

Long Wittenham – footpath matters

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I have been the foot path warden for Long Wittenham since October 2019, and report to the Parish Council every six months or so. I thought it might be helpful to write a brief summary of what has happened during that time for the village website.

The good news is that all the issues that I have found, and which have been reported to me, have all been reported to the Oxfordshire County Council, so thank you to everyone who has reported problems to me. You can find the details of the reported issues further down. Please continue to do so – either via the Parish Council, or direct to me via my email address (see above). Specific problems which have been reported are described in detail further below.

The less good news is that Oxfordshire County Council have been overrun with priority work during the Covid crisis and have not yet been able to respond to many of the reported issues. I have been working since the spring with the Long Wittenham Parish Council, and with Steve Brown in particular, to try and establish an effective working dialogue with Oxfordshire County Council, to try and ensure these problems are eventually resolved. We continue trying.

Other news includes the recent announcement that Sylva Foundation is planning to relocate one of the permissive pedestrian footpaths through its site, in order to improve separation between public on foot and heavy vehicles which visit the site. This work has not yet started, but is expected to begin in the coming months when Sylva secures funding. Below you can see the map which shows the planned rerouted footpath, and the links to the many other permissive footpaths that the Sylva Foundation has opened up.



Early in January, I am meeting up with Chris Parker, who is the Head of Land Management at the Earth Trust. Chris explained that as well as being in the middle of a large scale project to improve the visitor facilities at the Earth Trust Centre, they are also in the early stages of carrying out a detailed audit of the access provided across the Earth Trust Farm and, in particular, how this access network will link to the new visitor facilities. I am looking forward to talking to Chris to understand more about this, and will expect to have more news about this in the New Year.

Specific issues reported to Oxfordshire County Council since October 2019

Please see the Definitive Rights Of Way Map (scroll to the end), which maps the local footpaths to the FP numbers used in the descriptions that follow.

- A local resident reported that FP 287/3 which runs off 287/2 (the road past Bodkins field) has been blocked with an earth bank, (apparently for some years now). There is no FP sign, and the land over which the FP runs has been ploughed with no sign of the FP.



- Posts for marking the “new” Permissive FP in Westfield that joins 287/6 with 287/10 have been put in, but as yet there are no notices available to put on the posts to define the permissive FP.
- Several horse people reported late last year that the bridleway bridge which crosses the tributary to the Thames, where FP 287/11 joins FP 106/1 (FP to Appleford), is not safe for horses. It is clear that there are places on the bridge which feel weaker. On 17th March I noticed that the bridge was being repaired, and spoke to people doing the repair. They explained that the present work is an “interim” repair, and a further assessment is planned with the possibility of a full refurbishment.

