

Iron Line Project, Millom, Cumbria

For

CUMBERLAND COUNCIL

## VISITOR AND ACCESS MANAGEMENT PLAN

FINAL Rev A

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## 1.0 Introduction and Terms of Reference

- 1.1 In 2021, Appletons was commissioned by Cumberland Council to prepare an Access and Visitor Management Plan in order to inform the design process, initiatives and visitor attraction features, make predictions of the distribution of recreational use of the RSPB Hodbarrow Nature Reserve and to inform recommendations for future management of the reserve site.
- 1.2 The report sets out the short and medium term actions to ensure that the enjoyment of the reserve by new and existing visitors can continue hand in hand with the conservation of the sensitive wildlife habitats that are present in the reserve area.
- 1.3 In order to present a consistent framework for visitor management, there is a need to understand some definitions:
  - ❖ VISITOR MANAGEMENT is the process of influencing, directing and accommodating the flow of visitors to and within the destination.
  - ❖ A (DAY) VISITOR is a traveller taking a trip to a destination outside his/her/their usual environment, for a single day
  - ❖ A VISITOR is a traveller for any main purpose (Business, leisure or other personal purpose) other than to be employed in the place visited and is outside their usual environment.
  - ❖ A person is a TOURIST if their trip includes an overnight stay otherwise that person is a DAY VISITOR.
  - ❖ TOURISM is a movement of people to places outside their usual place of residence, pleasure being the usual motivation.



## 2.0 Setting the Scene

### What is the Iron Line site and RSPB reserve site at Hodbarrow?

#### Site Description and context

- 2.1 The land-based habitats of the Hodbarrow site covers approximately 65.57ha and are centred at Ordnance Survey Grid Reference SD 17592 78500. The centre of the site features a large lagoon which is enclosed by a sea wall with an artificial island to the south. To the west of the site is a caravan park and to the east lie fields used for pasture. To the north lies the access road and a network of fields, along with a recycling centre and a large waterbody, which forms part of a disused quarry (Redhills). The Duddon estuary is adjacent to the south and south-east of the site. The site lies in a rural context, with Millom town situated approximately 540m to the north of the survey site, beyond fields. The Hodbarrow Reserve is part of the wider Duddon Estuary SSSI and the Morecambe Bay and Duddon Estuary SPA. The area has other environmental designations including Special Area of Conservation (SAC).

#### Historical background

- 2.2 The Hodbarrow iron ore (red hematite) mines were located between Millom and the seashore at Hodbarrow Point and opened around 1850. The small settlement of Millom grew in response to the work that the iron mines generated, and it was the largest iron mine in the world at the time employing 1,435 people by 1896. In order to keep the ingress of sea from entering the mines a succession of three barriers were constructed by the Hodbarrow Mining Co. Ltd. The first was of wood which failed. What remains as the inner barrier is built from concrete and the huge outer barrier was constructed from slag faced with concrete blocks on the seaward side. The Millom Ironworks closed in 1968 and the loss of the town's major employers led to a period of economic depression and hardship in Millom. In 1986, the

105 hectare site was purchased by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB). It is now known as the Hodbarrow Reserve, which occupies the large coastal lagoon, which filled the area behind the outer seawall after the mines closed, together with grasslands and part of the Duddon Estuary SSSI. Historic structures, slag heaps and other industrial features remain on the site giving a glimpse of the industry that was so important to the town.



#### RSPB Hodbarrow

- 2.3 The Hodbarrow Reserve is managed by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and comprises the freshwater lagoon within the sea wall which is rich in wildflowers and insect communities living on the limestone slag of the previous iron workings on the site. Grassland and scrub stretch inland to the east to provide habitats for insects and breeding birds with further waterbodies and small wet scrapes/ponds. The reserve is managed to sustain the breeding numbers of little terns, common

terns and sandwich terns with the aim to increase little tern productivity.



2.4 The RSPB also aim to connect people with nature and be as accessible to as wide an audience as possible.

2.5 **Conservation objectives by RSPB at Hodbarrow**

- Restrict scrub growth – create varied age structure by cutting scrub annually and removing encroaching saplings.
- Control scrub on the calcareous grassland and maintain 25% heather on acid grassland by regular mowing to maintain appropriate sward heights.
- Leave 5-10% of the area bare ground.
- Control populations of large gulls.
- Maintain suitable conditions for at least 175 wintering red-breasted mergansers as well as wintering teals, coots, little grebes, redshanks, dunlins and breeding great crested grebes.
- Maintain 50.4 ha of standing water.

- Remove alien/ invasive plants.
- Prevent human disturbance.
- Monitor pollution.
- Re-establish breeding natterjack toads within the shallow pools by retaining water until July with open feeding areas and bare banks for hibernation sites.
- Control of aquatic vegetation by cutting back marginal growth.
- Maintaining 100square metres of threatened pillwort.

**Current recreation and use of the site**

2.6 The public can walk freely within the nature reserve with the site accessible from both Millom and Haverigg along Mainsgate Road and The Front. A number of public rights of way allow users to access most of the site on foot with the primary and vehicular movement across and around the site following the existing byway open to all traffic (BOAT). Users of the site have created a wide range of secondary routes and worn desire lines that cut through the site to reach viewing vantage points and areas of water bodies.

2.7 There are no formally designated car parking facilities for visitors and people currently park in approximately five small informal locations across the site in order to access their walking routes. Vehicular access is also permitted to access the public Redhills Quarry Waste Recycling Centre to the north of the reserve during certain days in the week.

