

Solway Wetland Centre, Campfield Marsh Nature Reserve



The latest meeting of the Cumbria Local Access Forum was held at the new visitor centre. Members heard about RSPB initiatives to increase visitor numbers and improve access to this northern area of Cumbria's countryside, for families and the general public, in addition to birdwatchers. Since the RSPB bought the farm it has been returned to lowland moss and raised mire. Visitor questionnaires led to the development of a Discovery Zone for the young at heart, with leapfrog, giant sculptures and a board walk for pond dipping, 'Tale Trails' which include 'fun maps' with stories and activities, which appeal to all ages, including teenagers. Members heard about the HLF funded Landscape Partnership Scheme, which is looking to link the reserve with longer walks in the wider countryside. One example is an ancient footpath 'Trod' to Anthorn, which has become impassable as it is now a bog, and needs a boardwalk to improve access.



After an informal lunch, the afternoon meeting started. Members heard Chair's actions since the last meeting, including attendance of a Regional Local Access Forum meeting in Manchester. An early agenda item is Members' News; everyone makes a contribution about their activities or raises a news item. It makes for a lively discussion, airing different viewpoints about access improvements. Members heard about funds for improving crossings of major roads: about 30 of these projects are planned for Cumbria. Concern was expressed over intrusion into upland landscapes by tree planting, plastic rabbit guards and fence lines, as can be seen from the M6 above Tebay. Worries were expressed that the economic and financial benefits of using public rights of way, in walking, cycling and horse riding are not being included in Cumbria's Health and Well Being programmes. Members heard a report of access to the Warcop MOD range, and news was heard that a judge has ruled that bridleways recorded on old maps are acceptable as evidence for addition to the Definitive Map. The Forum is represented on the South Lakeland Estuary Crossings, a group which is looking at the feasibility of attaching pedestrian and cycleways to railway bridges. There was much discussion over the processes involved in the Public Inquiries that take place when there are objections to the addition of new rights of way.

Despite the difficulties faced by Cumbria County Council, of further budget cuts and restructuring, much is happening to improve access to Cumbria's countryside, and the Cumbria Local Access Forum has an important advisory role to play.

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