

Parish Paths Partnership Newsletter

Summer 2020

Welcome and hope you are all well. It has been a challenging few months for the whole country but lockdown measures for COVID-19 are starting to ease. For many parishes the virus restrictions have created an unprecedented use of public rights of way.

Thank you for your valued support and help with managing paths at a local level. The matter of unofficial path closures has been handled with great sensitivity throughout Devon and we are grateful to you all for your input during this difficult time. The rise in use of social media and its careful monitoring and management by parish representatives has been a tremendous help. Many thanks to P3 volunteers for their ingenuity and sensible, measured approach to the current situation.

At the time of writing we are still living with COVID-19 restrictions but we are hopefully striking a balance between sensitive management of rights of way, the desires of path users and the needs of those within our communities who are more vulnerable.

1/. P3 grants and funding

Thank you to all those parishes that have submitted their P3 Finance forms and surveys for the coming year. P3 grants have now been issued and most parishes that are in receipt of an order have submitted an invoice to enable them to receive a grant. As before we remain unable to award a grant if:

- No survey has been completed and submitted
- No financial summary of expenditure and other finance forms have been submitted

Or,

- Funds carried are substantial and/or no projects are highlighted for completion

If you have not received a P3 grant and you were expecting funds, please do get in touch. For those parishes that are unfamiliar with the new ways of applying for a grant you now need to comply with our order/invoice process to receive your annual P3 payment. In simple terms this means that when you are in receipt of a DCC order you will need to raise an invoice and submit this to Devon County Council to ensure you receive your funds.

If your parish/town council or P3 group are due for a grant you will have received an email with details of how to process your order, together with template examples for downloading and completing your parish invoice for submission. Thank you to Angie Hurren from Broadclyst for advice on this matter from a parish perspective.

2/. Admin matters

Insurance:

Every so often we mention a few reminders for parish clerks and P3 volunteers in our newsletters. In this edition we are covering the matter of insurance and the need for compliance to ensure all volunteers' actions are covered in the event of a claim.

In many cases most parish and town councils will use either Zurich or Cornhill to meet with their insurance needs. Parish and Town Councils have powers to work on rights of way and consequently their insurers will have standard clauses that can be added to a policy to ensure that any volunteers and their actions are covered by insurance. If there are any additional costs with adding a volunteer clause to a policy, you can claim this proportion of the insurance premium from the P3 grant.

Volunteers' actions are covered by the insurance, but personal injuries are not. It is the responsibility of volunteers to carry their own personal injury insurance if they so desire. On this note, it is important to reduce the chance of being hurt by undertaking a risk assessment before commencing work on a path. This need only be a simple exercise that highlights and documents where problems may be encountered, and the mitigation measures undertaken to

reduce potential accidents. Remember to leave information with someone regarding where you are working and what time you are due to return. It would be wise to always carry a mobile phone, wear appropriate clothing and have access to a first aid kit. Apps that provide grid references and 'What Three Words' <https://what3words.com/> are a great way to give locations as to where you are working. Please do get in touch if you require advice regarding the writing of risk assessments.

Financial records:

It is a requirement of the P3 scheme to keep, at the very least, a separate budget line in your P3 group/Parish/Town Council accounts that shows your grant received and any spending against your budget. Not every parish will receive an annual grant and several specifically ask not to receive funds. It is however a requirement to annually send in your annual finance forms that clearly demonstrate your current P3 balance and funds spent during the year. [We will be contacting all parishes that have not yet sent in a return and request the above information.](#)

Keeping P3 records up to date

Communication remains one of the most important aspects of the P3 scheme and is it ESSENTIAL that all changes of parish/town clerk and volunteers are reported as soon as possible. If you are aware of pending changes please do get in contact so that databases can be kept up to date, information can be circulated, and training offered if needed.

In addition to names, addresses and other personal information it is important that we are kept informed of changes to parish/town council bank details to ensure prompt payment of annual grants.