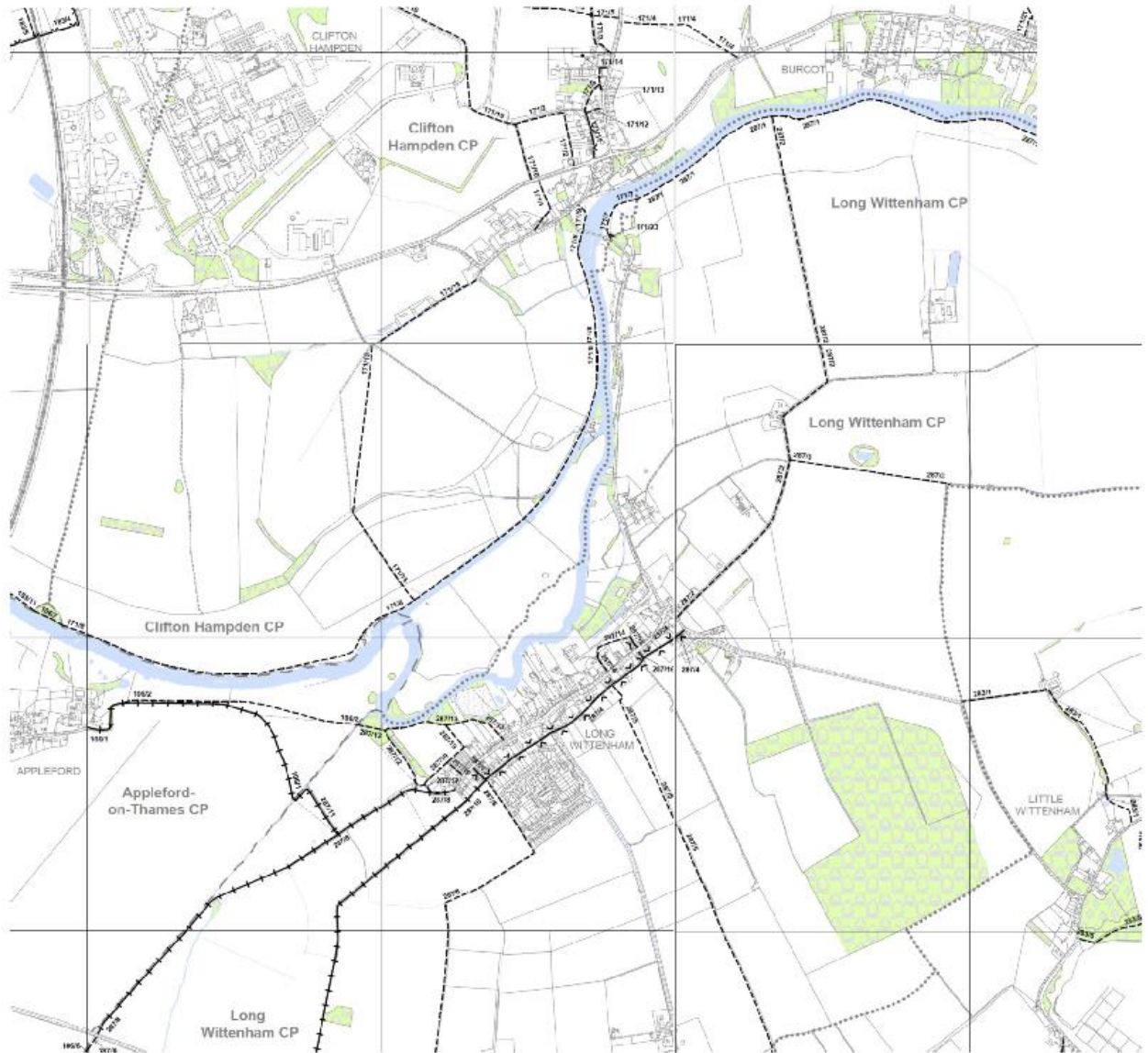
- A local resident reported that the footbridge across the ditch about 500m south of the Vine, on FP287/5 was damaged. A hand rail has broken, and the bridge is in a poor state of repair.

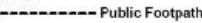
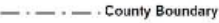
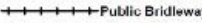
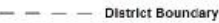
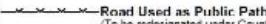
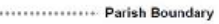
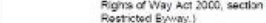



- A local resident reported that FP 287/6 which runs round Westfield from the top of Saxons heath, turns left over a footbridge and leads down to the Didcot road following the side of the field is not walkable. (Not to be confused with the recently approved permissive footpath which continues round Westfield from the footbridge to the cycle path). The field has been recently ploughed right to the edge, destroying what remained of the footpath. You can see from a comparison of the two photographs below, where the one on the left shows where the footpath has been ploughed right up to the field edge, and the one on the right, where a gap has been left to ensure the footpath is walkable. Both these photographs are of the same footpath (287/6), except the right hand photograph is on the walk up to the footbridge, and the left hand photograph is in the field having turned left and crossed the footbridge, and heading towards the Didcot Rd.



Definitive Map of Public Rights of Way for Oxfordshire : 21 February 2006



KEY:			
	Public Footpath		County Boundary
	Public Bridleway		District Boundary
	Road Used as Public Path (To be redesignated under Countryside & Rights of Way Act 2000, section 47, to Restricted Byway.)		Parish Boundary
	Byway Open to all Traffic		(where shown) Right of Way either: crosses administrative boundary, reaches terminus or changes status.