

Hitchin Footpath Problems – August 2016 Update

Report Structure

Overview

Part A Summary of current issues.

Part B Update on issues reported previously.

Part C Issues that we did not prioritise in the last report.

Overview

Members of the general public, our volunteers and members have highlighted very few issues since the last report. Although there are no new issues to report, although there have been changes in the status, or I have modified my view of some ongoing problems– see part B.

As noted in the February 2016 update, the following issues are complex and longer term and not solely the preserve of HCC.

- Paths that deliver the walker to a road with no safe onward pedestrian route or crossing (obvious examples are the northern end of FP27 at the B655 Hexton Road, FP29 at its junction with the A505 and FP89 at the Stotfold Road).
- Unsightly sites bordering paths which attract litter and fly-tipping which spills over onto the path – the enclosure of the electricity sub-station at the junction of Maxwell’s Path (FP18) and Union path (FP20) is an example here.
- The lack of any explicit strategy on walking, mention of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan or liaison with HCC in the second draft of NHDC’s Draft Local Plan (HF raised this in Hitchin Town Action Group’s response to the first draft some months ago).

Part A Summary of highest priority new and continuing issues

Description. Report section with further details appears in brackets.	Footpath or bridleway no.	New or continuing
Verge cutting on HOOP between Gypsy Lane (FP94) and Wymondley Road / St Michaels Road roundabout (this could become an issue again, although it may have been completed since my visit). (B1)		N
Prevent access to trail bikers on Oughtonhead Lane – a long term problem, but especially now since surfaces are much improved. Continue to monitor similar abuse on RBW94 (B5, B6)	RBW4 and RBW94	C

Part B Previously reported issues

1. HOOP between Gypsy Lane (FP94) and Wymondley Road / St Michaels Road roundabout

Although the verge on the N side of the road was still passable when I checked on 30/7/16, the verge on the south side was overgrown and anybody emerging onto the road from BW Wymondley 6 would have a restricted view of traffic approaching from the Hitchin direction (see picture). The newly installed signpost near the St Michael's Road roundabout at the junction with FP81 is pointing in the opposite direction from that intended (see picture).



Restricted view towards Hitchin from BW Wymondley 6



Signpost for verge path pointing in wrong direction

2. Footpath 10

A much better repair of the pothole has been made. Nevertheless, experience suggests that this will eventually fail so continued monitoring will be required.



3. Footpath 26

The drainage problem appears to have been solved, although I visited after prolonged dry weather, so it was unclear if there had been a puddle in the preceding days. The new drain could easily be blocked in future by detritus and needs to be monitored.



4. Footpath 20 Union path

The obstruction to this path will remain an issue. Although much of the vegetation has been cut back and there is now more room to pass, the fence is still leaning.

5. Gypsy Lane RBW 94

The resurfacing and drainage work carried out earlier in the year has been effective. Although the possibility of abuse by 4WDs and trail bikes was mentioned in February, there is little surface damage to suggest that this has been the case so far, and there have been no anecdotal reports of any abuse.

6. RB3 Oughtonhead Lane

There are now a number of potholes on the S side of the track that has recently been resurfaced between BW5 and FP2. They are as deep as they were before the work was carried out – see the picture showing the mountain bike for scale – the track surface is at the level of the wheel hubs, so the hole is at least 30cm deep and about 1.5m in length. As noted previously, although not a problem to walkers at present, the holes will continue to grow. In wet weather, they would be a hazard to unsuspecting mountain bikers and horse riders



Whether it is a good use of resources to attempt to address this issue is now open to question. The potholes on this level section of RB3 are not inconsistent with the section of RB3 between the end of Redhill Road and the junction with BW5, although the nature of the hazard is different. This stony section of track is sloping, but cut by relatively deep gullies due to the passage of water, and would be challengingly uneven to anybody not a confident walker.

6. RB3 Oughtonhead Lane (continued)

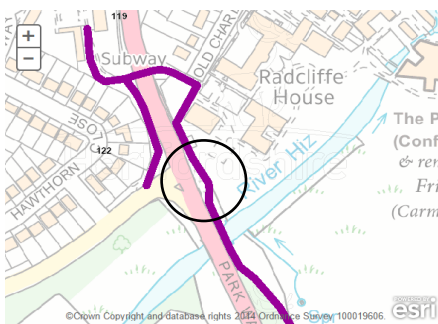
The path is also used illegally by trail bikers, especially in summer, as noted previously. In fact these may be partly responsible for the potholes. With several points of entry, this is a difficult problem to address, but potentially very serious – these bikes display no license plates and are unlikely to be insured. Their riders appear oblivious to the potential presence of young children on the track.

7. FP63 Taylor's Hill

In Taylor's Hill, damage to the lower layers of brickwork in the wall does not seem to have deteriorated much since your inspection. However, the vandalism damage to the top of the wall reported previously has been repaired.

8. FP119 tree root damage

Uneven surface on the tarmac section between the end of Old Charlton Road and the bridge over the R. Hiz (see map below). An issue here is that after this section, heading towards the Three Moorhens, the path is unsurfaced – it can be muddy but is reasonably even. This tarmac section could be treacherous if covered with leaf litter. On 3/8/16, it had not deteriorated significantly since my last visit, and the only lasting solution would be to remove the trees which screen the path from the road and which I consider undesirable. I would suggest that no action is required.



9. Surface damage repairs not completed

In the July 2015 report a number of points where surface repairs had been marked-up but not completed were noted. These occurred in Kershaw's Hill path, Taylor's Hill and FP14. I re-inspected these on 3/8/16. In some cases they appear to have been dealt with in a round of surface repairs completed by Ringway in December 2015. Some new patching has been completed and surfaces in general, are acceptable. An issue here is what criteria are applied to decide which cracks constitute a hazard and are therefore filled. This was noticeable in patching work completed on FP12, where the choice of cracks to be filled appeared arbitrary.

10. Failed lights in Braunds Alley

The signs saying that the electricity supplier was aware of the problem were still in place when I visited on 3/8/16. I have not visited after dark so it is possible that the signs have simply not been removed but the supply has been restored.

11. Lack of lights FP14

Previously I pointed out that FP14 has no lighting although it is illuminated when the lights in Wilshere Dacre School are on and/or when the lights on the Hitchin Boys School all-weather pitch are illuminated. The section between the rear entrance of Wilshere Dacre school and Bearton Avenue is a focus for antisocial behaviour – walls here are routinely daubed with graffiti and there have been several instances of supermarket trolleys being dumped here. Recently, I have seen a motor scooter driven down this path – a problem which barriers at either end could solve. However, I have questioned residents about this, and I am told that although this is a meeting point, the motor scooter isn't a persistent problem.

Part C Issues not prioritised in the last report

FP70 On the basis that the more people that know about this, the greater the pressure on those responsible, I have included this from one of our volunteers.

After heavy rain there is sewage discharge into the brook and across the path from the first two access covers starting from Stevenage Rd. This has been reported numerous times to the NHDC and to the Environment Agency, but the problem continues, and apart from acknowledging there is an issue, no action has been taken. Discharge into a water course is illegal, and further it is a health hazard both in the stream (children play in it along its length, all the way to Purwell Meadows and beyond) and on the path. Probably all that is needed is some remedial work on the structure to stop leakage, although in the long term, this section of the sewage system is already overloaded, and also has to cope with some rainwater.

Also two instances of **nettle growth** making paths hard to negotiate

FP43. In the copse south of the bypass bridge & on the other side of the bridge as it goes past the new nursing home on Priory End.

FP55. Close to Highbury School.

Bill Sellicks 9/8/16