



# St Lawrence Church

LECHLADE-ON-THAMES



## Improvements to Shelley's Walk

January 2022

Version 5

St Lawrence PCC

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## 1. Summary

### *The footpath ...*

Shelley's Walk is an important footpath through the churchyard from the Market Place to Wharf Lane primary school and beyond to the settlement of St John's. The stone setts were laid around 1830. The name relates to Shelley's poem 'Summer Evening Churchyard, Lechlade' although the earlier gravel path was probably in place at that time.

### *...has a high footfall,*

The footpath is used by many children and parents as they walk to and from school in all weathers. The footpath is also a busy thoroughfare for the schoolchildren and parents and the elderly, on foot in wheelchairs or mobility scooters users and tourists.

### *is in poor condition,*

The footpath is a grade 6 highway maintained by Gloucestershire County Council. The stone cobbled path is in poor condition resulting in significant undulations in the surface which makes it difficult to walk on and even more difficult to cross in prams or pushchairs or for wheelchair or motorized mobility scooters users. There is a risk of trips and injury for all users.

### *.. and is in a conservation area.*

The path is within a conservation area with a moderate significance although not listed. Any improvement needs to respect the heritage of the area while providing safe access for all ages and abilities.

### *Reasonable adjustments are proposed*

We have been working with GCC highways and public rights of way for several years to seek reasonable adjustments to the footpath to meet aspirations under legislation to enable access for all under the Equality Act 2010. Designs have been prepared by our conservation architects Chedburn Codd following discussion with the Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC) representatives. The proposals are shown on the attached drawing. This shows a 1.8m width of recycled limestone flags with the existing or re-laid stone cobbles on either side.

### *Governance*

As the proposed work is within the churchyard and outside the church, it is subject to approvals from Cotswold District Council (CDC) and the Gloucester Diocese Advisory Committee (DAC). CDC has indicated that if the path is relaid on the same alignment by a GCC contractor then it would be considered permitted development. A Faculty is needed from the Diocese for GCC to carry out the works.

### *Cost*

While it is the GCC responsibility to maintain the path, the need to meet higher conservation standards means that the cost is higher than a standard path. GCC has indicated that the cost of the works is £26k. GCC has sourced £18k from internal budgets. The Lechlade Heritage and Development Trust has granted £5k and the Lechlade Town Council £3k.

### *Timescale*

Subject to approval, the work has been scheduled for August 2022 during the school holidays when the footfall decreases.

## 2. Introduction

This report has been prepared to demonstrate the need for improvements to the existing Shelley's Walk (the footpath) in Lechlade to provide safe and level access for all ages and abilities.

The footpath is a class 6 highway maintained by Gloucestershire County Council (GCC) on land owned by the Parochial Church Council (PCC). There is a maintenance agreement between GCC and the PCC in place.

Reasonable adjustments are proposed to the footpath to provide level and safe access for all to the Church of England school, to the church's north porch and for residents, who are generally elderly, of the eastern part of Lechlade at St John's Priory Park.

The location of the footpath is shown in Figure 1. While the total length of the footpath extends from Market Place eastwards through the churchyard, our focus is on the stone footpath from the Market Place to the north porch; a length of 24m. The length further east from the north porch through the churchyard to the school was a gravel path which was subsequently paved with modern concrete paving slabs in the 1970's by GCC.

## 3. History

Shelley's Walk is a footpath running along the north side of the church from the Market Place to the primary school. From the Market Place to the church, the footpath is formed of stones laid on edge which are worn and uneven and have been previously repaired with stone and concrete infilling. The footpath is bordered by mature yew trees which frame the views along the north side of the church. Shelley's famous poem related to the churchyard, looking from the east towards a sunset, and there is no specific reference relating to the footpath in the text.

The physical structure of the footpath is of Low to Moderate significance; however, as part of the setting of the church it assumes a Moderate significance within the wider churchyard area<sup>1</sup>.

The church was completed in 1476 and the porch added in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century<sup>2</sup>. There was a church at St John's east of the town centre and the footpath may have been used regularly by priests and others at that time. The footpath may have been used for access to the wharfs on the river; the remains of a wharf are to be seen in the gardens of Church House.

Parish records<sup>3</sup> indicate that the cobbled stone path was laid in 1830, at the same time as the Pace reordering of the church. Shelley wrote his poem 'Summer evening churchyard, Lechlade' in 1815, probably before this cobbled path was constructed.

## 4. Footpath use

The footpath has a high footfall and is used for access from the Market Place to and egress from the Church of England Primary School. This includes a high number of children, some on scooters, and infants in pushchairs. Pre-COVID-19 headcounts show 160 people in the period 8.30 to 9.30 with a similar number returning in the afternoon.

