



Friends of the Nickey Line Newsletter 28 – December 2021

WHAT'S IN THIS NEWSLETTER?

It's a bumper issue since it covers a full year since our last newsletter.

- **What's Happening on the Nickey Line**
- **Surface Work in Harpenden and Maylands / Hunters Oak sections and Issues Arising**
- **Improved Access from Thumpers**
- **Busy Year for Work Parties**
- **Book Holidays with Ramblers Worldwide Holidays and Earn the Friends £s**

WHAT'S HAPPENING ON THE NICKEY LINE

New 5 Year Greenspace Action Plan for St Albans - New Surfaces Issue

The new 5 year Greenspace Action Plan (GAP) for the St Albans DC section of the Nickey Line (i.e. everywhere but Dacorum) is still being formalised. One significant issue from the drafts we have seen and also from discussions with officials is the type of new / replacement surfaces wanted when funds allow for surface improvements, particularly in the more rural sections of the Line.

The type of surface matters, especially in the rural sections - it will affect the level of usage, who uses the Line and how they feel about it. Costs vary and funding limitations will affect how much can be done and how quickly. There will be an issue for longer term repairs and maintenance too.

Black Tarmac is the officials' main preference, primarily because it provides a good surface for many users including disabled people and cyclists, and is also widely regarded as the most long term cost effective surface - although it is more expensive than some alternatives to lay so may be more difficult to fund initially.

But Black Tarmac is the most urban and least natural looking surface, although it does become less stark over time. It is also widely felt to encourage very fast cycling which can be incompatible with comfortable shared use by pedestrians and dog walkers who make up the majority of Nickey Line users in most sections of the Line. Strongly negative feedback on these as well as cost grounds was received by the Friends from some users after the Hunters Oak section in Hemel Hempstead was tarmacked earlier this year (see below in Hemel Hempstead News). Additionally, some runners find it too solid.

Alternatives to Black Tarmac include:

- **Coloured Tarmac** - In its simplest form this is basically tarmac with a top coat of coloured stone and this was laid in 2014 from Hollybush Lane to Roundwood Crossing in Harpenden. It probably costs up to 50% more than Black Tarmac and, like Black Tarmac, is long lasting with lower maintenance requirements. It may feel a bit rougher than Black Tarmac at least initially depending on the top coat used and extent of loose surface chips. It is good for cycling, probably not as 'fast' as Black Tarmac at least initially but, like Black Tarmac, is not necessarily liked by some runners. Its main advantage is that it can look more natural and less 'urban' than Black Tarmac.

- **Rolled Aggregate (Crushed Stone)** - Cheapest option, various types and qualities exist. These do not last as long as Black Tarmac and may need more maintenance. They generally cost half (or less) than Black Tarmac but should not look or feel as 'urban' as Black Tarmac. They are rougher than Tarmac and may well deter high speed cycling - but if laid well are okay for normal or 'country' cycling.

Friends conducted a survey of visitors to our stall at the Redbourn Classic Cars event in September. 35 visitors recorded their surface preferences usually after a detailed discussion of pros and cons and most added comments explaining their choices and/or views. Walkers formed the main user group at 80% with cyclists second at 46%. (Users could select multiple types of use.) Our conclusions were:

- Users are interested and have opinions on the choice of surface for 'their' Nickey Line
- Coloured Tarmac was the clear user first choice overall with half the users rating it as such
- Rolled Aggregate was the second choice overall
- Black Tarmac was the least preferred new surface, with only 1 in 7 choosing it as their top choice
- The main opinion driver was keeping the Line looking 'natural' with both the top two new surfaces supporting this (as well as the fall back 'Leave The Line As Is' option)
- The desirability of controlling fast cycling with the surface choice and devices like chicanes was also important to some users.

***** If you have a view on this, please do email us on friends@nickeyline.org *****

Harpenden News

Roundwood to Five Ways Surface

Many of you will recall the terrible mud bath that the Roundwood to Five Ways (Townsend Lane extension) became after the wet winter and spring.



Friends approached St Albans DC (SADC) to obtain urgent surface repair work. Initial cost estimates were beyond the SADC funding available but a civil engineer Line user we consulted suggested scraping the mud layer would improve the problem until more fundamental work could be

undertaken. Scraping of this section had been last undertaken in 2014 and it had certainly made a difference then.

