

Footpaths in Ettington – an update from Simon Pipe

At the public forum in January I suggested that it would be good to do an audit of the public rights of way in the parish, and also the unofficial paths that have formed over time. There are some problems, but there have also been encouraging improvements recently.

I have started this as a personal project and report some early observations here. I will provide a fuller report if there is interest. I would welcome input from other path users if the parish council thought this worth promoting.

The Ettington Neighbourhood Plan makes reference to footpaths, but mainly in the context of new development:

8.4 Protecting designated local green spaces and public rights of way is of paramount importance.

Policy LA4 - Encouraging Safe Walking and Cycling

The Neighbourhood Area has a wealth of public rights of way which should be protected, and where possible enhanced, expanded and positively utilised in all new development.

As appropriate, development must demonstrate how walking and cycling opportunities have been prioritised and connection made to existing routes.

Proposals which either adversely affect existing walking and cycling routes or fail to encourage appropriate new walking and cycling opportunities will not be supported.

I am aware the council may be approached to discuss the future maintenance of the public footpath alongside the Ryepiece Orchard development on Rogers Lane.

When I first came to the village I attempted to start a footpath maintenance group through the parish council, and there was support from the Rights of Way team at the county council. A start was made, but work pressures meant it was unsustainable. This might be worth revisiting.

I also highlight the Don't Lose Your Way project being run by The Ramblers, a mass-participation campaign to register as many "lost" paths and bridleways as possible for adoption as legal rights of way, before the deadline set by the government in 2016.

Opportunities for early (positive) intervention

I'd like to draw early attention to the informal paths around Ettington Chase, and suggest that the parish council could approach the landowners about these without waiting for a full audit of parish paths.

Ettington Chase woods: A small network of paths has been formed in the wood on the south-western edge of the hotel grounds. However, there is no legal right of access and technically, anyone trying to keep the paths clear could find they have committed criminal damage. It should be acknowledged that a legal right of way is technically obstructed by trees in the western corner of the wood.

I suggest the parish council might like to approach the landowner and perhaps thank them for allowing local people to enjoy the wood during lockdowns. If they are content to allow informal access, would they be happy for people to keep the paths clear, perhaps by cutting back brambles? It may be that in return, some villagers would be willing to undertake voluntary work, such as clearing the plastic tree protectors that currently litter the wood.

Ettington Chase wild flowers: Another unofficial path across the grounds of Ettington Chase has become very popular, perhaps because of the Spitfire estate. Again, the landowner might be thanked for allowing people to pass through to reach open countryside more easily. Last spring, the grassland on the village side of the screening bunds was not mown for several months, with the result that pockets of wild flowers appeared. This was very attractive, as well as being good for biodiversity, and I wonder whether the Chase might be willing to leave it unmown during the coming flowering season – until about July, I think. Could the council ask? It could be promoted as evidence of green credentials!

Don't Lose Your Way campaign

A number of lost paths in and around Ettington have been plotted on maps as part the Don't Lose Your Way campaign being run by The Ramblers. The website says "thousands of volunteers" checked 19th century maps and found 49,000 miles of paths that were not recorded when the definitive maps of rights of way were drawn up. It says: "Time is running out, with only five years left to collect the evidence needed to build and submit applications to restore the most important paths for future generations."

The next stage of the process is to decide which paths should be prioritized for reclaiming. In Ettington village, at least one is a lost cause: it passes through houses in Nelson Close. The parish council might take an interest in other paths, including some outside the parish that would be valuable for local people. The work of securing them would be done by The Ramblers. For instance, reclaiming one path would make it possible to walk across country

to Caffeine and Machine via Grove Farm, without walking along the main road. Others lead out to Goldicote and Alderminster, and part-way down through Staunchill Wood towards Ettington Park – where yet more lost paths have been identified.

The maps can be seen at <https://www.ramblers.org.uk/get-involved/campaign-with-us/dont-lose-your-way-2026.aspx>. Website visitors need to register for a free password.

Parish paths survey – early observations

The situation in Ettington is slightly bizarre: several legal public rights of way are obscured and sometimes obstructed by crops (which is illegal), but no one seems to mind because villagers have an extraordinary freedom to wander all around the fields east of Rogers Lane on paths that are not legal rights of way at all.

The path running behind the Hillman Way estate has been difficult to use in the past as a result of the developer installing a fence that moved it closer to the hedge and ditch. Overgrowth is now kept in check by the owner's sheep. There appears to be human intervention as well.



The footpath leading north from Short Lane, off the Banbury Road, has often been rendered impassable by crops in recent years, but during the past year's lockdowns a clear path has been formed across the first field, to the parish boundary (next picture).



But from here, it disappears and users must make their way as best they can to Stokeyleys Coppice, from where there is a choice of much better paths.

A year ago the path from Stokeyleys Coppice to the old railway yards at Thornton was difficult to follow in places, but it is now very clearly visible on the ground. The landowner has made efforts to guide users on the correct line and to improve the stream crossing:



This is a very worthwhile path from which the deserted village of Thornton can be seen – currently with water in the old moat:



One must walk along the wide verge of the main road for some distance to meet the narrow path that leads to the old Warwick Road. A villager took the initiative to clear this path in the first lockdown and it remains clear, but with an awkward sideways-sloping section around some overgrowth that would benefit from improvement:



I expect to find some other problem paths – some I know about. We should be grateful that on the whole, our paths are much more accessible than the ones in Loxley.

Some are challenging in winter but this is inevitable given the underlying clay. The answer is suitable footwear – and properly tied laces:



Simon Pipe
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