

## **OXFORD FIELDPATHS SOCIETY**

(Oxford and District Footpaths, Bridlepaths and Commons Preservation Society)

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### **Honorary Officers and Executive Committee, 2019-20120**

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### **District Secretaries**

Cherwell D Godfrey, 23 Hawkswell Gardens, Oxford OX2 7EX (Tel. 01865-514082)

City of Oxford vacant

South Oxfordshire N Moon, The Cottage, Church Path, Stokenchurch, High Wycombe, Bucks HP14 3TL (Tel. 01494-482494)

Vale of White Horse      vacant  
West Oxfordshire      vacant  
Scrutineer of Accounts      Joyce Dawson  
Website address: “[www.ofs.org.uk](http://www.ofs.org.uk)”

Enquiries should be addressed as follows:

Details of the Society’s work	Website or Membership Secretary
Membership	Membership Secretary
Walks – specific dates	Leader named in programme

Details of footpath problems should be reported directly to Oxfordshire County Council Countryside Access Team online, by using the Inter-Active Map on the Countryside Access Team website page under the heading - ‘How to report a problem’.

Renewal subscriptions (when not paid by Bankers’ Order) should be sent to the Membership Secretary. Cheques should be made payable to “Oxford Fieldpaths Society”. Taxpayers are asked to sign a Gift Aid declaration if they have not already done so.

Members wishing to assist the Committee by inspecting specific rights of way may offer their services by writing to the appropriate District Secretary or to Jim Parke. For information on public paths and general topographical detail, sheet 164 of the Ordnance Survey 1:50000 Landranger series is recommended (scale 2cm to 1km, roughly 1.25” to the mile). For fieldwork greater detail is shown on the 1:25000 Explorer series (scale 4cm to 1km, roughly 2.5” to the mile), available from many booksellers, stationers and outdoor clothing suppliers.

The Society is affiliated to:

The Ramblers’ Association

## 1. CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION

Watching news footage of the bushfires in Australia and the subsequent dust, rain and hail storms one cannot fail to acknowledge that the climate world-wide is changing. Here in Oxfordshire the effects appear less extreme, cold winters from childhood, walking in deep snow seem to be things of the past. Wet autumns and winters giving way to long hot summers appear to be the norm. Regardless of the weather members of OFS put on boots and sometimes wellingtons to stride out into the countryside. However, some walks especially those towards the end of the year had to be re-routed or shortened because footpaths were impassable and/or under water.

At the AGM in April Nick Moon arrived with copies of his new book 'The Oxfordshire Way' replacing the original 1978 edition and the downloadable version on the County Council website. The Committee agreed to make a contribution towards the printing costs as well as to fund the replacement of stiles with gates and we hope to see some installed in the not too distant future. I recall when we walked the Way some years ago in very wet conditions on the section between Waterperry and Pyrton there were innumerable slippery stiles.

Claiming 'lost paths' which are not on the Definitive Map has the deadline of the end of 2025 and David Godfrey and Nick Moon have been involved in the long and complicated work researching old maps and enclosure awards. When successfully claimed, these paths will open up more of the countryside for everyone to enjoy, though they may require new gates at field edges.

At the Wychwood Fair in September the Society had a stall and members of the committee: Jim Parke, Jenny Byrne, Margaret Jones and Anne Partridge talked to the visitors about the Society; the walks programme and the path clearance work. Shortly after the Society received a cheque for £500 from the HDH Wills Trust presumably the grant was made to the Society from the information a member of the Trust heard at the Fair. The Wills Trust is a charity involved in conservation and the maintenance of the countryside and supporting charities involved with the natural environment. The Committee agreed that this money should be spent on funding replacement gates. To this end we have funded gates in Waterstock and Stratton Audley and have received requests from other parts of the county. The Field Officers at the Countryside Services are aware that OFS is prepared to consider requests to help make road and stile free walking open to the public. Although we can offer to assist parishes in making this possible, the landowner may refuse permission.

