

Marton Moss

Footpaths, Bridleways and Cycle Routes Study

Revised August 2022



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Revision Note

This Report was first published for comments as part of the Evidence and Policy Options stage of engagement on the Neighbourhood Plan in July 2020. Since then, following on-the-ground improvements to the some of the paths the Appraisals have been revised. However, this a changing situation as paths can easily become overgrown again or other blockages arise. So, apart from this note it remains unchanged from the version published for the Regulation 14 stage consultation.

Introduction

1. This study sets out what public footpaths, bridleways and cycle routes exist across Marton Moss, reports on their useable condition and recommends what improvements are required to help ensure the routes can be fully used and enjoyed by local people. The study informs the preparation of the Marton Moss Neighbourhood Plan. It also provides information that the Marton Moss Neighbourhood Forum can use in discussions with Blackpool Council concerning the maintenance of the routes.

Background

2. Public footpaths and bridleways are Public Rights of Way and are routes along which the public have a legal right to pass through land irrespective of its ownership, provided users keep to the line of the designated route. It is an offence to block such a route and make it impassible. Users have a right to use a designated route even if it is planted with crops. Most Public Rights of Way are classed as footpaths – routes that can be used for walking only. Some Public Rights of Way are ‘bridleways’, these can be used by persons on horseback, leading a horse, riding cycles and on foot. There is however no obligation to facilitate the use of bridleways by cyclists such as to provide routes that are gate-free or surfaced for wheeled use. Cyclists are required to give way to other users on bridleways.

3. Public Rights of Way are particularly important in an area like the Moss where there is a substantial amount of open land but most of it is privately owned and not open to public use. Legally designated public footpaths and bridleways are off-road routes that provide opportunities for users to take leisurely recreation or more active exercise and so gain overall health and wellbeing benefits.

4. Unfortunately, not all the designated routes across the Moss are open to be used, some have deficiencies that hinder their use. One footpath is partly blocked by a building and several others are obstructed in some way. Ensuring that Public Rights of Way (PROW) are fully open and able to be used is a statutory function of the local highway authority – in this case Blackpool Council. The Council has committed to carrying out this role in the Lancashire Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2015 – 2025 (2016) which was jointly produced with Lancashire County Council and Blackburn-with-Darwen Council.

5. The Improvement Plan states (on page 6):

“Our responsibilities in respect of the PROW network include:

- *Signposting and waymarking of footpaths, bridleways and byways;*
- *Keeping up to date the Definitive Map and Statement which is the legal record of public rights of way;*
- *Maintaining the surface of a public right of way to a standard appropriate for the purpose for which it is used;*
- *Maintaining bridges over natural river courses;*
- *Keeping the public rights of way open and available by ensuring that other partners fulfil their responsibilities”*

6. The Improvement Plan goes on to set out (on page 7) the following statement of actions:

- Manage public rights of way
- Secure an improved network of public rights of way
- Improve wider public access

7. The Improvement Plan also recognises that people are generally living longer and with an aging population the incidence of disability increases, including problems with mobility. The three Councils commit to making the use of PROW more accessible and easier to use. This means less use of stiles and gates, appropriate ground surfaces and the provision of benches. The commitment falls short of making all paths fully accessible to wheelchair users. This is not an obligation on the authorities as it is recognised that it is not reasonably practical to make such a standard of provision universal across rural areas.

8. However, the Improvement Plan (on page 24) does aim:

“to achieve a well maintained network that caters for the widest number of users and with this in mind it is our intention to focus on improving and upgrading specific routes so that they can be enjoyed by even those with the highest level of need. This requires prioritising our improvements on routes that provide the greatest benefit to the widest number of users, typically multi-user routes. The proposal is to audit [the] existing network to identify multi-user routes and prioritise these for upgrade and maintenance.”

9. The Improvement Plan therefore has laudable ambitions to improve the PROW network. The necessary improvements are largely guided by legislation and responsibilities that are outside the planning system. It is therefore not the role of the Neighbourhood Plan to resolve the enforcement problems of blocked or obstructed paths on the Moss, but it can, through policies relating to new development, help enable routes to be appropriately diverted, where necessary, and even for completely new routes to be created. Establishing a new statutory public right of way can be difficult and protracted involving the consent of the landowners. Such owners are often more amenable to allowing a concessionary, permissive path that allows public use without granting such users full access rights.

10. At present there are few off-road paths dedicated for cycling use in Marton Moss. The 'bridleways' each side of Progress Way east of its junction with Midgeland Road are signed for cyclists to use and provide useful connections to the minor roads north and south of the dual carriageway, although some of these include steps. The only other cycleway close to the Moss is along the west side of B5261 Queensway in Fylde Borough, a road that becomes Common Edge Road on the Blackpool side of the local authority boundary. Just north of that point the cycleway ends.

