

## **Hargrave Annual Parish Meeting – 12 May 2026**

Over Easter I conducted a survey of all of Hargrave's public rights of way.

Overall, I found the paths to be in good condition. A couple of cross-field paths needed marking but these have now been sprayed off.

### **Signs and markers**

Most of the signs are in good condition but we do now have quite a few signposts in need of attention. I have reported these to Suffolk County Council, in some cases more than once, and it is probably time to chase up again.

I have also suggested a few places that might benefit from additional marker posts.

### **Bridges**

All our bridges appear to be in good condition and in December we got a spanking new bridge for the Denham bridleway, or the Golden Mile as it is sometimes called. It is built to the latest specification, with strong parapet rails, which make it safer for horse riders to cross.

### **Gates and stiles**

The gates and stiles all appear to be functional.

Last year I contacted the land manager concerning the three stiles near Great Southwood Park Farm. He removed one stile as it was no longer required to retain livestock and refurbished the other two.

Going forward, I suspect Suffolk County Council may seek to have these two remaining stiles replaced by gates, in order to improve accessibility. SCC have recently indicated they would like to see the gates and stile updated at Knowles Green, something which is going to be discussed by the Parish Council at its next meeting.

## **Other improvements**

We've just had the first full winter since the surfacing of the footpath behind School Cottages. I think it has proven very successful and this popular footpath can now be used throughout the year.

At last year's APM I grumbled about the state of the field-edge footpath from the bottom of Barrow Hill up to the church and also the overgrown Denham bridleway. The surface of these is supposed to be cut by Suffolk County Council twice a year, on our revised cutting schedule. As it happened, the very next day the council contractors cut these paths and I believe they did another cut in the autumn. Hopefully we'll get the same again this year.

There was still the long-standing problem, which I mentioned last year, of the overgrown side vegetation on the Denham bridleway. This made it difficult for walkers to get through in places, let alone horse riders.

In the autumn there was major clearance work carried out at the Church Lane end of the bridleway and in February the section at the far side of the new bridge was also trimmed back. Coupled with the new bridge I think the bridleway is now more useable than it has been for some years. Thanks to Mark Lennon the SCC Rights of Way Officer for his help in achieving this. However, in the winter a section of the bridleway gets very muddy with a small stream running down it. This is perhaps due to the blocked ditches running alongside and it would be helpful if these could be cleared.

## **Footpath maintenance**

Occasionally cross-field paths do have to be disturbed for cultivation but they should then be promptly reinstated. I think farmers have again done a good job at marking these paths and keeping them clear. If there have been any issues, I've found the land owners to be very helpful and responsive at dealing with them.

During the summer some of field paths may get overgrown, as they do every year. If they become really difficult to walk, I'll try to get them cut, but I know people also appreciate the wild flowers and biodiversity along the uncut field edges.

I would like to thank all the landowners and villagers who maintain our paths during the summer months, at their own time and expense. Without these people many of our paths would otherwise become very overgrown and we wouldn't be able to enjoy them as we do. In particular, I would like to pay tribute to Harry Wiseman who was always very supportive of walkers in the village.

## **Respect for the countryside**

We should encourage walkers to respect the countryside and the landowners by keeping to the proper paths, with dogs under control and on a lead when near livestock and buildings and to clean up after their dogs if they should foul the footpath.

I know some landowners may informally permit villagers to walk field-edges, even when they are not designated footpaths, but please be respectful of farmers wishes if they don't want their field edges to be walked.