



Good afternoon and hope all is well.

A few issues ago I touched on Rights of Way and how important these routes are to everyone in Northamptonshire. Usage has certainly increased over the last year and it has been fantastic to see more and more local communities accessing the countryside.

It seems I rarely write a newsletter that does not mention the weather and its impact on the extensive network Northamptonshire Highways look after.

I wanted to touch on the footpaths, byways and bridleways and what we can all do to protect this important asset, particularly over the winter months.

At this time of year, we often get reports of the Rights of Way network not being in great shape and difficult to access. Especially true this year after the incredibly wet few months we have had. Many of our routes have become a lot more challenging, muddy and a bit of a quagmire.

Seasoned walkers will go out in all weathers. The urge to walk means that they will not be put off by wind and rain. But this past year, we have seen a huge surge in people who may not normally think to venture out using our Rights of Way, no matter the weather. It's better than sitting in!

Despite the flock of new walkers being great to see, it has brought its own issues and landowner concerns.

The [Country Land and Business Association](#), (CLA) which represents 20,000 rural businesses across England and Wales, have said that walkers need to be aware of the impact they could be having on crops when they try to avoid the well-trodden and sodden paths across land.

People are circumnavigating the mud and walking over planted crops, damaging food crops and damaging businesses.



Some busier routes have widened dramatically. One example quoted by the CLA was a path that should be 5 ft. wide now measuring 11 ft. as walkers had created a new, drier route on adjacent land to the official path. Some paths have completely disappeared and extend across fields.

It is completely understandable that people want to take exercise in the beautiful countryside but the combination of heavy footfall and wet weather is causing lasting damage across the whole country.

Landowners are not against people using the paths but just want people to stick to them. Anyone I talk to thinks it is great that walkers are there and we certainly don't think that the action of some is deliberate. It is just that they do not realise the damage they are doing.

## Highway news e-bulletin 19 March – A rather muddy ramble

For many people, using these routes is new and they have only just started exploring this great network in Northamptonshire since, and because, of lockdown. As any seasoned walker will know, not all paths are accessible 365 days a year and the fact is you are not going to be able to avoid the mud and keep your trainers clean!

Please share this message. It may look like clean, drier grass you are walking on to avoid the muddy route, but it could very likely be early corn, barley or wheat, which is worth thousands to the farmer. Six tonnes of wheat is worth £,1000 and crops are being ruined. Some farmers also plant wildflower borders to encourage nature, and these are being trampled too.

The network is there for you to use and we want to work with local communities to encourage people to explore and rediscover, or discover, the joy of walking.

Now, this is where I am going to sound like I am teaching people to suck eggs but we genuinely do get many enquiries about how to use a Right of Way in mud! And our advice? To dress appropriately and wear suitable footwear that allows you to walk a muddy path. Not all customers are suitably prepared for walking in the countryside.

It may take quite a while to subside and dry out, especially near watercourses, following an exceptional bout of wet weather. However, the water will go and paths will become more accessible as the year goes on, as shown on the pictures here. One photo taken this week and one last summer.

Our Right of Way team will monitor sites as we move through spring and summer to ensure that the flooding does not remain an issue.

The small team of Rights of Way officers (Sarah Cureton, Nick Wedgebrow and Katie Brown) are responsible for 1929 miles network. The urban and rural routes, form an integral part of the transport network providing a healthier alternative to the car for accessing work, leisure facilities, shops, services and schools.

They also provides access to the outstanding Northamptonshire countryside together with many places of interest including historic sites, woodlands, and waterways all of which provide support for the local economy

We worked hard over the last year with interested parties and stakeholders to develop an incredibly robust [Right of Way Improvement Plan](#). I feel we now have a clear vision on how we will seek additional funding as and when the opportunity arises. I am keen to use innovative methods in the delivery of the service to ensure that the Rights of Way meet peoples' needs as much as possible.

As I said, we try hard to never close a Right of Way and certainly work with landowners who feel this is their only course of action. Covid -19 scared people and at the start some



landowners did not welcome the additional footfall. We worked with them to understand and address their concerns and keep routes open.

The risk of the coronavirus being passed on to others from people using public rights of way and other paths and trails is considered to be very low, as long as people follow the Government's instructions to maintain social distancing.

At the very outset of lockdown, we made it clear to landowners and the public that we have to work together and be respectful. We need to all follow the [Countryside Code](#), head for quieter spots and stick to the Public Rights of Way, no matter how narrow.

So, for now, pull on your wellies, waders, or even galoshes and get out there. Measure the level of risk and, although you may have to take mud off your boots, it should not take the shine off a great walk.

**Note** - One thing we do at the start of the winter is close our Byways. This is to prohibit the driving of any horse-drawn vehicle or motor vehicle (except motor cycles)

Every year from 1st October to 30th April these temporary closures to some users is put in place to protect them from damage, when the ground is very wet, from vehicles. During these times, the routes will remain open for walkers, cyclists, equestrians and motorcyclists and the regulation orders are required to prevent damage to the surface of the byways from larger vehicular use during the winter months.

If you do find an issue on a Right of Way, please report to our [Street Doctor Service](#) and to read more about these routes [click here](#).

Any antisocial behaviour occurring on a Right of Way should be reported directly to the police. The more anti-social behaviour that it is reported to **Northamptonshire Police's Safer Community Team on 101** or via the police's website, the more likely the police are to take advisory and/or enforcement action.

### **This week we -**

- completed **552** carriageway repairs and **135** footway repairs
- responded to **515** Street Doctor reports
- we inspected **2612** (100% of target) and cleansed **2543** (97% of target) gullies.
- This week the Thermal Road Repair unit working from our Wellingborough depot has been out in Harborough Road Rushden and Queensway in Wellingborough. Next week we will be in Midland Road, Higham Ferrers on Monday and Tuesday, Wednesday Big Green, Warmington, Thurs/Friday tbc
- The unit working from our Brixworth depot has been repairing in on the Kettering Road Broughton and Rushden Road at Pipewell. Next week we will The Derry, Crick and Spratton and Road, Brixworth

Highway news e-bulletin 19 March – A rather muddy ramble



Website: [www.northamptonshire.gov.uk/streetdoctor](http://www.northamptonshire.gov.uk/streetdoctor)

Telephone: **0300 126 1000**

For information and transport and highway updates, follow us on **Twitter @nnhighways**

To view all works and diversions, including Utilities, on the highway visit **one.network**