

Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) for the parish of Great Waldingfield in Suffolk, 2020

Preamble

Great Waldingfield has a population of about 1800 people. There is a primary school, a pub and a village store with post office counter. It lies on the B1115 road, 2 miles from Sudbury and 4 miles from Lavenham. Adjoining parishes are Chilton, Newton, Edwardstone, Little Waldingfield, Lavenham and Acton.

Routes into Sudbury

For commuters, shoppers and older schoolchildren, there is the B1115 road and there is a bus service. The footway along the B1115 is narrow and unpleasant next to fast moving traffic. There is no cycle lane and no room for cars to overtake bicycles if there is oncoming traffic. This is dangerous on the S-bends.

Recommendation - Create a new, surfaced footpath and cycle path across Chilton airfield (which is mostly owned by Suffolk County Council) linking Great Waldingfield and Acton with Sudbury via Chilton. The old runways form a possible basis to work from. This could link in with the Chilton path network and the bridges over Sudbury Northern bypass.

Access to and through the countryside

Why is this important?

1. Exercise and recreation. We know that this is good for our physical and mental health.
2. To reach a particular nearby destination without using a car. For example, a school, a friend's house, a church, a pub, an area of wildlife interest, a lovely view, a place to pick blackberries, etc.
3. Dog walking.

There is no 'freedom to roam' in England but Public Rights of Way (PROWs) allow us to cross private land on designated routes. They have gradually evolved into the rather fragmented network we have today and, in Suffolk, are the responsibility of Suffolk County Council. They can be found on Ordnance Survey maps and on the SCC website by viewing the 'Definitive Map'. Each PROW in every parish is allocated a number.

What are the problems?

1. Lack of Information. How many of us know where all the paths are and what is legally permitted? Could we follow the path on a map if there were no signs?
2. Maintenance. SCC has a duty to maintain the surface of the path, provide signposts and enforce the duties of the landowner. Its budget is inadequate to do this. The landowner has a duty not to obstruct the path, for example by fences, overgrown hedges, misleading signs. A landowner may plough and crop a cross field path as long as it is restored within 14 days.
3. Missing Paths. Before World War II, the path network was informal and in regular use by villagers and farm workers, who mostly did not have cars. The 1st edition Ordnance Survey maps in the 1880s show many more paths than we have today. After the war, parish councils were asked to formalise the path network, but this was not done consistently.

Hence there are gaps, dead ends and missing links. For example, it would be reasonable to think that someone could walk between neighbouring villages on a quiet lane, a pavement or a footpath without the dangers of walking on the road, but this is not usually possible.

4. Change of land use. Removal of hedges and woods to enlarge fields has resulted in paths now crossing the middle of an arable field instead of hugging the edge. Conversion of old farm buildings to residential use has resulted paths being diverted around the new curtilage.

General Recommendations

Monitor and maintain the paths we have now. The parish council, Suffolk County Council and perhaps volunteers would have a role. This could include vegetation clearance, waymarkers, and reporting of obstructions. With consent, possibly planting trees.

Produce a user friendly map of our paths on the village website, as a leaflet, on a display board.

The following steps would require negotiation with landowners followed by a legal process at Suffolk County Council.

Restore old missing paths where these would be useful.

Add new paths to meet current needs, some of which may be footways on roadside verges.

Consider path diversions for ease of use and maintenance.

Negotiate 'permissive paths' if we cannot secure permanent rights of way.

Specific Locations for Improvement

Unofficial Paths - I notice that in places, people appear to be creating paths where there is no legal right of way, simply by repeatedly using them. This is a good indicator of need so they are listed first.

1. From the entrance to the bowls club on Tentree Road around the grain barn on to the old runways of the airfield. This is the only way on foot to Acton without walking along Tentree Road. It would also be useful to add a footway along Tentree Road to Acton.
2. From the end of Bantocks Road along the field edge to the public footpath that leaves Valley Road going to Chilton Grange. Technically this is just into the parish of Chilton. This avoids walking on the dangerous Valley Road or its uneven verge. Also consider a footway.
3. From the Sudbury Road just beyond 'The Hollies' along the field edge and then along a farm track to the airfield runway. This avoids the narrow and noisy footway by the road. (Chilton)
4. A direct continuation of parish FP 11 along the field edge by the stream to the entrance of the community woodland on The Street.
5. Parish FP 5 from Hole Farm Lane to Upsher Green. The 150m of path nearest Hole Farm Lane is now cross-field and is ploughed up every year. People instead are using the field edge to the north-east via a hole in the hedge opposite Hole farm Cottages.

'Missing Links'

1. 200m section along the south side of the River Box linking parish FP4 to FP7 at the end of Hole Farm Lane, allowing a shorter circular walk using FP4 via the community woodland.
2. A field edge path to link FP4 near the sewage works with FP3 on B1115 by Dyers Green Farm. It would need to cross the stream.

3. Restore the links to Edwardstone and Newton from High Wood. A dead end public highway called High Wood Lane leads from Badleys Road to the ancient woodland where the three parishes meet. Previously this connected to Edwardstone church, Newton church and New Barn but the paths were not designated post war. This omission should be corrected, preferably as bridleways or byways.
4. A three way link between the Lavenham Road near Redhouse Farm/parish FP 1, the corner of FP3 250m north-west of Dyers Green Farm and Peak Hall Lane, Acton. Most of this exists on the map as farm tracks. It would improve east-west connectivity to Acton and Little Waldingfield.

The 'Box Valley Path'

There is a 60 mile 'Stour Valley Path' from Newmarket (near the source) to Cattawade (near the mouth), administered by the county councils and the AONB (For one section I am the trained voluntary warden). So why not a Box Valley Path from Great Waldingfield via Boxford to where the River Box joins the Stour near Stratford St Mary? Springs in Great Waldingfield lead to the school pond and then the stream which becomes the River Box. Unofficial path (4) and missing link (2) above would contribute to this. A good place for the official start would be the post office with its public transport links. Here we could have a display board of parish paths with or without the Box Valley Path.

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