Members of the Society enjoyed to breaks away this year. In late spring a group stayed at the HF house in Church Stretton, enjoying glorious weather and some tough walking over the Stiperstones and the Long Mynd. The second away trip was to Dovedale, again in good walking weather, taking in the glories of the Peak District. OFS members seem to be lucky on trips away as it had been very wet the week before the Dovedale trip both the Dove and Trent rivers had burst their banks and flooding was obvious in low lying fields.

Obviously, the success of the Society is dependent on the contributions of all the members and the AGM is the opportunity to acknowledge this. Firstly, the committee members who collectively make considered decisions taking the Society forward to its Centenary. In particular I would like to thank John Eyre who has retired from the committee after many years most recently as a general member but was for many

years Treasurer, a keen walks leader, and with Sue Crisp, organised trips away before the Society used Holiday Fellowship. Anne Partridge also resigned this year she has been a willing contributor to helping on stalls and with path clearance and continues to do so. Lesley Fraser has also resigned due to other commitments. Lesley organised the holidays with consummate skill and edited the Newsletter for the last four years. Secondly, I would like to thank the Walks Leaders who search out new walks, check the status of paths gates and stiles reporting to the Countryside Services when necessary. To the path clearance teams, 'the green gym,' and parish path wardens who cut back overgrowth, clean signs so that we can find our way. Above all I would like to thank the collective membership who come out on walks come rain or shine and make walking such an enjoyable and health-giving activity.

## **2. THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

The Executive Committee met six times during 2019. We now have six vacancies.

We have three vacancies for District Secretaries. This involves reporting problems, responding to requests for diversions, and checking possible claims for new paths. Most of the documents for checking claims are in the County Records Office in Cowley. We badly need people to undertake this work; it is one of the main planks of our charitable status. Also we will at some time need a new General Secretary, as the present incumbent won't last for ever. Ideally the position would be occupied by someone who has been a district secretary for long enough to learn the ropes.

## **3. STATEMENT OF PUBLIC BENEFIT**

Our work in protecting rights of way is a general public benefit. Our walks programme, as a health benefit, is also open and advertised to the public.

## **4. MEMBERSHIP**

On 31<sup>st</sup> December 2019 our total membership was as follows:

Life members	34
Annual members	196
Hon. Members	4
TOTAL	234

During the year 13 new members joined, 7 informed us of their intention to resign and 11 did not renew their membership.

Thank you to all those who have paid their subscription for 2020 by cheque or by Direct Debit at the beginning of the year but there are still a lot of members who only pay when they receive a reminder with the March mailing. If you prefer you can now make your payment by Internet Bank Transfer to Oxford Fieldpaths Society, Sort Code 09-01-52, Account Number 85394908. This method of payment saves the expense of postage and you can choose the date on which your payment is made.

We still only have e-mail addresses for 50% of the membership. This is a very useful way for our event organisers to communicate. If you are not sure if we have your address would you please just send a message to [gwynethtyson@btinternet.com](mailto:gwynethtyson@btinternet.com). It would also be helpful if you would let us know if your e-mail address has changed.

Our numbers are still declining. The membership is good value for money. Do please encourage your friends to come along.

## **5. FINANCE**

### **Main Account**

The Abstract of Accounts and Balance Sheet for 2019 are appended in the report. They show how the Society's income has been used and to what extent funds are being carried forward to meet future liabilities. There was a net surplus of Income over Expenditure of £1,342, a marked improvement from the deficit of £199 reported in 2018, partly due to a decrease in grants awarded of approximately £775 and an increase in donations of about £500. Subscription income in 2019 was £2,062, only marginally down from the 2018 amount of £2,087, a heartening sign as the decrease from 2017 to 2018 was £159 and the small decrease of £25 from 2018 to 2019 may indicate a stabilisation in membership income. Additionally, the surplus was increased by a generous grant from the HDH Wills Foundation. A useful financial guiding rule is that subscription income should broadly balance normal operating expenditure (taken to be total expenditure less discretionary grants). The normal operating expenditure in 2019 was £2,187 and for 2017, £2,393, these 2 amounts being quite close, indicating a reasonably stationary expenditure pattern. The 2019 amount of £2,187 is only marginally above the 2019 membership subscription total of £2,062, indicating that again in 2019 the membership subscriptions broadly balance the normal operating expenditure.