Encouraged by a very welcome donation of £1000 from the then County Councillor, David Williams (Many thanks David), we offered to contribute to reasonable work costs. The quote came to £3,500 which was more than had been expected but SADC then found the funds required (Many thanks to SADC) so the scraping went ahead in August organised by Herts Countryside Management Service (CMS).

One bonus was that the scraping uncovered some long buried abandoned rail lengths left over from the line clearance after the railway closed in 1979.



We believe the section immediately west of the Roundwood platform is soft and likely to become muddy still so have requested remedial patching (probably with rolled aggregate) of this section to prevent more problems building up. We are awaiting quotes from CMS and we shall then discuss funding options with them including the level of financial support from us.

Hedge Trimming below the Power Lines

In July, GB Construction, on behalf of UK Power Networks, reduced the height of the hedging and trees below the power lines between Roundwood Halt and below Knott Wood. Some of this looked quite messy at the time, but most of it is now looking okay after the summer's re-growth. In the new year our volunteers will be dealing with any areas that still need attention.

Hemel Hempstead News

Access Improvements for Thumpers in Hemel Hempstead

Dacorum BC have repaired the main steps down from Thumpers to the Nickey Line. Our thanks to their management team....

However, there remains a lack of level access to the Nickey Line between Queensway Bridge and

the edge of Yew Tree Wood. Friends have identified a level access possibility from Thumpers with an apparently modest price tag and with disabled parking nearby. This would provide a much improved access to the Line for local residents, disabled users, parents with young children etc. CMS have agreed our suggestion as attractive and are to seek costing and funding.



Thumpers Access Steps Repaired in October



Thumpers Possible Level Access Point

New Surface East from Maylands

A new Black Tarmac surface was laid from Maylands industrial estate to Cherry Tree Lane bridge in a project funded by Herts County Council and managed by CMS. The path is now much wider and of course less muddy than it was and this is very welcome. Snagging work has continued and at the time of writing is almost completed.

The nature of the Black Tarmac has generated mixed feedback from users and fuelled the debate about the type of surface we want for other sections of the Line as discussed above.



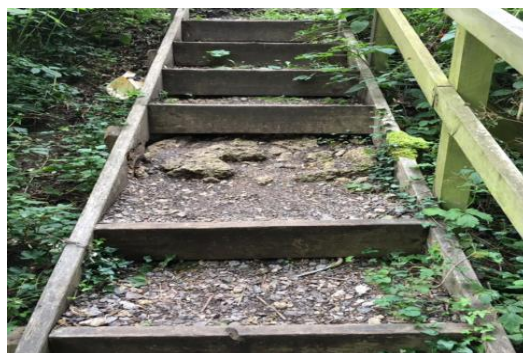
The New Tarmac Surface Near Hunters Oak



The End of the Tarmac at Cherry Tree Lane

Cherry Tree Lane Steps

Cherry Tree Lane steps are in a poor state and getting worse. We have asked St Albans DC / CMS to repair them and understand it should be done over the coming months.



General Waste Bins Take Dog Waste

We have continued to lobby for additional waste bins in the Hunters Oak section. A reminder that both Dacorum and St Albans general waste bins take dog waste.

**** Please use any available waste bins for your dog's poo bags ****

Redbourn News

Redbourn Line Work

We undertook several work parties in and around Redbourn this year collecting litter and controlling the vegetation plus working on the Orchard. See our section on Work Parties for more details.

Redbourn Classic Cars

We ran a stall at the September Redbourn Classic Cars event, using it to attract new members and volunteers as well as asking users about their views on new surface types.

As usual we would like to thank the Cars event organisers for a free pitch and also Luton and Dunstable Cycling for use of their gazebo. On this occasion we needed to have help from some of our volunteers for us to run the stall so many thanks to them too.



FRIENDS NEWS

Walks Programme

Three walks have been held since our AGM in May - on local and natural history in Redbourn, a butterfly walk and a nuts and berries walk incorporating folklore stories.

We hope to run a number of walks this coming year, so watch our website www.nickeyline.org for details.

We are also hoping that Rothamsted Research will open Knott Wood to the public at bluebell time and we will be writing to them in the new year to check on this.

Work Parties

Since our AGM, we have had 4 team litter picks covering the whole length of the Dacorum BC part of the Line, topped up by some 'solo' collections from volunteers and committee members.