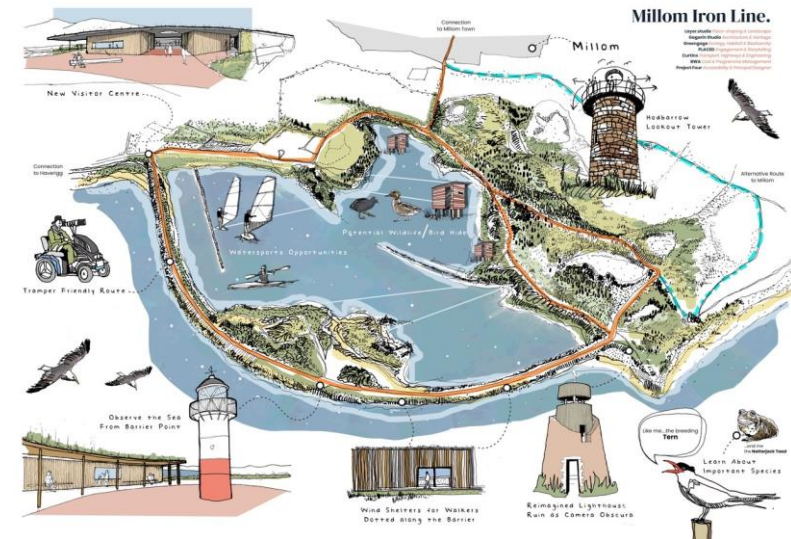
2.8 Whilst the vast majority of visitors both local and from further afield respect and enjoy the area for its birdlife, scenic value and tranquility, the site suffers from a degree of vandalism, particularly to previous signage, from disruptive behaviour and people swimming in the water bodies which is prohibited due to health and safety guidelines by the RSPB reserve.



## Why does Hodbarrow need improved visitor attractions?

- 2.9 Working with Copeland Borough Council, the Millom and Haverigg Town Deal Board secured an offer of £20 million from the Government's £3.6 billion Towns Fund initiative in 2021 for projects it identified as local priorities. Millom and Haverigg's Town Investment Plan seeks to maximise inclusive economic growth and better connectivity for the area while developing a welcoming arts, culture and tourism offer in order to encourage independent business and active lifestyles. One of the priorities is to promote and enhance the sensitive area around Millom's coastal lagoon and sea wall into an inspirational, fully inclusive and multi-sensory visitor attraction. To this end the 'Iron Line' Nature Inspired Route project competition was launched by Colander on behalf of Copeland Borough Council and from a short list of more than 20 landscape and architectural teams the competition panel chose Layer Studio. Layer Studio's team includes Gargarin Studio, Greengage, Placed, Curtains, BWA and Project Four. The team has worked from a draft design proposal encompassing the various constraints and aspirations for the site and have now prepared proposals for planning submission in 2023 following business case approval in September 2022.

## What form will these attractions take?



- 2.10 The aim of the scheme is to create a nature inspired multi-sensory experience across the RSPB Hodbarrow Reserve to join the Sea Wall. Whilst respecting identified sensitive ecological habitats the proposals will link enhanced and protected ecology, heritage and arts to translate this section of coast into a fully inclusive space. The route will accommodate art installations, revive the landscape and restore existing assets and remnants of the former iron mining industry that Millom town was founded on. The route will be supported by infrastructure including car parking and visitor facilities including a Welcome Hub facility.



## What ecological surveys have been undertaken within the proposals area?

2.11 As part of the background and baseline information to inform design proposals Copeland Borough Council commissioned an initial preliminary ecological appraisal in 2021 and additional surveys were undertaken in late summer 2021 and spring/early summer 2022 for Natterjack toad and Great crested newt, invertebrates, reptiles and Phase 2 botanical (NVC) surveys). These surveys have now concluded with some clear indications of ecological constraints for the design proposals. These constraints are additional to those required in relation to the statutory designations of the site (namely SSSI, SPA, SAC and Ramsar) which have been highlighted separately by Natural England and the RSPB. Ecological matters which have been considered may impact on visitor access include:



- Birds - Avoidance of direct and close access to breeding bird sites including the tern island, areas of dense trees and scrub and within wetland habitats.

- Reptiles - Limited impact due to vegetation management over time. Use of reptile fencing to protect reptile habitat during the construction phase may limit public access in certain areas.
- Amphibians – No protected amphibian species have been recorded within the development areas. The introduction of potential hibernation areas or hibernacula on the site may influence access arrangements.

- Botany – certain areas are very high importance habitats and contain intrinsically important species. Public access routes need to avoid these areas and car parking should be placed to avoid displacing important habitats.
- Grassland management – the introduction of grazing to manage important grasslands and reduce scrub cover is likely to impact visitor access.



## What are the potential impacts of visitors?

2.12 Recreational and informal visitation and the associated economic contributions made to local economies provide an important catalyst for conserving and enhancing public land and important habitats. Visitors to Hodbarrow can enhance social conservation and stewardship values, however, very sensitive wildlife reserves such as the Hodbarrow site are managed under a priority mandate with the primary objective to preserve predominantly natural settings and processes whilst also attempting to accommodate recreational visitor. Increased visitors come with its own set of challenges. Visitors can bring about increased littering, trampling of sensitive habitats, disturbance of protected species such as breeding birds and amphibians, unnatural feeding of birds and disturbance of the tranquility of the area by those who do not



respect the designations set up to preserve the very nature of the habitats. The highly sensitive nature of the

birds, particularly the fragile nesting terns at Hodbarrow, dictates that careful planning of visitor access routes must ensure that the breeding season is not compromised in order to promote these populations.