Income from OFS investments increased slightly from £878 in 2018 to £922 in 2019. The surplus of income over expenditure was £1,342 in 2019 and the accumulated balance now stands at £39,543, an increase of £5,191 over the 2018 amount of £34,352. This increase indicates that there is further scope for more grants to achieve the OFS objectives of enhancing countryside access.

In summary, the membership subscription income appears to be stabilising after several years of annual decline. If this trend continues, then, taken together with the generally robust financial situation, it indicates that a planned expansion in the awarding of grants may be undertaken to enhance accessibility for walkers on Oxfordshire footways, for example through "Donate a Gate" grants.

OFS members continue to sign Gift Aid Declarations; this is most beneficial to OFS, as it results in a significant amount of tax being recovered from HMRC, thereby reinforcing the Balance Sheet.

Our thanks are due to Joyce Dawson for her unstinting and valuable work as Scrutineer of the Society's Accounts.

In summary, the finances of OFS are in good shape and adequate to fulfil the objectives of the OFS Constitution in the near-term, although there may be issues of sustainability in the longer term.

### **Social Account**

The balance of the social account at 31st December 2019 was £421.49 which is an increase from the equivalent balance of £259.59 on 31st December 2018. The trip to Derbyshire made a profit of £85.00 and the trip to Shropshire made a profit of £76.50. The turnover for the year was £8148.50.

### **Standing Order**

The Society is most appreciative of those who pay their annual subscription by Standing Order. This method greatly assists cash flow at the start of the fiscal year.

## **6. PUBLICITY**

The OFS table at The Wychwood Forest Fair is now our regular annual publicity event and consistently attracts the attention of a number of Fair visitors. In September 2019 four of us were busy all day describing the activities and work of the Society. See the report from Liz Adams where it is stated that the work of the Society was noticed and OFS was awarded money to continue with the Society's work.

Advertisements continue to be entered into the Oxford Times Events section however the Events page no longer appears in the printed newspaper. The Oxford Times informed me that local Events now only appear on the online copy of the newspaper. Further changes have taken place recently as the Oxford Mail page appears when Oxford Times is searched. I found OFS through an Oxford Times advertisement therefore walks will continue to be entered into the Events section of the newspaper with the hope that the details will appear.

## **7. WALKS PROGRAMME**

For the year 2019 there were over 100 walks ranging from mid-week summer evening strolls to longer walks of 10 miles or more at weekends. This enabled continuity of our normal programme of at least two walks per week, on average, throughout the year. OFS walks have taken place in all parts of the County, from the Cotswolds and the Chiltern Hills to the wide open countryside of the valley of the River Thames. Some walks have strayed over the borders of Oxfordshire into neighbouring counties.

Currently twenty-six members are on the list of walk leaders. Inevitably some leaders are not able, for one reason or another, to submit walks for inclusion in future programmes. We are always on the lookout for new walks leaders as it enables the load to be spread more evenly. Help and advice is always on hand to assist any member prepared to come forward, particularly on undertaking the all-important recce.

Looking back on the weather which inevitably plays an important part in the programme, 2019 has been a year of extremes with record breaking temperatures ranging from an amazing spell of hot weather in the last week of February to the hottest day ever recorded in England on July 27th a temperature of 38.7° C ! On that day Margaret Jones led a walk in the north of the county from Horley to Horton along a section of the d'Arcy Dalton Way. Who said that climate change is not at work? However, these records were in contrast to an otherwise indifferent wet Summer. The late autumn and early winter period was extremely wet, with some walks having to be re-routed to avoid flooded field paths and the consequent muddy, slippery conditions.

