



**Forest of
Bowland
National
Landscape**

Annual Report 2025-2026

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Image: Bluebell (Forest of Bowland NL Partnership)

Cover image: Beacon Fell from Parlick (Forest of Bowland National Landscape Partnership)

View from the Chair

I'm very pleased to see that this latest annual report is a real reflection of the partnership work which takes place quietly, but constantly, between the many different stakeholders in the Forest of Bowland National Landscape.

Politicians, local authority staff, voluntary sector representatives, rangers, gamekeepers, farmers, local communities – and many others - are committed to seeing the Protected Area flourish.

High on the collaboration list has been the review of the current National Landscape Management Plan, with a new five-year plan set to come into effect during 2026.

With the national focus on nature and climate, the articles in the following pages demonstrate well how we are responding to this locally by taking practical action to bring benefit and investment to the area.

Peatland restoration continues apace, and behind the impressive

figures sit a whole host of disciplines – from ecology and archaeology, to GIS experts and skilled contractors. Take one of these pieces away and the puzzle can't be completed.

The Farming in Protected Landscape Programme continues to support landowners and land managers to achieve their nature, climate, engagement and sustainable business goals. The feature article on page seven demonstrates clearly how, working together, different organisations can bring about positive change.

News that 42 young hen harriers fledged from monitored nests in Bowland this year was heartening. It's a testament to the importance of continuing to work together to ensure that these fabulous birds thrive.

The Connecting People and Nature programme moved into its final year of delivery, focusing on communities in and around Lancaster and Morecambe.

Great work is being delivered in these areas already, and the programme has very successfully helped these existing groups build a valuable connection to nature and the outdoors into their offer.

Continuing this theme, national arts programme, Nature Calling, brought together the voices of people living both within, and around, Bowland. "Are you Lost?" was the resulting film, audio and textile installation, demonstrating just how important a creative approach can be.

Engagement is also key to the Brock and Calder Landscape Recovery Project. The feature on page 14 gives an insight into the 20 year vision of this landscape-scale programme .

Whether through on the ground improvements, supported visits, or the new, free to download, Discover Bowland app, access is a thread which runs throughout work in Bowland.



Councillor John Ibison, Chair of the Forest of Bowland National Landscape Joint Advisory Committee

Highlighting active travel, the Eco Escapes feature on page 11 shines a spotlight on exploring Bowland without the car.

On a personal note, I very much enjoyed attending the Bowland Celebration of Hedges in March, whilst the success of the annual Garstang Walking Festival - a true joint venture - was a pleasure to see.

An Outstanding Landscape of Natural and Cultural Heritage

Highlights for 2025-26



Image: Pendle Hill (G Cooper)

Peatland restoration work has continued in Bowland in 2025-26, mainly through Natural England's Nature for Climate Peatland Restoration Grant with support from United Utilities and Grosevnor. In total, 409ha of upland peatlands underwent restoration work through this mechanism, and a request for c. £1.4m for the 2026-27 financial year to undertake further restoration was approved. Additional financial backing allowed the Lancashire Peat Partnership to scale up through 2025-26 and the team is expected to grow further in the 2026-27 financial year.

Contact: dominic.hartley@lancashire.gov.uk



The Bowland Fells are one of the most important strongholds for hen harriers in England, supporting 39% of all nesting attempts in 2025. A total of 40 young fledged from 14 nests monitored by the RSPB on the United Utilities Estate - the highest number in more than 40 years. An additional two young fledged from a further nest monitored by Natural England. The sustained hen harrier population in Bowland reflects the success of partnership working and collaborative conservation efforts.

Contact: sonja.ludwig@rspb.org.uk

An Outstanding Landscape of Natural and Cultural Heritage

Lune Rivers Trust implemented woodland creation projects in the north western part of the Protected Landscape, planting 6,400 trees across 2.6 Hectares. The team worked with two local farmers to help them secure FiPL funding for woodland creation. National Landscape staff members volunteered to help plant some of these trees, along with volunteers from Global Link. United Utilities funding directly supported two further woodland projects. LRT also worked with three farmers to develop applications to the Forestry Commission for future woodland projects.

Contact: tim@luneriverstrust.org.uk



The Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) Programme reached the end of its fifth year, with Defra confirming an extension through to the end of March 2029. During the 2025/26 financial year, the FiPL team awarded just over £1.0 million to support a diverse range of projects. Funding enabled farmers and land managers to deliver work that enhances nature recovery, reduces the impacts of climate change, creates new opportunities for people to discover and enjoy the landscape, and strengthens nature-friendly, sustainable farm businesses. Explore the projects supported so far at: www.forestofbowland.com/farming-protected-landscapes

Contact: bowlandfipl@lancashire.gov.uk

The Bowland HayTime project works with farmers and landowners to increase plant & wildlife diversity in meadows, collecting seed from local donor sites, drying and re-distributing across restoration sites, with follow up plug planting. In 2025-2026 Hay Time worked with 17 landowners, managers and communities to start another 22ha on their journey, funded through Farming in Protected Landscapes. Over 220 people learned about meadows through events, including National Meadows Day. Botany training for meadow monitoring volunteers engaged a further 16 volunteers.