Please remember when communicating with parishioners and landowners to not email Wardens directly but, instead, use prow@devon.gov.uk then we can direct the enquiry to the appropriate person. It also means we can deal with things in a Warden's absence. Many thanks for your help with this.

3/. Getting the work done

You will all have seen the latest information sent by email regarding volunteers, contractors and working on paths. In short, you are now able to undertake work on rights of way, but this has to be completed in such a way that complies with social distancing, personal safety and working methods that do not endanger path users.

If you are clearing a path remember to maintain social distancing, barrier off the section of path preferably with tape and a simple explanatory note whilst working. You may also wish to consider wearing face coverings whilst undertaking work. Remember to ask if any members of the group are personally vulnerable, shielding others at home or have possible symptoms - you might wish to suggest they work away from the rest of the group or curtail their activities until COVID-19 has ceased to be a concern. Please make your Parish/Town Clerks aware that you are volunteering on the paths and the tasks you are undertaking.

If you intend to work on paths and have not yet advised DCC of your intention, please do drop me and the mailbox prow@devon.gov.uk an email confirming where you are working and that you are compliant with the email sent 27th May 2020. This helps to reduce the risk of a duplication of work.

4/. Using local contractors

Many P3 groups use a combination of volunteers for light trimming of paths and contractors for work that tends to require technical skills or the use of machinery. Our DCC contractors are experts in the management of rights of way but are always busy and particularly challenged this year with restraints following the virus. If your parish/town council has local contractors that are trained in countryside management and have a minimum £5m Public Liability Insurance you are most welcome to use them. Recently, the parish of Broadhembury required the urgent removal of a tree on a bridleway and asked a local contractor in the village with the skills and insurance to clear the route. The use of P3 funds in this way demonstrates a quick and simple approach to a problem that also supports a local business. Similarly, in Aveton Gifford quotes

are being requested from a local contractor to replace a section of failing boardwalk.

If you wish to discuss the use of contractors to undertake your work do get in touch and we can give you some advice. Your local person may also be interested in working for Devon County Council, if this is the case please feel free to contact prow@devon.gov.uk and we can provide information on the procurement process.

5/. Seasonal vegetation and bird nesting

Our wild birds and small mammals are continuing to nest and bring up their young. Please remember to carefully check hedges and general vegetation before giving a light trim at this time of year. There are lots of birds present and we need to be mindful of their needs. Technically, as a highway authority we are allowed to trim vegetation for the purposes of aiding free movement along a path but it is very important that any path clearing programmes include a thorough inspection of the vegetation to minimise the risk of damage to bird nests or fledglings. Please also be mindful of wildflowers – these are of great value to our pollinators.

6/. Trimming round gates and stiles

We greatly appreciate all the help we receive from volunteers to keep paths maintained and easy to use in parishes throughout Devon. Many of the most effective projects are the most simple and low cost. The following are a list of simple actions but possibly the most effective methods of keeping local paths in good order:

- Trimming around signs, stiles and gates with secateurs
- Checking and replacing waymarks and faded signs
- Looking for wear on gates, bridges, steps and stiles
- Cleaning moss and detritus from bridge decks (can significantly extend the life of the deck and reduce slips)

Larger projects involving surface, bridge and gate replacement, step repair and large swathes of vegetation management are all good projects for contractors.

Do get in touch if you have any questions or queries regarding projects and how to get them completed.

7/. Reporting matters to Iways

Do remember to use the Devon County Council report a problem page if you are faced with urgent health and safety issues or have some challenges on your parish paths that is beyond the scope of volunteers. The link to the page can be found here <https://www.devon.gov.uk/roadsandtransport/report-a-problem/> . The same site allows you to report other matters such as problems with roads, trees, lighting, potholes and broken manhole covers etc. Just click on the matter you wish to report and add your details. When reporting a problem with the rights of way network just click the PROW icon and then click on the small 'x' on the top right hand-side of the screen. You can search for a path using its parish:status:number reference or you can navigate the map to the location and click on the path. Once the information is sent your local warden will be able to respond.

