

Report by Mike Craddock, Leader of the Footpath Working Party

Landford Public Footpath Committee

The Committee dates from 1974, when a group of Landford residents, concerned about the condition of local footpaths, undertook a major programme of reconstruction, clearing and waymarking. The leader of this work was Michael Avery, who has remained active and interested in the footpath network until the present day.

The Constitution of the Committee was kept deliberately simple. It recognises the jurisdiction of the Parish Council, and the Chair may be appointed by the Council (in practice, Michael Avery has been the sole Chairman from 1974 to 2012, and a record to be proud of). The constitution provides for membership by one of the Landowners through whose properties the paths pass (never exercised), and sets out the functions of the Committee, and the essential officers to be appointed. A basic Bank Account holds the small funds.

The first edition of the Landford Footpath Guide was produced in 1979, written by Mike Avery and other members of the Committee, and the current edition (produced in 2011) is the 6th. In each edition the text has been updated, to recognise changes on the ground, but the original hand drawn illustrations have been retained. The current edition is the first to feature colour photographs on the cover. The booklet is sold in local shops and costs £2. Profits from its sale pay for the printing of the next edition, and for materials, such as paint for waymarking.

There could be benefits in sharing knowledge, particularly regarding paths that continue into adjoining parishes. For us, these are Redlynch and Whiteparish within Wiltshire, Melchet Park and Plaitford in Hampshire, and the New Forest forming our southern boundary. We would welcome information allowing us to include within our own guide a list of similar local guides and where they may be obtained.

The Committee organises an annual programme of inspecting and clearing the whole network of Landford Footpaths. Refreshing of Waymarking is also undertaken during the inspections. Reports are compiled detailing any problems encountered (beyond the normal ones of annual plant growth!), including any requests for help from the County Footpath Warden for such matters as broken stiles, major fallen trees and any other work beyond the scope of the members. The report is forwarded to the Parish Council, and to the Footpath Warden.

It should be noted that although the County is not responsible for the work of the Committee, volunteers are covered by Wiltshire Council's insurance. We advise the Warden at the beginning of the season of the programme of work to be undertaken. This insurance does not include Public Liability – which is why the Committee does not undertake the construction of stiles, bridges, etc, which are scheduled for work by the Footpath Warden.

The strength of the Committee has varied over the years, the work sometimes being undertaken by only two or three members. However, there are now more than a dozen volunteers, making it relatively easy to cover the annual programme. It should be noted that the Committee operates entirely independently of the Parish Council. This is partly an accident of history. A previous Chairman of the PC was not keen on Public Rights of Way, and led the PC of the day into total lack of interest in the work of the Footpath Committee. Accordingly, the Committee has just got on with the work. The current PC is interested and supportive – however it is important to note that no PC funds are employed, and the Committee is financially independent, but simply reports its work to the PC and the Warden. Some members of the PC choose to volunteer for the work, but in their private capacities – they are not there as representing the PC.

Mention the Ramblers Association.

Stress need for someone dedicated to keeping open our Rights of Way. 2017 deadline.