

## East Hagbourne Parish Council

### Proposals to Improve the Condition of our Roads, Footways and general Village Tidiness

A discussion document presented for the October 2018 Parish Council meeting outlined the condition of our roads, drains, footways and general village appearance and made initial suggestions on what is in need of attention and what we could do to make things better. That document, updated with a few comments received from Councillors, is included here as an Attachment.

In this report, we have tried to further develop the ideas into practical proposals for consideration by the Council as and when resources (people-power or financial) allow.

#### The starting point:

We all love our village and its wider parish area and appreciate its rural character as well as the great sense of community and diverse range of activities, many of them driven by volunteers throughout our community.

We applaud all those people - some known to us, others anonymous - who help look after the village by tending the areas outside their own houses, by picking up and clearing litter, by trimming stray brambles along our footpaths or in numerous other ways. It is this volunteer ethos that helps make our community so special.

Nevertheless, there are areas where the Parish Council can and should play a part: in co-ordinating efforts, in liaising with other authorities and in some cases undertaking tasks directly. While these activities have always gone on, over the past few years village "housekeeping" has taken something of a back seat through the years of economic hardship and while we have faced major projects and challenges in our parish. We feel that now is the time to redress the balance.

#### What could we do better?

The rural charm of East Hagbourne means that its street scene is less regular and manicured than we expect to find in a town. At the same time, we need to ensure that our roads and footways are safe for motorists and pedestrians and this can be challenging in those places where the infrastructure developed in a time much less heavily trafficked than today. Achieving the right balance needs a sensitive touch.

Driving around Oxfordshire and further afield, we are repeatedly struck that many villages seem to enjoy smoother roads and pavements, cleaner streets with no vegetation in the gutters and no sign of the blocked drains that plague some of our roads.

The issues are those already outlined in the Attachment, however in this document we have grouped the proposals into just four key topics. We believe that all four topics deserve consideration and action by the Parish Council, but recognise that what can be done depends on the resources available and on community aspirations in other areas.

#### **A. Street cleanliness** (items 1 & 2 in the Attachment)

Our streets suffer from accumulations of dirt and fallen vegetation, exacerbated by weeds growing in the gutters or the edges of tarmac areas. This is not only unsightly, but contributes to blocked road drains, impeding effective removal of rainwater from some streets.

The material found in our road gutters comes from various sources. Vegetation grows in the road gutter in many parts of the village. This in turn traps dirt, preventing it being washed into the drains. Fallen vegetation adds to the burden. This comes from fallen leaves in autumn and in places from pine needles (a year-round problem). In spite of the efforts of householders, much of this material accumulates in the gutters. Straw from farm vehicles affects Main Road, Blewbury Road and New Road at harvest time. The amounts deposited can be considerable, particularly at places where overhanging trees sweep material onto the road.

#### *Proposed Actions:*

##### *1. Street Cleaning*

*Responsibility for street cleaning including sweeping and litter bin emptying lies with SODC/Biffa. OCC are responsible for road drains and gully emptying. SODC have also carried out their annual summer 'big clean' which has included cleaning gutters, although OCC may also have responsibilities in this area.*

*Liaison with both authorities is recommended to develop a coordinated approach and more regular sweeping of the roads. The effectiveness of road sweeping is impaired by vegetation growing in the gutter. If this were loosened or removed before sweeping, the process would be more effective.*

*Consideration should be given to encouraging residents to look after the road outside their houses and the possibility of EHPC engaging a contractor for weed removal, in conjunction with SODC/OCC actions.*

## 2. Fallen Vegetation

*Fallen leaves in autumn are an annual occurrence and we do not have a tradition in England of organised leaf collection by the authorities. However, scheduling of road sweeping at this time of year could help reduce blockages caused by leaves. Discussion with SODC/Biffa is worthwhile, as well as asking residents to keep their frontages clear.*

*The fallen pine needles, particularly around Lower Cross are a year-round problem extending to both sides of the road, in spite of the efforts of the property owner. Regular road sweeping would help keep them at bay.*

