

Shrewsbury Ramblers Group

Footpath Secretary Annual Report: November 2020 to November 2021

Introduction

The Shrewsbury Footpath Secretary's remit covers some 42 Parishes centred on Shrewsbury although it often extends into surrounding areas. There is a small team of several Footpath Secretaries covering the Shropshire Area who liaise with each other and the Area FP Secretary Phil Barnes. The Walking Environment Secretary, Trevor Allison is also heavily involved. Interested Secretaries contribute to the Rights of Way Committee (ROW) for Shropshire which reviews activities annually and latest developments and issues of interest to all.

Footpath Issues

Over the last year the log of footpath issues has totalled about 38 cases (48 cases last year); these are documented on an Excel spreadsheet. Despite the COVID-19 lockdowns many ramblers took the opportunity to continue walking so footpath problems continued to be reported. All of these have been reported to Shropshire Council for action. The issues relate to:-

1. Common problems encountered by ramblers such as broken stiles/gates, unsafe bridges, locked gates, barbed wire, fallen trees, overgrown paths, ploughed fields, crop obstructions etc.
2. Responses to Planning Applications which impact on the footpath network due to proposed development and infrastructure works e.g. the NWR; housing developments etc.
3. During the COVID-19 lockdowns we dealt with a number of cases of ROW being illegally blocked by landowners and residents who were concerned about the spread of infection.

Many Council staff were re-directed to other duties during lockdowns so footpath "repairs" have been somewhat neglected. This work is undertaken by Council staff and the "P3" groups. The Shrewsbury P3 group re-started activities in October 2020 and this has continued through 2021.

A number of local issues have arisen due to the extent of **new house building around Shrewsbury**:-

- Walk 13 (Shrewsbury Ramblers 20 Walks book) was impacted by a temporary footpath closure for six months due to house building works along **Oteley Road**. An alternative route was established by Linden Homes/Bovis Homes which was fine for a while until it was blocked off by the builder for health and safety reasons to allow construction work to be completed. Shrewsbury Ramblers identified alternative paths and the public found a route through an adjacent housing estate. Unfortunately Shropshire Council provided no alternative route information (apparently not obliged to!). The footpath closure has now been extended to 1st March 2022.
- Planning permission was granted in early June for **340 new houses on land off Welshpool Road, Bicton Heath**. The development, between Calcott Lane and Shepherds Lane, will impact upon three footpaths (7, 8Y and 9). Shropshire Ramblers made representations to the Council during the consultation period and adequate provisions for the footpath network should be provided within the development. This is another one for us to keep a close eye on.

The **Shrewsbury North West Relief Road (NWRR) Planning Application** was lodged on 19 February 2021. The Shropshire Ramblers detailed response was submitted by the Shropshire Walking Environment Officer in terms of the impact on the PROW network and provisions for walkers. The application has still not been resolved and just recently a series of revisions were submitted to the Planning Authority for consideration.

A temporary closure order for up to six months was put in place from 23 May which affected **Walk 4 and the Severn Way below Darwin's Garden**. This was needed for embankment stabilisation works. The works were completed well within the six months and the path is now reopened.

A temporary closure order for up to six months was put in place from 21 June which affected the **Rea Brook footpath beneath the Kingfisher Bridge** (old railway line). This was needed to allow the construction of a fish ladder beneath the bridge plus river bank erosion protection. Again, the works were completed well within the six months and the path is now reopened.

On 22 June the **Emstrey-Atcham footbridge on the Severn Way** was reopened following its replacement. The bridge was washed away in last winters' floods where it crosses a deep ditch which drains into the river.

Lost Ways 2026 Deadline

While there is some interest in this initiative from local ramblers it has been difficult to identify anyone with the time and enthusiasm to take it on. The next stage is to complete further research to prove that any path mapped was a public right of way. Collated information and historical evidence will need to be submitted to the local authority. This would be a great project for anyone interested in local history. Rambler's volunteers could research old records; compile Claim Applications, and ground-check footpaths in the countryside.

Neil Mosley, Footpath Secretary, October 2021.