- 2.13 At Hodbarrow visitor impact is likely in the most part to be the physical changes to parts of the environment and the use of strategies to influence and inform visitors and to encourage certain behaviour is key to the success of the project. The RSPB have supported the project due to ongoing anti-social activities and maintenance issues such as littering, dog waste and vandalism which the project may help to alleviate and better influence visitor behaviour. The introduction of sensitively placed visitor features and rationalizing all informal access across the reserve will help to spread people throughout the area and deter people from sensitive wildlife habitats and address many of the existing access concerns.

**What are the public concerns and aspirations about increased visitor attractions?**

- 2.14 Local policy, RSPB conservation aims, the legal requirements for the SSSI designation at Hodbarrow and public usage influence the management of the reserve which currently has no overall consistent visitor management strategy in place for the area. A large proportion of the visitors to the reserve are from the local area with smaller numbers visiting from further afield particularly to observe the birdlife. The initial community engagement by PLACED surveyed respondents during the first half of 2022. The question was asked 'What does the Hodbarrow Nature Reserve and the surrounding area mean to you?' The overriding responses were:

- A beautiful place that is peaceful and quiet. The place contributes to people's wellbeing and mental health.
- A place where nature thrives. Ponds and access to the beach were pointed out.



- A place of history. The area is a shared and personal heritage and an integral part of the people's hometown.



- A place that is accessible. No traffic and a place that is used for exercise, walking and riding.

2.15 The project was met with mixed reports and some concerns which the management of visitors will need to address.

- There will be further maintenance issues, e.g., littering, dog waste, vandalism.
- Wildlife will be disturbed.
- Car parking will be more difficult.
- There will be anti-social behaviour and possible illegal camping.

On the flip side the community felt that there will be more visitors to the area and the town of Millom itself and that people would visit other local attractions possibly creating new jobs in Millom and Haverigg.

2.16 Expectations of the public in terms of the practical management of visitors needs to be observed. Accessibility improvements by improving footpaths and routes and making the area more inclusive for wheelchair/disabled users and pushchairs was generally supported by all participants.



Common sense approaches to management were made which included more dog waste bins, areas where dogs can be off the lead and signage to inform people of their responsibilities whilst in the reserve. Creating fenced-off areas to restrict public access to bird nesting areas was important to protecting nature. Car access, restricting car access to the sea wall and wider pavement to keep walkers safer from vehicle conflicts were key suggestions which need to be incorporated into the design proposals.



2.17 Full details of the Community Engagement process and results are available within the Community Engagement for the Iron Line Final Report, May 2022, by PLACED.

## 3.0 Focus for Visitor Management

### What is the Vision for Visitor Management?

- 3.1 The Iron Line site as a post industrial landscape and the Hodbarrow Reserve which has developed as a result of the irregularity and uniqueness of the abandoned ironworks can offer a welcoming place that offers opportunities for people to interact with the landscape, creates a desirable destination for visitors from near and far, conserves and enhances the areas unique character, avoids disruption to ecologically sensitive areas and supports the conservation of biological diversity.
- 3.2 Visitors can indirectly make a positive and sustainable contribution to the wider area in the form of potential revenue spent in the area and which in turn could help support the local economy and the management of the RSPB site. Sponsorship from local companies such as supermarket chains can be a source of potential funding streams or environmental partnering projects.
- 3.3 Visitors will be able to find tranquility with a sense of history, place and inspiration and enjoy an outdoor setting which will improve the quality of life, health and well-being.
- 3.4 Visitors will be encouraged to enjoy the Iron Line project within the RSPB site and to have a personal respect for its special qualities, legitimate activities and the interest of other people through education and interpretation.
- 3.5 Copeland Borough Council and the RSPB will work together within the framework of an agreed management plan identifying roles and responsibilities in the best interest of the area and its conservation to address conflicts between visitors and the natural environment.



### What can hinder the visitor aspirations of the Iron Line project?

- 3.6 There is a need to assess the influence of additional visitor access against the existing baseline access levels and capacity of sensitive habitats to absorb visitors which the RSPB and Natural England agree has already been met at Hodbarrow. The design of the Iron Line project needs to allow visitors access without inflicting irreversible harm or diverting attention away from positive management of habitats and to direct visitors away from existing sensitive habitats that are currently under pressure from lack of management. Natural England has a statutory obligation for the protection and favourable conservation management of the Hodbarrow reserve as part of the wider Duddon Estuary SSSI. Measures will be required to monitor and address any future unforeseen recreational impacts from visitors on sensitive habitats and the cumulative effects of any activities on wildlife. Avoidance of impacts is therefore crucial.
- 3.7 Local people visit the site on foot but increased visitor attendance will generally be by car, some also by bicycle or motor cycle. Parking needs to be controlled and any congestion at peak times needs to be addressed, otherwise it will have a negative impact on visitor experience and put increased pressure on sensitive habitats. Depending on visitor numbers at peak times it may require the Council to evaluate the road network in and around Millom in the future. Keeping the site open to cars at night can also indirectly give rise to illicit behaviour.



