

Campaign to reopen disused Carlisle viaduct gains crucial support

By Chris Story (Last updated at 14:05, Friday, 29 August 2014)

Success seems ever more likely for a hard-fought campaign to reopen a disused former railway viaduct.



Above: Highways Agency engineers carrying out work on the Waverley Viaduct

Critical support has emerged for pedestrians to be allowed to use the Waverley Viaduct in Carlisle.

The Highways Agency has taken over responsibility for the crossing from the British Rail Board Residuary (BRB).

And its officials say they will back moves to create a trust that would lead efforts to reopen and manage the bridge.

Their support is a significant boost to campaigners who believe they have a crucial window of opportunity to get access to the viaduct opened up.

They plan to form a trust to raise the money needed to achieve their aims – a move receiving no objections from the Highways Agency.

A spokesman said: “We are indeed in ongoing discussions with a group about re-opening the viaduct for pedestrian access.

“Although we are limited in the kind of practical support we can offer and issues such as the planning permission still need to be resolved, the Highways Agency is very supportive of the group’s aspirations and the idea of them forming a trust to help reopen and manage the bridge.”

Engineers have been at the bridge in recent weeks, carrying out maintenance work.

David Ramshaw, who set up www.savethewaverleyviaduct.co.uk, and retired lawyer Richard Bain are in discussions with officials about what the next steps could be.

They continue to gather political support for their cause, with Carlisle MP John Stevenson lobbying Dan Rogerson, an under-secretary in the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, on the issue and highlighting the possibility of the bridge becoming part of a nationwide coastal path.

Councillors have also given their backing to the cause, while more than 2,400 people signed a petition in 2010 calling for the reopening. Mr Ramshaw said: "The Waverley Viaduct has got to reopen. At some stage this has to happen, everyone says so."

Access to the bridge over the River Eden – a grade two-listed structure linking the Cumberland Infirmary to Etterby and Stainton – has been blocked for a number of years.

The British Rail Board Residuary put up the fences in 2009 as a temporary measure to stop vandalism.

Current planning permission for those barriers expires early next year and there is a reluctance to see that renewed.

Those backing the bridge's reopening believe the crossing would be an important link to the coastal and Hadrian's Wall footpaths, helping pull more visitors into Carlisle. The campaign group is an off-shoot of Sustainable Carlisle.

Mr Ramshaw added: "We don't know long it will take to raise the money or how much it is going to take, but it wouldn't take long for us to start work once we're set up."

A key element in securing support is likely to be tapping into Carlisle's status as a so-called healthy city and the reopening of the viaduct giving people more chance to enjoy exercise.

Jessica Riddle, a city councillor for Belle Vue, is one of the politicians supporting the campaign.

She said: "Carlisle is a healthy city and reopening the viaduct could contribute to that.

"Joining up the Hadrian's Wall and coastal paths makes sense. We would have a circular walk for Carlisle.

"I hope a new trust will be able to take this forward."

Campaigners are also certain that ways can be found to resolve issues over access at the Stainton end of the bridge.

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