11. The provision of purpose-built cycleways and the signing of cycling routes are the responsibilities of the local highway authorities and so fall to Blackpool Council acting in that capacity for the Moss. The Neighbourhood Plan cannot directly propose the provision of cycling facilities unless these are to be enabled by proposed new development. The Midgeland Farm site presents an opportunity to provide new off-road paths for all users, including cyclists, as part of a community park. However, the scope for development schemes elsewhere on the Moss to improve opportunities for cycling are very limited, particularly given the importance of providing extensive connected up routes.

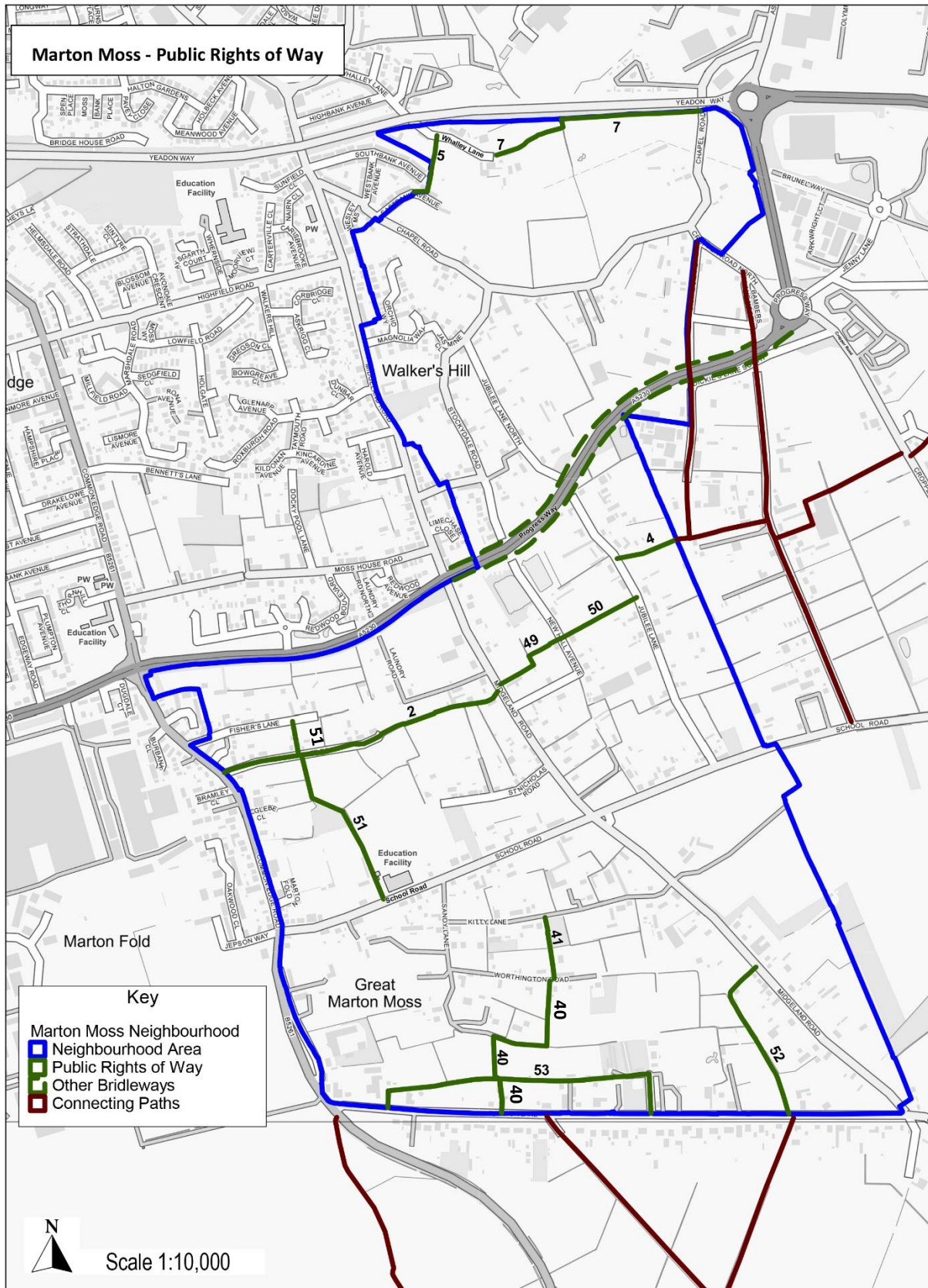
12. The best prospects of improving access for cycling across the Moss would be to sign routes along the less trafficked minor roads. Signage would help cyclists to easily find through routes and would also forewarn motorists of cyclists using the carriageway.

13. This report will firstly concentrate on each of the existing Public Rights of Way and will then go on to suggest possible new path routes. Towards the end of the report there is separate section dealing with cycling.