- 3.8 Visitor numbers are estimated by the RSPB to be around 40,000 per year of which 10,000 are not local. Visitor numbers over a bank holiday period are currently estimated to be 50 people per hour and those visitors are adequately absorbed into the landscape of the reserve without undue impact. The aspiration for a 80,000 visitors per year therefore equates to 219 people each day spread evenly across the year although it is evident that on good warm weather days and holiday periods this is likely to increase and potentially double or triple and other days visitor numbers will be very low. Estimates therefore would be looking at approximately 80-100 people per hour over the course of a day at these peak periods. Based on the company's experience this would require between 30 and 37 car parking spaces to be provided. The existing car park currently provides 18 car spaces with the potential to create an additional 63 car spaces in a new car park area. Visitor numbers would need to be in excess of 50,000 per year for the RSPB to consider involvement in a visitor management operation by the charity. The question of how

capacity is assessed at Hodbarrow currently remains a difficult matter to evaluate. The capacity of the site to absorb visitors is also a potentially controversial matter for the RSPB as ecological damage to coastal areas is predominantly due to increased recreational pressures and dog walking which can damage wildflowers habitats and the tranquility of ponds where terns breed. These issues come into focus at a time when the RSPB is currently raising awareness of these concerns.

- 3.9 Insufficient funding and support to provide a positive experience for visitors will erode the aims of the project.

- 3.10 Charging high prices for facilities which are perceived should be free, such as car parking, will lower visitor expectations and may discourage future visits.

#### **What can help the visitor experience of the Iron Line project?**

- 3.11 Custodians of the area (RSPB, local businesses, and volunteer groups) need to work as one team and engage with visitors. It is recommended that site-based staff with a visitor engagement and educational warden role would be beneficial in managing both visitor and coordinating volunteers. They need good information, training where necessary and support from the RSPB and the Council. The town needs to understand the needs of the visitors, be knowledgeable about the site and its designations and to pool resources.



- 3.12 Controlled and explained access arrangements to different parts of the site will allow visitors to experience the area but also respect the integrity of the wildlife. Interpretation is considered a key factor in the management of visitor expectations and enjoyment. The more information people have about where they can go and what they can do within the reserve setting will increase visitor enjoyment. Site interpretation therefore needs to be regularly maintained, remain current and seasonally relevant.
- 3.13 Strong and well-designed features which distribute visitors to the right places and engage their interest will assist in displacing them from sensitive areas. This will include wildlife hides, viewing areas, seating and picnicking areas, welcome hub building and repurposing and/or refurbishing existing structures.



judgements which can be reflected and shared by word of mouth or online recommendations such as Facebook or Trip Advisor.

- 3.14 Presenting consistent and accurate information will enhance visitor experience. Co-ordinating the messages delivered by all interested parties will reduce confusion and aid site management. Visitors can be aware of the area but do not always understand the environmental value and its maintenance needs. Visitors may be unaware of the impact of their activities on the special qualities of the area. People need simplicity and the reserve needs to create a focus to reduce confusion.
- 3.15 Controlling visitor numbers at peak times will assist in keeping the area tranquil and prevent impact on ecologically sensitive areas, particularly at the tern breeding season. Methods to control numbers may include information relayed via media platforms such as a dedicated website or App. Car counting technology on site which would trigger the closing of an entrance barrier may also be an option. Further control methods could be explored by engaging traffic consultants.
- 3.16 For the visitor, the experience can be everywhere. Most people do not want a packaged experience but will wish to see the area that celebrates its distinct identity. The visitor journey needs to be inspiring and memorable so that it encourages positive



## 4.0 The Iron Line as a Destination

- 4.1 Approximately 68,000 people live in the Copeland Borough and an estimated quarter of a million people within a 30 kilometres distance of Hodbarrow and Millom including large areas of the western and southern Lake District and the Barrow area which generates a large pool of people that could make the relatively short journey to the Iron Line as well as the local people who visit the reserve on a frequent basis on foot and by other means. There will be a wide range of interests on the reserve once the project is delivered as well as the potential for there to be a series of events and activities across the year. Along with the distinct landscape, the area has an industrial heritage and animal and plant communities that will appeal to a wide range of visitors.



- 4.2 The Community Engagement survey has concluded that two thirds of the participants invited who responded to the question 'Do you think the Iron line project will be good for Millom?' conveyed positive feelings towards the project. Participants shared examples of good practice visitor attractions in the region including Leighton Moss RSPB reserve, Lancashire and Grizedale Forest and Lake District sites which includes forest tracks for wheelchair users and public art that is environmentally friendly.



- 4.3 In order to manage visitors consistently there is a need to understand what motivates visitors<sup>1</sup>
- Visitors who are 45+ or travelling without children and are financially stable have a bias towards heritage, arts and cultural attractions with a strong appeal towards days out in the 'great outdoors'. They enjoy soft walking, pottering about and sightseeing.
  - Families with children aged 3-16 look for attractions and activities but are also cost conscious. Older families may be looking for family time together and their activities may be more diverse.
  - Visitors who are 25-45 and mainly travelling without children are more inclined to visit attractions that have a physical activity and need fitness. They may often plan or visit somewhere on route that will not take up too much time or be a place to visit toilet or eating facilities.

<sup>1</sup> Team Tourism Consulting (2013), Staffordshire Visitor Information Strategy – Action Plan, Destination Staffordshire

- 4.4 Visitors, whether regular day visitors or first-time visitors from further afield will want their experience to be a good one and it requires managers to understand more about the visitors and

engage with them. Delivering a quality experience through a well-managed site will create loyal visitors who will want to recommend the Iron Line as a worthwhile destination. Visitor management objectives or actions within acceptable environmental limits will also encourage visitors to be compliant with codes of conduct at their destination.