At the time of writing this report, I am busy working on the jigsaw of walks to be included in the Summer 2020 programme. Again I am most grateful to all those members who have submitted their proposed walks – both long and short – for all of our members to enjoy. Thank you everyone!

## **8. THE COUNTY COUNCIL AND RIGHTS OF WAY MONITORING GROUP**

At the end of 2019 the future of the Monitoring Group (formerly the Liaison Group), which has provided a valuable county-wide forum for the discussion of public rights of way strategic and policy issues between council officers, user groups, landowners etc. since c.1975, is once again in doubt due to poor attendance (in particular by some other user groups and the land-owning interests), a perceived lack of

membership input (which may result from the inability of the cash-strapped County Council to carry out what is suggested) and a perceived duplication with the Local Access Forum (where the members are individuals and are not allowed to represent organisations and which has a wider remit including open access land etc.) This Society has, however, always highly valued the Monitoring Group, has sought to ensure that we always send the two representatives to it to which we are entitled and we have frequently presented papers to the meetings to ensure that interesting discussions take place.

Particular discussion subjects this year were the on-going restructuring of the County Council and staff vacancies and their impact on public rights of way work. A further subject was the progress being made by Mike Walker and his team on tackling the backlog of definitive map modification order applications and in particular the determining of large numbers of applications for the upgrading of bridleways and restricted byways to byways open to all traffic. While the details of each application had to be considered individually and in some cases it was decided that restricted byways should be extended etc., the important result from our point of view was that none of the exemptions in the Natural Environment & Rural Communities Act 2006 applied and it was decided that rights of way for motor vehicles had been extinguished under the Act. The related subject of OCC's policy on motor vehicles on public rights of way and the use of traffic regulation orders where problems arise was also discussed.

For this year we are considering raising the subject of the need for updating the Definitive Map which is now 14 years out of date and possibilities for resolving long-standing anomalies, some of which may result from the destruction or loss of the relevant documentation during local government reorganisation in 1974.

## **9. OUT ON THE GROUND**

### **Lost Ways**

The deadline for claiming paths that may have existed before January 1, 1949 is January 1, 2026. This means that no paths may be claimed from documentary evidence after that date; also that much-used paths within villages which are not yet on the Definitive Map (except those in recently-built estates) may also be lost unless claimed. The chief documents for making such claims are Inclosure Awards, Tithe Awards and canal and railway plans (most of these are in the County Record Office off Cowley Road) supported by old maps if possible. Those interested may contact me by e-mail ([dgodfrey929@btinternet.com](mailto:dgodfrey929@btinternet.com)); please include "lost ways" in the subject. Research into potential lost ways may be done at any time, but claims based on this research should wait until the new legislation (which has a streamlined procedure) comes into force. This could take some time, as it requires Parliamentary time to enact the scales of fees for appeals.

Much of the research into other documents can be done online, but there is still need to research documents held in the National and Parliamentary Archives.

### **Housing**

Many developments are proposed to meet "Oxford's Unmet Need" and other such "targets". These must be scrutinised (whether or not we oppose them) to ensure that

they do not result in severed or unsatisfactory footpaths, and that opportunities are taken to reopen severed rights of way over former airfields etc.

### **General**

The number of outstanding claims has reduced from 106 to 79, mainly from the rejection of 31 claims to upgrade restricted byways to allow vehicular access. At the time of writing, 18 modification orders have been made, with five receiving objections (one because the map references were incorrect), eight confirmed and five still in progress.

The route of the Oxford Expressway is still vague, and it was expected that a preferred route would be announced before Christmas; this has been held up by the confused state of parliament before the election, along with other legislation.