*Vehicles from at least three farms pass through the village and straw falling from them is becoming an annual problem. Farm vehicles are becoming larger and how tightly the straw is packed also affects how much blows off. Discussion with farmers is recommended to explain our concerns and hear their needs.*

*The problem is much more severe where overhanging trees brush against the road. Problem trees should be identified and owners contacted to have them properly cut back, perhaps with help from OCC to set suitable criteria/standards.*

## 3. Road Drains

*Fallen leaves and straw, together with silt, contribute to regular blockages of the road drain entries, causing water to flow down the roads during times of rain.*

*We should encourage all residents to keep the drains outside their properties free of obstructions. In those places liable to flooding, this is in residents' own interest to prevent flooding of the road which could affect properties, particularly along Main Road and Blewbury Road.*

*OCC have over the past few years carried out maintenance to the road drain system along Main Road and on Blewbury Road to remove blockages and improve water flow into the stream. There remains a problem along New Road as it approaches Lower Cross. There remains a problem along New Road, particularly between Great Mead and Lower Cross where drains are regularly overwhelmed. The problem is exacerbated by water flowing off Great Mead. Discussion with OCC is merited.*

## **B. Pavements** (item 3 in the Attachment)

Some of our pavements are in acceptable condition, but many show surface deterioration that makes them difficult and potentially hazardous for those less sure-footed or who are in pushchairs or mobility scooters. The pavements are narrow in some areas. In places this is because of the topography and historic layout of the village, however where width is restricted by vegetation or obstruction, these issues should be addressed.

In some areas, grass has encroached onto the tarmac area and width can be recovered if this is trimmed back. While many householders cut back their hedges diligently, there are areas where hedges and other vegetation regularly grow out into the pavement area. In problem areas hedges need to be cut back to the property line and to at least head height. Some sensitivity is needed, particularly where vegetation adds to the attractiveness of the village.

Many residents understand and act on the Council's request to keep pavements clear of parked cars and leave at least enough room for a double pushchair, however, visitors and contractors frequently ignore or are unaware of this guidance and block pavements. Parking is restricted in many parts of the village and attention should be focussed on those areas where vehicle and pedestrian traffic is greatest. It is not acceptable that pedestrians and those in pushchairs and mobility scooters should be forced into the roadway.

We have an extensive network of pavements and footpaths in our rather compact village - our village could become a "pedestrian friendly village" if we wanted to promote it that way.

*Proposed Actions:*

1. *Identify those pavement areas where the surface condition is poor and remediation is needed and discuss with OCC. It is recommended that this discussion should focus on an overall upgrading rather than just patching the worst areas. Consider engaging an independent expert to determine what is needed.*
2. *Survey those pavement areas where width is restricted and decide whether these can be addressed by resident/volunteer action, or whether engineering solutions are needed in some places.*
3. *Identify those areas where pavements are obstructed by hedges or other vegetation and ask householders to rectify the problem, calling on OCC for advice and support if needed.*
4. *Obstruction by vehicles seems to be mainly a problem of communication rather than wilful disobedience - it is rare for someone to object if poor parking is politely pointed out to them. Consider greater publicity to residents and continue use of Council notices on poorly parked vehicles. Consider whether roadside signage is needed to prohibit parking on pavements.*

#### **C. Roads** (item 4 in the Attachment)

Road surfaces in parts of the village are worn and extensively patched. The recent open day at OCC gave some encouragement that there may be more resources and better techniques applied to road repairs in the coming months, however the new techniques may not be applied to minor roads. It is important that the heavily trafficked roads are kept in good condition to maintain safety. Both surface condition and road markings are important. Fix-my-street is a valuable resource to report defects and OCC can respond quickly if it is a priority. The Parish Council's appointment of a 'super user' is a good step towards managing our roads.

