OXFORD FIELDPATHS SOCIETY

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

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District Secretaries

Cherwell D Godfrey, 23 Hawkswell Gardens, Oxford OX2 7EX (Tel.

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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"

Enquiries should be addressed as follows:

Details of the Society's work Website or Membership Secretary

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

The year 2020 is one which most people were relieved to see the end of as the Covid-19 pandemic has had, and continues to have, a profound effect on us all. In March, the first lockdown was announced and group walking was forbidden. The footpaths, however, seemed busier than ever and we watched a beautiful spring unfold while we were on our permitted hour of exercise. The slow-down in our lives allowed us to appreciate nature more closely; was the spring blossom more abundant and did the birdsong seem louder? Then in the summer group walking was permitted. with some constraints, and leaders took up their roles again, it was good to be out again enjoying the company of friends and fellow walkers. Despite restrictions the annual outing in September took place with social distancing and an enjoyable day was spent in Chichester walking along the foreshore of the harbour. Jenny Byrne and Marsaleete Anderson were fortunate in doing the preliminary checking for the outing before the lockdown. Late autumn brought a second lockdown in November, there was a brief respite during December, before lockdown 3 started just after Christmas, and, as I write this the lockdown continues into 2021. We are waiting for the roll out of the vaccines and the easing of restrictions to allow members to be out again collectively.

One of the most apparent effects of the pandemic has been the usage of footpaths particularly as team sporting activities were cancelled and the public really started to appreciate the miles of footpaths that surround us. The widths of footpaths have by necessity widened as people tried to maintain the desired two metre distance and consequently there has been serious inroads into arable fields. This has caused distress and loss of income to farmers who have seen fields turned into mud baths with young crops flattened as it has been a wet autumn and winter consequently there are plans to update the Countryside Code. In some of the National Parks there has been serious erosion of paths especially in the hillier areas which bring more problems in trying to restore them.

The AGM last year had to be postponed, and in the second mailing of the year the minutes of the AGM held in 2019 were circulated, and members were asked to complete a voting slip, either by post or on-line, to approve the annual report and financial statement and the re-election of those members of the committee whose term had ended, all of this had been sent out in March mailing. The number of members who responded was similar to that of members who have attended the AGM in previous years. There were no objections or questions raised, so it was possible to notify the Charities Commission that we had fulfilled our obligations under the Charities Act. Despite the restrictions the committee has continued to hold meetings our first in March was completed by members circulating individual reports which were then collated. Since then, we have met on-line which has allowed us to see each other and to discuss the large number of applications for diversions of footpaths and modification orders which the Countryside Services have been working through.

Preserving the footpaths and keeping them open was the main tenant of OFS's founding fathers and this is more important than ever, especially to preserve the Green Belt which surrounds Oxford. The current plans to meet Oxford's 'unmet housing needs' has seen various colleges and Oxford University planning to sell off land within the Green Belt which is causing concern in many of the local parish councils especially as the planning law currently going through Parliament would

seem to make this easier. When plans come up it is essential to ensure that those footpaths which are on the definitive map are preserved and do not just become pavements through housing estates. Nationally there has been a decrease in Green Belt land which has been repurposed for housing, which is detrimental to society as a whole.

For the last seven years we have been extremely fortunate to have Sir Hugo Brunner as our President, a role he initially said that he would take on for three years, so we are fortunate indeed. In the summer he indicated to me that he would like to retire at the AGM. He has been a fine advocate for OFS and has run the AGMs with great efficiency, I am grateful for advice has given me and it is always a joy to chat with him on walks, sadly all too few this year. Currently we are seeking his replacement. The Annual Report gives me the opportunity to thank other people who contribute to the ongoing success of the Society, all the committee but in particular: Mike Wykes the Treasurer, Gwyneth Tyson who deals with the membership, and Sue Crisp who creates order from our discussions at meetings. David Godfrey and Nick Moon investigate the plans submitted to the Council and Jim Parke masterminds the walks programme and a particular thanks to Joyce Dawson who has once again scrutinised the accounts. Of course, I need to thank the leaders who spend time finding new walks and taking charge on the day, despite the restrictions we have had this year, and finally above all the members who continue to support the Society whether active or not and get out into the countryside.

2. THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The Executive Committee met six times during 2020. 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 31st December 2020 our total membership was as follows:

Life members 34
Annual members 188
Hon. Members 4
TOTAL 226

During the year 8 new members joined, 7 informed us of their intention to resign and 14 did not renew their membership.

Thank you to all those who made the change to pay their subscription by Bank Transfer. This is very helpful saving all the work involved dealing with a lot of

cheques. It will be particularly helpful in 2021 when restrictions make it difficult to get to a Bank or PO to pay in cheques and the Postal Service is somewhat slow and not totally reliable. If anyone else wishes to pay by this method the account name is Oxford Fieldpaths Society, the Sort Code is 09-01-52 and the Account Number is 85394908.

The Lockdown caused by the pandemic meant we made extra mailings to inform members of the closure of the programme and the arrangements for an AGM. The bonus to this meant that we gathered quite a few more email addresses and were notified of some changes. If we don't have your email please send it to me (gwynethtyson@btinternet.com) as more information will be distributed by this method in future. It is also good to check our website for the very latest information.

Let us hope that 2021 will be a better year with more opportunities for some good walking.

5. FINANCE

Main Account

The Abstract of Accounts and Balance Sheet for 2020 are appended in the report. They show how the Society's income has been used and to what extent funds are now being carried forward to meet future liabilities. There was a net surplus of Income over Expenditure of £839, a significant decrease from the surplus of £1,342 reported in 2019, mainly due to a decrease in membership subscriptions (from £2,062 in 2019 to £1,827 in 2020), a decrease in donations (£590 in 2019 to £153 in 2020) and a decrease in dividends and interest (£922 in 2019 to £744 in 2020). The annual decrease in subscription income in 2019-2020 (£235) was significantly larger than that between the year 2018 to 2019 (£25) and more in line with the corresponding decrease for the year 2017 to 2018 (£159). This is a cause of some concern as it may presage a longer term membership decline.

The net expenditure decreased by £457 over the year (£2,412 in 2019 to £1,955 in 2020), partly as a result of there being no physical AGM in April 2020, on account of pandemic restrictions.

A useful financial guiding rule is that subscription income should broadly balance normal operating expenditure (taken to be total expenditure less discretionary grants). Applying this measure to the 2020 and 2019 year-end balances, for 2019 the expenditure (less discretionary grants) exceeded the subscription income by £25, whereas for 2020, the subscription income exceeded the expenditure (less discretionary grants) by £125. This apparent improvement in sustainability was due in the main to reduction in expenditure (no physical AGM in 2020) more than compensating for the reduction in membership subscriptions. When life returns to more normal circumstances, it might be expected that normal operating expenditure will tend to exceed membership subscriptions but it may be that the upsurge in public awareness of outdoor exercise, that has been apparent during the pandemic to date, will result in increased membership in years to come.

Income from OFS investments decreased from £922 in 2019 to £744 in 2020, probably on account of the generally adverse economic climate during the pandemic which likewise depressed the total value of OFS investment assets from £39,543 to £37,922 over the year.

The current account bank balance at December 31st, 2020 (£4,764) shows an increase over the value a year earlier (£3,925) and this 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 resuming a trend of gradual decline after steadying in 2019. However, the healthy bank balance together with the robust value of the investment assets indicates that a planned increase 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 and this is most beneficial to OFS, as it results is 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.

It should be noted that the checking of the financial statement for this Annual Report by our Scrutineer had to be adapted to be compatible with government rules on conduct during the pandemic. Normally the scrutiny process involves physical meetings between the Treasurer and the Scrutineer and the transfer of material documents to allow the Scrutineer to check the requisite spreadsheets. This was not possible in the circumstances and it was decided that only electronic transfer of documents was acceptable and this resulted inevitably in the scrutiny exercise being less comprehensive than it normally is. Nevertheless, by transmitting the OFS bank statements and the statements covering all the investments, it was possible to fully scrutinize all external incomes and expenditures to and from OFS. What was not possible was the verification of the internal transfers, for example, the attribution of expenditures over the categories of Grants, Training, Postage, Telephone and Internet etc, so that these attributions, which appear in the Statement of Financial Activities, are in effect self-certified by the Treasurer. Since all external financial transfers are fully scrutinized, the self-certification of the internal transfers is deemed acceptable in the anomalous current situation.

