

Cumbria Local Access Forum meeting, 21 April 16 Newbiggin Village Hall

CLAF members heard a presentation by North West Coast Connections Project (NWCC), set up by National Grid to transport electricity generated by the proposed Moorside nuclear power station to link with the national electricity transmission grid.

NWCC have identified corridors both north and south from Moorside in West Cumbria, and have liaised with over 28,000 interests since 2014. Ways to reduce the impact of 50m high new pylons along the Cumbrian coast were discussed. Burial of the power lines (undergrounding) would need three trenches, a 60-100metre area being cleared of vegetation with buildings every 800m. A tunnel is planned for under Morecambe Bay, involving some new technology.

Formal consultation will start later in 2016. In March 2017 the plans will be submitted directly to government for approval, and in 2019 building the grid will start for the 2024 planned electricity generation from Moorside nuclear power station.

The construction work planned for 2019-2024 will generate much heavy traffic, to get equipment on site and remove spoil excavated from the Morecambe Bay tunnel. Road, rail and dock improvements are being considered. NWCC are looking for places to dump the spoil from the Morecambe Bay tunnel.

There will be very considerable disruption to public rights of way (PROW) along the route. This will include the Coast to Coast footpath and cycleway, and the Hadrian's Wall path. David Gibson of Cumbria County Council gave an update on meetings with NWCC, who have set up a consultancy to 'get it right' over PROW. They are trying to categorise the usage of the paths crossed, into major, secondary and ordinary PROW.

It was felt to be a very useful presentation which generated many questions.

The formal afternoon CLAF meeting included a very useful discussion on the future organisation of the Local Access Forums for Cumbria, Lake District and Yorkshire Dales National Park following the National Park extensions. It is hoped in future to work together more closely and efficiently.

Members reported on meetings which they had attended on behalf of the CLAF, on footpath diversion applications visited, and on the creation of a new stretch of footpath. Others reported on repairs to flood damaged paths and on the growing evidence of the value of countryside access to people suffering from dementia.

The next meeting is scheduled for 20 July 2016. Members of the public are always welcome to attend.

