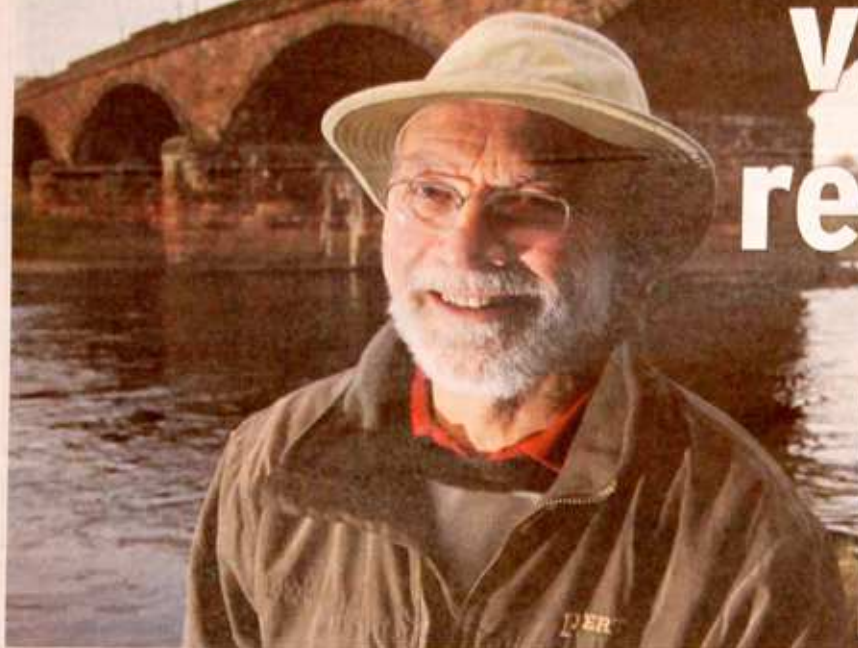


# talkingpoint

## Should the Waverley viaduct be re-opened?



David Ramshaw by the Waverley viaduct. The support was unanimous. One of the councillors said it was a no-brainer.  
JONATHAN BECKER

**T**he days when trains linked Carlisle with Waverley station in Edinburgh are long gone – but the bridge they used is still there.

And when the trains left, the pedestrians took over. For almost 40 years the Waverley viaduct served a new purpose as unofficial footbridge over the River Eden, and a handy shortcut between the Willowholme area of Carlisle on its south bank and Stainton on the north.

That came to an end in 2009, when its owners erected steel fences sealing it off at either end. It has been unused ever since – but not forgotten.

People living in west Carlisle complain that it used to save them the journey up to Hardwicke Circus to cross the river. And for environmentalists, the viaduct cut out a lot of car journeys and the pollution they caused. Some 2,400 people have put their names to a petition, asking for it to be re-opened as a proper footbridge.

In a month's time its future will be considered by city councillors.

They are visiting the site on Wednesday, December 14 to help them decide whether or not it should remain sealed off for

### Stephen Blease reports on a hot topic

another three years, as its owners want.

The petition for re-opening was organised by Sustainable Carlisle and Richard Bain of the group is one of its signatories.

"It's not as if the River Eden has lots more crossings – it hasn't," he points out. "The only traffic-free crossing is the Memorial Bridge in Rickerby Park, which is 89 years old.

"Durham has about half a dozen, and the most recent was built two years ago, not 89 years ago. They are all well used, and that would be the case in Carlisle.

"One traffic-free bridge simply can't be enough for a city of our size."

David Ramshaw, also of Sustainable Carlisle, lives within dog-walking distance of the bridge and says the benefits for areas such as Etterby, Belah, Newtown and Belle Vue are obvious.

"Someone who lives in Etterby and has to go to the Infirmary could walk across there in 10 to 15 minutes," he points out.

And he says the idea has plenty of public backing. He gave a presentation on it to a public

meeting in September and says: "The support was unanimous. One of the councillors there said it was a no-brainer."

The areas on either side of the viaduct hold four nature reserves – Kingmoor North, Kingmoor South and Sidings reserves north of the river, and Engine Lanning reserve on the southern side – and David adds: "Re-opening the viaduct as a footpath would link the four together. Fishermen, dog walkers, runners and so on could access the footpaths on both sides more easily."

And providing more opportunities for walking would tie in Carlisle's status as a Healthy City. The World Health Organisation awards the title to cities which make substantial efforts to improve residents' health. But David reckons there is still ample room for improvement.

"In Belle Vue average life expectancy is only 73.5 years compared to 81.7 years in Stanwix. To put it bluntly, if you live in Stanwix you will on average live 8.2 years longer than someone in Belle Vue. Is that acceptable?"

"Walking as a leisure activity is not only excellent physical exercise, but it gives a sense of well-being. Unlike Stanwix and other parts of Carlisle, if you live in Belle Vue there's little access to a network of public footpaths, to take you out to enjoy the countryside.

"The viaduct is only a short distance from Belle Vue, and once you are over it the footpath goes alongside the river. It's flat, so it's ideal for young and old, families and people with mobility problems. Children especially love riverside walks."

**S**ince the railways were privatised in 1994, old structures on disused lines have been in the hands of a public body called British Rail Board (Residuary) Ltd. It is responsible for some 4,000 old bridges, tunnels, viaducts, walls and culverts across the country, including Waverley viaduct. And it is the body that has applied to permission to keep it sealed off.

Chris Hartman, head of planning at the city council, explains that the company has

two reasons for wanting to keep the barriers up.

"It has a responsibility for health and safety, so it has to stop people accessing the bridge," he says. "And it has now become a Grade II listed structure so it needs to prevent any more damage to it."

In any case, taking down the barriers would not automatically turn the viaduct into a footbridge. "It was never an official right of way. If it was a public right of way the county council would be responsible."

So if the barriers do come down there will be a lengthy process to go through before the viaduct could formally be opened to the public. And Rob Graham, chairman of Kingmoor Parish Council, which covers Stainton, points out that most people there are against it.

"As a council we have to follow the views of the majority in the village," he says. "It is a quiet little community, and residents want to retain the status quo."

But the petition signatories are determined to press ahead. For as Richard Bain adds: "It's not just for the 2,400 people who have signed the petition.

"It's for the thousands of people who would be able to use it in years to come."

**WHAT DO YOU THINK?** Write to: Letters to the Editor, News & Star, Dalton Road, Carlisle, Cumbria CA2 5UA or email [letters@cngroup.co.uk](mailto:letters@cngroup.co.uk) Have you got a talking point you want us to address? Let us know