Social Account

The balance of the social account at 31st December 2020 was £347.49 which is a decrease from the equivalent balance of £421.49 on 31st December 2019. The trip to Chichester made a loss of £74.00 due to Covid-19 restrictions on numbers.

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 Wychwood Forest Fair was cancelled this year, and Oxford Times is no longer advertising walks. With limited group walking in 2020 it was good to see a few OFS walks go ahead. The prebooking system for 6 people worked well and allowed us to walk safely together. For the few walks done it was good to meet and enjoy the countryside. Jim will report on the Summer programme now in preparation, we are hopeful that the walks will be possible. As we are all following Government guidelines please can we ask you to check the OFS website for the latest information?

7. WALKS PROGRAMME

The year 2020 has been dominated by the Covid-19 pandemic which has had a profound effect upon the walks programme. Unlike the 2001 Foot-and-Mouth pandemic which caused all Public Rights of Way to be closed off to walkers, this human pandemic has seen two periods of lockdown when it was not legally possible to walk the footpaths in groups. The first period of lockdown was initially for the three months from April to June, while a second lockdown was imposed in November onwards. At other times group walks were allowed but the number going on walks was restricted. Other measures were introduced, such the need to book a place on a walk and for members to keep a social distance apart of 2 metres while on a walk. Walk leaders were required to keep a list of members on a walk and also to complete a Health and Safety checklist for each walk they led. Some walk leaders felt they could not lead a walk because of the need to shield themselves at home because of underlying health conditions.

Currently twenty-six members are on the list of walk leaders. Inevitably some leaders feel unable 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 with undertaking the all-important recce.

At the time of writing this report, I am busy working on the jigsaw of walks to be included in the Summer 2021 programme. With the rapid programme of vaccination under way, it is hoped that group walking will be permitted to resume in April at the start of the summer season. Again, I am most grateful to all those members who have submitted their proposed walks – long and short – for all of our members to enjoy. Thank you everyone!

8. THE COUNTY COUNCIL AND RIGHTS OF WAY MONITORING GROUP

In 2020, due to the coronavirus, no meetings of the Monitoring Group were held as the first was due soon after the beginning of the first lockdown, but reports were sent to Monitoring Group members by senior County Council officers when the autumn meeting had to be cancelled. For 2021, as it looks unlikely that a normal meeting will be possible in the spring, we are requesting the County Council to organise a Zoom meeting instead as it will then be 18 months since the last normal meeting and we need to know how the situation now is and what changes are likely to result from corona given that, on the one hand, money is likely to be tighter than ever, but, on the other hand, corona has resulted in increased path use and emphasised the importance of preserving and improving the path network.

9. OUT ON THE GROUND

Lost Ways

Oxfordshire Area Ramblers are undertaking a project to look for 'Lost Footpaths' in the County and hope that Parish Path Wardens, who have an unrivalled knowledge of the paths in their areas, can help them in this task. Lost footpaths are those that, for one reason or another, were not recorded when the Definitive Map of Public Rights of Way was drawn up for the first time in the 1940s. We have until **January 1**st **2026,** using documentary evidence, to identify such lost paths and register them as claims on the Oxfordshire County Council list for future inclusion on the Definitive Map of PRoWs.

For the past year or so a team of volunteers under the leadership of Jack Cornish at Central Ramblers have checked the whole of England and Wales looking for all possible lost paths on old maps. Some 49,000 miles of potential lost paths have been recorded. It is estimated that Oxfordshire has nearly 700 miles of such paths. The routes of these paths have been recorded on to a digital inter-active map which enables one to zoom down to a local level that shows them in great detail.

Members may be interested to inspect this map. This can be done by following the steps listed below.