### **Cherwell**

The Chiltern Railways dualling of the Bicester line and consequent works on the diversions are now complete. HS2 will affect about six paths in Mixbury, Finmere, Newton Purcell and Godington, including two at Finmere Quarry; the plans involve minimal diversion and disruption. The plans for East-West Railway (from Bicester to Milton Keynes) involve the diversion of Launton FP12 and FP21 to stay on the north-west of the line, to join FP11 at a single crossing, also a footbridge with cycle ramp at Jarvis Lane between Bicester and Launton and an extra path from the crossing towards the Poundon road. The diversions round Finmere and Ardley quarries have again been extended to 2032 to allow more time for restoration because of the reduced amount of landfill, and to allow for further extraction between BR4 and the A421.

Large areas adjacent to Banbury are earmarked for development including an area between Salt Way and the A361 for which planning applications have been made. The Local Plan also includes 4,400 houses north of Oxford in areas which have been flooded recently. The orders for FP33 south of Salt Way and FP58 in the Thorpe Way industrial area have been confirmed; the order for FP28 in the Salt Way development is still outstanding.

Minor diversions away from houses at Bucknell, Deddington and Sibford Gower have been confirmed, as has a field-edge diversion at Wigginton. The diversions at Paradise Farm, South Newington, which remove the paths from the paddocks and remove a definitive map anomaly, have been confirmed.

There are proposals for major development (but no Cold War museum) at Upper Heyford which could result in joining up the Avesditch and Portway bridleways and routing Somerton FP13 along the outside instead of it being bisected by the security fence. Proposed diversions on Wigginton FP1 alongside an existing fence, Wroxton FP9 at the mill, and Deddington FP5 to avoid a planned house, are still outstanding. The bridleway at Mixbury is confirmed, but there are objections to the two claims in the school grounds, and to the cul-de-sac claim in South Newington. The path behind the pub in Shenington has been confirmed. Two claims have been made for paths in the grounds of the school at Yarnton Manor.

Diversion proposals are outstanding for the path through the industrial buildings at Green Farm, Ardley, and at Chesterton Fields Farm where we have reluctantly



agreed as there are problems with both the existing route and the alternative diversion.

## **Oxford City**

Little progress has been made with public path issues in the City in 2019.

We objected to the proposed diversion of Oxford FP80 through a redevelopment of the social housing in Warren Crescent, on which the City Council had failed to consult user organisations or even the County Council before making the order as the proposal was to divert the path through narrow alleyways and along an estate road instead of leaving it along the edge of Lye Valley nature reserve where it currently runs. A half-hearted attempt by the City Council to find a compromise then failed as they insisted that we should withdraw our objection to the original order before they would provide us with a proper plan of their alternative proposal. As things stand, the order, to which several objections have been made, will have to be passed to the Planning Inspectorate and may need a public inquiry.

Attention is also required to FP57 which was illegally diverted across the Barton Park site but was then put back close to its original line. Neither the City nor the County Council could be persuaded that this path needed a grade-separated crossing of the A40 to provide future residents with a safe direct pedestrian and cycle route to Headington and it remains to be seen how satisfactory the provision will be for this important through-path from Headington to Elsfield through the Barton Park development.

The long-standing problems of paths around the Churchill Hospital and Kassam Stadium being obstructed and illegally diverted continue to receive little attention from the County Council, as does the illegal encroachment by the new development on the site of East Minchery Allotments, but luckily no new major problems have arisen.

## **South Oxfordshire**

2019 has been a slightly better year for public rights of way in South Oxfordshire as both Field Officers have remained in post and been gaining in experience although the lack of an assistant or secretarial back-up makes it difficult for them to make any significant impact on the backlog of intractable unresolved cases.

On the positive side, the County Council's recent initiative to make inroads into the backlog of definitive map modification order applications has resulted in orders being made to add no fewer than 10 additional public rights of way to the Definitive Map, one of which has already been confirmed. A further path at Shiplake has been added to the Definitive Map by means of a creation order and will enable the section of Thames Path between Shiplake Station and Shiplake Lock to be rerouted largely along the river instead of along tarmac roads without having to pass through private gardens linked by a series of ramshackle gates, which some walkers might have found embarrassing and might have caused bottlenecks on summer weekends.

