

Lancashire Wildlife Trust's Vision and Strategy for The Future of Lancashire's Peatlands

Our Organisation

Lancashire Wildlife Trust (The Wildlife Trust for Lancashire, Manchester and North Merseyside) is a charity which has been in existence since 1962. We are a key voice for nature, both locally and nationally. We manage reserves, deliver specialist projects and have a people and wildlife team engaging people in sustainable living and conservation from the very young to the retired. We own and manage 38 nature sites, covering over 1300 hectares. The Trust also manages and advises on the wildlife management of a number of other sites in the region – safeguarding, enhancing and influencing others to benefit wildlife.

We have around 28,000 members, around 1140 volunteers and around 160 staff. Our key objectives are to protect, create and enhance wildlife in the region, creating Living Landscapes and Living Seas; to stand up for wildlife and the environment and to inspire people about the natural world and encourage everyone to take action for wildlife. Our key performance indicators over the last year included inspiring 17,351 children and young people, supporting and advising 253 groups, training 619 volunteers and engaging 12,845 people in our programme of events.

We believe working in a Living Landscapes context is essential for the resilience of our wildlife and that partnership working and stakeholder engagement is crucial to this. Our commitment to the Great Manchester Wetlands (GM Wetlands) Nature Improvement Area demonstrates this; not only have we established a partnership with 22 organisations and secured designation of this status from the relevant Local Nature Partnerships, but we also continue to administer the secretariat as we see the influence and advocacy of this work crucial for its future improvement and protection.

Mosslands and peatlands (both referred to as peatlands in this bid) are a key habitat that we have seen as a priority for many years. Often overlooked and misunderstood, we have led years of campaigning, advocacy, purchase and site restoration for a habitat that was once vast within our region and now is hugely reduced, fragmented and in poor condition.

With thanks to Esmee Fairbairn Foundation (EFF) we delivered the Bring Back The Bog project, matched with Heritage Lottery Fund money, to buy a peat extraction site and start the restoration of this 100 hectare (ha) site, alongside improvements to other sites within this area, giving us excellent skills in lowland moss restoration and monitoring on a large scale. EFF supported our volunteering and community engagement with fantastic results.

Another project that embodies our ability and ambition to deliver habitat restoration in conjunction with a wide variety of landowning organisations is the South Pennines Grassland Project. This 5-year project, funded by landfill tax and the Scout Moor Windfarm Habitat Enhancement Fund, has brought 200 hectares of County Wildlife Site grassland into positive conservation management and created 50 hectares of new species-rich grassland by working with private and public land managers.

Lancashire Peatlands - Our Vision and Strategy for the next 5 year

We have secured £210,000 from Esmee Fairbairn Foundation for the Lancashire Peatlands Initiative to run from April 2019 to march 2022 with a view to sustaining activity long term working towards our Lancashire Peatlands Strategy.

2.2 full-time members of staff, based within Lancashire Wildlife Trust (LWT), will deliver activity that will drive forward a co-ordinated approach to all of our peatland habitats, raise awareness of their importance,

and build in resilience for their future protection through volunteer activity and sustainable funding resources.

Activities will include:

- lowland and upland peatland habitat restoration and improvement
- Securing further funds for capital restoration and future sustainability
- partnership working and stakeholder engagement
- consumer peat-free purchasing campaigns
- policy influencing
- community involvement
- volunteer and skills development
- developing innovative income sources
- research and monitoring
- knowledge and best practice dissemination
- demonstrating sustainable alternative land management practices

The Need/Opportunity

a) Need for the work and why it is timely

Peatlands are precious. The IUCN UK Peatland Strategy 2018 says *“Peatlands are among the most valuable ecosystems on Earth and a stark example of how important our natural environment is to our wellbeing. Occupying just 3% of the Earth’s land surface, peatlands are our largest carbon store on land. They are places where people derive clean water and food, and can act as buffers for environmental disasters, such as flooding. They are also of global significance for biodiversity with the majority of peatland species and habitats rare, threatened or declining.”*

Peatlands provide a number of vital eco-system services to society:

- Carbon - Peatlands have a huge impact on climate change. Worldwide, peatlands are incredibly important carbon stores that contain twice as much carbon as all the world’s forests. Peatlands around the world are largely degraded and damaged through drainage and burning and emit as much as 8.5% of all man-made carbon emissions¹. In the UK, it is estimated that 1.8 million hectares (ha) of peatland, out of 2.3 million ha, is damaged. But healthy peat bogs actually remove carbon from the atmosphere and lock it up. In addition, re-wetting drained peat results not only in climate change mitigation, reduction of land subsidence and improvements for biodiversity, but also creates climate change adaptation effects such as groundwater retention, environmental cooling and water flow regulation.

“Restoration of peatlands is among the most cost-effective options for mitigating climate change.”

Achim Steiner, Executive Director of UN Environment Programme

- Water quality and flooding – the Making Space for Water reports have demonstrated that restoring upland blanket bogs has a positive effect on the quality of drinking water sources, reducing the need for costly treatment downstream, and on the attenuation of storm run-off, reducing the downstream impact of storms by lowering the risk of flooding.