14. The following two pages show maps of the Neighbourhood Area. Map 1 shows the routes of all the Public Rights of Way (plus the bridleways each side of Progress Way) in the Neighbourhood Area along with connecting paths just outside the Area. The statutory path designation numbers shown on this map will be used to identify each right of way in the remainder of this document. Map 2 on page 7 shows the condition of the paths in terms of whether they are fully open for use, obstructed in some way or completely blocked.

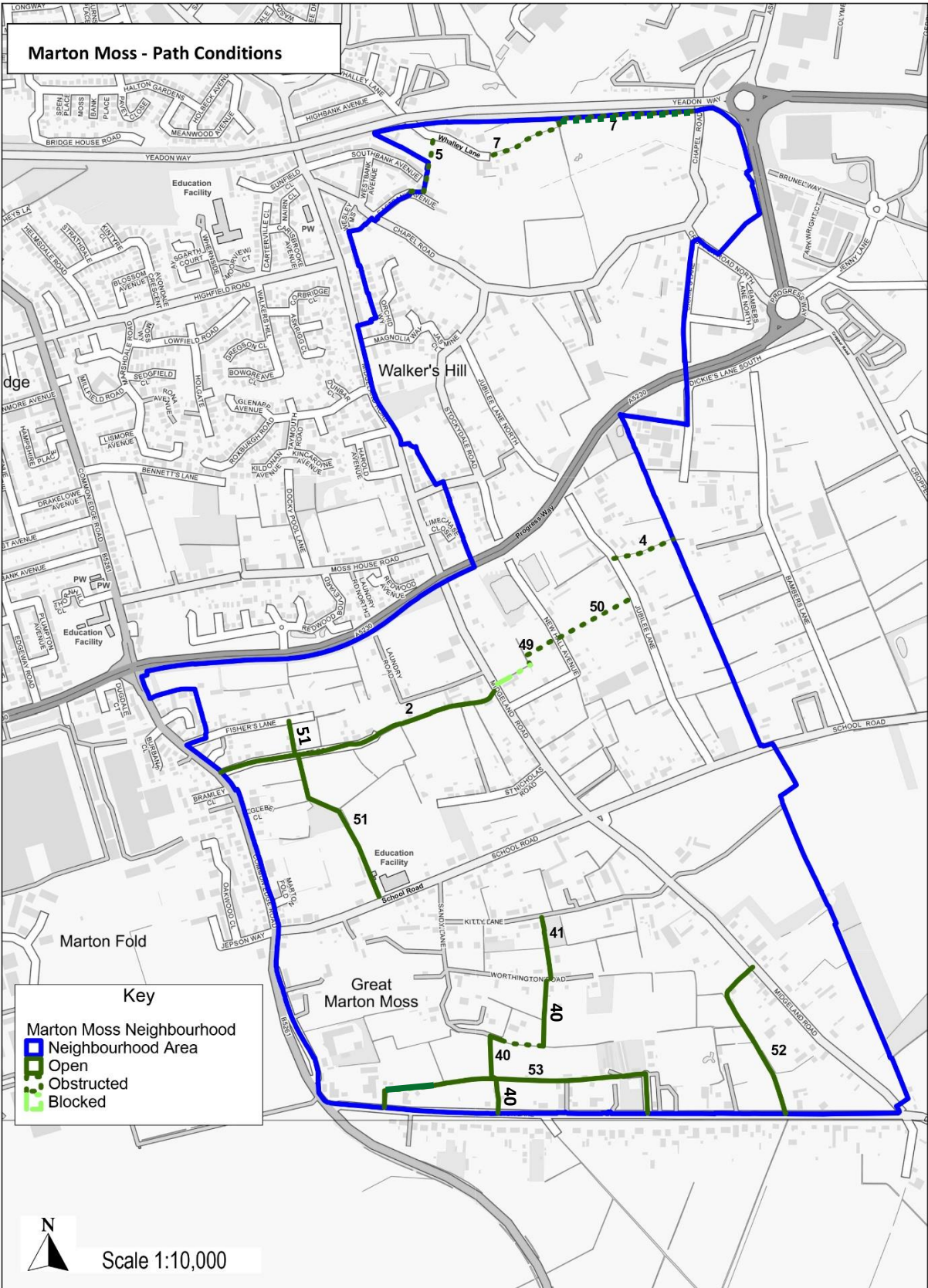
15. To inform the July 2020 version of this report attempts were made to walk all the paths in the Neighbourhood Area between November 2019 and February 2020. The condition of the paths was re-checked between October 2021 and February 2022. At that time of year seasonal vegetation along and across paths can be expected to have died back, at least to a degree. However, several paths were still found to be obstructed or difficult to use by the extent of vegetation.

16. On the pages following the maps are the Path Records; these detail the findings of the site visits and provide a commentary on the usefulness of each route and any recommended actions concerning their condition.