In addition, the threat of various bridleways and restricted byways being upgraded to byways open to all traffic and therefore opened to motor vehicles has been lifted by OCC rejecting the modification order applications to that effect as they determined that a right of way for motor vehicles had been extinguished by the Natural Environment & Rural Communities Act 2006.

A total of six diversion orders were confirmed during the year, all of which the committee considered to be acceptable or in the public interest. We have also agreed to the diversion of a further five rights of way, for some of which orders have been made.

Protracted negotiations for the diversion of Goring Heath FP27 around a section of woodland the landowner would like to incorporate into his garden have, however, so far resulted in no agreement, as, while we were prepared to accept some diversion, the routes proposed so far have proved to be unnecessarily long and circuitous.

Our objections to the proposed extinguishment of the section of Culham FP1 over the railway level-crossing also remain in place as, while there may be legitimate safety concerns about the level-crossing, an extinguishment cannot be justified when a suitable diversion is available.

Finally, the rejection of the planning application for a major gravel working at Clifton Hampden means that the need for a circuitous diversion of Clifton Hampden FP15 has disappeared, but the path remains illegally diverted along a farm road instead of crossing a large arable field so that some action is still required to restore the path to its legal alignment.

### **Vale of White Horse**

The claim for a bridleway between Duxford and Great Pine Break has been refused. There are objections to the order to define the width of West Hanney Byway 2. Claims for footpaths from Appleton church to the former Thatched Tavern, and from Appleton BR10 to Northmoor Lock, and a variation to the line of Drayton FP24 to join up with Abingdon FP3, are still in progress. We have been consulted on the removal of vehicles from byways in Lockinge, Ardington and West Hendred, especially where these use an unsuitably steep crossing of the Ginge Brook. Diversions avoiding a farm at West Challow, through Badbury Hill car park, and in the Crab Hill estate in Grove and Wantage have been confirmed.

The footpath through the quarry at Bayworth (Sunningwell FP8) is likely to be closed for some time, as the cost of putting steps up the quarry face is likely to exceed £30,000. The path bisects the deer farm, and the owner apparently will not allow a diversion. The Parish Council and the local councillor have taken up this case. We are also pursuing the long-standing closure of Marcham BR17.

### **West Oxfordshire**

The diversion of Great Tew FP6 at Soho Farms (an eyesore) and another on the same path at Tracey Farm are still outstanding; the former has potential drainage problems. The second planning application to build 28 luxury homes and a Bentley showroom and museum east of the Enstone Airfield site with access from the Enstone-Great Tew road, is still to be decided.

The diversion of Rollright FP7 at Little Rollright has been confirmed, but this has been taken to the High Court by Open Spaces Society on a legal point. Minor diversions of North Leigh FP35 (for housing) and Churchill FP4 (where it was discovered that the path ran three feet into the estate gardens instead of along the field edge) have been confirmed. The plan to close the bridleway at Tackley and substitute a new bridleway west of the railway to Whitehill, with a pedestrian bridge over the railway, has met opposition from nearby residents.

## **10. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

We again would like to thank all those members whose hard work and support have helped make a useful contribution to rights of way work in the county. We also thank those who go out unheralded with secateurs, and clear out the rampaging weeds and vicious vegetation that block paths in summer. We are also grateful for the work of our colleagues in the Chiltern Society, Open Spaces Society, Cotswold Wardens CPRE and Ramblers' Association.

**OXFORD FIELDPATHS SOCIETY**

**BANKER'S ORDER FORM**

Please complete this form and send it to the Membership Secretary, to start a new Banker's Order. To change an existing order this form should be presented to your own bank branch.

To.....  
(name and full postal address of your bank)

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Please pay to Santander UK plc, 2 Triton Square, Regent's Place, London NW1 3AN, for the credit of the account of the Oxford Fieldpaths Society (Sort Code 09-01-52, Account 85394908) the sum of

£..... (.....)  
(amount in words)

on January 1<sup>st</sup> ..... and thereafter on the same day of each year until further notice.

SIGNATURE.....

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

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