

PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY

COLD ASH

COLD ASH PARISH COUNCIL

Date: April 2021

Version: 3



PROW in cold Ash

Cold Ash Parish is well served by Public Rights of Way. There are 27 within the parish, including:

- 21 Footpaths
- 2 Bridleways
- 4 Byways Open to All Traffic (BOATs)

The network also links into the networks in surrounding parishes, providing lots of great walking opportunities



Current Status

Since the start of the COVID pandemic, we have seen a **significant increase** in the number of people using the PROWs around the parish. This has led to much more impact on the walking surfaces, **turning some of them into a quagmire**, during wet periods. This, in turn, has led to **people walking on a wider area** than the PROW, which can have adverse impact on the landowners fields and local wildlife. **Some landowners have responded, putting up additional fencing and restrictions.**

All of this has led to **a number of complaints** being made by PROW users.

Whilst we haven't received any complaints from **landowners** directly, it's clear that **many are unhappy** with the impact the new and increased number of users are having on their land.

Current status and issues

The increase in complaints cover a number of areas, including:

- the usability of some of the PROWs, due to them becoming a **quagmire**
- the use of **barbed-wire** alongside PROWs
- the **height of wire fences** being erected around woodlands
- the **width restrictions** on some of our footpaths
- **inappropriate signage** put up by landowners

These are in addition to ongoing complaints about **blocked footpaths**.

These issues tend to fall into two types of complaint/request:

- Legal issues
- Maintenance issues

There's been a **level of frustration** at the perceived slow response of WBC in resolving issues

Current status and issues

There are 8 PROWs that have issues reported on them:

1	COLD/1/1 & COLD/1/4	Stoney Lane to Parish Boundary at Henwick Manor	Footpath
2	COLD/2/1	Ashmore Green Road at Hill View Farm to FP1	Footpath
11	COLD/11/1	Stoney Lane to Fishers Lane	Footpath
15	COLD/15/1	Cold Ash Hill to Ashmore Green Road	Footpath
16	COLD/16/1	Cold Ash Hill to Ashmore Green Road	Footpath
20	COLD/20/1	Collaroy Road to The Ridge (via St Gabriel's)	Bridleway
24		FP18 to Bucklebury FP network	Footpath
25		The Ridge to Broadview Farm	BOAT

There are 6 PROWs that haven't yet been assessed

Management issues

The management of PROWs tend to be **limited and reactive**, at the moment:

- We and WBC **react to complaints** received, rather than **proactively check** for issues
- We **pass information** on complaints to WBC, but there's not necessarily a reciprocal arrangement
- We assume that WBC will manage the issues and **do not have a structured approach of monitoring them through to resolution**
- WBC tend to deal with legal issues and clear breaches – **it's not always clear-cut** whether there's an issue to be resolved
- **WBC has limited resources, so are unlikely to be able to provide anything greater than their current service**

Responsibilities

In essence:

- West Berkshire Council has a **statutory duty to maintain** Public Rights of Way
- Owners/occupiers of land must keep PROW routes **visible and not obstruct or endanger users**
- Parish Councils have **no direct responsibilities** for PROW

Cold Ash Parish Council (CAPC) do receive and report issues to WBC and also carry out a level of monitoring and tracking of issues, but **do not currently undertake any direct remedial action.**

Parish Councils have an **obligation** to meet the expectations of its parishioners. In recognition of this, Parish Councils can undertake a number of activities under **powers devolved to Parish Councils.**

In addition to what Cold Ash Parish Council does on PROWs, **it could:**

- **Proactively monitor** their status
- Undertake some **level of maintenance**

What would be required to improve the position?

To increase our involvement in monitoring and maintaining PROW will require **additional resource**, either or both of:

- Volunteers
- Funding

We have started negotiations with WBC and have established that they may be prepared to **joint-fund** some maintenance work – the level of contribution will be based on **priorities and/or budget limitations**. We could also look at opportunities to work with **landowners**, who may be prepared to provide funding.

However, the most likely routes to improve PROWs is through **volunteer action and/or local funding**.

This has led to a couple of ideas?

Building on the success of the volunteer involvement in the WAG, we've come up with two ideas:

IDEA 1

That we establish a team of **Footpath Marshalls**.

Each Footpath Marshall would be expected to:

- **walk the footpath(s) at regular intervals** - frequency would be dependent on the season and conditions but should fit in with the natural use of the footpath
- **report any issues** – this is likely to cover obstructions / signage / styles & gate /status of the surface
- **Carry out light maintenance** – basic clearance work that can be done with secateurs and pair of gardening gloves

IDEA 2

That we establish a team of **Footpath Volunteers** to attend maintenance days. These would require a medium level of effort and are likely to:

- involve **improving the surface** in particularly wet areas through:
 - **Dressing the surfaces** with scalping's or similar
 - **Digging drainage channels**, to take away surface water
- involve **trimming overhanging branches** and medium-level clearing
- use **basic tools** – spades and saws
- be run on a **regular cycle**, with volunteers signing up to sessions (frequency to be agreed)

Questions

1. Are you supportive of Cold Ash Parish Council looking to lead proactive action on our parishes PROWs?
2. Are you supportive of us trying to establish a team of Footpath Marshalls?
3. Would you be prepared to volunteer as a Footpath Marshall?
4. Would you be prepared to volunteer to join the team of Footpath Volunteers?
5. Would you support Cold Ash Parish Council in allocating budget to the Footpath Volunteers initiative?

Next steps

If we do establish a team of **Footpath Volunteers** then we will need to:

- Explore the option further with WBC
- Test the proposal with a number of landowners
- Firm up on the details and arrangements
- Check the position regarding insurance