

Meeting 31: 23rd April 2009

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Icknield Way – Central Bedfordshire

Background

From the Ramblers Association Icknield Way (IW) path page: “Bledlow to Knettishall Heath near Thetford, 206km/128 miles. Devised by the Icknield Way Association and supported by the Ramblers as part of a campaign to achieve National Trail status for the whole length of the ancient trackways linking the South Coast and the Wash, the Path was opened as a promoted route recognised by local authorities in 1992. Although National Trail status is yet to be achieved it is now possible to use the Way as part of a chain of routes including the Wessex Ridgeway, Ridgeway National Trail and Peddars Way National Trail between Lyme Regis and Hunstanton.”

From the IW path Association home page: “The Icknield Way is unique among long distance tracks because it can claim to be “the oldest road in Britain”. Extending from Ivinghoe Beacon in Buckinghamshire to Knettishall Heath in Norfolk, it consists of prehistoric pathways, ancient when the Romans came. Dotted with archaeological remains, it survives as splendid tracks and green lanes along the chalk “spine” of England. The Icknield Way Association looks after the interests of the route as a whole, monitoring any actions that may threaten its integrity and urging improvements to the route for walkers.”

Is there a problem?

I believe there is. The IW path and trail development seems to have been dormant for a couple of years. The last notable action (which required considerable effort from those involved) was the reissue of the IW path guide in January 2007. Nothing has happened to the trail in Bedfordshire, to my knowledge, in recent years.

Natural England has been reviewing National Trail support, this is ongoing. Much of the southern end of the route runs through the area of the new Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC). CBC is the new Unitary Authority incorporating part of Bedfordshire County Council and the two district councils of Mid and South Bedfordshire. So what is CBC going to do to promote and develop this established Long Distance route?

Signposting & Waymarking

The IW path and IW trail signposting was installed several years ago. Some signs have disappeared, and not been replaced. Other issues arise as the IW path have changed its route in the January 2007 edition of the guide, notably taking the route out of Luton. The old signs need to be removed and the new route needs to be properly (and consistently) signed.

Ordnance Survey Mapping

The OS map currently shows the IW path as a Long Distance Path. However they reviewing the numbers of routes shown and are reliant on the local Highway Authorities (now CBC) to endorse the significant routes. Based on

the changes to the IW path in the 2007 guide, these have not been incorporated into the latest OS mapping.

Development of IW Trail

A number of lengths of the trail are currently along roads, a number of lengths were intended to run along off road locations, which require landowner agreement, or planning gain. The current status of these proposals needs review/refreshing.

Promotion

Despite some of the issues described in this document the route(s) existing, how are the route(s) promoted? The CBC website launched on the 1st April was notable for its lack of any RoW information – although, being generous this could be considered as ‘work in progress’. The leaflet produced a few years ago for the IW trail included numerous errors and identified lengths of ‘multi-use’ route which were only legally defined as footpath, leading to potential conflict.

Website

The IW websites (www.icknielldwaypath.co.uk & www.icknielldwaytrail.co.uk) have not been kept up to date. It does not have current photos of the whole route, the maps are old/missing – the only map of the whole route is shown on the cover of the book thumbnail image

The IW trail website has been ‘squatted’ by someone, and therefore completely disappeared. The link on the IW path site still links to this old trail site.

Resources

Resources are available for reviewing and developing the IW path and trail, could be available from:

- Central Bedfordshire Council staff
- Chilterns Society, Sustrans, RA & BHS volunteers
- Specific funding, e.g. growth area funding.
- IW association, Bedfordshire group, if there is a Bedfordshire support group

Stakeholders

- IW path association
- Ramblers Association
- British Horse Society
- Sustrans
- Central Bedfordshire Council
- Luton Borough Council

Next Steps

Where can these observations and issues be debated? Could CBC arrange a workshop for stakeholders to meet and discuss?

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