



Bridleway Dedication – Woodland North of Rusland Church, Colton & Satterthwaite Parishes

Summary

1. A path through woodland owned by the Lake District National Park Authority has long been identified by staff as a potential bridleway.

Recommendation: We dedicate a public bridleway 566039/511094 through Sawrey Stricely, Brewer Wood, High Crag Wood, Stricely Wood and Stoney Hazel as shown ABCDEFGH on the map at Annex 1 – section CDEF being upgraded from existing footpath 566018/511063.

Background

2. Back in 2015 we consulted upon a possible bridleway addition through our woodlands north of Rusland Church. The proposed route runs from the unsealed road at Force Mills (Point A), southwards through Sawrey Stricely, Brewer Wood, High Crag Wood, Stricely Wood and Stoney Hazel to the road west of Rusland Church at Point H. The section CDEF is already a public footpath, and this would be upgraded to a bridleway, with ABC and FGH being added as a new public right of way. The proposal wasn't pursued – but we have recently revisited the site with our Ranger Team and Woodland Officer.
3. The land is already statutory open access land – so the whole area is open to walkers. But there is currently no legal access for horse-riders (or cyclists). An old extraction track runs through the entire plot, and we consider that this would make an excellent bridleway. Although the roads in the area are relatively quiet, creating a bridleway would mean that riders have more opportunities for circular routes.

4. The track already exists – and is already suitable for walkers and horse-riders. Some light trimming with hand tools is required throughout to make it more easily usable, and taking out a few shrubby growths back to the original tractor width (the southern half is a clear track already, the northern half has grown in a bit – but the tractor tracks are visible and the constructed edges of the track still there) – but this is already planned as part of our woodland management anyway. We would also replace (or remove) the two internal deer gates, which are coming to the end of their lifespan anyway. The character of the route is expected to limit its attractiveness to large numbers of cyclists, especially when compared to more suitable routes to the north. We have no plans to change the surfacing (except we might put a small pipe in at one low point that gets boggy and has some standing water in the winter). We intend just to leave it as an old extraction track with a solid (sub)base that has developed a natural top surface – making a perfect bridleway that may be used by occasional horse riders or cyclists. It is not proposed to promote it other than by informing the Ordnance Survey so that it will appear on their future maps.

Policy context

Links to Vision and Management Plan

5. The key outcome of the Vision for the Lake District National Park 2051 is that the Lake District is deeply valued by the nation as a thriving, working landscape, which is nature and heritage rich, climate resilient, and socially and economically vibrant.
6. The Management Plan contains the policies and actions for achieving the aims of the Vision. One of the nine objectives is to ‘Inspire people to understand, enjoy and care for the Lake District’, and one of the best ways to achieve this is to have an easy-to-use rights of way network to enable people to explore the landscape, nature and heritage. An aim within the objective is ‘Improving and maintaining the rights of way network’.

Links to Business Plan

7. Our Business Plan states what actions will be taken as the National Park Authority plays its part, in partnership with others, in realising the Vision. The core Access & Recreation Action is to deliver the 'improve, maintain, promote and integrate elements' of the 'Out there' Strategy to deliver infrastructure and services which focus on serving under-represented groups (as identified by the 'Lake District for Everyone' Key Outcome Group).

Links to other strategic plans

8. The Ranger Service Plan 2026-27 contains the priorities for our service, including Contributing to World Class Visitor Experiences. This aims to achieve a programme of activity that will implement the Lake District Access and Recreation Strategy.
9. 'Out There' our Access and Recreation Strategy for 2023 - 2028 (approved March 2023) contains our vision for countryside access and recreation in the Lake District, which is: A well-connected network fit for purpose in the 21st Century with high quality infrastructure, facilities and services meeting the needs of all visitors and residents. We have identified four priority themes of work, and under each of these are a series of strategic actions that will contribute to the achievement of our goal and our strategic aims. The four priority themes are:
 - Improve: rights of way and countryside access.
 - Manage and maintain: rights of way, countryside access and recreational activities.
 - Promote and engage: connect more people to nature and the special qualities of the Lake District.
 - Integrate: with health and wellbeing, sustainable transport and the economy.

10. This proposal will benefit cyclists and horse-riders by creating a public bridleway through attractive woodland – linking minor roads and creating the ability for short circular rides. This fits our overall aims of improving the network in general.