- 1. Open up the webpage www.ramblers.org.uk. Go to Home Page.
- 2. On the left hand side of the home page click onto the text 'Don't Lose Your Way' 'Find out More'
- 3. Next webpage click on to 'Explore the full map of lost paths' *
- 4. Next webpage click on to 'Love It. Save it' 'Map of lost paths'
- 5. If you are a first-time user you then need to provide yourself with a password for future access and sign in using your email address.

The Inter-active map then appears. The map comes up showing the environs of Exeter. In the top-right corner you can type in a place name or post-code and the map will automatically move to that location. Existing PRoWs are shown in green and potential lost paths in blue. A choice of base maps is given. The most useful to use is the OS map but the most fascinating is the historic 6 inch to the mile survey undertaken over a 100 years ago. This reveals the huge amount of urbanisation that has taken place in the County over that period of time.

Members of the OFS who are PPW volunteers will have received guidelines from their Local Coordinators on what action to take in checking for lost paths in their parishes. The main task is to prioritise those paths which are of most benefit to walkers. Many of the lost paths shown on the inter-active map are duplicated by existing Public Rights of Way or are very short spurs. Others have been built over and incorporated into housing estates. The aim at present is to record those paths that are worth consideration for registration as new PRoWs.

For further information contact Jim Parke: jmh.parke@btinternet.com

General

The number of outstanding claims is now 76. At the time of writing, 16 modification orders have been made, with seven receiving objections (one because the map references were incorrect), five confirmed and five still in progress. Two claims have been refused.

The Oxford Expressway is officially paused. This may mean that it will take the shape of random road improvements. The number of houses in the so-called Arc has increased from a million to a million and a half – where will they all be put?.

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.

Cherwell

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. An extension to Finmere Quarry is proposed, with temporary diversion of the east end of BR4. The diversion of Ardley BR27 will become permanent if the diversion order is confirmed, with the promise of an extra bridleway north of the Viridor plant when restoration is complete,

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.

There are proposals for major development 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. The proposed diversion on Wroxton FP9 at the mill is still outstanding. The bridleway at Mixbury is confirmed, but there are objections to the two claims in the school grounds, and to the cul-desac claim in South Newington. Two claims have been made for paths in the grounds of the school at Yarnton Manor. We have recently been consulted on proposed for Hook Norton BR32 at Swerford Park and on complicated proposals for realignment of paths in Wroxton Quarry which currently go up impassable cliffs.

Oxford City

As a result of the coronavirus, little change occurred in respect of the public rights of way network in Oxford City.

As expected, the City Council passed their diversion order for Oxford FP80 at Warren Crescent, to which the Society had objected as it would take the path through the redeveloped social housing and along a road instead of along the edge of the nature reserve as we were seeking, to the Planning Inspectorate who in 2021 have initiated the written representations procedure to decide the issue.

Less controversial was a proposal for a minor diversion of Oxford FP116 (the riverside path from Mill St to Folly Bridge) at Gibbs Crescent.

The Society also raised again with the County Council the horrendous condition of Old Marston FP3 near the new Swan School where frequent flooding and awkward, not to say dangerous, stiles make passage extremely difficult in an area where urbandwellers unused to such phenomena normally to be found on remote rural paths are often deterred from trying to use the path. The Society is therefore offering to donate kissing-gates as part of a joint initiative with the County Council to make the condition of this path more suitable for an urban-fringe location.

South Oxfordshire

While coronavirus has generally limited progress on public rights of way issues in South Oxfordshire, 2020 marked a real milestone as the definitive map modification order application for a whole network of paths in and around the Great Western Park development in Didcot was finally completed with the addition ultimately of 17 new

paths to the Definitive Map. Unfortunately, of course, what were once rural dog walks on the edge of the town have largely become urban paths but the residents of the new development undoubtedly have more possibilities to walk in the vicinity of their homes as a result of our efforts to retain these paths. Other paths are also still obstructed by the builders' temporary fences and excavation works but now we have the network securely on the map and it is just a matter of ensuring that the remaining problems are resolved as and when construction work is completed.

Two village paths are also being added to the Definitive Map at Great Haseley as has the ancient carriage road through the River Thame ford at Drayton St. Leonard which is regularly used by horse riders and is also passable for walkers in the summer months fancying a cooling walk through water above their knees.

