**CORVEDALE PARISH COUNCILS** **26 JUNE 2017**

**FOOTPATH REPORT – JOHN FARLEY P3 CO-ORDINATOR (CORVEDALE)**

P3 is shorthand for Parish Paths Partnership, which is an organisation set up under the aegis of Shropshire Council whereby groups of volunteers undertake footpath (and some bridleway) maintenance on behalf of the Council. Normally, as one would expect from the title, such groups are based in a single parish.

The Corvedale group grew out of an initiative in 2003 by myself to create the 11 mile waymarked Corvedale Three Castles Walk route with the aim of stimulating tourism business in the area. This was funded almost entirely from Heritage Lottery Fund grants although we also worked closely with Shropshire Council through the 3+ years it took to develop. It was formally opened in August 2006 and a copy of the walks leaflet and accompanying book were made available to every household within the delivery area of The Corvedale News. As we were nearing the end of the project, which was by this time already working within the P3 Scheme, the volunteers working with me decided they had so much fun they wished to continue, and are now doing so over 10 years later. As we had members who lived beyond the boundaries of Diddlebury and Munslow parishes, and there were no adjoining P3 groups, we extended our remit to embrace the “upper Corvedale” hence incorporating most of Abdon &Heath, plus bits of Stanton Long and Shipton, and have even operated beyond those boundaries if the need arose. We have taken on responsibility for the section of the Shropshire Way which traverses the Corvedale from Bank House, Upper Earnstrey, where it comes off Brown Clee, across to Wilderhope Manor. As far as I am aware, we cover the largest area of any P3 group in the county. Our proudest boast is that we haven't fallen out with a single landowner within “our patch” since we began. I hope this isn't tempting providence and that it will long continue.

Diddlebury Parish Council has recently had a footpath issue figure on its agenda and as a consequence it's clerk contacted me. I thought that rather than just respond to the DPC on that issue, it would be a good opportunity to bring the parish councils covered by our activities up to speed with all the issues we are currently handling which may be of interest to them including one where we would like to seek assistance from the Councils. Clearly, we have limited resources and limited volunteer time, so over such a large patch we have to allocate priorities as we see them. Given our background, and its success in generating tourism business for the Dale, the C3C Path tops our list. We then look at the recreational use of the rest of the path network and respond to input we receive from all interested parties – landowners, footpath users, councils (both parish and county), national organisations etc.