*Proposed Actions:*

1. *Ensure that all defects requiring attention are reported to OCC through fix-my-street.*
2. *Discuss with OCC their longer term plan to upgrade those road areas that have become neglected.*

#### **D. Footpaths and Countryside** (items 5 & 6 in the Attachment)

Our extensive footpath network is one of the key attractions of our parish and is valued by residents and visitors alike. It will become more important as East Hagbourne plays its part in the Didcot Garden Town concept as the 'green lungs' of the town. The footpath network includes traffic-free pedestrian routes both within the village and extending beyond the built environment to the wider countryside. Those paths within the village are used for everyday activities and "dry feet" routes are needed to access key facilities, however, extensive paving would impair the rural nature of the village and a balanced approach is needed.

Maintaining footpaths open and passable requires some regular maintenance. It has to be accepted that some paths will become muddy, however the attractive hedges that line many of them need regular attention to prevent brambles and other growth encroaching. At present this is not handled on an organised basis. A number of volunteers keep the paths orderly as needed, but at times the cut vegetation becomes too much to 'lose' in the hedge side.

The wide arable fields around the village allow access to wide views towards the Chilterns and North Wessex Downs AONBs. The setting of the village in this wider landscape is enhanced by the paddocks, fields and trees surrounding the built environment that provide a soft transition to the farmed land. This soft transition is valuable and continued use of paddock land for animals should be encouraged.

*Proposed Actions:*

1. *Encourage everyone in our parish to value and care for our footpath network and the surrounding fields, paddocks and wider countryside.*
2. *Encourage continued volunteer effort to keep footpaths clear and report any major issues. Explore whether this activity could be carried out in a more organised way and whether contractors should be employed to supplement these efforts.*
3. *Encourage and recognise those individuals who regularly pick up litter and keep our village tidy, while encouraging other to do likewise. Support and reinforce the annual Litter Pick as a focal point of these efforts.*

# ATTACHMENT

## A discussion document presented for the October 2018 Parish Council

East Hagbourne Parish Council has been looking into the state of maintenance of the village. Efforts earlier in 2018 to appoint a village monitor were unsuccessful. Over the summer I have been looking at the village with respect to its state of maintenance, cleanliness and tidiness and these observations are presented as input to the ongoing discussion.

### Scope

This note addressed question of village cleanliness, appearance and tidiness. Other important questions such as general road safety are not addressed here.

### Methodology

We have in the past surveyed the village to identify places where overhanging hedges or trees etc. needed attention. This approach has its place, but here I have taken a different tack, grouping my comments in terms of the different maintenance issues facing the village and wider parish. A number of these have been flagged before, but progress has been restricted firstly by lack of resources over the period of recession, but more importantly by the lack of agreed standards/objectives by which to measure progress. I have made some suggestions for such standards in the text - these are proposals only and challenge/improvement is welcome on this, as in all the material presented.

### The Key Issues

The key issues addressed here are:

1. The condition of road drains
2. Street cleanliness
  - Weeds/soil/straw in gutters and blocking drains
  - Overhanging trees
3. Condition of pavements and obstructions
  - Pavement surface condition and sloping/uneven areas
  - Maintenance needs
  - Overhanging hedges
  - Obstruction by parked cars
4. Potholes, road markings and signage
5. Footpaths, hedges and brambles
6. Condition of paddocks and fields

#### 1. The condition of road drains

Over recent years we have experienced a number of periods of prolonged and heavy rain. In these conditions the road drains can become overloaded. Some significant work has been carried out by OCC in the past few years, notable to the entry from Blewbury Road into Hacca's Brook and to the drains along Main Road from Hagbourne Village Hall down to the stream at Parsonage Lane. Nevertheless, the drains are old and not all in good condition. It is not unusual to see water flowing along the roads rather than into the drains along Main Road, Blewbury Road and particularly New Road towards Lower Cross after heavy rain. The new housing next to the village hall will only add to the water flow.

After heavy rains, water has flowed across the road from the orchard at Kingsholme into the stream. This is because the stream at this point is culverted into three rather narrow pipes, at least one of which is blocked. OCC have jetted the pipes in the past, but they remain partially blocked.