Despite coronavirus, negotiations have continued about various diversions including one at Whitehouse Farm near Brightwell Baldwin, one to take Chalgrove FP3 round the edge of development on the edge of the village, the legalisation of the long-standing unofficial diversion of Wallingford FP17 and a diversion to improve the crossing of Wallingford Bypass on Brightwell-cum-Sotwell FP25, but the County Council has decided to make a diversion order for Goring Heath FP27, to which we shall object as the route is too circuitous and claimed paths at Checkendon/Stoke Row, Watlington and Chalgrove have been subject to objections so that they will have to be decided by the Planning Inspectorate. Following a diversion consultation about Tetsworth FP65 which is currently obstructed by a manege, we have raised with the County Council the question of other blocked paths at Attington Stud which the current owner inherited from his predecessor and the possibility of devising a diversion package to enable walkers to pass through the stud more easily and we hope that 2021 will bring some constructive proposals to resolve these issues.

Vale of White Horse

The objections to the order to define the width of West Hanney Byway 2 have been referred to the Planning Inspectorate. Claims for footpaths from Appleton BR10 to Northmoor Lock, to divert a claimed extension of West Hendred BOAT 9, claimed as a bridleway, along foeld boundaries, and a variation to the line of Drayton FP24 to join up with Abingdon FP3, are still in progress. The claim at the Thatched Tavern has been confirmed.

Sunningwell Parish Council has obtained a feasibility study for the footpath through the quarry at Bayworth (Sunningwell FP8); we await action from the County Council. The path bisects the deer farm, and the owner apparently will not allow a diversion. Also the steps on Sunningwell FP12 (Green Belt Way) have become virtually a playground slide. We are also pursuing the long-standing closure of Marcham BR17, where there are signs of slow progress.

West Oxfordshire

The diversion orders for Great Tew FP6 at Soho Farms (an eyesore) and another on the same path at Tracey Farm have been made; the former has attracted objections.

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.

A diversion proposal has been received to reroute the paths round Hanborough School, which is being extended. The diversion of North Leigh BR31 has been confirmed, removing the need to climb over a barn and an overgrown rubbish dump.

A Restricted Byway (open to horse-drawn, but not motorised, vehicles) at Over Norton, two footpaths at Chadlington and a bridleway at Standlake have been confirmed. Diversions to eliminate the dead ends at Chadlington and Taston are in progress. There are objections to the byway at Brize Norton, probably because it crosses the A40.

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.

And finally . . .

The deluges of October ushered in the season of mists and miry squelchfulness, close bosom friend of sloshmire, bog and flood, conspiring with them how to load and bless our boots with football-sized half-tons of mud (as Keats didn't quite say), along with that sinking feeling followed by vain search for the ankles, and the return home sloshed and plastered without having partaken of alcohol. The photograph below was taken on Christmas Day, the day before we were confined to "accessible countryside" by the current lock-up. The location of this particular accessible countryside is between Middle Farm and the appropriately-named Water Eaton Manor where the Green Belt Way joins the manor drive. Now . . . can I master the technology to squeeze the photo in, and . . . help!! – which way is up??



OXFORD FIELDPATHS SOCIETY

BANKER'S ORDER FORM

Please complete this form and send it to the Membership S Order. To change an existing order this form should be pres	
To(name and full postal address of your bank)	
Sort Code	S Place, London NW1 3AN, for the (Sort Code 09-01-52, Account
SIGNATURE	
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GIFT AID DECLARATION	
Please complete this form only if you have not already give tax status has changed.	n us a Gift Aid Declaration or your
Name Address	
	Postcode
Please tick one of the following options I wish the Oxford Fieldpaths Society to treat as (including membership subscriptions) I have paid since (including membership subscriptions) that I may pay from notify you otherwise. I understand that I must pay Income equal to the tax retained by the Society.	6 April 2000 and all donations the date of this declaration until I
OR ☐ I am not a UK taxpayer	
Print FULL name	
Signed	Date
Please print your full name; we need your first names to cla	im tax from Inland Revenue.