Options

11. The following options are possible:
 - a) Dedicate the route as a bridleway
 - b) Dedicate the route as a footpath
 - c) Do not dedicate the route

Proposals

12. I recommend option 11a. Option 11c will not achieve anything, and Option 11b is not good value as the area already has open access rights for walkers. Option 11a is the only option that brings about public benefit and creates a new access route for cyclists and horse-riders.

Discussion

Grounds and Tests for a Creation / Dedication

13. There are no specific grounds or tests in respect of dedicating new rights of way over our land. In essence, it's simply whether we wish to grant the public new rights of access, and whether we consider it expedient to do so.
14. We could assess expediency by considering the two questions under Section 26 of the Highways Act.
 - Is there a need for the new path?
 - Is it a good idea to create the new path taking account of;
 - how it will be more convenient or enjoyable for most of the people living locally or other members of the public; and
 - how it will affect the rights of those with an interest in the land

Is there a need for the new path?

15. We haven't been pressured by horse-riders or cyclists specifically wanting a new route here. It is not included in the Rights of Way Improvement Plan, but was initially raised as a suggestion through the Rusland Horizons Project. It could be said that there is not a specific 'highway need' for the path, as it effectively links the same two tarmac roads as the unsealed road just to the east, but if we are seeking to have safe, off-road, routes for non-motorised users – then this could be classed as 'needed'.

Will it be more convenient or enjoyable for most of the people living locally or other members of the public?

16. The bridleway will effectively create an entirely traffic free route through the woods, but really, it's more to do with enabling the potential for short circular horse rides (more than for cyclists) – such as shown on the map overleaf in red. This is a very pleasant 3.5km (2¼ mile) ride or walk, offering completely differing habitats of woodland and open views. And although the area is public open access land, many walkers feel much more comfortable planning and using public rights of way than access land where they don't always know what to expect.
17. Our consultees, especially horse-riders, have generally said that it will be a good addition to the network, so it can be taken that the public do indeed consider that it will be convenient and enjoyable for them.
18. A councillor from Colton Parish Council has raised concerns over issues of potential conflict with dogs, the lack of a need and funding. I have listed these below, with our responses *in italics*, and the councillor's replies to those. Whilst these concerns are validly held, our experiences with the >900km of bridleway within the Lake District show that they are often perceived potential issues, that don't generally arise.
- As an enclosed area dog walkers often have dogs off lead. Meeting a horse or bike as the footpath joins a bridleway could cause issues. I have met many walkers on the path.

- *Would it be possible to provide a bit more information on this please. In the Lake District we have approximately 940km of bridleways, most of which have links to footpaths, and all of which will be shared with walkers – often with dogs. We don't have any significant level of reports of conflicts between dogs and horses/bikes – so I'm wondering whether you have any knowledge of such incidents elsewhere that would help the committee? What issues are you envisaging?*

I have no specific incidents but having a young Collie my concern is he has recently started to bark when startled. He is familiar with bikes and horses but unexpectedly meeting either might illicit a response. At present I let him off lead in Stony Hazel but not on the green lane to the east as there is a possibility of meeting bikes, horses and vehicles. Someone unfamiliar with the area starting off on the footpath by the Rusland reading room may well be unaware that they are about to join a bridleway. I think I'm a responsible dog owner. I don't want to be responsible for an accident.

- Bikes already use the track.
 - *If the public are already using the route on bikes then this could actually mean that it has become a public bridleway through uncontested usage anyway. And weakens the above concerns.*

I have regularly seen mountain bike tracks in the mud on the footpath and on the proposed bridleway. I have seen 2 bikes using the proposed bridleway. I walked the proposed bridleway on the 10 th September to inform my response to this proposal and met 2 people on push bikes heavily laden with camping gear. They appeared to be looking for somewhere quiet to “fly camp” as it was late in the evening. Totally judgementally they looked like people who would do so responsibly!

