to clear litter and remove graffiti on identified routes on an annual or bi-annual basis. This could be done as part of the annual footpath surveys.

ACTION: The collection of litter and notification of graffiti could be built into the spec' for the annual footpath survey. The council should request its grounds staff to do an urgent litter collection on the PROW in the area of Archway School. Funding is being set aside next year to tackle the problem of graffiti in the Wallbridge underpass area – this is currently the worst PROW.

PROMOTION AND MARKETING

RECOMMENDATION 23: Create a way marked route running around Stroud, as close to the border of the parish as possible. Where necessary, try to negotiate with landowners to fill in any missing links as permissive paths. This could be promoted through an annual 'Beating of the Bounds' event for charity.

ACTION: A draft route and outline costings for this project are currently being produced by a volunteer. This also forms part of the joint bid for the Living Landscapes project headed by Stroud Valleys Project. This project should be completed in 2007/8 funded through the Town Council's 'Footpath' budget.

PUBLIC CONSULTATION

RECOMMENDATION 19: That the public and local Ramblers group is asked for its views on the audit and invited to identify additional routes and to evaluate the value of the network to inform future decisions. Also the public is asked for help in the process of dedicating selected new PROW. This to be done via the autumn newsletter and a public consultation event.

ACTION: This will be done via the next newsletter to coincide with a display in the town council office. Funding to be taken from this year's budget. A meeting to be arranged with the ramblers group as soon as possible.

RECOMMENDATION 20: The town and county councils get together to drive forward this audit by developing a full Footpath Strategy with detailed action plans and budgets to support the work.

ACTION: An initial meeting has already been held and a second one will be arranged to look at how detailed issues from the resurvey can be dealt with. This document should be adequate in terms of driving the work forward.

TAKING CONTROL OF THE PATHS

RECOMMENDATION 21: To make some initial enquiries into the possibility and desirability to taking of the provision of the maintenance of the PROW network in Stroud.

ACTION: At our initial meeting with GCC, there seemed to be a willingness to consider drawing-up an agreement by which the town council can take on responsibility for the day-to-day management and maintenance of the PROWs in the parish. This would not involve dealing with official complaints or for any of the legal issues involved in creating/deleting paths or re-routing them – although in dealing with the paths on a day to day basis this would certainly build up a working knowledge within the council of this sort of work for future reference. This would obviously involve an additional expenditure in terms of maintenance, although we are already doing a lot of this work. Don't expect the 30p a mile from GCC to go too far!). Having now completed a full survey of the condition of

the routes and the likely amount of ongoing maintenance, the council is now in a position to decide whether it wishes the clerk to proceed with considering this recommendation in more detail

PROMOTION AND MARKETING

RECOMMENDATION 22: To create a series of marked routes, using the town as a base to explore the surrounding countryside using as many of the routes identified in this report as possible. These to be promoted in a suitable manner, including the internet.

RECOMMENDATION 25: To carry out research into possible funding opportunities to pay for projects identified in the final Footpath Strategy for Stroud.

ACTION: The clerk/assistant clerk be asked to investigate possible external funding sources for such work and submit applications as necessary with suitable partner organisations.

RECOMMENDATION 24: Appeal for members of the community, or a business, interested in organising an annual walking festival in Stroud. Maybe to tie in with the launch of these new routes in the spring of 2007.

ACTION: Longer-term priority

RIGHT TO ROAM AREA

RECOMMENDATION 18: That the open access is properly marked with supporting information and publicised. That investigations are also made into using this area to create improvements to the 'difficult' route of the adjoining PROW.

ACTION: Longer-term priority

STILES, BRIDGES AND GATES

RECOMMENDATION 4: That GCC is encouraged to carry out an assessment of all stiles, bridges and gates in the parish, as part of a longer-term plan to bring them all up to modern standards, to ensure that the network is genuinely 'easy-to-use for all'.

ACTION: The county council is due to carry out full survey of its footpath network in the next year including stiles etc.

MAKE BETTER USE OF THE PLANNING SYSTEM TO GET IMPROVEMENTS

RECOMMENDATION 26: The town council should agree a new policy to secure contributions from all developers towards improvements to the footpath network and ensure that all schemes provide suitable footpath links to the local network.

ACTION: Using the evidence gathered from these two surveys, instead of the usual request for play equipment funding, the town council seeks equivalent funding (based in the per household calculations for play equipment) for improvements to local footpaths from the next major development application received for consideration. The clerk to write to the planning department at SDC in advance, to register this requirement and seek guidance as to if this is achievable.