

Cumbria and Lakes Local Access Forum (CALLAF) meeting at St Bees, 4 July 2017: Roll-Back on the England Coast Path route

CALLAF members met at St Bees to hear about progress on Stretch 2 of the England Coast Path (ECP), from Natural England (NE) lead staff Gerry Rusbridge and Kerry Rennie. Gerry gave a brief overview to Coastal Access, based on the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009. Each of the 8 delivery units (a stretch) in NW England go through 5 stages. 1. 'Prepare' Information gathering. 2. 'Develop' Meeting occupiers and owners to agree the path orientation. 3. 'Publish' Publishing proposals with an 8-week period for responses. 4. 'Determine' Objections considered and approved by the Secretary of State. 5. 'Open' involves putting in signs, and steps if required, and then the new Access Rights make the ECP open to the public, as a strip of Access Land. The legislation allows for 'Roll-Back' if the coast is eroded back, without any need to refer back to the Secretary of State. NE and CCC are currently discussing the need for the path to roll back at St Bees, to take account of severe erosion around the southern end of the golf course and Pow Beck.

In Cumbria, Stretch 1 from Allonby to Whitehaven is open. Stretch 2 Whitehaven to Silecroft has gained approval and is in the 'open' stage, though coast erosion is slowing progress as the whole stretch must be fully established before commencement of the new rights. Stretch 3 Allonby to Gretna has 10 objections, concerning possible spread of disease, bird disturbance and quickly rising tides, to consider; these objections are being handled by the Planning Inspectorate. Stretch 4 Walney Island is approved; establishment work will get underway this year and the stretch may well be open to walkers next summer. Stretch 5 Silecroft to Silverdale is nearing the end of planning work in Stage 2. Members asked about estuary crossings, which present a severe problem as Natural England's coastal access programme cannot fully fund the larger bridges which may be required. NE will continue to explore partnership project opportunities for these new crossings.

CALLAF members were led south from St Bees in blustery wet weather. Bob Muscat, Cumbria Countryside Ranger, outlined the local support, from Allerdale and Copeland Councils, St Bees School, Parish Council, caravan site and most farmers, for the ECP route to go over the cliffs at the seaward side of the golf course. Since agreeing the line for the ECP, storms have eroded the boulder clay cliffs nearly to one of the golf course greens leaving too little room for the coastal ECP, and Roll-Back is needed. All agreed that the preferred route is seaward of the golf course, to link with the prepared new bridge over Pow Beck. This route is being negotiated.

The formal afternoon meeting at the Seacote Hotel, St Bees, included a further coastal update, mentioning two other points on Stretch 2 where Roll-Back involves some realignment. The ECP is expected to stay on the seaward side of Sellafield. Members reported on current rights of way issues, in Kells, and Kendal, and the many temporary closures, including at Dodd, Keswick, to mend storm damage. There was discussion on the issues relating to parking at Seathwaite in Borrowdale. Parking is also a problem near Cat Bells. Low water levels in Derwentwater recently had added to the problems. It was agreed that further provision of sustainable transport was needed in Borrowdale. A walk leader reported a good experience of footpaths and useful signs in the Grange and Arnside areas. A member of the public had raised the issue of the legal use of 4x4 vehicles on unsurfaced roads (UCRs) around Tilberthwaite, Coniston and there was discussion about maintenance responsibilities and related issues. The item will be included in the next agenda for full discussion.

The next meeting will be on Thursday 5 October 2017.