**Objective:** *There will be times after heavy rain where the drains cannot cope and water lies for a time on the road. We have to accept this to some extent, but if the drains are working, the water should quickly flow away. There are at least three places where houses are susceptible to flooding from road water: at Kingsholme, and at Blewbury road, north and south of the bridge over the stream*

**What can we do:** *The work of the flood volunteer group is important to keep the stream channels flowing, particularly downstream from Blewbury Road. Residents need to be vigilant after heavy rain and if blocked drains are suspected, to alert OCC so that they can be cleared. Taking action before very severe rain occurs may save some houses from flooding.*

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## 2. Street cleanliness

We have always argued that our village should retain a rural character and not become excessively urbanised. Nevertheless, our streets can sometimes present a rather untidy and even dirty appearance. There seem to be a number of factors at play.

Particularly during the recession years, the level of maintenance carried out on road surfaces has been minimal, although we have seen improved signage installed around Lower Cross and at the railway bridge. Specific comments on road markings and potholes are included in sections 4 & 5.

However, the main feature affecting cleanliness is the accumulation in some places of weeds, dirt and straw in gutters which is unsightly in itself and can contribute to blockage of the road drains.



Even the new pavement along New Road has weeds growing out of the tarmac edge and the base of the kerbstones. Such growth attracts soil and dirt accumulations, either from wind-blown dust or run-off from the fields, quite apart from the effects of straw from passing farm vehicles. The weeds are not easily removed even by the rotary-brush road sweepers and silt gets washed into the drain traps, meaning they require more regular cleaning.

**Objective:** *We should aim to keep our gutters clean and clear of weed growth and silt.*

**What can we do:** *Over the summer, I cleared a length the gutter for a length of about 100 metres outside my house and produced three barrow loads of material - this is more than could be handled by a Parish Council employee, because they would have no proper way to dispose of so much material. Some discussion with OCC is merited - if we could find a way to loosen all the gutter material before the rotary road sweeper comes round, clearance would be more effective.*

During the summer months, several farms transport straw mainly from the south of the village through Blewbury Road, Main Road and New Road. The vehicles used are large in accordance with the need of the farmers to manage large areas of land with few people. The straw overhangs the trailers and appears to be packed fairly loosely - in any event, pieces can fly off even where the road is not obstructed by trees or hedges. The problem is, however, much exacerbated where hedges overhang, sometimes as far as the roadway, and particularly where overhanging trees brush against the load - see example below on Main Road.



**Objective:** *Accepting that we are a rural community and farming activities need to continue, we should aim to minimise the amount of straw blown onto our roads.*

**What can we do:** *Discussion with farmers would be worthwhile to understand what they can do and how they see the problem. Equally, we need to engage with those houses where trees overhang and brush material from the straw trailers. A simple survey would identify the problem areas. OCC may be able to help in arranging with owners to have trees cut back where needed.*

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## 3. Condition of pavements and obstructions

This section discusses the pavements running alongside our roads. The wider footpath network is discussed in Section 6.

There are pavements along most of the roads in East Hagbourne, apart from a few problem areas, notably around Upper Cross, where the road width is not sufficient.

**Condition of existing pavements:** The pavements are usable by pedestrians, however rough surfaces, width and slopes make it difficult in places for a pushchair/wheelchair. Many areas are in good condition and require no attention, but there are some areas, notably Main Road east of the Fleur-de-Lys and there are areas where the surface is rough and the tarmac has broken up, notably along Main Road and Blewbury Road. OCC will repair these if the condition is severe - issues can be reported through fix-my-street.

There are also areas, again along Main Road, where the pavement slopes steeply into driveways. These areas can be difficult to negotiate especially during icy conditions.

(a) An example along Main Road where a fall occurred



(b) Shoe Lane



(c) An area marked for attention in Blewbury Road



**Maintenance needs:** OCC will accept responsibility for the pavement immediately adjacent to the road, however driveways extending towards houses are the responsibility of the house owner. Severe defects should be reported through fix-my-street.

