Written evidence submitted by the Upper Denton Parish Council
(RUT0244)

Summary:

No mobile phone coverage in Gilsland.

Lack of regular & reliable public transport provision, to directly access World Heritage site in eastern Cumbria.

Introduction

This a rural area approximately 20 miles east of Carlisle with Gilsland village having some 400 inhabitants split between Cumbria & Northumberland with the majority living in Northumberland. The main employment in the area is farming with tourist beds and services along the Roman Wall Trail being increasingly important. The Co-Op own and operate the Gilsland Spa Hotel, a 91 bedroom hotel, with other tourist beds being available at privately owned B&B’s spread throughout the area.

Spadeadam RAF site is close to the village which it shares with DNVGL an oil and gas testing company on the old British Gas area of the same site.

Mobile Phone Coverage

1. After local appeals for improved mobile phone coverage, the village currently has none, and with support from English Heritage and our local MP Rory Stewart, Arquiva were supposed to install a new mast in 2015. Due to the failure to complete on time we believe the Treasury withdrew the funds and the project was abandoned. Neither the DCMS, who were supposed to be overseeing this project, or anyone else connected with it would respond to emailed enquiries to public supported websites so the matter is back with our MP and there has been no further progress. In our view national funds should be made available to support increasing tourist access to this part of a World Heritage site as most of them rely on apps on their phones for information and directions when they are in the area, which currently isn’t available.

Public Transport and the World Heritage site

2. With the withdrawal of all subsidies from bus transport by Cumbria County Council the “Roman Wall bus” the AD122, has struggled since 2015 to run into west Cumbria up into Carlisle. It still runs in Northumberland and there is a connection into Birdoswald, the English Heritage run site just beyond Gilsland in Cumbria, by a
regular service bus that runs Monday to Saturday, with 3 connections a day in either
direction, but it is time consuming and difficult to access as it has changed a number
of times in the very short time it has been operational. Certainly most overseas
tourists finalise their plans by the previous September and we haven’t had any
certainty how any existing service would run the following year, as decisions are
made in the March for that year.
Signage on sites of the Roman Wall in the Gilsland area has also been neglected, in
fact removed and not replaced, despite numerous requests for them to be
reinstated over the last 3 years.
We also support the movement to reopen Gilsland station allowing visitors to get off
the train directly onto the Roman Wall Trail, thus allowing more day visitors and
potentially taking people who were visiting the Lakes the opportunity to visit this
area.
While the local population alone cannot justify the investment required to increase
the accessibility of the area we feel that to meet current central government
environmental targets external investment is required by a national body and it
should not be funnelled through local councils who have competing priorities with
more heavily populated areas gaining funding at our expense.

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