

Survey of local public rights of way

A survey of local public rights of way was carried out in March 2021, to map the location of stiles, kissing gates and similar infrastructure, so as to evaluate the feasibility of creating more and longer stile-free routes.

This followed the installation of three new steel kissing gates on footpaths S47 and S75 in 2020 (p.1815/3e refers), with the co-operation of Nailstone Parish Council, local landowners, and the LCC RoW Team. The new gates had been 100% funded by the LCC Highways & Community Fund.

Carlton Parish Council has been instrumental in creating stile-free walking routes in around the Parish in a series of projects spread over many years, with support from local landowners and a range of organisations (see Report 2018-15, p.41, ‘Stile-free routes’).

Landowners generally welcome steel kissing gates because they are safe, stockproof and easily seen by footpath users, so there is no doubt about the line of the footpath and no excuse for trespass.

Less-able walkers find it difficult to climb stiles, and may find it impossible to follow a route which involves climbing successive high stiles. The removal of stiles improves access to the countryside for all users, and the Parish Council believes that it also attracts tourists to the area and contributes to the local economy. The importance of facilitating good access to the countryside for socially-distanced exercise has been demonstrated during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Barriers to walkers, in order of increasing difficulty, are gaps, gates and kissing gates, crush stiles (which have a footstool), footbridges (which usually have a low rail at each end), and stiles (which have a footstool and fence rails which have to be climbed). The location of these barriers is marked on the map overleaf.

In some areas of arable cultivation, stiles have been removed rather than replaced, and field gates have also often been removed. These gaps offer easy passage for walkers at present, but they may need to be made stockproof if the fields become used for livestock in future.

The Ashby Canal towpath provides a level walking route through the area, but is not a public right of way. There is unobstructed access to the towpath from all of the bridges shown on the survey map, except for Iliffe Bridge (No.45).

A new steel kissing gate costs about £400, and installation about the same again. There are currently 29 kissing gates in the Parish, representing a total installation cost of around £23,200. Almost all local circular walks pass through neighbouring parishes, so co-operation is required to create significant stile-free routes.

Steel kissing gates are longer-lasting and require less maintenance than wooden gates or stiles, and may be installed by the LCC RoW Team when wooden stiles are replaced. There is scope for co-operation when wooden stiles require replacement.

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