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<sup>1</sup> Statement of Significance Vol 2 prepared by Chiz Harward BA MCIfA, Urban Archaeology, 2019

<sup>2</sup> Buildings of England Gloucestershire 1, David Verey

<sup>3</sup> Parish records, Lechlade

The footpath is frequently used by the elderly either walking or in mobility scooters to travel to and from the town from the St John's Priory Park. These mobility scooters generally use the side gravel at the Market place end to avoid the path but then have great difficulty in navigating the broken stone edging and the undulating and irregular stone footpath. Using this footpath avoids the heavily trafficked St John's Street which has narrow uneven pavements, often obstructed by parked cars, and close to passing heavy lorries.

We carried out a count over four weekdays at peak times when the school was open with the following results:

- 08.30 to 9.00: 157 plus 12 pushchairs.
- 14.45 to 15.15: 181 plus 12 pushchairs.

This count excludes the elderly, several in mobility scooters or wheelchairs, who are regular users of the path during the day.

The path is also used regularly by visitors to Lechlade walking a 'circuit' to the Trout public house and back along the river as featured in the Lechlade Walks publication<sup>4</sup>. It is also used by walkers as a north bank alternative on the Thames Path.

Some people often walk on the narrow gravel strips at the edge of the footpath (see photograph on the report cover) but there is no alternative than to walk over the stone cobbles when they pass the north porch.

The north porch of the church adjoins the path but is currently only used as an emergency exit or on occasion of large services such as Remembrance Day. The church would like to make greater and more flexible use of the porch if access is improved.

*Right: Pushchairs using the footpath*

*Below: Wheelchair users find the surface very difficult to cross; very often the narrow gravel area is used to avoid the very uneven stone path.*



*Below right: the postman has difficulties pushing his mail trolley along the path.*



<sup>4</sup> Lechlade and Fairford walks

## 5. Construction and Condition of the footpath

The 24 m length of cobbled stone footpath is a maximum 2m wide. It comprises quarried stone set vertically in compression, from 30 to 80mm width set on edge to an unknown depth and base. The stones form an irregular pattern with significant variations to the surface. This may be due to any earlier loading not being distributed evenly across the path or settlement where the path has been excavated. There is also an edging of larger stone laid vertically on both sides of the 2m wide footpath.

The source of the stone is not known but probably a locally sourced limestone<sup>5</sup> of poor quality. Some of the stone shows clear horizontal bedding planes but others do not; it is possible that the footpath was repaired with other stone at some time. We know that the wharfs at Lechlade were used to transport stone down the river to Oxford and London<sup>6</sup>.

The west end of the churchyard used to have railings with a gate, but these were removed during the second world war. At the west end the footpath narrows to where the gate stood.

*Left: north edge of the footpath adjacent to the cottage wall*

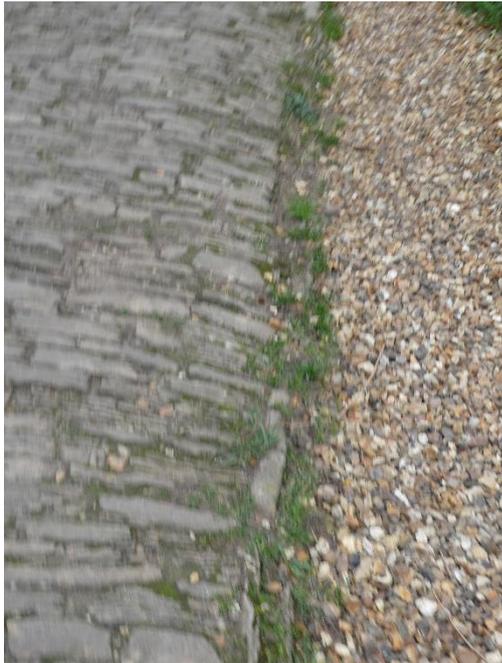


*Right: south edge of footpath*



<sup>5</sup> Oxford Stone, Arkell, 1970

<sup>6</sup> Strategic Stone Study, A building stone atlas of Oxfordshire, Historic England, March 2011/ December 2017



The poor condition of the path can be summarised below.

- stones are uneven. With the relatively thin stone on edge, different levels of adjacent stones set vertically results in an undulating profile which is difficult to walk on.
- some early infilling with larger stones; date unknown.
- concrete infilling of several areas is clear, particularly outside the north porch. This appears recent although we have not found evidence to show the date of this infilling. Some of this infilling is coming loose.
- Some settlement of the path in a couple of areas where excavation for utility services has been carried out; this is recent.
- footpath drainage does not work. In heavy rain, water ponds on the footpath surface and only disperses slowly. In icy conditions, there is a high risk of ice which is hazardous.



*Left: uneven profile of the footpath looking east*

*Below: uneven profile of the footpath looking east.*



*Right: path settlement resulting in large dip in alignment.*

*Lower Right: concrete infill*

*Bottom left: southern edge of footpath with adjacent gravel surface*



## 6. Significance

The physical structure of Shelley's Walk is of Low to Moderate significance; however, as part of the setting of the church it assumes a Moderate significance within the wider churchyard area.

Shelley's poem refers to the 'Summer Evening Churchyard, Lechlade' and refers to the 'sunset's rays' and 'dim and distant spire' suggests that Shelley was looking at the aspect from the east end of the churchyard and not near the existing stone footpath.