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Map 1: Public Rights of Way (and other Bridleways) in and around Marton Moss



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Map 2: The usable condition of paths within Marton Moss

PATH APPRAISALS

Footpath 2 – Ecclesgate Road (Common Edge Road to Midgeland Road)

Signage	Signs are displayed at both ends of the path.
Typical Width	About 5 metres at the western end where the route is a roadway, narrowing to about 1 metre at the eastern end that is only open to pedestrians.
Ground Conditions	Good. Approximately two-thirds of the route from Common Edge Road has a partially tarmacked surface (see Photo 1), further east through to Midgeland Road the surface is firm open ground (see Photo 2).
Gates, Stiles & Bridges	None
Any Obstructions?	No
Usefulness	High. Although the western part of the route is used as a vehicle access road serving several residential properties and for servicing a water attenuation basin, this does not detract from the attractiveness and usefulness of the path which also provides pleasant views over a major tract of open land to the south that is a characteristic feature of the Moss. The route also provides a convenient connection with Footpath 51 which links Fisher’s Lane with School Road.
Recommended Actions	None



Photo 1: Ecclesgate Road looking east from near junction with Footpath 51



Photo 2: Footpath 2 (continuation of Ecclesgate Road) alongside water attenuation basin

Footpath 4 - East of Jubilee Lane

Signage	Yes, clearly visible from Jubilee Lane.
Typical Width	Approximately 1 metre.
Ground Conditions	Firm open ground from Jubilee Lane to a horse stabling yard; then the route crosses a muddy horse paddock.
Gates, Stiles & Bridges	A bridge over a dyke at the far eastern end.
Any Obstructions?	Yes. Overgrown after second stile from Jubilee Lane and then considered illegally blocked by the Council by a fenced horse paddock with no stiles.
Usefulness	Moderate. The path is difficult to use because of the lack of stiles and equestrian uses however it does connect with paths outside the Neighbourhood Area. One is a path heading north which, at its southern end, is a little overgrown with vegetation before further north it becomes Dickie's Lane South. The other path due eastwards is passable but with care due to its restricted width to Bamber's Lane. From here pedestrian access to Ramp City skate park appears to be possible.
Recommended Actions	Provide stiles at each point where the path is fenced across and clear overgrown vegetation.



Photo 3: Footpath 4 from Jubilee Lane



Photo 4: Footpath 4 looking towards Jubilee Lane from just outside Neighbourhood Area

Footpath 5 – Eastbank Avenue to Whalley Lane

Signage	None
Typical Width	A minimum of about 1 metre
Ground Conditions	Appears reasonably firm
Gates, Stiles & Bridges	Gates at both ends
Any Obstructions?	Yes. The gates at each end are not locked but the one at Eastbank Avenue looks like a fixed fence panel may be blocked beyond.
Usefulness	Potentially useful. The route is short (about 150 metres long) and but contained within high fences at the Eastbank Avenue end (see Photo 6) and is not clearly demarked through a horse paddock which makes it intimidating to use however being able to gain easy access to Whalley Lane (see Photo 6) would enable walkers to continue eastwards along Footpath 7 (see below).
Recommended Actions	A permissive path across open land from the vicinity of Eastbank Avenue to Whalley Lane that then enables a connection to an unobstructed Footpath 7 to Chapel Road would provide an attractive alternative through route.



Photo 5: Footpath 5 showing high fences at Eastbank Avenue end



Photo 6: Footpath 5 'fence gate' at Eastbank Avenue end

Footpath 7 – Whalley Lane to Chapel Road

Signage	None
Typical Width	About 1 metre, where unobstructed.
Ground Conditions	Reasonably firm except at Chapel Road end where it is muddy
Gates, Stiles & Bridges	One bridge over a dyke.
Any Obstructions?	Yes. At the Chapel Road end the line of the path is overgrown with vegetation and fenced off from the road without a stile. To gain access to the path here users are forced to climb over the nearby field gate/fence and cross muddy ground. Further west along the northern boundary of the field/at the bottom of the Yeadon Way embankment, the line of the path is bounded by a post and wire fence (see Photo 7) and overgrown with vegetation in places forcing walkers back into the field. Access to the bridge from the Chapel Road end is obstructed by overgrown vegetation but beyond the path continues across under-used land (see Photo 8). Where the path reaches Whalley Lane is not clearly visible on the ground and is further obstructed by overgrown vegetation.
Usefulness	Moderate. This is the only Public Right of Way within the major tract of open land north and west of Chapel Road, characteristic feature of the Moss.
Recommended Actions	Display signs at both ends of path, provide a stile at Chapel Road, clear vegetation and other obstructions. A new path from Chapel Road near its junction with Stockydale Road to the mid-point of Footpath 7 would provide a useful route across the open fields.