## 5.0 Primary Visitor and Access Management Strategy Recommendations

- 5.1 From initial analysis, enhanced visitor infrastructure which will be delivered by the Iron Line proposals, visitor management and focus on raising awareness on the sensitive ecological features of the site could allow the site to absorb a greater number of visitors and increase the enjoyment and experience of those visitors.
- 5.2 The following table analyses the pros and cons of a range of initiatives and proposals that can be implemented and included across the reserve as part of the Iron Line proposals in order to assist with the management of access and use of the site by visitors. Many of these proposals have been considered as part of the design process for the Iron Line and will ultimately form the detailed design which will be submitted into planning in 2023.

### Visitor and Access Management SWOT Analysis

Table 1

		Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
<b>On site access management</b>					
<b>1</b>	Provision of features: Viewpoints Dog bins Litter bins	Positive measures. Creates focal points for visitors. Helps enhance the sense that the area is being looked after and actively managed.	Needs careful consideration of location. Can develop points for littering and dog mess. Requires regular maintenance and emptying especially in warm weather.	Links to other features such as interpretation. Can manipulate visitor routes away from sensitive areas.	Risk of encouraging more dog walkers from local neighbourhood.
<b>2</b>	Dedicated routes/ boardwalks/ surfacing/ bunding/ fencing to direct access along particular routes and restrict access to sensitive areas.	Positive measures. Can focus visitor to access particular areas and bypass ecologically sensitive areas. Allows wheelchair users greater access to the site overall.	Boardwalks unsuitable for horse riders which results in horses by-passing routes and causing greater damage. Requires maintenance and repair especially boardwalks.	Can become a feature of the site. (Horse riding is only permitted on dedicated bridleways which should remain suitably surfaced).	Shades out plant communities and removes bare ground for invertebrates.
<b>3</b>	Location of permanent and specifically designed car parking area with sustainable surfacings and organised spaces.	Draws visitors to particular locations and prevents unauthorised	May draw too many visitors at peak times.	Can help to rationalise access and potentially focus visitors in a way	Will require maintenance upkeep.

		parking. May reduce car numbers using the BOAT to access across the reserve.		that ensures dog bins and interpretation are more accessible and visible.	
4	Closing or limiting parking.	May reduce footfall at times when too many visitors will impact detrimentally on the ecology of the area.	Unpopular with visitors if they have made a journey at whim.	Reduced cost of maintenance by overuse.	Unauthorised and roadside parking may become a problem. Difficult to control.
5	Introducing parking charges.	Generates a message to visitors that it is an owned and managed site. Most people expect to pay at least a nominal charge for parking. Limit length of time of stay which can spread visitor numbers across the day.	Unpopular with locals who may be the most frequent visitors by car. Input requires machines and checks to be made to see that people are paying. Measures needed to give fines for non-payers.	Generates revenue to fund other management measures. Regular visitors could have yearly reduced cost permit.	Machine open to vandalism.
6	Fenced areas for water bodies and fencing to boardwalks.	Positive management for amphibian conservation in the area.	Will require construction and maintenance of fencing and gates. Need access for land owners/farmers to move livestock.	Allows dog walkers who routinely let dogs off the lead to be directed to areas where it is safe for them to be off the lead.	Fencing open to vandalism. Some visitor will disregard fencing restrictions.
7	Fenced off areas to undesirable informal paths/areas in other private ownership.	Positive measures to close access to sensitive ecological areas and private land.	Involves additional costs and needs potential liaison with landowners.	Dedicated routes can be promoted and publicised with links to other infrastructure.	Visitors may still force routes beyond dedicated routes.
8	Visitor centre/ reception	Would be a destination draw for first time visitors. Provides employment. Provides increased engagement with visitors. And enhanced facilities	Expensive investment. May bring increased access which is more difficult to manage.	Part funding from other sources. Could be a base for other educational groups, events and work parties etc.	Would require planning permission. Additional maintenance/ insurance costs etc.

for better visitor experience.  
Provides revenue.

#### Education/Information provision/ visitor awareness management

9	Signage directing visitors including highlighting sensitive areas.	Signs can target particular groups – children, historians, bird watchers etc.	Too many signs can get confusing and unsightly and give an over managed urban feel. Too much information on signs may mean they are not read, understood or ignored altogether.	Can move visitors away from important site features e.g., sensitive tern breeding areas.	Signs very vulnerable to vandalism so need to be robust. Maintenance involves repairs and cleaning of graffiti etc.
10	Codes of Conduct: E.g. No swimming Dogs to be kept on lead Keep to designated routes	Clearly sets out how visitors are expected to behave.	Difficult to promote to casual visitors.	Potential to promote online. Links with events and other projects.	Potential to be ignored without face-to-face presence of enforcer, incentives and promotion.
11	Maps and leaflets	Single map that can be used on a range of interpretation. Routes may need marking or coding on the ground. , signs, internet, printed material. Ensures clarity and consistency. Simple and low cost.	Printed material can create a litter problem.	Ensures a single message and helps people find their way and best routes for their particular interest. Avoids areas that are sensitive.	May help encourage visitors to other areas linked to the site i.e. coastal trail.
12	Educational work with schools.	Enhances conservation awareness. Enhances health and well being of local children by learning in an outdoor environment.	Benefits or only achieved over longer periods.	Established contact with parents. Long term awareness raising. Maintains contact and support with local community.	Requires long term input and co-operation from local schools.
13	Interpretation boards on site	Welcoming and	Needs regular	Opportunity to inform	Interpretation ignored or