* Broncroft Mill Bridge (Path 0501/18Y/2) – this was washed away in flooding in 2008. It would be enormously costly to replace and if replaced in situ would pose a flood risk to the adjoining properties. Those dwelling in the adjoining properties are inconvenienced from time to time by walkers trying to locate and use the no longer existent bridge. I was asked by the clerk of the DPC if path closure/diversion notices could be fixed to deter walkers from trying to use the route. These have now be produced by Shropshire Council and we have fixed them to the 4 route access points. Spare copies have been supplied to Ian Hankinson should any of the notices disappear. We have also had discussion with local residents, landowners and the Council about a possible route diversion involving stepping stones upstream from the bridge site.
* Bridge Cottage Peaton (Path 0525/54/1) – there is a footpath shown on the definitive map as running across the front of Bridge Cottage to a non existent bridge approximately 30 yards downstream from the road bridge over Pye Brook and then continuing across the meadow on the opposite bank. All available evidence suggested that the bridge didn't even exist when the definitive map was drawn up in the early 1950s. When developing the C3C route, I negotiated, with the help of the Council, a permissive path alignment (Path 0525/P4/1) which began the over the road bridge and then took an amended route across the meadow so as to pass the site of Corfham Castle. This route now appears on recently published OS maps. We are now assisting the landowner of Bridge Cottage to pursue a path diversion order to regularise the situation and get the permissive route accepted as the new definitive.
* Corfham Castle site (Path 0525/P5/1) – this is a scheduled ancient monument site. When we developed the C3C route, we placed an interpretation board within the site, with full consent and supervision of English Heritage. At that time the location of the interpretation board was within an area enclosed by a barbed wire stock fence. Over time the fence has fallen apart and not been replaced. The board has since been damaged (supports bent) by cattle using it as a scratching post. I have now received a quotation from a professional fencing contractor to straighten the board and construct a new small stock proof enclosure around the board. We do not have the skills in the P3 group to do this work. Given the amount of benefit the C3C walk has brought to Corvedale businesses, I am seeking contributions from Diddlebury and Munslow Parish Councils to cover the cost of this work total £274.27 (quotation available for inspection).
* Footpath from The Moors, Diddlebury, to Corvedale School (Path 0525/20/1) – this is the issue raised by the DPC. The footpath is incorporated within the C3C route. We were asked by Shropshire Council if we wished to join and assist with installing a kissing gate in place of one stile on the route – we did. The stile to be replaced hadn't been used for a good while as regular users had enlarged a weakness nearby in the adjoining hedgerow and clearly used that instead. Subsequently we have replaced a second stile but the question of further upgrading the footpath to allow it to be used by mothers with pushchairs as a route to the school involves many parties and raises many other issues. Within the remit that the P3 group has set for itself and agreed with Shropshire Council, we do not consider it to be a priority.
* C3C route between Munslow and Aston Munslow parallel to B4368 (Path 0546//36/1) – we have recently received an enquiry whether this section of the C3C route could be upgraded to remove stiles and make it more usable for people with limited agility. There is no footpath along the side of the B4368 for this length and there is good evidence that the path is used very regularly by locals as well as visitors to the area. This would require considerable effort and to date the P3 group has not itself held stock of kissing gates and handled installation. There are numerous financial and logistical issues which need to be considered but the group would support the idea in principle.
* Ditto Aston Munslow to Diddlebury (Paths 0546/45Y/1 and 0525/45/2) – the arguments for upgrading this route are very similar to the above and subject to finance and resources our response would be the same.
* Diddlebury, Delbury Cottage to Delbury Hall main drive (Path 0525/26/2) – all C3C route. The section of this path adjoining Delbury Cottage to the narrow footbridge is incorporated within the C3C route description which was signed off by Shropshire Council in 2006. Two years ago we discovered that the sleeper planking on the bridge had rotted through in one place. In the short term this was remedied by fixing a sheet of 5 ply board over the hole. Shropshire Council then denied that the bridge was on the definitive line of the RoW and that it ran the west side of the brook. It is acknowledged that the track on the other side is also used by walkers as an alternative route. But, conversation with Mr Wrigley, who owns both sides of the brook along that section, confirmed that his deeds show the definitive route to be the footpath and the little planked bridge (which Shropshire Council has clearly maintained in the past (1980s). This situation is unresolved and remains outstanding. Where the two routes reconnect, at the field which leads up to the Delbury Hall Main drive, there is now a new fence and stile (a “Topher special” – I'm sure he wont mind my describing it in that way). There may be issues with walkers using the adjoining large vehicular gate when there is stock in the field. The views of the DPC on this situation would be welcome.
* Corfton Manor (Path 0525/25/3) – adjoining the entrance drive to Corfton Manor, there were two wrought iron kissing gates on the footpath heading due east towards Diddlebury. The path forms part of the C3C route and Heritage Lottery funds were used in 2004 to carry out restoration work on the gates. The gates, and associated wrought iron fencing were removed when building works to the Manor and drive began last autumn, these are still ongoing. The footpath is still accessible but local residents have raised concerns. Following discussions with the owners (Millichope Estate, which has given great support to the group since it was founded) I have been assured that at least one of the historic kissing gates will be reinstated when the building works are completed.
* Shropshire Way – the line of the Shropshire Way across the upper end of the Corvedale was established over 30 years ago. Earlier this year Shropshire Council launched a new initiative to upgrade the route of the Shropshire Way and to bring all the signage, field furniture and all the public information (maps, websites etc.) up to latest standards. The P3 group was asked to carry out a condition survey of the proposed latest route (there have been other realignments over the years), which hasn't been changed over our patch, and report on what works need to be undertaken to upgrade the signage and field furniture. This report has been submitted to Shropshire Council. We have actually already undertaken a few small upgrade improvements of our own initiative where they fitted in with our objectives and capability.

Most of the work we do arises from needs identified by members of the group, several of whom are regular walkers. We also receive input from landowners and members of the public but are surprised by the relatively few such calls we receive. However, we are pleased and fortunate to receive fairly frequent plaudits, especially when people come across us when we are out working. We are thankful for the continued support we receive from Shropshire Council at many levels and in many forms. However, looking to the future it seems likely that, if we are to continue, we will need an increasing level of support from our local parish councils.

John Farley – 24/6/17