Photo 7: Footpath 7 alongside the Yeadon Way embankment looking towards Whalley Lane



Photo 8: Footpath 7 showing footbridge and land beyond to Whalley Lane

Footpath 40 – Division Lane to Worthington Road via Sandy Lane

Signage	Signs at Division Lane, Sandy Lane and at eastern end of dyke-side length midway along the route but not at Worthington Road
Typical Width	About 1 metre but narrows to less than half this alongside a dyke from the eastern end of Sandy Lane (see Photo 9).
Ground Conditions	Reasonably firm except along dyke edge which appears unstable and is prone to flooding.
Gates, Stiles & Bridges	One bridge over a dyke.
Any Obstructions?	Yes. The dyke edge length is too narrow to safely use.
Usefulness	High. The length from Division Lane to Sandy Lane provides a very useful through route and it also connects with Footpath 53, see Photo 10. In addition, this length provides pleasant views over the major open land tract here which is characteristic of the Moss. Potentially there is also a useful link through to Worthington Road after turning northward beyond the dyke-side length. Here the path is undefined on the ground, so its route is not clear to follow.
Recommended Actions	Ideally enforce repositioning of the garden wall to allow widening of dyke-side length off Sandy Lane. Failing that, provide a boardwalk over the whole length of the dyke. Display sign at Worthington Road. Clearly define the stretch south from Worthington Road.



Photo 9: Footpath 40 alongside dyke looking east from Sandy Lane



Photo 10: Footpath 40 from near junction with Footpath 53 looking towards Sandy Lane

Footpath 41 – Kitty Lane to Worthington Road

Signage	At both ends.
Typical Width	Approximately 0.5 metres (see Photos 11 and 12).
Ground Conditions	Reasonably firm.
Gates, Stiles & Bridges	One bridge over a dyke.
Any Obstructions?	No
Usefulness	High, good link through.
Recommended Actions	None



Photo 11: Footpath 41 from Kitty Lane



Photo 12: Footpath 12 from near Worthington Road looking north towards Kitty Lane

Footpath 49 – Midgeland Road to New Hall Avenue

Signage	Yes, at both ends but concealed at Midgeland Road.
Typical Width	Up to 1.5 metres.
Ground Conditions	Rough under foot due to coarsely cut vegetation stubble and susceptible to flooding in places.
Gates, Stiles & Bridges	Stile at New Hall Avenue end.
Any Obstructions?	Yes. Path is partially blocked by a building at Midgeland Road end (see Photo 13) and is accessible only when that children’s nursery is open.
Usefulness	Potentially high as it would provide a convenient through route from Midgeland Road and could also connect with other paths further east (No. 50) and west (No.2).
Recommended Actions	Widen path around blocking building using adjoining land if necessary and improve ground conditions.



Photo 13: Footpath 49 from New Hall Avenue



Photo 14: Footpath 49 partially blocked by building off Midgeland Road

Footpath 50 – New Hall Avenue to Jubilee Lane

Signage	Yes, at both ends.
Typical Width	About 1 metre.
Ground Conditions	Tough going under foot with coarse cut vegetation stubble and parts prone to flooding.
Gates, Stiles & Bridges	Stile at Jubilee Lane end.
Any Obstructions?	No
Usefulness	Potentially high as it would provide a convenient through route that could be continued further westward if Footpath 49 is made passable.
Recommended Actions	Improve ground conditions.



Photo 15: Footpath 50 from New Hall Avenue



Photo 16: Footpath 50 showing flooding

Footpath 51 – School Road to Fisher’s Lane

Signage	Present throughout.
Typical Width	About 1 metre.
Ground Conditions	Tarmacked at School Road end, then a mown grass strip to Ecclesgate Road (see Photo 17) but often with some waterlogging in parts, firm open ground between Ecclesgate Road and Fisher’s Lane (see Photo 18).
Gates, Stiles & Bridges	Dilapidated gate towards School Road end, several bridges over dykes further north, some in a poor state of repair.
Any Obstructions?	No
Usefulness	High. Provides direct access to the informal open space to the rear of the school that has all the attributes of a Local Green Space and continues as a convenient through route connecting with Footpath No. 2 and providing views of the major tract of open land south of Ecclesgate Road that is characteristic of the Moss.
Recommended Actions	Repair gate, bridges and either improve drainage or provide boardwalks along lengths prone to waterlogging.



Photo 17: Footpath 51 looking towards Ecclesgate Road



Photo 18: Footpath 51 north of Ecclesgate Road looking towards Fisher's Lane

Bridleway 52 – Midgeland Road to Division Lane

Signage	Present at both ends but neither are clearly legible.
Typical Width	At least 2 metres.
Ground Conditions	Firm and generally grassed.
Gates, Stiles & Bridges	None.
Any Obstructions?	No. Metal locked bollards (see Photo 19) at each end do not obstruct legitimate users but prevent vehicular use.
Usefulness	High. This is a rare bridleway in the Neighbourhood Area and connects a lightly trafficked length of Midgeland Road with Division Lane which has other bridleways continuing further south in Fylde Borough.
Recommended Actions	Replace signs.



