



Humber, Ford and Stoke Prior Bridleways

Annual Report - 2025

Iain Cholerton
1st May 2025

SUMMARY

This report updates my previous annual reports. For reference I will only report where improvements have been made during the year or where there are new or worsening deficiencies to keep this report short. I would welcome receiving a few spare Bridleway markers at the Annual Meeting to replace some that have faded or disappeared.

Routes are designated as per the Herefordshire Council PROW and Highways map (e.g. FD 3, SP 28). Gates are numbered with the PROW number and the Parish Clerk's designation. (e.g. SP 28.1 for gate 1 on PROW SP 28)

BRIDLEWAYS

SP 28/FD 3 – Witsetts, Briery Mere to Ford.

Issues remain with gates SP 28.1, SP 28.2, SP 28.3 and SP 28.4 as reported for a number of years. Riders manage to negotiate them, so they are not currently a priority for PC engagement. The route from the road at Witsetts Farm to SP 28.1, despite the driest winter for many years, is not helped by an overflowing run-off sump at the bottom of the field to the South (Mr White's). Like last year, the route here has regularly been swamped again this year and was often unusable during winter months. See Photo 1.



Photo 1. SP 28.1 to the road (April 2024)

During the summer the dense undergrowth along the track makes it difficult to pass through from the road to SP 28.1. If possible, an annual cut back by the lengthsman (as was done in 2022 – see Photo 2) would be appreciated.



Photo 2. SP 28.1 to road. Cut back by Lengthsman (Sep 2022)

Rocks were removed by contractors from the field alongside Briery Mere and placed in a number of piles on the PROW. See Photo 3. I have spoken to John Walters, Mr Mercer's Farm Manager, who has undertaken to ensure this does not happen again.



Photo 3. SP 28.2-3 (April 2025)

At my meeting with Mr Mercer’s Farm Manager he has agreed to create a headland around this field to ensure that this route across, which often becomes muddy in winter, is rideable all year round. See Photo 4.



Photo 4. SP 28.2-3 (March 2025) to Mrs Jackson’s gate

The undergrowth at SP 28.4 has been cut back to improve access. See Photo 5. The gate is extremely difficult to negotiate, and impossible from the mounted position due to the low positioning of the latch, so when there is no livestock in the field it is regularly left open.



Photo 5. SP 28.4 (April 2025)

SP 12 – Briery Mere to Norman’s Farm.

No significant changes. As in previous years the track from SP 12.2 to SP 12.3 has again been deeply rutted by farm traffic making it difficult to use in the winter months. See Photo 6.



Photo 6. SP 12.2 – SP 12.3 (April 2025)

Although much drier this winter, the gate SP 12.3 remains difficult to use during wet period. See Photo 7.



Photo 7. SP 12.3 (April 2025)

SP 17 – Witsetts to Trap Cottage.

From Witsetts to Wickton Lane, all well-maintained. See Photo 8. Many thanks Pete L-H..



Photo 8. SP 17 (April 2024)

From Wickton Lane the route then descends along the sunken path to emerge at Trap Cottage at the top end of the village. The residents of Trap Cottage have recently staked a claim (literally – see Photo 9) to over half the PROW as it joins the sunken path to create a delineated car park. The width of the path to the side of the stake is less than 2 metres. I am unsure if this is legal and request the PC come to a view and take action as necessary.



Photo 9. SP 27 Trap Cottage (April 2025)

SP 27 – Sunnybank/Bowley Lane to Wickton.

Due to liberties taken by some riders (riding 5 abreast and actually around the field rather than following the direct route between gates), the landowner has now delineated with

tape the route from SP 27.1 to SP 27.2. See Photo 10. There is still ample room, and the route complies with the required width for a headland (3 meters).



Photo 10. (February 2025)

As in most years, the route across to Wickton Copse is regularly cropped over and not reinstated within the 14 days as required in Government Regulations. See Photo 11. As a compromise, Mr Mercer's Farm Manager has agreed that when the route becomes difficult, riders may continue to use the farm track that is not a PROW back to Wickton Lane. He does not wish to create a headland around this field.



Photo 11. SP 28.2 – Wickton Copse. (April 2025)

HU 4 – Humber to Buckland (Parish Boundary).

Since last year, a new smaller 4-foot gate has been installed at HU 4.1 making it much easier for riders to pass. See Photo 12. Thank you, Rich Collins.



Photo 12. HU 4. H U 4.1 (Mar 2025)

HU 10 - Risbury to PG 11 and Marston.

This route, which starts at Risbury Cross, has been much improved this year by the residents of Yew Tree Cottage. See Photos 13, 14, 15 and 16. The drains have been made more effective, the grass cut, overhanging branches trimmed, and a superfluous rotten gate (HU 10.3) taken off its hinges to allow easier passage. Many thanks to the owner Rebecca Davies.

However, the gate post at HU 10.1 is rotten at its base and needs replacing. See Photo 13.



Photo 13. HU 10.1 (April 2025) Rotten Post



Photo 13. H U 10.3 (April 2025) Gate now unhinged.



Photo 15. HU 10.2-3 (April 2025) Improved drainage.



Photo 16. HU 10.3-4 (April 2025). Grass cut.

PG 11 from Marston to Parish Boundary.

The saga continues at gate PG 11.2. After the courts judged in 2023 that the PROW did indeed pass through the large double gates at PG 11.2, Tim Parry of Burnt Mill, who farms

the land beyond the gates, was directed by the landowners of Sheepcote (Chris Belford and Clarissa Edwards) to remove the pipe and gravel he had previously laid to improve the drainage at the gate. This has resulted in the gate area now being very boggy (even in a dry winter, as a small stream/drainage ditch runs down past the gate). Because the gate is secured with a chain and catch that requires two hands to open, riders have to dismount into the mud and open the gate. See Photo 17 and as it was in 2022 Photo 18. The small gate (see Photo 19) has been secured by barbed wire and is no longer used.



Photo 17. PG 11.2 (April 2025)



Photo 18. PG 11.2 (May 2022)



Photo 19. PG 11.2 (April 2025)

So, although no longer a danger to riders as the elephant trap (see Photo 17) was previously filled in, it is still far from ideal. I would suggest an approach by the PC to the landowners of Sheepcote (who I believe now live in Cyprus) to make good the approach to the double gate.

The route enters Marston Firs and exits through PG 11.11 and continues to Hegdon Hill outside the Parish Boundary. This gate was replaced in 2022, but the gate area regularly becomes muddy. The gate currently cannot be opened and closed as it is stuck in solidified mud. See Photo 20.



Photo 20. PG 11.11 (April 2025)