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The Upland Summer Mayfly (*Ameletus inopinatus*) is an increasingly rare, upland specialist species. Threatened principally by climate change resulting in warmer water temperatures, populations of *Ameletus inopinatus* in England are known to be small, fragmented and isolated. During Wyre Rivers Trust (WRT) macroinvertebrate sampling, a tiny subpopulation of *Ameletus inopinatus* was found to be present on the River Calder. To monitor this population, three floating emergence traps were deployed by WRT in April 2024 at Oakenclough to capture emergence data on this nationally significant species in addition to collecting complementary temperature and water quality data.

Contact: tom@wyreriverstrust.org

An Outstanding Landscape of Natural and Cultural Heritage

The Environment Agency undertakes River Habitat Surveys to build a consistent evidence base on the condition and naturalness of headwaters, enabling better targeting of restoration, supporting statutory reporting, and understanding how upstream habitats influence wider catchment health. The team completed a survey at a Small Streams Network site on White Hill Beck in Gisburn Forest near Stocks Reservoir. The site was in good condition, with lots of woodland and rough pasture and moss, along with some grasses, filamentous algae and mayflies in the channel.

Contact: helen.dix@environment-agency.gov.uk



The Forest of Bowland Farmer Group has grown to more than 175 members, offering farmers a steady stream of information and training to support them through the ongoing agricultural transition. Over the past year, the group has run nine well-attended events, including training sessions, workshops, and farm walks and talks. In addition to these gatherings, members have also received quarterly newsletters and interim email updates sharing key dates, news, and reminders.

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United Utilities works in partnership with a number of organisations in the Forest of Bowland National Landscape, to deliver a range of positive environmental outcomes. The major element of which is working with the National Landscape team, funding and delivering peatland restoration, as well as support to the FiPL project. We also work closely with the Wyre and Ribble Rivers Trusts, with initial work started on a range of projects to deliver improvements to riverine habitats and water quality. In addition, we jointly fund and support the work of the RSPB, monitoring hen harriers and other bird species breeding on the UU Bowland Estate.

Contact: pete.wilson@uuplc.co.uk



The Loud Phosphate & Natural Flood Management (NFM) Project is a collaborative partnership between United Utilities and Ribble Rivers Trust. Running until 2028, the project aims to improve the water quality of the River Loud and Chipping Brook by reducing phosphate pollution, lowering flood risk to the local wastewater treatment works, and increasing the use of Natural Flood Management measures across the catchment.

Contact: info@ribbletrust.com

An Outstanding Landscape of Natural and Cultural Heritage

Riparian Tree Planting Projects

Two significant projects were delivered during the 2025-26 financial year in Quernmore and Roeburndale, with support from Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) funding.

The works included fencing off watercourses and planting trees and shrubs to create networks of riparian habitat covering a total of 2.38 hectares. With support from the Lune Rivers Trust, 3,496 trees and 200 shrubs were planted along eight stretches of watercourse, with sheep netting and protective guards installed to ensure successful establishment.

The projects also incorporated boundary improvements, including hedge laying, hedge planting, dry stone wall restoration, wall top wiring, and the installation of field gates, further enhancing the surrounding habitat connectivity.

