

Cumbria Local Access Forum (CLAF) meeting at Hadrian's Wall, Birdoswald July 2016



Members met in a torrential thunderstorm at Lanercost Bridge, before moving north to Howgill Farm, to look, appropriately, at a stretch of the Hadrian's Wall Path which was suffering from a complex series of drainage problems, dating back to Roman times. Heritage England prefers the National Trail to have a short grass surface, but this is quickly trampled by the large numbers of walkers. These issues are not easy to solve due to the severe restrictions imposed in working on top of a Scheduled Ancient Monument, where an archaeologist is required to oversee any excavations, for example to replace finger post indicators or kissing gates. The paperwork involved in maintaining a National Trail on top of a Scheduled Ancient Monument is daunting. Cumbria County Council is now working much more closely with landowners. Partnerships with local communities may be the way forward, particularly as future funding is uncertain. Funding is often for only 2 years, while work programmes may be 3 years. Walkers along the National Trail help to keep local services open, like the buses, B&Bs and shops. Thanks were expressed to Gary Pickles, Hadrian's Wall Path Ranger, and Chris Graham, Countryside Access Officer, for explaining the challenges faced along Hadrian's Wall.



In the afternoon meeting, which took place at Birdoswald Visitor Centre, members welcomed Councillor Helen Wall, from Barrow, to the CLAF. The major

item was the planned merger with the Lake District LAF which will coincide with the National Park extensions on 1 August. The Chair reported on constructive meetings with senior CCC officers about how to deliver countryside access with fewer staff. Members raised a large number of points. Concerns were heard that horse riding opportunities were not sufficiently stressed on the County's Countryside Access web page, and that there are no bridleways in the Barrow area. Other concerns were that some stiles had over-high steps, and that very large numbers of cattle in fields can frighten walkers. Standard stile steps on a ROW are 30mm, any higher would be the landowners' responsibility /choice, and it was explained that many farmers are now using a New Zealand system of grazing large numbers of dairy cattle in a series of paddocks. Parks in Carlisle are still suffering from the effects of Storm Desmond, and there are concerns about the surface of the Sustrans cycle way to Dalston, as there is no money for maintenance. There is now a pack of 'Doorstep Walks in and around Carlisle' available on the city's web site. Members were asked to look out for, and respond to, the report on Stretch 3 of the England Coast Path, from Allonby to Gretna.