Photo 19: Bridleway 52 near Midgeland Road



Photo 20: Bridleway 52 looking north from Division Lane

Footpath 53 – Off north side of Division Lane

Signage	Yes, at both ends.
Typical Width	About 1 metre.
Ground Conditions	Mostly firm bare ground but also some tarmacked lengths.
Gates, Stiles & Bridges	None.
Any Obstructions?	No.
Usefulness	High. Provides a useful alternative to Division Lane (which does not have footway pavements), connects with Sandy Lane via Footpath 40 and provides views of a major tract of open land which is a characteristic feature of the Moss.
Recommended Actions	None.



Photo 21: Footpath 53 near junction with Footpath 40 looking east

'Bridleways' along each side of Progress Way east of Midgeland Road

Signage	Well signed as multi-user paths for pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders.
Typical Width	Approximately 1 metre (see Photo 22).
Ground Conditions	Tarmacked throughout.
Gates, Stiles & Bridges	None.
Any Obstructions?	No.
Usefulness	Although the surfaced width is limited given their multi-user purpose, these paths provide useful off-carriageway routes that connect on both sides of Progress Way with the cul-de-sac ends of New Hall Avenue, Jubilee Lane and just outside the Neighbourhood Area, Dickie's Lane and Bambers Lane.
Recommended Actions	None



Photo 22: 'Bridleway' along south side of Progress Way near Jubilee Lane looking east

Public Rights of Way Conclusions and Overall Recommendations

17. The provision of Public Rights of Way across the Marton Moss Neighbourhood Area is currently a mixed but improving picture. Some parts are well served by easy to use paths providing attractive and convenient through routes. Other parts are poorly served with obstructed or blocked paths. Some of the deficiencies would be easily solved with better maintenance and further improved signage but other shortfalls pose greater challenges. As indicated towards the start of this report most of the available remedies fall outside planning powers and hence the scope of the Neighbourhood Plan. However, the Plan does potentially have a role to play in facilitating better path provision with a policy enabling 'planning gains' to be negotiated as part of planning applications for development.

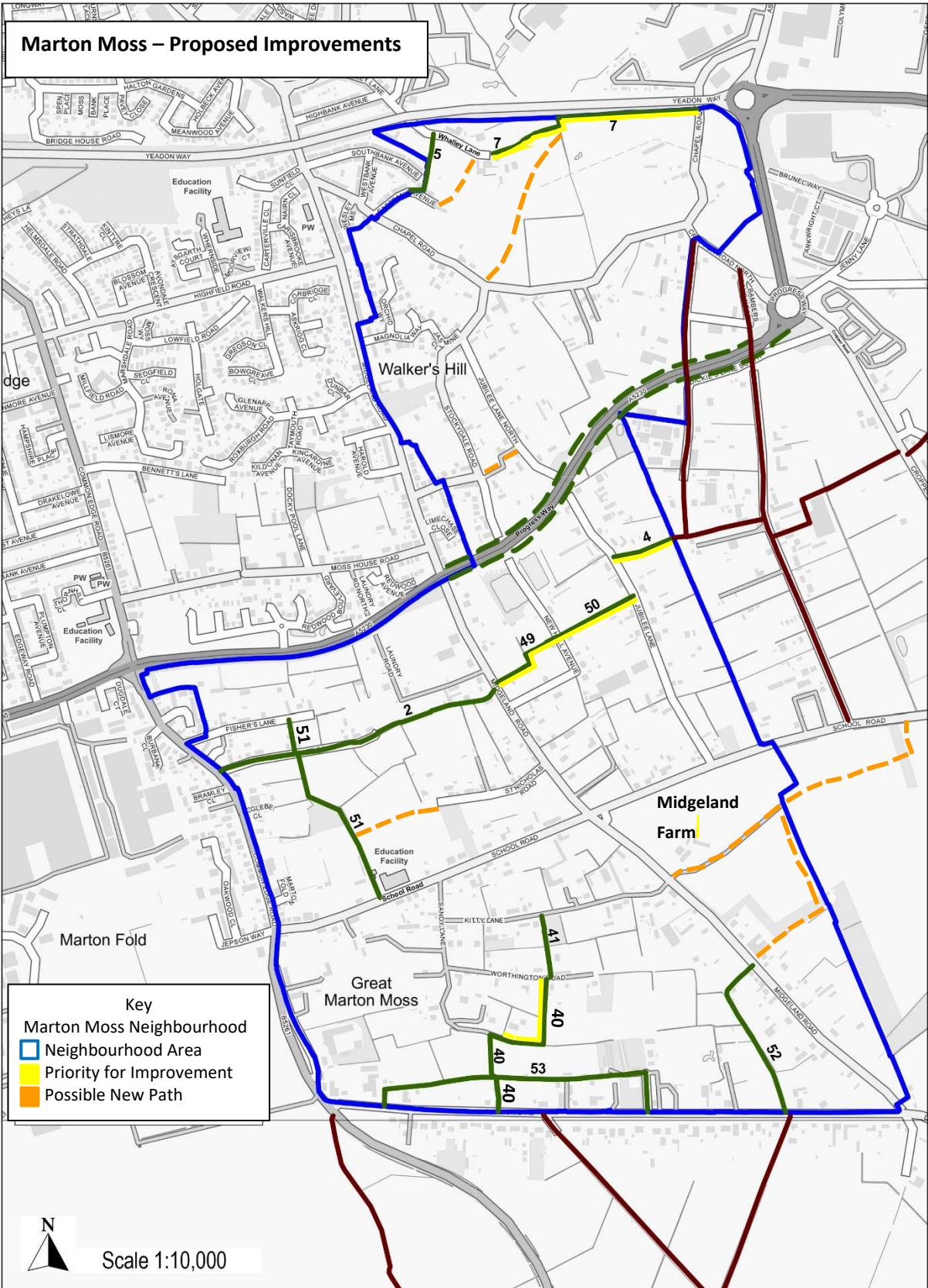
18. The map overleaf (Map 3) highlights the existing public rights of way that should be priorities for improvement and suggests the approximate routes of possible new footpaths that may be achievable with the landowners' consent and/or implementable in combination with development proposals.

