



FOOTPRINTS

Summer 2026

News from St Albans and District Footpaths Society www.stalbansfootpaths.org.uk

CHAIR'S CHAT

Looking back at last summer's edition of Footprints, I was surprised to re-read my comment that 'it seems that we're having a long hot summer'. I noted then that some local farmers were worried that the prolonged dry weather would lead to poor harvests due to the lack of rain.

Given the astonishing run of heatwaves we've had this year – three so far - last year seems to have been rather mild by comparison. Fortunately, we have not had the wildfires France and Spain have had, with people being evacuated, homes and property destroyed and temperatures reaching unbearable levels. But the UK has still had record-breaking temperatures – and wildfires in the Scottish Cairngorms have been a sharp reminder of the dangers of climate change.

We recognise that very high temperatures are a health risk. We advise that a walk should be cancelled if the leader feels excessive heat could lead to walkers becoming unwell. Indeed, one or two walks have been cancelled on this ground. Quite apart from the risk to health, it is not pleasant to walk in such conditions though luckily there are many walks through woods and on shaded paths that help us escape the sun.

Hertfordshire has a great variety of footpaths covering different terrain – sometimes muddy in winter or spring, sometimes icy (another health hazard) and now the relentless heat. There are also occasional obstacles – such as when farmers fail to maintain a footpath across a field or plant crops that obstruct the right of way. These can delay a walk while the correct route (or a way round the obstacle) is found. This is why the work of our Footpath Representatives is so important; they regularly check the rights of way and report problems to the local authority. Hertfordshire's Countryside Access Officer has been very responsive to our complaints and takes prompt action where necessary to rectify problems. We do not yet know how this relationship will change with the upcoming new local government reorganisation. However, we do know that we will continue to do what we can to preserve public rights of way and access to the local countryside.

Alison Hannah, Chair

AGM 2026

On Monday 22 June we held our AGM at St Mary's Church Hall in Marshalswick. We were very pleased that Councillor Matt Fisher, Mayor of the City and District of St Albans, was able to attend at the end of the formal business. He gave a speech expressing his support for the aims and work of the Society (see below). Afterwards, he stayed on to join us for tea, cakes and an informal chat.

The Chair reported on the main activities over the past year. The Treasurer and Membership Secretary have now completed their first full year in these roles. The transition went smoothly, with all administration and financial systems working well. Phil Escritt, who was our representative to the Ramblers' Association and advised us for many years on local developments affecting footpaths and rights of way, has now retired. We are very pleased that Glyn Owens and David Hodges will continue to represent our views to the Ramblers in addition to their other activities with the Footpath Representatives' Group.

The AGM is an important event as this is when our members elect or approve the Executive Committee and other key roles. The current Executive Committee members were willing to continue in their positions and were re-elected. Those holding other roles, including members of the Footpath Representatives' Group, were agreed. This year we also had a candidate for the role of Vice Chair and Keith Bunker was elected to take up this position. This is particularly important as the current Chair must stand down in June 2027 when her term ends.

We are very lucky to have a committed and active group of members who enable us to maintain our activities. Our walks programme provided weekly walks (come rain or shine) throughout the year. The Footpaths Representatives' Co-ordinator has been able to fill all vacancies. The St Albans District has a full list of footpath representatives and all local rights of way are regularly checked. We also held our usual social events - the soup lunch, annual picnic, garden party and Christmas lunch. All in all, it has been another successful year for us, although we remain alert to look out for and mitigate risks that may impact on our future activities.