- There is a Bridleway a few hundred yards away that goes to the same place. (I have never seen a horse or bike on it!?).
 - *I think you may be referring to the public road (not bridleway) to the east? This is actually part of the benefits of creating a bridleway through Stoney Hazel, as it will give horse riders a mainly traffic-free short circular route to ride in relative safety. I have seen bikes, and motorbikes on this road – and I've only walked it a handful of times!*

I have seen motorbikes on the green lane to the east. In the 5 years I have lived in Ickenthwaite I haven't seen a horse rider on the Riggs, the Nibthwaite to Ickenthwaite green lane or in the Rusland valley. I agree a quiet safe area for riders is needed. For whatever reason the Rusland valley appears not to be a place that's used. (If there are plans for a proposed riding stable or that the area is going to be promoted for horse riding I can see the need). Is there a need for another cycle route?

- Is there the funding to maintain the surface with increased usage?
 - *As this is our property, we will have access to two sources of funding – property and rights of way. The track is actually an old extraction track throughout, the southern half being solid underfoot, and the northern section having become a little more soil based. However, there is a solid sub-base underneath the soil surface. It is therefore our view that there is little likelihood of any significant maintenance requirements. We are not anticipating an enormous amount of additional usage.*

My maintenance concerns are prompted as much by the misuse of green lanes and footpaths. Your comments about uncontested usage are very true. I suspect if made a bridleway in Stony Hazel motorcycles will use it. (A convenient link to the green lane to the east). This is based on my own experience of reporting the washed out green lane from Nibthwaite to Ickenthwaite and resultant debris on the road. Residents cleared the road. When reported a again a month later after another storm I was informed that highways were aware as it had already been reported. A year later

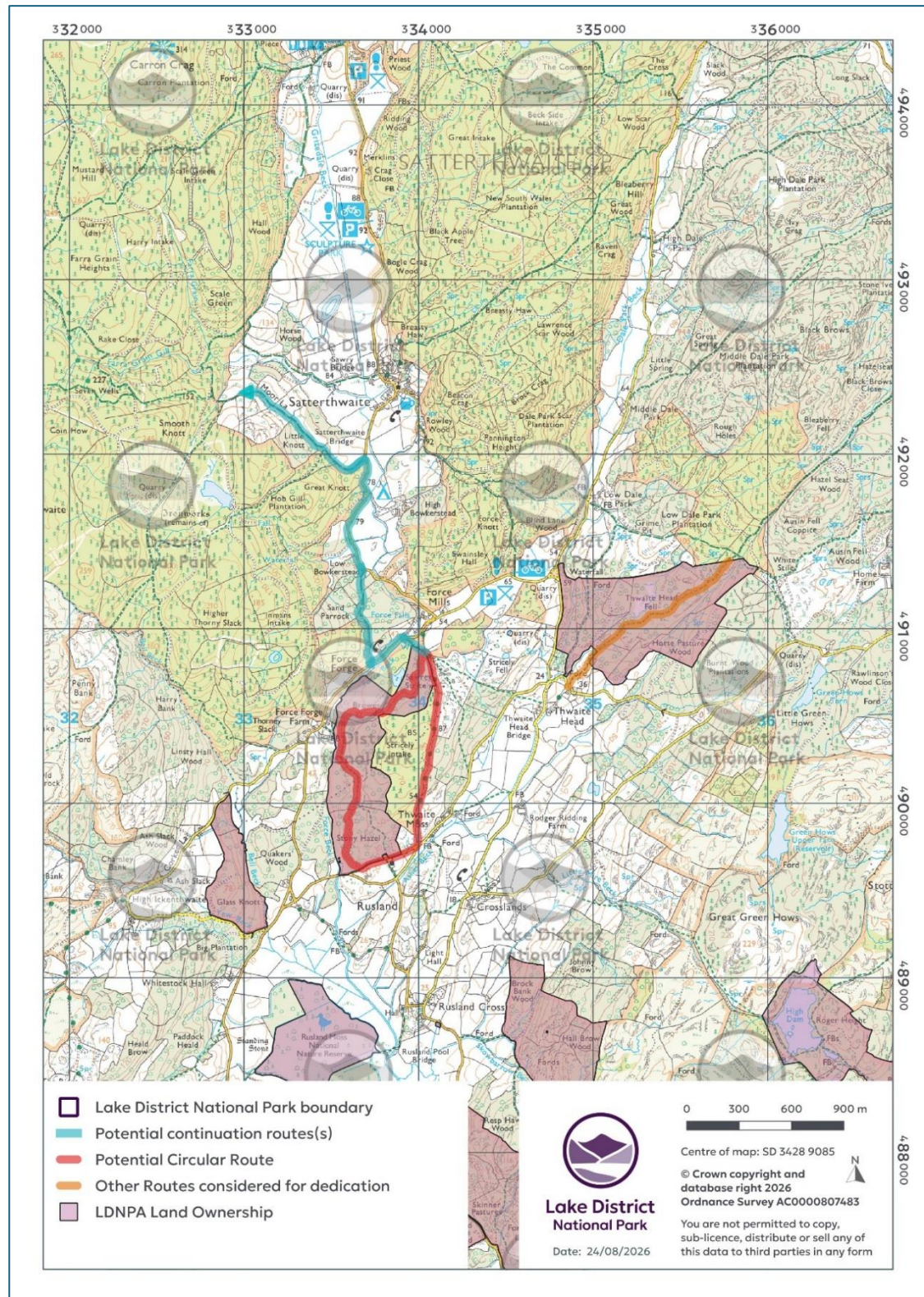
nothing has been done. In the meantime as predicted and subsequently reported motorcycles now use the footpath that links to the Riggs to avoid the worst of the green lane. (The police have it marked as an illegal route on their map). I am concerned that rather than providing a quiet safe bridleway for horse riding in Stony Hazel it will become an illegal green lane creating another problem there aren't the resources to resolve?