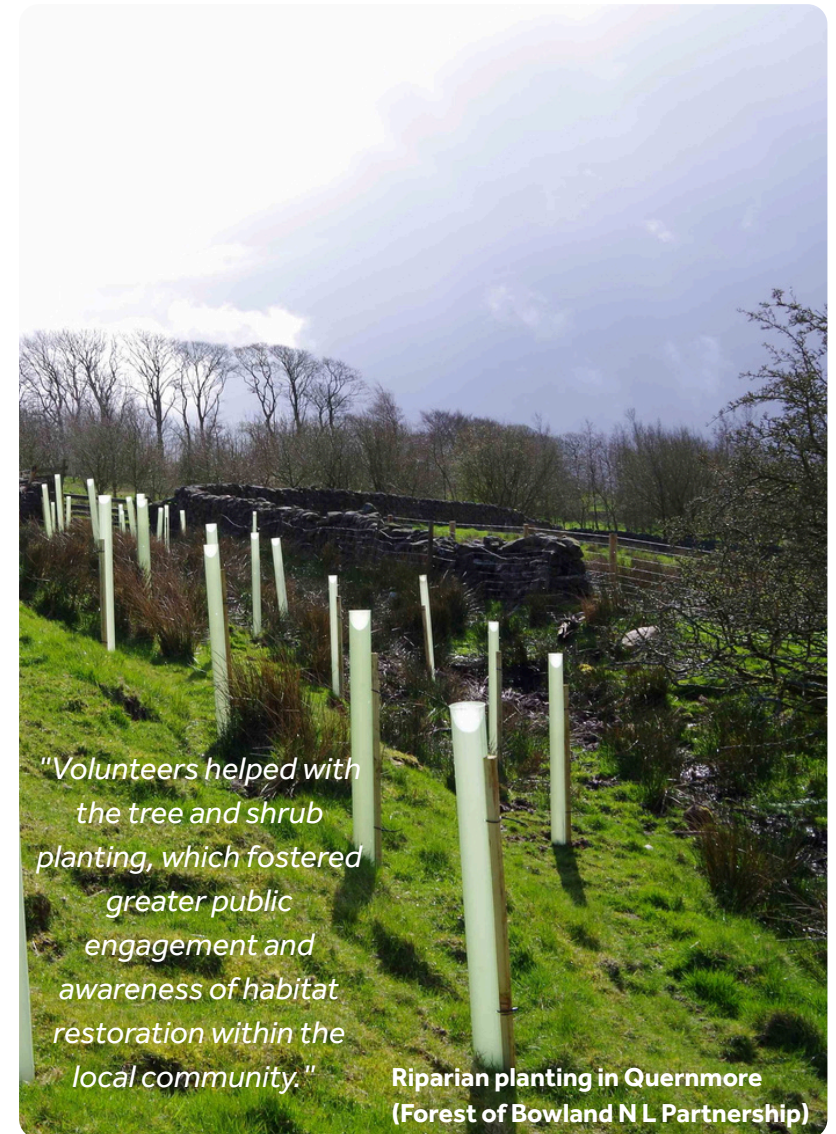
Establishing these riparian networks delivers a wide range of environmental and farming benefits.

Vegetated buffer strips function as natural filters, trapping sediment, nutrients, and agricultural pollutants before they enter watercourses, thereby improving water quality across upland catchments. As trees mature, their root systems stabilise riverbanks, reducing erosion while slowing surface runoff and helping to attenuate peak flows, contributing to natural flood management downstream.

Native tree and shrub planting enhances biodiversity by creating valuable habitats and ecological corridors, while shading from the canopy helps regulate water temperatures, supporting aquatic species. Fencing reduces livestock pressure on riverbanks, improving animal health, soil health and reducing pollution and sediment run off.

Collectively, these measures contribute to climate resilience, carbon storage, biodiversity, and the conservation of Bowland's distinctive landscape.

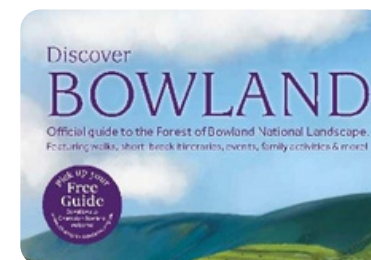
Contact: bowlandfipl@lancashire.gov.uk





The Discover Bowland 2026 guide was launched on 26 February at Holden Clough Nurseries, with 40 members of the Bowland Sustainable Tourism Business Network in attendance. Many partners support the guide through advertising, helping keep it free to the public. The printed guide and companion website offer practical information, local stories and inspiration for visitors and residents as well as places to visit, stay, eat and explore.

Contact: hetty.byrne@lancashire.gov.uk



Wyre Coast & Countryside Service volunteers gave over 7,000 hours of time to undertake patrols, and path and habitat management of popular destinations, from Nicky Nook to Brock Valley and from Cobble Hey to Bleasdale. They also supported many Wyre Great Outdoor activities that contributed to the Festival Bowland programme, with events such as the annual whimbrel watch and bat walks, conservation opportunities and heritage days. The busiest months were May and September.

Contact: countryside@wyre.gov.uk

Resilient and Sustainable Communities

Champion Bowland objectives are Conservation, Heritage and Community. It is an independent charity with six volunteer Trustees, raising funds and offering grants in support of the Forest of Bowland National Landscape Partnership Management Plan. This year's projects included Downham Village Hall Apple Day and Thornley Community Hall renovation. Champion Bowland hosts the Discover Bowland website, which promotes sustainable tourism providers, of which there are now 37 paying members.

Contact: chair@championbowland.org.uk



The Forest of Bowland continues to be a popular search on VisitLancashire.com and received over half a million views in 2025-26. The National Landscape also featured in Visit Lancashire summer and events digital guides, which received over 20K views. The Forest of Bowland National Landscape was mentioned in media coverage highlighting Dark Skies, UK's Prettiest Villages, Best Walks, Great Days Out and Family Nature Holidays. These and specific features in The Guardian, The Times and The Telegraph had potential reach of over 83 million readers. New photography commissioned by Marketing Lancashire included locations in and around Gisburn Forest, Assheton Arms, Gazegill Organics.