In the areas where tarmac is verged with grass, the open area of tarmac has often been reduced by encroachment of the grass. Outside my own house, I was able to increase the tarmac width from around 60cm to nearly 100cm by trimming back the grass and turf that was covering it. This is something we could encourage householders to do and could also consider a Parish Council effort in this area.

An area of narrow tarmac on Blewbury Road



and an area that has been cleared of grass



# ATTACHMENT

**Overhanging hedges:** Overhanging hedges are a perennial problem in some areas. Many householders regularly keep their hedges in check - a good example at 10 Main Road is shown below. Others only respond when asked.



The regular problem areas include

- The corner of Blewbury Road and New Road
- Greenshutters
- Wilcher Close (although a less trafficked area)
- Outside the school

## Areas to consider improvements:

There are a few areas where improvements may be merited, subject to a wider review and prioritization.

- The pavement outside Greenshutters has a grass strip that could be tarmacked to increase the walkable width.
- The pavement alongside the orchard opposite Kingsholm is narrow, especially when the attractive hollyhocks are in growth.

No doubt the list could be extended/refined.

Pavement/grass outside Greenshutters



and hollyhocks outside Kingsholm.



There are some problem areas where improvements are not easy and we may have to live with the existing road layout. Both the examples quoted were investigated extensively in the EH Parish Plan 2011-2015.

- Upper Cross. There is no pavement from the front of Tudor House round to the school lower entrance. The road width would not allow one to be installed without reducing the road to one direction. Hardware such as a chicane would not be appropriate at such a sensitive and iconic location in the village. On the positive side, a safe foot access to the school is possible by following Shoe Lane, The Croft and behind the village hall to the pedestrian crossing.

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- Lower Cross: The concerns here are related mainly to motor traffic which is not part of this review, however foot access from the south side of Blewbury Road onto Main Road is difficult, because two road crossings are needed. However, access to the shop has been much improved by the pavement installed along the east side of New Road a couple of years ago as a joint venture of OCC and EHPC

**Obstruction by parked cars:** This remains a significant barrier to safe passage along the pavements, particularly for those using pushchairs or mobility scooters. The residents of New Road are mostly to be congratulated for their considerate parking, however the pavement is often blocked by contractor and other visitor vehicles who may not be so knowledgeable. Similar problems occur along Blewbury Road. Cars parked along Main Road, with the occasional exception, do not generally present an obstacle to safe foot traffic. Parking along The Croft, Lake Road and Wilcher Close is generally orderly, however some vehicles on Harwood Road park on the verge, causing damage to the grass.



**Objective:** *Maintain safe foot/pushchair access along pavements through maintenance and targeted improvements, without compromising the rural nature of the village.*

### **What can we do**

*In discussion and cooperation with OCC,*

- *Review the areas of pavement that need resurfacing*
- *Consider target improvements to the pavements where practical.*

*Through communications with residents*

- *Raise awareness and compliance with our expectations about keeping hedges trimmed.*
- *Keep pressure/awareness on considerate parking*

## **4. Potholes, road markings and signage**

The recent open day at OCC gave some encouragement that there may be more resources and better techniques applied to road repairs in the coming months. A number of potholes have been marked up for attention by OCC, so it will be interesting to see the eventual quality of any repair work. There is an open question about the quality of repairs carried out by utility companies which may not be to the same standard. Potholes along our principal roads are the most visible, but those along the approach roads, particularly from Coscote can be particularly damaging where the narrowness of the road forces vehicles to drive close to the verge.

Some road markings are becoming faint and a survey would be worthwhile to identify what needs fixing. The Road signs are generally in good condition, with some signs replaced in the past couple of years. However we are still awaiting replacement of the Give Way sign at Lower Cross and the eventual return of the finger post.

These issues are all topics handled by OCC. We in the village have a role to play in being vigilant and reporting what needs doing through fix-my-street.