19. At present the northern part of the Area is poorly served with useable paths. Footpath 7 from Chapel Road to Whalley Lane should be the easiest to clear of obstructions given these are mainly caused by overgrown vegetation. However, a new southerly route from this path either linking with Eastbank Avenue and/or to the vicinity of the Stockydale Road/Chapel Road junction would greatly improve accessibility to this major tract of open land. Further south on Stockydale Road is a possible link through to Jubilee Lane North, however although previously used informally this is not open to the public.

20. In the central part of the Area, south of Progress Way and to the east of Midgeland Road there are again problems with blocked and obstructed paths. The main focus here ought to be to provide a useable route from Midgeland Road able to connect right through to Bambers Lane (outside the Area) by improving Footpaths 49, 50 and 4 including, if necessary, a minor diversion of Footpath 49, probably associated with development of land off Midgeland Road.

21. To the west of Midgeland Road and north of School Road, Footpaths 2 and 51 provide convenient east/west and north/south links to local services including St Nicholas School and Nursery, sports and recreation spaces and The Shovels public house (albeit into the back of the carpark). Footpath 51 would however benefit from better drainage or the provision of a boardwalk south of Ecclesgate Road. A suggested new path from near the western end of St Nicholas Road through informal open space (see separate Local Green Space Study report) would make a very useful addition to the network as the route would also provide access to the School and nearby football ground.

22. Nearly all the public rights of way across the Moss are public footpaths. Aside from the bridleways bordering Progress Way, path 52 is the only one open to horse use. That does provide a pleasant alternative to using the southern end of Midgeland Road and also connects with bridleways continuing further south in Fylde Borough. However, horse paths are in short supply overall across the Neighbourhood Area and although the relatively lightly trafficked side roads are useable by horse-riders additional provision ought to be made. One solution would be to provide a bridleway route around the Midgeland Farm site as part of a multi-user community park. Map 3 overleaf shows only a few possible main path routes to and through the Farm site, many more multi-user paths could be provided with a new park.



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Map 3: Public Rights of Way proposed improvements

Proposed Cycle Routes

23. There are no routes in the Neighbourhood Area that are reserved for cyclists. Creating new paths solely for cyclists (cycleways) would be expensive. Given that there is a network of minor, less trafficked roads and lanes across the Moss these offer a good opportunity to be signed as cycle routes where cyclists would use the carriageway. Signage would help cyclists to easily follow the routes and would also forewarn motorists of cyclists.