Contact: anna@marketinglancashire.com

All terrain wheelchairs continue to be provided through the National Landscape partnership project with Access the Dales. A hub host refresher day was held, covering future plans and ensuring that all hosts were aware of their responsibilities. Thanks to the support of the Duchy Of Lancaster, replacement and resetting of gateways and a footbridge on the permissive route between Wood End Farm and Dunsop Bridge means that a safe pedestrian and ATW-accessible link has been kept open, allowing connection to the wider rights of way network.

Contact: sarah.dornan@lancashire.gov.uk



A multi-partnership team worked with project co-funders, United Utilities, to bring about significant upgrades, including a durable, stockproof footbridge, along 200m of boardwalk through Holme Wood near Grizedale Bridge. The National Landscape team, Wyre Coast & Countryside Service staff and volunteers, LCC's Public Rights of Way team and Wyresdale Estate all supported the project. Volunteers from the Coast & Countryside Service will monitor and help to maintain the route going forward. Close by, a particularly challenging section on Nicky Nook was regraded, making it more accessible to visitors.

Contact: sarah.dornan@lancashire.gov.uk

Resilient and Sustainable Communities

Following an accessibility summary report, with recommendations by Experience Community, and using Defra's Access for All: Removing Barriers funding, the National Landscape team were able to deliver accessible upgrades to some of the mountain bike trails in Gisburn Forest. Using the Adaptive Mountain Biking Trail Standards, two sections of the blue-graded Bottoms Beck Trail have been enhanced, in conjunction with other improvements carried out by Forestry England, all designed to make this route more accessible for mountain bikers.



Contact: sarah.dornan@lancashire.gov.uk



Following bank erosion along the River Brock, and loss of some of the associated public right of way, Wyre Coast & Countryside Service worked with Wyre Rivers Trust and LCC's Public Rights of Way team to reinstate access at this very busy visitor site. Natural river revetment techniques have allowed the river to be as natural as possible, whilst step construction, drainage, vegetation clearance and accessible picnic benches have all contributed to the improvements at what is an extremely popular destination.

Contact: countrysideservice@wyre.gov.uk

In 2025, the Forest of Bowland National Landscape launched its Champion Species initiative at a gathering of the Sustainable Tourism Business Network. The campaign promotes awareness and conservation of 14 rare or representative local species as part of Bowland's wider Nature Recovery Plan. Working with Salt Marsh Studio, the team created a series of 14 illustrated pin badges and related products. Local businesses can also get involved through the 'Sponsor a Species' scheme, aligning with a species and demonstrating their support for nature recovery. Find out more: www.forestofbowland.com/champion-species-badges



Contact: hetty.byrne@lancashire.gov.uk

Eco Escapes

Two short-break itineraries were launched in July 2025 to inspire visitors to explore the Forest of Bowland National Landscape using public transport.

Developed in partnership with Community Rail Lancashire and unveiled during Community Rail Week, the itineraries connect Clitheroe and Whalley rail stations with local bus services and active travel routes, encouraging visitors to explore on foot, by bike, or via public transport.

The itineraries—*Bowland Tracks to Trails* and a shortened three-day version of the *Ribble Valley Jubilee Walking Trail*—are available to download for free from the Eco Escapes website. Designed to be flexible and accessible, they provide a practical and appealing way to experience the area without reliance on a car.

Enhanced bus connections, including the introduction of Service 11 in spring 2024, further support sustainable access by linking key walking routes along the Hodder Valley.

Visitors can reach destinations such as Slaidburn, Dunsop Bridge and Whitewell, directly from Clitheroe using public transport, enabling both circular and linear route options.

Funded by the Community Rail Network and the Department for Transport's Community Rail Development Fund, the itineraries include fully mapped walking and cycling routes that integrate with existing rail and bus services across Bowland. They are available as downloadable PDFs and can also be followed using GPS-enabled smartphone apps, making them easy to use in the field.

These additions bring the total number of itineraries available on the Eco Escapes website to fourteen. The website also features an interactive sustainable travel map, alongside information on local attractions, accommodation, walking and cycling routes, and wildlife, providing a comprehensive resource for planning low-impact visits. www.ecoescapes.org.uk

Contact: hetty.byrne@lancashire.gov.uk





Image: Fungi Foray (Forest of Bowland NL Partnership)

The Connecting People and Nature project, a partnership between the Forest of Bowland National Landscape and The Ernest Cook Trust, moved into Lancaster and Morecambe for its' final year of delivery. Connections were made with groups in North Lancashire, to help develop and support nature friendly communities, and increase access opportunities into the National Landscape. The Connecting People and Nature project has been working alongside other nature-based organisations in local communities to help develop connections and encourage a legacy of nature connection to participants.