8/. Knotweed, dogs, litter and picnics – how to keep your community safe

Currently we are in the middle of the Summer growing season and plants like Hogweed and Knotweed are in their element. If you are cutting vegetation either manually or by a strimmer please take care. Hogweed sap, when exposed to the sun, causes blistering and burns to the skin. Always remember to cover up and wash exposed skin as soon as possible after clearing vegetation.

Look out for Knotweed and report any presence to landowners as soon as possible. We only treat Knotweed when it is obstructing a path – it is a landowner responsibility to arrange for the eradication of the plant before it spreads to neighbouring land and property.

Over the last few weeks/months, as the general public have gradually started getting out and about, we have received news of an increasing misuse of paths. There have been bikes and horses spotted on footpaths, picnics being consumed on the line of the path and general behaviour which has caused

either obstruction or inconvenience. As a solution, landowners may add discreet temporary signs to remind the general public how to conduct themselves whilst enjoying rights of way.

Dogs continue to be a source for concern in some parishes. If you have canine issues, we suggest you contact your local District Council for up-to-date Byelaws and opportunities for parish participation in local consultations. Regular reminders in parish magazines and visits by your Dog Warden are a real help. Positive messages like 'Thank you for picking up after your dog' are a great way forward. Please remember that livestock worrying is a matter for the Police.

9/. Notes to include in general parish information

With lots of agricultural activity going on at this time of year there is a great need to manage the balance with public access. Many parishes send out newsletters or messages on social media. If your parish distributes information you might like to include:

- Reminders to landowners not to crop paths
- Dog owners should pick up after their animals and keep them under control at all times
- Households with hedges alongside paths need to be aware of vegetation growth reducing the width of paths – especially when we are being encouraged to socially distance ourselves
- Add a system of reporting to the parish council if there is a problem with a right of way – try not to include personal emails or telephone numbers.
- Devon Funding News <https://www.devon.gov.uk/fundingnews/> is a useful source of information for communities looking for funding. Use the link to sign up for regular updates via email.
- How to behave when walking or running through a field of cattle – there is good advice offered by clicking on the following link [walking amongst cattle](#)

10/. Annual workshops and Strimmer courses

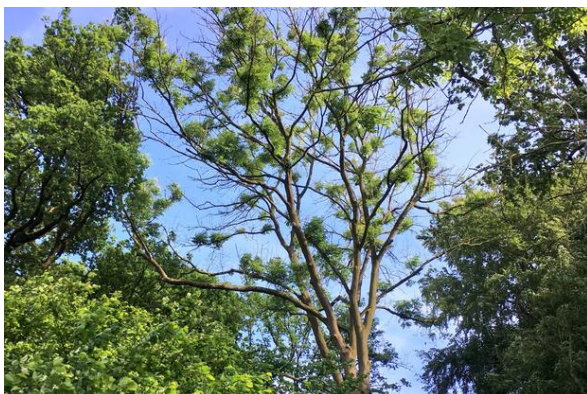
Unfortunately, we had to cancel a planned strimmer course earlier this year and currently we are unable to arrange a new date. If you have volunteers that would like to learn how to use a strimmer on rights of way, then please do



Picture shows delegates on a Strimmer course

get in touch and we will add names to a list. Details regarding future dates and venues will be made available as soon as possible.

We were hoping to move our traditional autumn 'Walk and Talk' events to the Spring this year and cover the topics of Ash Dieback and tree management, but unfortunately these events have not been possible due to the COVID -19 restrictions. We will reconsider these events as soon as we are able to safely organise public gatherings. Information will be circulated to P3 volunteers, groups, parish/town councils.



Picture shows an Ash tree with classic dieback evidence

11/. COVID -19 and information relating to rights of way

Naturally the situation with COVID-19 is fast moving and we are seeing almost daily updates with changes from the government. Currently, we are all allowed to access rights of way for exercise and maintenance purposes. If there are any changes to this information we will be in touch with clerks/P3 coordinators by email. Please continue to watch the media and follow advice offered by the NHS and Government. A link to Devon County Council COVID-19 advice may be found [here](#).