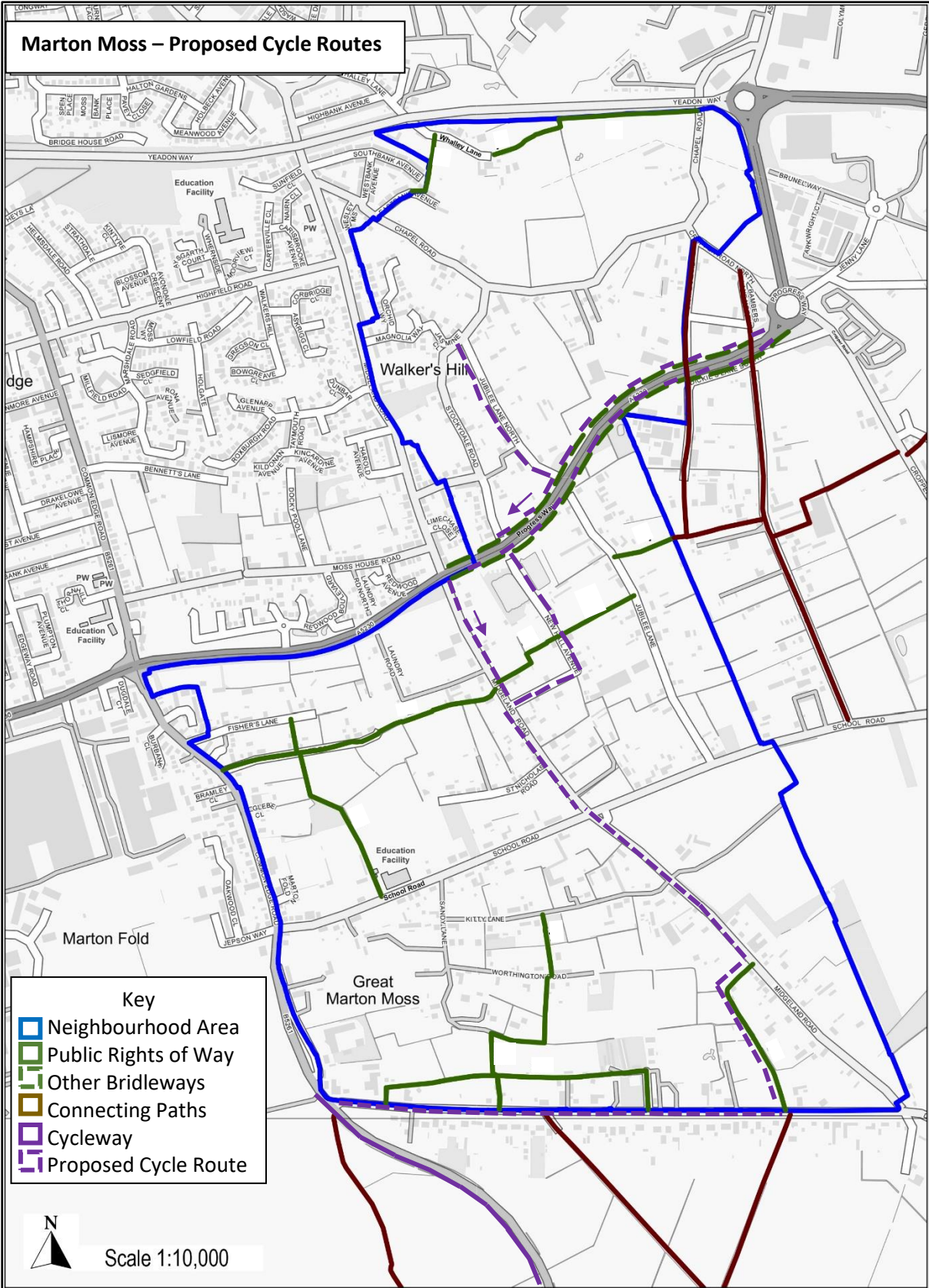
24. Map 4 (overleaf) shows a suggested network of cycle routes that could be signed for that purpose. Division Lane makes a junction with the B5261 close to the northern end of the cycleway that links with St Annes along the west side of Queensway (outside the Neighbourhood Area). Division Lane itself is lightly trafficked as is Midgeland Road South and bridleway 52 provides a potential 'short cut' connection between them, especially if it becomes suitably surfaced. North of School Lane, Midgeland Road is busier but sufficiently wide to safely accommodate cyclists.

25. At the Midgeland Road junction with Progress Way cyclists can use the 'bridleway' paths either side of this dual carriageway east of the traffic signals here. However, due to other traffic movements this junction is not easy for cyclists to use. For northbound, as well as eastbound cyclists, it is suggested New Hall Avenue is used to reach the 'bridleway' path on the south side of Progress Way and this is then used up to a safe crossing point near the roundabout with Cropper Road. This is outside the Neighbourhood Area in Fylde Borough, but Bambers Lane North offers a short but little trafficked route. An alternative would be Dickies Lane (north), on the boundary of the Neighbourhood Area. This has the status of a bridleway so is open to cyclists, but it also serves as a commercial access road making it less attractive to use.

26. The 'bridleway' paths on both sides of Progress Way provide connections with several side roads to the north and south. For cyclists heading south from Chapel Road, Jubilee Lane North probably offers the best compromise of attractiveness over convenience to users being less trafficked than Stockydale Road. Chapel Road itself is not proposed to be signed as a cycle route as it has limited width, especially to the west, and is quite busy with traffic. So unfortunately, the proposed cycle route does not provide a connection to retail and business use to the north east of the Neighbourhood Area.

27. Southbound cyclists from Jubilee Lane North/north side of Progress Way will be able to more easily use the traffic signals at the Midgeland Road junction given they will not need to cross other traffic and therefore Midgeland Road heading south can be signed as a cycle route.

28. The proposed network may have limited appeal to those cyclists wanting the shortest possible, quickest routes to places and who do not mind using busy roads but nevertheless the routes proposed should prove attractive to recreational cyclists.



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Map 4: Proposed Cycle Routes