

CUMBERLAND COUNCIL
CONSULTATION RESPONSE

Proposal: Erection of visitor centre with café/shop, group room, staff/volunteer, toilet facilities and car park; consolidation, repair and installation of interpretive sculpture to Towsey Hole Windmill; refurbishment of existing tern hide; new bird hides/viewing screens, pathways, gateway features, street furniture and demarcation of spaces at existing car park; enhancement of wildlife habitats; associated landscaping and drainage infrastructure; and maintenance of byway with restricted vehicular access (the Iron Line project)

Address: Hodbarrow Nature Reserve, Millom

Reference: 4/25/2198/0F1

Date: 17/07/25

Description: Hodbarrow is a former haematite mining location, consisting of a variously worked and reclaimed foreshore, which has subsequently been flooded and turned into a nature reserve following the closure of mining and ironworking activities in Millom in the late 1960s.

Conclusion: No objection

Assessment:

- Main visitor centre.
 - Compared with previous scheme, new design is more compact, and features a larger car park adjacent to it on the landward side.
 - The design appears to balance being attractive and interesting, with more practical concerns. The previous design, essentially three separate buildings clustered beneath a walkway, would likely have presented a number of challenges in terms of cost and complexity of both construction and operation.
 - The building is at the edge of the scheme and separated from most of it by dense trees. Although I am not in a position to comment with certainty on its impact on the settings of the heritage assets listed below, I anticipate minimal impact, mitigated by distance, vegetation and the small and attractive design of the structure.
- Towsey Hole Windmill (Non-designated heritage asset)
 - The proposal here is for repair and consolidation of the structure using lime pointing and engineering brick where necessary. Although light on details, this is a non-designated structure and work that would not require planning permission, and with clear public benefit.
 - The proposed installation is a sculpture that resembles a windmill's cowl and fantail, with a new concrete floor and interpretation.
 - These works will have some impact on the building's significance, and I anticipate that this will be positive through conveying the building and wider site's history.
 - Structural impact on the remains from the installation are likely to be minimal and reversible.
- Inner Barrier (Non-designated heritage asset)

- Annie Lowther Hide will be located close to but not on the Inner Barrier, which is ruinous and remains only at its ends. The hide will therefore affect its setting, however I'd view this impact as negligible and with clear benefit in the accessibility and use of the entire site.
- Outer Barrier (Non-designated heritage asset)
 - Improvements to the surfacing and pathways on the Outer Barrier may entail negligible harm to the barrier's appearance, however this is minor and appears justified by the increased access and enjoyment of the overall site it makes possible.
- Howbarrow Lighthouse (Non-designated Heritage Asset)
 - New seating and surfacing is proposed, which I anticipate will have a positive impact on the setting of the lighthouse in allowing it to be experienced and enjoyed to a greater extent.
- Hodbarrow Beacon (Scheduled Ancient Monument)
 - Works to the Beacon are not proposed, unlike with the previous submission from 2023.

Relevant Policies and Guidance:

Paragraph 139 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) asserts that "Development that is not well designed should be refused".

NPPF para. 210 states that "In determining applications, local planning authorities should take account of the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation..."

NPPF para. 212 states, in the case of designated heritage assets, "great weight should be given to the asset's conservation", irrespective of whether potential harm is substantial, less-than-substantial, or total loss. Where harm to a designated heritage asset is less-than-substantial, it should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal (para. 215).

Paragraph 216 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states the effect on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account when making decisions.

Opportunities should be sought for new development within conservation areas and the settings of heritage assets that enhances or better reveals their significance. (para. 219)

The Copeland area's Local Plan contains a number of relevant policies:

- BE1 provides for the preservation and enhancement of built heritage assets by:
 - Requiring a heritage impact assessment or heritage statement where the proposal would affect a heritage asset;
 - Giving great weight to the conservation of Copeland's designated heritage assets when decision making;
 - Ensuring that new development is sympathetic to local character and history;
 - Supporting proposals for the appropriate reuse of vacant historic buildings, recognising that putting buildings into viable uses consistent with their conservation can help sustain and enhance their significance;
 - Supporting proposals that increase the enhancement, promotion and interpretation of Copeland's architectural and archaeological resources;

- Strengthening the distinctive character of Copeland's settlements, through the application of high-quality design and architecture that respects this character and enhances the setting of heritage assets.
- BE2 states that development should preserve or enhance designated heritage assets (or important archaeological sites) and their settings. The more important the asset, the greater weight that will be given to its conservation. Proposals that better reveal the significance of heritage assets will be supported in principle. Any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset will require clear and convincing justification.
- BE4 refers to non-designated heritage assets, saying that development should preserve or enhance such heritage assets and their settings. Proposals that better reveal the significance of heritage assets will be supported in principle. Proposals affecting non-designated heritage assets or their settings should demonstrate that consideration has been given to their significance.
- DS4 outlines the Council's expectation that all new development will meet high-quality design standards that contribute positively to the health and well-being of residents.
- DS5 refers to the importance of achieving good standards of design in both hard and soft landscaping.
- RE3 provides details on proposals to convert traditionally constructed barns and other rural buildings into commercial or community use.

Sammy Woodford

Conservation and Design Officer