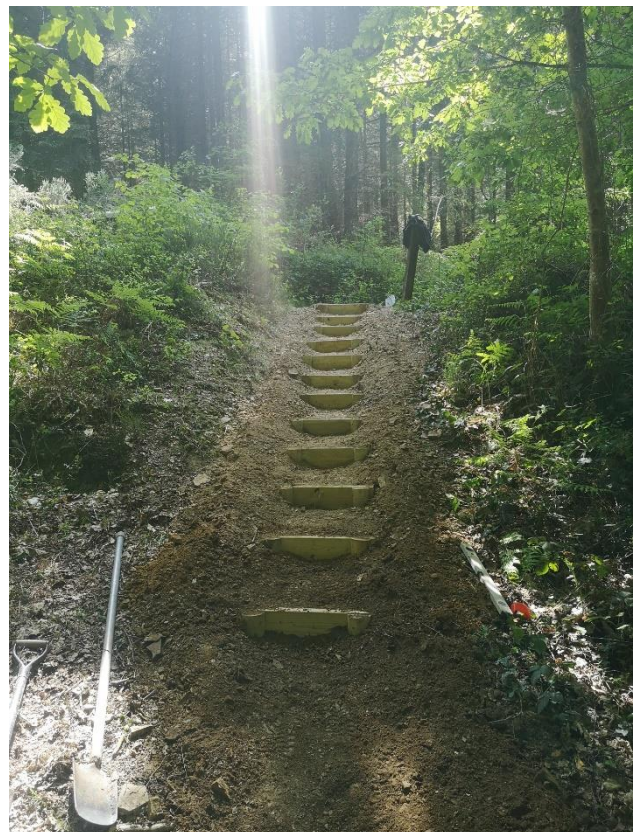
12/. Projects and updates

Despite the current lockdown measures work still goes on. The following is a rather ethereal picture from the parish of **Whitestone** featuring a flight of steps in a very remote location. The weather was bad last autumn making access tricky, but the recent dry spell enabled Francis Clark, under the instruction of the parish council, to complete the work as shown.

Many thanks to Vicky Bryant, P3 coordinator, for helping in organising this work.

In **Buckland Monachorum** Susan Woolacott worked to oversee a tricky surface project involving a narrow path and contractors using machinery to complete the ditching – the following is an extract from an email demonstrating communication between the Parish Council, community and Devon County Council:

.....Our project on footpath 19 which we put on our list to do will be going ahead this week .



Our maintenance guys will be putting the “grader” along the small lane bordering the moor sometime this weekwe did the same job 5/6 years and it has worked very well .They grade it and then clear the gully by the hedge, it’s a day job.

I have checked the hedges either side for bird nests, and they have all flown away. I have also put the information on BMPC and Yelverton Facebook site, as soon as I know which day the work will be undertaken, I will pop a notice up either end..... Thank you Susan for your liaison with the community, landowners and contractors regarding this specific project.

Thanks and Farewell to Pam Capener from Chardstock.



For the last 21 years Pam Capener has kept the paths in Chardstock in great order by engaging local supporters, landowners and contractors to maintain the paths. In addition to the maintenance programme Pam has co-ordinated a twice weekly walking programme that has encouraged

locals to get together with the shared goals of improving health and enjoying the countryside. In addition to the weekly walks Pam has co-ordinated the annual August ‘Week of Walks’.

In recent times Pam has passed over the reins of P3 Co-ordinator to Freda Goff, a fellow keen walker and volunteer.

Thank you, Pam, for all your hard endeavours over the years – you have been a true inspiration to so many.

.....And finally

COVID – 19 has turned our lives upside down in so many ways but our rights of way have enabled the community of Devon to gain a breath of fresh air to help aid our mental and physical health at a difficult time. Thank you for supporting the path network and enabling others to get out and enjoy what it has to offer.

Best wishes

From Devon County Council’s Public Rights of Way Team