

THE STATE OF EYNSHAM PAVEMENTS

This is a report on the state of footways / pavements in Eynsham, in relation to elderly or disabled people who are using wheelchairs or disability scooters or other forms of disability frame. It was prepared by CR Caudle and compiled 11 August 2010.

Please note, what follows is not necessarily endorsed by Eynsham Parish Council.

INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

Having lived in Eynsham for around 52 years, I am no longer a newcomer. I served the village as a Section Officer (Sgt) for Thames Valley Police Special Constabulary for 10 years, and started the first Eynsham foot patrols.

Like most people, I would walk the village streets without much thought to the pavements, unless I tripped on a raised paving slab. However, I became disabled in 2008 and suffer with my spine and hip joints due to ankylosing spondylitis (calcification of the spine), which makes it extremely painful to be jolted and is exacerbated by sharp movements.

This year I obtained a disability scooter to enable me to visit the shops, and importantly to visit mum in the churchyard- which I have not able to do since Christmas, as I cannot walk far. On my first outing I was very careful, as I had to see which paths I could or could not go on.



I was shocked at the state of the paths around the village and the effect they had on my spine and hip joints. They were fine for walking on, but I don't think any thought has gone into their impact on people in wheelchairs or motorised scooters, or users of walking frames, or any who are infirm or elderly or injured.

My disability scooter has pneumatic tyres and springs front and back; some have solid tyres and only rear springs. The effect on them and on wheelchair users would be far worse. One elderly lady called Margaret, whom I met at the Day Centre, tells me she does not go down to the Co-op with her 3 wheel frame - she is just too frightened as the paths are so bad. That seems to sum up the current state of affairs.

A number of other people in the village agree the paths are a disgrace. I even have the support of Care with Care and Director Jan Malpus, whose staff take the elderly for walks in wheelchairs and frames, who also agrees that something needs to be done - and soon.

I felt that the elderly, the injured, and indeed anyone with a scooter or wheelchair, should have a better deal in getting around, especially in their own village. I therefore contacted Councillors Margaret Stevens of West Oxfordshire District Council and Sue Osborne on the Parish Council and offered to carry out a survey and report.

I have prepared this report street by street, with photos of areas that cause considerable shaking / jolting and exacerbate any existing problems - the Slideshow shows a selection. It is important to note that while paths may look OK, even to the trained eye, the only way to judge their state from a wheel-chair or scooter perspective is to ride along them.

I present these findings in the hope that some working party can be arranged to discuss a strategy for change - to make our lives easier now and the future. I would also suggest that disabled people are consulted or have a seat on any future working party, or indeed before any new paths or dropping of kerbs.

SUMMARY

In carrying out this survey, *I found the same four problems recurring time and again:*

1. where long sections of pipework or other essential services have been laid into the path - very noticeable from the tarmac's pinkish colour and very widespread.
2. where repair or installation has taken place and black tarmac has been used, the repair / installation tarmacking has been of poor workmanship, leaving lumps or raised edges.
3. where tarmac has been laid over existing tarmac, usually brushed on - the layer is so thin that after wearing away it leaves terrible ripples.
4. tarmac and concrete broken away, leaving holes and very rough surfaces.

I have also found access plates for gas, cable etc, which have sunken into the ground at an angle. Worse still are areas of concrete pathway that have broken up leaving small holes, which may seem nothing to walkers, but seriously shake up anyone on wheelchairs and scooters.

In all, the situation for wheelchair and scooter users is serious. It is no wonder they don't get out much, unless it is absolutely essential, given the state of some paths. The mounds, rough areas, poor tarmacking and poor upkeep have rendered some paths unusable for the people this report is aimed at. The no-go areas are:

- Newland Street - entire pathway opposite the White Hart public house
- Spareacre / Marlborough Place - small section near 34 Spareacre Lane
- Wytham View
- Drop edge at junction of Queen Street and Oxford Road
- Access path from Mill Street to Conduit Lane
- Two cobbled areas on Acre End Street
- From roundabout Acre End Street left hand side.

DROPPED KERBS: It is a common practice these days to drop kerbs for cars to park in the driveways. However the practice of sloping the path penalises people who are elderly or disabled. Cars have powerful engines and could easily go up from the road if just the edge was lowered; meanwhile disabled people suffer the fear of tipping over.

BODGED REPAIRS: The other main problem is tarmac which is badly repaired by contractors and not checked by the council. If you have large holes, then why fill the large hole but leave the small ones, it makes no sense, and only leaves the small holes to get bigger in the future, and then requires a return visit incurring more cost.

THOUGHTLESSNESS: The rough surfaces, holes, bad tarmacking, obstructions and dropping of paths for car entrances are forcing people in our position not to venture out - especially at night. But householders are creating further problems, by:

- letting plants and hedges protrude onto footpaths.
- blocking pathways on dustbin days.
- parking cars half on the path and half on the road.

It cannot be right to discriminate against the infirm, the ill, and disabled people in this way, not deliberately, but by the lack of knowledge.

PRIORITIES

I am well aware of the national state of finances and its impact on our councils, but I suggest this situation is so serious that funds should be taken from other projects, or grants applied for, at least to repair the main routes:

- Hanborough Road
- Mill Street
- Acre End Street
- Witney Road
- Marlborough Place
- Spareacre Lane.

Disabled and elderly people should have a fundamental right to access shops or any other business or for recreation. At present many will not venture to the shops or the playing fields, or even to see the Carnival because of the state of the paths. Ideally the whole path should be replaced to the standard of the stretch on Witney Road. Had proper maintenance been carried out over the years, it would not involve high cost repairs. Lessons should be learned and a proper maintenance routine instigated.

OVERVIEW

The village footpaths have been there a long time, but they have suffered neglect over the years. Recently it is evident that more emphasis has been placed on accommodating the car driver, as well as lack of forethought when improving pavements and pathways or indeed installing new paths on estates, in terms of lowering kerbs and resurfacing and general upkeep of these important access routes. In many places it is smoother to ride on the road than on the paths - which is dangerous, as a scooter / wheelchair will not be expected there.

I have ridden along the paths listed in this report and it was worth enduring pain to get this survey done; but until the paths are repaired I would not want to do it again. The same issues came up on a regular basis:

1. Cars parking on half road / half pavement thus blocking users from passing by day and night.
2. Hedgerows encroaching well into the pathways.
3. Trees / shrubs hanging down that have to be driven through.
4. Flowers / shrubs growing outside the property boundary meaning you have to drive through them.
5. Sinking of access plates / hatches.
6. Shoddy repairs / tarmac raised where pipes / cable had been laid.
7. Missing plate covers.
8. No dropped kerbs to give wheeled access to pathways.
9. Kerb access to paths, not dropped enough.
10. Tree roots pushing up through tarmac, causing a ridge to form.
11. Cracked paving which is sinking.
12. Cobblestones instead of tarmac, making the person shake violently.
13. Steep slopes in driveways, creating a fear of tipping if not actual injury.
14. Failure to clear paths, meaning people have to go onto the road.
15. Rubbish bins not brought in after collection but left in the path.
16. Restrictive barriers, making access impossible for some.

I hope the photos will give a better understanding of the problem.