		informative.	maintenance to avoid a neglected appearance.	first time visitors or occasional visitors.	ineffective at changing behaviour. Creates more of a destination and risk of increasing access.
14	Detailed material on the internet.	A good way of informing people who do not know the site before they arrive. Easy to keep live and updated with seasonal information.	Needs regular updating by a dedicated person/team. Local visitors unlikely to bother to read information.	Opportunities to advertise events, volunteer activities, health and safety issues and ecologically sensitive times of the year that need visitors to avoid.	Not necessarily read by locals.
15	Face to face wardening with engagement role.	Likely to work with a range of visitors and across all interest groups. Contact with visitors personalised and targeted.	Expensive to provide full or part-time warden. Could divert existing staff from important habitat management or monitoring.	Eyes and ears on the ground ensures issues are picked up early particularly by the conservation bodies. Potential for other tasks to be deployed such as monitoring, enforcing charges and restrictions etc.	Depends on character and ability of the warden and their experience.
16	Liaison with local community groups	Potential to reach a range of local residents and audiences including those that visit sporadically.	Requires considerable staff input.	Potential to reach a wide audience with a range of measures.	Risk of hearing complaints for which no action is justified or possible.
<b>Enforcement visitor management</b>					
17	Face to face wardening with enforcement role.	Likely to work with a range of visitors. Issues dealt with as they happen and direct means of ensuring visitors who cause problems are targeted.	Expensive to provide full or part-time warden. Could divert existing staff from important habitat management or monitoring. Likely to alienate some visitors. Tackles only those who disregard codes of conduct rather than	Could be used if other measures fail.	Could be used sporadically at peak season visiting times.

			tackling overall volume of footfall which could impact on ecology.		
18	Permission for managed events	Ensures dialogue and formal granting of permission likely to lead to more responsible and well organised events that bring in revenue and further visitors.	Some events may not need permission. Some events may need SSSI consent which may need lengthy dialogue.	Potential to engage with a wide range of visitors.	Some events may simply go ahead and cause further problems.



## 6.0 Delivering Quality

- 6.1 In order to manage and adjust visitor management all local stakeholders need to play their part and be willing to support the shared purpose and aims of the Iron Line. A system of measuring performance needs to be in place so that partnerships can measure progress in meeting visitor management objectives. Some new surveys (i.e. ecology surveys) may need to be commissioned and additional data collected. The performance measurement method will need to distinguish between outcome indicators that measure long-term overall changes and input indicators that measure progress in delivering the actions that lead to change. A monitoring programme comprising of a Steering or Management Group involving representatives of all stakeholders would be a recommended vehicle for assessing impacts and change, both negative and positive, mitigating previously unrecognised impacts and making positive changes to management structures.
- 6.2 The following table highlights and evaluates the various areas that can be considered to form a visitor management strategy which looks at delivering a quality product for the heritage of the site, the experience of visitors and the creation of future opportunities for the Iron Line. It is accepted that not all recommendations can be adopted for both logistically and monetary reasons but it provides a 'shopping list' of actions that can prioritized over a given timeframe.

### Visitor Management Strategy A Framework for Quality Action

Table 2

Action ref.	Action	Risks	Management	Timescale	Recommended lead responsibility	Stakeholders
<b>Quality for Heritage and Environment</b>						
1	Develop a reserve opportunity map to take in the RSPB area and all other areas which would be within the project proposals planning red edge application site. This would grade areas by sensitivity to impact from leisure activities to include effects on tranquility, flora, amphibians, and birds.	Lack of up-to-date data.	Share best practice. Develop Natural England's Ecosystems Service Tool – will need regular ecological monitoring survey data to keep it up to date and to be able to feed into any site habitat management plans.	Year 2-10	NE	Steering Group - Copeland Borough Council, RSPB, NE
2	Assess the capacity of habitats to absorb visitors without inflicting	Lack of up-to-date data.	Liaise effectively with RSPB and NE and set up steering/working group –	Years 2-4	RSPB	Steering Group - Copeland

irreversible harm to the integrity of conservation interest.

will need regular ecological monitoring survey data to keep it up to date and to be able to feed into any site habitat management plans. Any mitigation measures need to be monitored for effectiveness and assessment undertaken for the effectiveness of positive interventions such as land based management regimes. Need to use current visitor numbers for baseline for HRA and additional numbers managed as additional to site baseline.

Borough Council, RSPB. Recommended that RSPB take a lead in the Steering Group and they will be key to early identification of problems.

3	Agree and implement an integrated information and interpretation strategy with all local stakeholders informed by target audiences.	No consensus on the message to visitors. Not engaging enough.	Develop practical working group.	Year 1	Copeland Borough Council lead with agreement with RSPB.	Copeland Borough Council, RSPB
4	Develop consistent and effective management of on-line information and messages.	Competition from other visitor attractions in the area or region.	Develop promotional events and information to win visitors.	Year 2 onwards	Copeland Borough Council lead with RSPB input. Information can be shared across both Council and RSPB media platforms.	Copeland Borough Council, RSPB
5	Actively engage with on-line user generated resources and social media forums and respond to their comments to reinforce essential management and visitor information and secure feed-back.	Resources and time constraints. Virtual becomes disengaged from the physical. Conflict as to whom takes the lead role? Possibly something taken on board by a volunteer.	Develop a customer relations role. Circulate finds to all parties.	Year 2 onwards	Copeland Borough Council or operator lead in conjunction with RSPB. Hodbarrow operations to remain with	Copeland Borough Council, RSPB