Contact: abbie.hampshire@lancashire.gov.uk



Festival Bowland is a year-round calendar of events celebrating the nature, landscape, culture and heritage of the Forest of Bowland National Landscape. During 2025, 82 events attracted over 1100 attendances. With subjects ranging from dark skies and herbal first aid to geology and local history, the programme aimed to reach a wide audience. Wyre Council's weekly short walks from Garstang proved popular, whilst RSPB's moorland safaris were fully booked. Thanks go to all those involved in organising, delivering and hosting such a varied programme.

Contact: sandra.silk@lancashire.gov.uk

A Strong Connection Between People and the Landscape

Rob St John created a beautiful film and audio artwork, 'Are You Lost?' reflecting the conversations he had with young people from Nelson and Burnley along with farmers, walkers, researchers and historians from Bowland. Displayed at Nelson Festival of Culture, Jinny's Barn in Dunsop Bridge and at Gisburn Forest Hub, this Nature Calling installation achieved our aims of reaching new communities and enabling them to connect with nature and the national landscape. Part of a national arts programme led by NLA and Activate, supported locally by Lancaster Arts.

Contact: cathy.hopley@lancashire.gov.uk



Wyre's Coast & Countryside Service hosted a series of treks enabling people with mobility difficulties to get to areas they perhaps thought they would never access again. A visit to Cobble Hey Farm in May, the Dunsop Valley in July, Garstang and the Lancaster Canal in August and Bleasdale during the autumn showcased just some of the local wildlife, spectacular scenery and fascinating heritage found in Bowland and the surrounding area.

Contact: countrysideservice@wyre.gov.uk

Organised and run by volunteers supported by Wyre Coast & Countryside Service, the 21st Garstang Walking Festival attracted over 320 individuals (many attending multiple activities) across 44 events during its nine-day run in early May. 93% of customers surveyed gave five out of five in terms of overall satisfaction, with the remaining attendees giving a score of four; outstanding customer satisfaction all round, and a real credit to the volunteer walk leaders and staff involved.

Contact: countrysideservice@wyre.gov.uk



Days to Remember aims to support and encourage older people, including those living with dementia, their family members and carers, to keep connected to nature. During 2025-26 the programme worked with over 100 people from 10 groups, ranging from care homes and day centres to community groups and carer support. Activities included nature-inspired creative sessions, bird watching, farm visits, story-based movement, sound bathing and a train journey along the scenic Bentham Line. Our thanks go to all the participants and session providers.

Contact: sandra.silk@lancashire.gov.uk

A Strong Connection Between People and the Landscape

Brock and Calder Landscape Recovery Project

Supporting farmers to adopt nature-based solutions, diversify land management practices and collaborate at a landscape scale to deliver for water, nature and communities.

The Brock and Calder Landscape Recovery (BCLR) Project led by Wyre Rivers Trust (WRT), covers ~4000 ha of the Brock and Calder catchments.

The Project was developed in response to escalating environmental challenges, including more frequent and severe flooding and drought events, fragmented and degraded habitats, declining biodiversity, water pollution, and soil degradation.

By supporting farmers to implement nature-based solutions on their holdings, diversify land management practices and collaborate at a landscape scale, BCLR aims to deliver measurable benefits for both the environment and local communities.

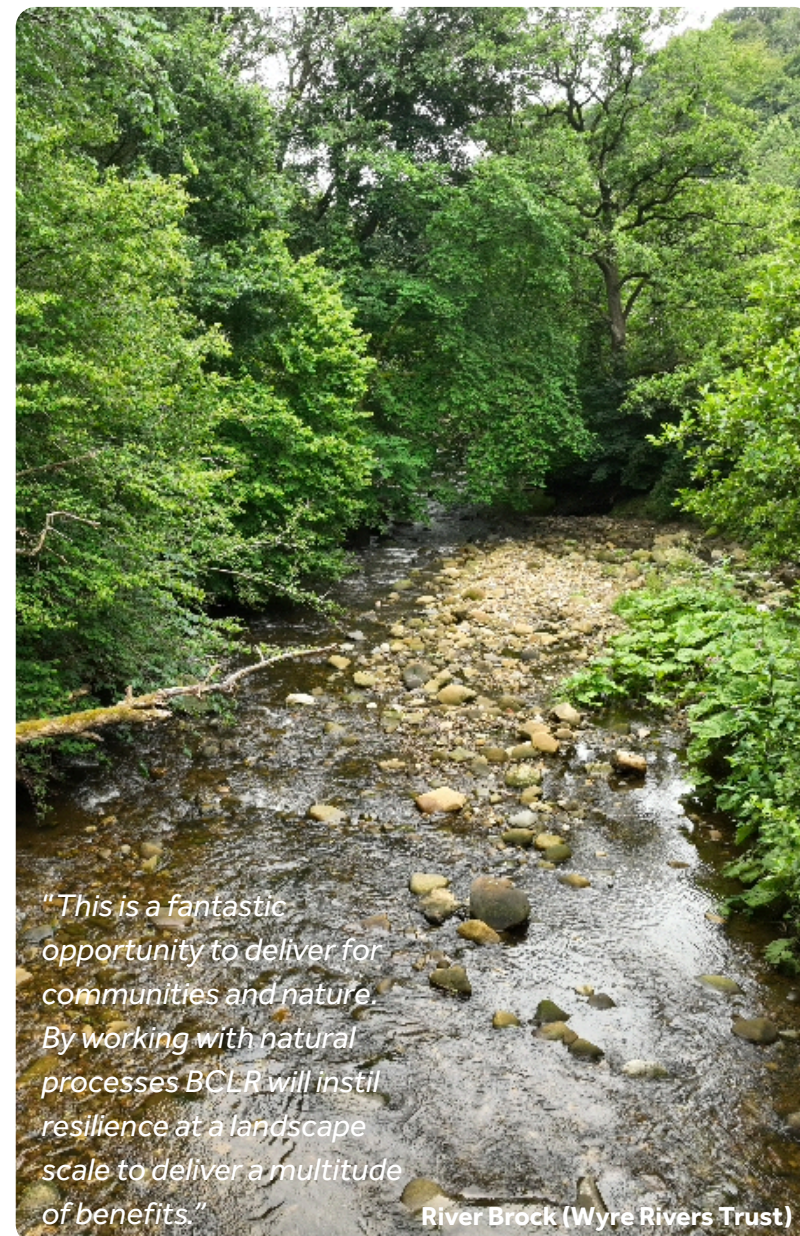
Community engagement and education are central to the Project's objectives.

