

Ropley Parish Council

Improving Ropley Footpaths

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Introduction

Ropley Parish Council is keen to improve access to the local footpath network in Ropley by replacing some stiles with kissing gates. This is in line with the Ropley Neighbourhood Plan, extracts of which are quoted below in figure 1.

The Parish Council will apply for funding from Hampshire County Council to support this, as well as use Parish Council funds set aside for this purpose. A volunteer group is being set up in Ropley to work alongside expert rangers from Hampshire County Council to install some of the kissing gates, so that more kissing gates can be purchased with the available funds.

Aims of Improving Ropley Footpaths project

The aims of the project are to:

- Ensure footpaths that exit onto busy roads have a kissing gate to reduce the risk of children and dogs running onto the road
- Improve access to footpaths that provide safe walking links between the village centre and outlying clusters of housing in Ropley (for example, Soames Lane, Ropley Dean, Gilbert Street) described as 'priority routes'
- Improve access to circular walks, providing a positive impact on physical and mental health.

Benefits for landowners

The project has a number of benefits for landowners;

- Stiles will be replaced with kissing gates at no cost for the landowners.
- Landowners will see a reduction in maintenance costs as the metal kissing gates will last longer than wooden stiles.
- Rights of way will be clearer, thus reducing the chance of trespass.

Landowners will be consulted before specific improvement projects are carried out.

Improvement ideas

- Appendix A provides a list of potential improvements.
- The areas for improvement will be prioritised, and developed into a multi-year plan, starting in 2023. The speed with which the plan can be delivered will depend on the level of funding available, and whether we can recruit volunteers to help replace the stiles with kissing gates.

Figure 1: Extracts from [Ropley Neighbourhood Plan](#)

Ropley Parish has a network of 45 footpaths, bridleways and green lanes which provides for walkers and on some routes for cyclists and horse-riders too. However, not all the paths link up, so consequently pedestrians, cyclists and horse-riders have to compete with motorised traffic on the roads and narrow lanes.

Travel through and within the parish is predominantly by car, and car use has expanded significantly in line with trends across Hampshire and nationally. This increased traffic is eroding the character of Ropley's lanes and is having a detrimental impact on their use by walkers, cyclists and horse-riders. A recent survey amongst children at Ropley village school showed that only 28% travelled there on foot or by bicycle.

Growing volumes of motor traffic mean Ropley's lanes are becoming less pleasant for other road users, and create actual and perceived risks to safety. Problems are most acute on minor and single-track lanes at the centre of the village and in outlying settlements.

Policy CP31 of the East Hampshire District Local Plan Joint Core Strategy states that walking and cycling need to be promoted as means of access to jobs, facilities and services.

Locating new housing within walking distance of local facilities can help to minimise the use of private means of transport for those journeys and thus avoid additional traffic.

The Joint Core Strategy further states that walking and cycling need to be promoted as a recreational opportunity with a positive impact on physical and mental health. Policy CP31 seeks to protect and provide safe and convenient cycle and pedestrian links that integrate with existing cycle and pedestrian networks.

Hampshire County Council has overall authority for rights of way, but has asked parishes to identify which routes provide most benefits to residents. The most important paths in Ropley radiate from the village centre to outlying clusters of housing, providing links to the village shop, school and parish hall. These 'Ropley Priority Paths' are shown in the Evidence Base. These paths may become part of the County Council's network of Strategic Routes, which will be the paths to which the County Council will give greater priority in the allocation of resources for improvements, such as grants towards the replacement of stiles with gates.

Ropley Parish Council will:

- proactively develop plans to improve the Ropley Priority Paths especially those that would serve new housing development
- work in partnership with Hampshire County Council and landowners to implement the identified improvements
- consider allocating some of its Community Infrastructure Levy receipts to those improvements
- commit to support enhancements to walking and cycling linkages to the South Downs National Park.