

Wheelchair Trail Around Gogmore Farm Park, Chertsey

17th June 2020

As a result of the Government's new loneliness strategy, a multi-agency working group set up by Runnymede Borough Council identified wheelchair users as needing places to go and socialise. One suggestion was to have a local wheelchair trail.

Suzanne Stronge from Runnymede Borough Council devised a wheelchair trail through Gogmore Farm Park, Chertsey and asked if RALG could assist her with testing the route with a wheelchair user.

She produced a draft sketch map of Gogmore Farm Park's wheelchair trail along with a set of trail instructions including interesting information about the park and points along the trail.

Pauline Carter (a wheelchair user) and her husband Simon met Suzanne and her husband to trial the trail on a warm but cloudy weekday.



The hour and a half spent together was very fruitful for both parties and it was easy to maintain social distancing on the way round. It is a very interesting route that could easily be themed around the unusual range of trees to be found along the way – all of which are explained in Suzanne's notes and reflect their botanical history.

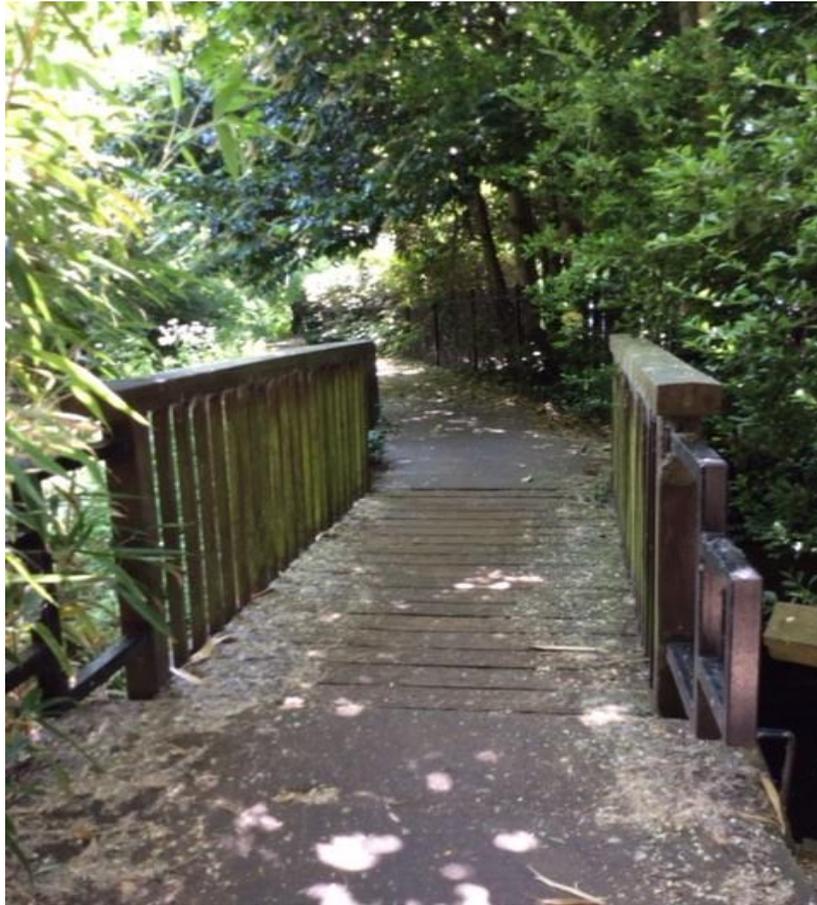
There were some minor accessibility issues highlighted and useful discussions exploring on how to enhance the user's experience.

Accessibility:

- There is a long ramp with wide gates and a tight turn at the top to be negotiated to access toilet facilities. There is a disabled toilet (radar key) but it was closed off due to lockdown
- There were plenty of seats/benches/resting areas along most of the trail but there is one stretch about 1/3 of the way round that has no seats/benches for about 300m
- Most of the route is tarmac but there is one graded section of about 150m that could be muddy underfoot when wet so could be slippery and a hazard to disabled walkers. If conditions on any day are deemed a hazard, there is an option to detour via the roadway but this does require crossing the road twice (once on a blind bend) or simply retrace to the first bridge on the walk (immediately next to the toilet block) and cross to re-join the route there
- This section is also slightly narrower than the rest of the walk but still sufficient for the width of a wheelchair or a walker with carer/guide
- The route would be enhanced by edging strips along the paths for visually impaired users, especially as the walk follows the course of the River Bourne
- One bridge required its tarmac access ramp to be repaired since it had a large crack which could pose a trip hazard to disabled walkers



- One bridge's wooden decking required being recovered with wire netting so in wet weather wheelchair users and disabled walkers had better grip



- The tarmac path was uneven in places as well as having a camber in places due to tree roots



- There is an option to cut the route short about halfway round, or make a short diversion for toilet facilities
- There are ample spots to picnic near the start/finish or about halfway round but there was only one picnic table (next to a children's play area. It was suggested that, if more picnic tables are provided, they include wheelchair accessible designs.



User Experience:

- Suggestions were offered to enhance and clarify the route instructions. It was suggested that the trail instructions/information could be produced as a trifold leaflet and downloadable Word document for phone/laptop
- It was suggested that the trail instructions/information could be made accessible for the visually impaired by being Arial font size 16 in black on a yellow background
- It was suggested that the experience could be improved for trail users, especially the visually impaired, by having soundbites of any bird songs that may be heard in the park available to download so trail users could perhaps try to identify bird songs heard
- It was suggested that the trail could be improved for trail users, especially the visually impaired, by having a description of the tree bark patterns for the trees that can be found in the park so trail users could perhaps try to identify trees by the feel of their bark



- More points of interest were added to the proposed leaflet/download as it became clear on the way round that the area has an interesting botanical history and theme based on its unusual diversity of trees. Suzanne's notes included several photos to assist identification

- There are a number of accessible fishing platforms which are big enough for wheelchair users. One is reached by a ramp which, on the day of the walk, needed foliage cut back and weeds removed whilst another needed a deep hole to be filled in near one of the wooden boards by the riverbank



- There are children's playground facilities next to the car park