Throughout the two-year development phase, WRT have worked with a range of stakeholders to develop a strategy for the 20-year implementation phase. That strategy aims to increase public understanding of ecosystem restoration whilst providing opportunities for communities to actively participate through volunteering and citizen science.

The Project's outreach programme will empower communities to connect with the landscape through improved access to green and blue spaces. Planned enhancements such as path upgrades and improved signage will work to encourage responsible access, and protect habitats of international importance. A varied learning programme will provide a diversity of learning opportunities for communities across the North West.

Working with partner organisations BCLR will ensure that it delivers impactful and long-lasting social programmes, enriching the social landscape of the area by connecting people and nature.

Contact: heather@wyreriverstrust.org



Membership of the Joint Advisory Committee 2025-2026

Lancashire County Council

County Councillor G Murfin
County Councillor S Crimmins
County Councillor G Kniveton

North Yorkshire Council

County Councillor S Myers

Lancaster City Council

Councillor P Jackson

Pendle Borough Council

Councillor B Newman

Preston City Council

Councillor J Iqbal

Ribble Valley Borough Council

Councillor R Elms

Wyre Borough Council

Councillor J Ibison

Lancashire Association of Local Councils

Councillor S Houghton

Yorkshire Local Councils Association

C Price

United Utilities

P Wilson

Environment Agency

H Dix

Natural England

J Cooper

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)

