

Parish Paths Initiative: report to Parish Conference, 21st May 2009

1. Introduction

- Parish Councils make a vital contribution to the effective management of the borough's 188 miles (303 km) of public rights of way (public footpaths, bridleways and byways.)
- The Borough Council, as Highway Authority, has the legal duty to maintain and protect the public rights of way network, and in order to achieve this the borough works closely with a range of stakeholders, including landowners, path user groups and Parish Councils.
- This work includes making sure that the paths are clear of vegetation or other obstructions, that gates and footbridges are in good order, that the paths are well signed and way marked and that popular routes are well publicised and promoted.
- One of the main ways in which Parish Councils can get involved in public rights of way is through the **Parish Paths Initiative (PPI)**.
- All Parish Councils in the borough, and Eton Town Council, participate in the PPI, as there are public rights of way in every Parish. (See table at Appendix 1)
- The PPI scheme is co-ordinated by Sharon Wootten, one of the borough's three Public Rights of Way Officers.

2. How the Parish Paths Initiative (PPI) works.

- Firstly, in February/March each year a "suggestions form" is sent out to all Parish clerks, for Parishes to identify specific projects they would like to be progressed in the coming year. These could be improvements to specific paths, or more general projects such as a new Parish walks leaflet or a guided walk or event.
- Secondly, there is on-going contact between Sharon and the Parish clerks or Parish Councillors during the year as the individual projects progress.
- Thirdly, two Parishes (**Cookham** and **Old Windsor**) employ their own contractors to carry out vegetation clearance works on all public rights of way in their Parishes, supported by an annual grant paid by the borough through the PPI scheme.
- In addition to the Parish Councils, there are three other partners in the PPI scheme: the East Berks Ramblers Association, who carry out regular path condition surveys on behalf of the borough, the British Horse Society, and the National Trust which owns and manages land at Maidenhead Thicket

and in Cookham which include many public rights of way and other informal paths.

3. Previous successes

- During the 11 years that the PPI scheme has been operating, there have been numerous small scale but locally important improvements to the public rights of way network due to the direct input and involvement of Parish Councils.

Recent examples include:

- Leaflet produced in partnership with **Datchet Parish Council**: *“Foot and Cycle Paths in and around Datchet”*.
- Leaflet produced in partnership with **Bray Parish Council**: *“Walk to a healthy future, a picturesque walk around the village of Holyport”*
- Leaflet produced in partnership with **White Waltham Parish Council**: *“White Waltham Parish and Paths”*.
- Leaflet produced in partnership with **Waltham St Lawrence Parish Council**: *“Waltham St Lawrence Parish Paths and Circular Walk”*.
- Leaflet produced in partnership with **Sunningdale Parish Council**: *“Walk, Discover, Enjoy your Sunningdale”*, and posters/newsletters promoting the Parish Walks which are held twice a year in Sunningdale parish.
- Stiles replaced with gates on Footpaths 18 and 19 Bisham, in partnership with **Bisham Parish Council** (see before and after photos in Appendix 2)
- Stiles replaced with gates on Footpaths 26 and 49 Cookham, in partnership with **Cookham Parish Council** (see before and after photos in Appendix 2)

4. Other ways in which Parish Council’s work with the Public Rights of Way team

- **Milestones Statement annual review**:
- Each year the borough produces a Milestones Statement that sets out targets and priorities for public rights of way work in the coming year.
- All Parish Councils are consulted on the draft Milestones Statement in February, and any comments or suggestions are reported to the borough’s Rights of Way and Highway Licensing Panel when it considers the draft report for adoption at it’s meeting in March.

- The published Milestones Statement is then circulated to all Parish Councils in April. (The 2009/10 Milestones Statement can be viewed on the borough website at http://www.rbwm.gov.uk/web/prow_index.htm)
- **Local Access Forum:**
- The borough runs a Local Access Forum, which was set up under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. Several Parish Councils are already represented on the Forum (see current membership list at Appendix 3), and further Parish representation would be welcome.
- The Forum meets twice a year and considers a wide range of plans and projects that affect public rights of way. There are currently some vacancies on the Forum and anyone interested in finding out more information is welcome to contact Andrew Fletcher (Public Rights of Way Officer) who manages the Forum.

5. Conclusion

- The Public Rights of Way team is keen to encourage and build upon our existing work with the Parish Councils, whether through the PPI scheme, or Local Access Forum, and are happy to receive any comments or suggestions:

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