**Parish Footpath Officers Report May 2025**

1. PFO Introduction Meeting

Around 100 footpath officers have now received some introductory training from Steve Organ PROW Volunteer Coordinator he organised about 10 meetings throughout the county for footpath officers, clerks and anybody else who interested.

From Little Birch I attended as well as Neil Barrington and Chris Atkinson. Steve explained what the role involved and we went through whose responsibilities different issues might be. We were also told of the new draft handbook that could be viewed online, we were given a bag containing a few tools in including secateurs, folding saw, safety glasses and a personal first aid kit, at a later date we will be issued with identity badges and high viz jackets. It was a very useful meeting and gave us the chance to talk to some of the PFO’s we had not met before.

1. Noticeboard There is a possibility that if we make a good case for the noticeboard we could get some funding from Herefordshire Council, I’ve been told unofficially on two occasions recently that there is a chance that they might look favourably on parishes that are being proactive in terms of encouraging people to use their local footpaths. If you think it’s worth approaching the council for funding, I will draft something that the Clerk could include in a request to PROW. As the noticeboard would include a map of Aconbury as well as Little Birch, I think we could ask the Chair of Aconbury Parish Meeting to also approach the council regarding this.
2. Bridges

We have issues with two bridges over the Wrigglebrook, LB 23 did have a railway sleeper bridge, this was washed away in the floods earlier in the year. The sleeper is now resting about 30m downstream wedged between the two banks. I have discussed this with the footpath inspector who will visit and then advise on the best course of action. The second issue is on LB 21 that was totally overwhelmed by the heavy rain, we discussed before and it was suggested that we manually try and dredge to stream. Having inspected this week after the dry spell that we have had, I think this would be a very difficult undertaking. I have spoken to Jamie Langford from Church Farm and asked if he has any equipment that might be able to dredge it for us, but he has said that he has not got anything that would be suitable. So, I have also referred this to the footpath inspector who is going to come back to me with some recommendations.

1. Walks

We had a very successful Dawn Chorus walk with 16 people attending. We were very fortunate to find a very knowledgeable bird watcher Gervase Mangwana who lives in Reform Cottage Little Birch Road who was able to join us and share his knowledge of the birds we heard. On our return to Merrivale Farm we were served with bacon butties, tea and coffee and toast in the barn next to the cows. We are very grateful to the Mason Family for providing the breakfast and for the use of their barn. Donations from those talking part amounted to £100 this was presented to St Michaels Hospice. We have two more walks planned one for the 1st June which is going to be a Flaura and Fauna Walk led again by Andrew Nixon we’re still planning this but hoping to look at some different habitats to previous years. On 28th June we will be supporting local resident to raise some sponsorship money for her walk along the Great Wall of China, she will be selling cakes and organising a raffle at the end of the walk.

1. Map of the parishes

No progress has been made on this in the last month.

1. Footpaths

I have been out checking footpaths, all of them are accessible although we are getting to the time of year when vegetation grows very quickly and we will need to do some cutting back in certain areas in the next month.

Chris Fowler

Little Birch Footpath Officer