S Ludwig

Bowland Landowners and Farmers Group

A Taylor

Ramblers Association

D Kelly

Friends of Bowland

M Pilkington

Champion Bowland

M Pugh

Moorland Association

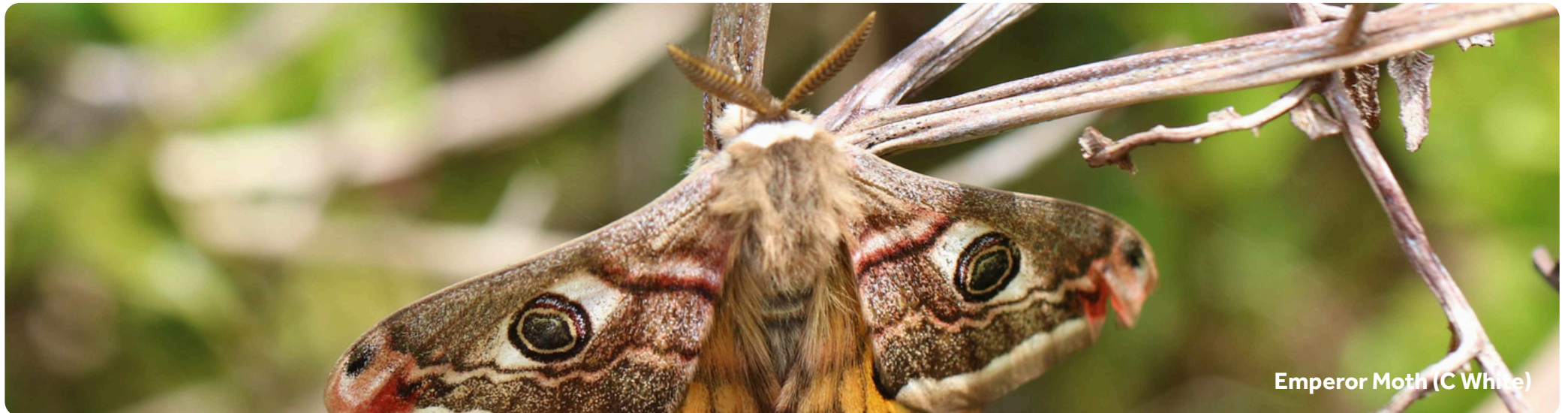
N Kilgour

Lancashire Wildlife Trust

T Burditt

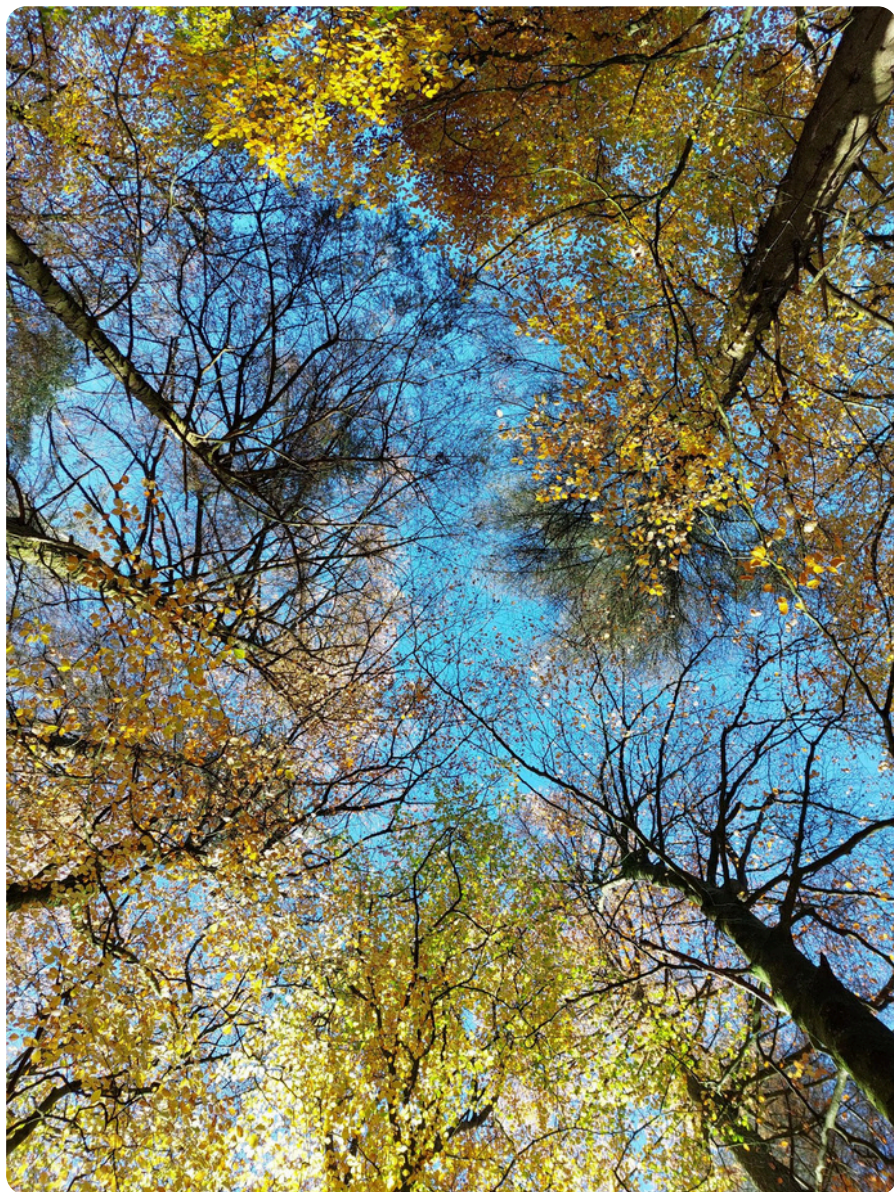
Forest of Bowland National Landscape Team

T Lund



Emperor Moth (C White)

Financial Summary 2025-2026



Actual 2025/2026
(Out-turn prices) £'s

EXPENDITURE

Core Costs

Salaries, including travel and training	293,922.44
Out-based premises	15,667.28
Partnership costs	64,188.39
Central, Deparmental & Tech. Support (LCC)	25,303.40
SUB TOTAL OF CORE COSTS	399,081.51

Non Core Costs

Projects	276,857.00
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	675,938.51

INCOME

Government Grants

Defra Grant (including uplifts)	535,932.00
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Contributions