- *With regard to concerns about motorbikes suddenly starting to use the path because it is a bridleway. Since 2000, the length of bridleways within the National Park has increased from 855km to 940km. I am not aware of any reports of additional usage of this extra 85km of bridleways by motorbikes. Our experience is that the main motorbike/bridleway issues are old historic public roads that have been recorded as public bridleway – routes like Walna Scar, Garburn Pass, Park Head Road, and so on. Not on 'new' bridleways.*
- *The specific issue you mention at the Riggs seems to be as a result of a road becoming in disrepair and so motorbikes have used an alternative footpath instead. Which would indicate that the problem isn't so much motorbikers looking for new routes – but finding a way round an obstruction. And also, implies that the issue would be the same whether the route were a footpath or bridleway (that is – the route's status makes no difference).*

How will it affect the rights of those with an interest in the land?

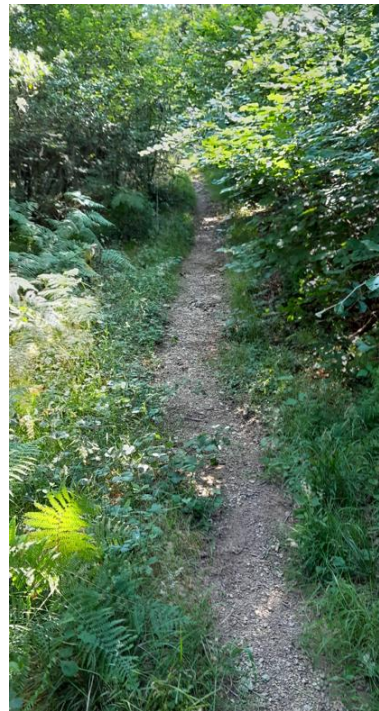
19. The land is wholly owned by the LDNPA. We would be dedicating the right of way and so accepting any impacts. We have consulted the deer managers and those with rights to work and extract wood – and they have raised no significant concerns.
20. The coppicer hopes that it will not encourage motorbike usage. We have no evidence that making something a bridleway encourages motorbikes to use routes that they were not previously using.
21. The property team have mentioned a few conditions to their support, all of which will be accommodated legally through the dedication process or minor practical works.

Map showing proposal, potential circle and linkages. (We also looked at dedicating the route in orange, but a recent site visit showed that it was not particularly suitable without large amounts of work.



Some recent photos of the track showing the nature and suitability (south to north).







Other Considerations Required by Legislation

22. Before changing the rights of way network we are required to have regard to any material provision of a Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP). No RoWIP formally exists now for Westmorland & Furness or Cumberland, so we are effectively considering our own Access & Recreation Strategy to be the LDNPA's RoW improvement plan.

https://www.lakedistrict.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0023/59270/Out-there-Access-and-Recreation-Strategy-2023-final.pdf

23. The proposals meet the general aims within the Access & Recreation Strategy (as discussed in the Policy section).

We have a duty to audit the proposals with regard to limited mobility. The route is mainly a rough track through woodland. There are no stiles, so it will be suitable for people with some limited mobility. It will not be suitable for all, simply because it would take large engineering works to surface the route to a satisfactory level – which would change the character. Conceivably more rugged devices (all-terrain trampers) could be used to follow the new bridleway – but they will already have access anyway, so the dedication will not change anything.

