

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT FOR WBA AGM

ON THU 30 MARCH 2023.

March 2022 was our first AGM after a break of two years caused by the COVID pandemic. Along with other organisations, that break hit us relatively hard in terms of being able to deal with PROW problems. Fortunately, your small band of committee members maintained a sense of humour throughout and we are now able to get out and about to survey problems which have been reported to Wiltshire Council before being brought to our attention by PROW users. During this last year we have returned to a full programme of meetings which are held in Devizes on the second Wednesday of each month. Here we discuss progress on ongoing/outstanding issues, new reports received during the month, reviewing correspondence received, predominantly from Wiltshire Council, but occasionally from town/parish councils or other user groups, and formulating responses as necessary. These meetings are not a closed shop so if you wish to find out more about our work, you are most welcome to come along.

Regarding reporting of incidents can I please ask that after notifying WBA of any PROW problem which you have reported to Wiltshire Council, you continue to monitor that report for any comments added, and notify us of those too. Those comments can be most useful and informative at future dates. Can I also ask with regard to reporting, request friends to submit too. One report is viewed as low usage and therefore low priority. Several reports suggest higher usage and stand a better chance of getting something done.

You have already heard from Michelle regarding the current state of our bank balance. This is monies accumulated almost entirely from the organisation of pleasure rides by Rosie P. I have previously commented on our attempts since 2017/18 to offer some small financial aid to Wiltshire Council for the maintenance of PROW's, and the responses received. At the AGM of 2022 I was able to report

that the PROW Access Officer Team had been taken under the umbrella of Highways and the challenge of contributions was being taken forward by Michelle. That has paid dividends and during September 2022 a meeting was organised by Mr Chris Clark, Head of Highways, attended by members of the Countryside Access Team and WBA. A second gathering was held during November 2022 and a third has been arranged for April this year. We have already paid a contribution towards the clearance of one bridleway, and accepted quotes for the clearance of three others. Hopefully more to follow.

I say more to follow, but this is of course dependant on us being able to maintain our flow of income. Although in 2022 Rosie was looking at the possibility of organising two pleasure rides, the pressure of troop training on Salisbury Plain eliminated this as a possible venue. The Savernake ride was organised with all necessary authorisations in place. However, at the last minute, the son of Lord Cardigan, who we have since discovered has a 51% stake in the estate, closed road barriers to the forest, declared WBA as trespassers and the event illegal. He summoned the attendance of Wiltshire Police who, in the interest of public order asked WBA to leave. This then left police with a traffic problem on the A4 road with the arrival of horse transport. Rosie subsequently received a visit from Lord Cardigan and a letter of apology. Entry refunds were made to all attendees who had pre booked but this did not compensate for fuel cost or for the hire of transport.

Staying on the theme of pleasure rides, Rosie is pushing forward with plans to arrange a Savernake ride again this year but this isn't without significant hurdles so at the moment that is still a project in progress. Rosie, thanks for your perseverance. If anyone can suggest suitable venues, or better still organise a ride, do let us know. It basically comes down to no rides, equals no income, equals no financial contribution to maintenance, equals loss of PROW availability thus forcing riders back onto roads which presents an obvious danger to life and limb. It's a vicious circle.

Throughout the year we have continued to attend meetings with The Wiltshire and Swindon Countryside Access Forum, (WSCAF) and carry out maintenance work over SPTA in collaboration with MOD(DIO) and The Green Lane Association. (GLASS).

I also reported last year that at a WSCAF meeting in Mar 22 we were informed that after much lobbying from interested parties/user groups, the government had dropped the requirement for DMMO applications to be submitted by the 2026 deadline, much to the delight of all. That situation has sadly changed. On Wednesday 22 March 2023, DEFRA issued a statement that ‘The Secretary of State has simply implemented a five year extension to 1 January 2031’. Strangely, that ruling applies to England only.

Finally I’m sure you will all join me in thanking your small but very hard working committee for their continued efforts over the last year. I know it hasn’t been easy. And a special thank you to Barbara MacMullen who in January 21, having previously filled the post of Minutes Secretary for some 17 years stepped back into the post on a temporary basis whilst we sort a replacement. Barbara – You’re a STAR. Can I now introduce Mrs Kate Dilnott-Cooper who answered or plea and volunteered. Kate will be taking over wef our next meeting on Wednesday 12 April 2023.