United Utilities	7,140.00
Other project contributions	

County Councils

Lancashire	49,326.00
North Yorkshire	14,280.00

District Councils

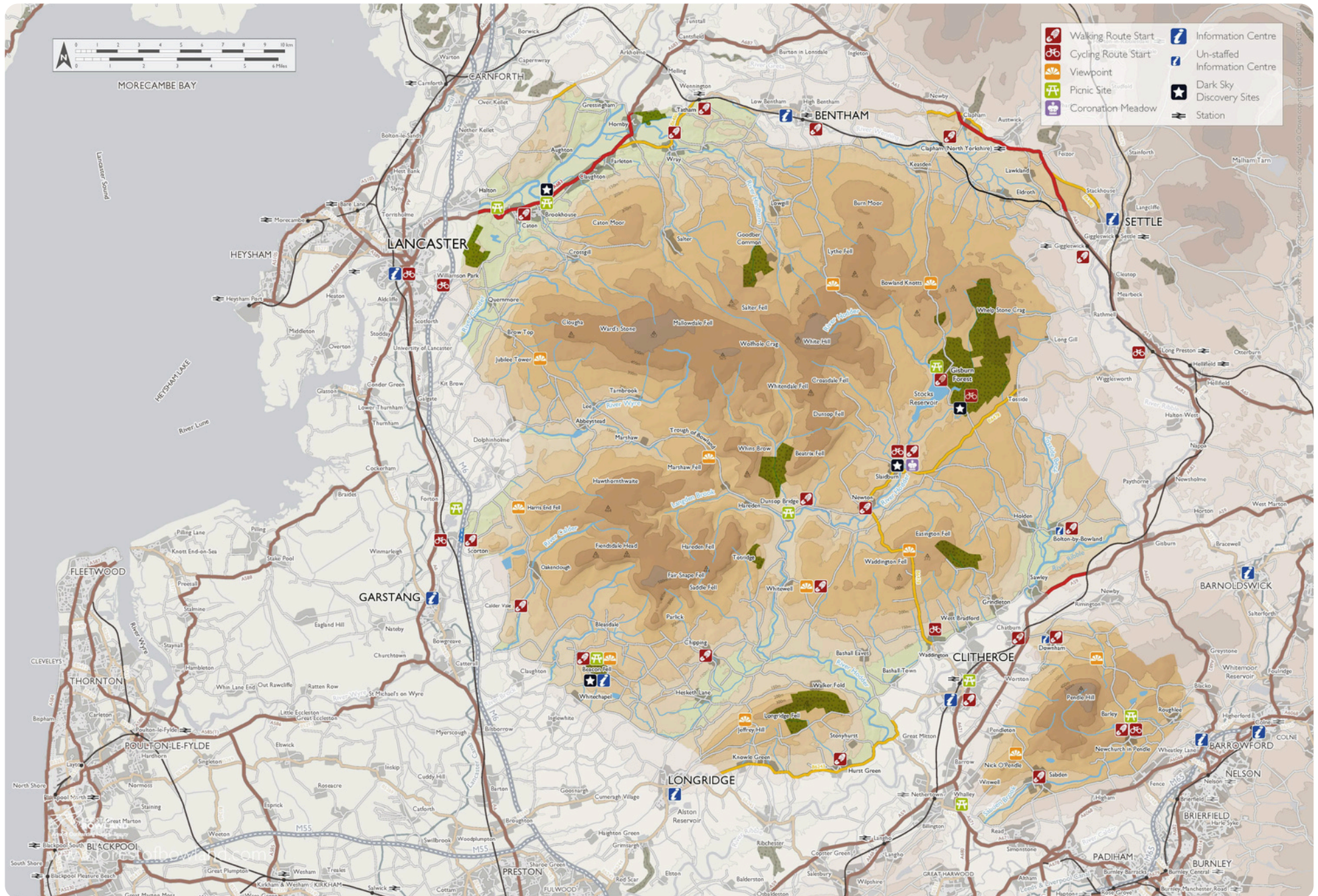
Lancaster	7,140.00
Pendle	7,140.00
Preston	7,140.00
Ribble Valley	7,140.00
Wyre	7,140.00

TOTAL INCOME RECEIVED	642,378.00
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CONTRIBUTION TO SUPPORT COSTS (IN KIND)

Lancashire County Council	£33,560.51
	675,938.51

Map of the Forest of Bowland National Landscape



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Wyre Council Coast Countryside Service

countrysideservice@wyre.gov.uk

Photo Credits

RSPB_Ivan Ellison; p4 (bottom left)

Lune Rivers Trust; p5 (top right)

Wyre Rivers Trust; p5 (bottom left)

Environment Agency; p6 (top right)

Ribble Rivers Trust; p6 (bottom left)

Wyre Coast & Countryside Service; p8 (bottom left), p10 (middle left), p13 (middle right)

Visit Lancashire_Alfred and Co Photography; p9 (middle left)

Lancaster Arts; p13 (top right)

All other images; Forest of Bowland National Landscape Partnership



Catlow and Gisburn Forest from Lamb Hill (Forest of Bowland National Landscape Partnership)