Alison Hannah, Chair

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

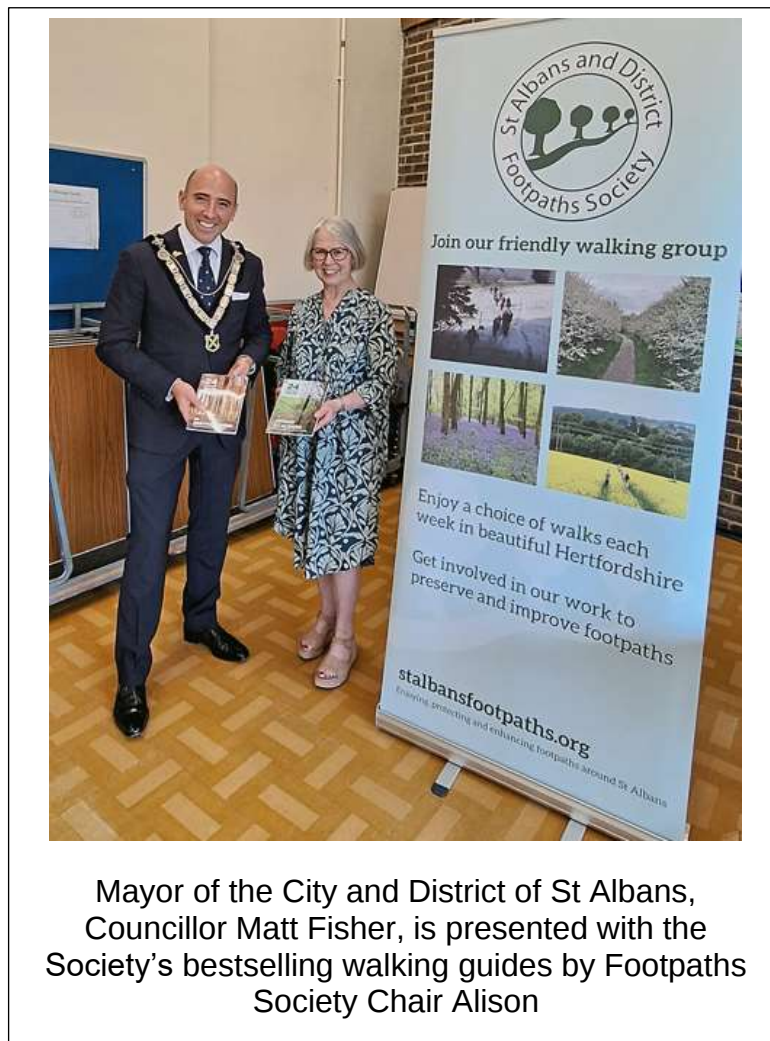
We would like to welcome new member: - **Louise Arnold**

We hope that you have enjoyed your first walks with us and made friends with your fellow walkers.

AGM 2026 – The Mayor's Visit

Mayor of the City and District of St Albans, Councillor Matt Fisher, joined the 2026 AGM of the St Albans and District Footpaths Society on 22nd June and was highly complementary about the work of the Society as it nears its 60th birthday. The Mayor recognised the breadth of work undertaken by the Society's members who help maintain, improve and protect footpaths as well as offering at least two walks a week to its 100 members.

Having himself chosen to highlight the powerful role of volunteers during his time in office, the Mayor offered his 'sincere gratitude' for the work the Society does to walk, protect and improve the footpaths of St Albans and beyond. He referred to how the Society's 'stewardship' role connects all members with the countryside and with each other; and how much can be achieved when 'expertise and enthusiasm' come together. He wished the Society well for the future.



SUMMER PICNIC WALKS

Since our annual summer picnic walks started some years ago, we have always held them at Ashridge as there are a variety of walks there and plenty of parking. However, this year, on 2nd July, we started in Verulamium Park with the long walk going around Gorhambury and the short walk following the River Ver to the Watercress Wildlife Reserve.

Member enjoying their lunch and a rest in the shade after the walks on rather a warm day.
Photo by Nicki Marriott.



PLEASE SPREAD THE WORD

Membership of our Society is slowly decreasing. If we are to continue our walk programmes in it important that we encourage more active members to join us.

We have found that the best way we get new members is by word of mouth. We are therefore encouraging all members to spread the news about us amongst your family, friends, neighbours, etc. Our unique selling point is that we have 2 weekly walks and we are a friendly welcoming group.

WALK LEADERS GUIDE

We have recently updated the walk leaders guide and wanted to share it with all members. All walkers should be aware of walk safety and etiquette.

REASONS FOR CHOOSING TO LEAD A WALK

The Society encourages all members, including new members, to become walk leaders. The attraction of group walking is to discover new places and to meet new people. You may have your own favourite walk that you would like to share but are not sure how to go about it. We will provide information, advice and support to help make this an easy and enjoyable activity.

Being a walk leader builds confidence, helps you to learn more about the area where the walk takes place and expands the circle of walkers you can meet and chat to during the walk.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO LEAD A WALK

The first step is to decide what walk you would like to lead. You may have one in mind already. If not, a good start is to choose a walk from one of the Society's books, available from various outlets in the area, or from Jane Kerr, our Books Distributor:

- **24 Footpath Walks around St Albans (the "green book")**
- **24 Footpath Walks in Hertfordshire (the "brown book")**

The next step is to contact our Walks Programme Organisers John Lickiss (fpslongwalks@hotmail.com) for long and Sunday walks and Jane Kerr (walksprog@gmail.com) for short walks. They can discuss the proposed route with you and what's needed to prepare for leading a walk. If you wish, they (or another walker) will walk round the proposed route with you to identify suitable stops and check there are no potential hazards or difficulties.