24. Impact on the needs of agriculture and forestry - assessment required under schedule 6, of the Countryside & Rights of Way Act 2000. The land is all amenity woodland rather than used for forestry. We already have proposals for altering the fencing and gates.

25. We consider landscape impact, biodiversity and archaeological interests and have to conserve biodiversity under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006. And under section 11 of the Countryside Act 1968 we have to have regard to the conservation of flora, fauna, and geological and physiographical features and the amenity of the countryside. No significant adverse effects have been identified. The proposal mainly uses an existing track, and no concerns were raised by the County Wildlife Sites Officer.

26. The proposal does not appear to have any effects on these aspects.
27. Impacts on Outstanding Universal Values (OUVs) – In my view this dedication would have no direct impact on the OUVs of the Lake District World Heritage Site.

Stakeholder consultation

28. We have consulted our usual consultees, including Westmorland and Furness Council (the Highway Authority), relevant user bodies, interested parties, utility companies – along with others who have requested to be consulted.
29. We received the following responses:

Name of stakeholder	Consultation response <i>[and LDNPA comments]</i>
Westmorland & Furness Council	Excellent proposal. Support this, always good to be able to create a new section of rural bridleway.
Colton Parish Council	Received from a Councillor: 1 As an enclosed area dog walkers often have dogs off lead. Meeting a horse or bike as the footpath joins a bridleway could cause issues. I have met many walkers on the path 2 Bikes already use the track. 3 There is a Bridleway a few hundred yards away that goes to the same place. (I have never seen a horse or bike on it!?) 4 Is there the funding to maintain the surface with increased usage?

Satterthwaite Parish Council	Satterthwaite Parish Council support the proposal and look forward to its completion if agreed.
Local Horse-rider	This looks a great initiative and would be very welcome. I look forward to its completion soon.
British Horse Society	We would support this and can apply for funding to help with gates etc.
Horse-riding Facebook groups (Trails Trust)	Just wanted to email to support the creation of the proposed bridleway between at Hazel Knott. This will be a fantastic link into the network and please add the Facebook groups Ride Cumbria (over 2600 members) and Ride Lakes Dales and Morecambe Bay (over 600 members) to the list of supporting groups. Hopefully if not already there will be an official email from Cumbria Bridleway Society.
Open Spaces Society	We have walked the footpath from Rusland Church to Force Forge on several occasions and have also of used the proposed bridlepath from F to G. This is a delightful area to explore but, despite being s16 CROW land, is best enjoyed from the PROW given the difficulties of walking through many parts of the woods due to the nature of the ground, the fence and the vegetation. The new route will enhance access to this area. We note the use of deer fencing, and gates across the existing public footpath which we wonder if, rather than replace the gates, you have considered whether or not the fence is required for the future and ought to be removed. It is a significant barrier to open access. <i>[referred to Woodlands Officer]</i>. You have noted one area of the proposed bridlepath which needs some drainage work but we wonder if a little more surface work might be done on the existing footpath surface where, in winter, it

	can become wet. However, such areas are only a minor part of the route. We would also hope that a clearer access path (perhaps permissive but would prefer a PROW) could be made from G-H so people on foot could more readily access Stoney Hazel Forge site. If such work has been done since our last visit then we would welcome that. <i>[Referred to Property]</i> Perhaps also the npa could look at a more user-friendly access to the existing PROW at Rusland Church, possibly even a minor diversion to take the path outside the church hall yard and buildings? <i>[Not related to this proposal – but responded]</i> The OSS would therefore thank the LDNPA for this initiative and fully support the creation of the proposed bridlepath.
Glade Deer Management	Thank you for your email and opportunity to comment. The creation of a bridleway will not affect our activity re deer management. Our only request would be prior notice of any groundworks taking place so we can avoid that area please?
Cycling UK	Thank you for this. It's great to see a proactive approach to creating more routes for horse riders and cyclists. Cycling UK would like to support this upgrade, which will be a good addition to extend the bridleway network in the area.
Cumbria Wildlife Trust	I am writing from the County Wildlife Sites Project about the creation of a bridleway through Stricely Wood County Wildlife Site. This site has been surveyed and was ratified by the Site Selection Panel in 2026. As this site was designated for the value of the habitat as a whole and the track already exists, there are no objections from the County Wildlife Site team.