¹ (ref: Joosten, H., Sirin, A., Couwenburg, J., Laine, J. and Smith, P. (2016 in press). *The role of peatlands in climate regulation.*).

- **Biodiversity** – Lowland raised bogs (mosslands) are extremely rare habitats in the UK. In LWT's area, 97% of mosslands have been destroyed. However, those remaining support over 15 different Priority BAP (biodiversity action plan) species (also known as Species of Principle Importance), including water vole, brown hare, willow tit, bog bush cricket, common lizard and black darter dragonfly. Plant species are unique and characteristic of the habitat, with restricted distributions, meaning they are vulnerable to local extinctions. They include cross-leaved heath, hare's-tail cotton-grass, sundew and the rare marsh gentian. The upland peatlands are iconic landscapes supporting internationally important arrays of habitats and species, including blanket bog, bog rosemary, cloudberry, merlin, curlew, lapwing, golden plover, short-eared owl and hen harrier. Both habitats support the range of *sphagnum* mosses which ultimately form the peat itself. Most of the upland peatland SSSIs are classed as unfavourable recovering.
- **Amenity, landscape and heritage** – our peatlands are wild places that provide a source of recreation and enjoyment. In Lancashire, some upland areas, like the West Pennine Moors SSSI, are close to large urban populations, whilst others, like the Bowland Fells, are much more remote. The mosslands around Manchester are close to large population centres, many of which include areas of high social deprivation, and offer a recreation resource and opportunity to enhance wellbeing, as well as a link to the region's rich heritage.

Recognising the need for dedicated staff to drive this agenda forward

Since the development of LWT's Mosslands strategy in 2009, we have been actively restoring lowland raised bogs across our region, working with research bodies to investigate carbon emissions, involving communities in accessing and appreciating peatlands, influencing policy makers about their environmental, social and economic importance and working in partnership with other organisations through e.g. the GM Wetlands Partnership.

However, since September 2017, we have been without the role of Mosslands Manager and the impact of this is being sorely felt. It is proving difficult to coordinate Trust-wide delivery and we have missed funding opportunities; for example, Winmarleigh Moss, a key site in need of much more work, was omitted from the recent Defra Peatland fund. Alongside this, our resources to co-ordinate the GM Wetlands partnership are rapidly running out and it is notable that more capacity is needed in order to drive partners to work proactively together for our lowland mosses.

Dedicated staffing is urgently needed to prevent the excellent peat-focussed progress made so far from being lost, and now more than ever, we need to pull the workstreams together to generate more value, profile and awareness of the importance of peat. There needs to be leadership that can drive the agenda, maintain momentum, engage partners, secure funding opportunities, share best practice, and campaign on behalf of peat to promote a supporting policy framework, drive innovation and ultimately protect and enhance further habitat improvements.

Maximising current opportunities for our peatlands

Now is the right time to do this. More than ever before, the criticality of managing peatlands properly is being widely recognised by governments and policy makers. In the UK, the IUCN Peatland Programme has just published its UK strategy for 2018-2040, aiming to drive and coordinate action, and to provide the focus and vision so that key stakeholders can pull together in the same direction, helping scale-up and strengthen existing efforts.

Our aim is to reach out and involve people and partners, raise awareness and improve our peatlands. Bringing more partners together would help to make progress towards the long term aims of the IUCN strategy (ultimately to deliver 2 million hectares of peat under restoration or in good condition by 2040).

The UK government have also recognised the importance of peatlands in the new 25 Year Environment Plan, making a commitment to create and deliver a new and ambitious framework for peat restoration in England. A government Peat Strategy will be published later this year. So, there is some recognition and words – but with no overall owner for peat in Lancashire, there is no ability to maximise the opportunities that this presents. In addition, with the UK leaving Europe we need to seize the crucial opportunity to influence new land management grant schemes which could replace current agri-environment schemes so that they result in better outcomes for peatlands.

b) Skills, experience, networks and insight that allow us to make a difference:

We believe we could make a clear difference to promoting the restoration of both lowland and upland peat areas, building on two decades of successful mossland improvements, working with volunteers, involving local communities and partnership development. For example, the highly successful “Bring Back the Bog” project supported by EFF provides an excellent template for community engagement and we would also incorporate lessons learned from restoration approaches taken. As lead partner of the Great Manchester Wetlands, LWT have built up successful relationships with organisations involved with the long term strategic management of nature sites and networks, with the aim of restoring and reconnecting habitats and wildlife across a landscape-scale area. We would apply such a partnership working approach to the proposed Lancashire Peatlands Initiative, making the most of relationships developed with landowners, partners and contractors through our South Pennine Grassland project, and the LPP.