PLANNING A WALK

Make sure the walk is safe and complies with good practice, as set out below:

- **Ensure that the route follows public rights of way, permitted routes, or access land**
- **Ensure there is suitable parking** at the starting point that will not inconvenience local people or endanger other road users
- A local public house is often willing for walkers to park in their car park if they will return for a pub lunch or drink. The leader should confirm this with the pub before the walk, preferably before the programme is circulated. Alternative parking should also be available for walkers who do not
- **Lunching:** It is customary (though not essential) for the Thursday long walks to end with lunch in a pub. If this is the plan, the leader should contact the pub in advance to book a table for the approximate number and time and also to check the ordering arrangements. Many pubs will open before 10 am so the group can go in to pre-order (and use the facilities) before setting off. Others will not be open but will ask for a list to be posted through the letter box
- **Checking and rechecking the route:** the route should be checked by the leader together with another walker, if wished. In addition to the initial planning and walking of the route, the leader should also check the route again shortly before the scheduled date to ensure that it is clear. Changes can occur quickly

- **Review risks and hazards** you are likely to encounter before and during the walk (such as busy roads, high stiles, or excessive mud or water) and consider any alterations needed on the route if conditions are problematic
- **Plan regular breaks & comfort stops:** no walk should continue for more than 2 hours without a rest pause of at least 10 minutes. Morning walks include a “coffee” break (walkers bring their own refreshments) and leaders should identify a suitable place for a “comfort” stop along the walk

INCORPORATING THE WALK INTO THE WALK PROGRAMME

- **Initial Preparation:** The average speed of a group of walkers is about 2 - 2.5 miles an hour; walks begin at 10 am and usually end by 1 pm. Suggested distances are:
 - Shorter half-day walks (normally Thursday) 4 to 5.5 miles
 - Longer half-day walks (normally Thursday) 6 to 7.5 miles
 - Half-day or whole day walks (occasionally on Sundays) 6 plus miles, often as a “figure of eight” with a break at lunchtime
- **Please supply the following information to the walk organisers,** most of which will be included in the walks programme:
 - Name of leader and contact details (email and mobile phone number)
 - Date of walk
 - Length of walk (accurately measured)
 - Start Point, including postcode if available.
 - OS Explorer Map No and Grid Ref (it is essential that this is accurate)
 - Any lunch arrangements
 - BRIEF Description of Walk
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THE WALK LEADER’S RESPONSIBILITIES

- Check the weather forecast in advance
- In very inhospitable weather conditions, such as snow or ice, or if excessive heat is forecast, the decision whether it is safe or advisable to undertake a walk rests with the leader.
- It is perfectly acceptable to cancel a walk at the start, if the leader is unsure about the conditions or thinks it is too risky to allow the walk to take place safely.
- Walk leaders should carry water, a mobile phone (if not, check who has a phone), and relevant Ordnance Survey map.
- A First Aid kit is sensible. One will be provided by the Society free of charge once the walk leader attends our occasional one-day training course.
- At the walk starting point the leader(s) should introduce themselves, and any new walkers, warn walkers of any unusual hazards, count the number of walkers, & appoint a backmarker, who walks at the back of the group.
- In case of emergency the location of access roads or tracks and the nearest habitation will need to be established. The smartphone app What3Words is used by emergency services, provided the mobile phone can use this. Call 999 or 112 (the latter allows for poor reception areas).

ON THE WALK

- **Leaders are not expected to take undue risks.**
- At any times of uncertainty, the leader is responsible for decision-making and directing the party.
- **The leader sets the pace** and walkers should not go ahead of the leader.
- The leader is responsible for advising the group to **observe the Country Code**:
 - Follow public rights of way or permitted routes
 - Use designated stiles and gates
 - Walk in single file through cultivated fields, including grass verges
 - Cross fields with livestock calmly and quietly, keeping the group together.
 - Walk on the right-hand side of roads, in single file, taking special care at sharp bends and road crossings.
- The backmarker should be responsible for closing gates, if previously closed, keeping the party together and alerting the leader to slow down if necessary.
- After breaks, the leader or the backmarker should again check the numbers.
- The leader should check regularly that there are no large gaps and, if necessary, pause to allow the tail to catch up.
- If an accident occurs during the walk, the leader should inform the Walks Programme Organiser(s) of the details – including the name of anyone hurt, date and time, location, nature of injury and action taken. The Walks Programme Organiser will keep a record of all accidents.