					RSPB.	
6	Establish a continuous evaluation of visitors' experience and understanding of the Iron Line and Hodbarrow Reserve to refine future management.	Time consuming. Possibly something to aspire to in the future. May only relevant to new Visitors Centre. Gathered data not analysed or used.	Develop automated systems on-site and on-line. Publish findings.	Year 2 onwards	Copeland Borough Council.	Copeland Borough Council, RSPB, volunteers
7	Undertake regular surveys and monitoring to maintain knowledge of visitor activities and preferences.	Time consuming and cost implications.	Establish a Steering/Management Working Group. Engage volunteers.	Year 3 onwards	Copeland Borough Council or operator lead. Surveys every 5 years.	Copeland Borough Council, RSPB, volunteers

### Quality for Visitors

8	Review the standard and design of all features and facilities to be used by visitors. Agree a standard to maintain the quality of any built architectural or landscape features.	Operators may put financial gain before environmental benefits. Difficulty in securing operators particular in today's financial climate.	Establish a Steering/Management Working Group.	Year 2/3	Copeland Borough Council to set standards in leases to leaseholders. Operator to ensure these are maintained by preparing annual report and evidencing positives and failings with mitigation proposals.	Copeland Borough Council
9	Develop and implement an Iron Line car parking strategy to reduce the impact of motorised vehicle entering the reserve i.e. town park and ride facilities.	Cost and suitable space prohibitive. Engaging other transport operatives. Difficulties in enforcing tickets. Unauthorized access to recycling centre. Removal of rubbish and fly tipping. Unsociable behaviour when visitor centre closed but car park open.	Agree scope and timetable. Identify reduced environmental impacts. Other considerations: Car park/visitors centre operators responsible for removing fly tipping and rubbish in car park/ visitor centre land when the recycling centre is	Years 1-3	Copeland Borough Council with specialist resources.	Copeland Borough Council, Renewi (operators of the recycling centre until 2034).

closed.  
 Car park to be open or closed when visitor centre closed.  
 Need to consider installation of CCTV.  
 Need to consider gates to recycling centre.

10	Develop an access strategy to encourage walking, cycling and horse riding.	Unable to create a suitable network linked with other footpaths, cycleways and bridleways. Connection may increase pressure on sensitive areas outside reserve boundaries.	Identify and assess public rights of way hierarchy. Access impact on Coastal Access Trail.	Years 1-2	Copeland Borough Council – enforced by planning condition.	Copeland Borough Council
11	Develop a style of way marking and directional signs to be consistent across the reserve.	Conflicts between stakeholders.	Engage a design coordinator.	Years 1-2	Copeland Borough Council with input from RSPB to maintain consistency across the whole site. RSPB responsible for signage within the reserve.	Copeland Borough Council, RSPB
12	Where sensitive habitats are at risk from recreational pressure, identify 'Suitable Accessible Natural Green Spaces' elsewhere and promote its use.	Lack of deliverable infrastructure.	Engage with Local Authority planning to establish designated PROW and other green spaces. Engage with Morecambe Bay Eden Project North to understand what is being delivered that could be adopted at Hodbarrow.	Years 1-2	Copeland Borough Council	Copeland Borough Council

### Quality for Opportunities

13	Encourage site managers and custodians to work as a single team to all who use or benefit from the reserve environment to improve efficiency and visitor satisfaction.	Organisational cultures may block co-ordination. Work programmes will not dovetail.	Park problem areas for year 1. Allow for things to bed in.	Years 2-5	Copeland Borough Council and Steering Group.	Copeland Borough Council, RSPB, local business interest
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<b>14</b>	Enhance training and support for all who conserve or inform visitors about Hodbarrow. Good experience in order to build trust with visitors.	Lack of quality control. Time consuming. Costly exercise.	Engage HR from Local Authority.	Years 1-5	RSPB to lead with volunteers once established.	Copeland Borough Council, RSPB
<b>15</b>	Supply consistent leaflets and messages when people arrive or leave the area.	Costs constraints to keep leaflets updated.	Undertake research into content of material distributed, language, narrative and design/imagery of interpretation and information material. Consider local sponsorship with businesses.	Year 1 onwards.	Copeland Borough Council	Copeland Borough Council, RSPB
<b>16</b>	Engage with the education sector and promote vocational qualifications at Key Stage 2 and 3 to promote understanding and future careers.	May not be a priority in schools' curriculum. Difficult to organise.	Engage with local schools. Liaise with Eden Project North where they are developing a Bay wide curriculum which may be adopted by local schools.	Years 2-5	Copeland Borough Council (Education Department)	Copeland Borough Council, local primary and secondary schools

## 7.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

- 7.1 The Iron Line proposals and the Hodbarrow nature reserve as a destination for visitors and tourists needs to continue to serve as a vital and protected habitat. The features which are to be proposed as part of the Iron Line to encourage this tourism, access and usage cannot compromise the statutory protected wildlife and the sensitive habitats that exist in this part of the coast.
- 7.2 Access for people to nature reserves and naturalised landscapes is recognised as being a positive experience for peoples' health and well being. Nature stimulates and encourages physical activity and creates social opportunities for all ages. Real world learning and outdoor education whether delivered directly or passively allows all people to be better informed about the role nature plays in our world and gives children especially a greater knowledge of, and confidence in the natural environment.
- 7.3 The careful and sensitive design of features for the Iron Line in combination with the way visitors are managed within the reserve and how access and behaviour is managed should allow the reserve to absorb visitors without impact on the character and ecology of the site.

