

# SAVE THE WAVERLEY VIADUCT ACTION GROUP

PART OF SUSTAINABLECARLISLE.ORG

1 November 2011

You will probably be aware of our on-going campaign to re-open the Waverley Viaduct. A petition to re-open the viaduct to the public was discussed at a full City Council meeting on 4 May 2010. The decision reached included a pledge that a representative of the petition's organisers should be 'involved and kept informed of progress'. This has not happened.

This letter is to give a brief history of the viaduct since its closure to rail traffic in 1973 and the current campaign to have it re-opened as a recreational and environmentally friendly facility for the public.

The Waverley line between Edinburgh and Carlisle closed in 1969 but traffic as far as Longtown MOD site continued until 1973.

Since then, pedestrians have used the viaduct as an unofficial footpath, although there have been occasional efforts to prevent them doing so by the British Rail Board, the body responsible for the land, which erected steel fences at each end of the viaduct to permanently restrict access on health and safety grounds. British Rail in Residuary at York are responsible for the maintenance of the viaduct.

The viaduct is a listed structure and a National Heritage footpath (Hadrian's Wall path) passes under its southernmost brick 'skewed' arch, built on a banked curve, a fine example of Victorian engineering. Unfortunately the site is disfigured at the moment by the above-mentioned fences which have been further reinforced with sheet steel such that they now remind one of that hideous structure, the 'Berlin Wall'.

The southern end of the viaduct is situated in Engine Lonning, the site of old engine sheds and workshops, which has been transformed into a nature reserve over recent years. The northern end passes over the riverside public footpath which gives access to Etterby and the 'Kingmoor Sidings' and 'Kingmoor North and South' nature reserves. Incidentally the main footpath through Kingmoor North is built on the old Waverley Line as far as Crindledyke.

Through the 70's and 80's the viaduct was left open and walkers, fishermen, workers and other pedestrians regularly used the route for recreation or commuting to work without having to travel into the centre of Carlisle and across Eden Bridges. The viaduct always had a low parapet wall and, as it was neglected by British Rail for many years, it decayed and was helped on its way by local vandals who pushed parapet stones over into the river, so that eventually access was blocked permanently on health and safety grounds.

Since then local people and organisations have campaigned for re-opening of the viaduct. British Rail originally offered to bring the viaduct into good repair and give it to Carlisle City together with a lump sum of money for future maintenance. This was rejected by the Council in spite of a 2100 person petition and speeches from supporters at the meeting. It later transpired that British Rail were prepared to continue maintaining the viaduct at their expense and re-open it to public access if the City council were prepared to pay for the building of parapets walls. This latest offer has yet to be discussed by the council. The existing steel barriers were only given temporary planning permission until March 2011 and we hope to persuade the council to

accept British Rail's new offer and not to renew permission for the barriers.

In response to the application for temporary planning permission which was made in December 2009 (application 09/1094) the Council's planning officer made the following points:-

- A. Prior to the erection of the fencing the viaduct was well used.
- B. The Council favoured a long-term solution that would 'allow pedestrian access across the bridge'.
- C. The steel sheeting then in place was very unsightly and was clearly visible from the surrounding area. It had a significant adverse impact on the character of the area and on the listed viaduct. The same criticism applies to the replacement fence erected after planning permission was won.
- D. The owner BRB (Residuary) was in early 2010 'working up a scheme' to repair the parapet walls.

#### Arguments for re-opening the Waverley Viaduct

1. We would have a re-instatement of foot access for walkers between the north and the south of the river within a short time - for which a large number of people in the city have been campaigning over many years. Indeed in their 1976 publication *Eden Riverside Trail* the Council, themselves, expressed the hope that 'by the end of September 1976 permission would be granted to open the viaduct for walkers, so that walkers on the trail could return by the river's north bank'. That was 35 years ago! How many trillions of gallons of water have flowed under the bridge since then?

2. We would no longer have the embarrassment of a hideous 10ft high, graffiti daubed metal wall within a few metres of the Hadrian Wall long distance footpath and the Cumbria Coastal Way footpath could use both banks of the river.

4. The recreational benefits of re-opening the viaduct are obvious, but I will list them anyway.

- (i) walkers, runners, fisherman and others on either side of the river could cross to the path to the other side and make a circular route of about 2 miles to return by the new CNDR river crossing. All four nature reserves in the area could easily be accessed by foot. Currently Engine Lonning is out on a limb and rather underused as a result. Opening the bridge would bring many more people to the area and make the river banks more popular for traffic-free recreation. It should be noted that, when BR applied retrospectively for erection of the 2 barriers in early 2010, their application was (unsuccessfully) opposed by the Council's countryside officer Jon May (application ref09/1094).

If the viaduct was opened up for walkers - 'which he favoured' - he considered it would provide a 'fantastic footpath link'.

- (ii) there would be a new, short, 'traffic free' route between Etterby and Newtown, including the Cumberland Infirmary for pedestrians. This would be a boon to workers living in these two suburbs who wish to walk to work on the other side.
- (iii) The Kingmoor Nature Reserve extends from Crindledyke (following the old Waverley Line) to Etterby Road. Footpaths link Kingmoor North, Kingmoor South and Kingmoor Sidings Nature reserves which naturally lead down to the river at Etterby and along the north bank to the Waverley Bridge. The Waverley Viaduct is the missing link requiring repair.

Those opposing the re-opening of the viaduct to pedestrian traffic have argued that they are concerned about the possibility of easier access to the north side of the river of 'undesirable characters' such as teenagers with air rifles and illegal motor cyclists. We would make two comments on this:

1. The comment, if valid, could apply equally to the same type of people crossing to the south from the north.
2. This is not a valid reason for keeping the bridge closed. There have been very few problems in the last year or so in Engine Lanning with this type of bad behaviour. Due to action through Neighbourhood Forums and co-operation of the police such problems have all but disappeared. Motorbikes being ridden illegally have been seized and destroyed by the police, who exercise a zero tolerance policy with this type of behaviour. They also treat the mis-use of guns very seriously indeed.

Our aim is to further publicise our campaign and persuade the City Council to accept the British Rail offer to continue to maintain the viaduct and allow access, as long as the Council agrees to provide suitable fencing.

We now know that the Council Planning department would accept wooden steps or a ramp descending from the downriver side of the northern abutment directly onto the existing public footpath, together with a central walkway, bounded by Paladin fencing, down the middle of the viaduct to satisfy Health and Safety requirements. This would be quite inexpensive and would not be a problem to English Heritage as the structure of the viaduct would not be affected. It would be an 'informal path' which could be opened in the near future. We have no idea of actual costs but it should be relatively easy for the council officers to cost such a structure. The existing eyesore of the 'Berlin Wall' style barriers, which will require new planning permission soon anyway, could be removed and the view from Hadrians Way of the viaduct would be much improved.

We would have the viaduct open for walkers at very little cost to the City. Once opened we are sure that its popularity with local citizens and visitors to the city will ensure that, as time progresses, further funding could be raised to improve the facility for walkers.

The importance of tourists to the city economy cannot be over-emphasised and the re-opening of this viaduct would have a very beneficial effect on that.

We are very grateful for the support of the following.

Carlisle Rambling Association, Carlisle and District Rambling Club, Living Well, Carlisle Angling Club, Cumbria Wildlife Trust, The Northern Viaduct Trust, The Cumbrian Railways Association, RSPB, Railway Ramblers and the Commons, Open Spaces and Footpaths Preservation Society (abbreviated to the Open Spaces Society) - the last three being national organisations.

Letter compiled by David Ramshaw with valuable input from other members of the Action Group.

Revised 1 November 2011.