19 April 2026

FIRST AID COURSE

A few years ago we held a course (run by First Aid for All, Hertfordshire) for walkers on how to handle medical emergencies. The Critical Response Training course showed us how to preserve life, prevent life-threatening conditions from worsening and promote recovery.

Trainees were shown - and practised - how to clear airways, put someone in a recovery position, practice CPR and use a defibrillator. We were also taught how to respond to bleeding (including nosebleeds), fractures, head injury, choking and other health emergencies. Advice was given on the contents of first aid kits and certificates were provided at completion of the course.

The cost of the course will be paid by the Society and is free to members. If anyone would like to take part, please let me know.

Alison Hannah stalbansfootpaths@gmail.com

PHOTOS FROM RECENT WALKS



Thanks, in particular to Helen Glenny, who has provided a regular stream of photos of recent walks.

SOCIETY PUBLICATIONS

Members of the Society can obtain a copy at the discounted price of £5 (Brown Book) & £5.50 (Green Book) from Jane Kerr (stalbansfootpathbooks@gmail.com / 01727 852438 (+postage unless collected or on short walk.)



IMPROVEMENTS TO FOOTPATHS

It is always good to report work carried out by Herts CC to improve the footpaths in our area.



DONATION TO CHARITIES

Every year we make donations to charities who are improving the areas in which we walk. We have reports from 2 of them, thanking us for our support.

THE OPEN SPACE SOCIETY

The Open Spaces Society, which campaigns for public paths, and commons, greens and other open spaces throughout England and Wales, is Britain's oldest national conservation body. Formed in 1865, originally to protect commons in and around London, such as Hampstead Heath, Epping Forest, and Wimbledon Common, it went on to found the National Trust in 1895, believing that ownership was the best means of protecting land. In 1899 it embraced public rights of way and has championed them, alongside open spaces, ever since.

The society campaigns relentlessly for more and better-quality public access to paths and spaces in town and country. We assist our members, and through our legal-action fund adopt cases which are of national significance, and make grants to members who are fighting legal battles. Our local correspondents act for us on the ground, and are delighted that Phil Escritt is so diligent for us in St Albans. The society depends on its volunteers and members, and we can offer our national expertise in campaigning and policy. We greatly appreciate the long and steadfast support of the St Albans and District Footpath Society.

Kate Ashbrook, general secretary, the Open Spaces Society

VER VALLEY SOCIETY

The Ver Valley Society was formed in 1976 to ensure a minimum flow and good water quality in the River Ver, a rare chalk stream. The Ver-Colne walk was also established at that time and expanded in 2010 to include circular walks, interpretive oak benches and a linear River Ver Trail.

Improving the habitat in and along the river is the most frequent task of our many volunteers. This ranges from introducing woody structures into the river to encourage clean gravel where many invertebrates at the bottom of the food chain live, to pollarding fast-growing willows that can quickly envelop the river and reduce biodiversity.

The donations from the St Albans & District Footpaths Society have helped us to equip the volunteers with the tools they need. This has been especially useful for the 'Flying Squad' of midweek volunteers who resolve immediate issues on the footpaths of the Ver Valley Walks. This complements the work of Herts Countryside Rights of Way volunteers but are jobs too small to be part of their weekly schedule. This year's donation is being contributed to the Redbournbury Bench Fund, to replace the most popular of the oak benches on the footpath beside the Ver.



Creating a brush berm



Beautiful Ver at Redbourn



The Flying Squad

REPORTING FOOTPATH PROBLEMS

Please let us know of problems you find with footpaths within the district or better still report them yourself – see below.

RIGHT OF WAY PROBLEMS

If you find any problems on footpaths in the county these can be reported online at: -

<https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/services/highways-roads-and-pavements/report-a-problem/report-a-highway-fault/public-rights-of-way/public-rights-of-way.aspx>

REPORTING FLY TIPPING

St Albans District Council (SADC) outsource their refuse collection to Veolia. If you see fly tipping locally, you can phone them on 01727 809 019. Or email:-

wastemanagementservices@stalbans.gov.uk

I hope that you have enjoyed this edition of Footprints. I am always looking for articles and photographs for Footprints from members, which in the past have covered subjects as walks they have enjoyed, holiday experiences, society history, etc.

If you have an article you would like to submit, please look out for email requests for the next edition.

Mike Marriott – Footpaths Editor

