

Herstmonceux Parish Annual Meeting 26th April 2021

Community Routes Report

The Community Routes project is a new initiative that commenced in 2020. It is a collaborative project involving Vitality Villages, Herstmonceux Parish Council, E.S.C.C. Rights of Way Team and local landowners. The aim of the project is to improve the local footpath network to make it more accessible to local residents and visitors, initially concentrating on keeping footpaths clear and replacing traditional stiles with gates or ladder stiles. The rationale behind replacing stiles is the principal that if someone can walk across a field using a public footpath they should not be stopped from proceeding by an inadequate piece of field furniture. Even well-maintained traditional stiles are difficult for some people to negotiate.

Short countryside routes are identified by Vitality Villages as popular with residents and visitors and are surveyed and assessed on their condition and what work needs to be carried out. Thought is given as to whether a route is near one of the three main centres of population in the parish: that is Herstmonceux, Cowbeech and Windmill Hill.

Herstmonceux Parish Council and the E.S.C.C. Rights of Way Team are made aware of which route is being considered and the next step is to approach the landowner(s) over whose land the route passes and hopefully agree on an acceptable action plan and costs are calculated. It is at this stage that Herstmonceux Parish Council are approached for financial support.

Where possible all work is carried out by members of Vitality Villages. This includes the construction of ladders stiles in the Men's Shed and installing gates and ladder stiles in position. Footpath clearance work is managed by Vitality Villages under the authority of E.S.S.C. The Rights of Way team also provide logistical help and advice.

Due to the pandemic and covid restrictions work has been limited. In fact the footpath clearance team were not able to go out at all last year. We had more success with the stile replacement work:

March:- the first ladder stile was installed on Nunningham Farm adjacent to Bagham Lane. Technically this pre-dates the Community Routes Project, but it was a catalyst that helped bring together the different parties.

July:- Three stiles and one gate on the route from Victoria Rd to Comphurst Lane were replaced with four self-closing gates.

November:- Work on a route near to All Saints Church to replace three stiles with two self-closing gates and a ladder stile was been agreed with the landowner. The gates have been purchased and the ladder stile is 80% complete. We await the ease of restrictions to enable the Men's Shed to be open and the work in the field to be undertaken.