**Objective:** *Maintain our road surfaces, markings and signage in good condition to preserve road safety and maintain a good appearance.*

**What can we do:** *The key action is vigilance and knowledgeable reporting of defects to OCC. Consider appointing a 'super-user' of fix-my-street. We need to be aware that OCC will prioritise actions on the basis of safety needs and work with them.*

## **5. Footpaths, hedges and brambles**

Our network of footpaths is a great asset to our parish and something that contributes greatly to the character and attractiveness of the area. The footpaths provide safe and pleasant ways of getting around the village as well as accessing the wider countryside. To achieve this, the network needs to provide ease of passage while retaining the rural feel of the paths. The Parish Council has in recent years applied an informal policy whereby some key routes are provided with a hard surface, while the

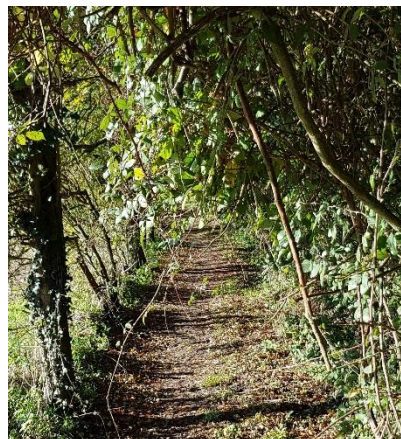


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more remote paths retain a rural atmosphere and may need wellies. The paths along the perimeter of the village are somewhat intermediate and their condition will vary with weather conditions.

The grass along some of our paths cut by our contractors on a regular basis. Others (e.g. along the Fieldside footpath) would perhaps benefit from cutting, but this is not currently done. East Hagbourne has a good history of volunteer action and many areas are kept tidy by land owners or local residents on a voluntary basis. Some worthy individuals also pick litter on a regular basis and help keep our paths and open spaces looking tidy.

A more pressing challenge is control of the trees and brambles lining some of our footpaths. Other footpaths including FP6 (heading west from the garage) and FP18 (leaving Blewbury Road at the bend by no 27) are suffering because trees and brambles need pruning. Volunteer effort is one approach to this question. A volunteer group cleared the covered section along the end of the Fieldside path (FP12) a few years ago, but this area has since been untended and is now difficult to pass. Where the amounts of vegetation removed are small, it can generally be 'lost' under the hedges, but in some cases larger amounts are generated and present a challenge to remove.



OCC has responsibility for footpaths, but has few resources. They are certainly a good source of advice and may be able to help with any intractable problems we identify. Their general approach, however, is to require land owners to carry out any necessary work.

The Sustrans Route is a permissive path where it follows the railway embankment. This is an attractive asset for the village as well as the surrounding communities. A number of the attractive wooden features along the embankment are in poor condition. Discussions with Sustrans would be worthwhile to encourage their reinstatement.

**Objective:** *Maintain our footpath network to provide a safe and attractive way of getting around the village and accessing the wider countryside.*

**What can we do:** *Self-help is a great resource, but the ethos needs reinvigorating if it is to continue into the future. We need to survey our footpaths to decide what needs to be done and then discuss with OCC (and for the embankment with Sustrans) to come up with a plan.*

## 6. Condition of paddocks and fields

The East Hagbourne Village Landscape & Character Assessment, carried out as input to our Neighbourhood Plan has helped us to look more closely at our parish. There are a number of paddocks and fields around the village that act as a soft transition between the built environment and the wider arable landscape and which add greatly to the atmosphere and setting of the village. As well as being attractive, paddocks provide a valuable resource for those who keep horses or other animals and are effectively a working resource. However, the fields only retain their visual and practical attraction if they continue to be used in this productive way. Some fields/paddocks seem to be viewed by their owners as purely speculative holdings in the hope of future planning permission and some have been allowed to become overgrown.

**Objective:** *Maintain our network of green fields and paddocks close to the village so they remain as working fields and contribute to the setting of the village.*

**What can we do:** *We cannot dictate to land owners how they manage their land, but we should express our thoughts on the value of the land to the setting of the village and encourage sympathetic management.*