

End of the line for construction as A66 Keswick to Threlkeld trail is reopened

Its re-opening and improvement, which will benefit cyclists and pedestrians in particular, was made possible by Highways England's designated funds programme which covered almost half the £7.9 million project costs.

Bruce Parker, Highways England's head of planning and development for the North West, said:

As part of our ongoing commitment to giving cyclists and pedestrians a better deal along our major A roads network, including the A66, we were delighted to be able to provide almost half the money needed to restore and enhance the link between Keswick and Threlkeld. It is fitting that the route has re-opened today exactly five years after it was so badly damaged by Storm Desmond.

The route provides a much safer and far more pleasant alternative to cyclists and pedestrians using the busy A66 and we hope it is used and enjoyed for many years to come.

To mark the re-opening on Friday two local school children from Threlkeld and St Herbert's Primary Schools were the first through the Bobbin Mill tunnel which has been re-opened for the first time in nearly 50 years as part of the project to fully reconnect the route.

Monty and Holly both aged 10, were joined by the Mayor of Keswick, Paul Titley, Chief Executive of the Lake District National Park Authority, Richard Leafe, along with various other community and partner representatives for a socially distanced celebration.

The Keswick to Threlkeld Railway trail has been fully reconnected and enhanced, new picnic benches, seats and perches at viewpoints have been installed as well as new comprehensive on-site interpretation to fully tell the national park local history and heritage story of the trail and give information on local wildlife and flora and fauna. In 2015 Storm Desmond brought the worst floods the county has seen, with around 178.4 mm of rain falling in Keswick. As a result two of the original Victorian railway bridges that cross the River Greta and around 200 metres of path were completely washed away, Rawsomes Bridge was deemed unsafe and the well-used route between Keswick and Threlkeld was completely cut off.

As much as possible the Lake District National Park found some alternative routes but through feedback it was clear how important the route was to the communities of Keswick and Threlkeld, visitors to the area and to local

businesses. As part of the design stage, a survey showed that the reconnection of the trail could be worth around £2 million to the local economy.

The extensive reconnection project has included:

- rebuilding and repairing 5 kilometres of the trail
- re-opening and extending of the Bobbin Mill railway tunnel
- construction of two new bridges
- extensive repair of a third bridge
- creation of 200 metres of brand new path
- work completed to stabilise the river bank along the way
- entire route being made more resilient to future flooding
- new on site interpretation project completed

Richard Leafe, Chief Executive of the Lake District National Park Authority said:

This has been the most ambitious construction project we've undertaken as a National Park Authority. It's taken five years to complete due to the scale, but we're thrilled to be able to reopen the trail on the anniversary of Storm Desmond. I'd like to thank all of our funders and project partners for their input and the local community for their initial fundraising and for their patience whilst the work was ongoing. I very much look forward to using the trail and seeing others make use of this fantastic safe, local route which provides a sustainable transport link between Keswick and Threlkeld.

A £7.9 million package was agreed to enable the project to go ahead and consisted of funding from the European Structural Investment Funds which supports innovation, businesses, low carbon activity to improve local growth and create jobs. Funding was also received from Highways England, Cumbria Local Enterprise Partnership and the Lake District Foundation.

Jim Jackson, Chair of Cumbria Local Enterprise Partnership's Investment Panel, said:

We are delighted that with the assistance of a £300,000 contribution from the Local Growth Fund, the Keswick to Threlkeld Railway Path is set to reopen to the public. This much-loved route will strengthen the visitor experience and economic performance of the Lake District National Park. We're looking forward to seeing both Keswick and Threlkeld communities benefit as visitors enjoy the route once again.

Additionally the Lake District foundation led a fundraising campaign which was supported by the local community, with businesses, residents, visitors and organisations all playing their part in raising money through everything

from duck races to online auctions.

Sarah Swindley, the Lake District Foundation's CEO, commented:

The community fundraising campaign raised an incredible £130,000. We were thrilled to have had so much support from the local community, businesses, residents, visitors and organisations; everyone played their part to make it happen. We would like to say a huge thank-you to everyone who donated during the campaign. We are looking forward to the opening this Saturday and for everyone to enjoy the new path for years to come.

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.