LDNPA Woodland Officer	Supports proposal – would like to have gates recorded as limitations (will be removing them for now, to see what happens).
Coppicer	I am a licence holder and work the LDNPA woods in Stoney Hazel and have done for 30 or so years. I think it is a good idea, generally I'm always in favour of increasing rights of way access in our beautiful area. I do think that the deer fence gates might need improving / renovating though, so that they are easy to open and shut. I think you noted this in your proposal. I suppose my only slight concern is that it might attract attention of the less lawfully minded, off-road motorbikes? but hopefully not.
LDNPA Property Team	This seems a good idea, using the line of the existing footpaths minimises the impact on the woodland, and thus I am pleased to advise that Property are supportive of the proposal, subject to the following being taken into consideration, • This is an ancient woodland can we ensure that any impact on the soils / ground flora / tree root protection areas is kept to a minimum. • The proposal will involve the removal of an existing deer fence, this is largely redundant, but can we ensure that removing the gates now would not limit future management options without the need for a new Section 147 application. • Can we ensure that where the removal of encroached vegetation is required, disturbance to the adjacent woodland is kept to a minimum preferably through the use of hand tools. <i>[All agreed beforehand with the Woodland Officer]</i>

Demonstrating best value

Work Programme and Relevance to This Case:

30. This proposal has come about through a suggestion made for improved linkages during the timespan of the Rusland Horizons Project (2015-2019) – although it wasn't completed at that point. We are currently attempting to complete outstanding cases, and this is one of those on the list.
31. **Challenged** – The **challenge** is for us to achieve our policies without significant financial or staff implications. The proposal is relatively straightforward. Gates need replacing, but our Woodlands Officer already had this in mind to do anyway. Furthermore, the horse-riding societies have offered to contribute towards the costs of the new gates.
32. **Compared** – We have **compared** our casework completion rates with other authorities, and our rate of processing these sorts of orders is roughly comparable.
33. **Consulted** – We have **consulted** user bodies, the Local Access Forum, and other interested parties as part of the process, their responses and our comments are included above.
34. **Compete** – Only we can dedicate new rights of way over our land.

Finance considerations

35. The staff and administrative costs for a proposal such as this difficult to quantify. A standard public path order is around £3,150, and two adverts in the Westmorland Gazette, costing around £350+VAT each. But for a dedication, there is far less paperwork, only one process and one advert. So, it is probably less than half the amount. The works to the gates are mentioned above, and could end up fairly cost-free. Some minor trimming is required, which will be done by a volunteer working day.

Risk

36. There is little risk involved. There is no opportunity for objections to public path dedications, only a Judicial Review – which I consider unlikely here, given that this is our land.

Legal considerations

37. The dedications will be made under section 25 of the Highways Act 1980 and we are able to do this under this section by virtue of schedule 9, paragraph 11 of the Environment Act 1995. The later modification element will be made under section 53A(2) of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981, and we have powers to do such orders through our Agency Agreement with Westmorland & Furness Council. The action strikes a reasonable balance between private and public rights.
38. This report is to authorise us to dedicate a path on our own land. The actual dedication on our land will then be formally carried out by the Head of Rangers and Head of Resources through a separate document.

Human resources

39. The work from hereon to implement this proposal is approximately 25 hours from members of the Ranger teams, one hour from the GIS Officer, and one hour from a member of Legal Services. The work involved is all part of our day-to-day duties.

Diversity implications

40. I have not identified any significant diversity implications.

Sustainability

41. I have not identified any significant environmental, economic or social effects which would result from this proposal.

Summary

42. The majority of our consultees welcome and fully support the proposal. The concerns raised by a local councillor / residents are similar to those often raised when bridleways are proposed – but our experience at creating some 85km of bridleway over the last 25 years are that the initial perceptions of potential problems such as these generally does not convert into an actual issue when the change has happened.

List of Annexes

Annex 1: Dedication Proposal Map

Background papers	Case file reference: 1412.511.12
Author / Post	Nick Thorne, Senior Rights of Way Officer
Responsible Director	Hanna Latty, Sustainable Development
Date written	30 September 2026