What are quick wins for the short-term visitor management?

### Walkways and fencing

7.4



flora.

Careful siting of pedestrian walkways and boardwalks and fencing off certain areas will facilitate the visitors access and encourage and steer them to destinations that have been carefully sited to avoid impacts to the landscape and sensitive habitats. On balance it is considered that walkways and footpaths will help to reduce impacts on sensitive ground

### Vegetation clearance

7.5



Clearance of scrub vegetation/control in agreement with the reserve management plan and the creation of informal routes and potentially fenced pathways in these areas will assist the more sensitive habitats to remain intact and not to become fragmented due to impact from visitors accessing the 'no-go' areas. Boardwalks through wet scrub could also be introduced. However, the level of impacts by the continued use of informal pathways should be monitored.

### Viewing areas

7.6



The sensitive siting of viewing areas, platforms and hides will allow visitors to observe wildlife and important historical aspects of the Hodbarrow site and encourage visitors to linger in certain places during their visit. The

introduction of these features will require separate/ additional ecological assessments and form part of the Habitat Regulations Assessment.

## Interpretation and signage

7.7



Clear and consistent signage that is both attractive and robust will be vital to the enjoyment and wayfinding for visitors. By providing visitors with the correct type of interpretive sign will

enable visitors to understand the importance the cultural and environmental heritage of the Hodbarrow area. Signage can inspire visitors and used effectively can create a sense of community ownership, pride and tells people about their surroundings and locations of wildlife interest. Signage can also provide visitors with choices according to their interest in coming to Hodbarrow but also hopefully give the visitor a reason to return.

## Maps and Leaflets

7.8



Up to date informative leaflets that can be used to navigate the site will be useful in helping direct visitors to the features that they wish to see and preventing incursion into sensitive habitats that are not part of the Iron Line route.

## Educational resources

7.9



The management of visitors will depend greatly on the quality of information and particularly educational resources which

along with outdoor interpretation will be delivered through the new Welcome Hub. There is the opportunity for educational workshops that focus on the Hodbarrow experience and for interpretation to help guide visitors on their outdoor experience before they leave the building.

## Car parking

7.10



The careful siting of car parking and the potential for parking charges at certain times may assist in controlling visitor numbers particularly at predicted peak times. Formalised parking that is designed to be sympathetic to the natural surrounding may assist in

sending out the message that the site is owned, well managed and monitored thus reducing the propensity for antisocial behaviour from certain visitor groups. This would also bring in a degree of revenue but would require initial capital investment.

## On site warden

7.11



The provision of an on-site warden particularly during the spring and summer months who would work with a range of visitors and across all interest groups would enable contact with visitors. A warden can be the eyes and ears on the ground to ensure issues are picked up early particularly by the conservation bodies responsible for the statutory protection of the SSSI. There is also the potential for other tasks to be deployed such as policing visitor behaviour, monitoring impacts, enforcing charges and restrictions and helping people find their way around the site. A part-time warden may be



required to managed the welfare of livestock as part of management proposals during the Autumn and Winter.

### Guided walks

7.12



Management of large groups of visitors can often be achieved by on site guided walks which can be used to control the access of large groups and support the successful enhancement of visitor experience especially school groups. By

explaining and revealing all aspects of the Hodbarrow site visitors are likely to positively spread the word of the Hodbarrow attraction. These can be scheduled across peak periods and booked in advance.

### Volunteers

7.13



Active volunteering with the RSPB and as part of the Council's initiatives for the Iron Line can provide a conduit for nature to stimulate interest and to help direct and inform visitors. Volunteers can often deal with issues as they happen and can be a

direct means of ensuring visitors who cause problems are targeted.

### Interactive digital media

7.14



As a large and increasing number of people now use smart phone technology this medium can help guide and manage visitor access and encourage their interest in the features to be experienced at the Iron Line. A

dedicated App for the Iron Line could help visitors' navigate the site and inform them of the features of wildlife interest including educating people on conservation issues and how to experience

the site that avoids impact on sensitive habitats and particularly breeding terns.

### Online information

7.15



Information that can be published online can assist in informing people of what's happening at Hodbarrow on any given day or season, car parking charges and how to access and navigate the site. This can help to manage people's

expectations and behaviour if they are given advance notice and in controlling visitor numbers during peak times.

### What are the long-term wins for visitor management?

#### Steering Group

7.16



The continuous collection and evaluation of visitor access and management issues over time and how to refine future management can be addressed through a Steering Group made up of all stakeholders involved in the project. Feed back from online

reviews such as Trip Advisor and Google Review are tools that can feed into Steering Group meetings.

#### Monitoring surveys

7.17



Regular surveys of the ecology of the site to evaluate an impact that may be occurring by visitor

access and behaviour as set against the baseline surveys undertaken in 2021/2022 should be programmed over a 25 year period. Whilst this may have cost implications it is important to establish that the statutory designation of the reserve as a SSSI and the ineptest features of the SPA/SAC/Ramsar site is not being compromised in any way.

### **Maintenance**

7.18



Regular management of the site in terms of its aesthetics and ecological management should be built into the overall long-term strategy for the Iron Line. Repairs and poor management regimes can lead to a poor perception of the area and allow anti-social behaviour, vandalism and misuse of a site if it appears neglected.