The impact and proposed mitigation are described in Table 6-1 below.

**Table 6-1 Footpath – impact and mitigation**

Location and benefits	Impact	Mitigation
<p>The length of Shelley's Walk from the Market Place eastwards to outside the north porch.</p> <p>Proposals to provide unimpeded access for all ages and abilities.</p>	<p>Low impact.</p> <p>Design proposed with Purbeck Taynton stone flags consistent with the heritage of the conservation area. The design is based on discussions with GCC and the DAC.</p>	<p>9m length of stone cobbles on the north side of the proposed footpath from the Market Place to be retained. Existing cobbles to be laid over gravel for the remaining length to the north side, of varying width.</p>

Location and benefits	Impact	Mitigation
This is provided by a level smooth access from the Market Place.		Existing cobbles lifted and relaid along the south side of the stone flags of width varying from 0.5m to 1.0m.  Photographic record of the area prior to work.  Archaeological watching brief.

There is a weathered penance stone immediately outside the north porch which will not be affected by the proposals.

## 7. Improvement proposals

The design philosophy is to make reasonable adjustments to provide a safe means of access along the path for all ages and abilities including wheelchair and mobility scooter users. This is consistent with the advice from Historic England<sup>7</sup> to meet the Equality Act 2010. This requires a 1.8m width of level flagstones, sufficient to enable two scooter or pushchair users to pass.



To maintain the important heritage of the area, we propose flat limestone flagstones. The recycled limestone flags have been selected for their hard-wearing features and compatibility with the heritage of the area.

The existing stone cobbles along the line of the 'level' footpath will be removed and stored for reuse as required.

The existing stone cobbles to the north of the 'level' footpath will remain in place. Stone cobbles will be laid in gravel areas north of the path, between the limestone flag footpath and the external wall to the cottage.

To the south of the recycled limestone flag footpath, stone cobbles will be laid up to the edge of the elevated churchyard area or to a width of 0.5m.

## 8. Governance and approvals

As the proposed work is within the churchyard and outside the church, it is subject to approvals from Cotswold District Council (CDC) and the Gloucester Diocese (DAC). CDC has indicated that if the path is relaid on the same alignment by a GCC contractor then it would be considered permitted development.

<sup>7</sup> East access to Historic Buildings, Heritage England, Dec 2012; Easy access to Historic Landscapes, heritage England Dc 2013.

A Faculty is needed from the Diocese for GCC to carry out the works. The DAC approved the proposals in December 2021 and a petition has been submitted to the Chancellor.

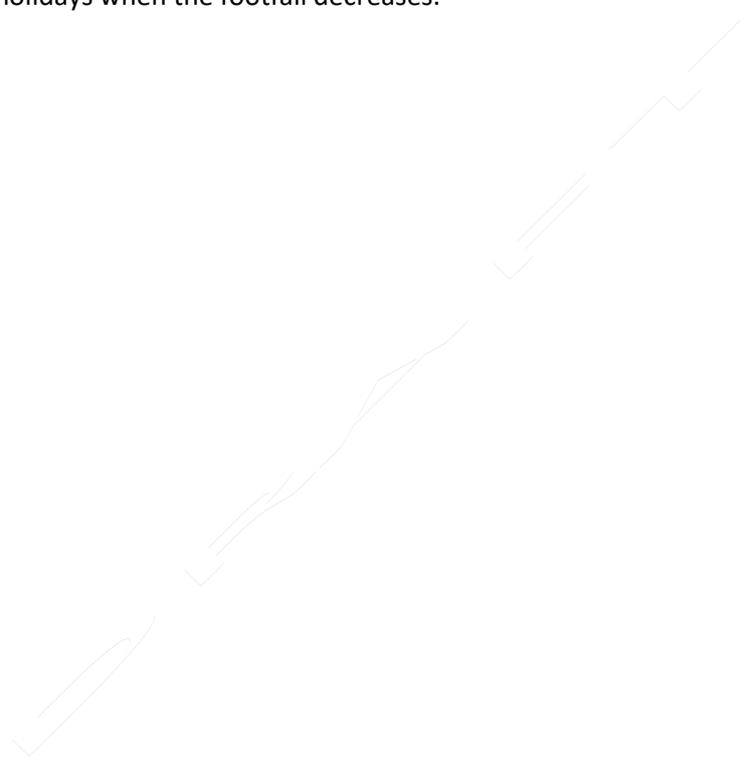
## 9. Costs

While it is the GCC responsibility to maintain the path, the need to meet higher conservation standards means that the cost is higher than a standard path. GCC has indicated that the cost of the works is £26k. To date they have sourced £18k from internal budgets. The Lechlade Heritage and Development Trust has granted £5k. The Lechlade Town Council has granted £3k towards the project.

Lechlade St Lawrence PCC has incurred architect and archaeologist fees and associated costs of up to £1k.

## 10. Timescale

Subject to approvals and meeting the funding gap, the works have been scheduled for August 2022 during the school holidays when the footfall decreases.



### 11. Artist's view of completed footpath