In the same period we have also held 4 full general work parties, thanks to our willing volunteers. Two of these have been held in the Dacorum section for the first time, now that we have resolved insurance issues with Dacorum BC.

We have also run a number of smaller working groups who have undertaken litter picks and vegetation control at various locations along the Line, including the cutting of the scallops (cleared areas) by Knott Wood and the usual crop of fallen trees and branches throughout the Line.

The orchard site near Chequer Lane, Redbourn is now being managed by the Friends. Much bramble root has been dug out and two replacement apple trees planted – a Hitchin Pippin and a Brownlee’s Russet. William Brownlee was a Hemel Hempstead based fruiterer based at Marlowes, who developed the apple in 1848, so we believe his Russet is a very appropriate choice. Pyramidal orchids and shaggy inkcap toadstools have since been seen there.

In September we held a ‘thank you’ event for volunteers, in recognition of the amazing help we receive from them in keeping the Nickey Line attractive to users. Many thanks to Redbourn Parish Council for the free use of a room at their Parish Centre.

Why not join our volunteer team? Our work parties are fun and enjoyable, and a great way of contributing to making the Nickey Line even more enjoyable for all. You can work for as long as you wish, and all contributions are welcomed.

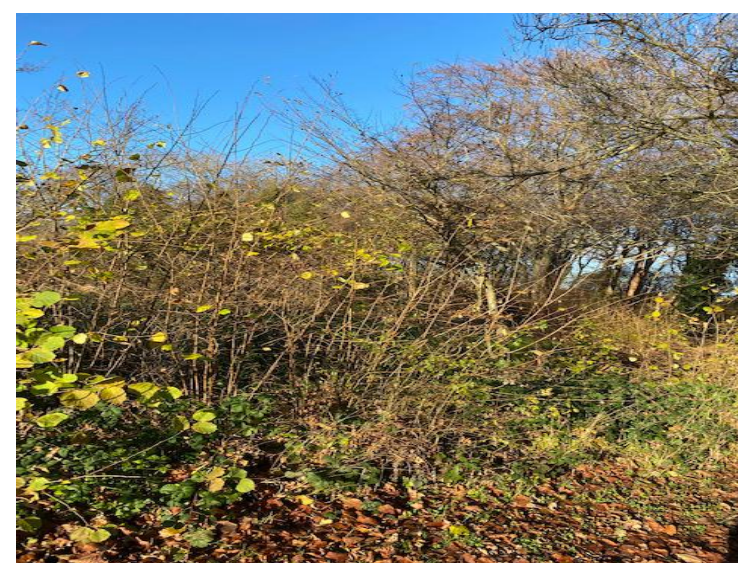
**** Contact Geoff at geoffbunce.t21@btinternet.com or 07903 476584 to be added to our volunteer working party email notifications. Watch the website for details of future planned work ****



Dacorum Litter Pick Team in April



February Litter Pick ‘Haul’ from Redbourn to Cherry Tree Lane



Hedge Laying Site near Knott Wood ‘Before’



... And ‘After’



Cutting Back Vegetation at Hunters Oak in November



Brush Cutting by Knott Wood in September



Redbourn Orchard with Flowers in July



Orchard After the Annual Cut in September

AGMs 2021 and 2022

The 2021 AGM was held 'virtually' on Zoom. Thank you to all of you who participated. All motions were supported.

Given the ongoing Covid situation, we anticipate holding the May 22 AGM on Zoom and shall fix the date in the New Year.

Facebook Group "The Nickey Line"

Our Facebook Group has grown substantially and now has over 1050 users who publish pictures, comments and stories about the Line as well as communicating problems noticed.

Why not join the Group today and add your favourite photos and stories?

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/363326034099616>

Ramblers Worldwide Holidays Walking Partnership - Book a holiday with Ramblers Worldwide Holidays (www.ramblersholidays.co.uk) and you can nominate Friends of the Nickey Line to receive £10 per head for UK holidays, £20 for short haul holidays, and £30 per head for long haul holidays. **You must nominate Friends when you book!**

Nickey Line Zoom Talk To Your Local Group? We can give illustrated talks on the History of the Nickey Line online via Zoom to local organisations who want a guest speaker, in return for a small donation to the Friends. If you know of any organisation who may want one, please suggest they email us on friends@nickeyline.org.

A Happy Christmas and Covid Free 2022 to all our Friends!

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