

Stoke St Michael Parish council

Please accept my apologies for not being able to attend the Stoke St Michael AGM for 2023.

Report

The parish council provided funding for the purchase of an electric strimmer, hedge cutter and accessories and also provided funding for me to attend a certified course. Thank you.

The equipment has been in regular use around the village in the clearing of footpaths, hedges, gates and stiles.

I have received thanks in person and on social media from villagers and non-villagers as a result of the work I have done.

I have also lent the equipment to the SSM Woodland group regularly and they use it to clear Millennium wood. This is a regular occurrence.

It is necessary to buy the strimmer cord and I am reimbursed by the parish council.

There are no faults or breakages with the equipment to be reported at this time.

The growing season is with us and already I have been at work around the village. There is plenty to do and I fit this role in around work and other activities.

I can only do so much, and I prioritise what I do based on health and safety; necessity and most common routes.

I get notification from Somerset County council about a problem, then go and rectify it. Based on this, depends on the action I take.

I can build and repair stiles; cut down overgrown material but I am unable to cut/chop trees that are blocking paths due to not having a chainsaw or the qualification to use one.

Over the last year, I have arranged the changing of some of the old stiles around the village to kissing gates and pedestrian gates.

The changes are:-

Metal kissing gates have been installed on Frog lane; The "Double Stile" (field behind the school) and in Cookswood Quarry.

Pedestrian gates have been installed at both entrances to Yellow gate field.

As a result of this work, many more people are walking this route because it is now access for all, safer and completes a nice route around the village.

A new wooden kissing gate has been built on Susanna's Lane.

Other stiles have been fixed and repaired as necessary.

Ongoing problems

Cookswood Quarry - the footpath through Cookswood continues to raise issues but they are trying to keep disruption to a minimum. It is a working building site so some consideration must be given.

I have noticed an improvement in the route through the construction site with gravel being laid; hedges being put down; fencing moved to accommodate walkers; new signs indicating pedestrian routes etc. They have also cut back the undergrowth and tress on Bectar lane and have opened up the footpath parallel to Bectar lane.

I am in touch regularly with Mr Massey and he assures me that he does take the footpath issue seriously and is well aware of the problems. He does listen and does act, although it may still take time for some actions to be carried out.

Somer's Farm - There is a stile going to the Old Manor House near Somer's farm that is a health and safety issue. The stile is rotten and the ironwork is rusty.

Clare Haskins (Somerset County Council footpath manager) and I offered the land owner (Mr J Hill) a pedestrian gate to be fitted free of charge but he insisted on a stile.

Ms Haskins has advised that a pedestrian gate would be better but Mr Hill is not willing to have one. Ms Haskins has said they will not waste money on cutting out the rusty steel supports and put in a new stile, when a pedestrian gate has been offered at no cost to Mr Hill.

Potential Solar panel development - Burgess Hill - I have been working with Mr N Hiscox to help him with his plans to build a solar panel field on his land.

Currently there is a stile on Burgess Hill and a footpath that leads to Susanna's Lane. The plan to build a solar panel field was seen to affect the footpath.

This is not the case.

Mr Hiscox wants to keep the footpath open and the aim is to create a 6m wide pathway across the site, from Burgess Hill to Susanna's Lane.

This will be fenced in and allow him access to cut the grass and hedges; keep any livestock safe; keep walkers and dogs safe. He is planning to build another fence which will separate the footpath from the panels. He has already installed a high quality fence around the outside of the field. Ms Haskins and I agreed that we could install a Bristol gate at the top of Burgess Hill to replace the existing stile, at no cost to him or the Parish Council, to allow ease of access for walkers and any machinery needed to cut the hedges and grass; it will comply with all health and safety issues; and will comply with all current legislation.

We have no objection to the proposed solar panel field and based on Mr Hiscox's wishes to preserve and enhance the nature around the area, including making the footpath wider, safer and with access for all, we fully support his plans.

Summary

I really enjoy being the Parish Path Liaison Officer for our village and surrounding area.

I know our villagers and other people appreciate the work I do and I would like to continue to be the PPLO for our parish.

Al Stewart

SSM Parish Path Liaison Officer

alunstewart69@hotmail.com

07889093179