

Meeting: Council
Date: 10 January 2024
From: Dr Michael Brown (resident)
To: Councillor Gillbe, Executive Member for Planning and Transport.

Question:

"I would like to understand the latest status of the diverted footpaths at the Royal County of Berkshire Polo Club fields in Winkfield.

As you know this issue has been ongoing for more than 3 years without resolution despite numerous efforts by the public and councillors to resolve. There is a proposed diverted path however it is,

1. Still not signposted (temporary signs have been removed from a significant proportion of the route) and therefore not clear
2. The diverted route is partly along a road shared with cars, vans and heavy trucks - this is not a footpath and has the potential to increase the council's liability to maintain it in the future
3. Large sections of the "path" are entirely waterlogged and virtually unusable - it is the responsibility of the local authority to maintain the surface of public footpaths.

My question therefore is when and how will this all be resolved so the users of the public footpath can do so safely and free of risk of injury?"

Answer:

I thank the resident for their question, and provide reassurance that this matter continues to be a focus of the time of our SANG and Rights of Way Officer. The answers to the specific questions are set out below;

1. The signposting of the temporary diversion route is the responsibility of the Polo Club. The council met with the Polo Club in December 2023 to clarify the current issues with the diversion and the various surface upgrades required before a formal Diversion Order can be confirmed. Once the formal diversion order is confirmed then the council will install new waymarking along the route.
2. The diverted route does follow the verge of short sections of shared use track. The traffic use is minor and is considered acceptable where the surface is good and sightlines are clear. Due to the vehicular use the Polo Club remain responsible for upkeep and it would be expected that these sections would be of a more resilient surface that other rural footpaths (e.g. across arable or wet fields).
3. The waterlogged areas of the diversion route have been discussed with the Polo Club following the site meeting in December 2023. The works required to get these sections up to the standard expected for a rural footpath have been highlighted and the next meeting is currently being arranged with Wooldridge, the company developing the site, who the Polo Club will use for the completion of practical works, for January 2024. It is worth noting that many rural paths are suffering particularly this winter from the wet weather conditions and whilst issues have been raised and need to be agreed, ground conditions may slow progress.

It is anticipated that the diverted route will be complete and functioning by the end of Spring 2024, with works subject to the weather conditions but seeking to ensure improvements are made in phases as soon as conditions allow.