



PODGILL VIADUCT: Built as a vital link to bring coal from Newcastle to Furness. (Contributed picture)

Viaduct on track to become a footpath

THE Northern Viaduct Trust's hopes of restoring an old railway track and viaduct which once carried coke to Barrow's iron furnaces have taken a huge leap forward.

The trust has bought the disused one-and-a-half mile track from Hartley to Kirkby Stephen's Stenkrith Park, which crosses the Podgill Viaduct, and hopes to transform the railway line into a footpath and bridleway, suitable for walkers, people in wheelchairs and horse-riders.

The aim is to open the new routes by the end of this summer.

Restoration work began on the historic Grade II listed viaduct immediately after it had been purchased from Rail Property Ltd.

"It was part of the Stainmore railway that ran from Darlington through Kirkby Stephen and on to Tebay. It was built really to bring coke over from the North

— by Rachel Garnett

East for the iron furnaces in Barrow," explained Michael Sewell, chairman of trustees.

"It was used by rail traffic until about the 1960s, when they stopped through trains over Stainmore, but there was a link to Hartley quarry for the lime and limestone until the 1970s, then it was closed altogether."

Despite being neglected for two decades, the viaduct is not in bad shape, but does need quite a bit of work, said Mr Sewell.

"The main thing we've got to do is waterproof it, because if water gets into the masonry and you get a severe frost, you start getting trouble with the masonry falling off.

"Also it has very high parapets. I'm not a very tall person and I

have to stand on tiptoe if I want to see over, so we are hoping to raise the level of the track so people will be able to look up and down the little valley it crosses."

The hope is to create a link from Kirkby Stephen's Stenkrith Park, and the park's owners - the Birtles family - have agreed a footbridge can be built.

Access from the Hartley end has yet to be agreed.

The project so far is costing £140,000, which has been funded by the Railway Heritage Trust, Rail Property Ltd, Friends of the Lake District, Eden District Council, the Manifold Trust, and European Regional Development Fund.

Mr Sewell said it was hoped to raise further money to carry out more work. The main contractor is Mawdsley of Appleby.

For safety reasons, it is not possible to allow access to the line during restoration works.