In summary LWT has:

- been working on restoration and improvement projects on 10 lowland raised bog sites covering over 300 ha and has attracted funding from a wide variety of sources enabling the purchase of sites, restoration and delivery of community programmes
- experience of restoration techniques across a variety of upland and lowland peatland types, including previous peat extraction sites
- track record of working effectively within partnerships and providing leadership across Lancashire
- an excellent track record of including local communities in mossland restoration, training volunteers, working with Friends groups and increasing accessibility for people.
- experience of communicating key messages about peatlands to the general public and specific stakeholders, e.g. raising the public profile of lowland bogs and their value as a wildlife haven and community resource
- experience of providing advice on good land management practices to landowners and good working relationships with landowners in the region and believe they would be receptive to proposals.
- wider networks and contacts for influencing key policies and strategies
- networks and relationships to further develop areas of cooperation
- access to advice and knowledge from colleagues involved in peatland management in other regions, such as Yorkshire Wildlife Trust’s Yorkshire Peat Partnership and the Pennine PeatLIFE project
- experience of scientific surveying and monitoring techniques
- contacts with the region’s Higher Education establishments on a variety of research projects
- developed an understanding of cultivating plant species e.g. *sphagnum* propagation
- experience of mossland species reintroductions, e.g. Large Heath Butterfly at Heysham Moss, and is leading a GM Wetlands project to deliver further reintroductions.

- The right ethos and enthusiasm to drive this forward – we are an innovative, adaptable, flexible, visionary organisation used to delivering ambitious projects and developing novel approaches to support delivery of its work

Lancashire Peatlands Strategy

Recently the Trust has reviewed the achievements of the last decade to determine what it should be doing in the next decade to promote the peatlands agenda if suitable funding can be secured. We need to address bringing together under the Lancashire Peatlands Initiative the work of the existing Lancashire Peat Partnership on uplands, the current lowland mossland work within GM Wetlands and across the wider LWT area, as well as new joint projects across areas of commonality and innovation. The overall aim needs to be to create a much more “joined-up” landscape with functional linkages between the lowland and upland peat areas.

We would put in place a project team to focus on three priority outcomes:

- 1) Key peatland habitats in our area will be improved or restored
- 2) Campaigning with our partners will change attitudes of people, organisations and businesses
- 3) Local communities will be engaged and enabled to contribute to the work in their area

1. Key peatland habitats in our area will be improved or restored:

- By 2022 a further 600 ha of peatland habitat will be improved or restored and £1.2m of additional funding towards landscape improvements will be levered in that will enhance our ecological networks and contribute to wider sustainability goals and ecosystem services, strengthening climate change resilience in critical pinch points for species migration
- Co-ordination and delivery of key habitat improvements will be targeted through the application of decision-making tools such as the Priority Peat reports, citizen science surveys and research, seeking to join up sites within the wider landscape to enhance ecological networks.
- Best practice restoration techniques will be identified and applied and ongoing research monitoring and surveying will track outcomes as well as continuing to inform techniques e.g. in revegetation, species presence and carbon balances. Information and knowledge will be shared widely within the project and among wider contacts e.g. other peat partnerships across the UK and Europe, particularly if successful with Interreg
- Constructive relationships will be established with landowners and demonstration sites set up to encourage others to participate in a natural capital land management approach
- Encourage a more favourable management regime for the land surrounding our mossland sites, to create hydrological buffer zones, which could entail projects trialling paludiculture, demonstrating end markets for alternative wet agriculture products and economic benefit for land owners/managers, resulting in improvements to the condition of sites.

2. Campaigning with our partners will change attitudes of people and organisations

- A long-term campaign will be launched aimed at the general public to protect peatlands from further commercial exploitation, working with organisations such as the RHS on their peat-free gardening campaign and promoting alternative growing medium products in the horticulture industry.
- Innovative and replicable funding models for self-sustaining natural capital approaches to land management will be developed e.g. expanding LWT’s Carbon Capture scheme to help businesses

address their impacts, working with developers on natural capital approaches and exploring the potential of the Biodiversity Net Gain principle.

- Establish and strengthen a number of partnerships that help us to work collaboratively for our peatlands
- We will engage with and influence regional and national environment and planning policies to raise awareness and seek recognition of peatland ecosystems service and support for enhancement – e.g. ensuring the contribution of peatlands are included in the GMCA’s carbon model and DEFRA’s Urban Pioneer within their 25 year strategy

3. Local communities will be engaged and enabled to contribute to the work in their area

- Continue to develop community engagement, empowerment and campaigning / championing activity
- We will build the capacity and skills of local people through a programme of volunteering, local group empowerment and a team of Landscape Champions, supported through a training programme and widely promoted through a rewards and recognition package.
- Delivering a programme to build awareness and appreciation of Lancashire’s peatlands among local communities, to encourage access and engagement.

The team of two full-time staff (a Project Manager and a Project Officer), complemented by the Great Manchester Wetlands Co-ordinator (0.2), would deliver the above outcomes through:

- securing further funding streams to deliver the work areas, developing innovative approaches to funding such as working with developers on demonstrating the viable application of a biodiversity offsetting/natural capital gain approach
- strengthening partnership effectiveness to derive greater value – leading, coordinating and supporting work, enabling individual strengths to be applied, engaging current and new partners in the Initiative and linking the work of partnership organisations,
- applying a strategic, landscape-scale approach (similar to that of the GM Wetlands) to achieve greater delivery leverage and take advantage of economies of scale
- producing an overarching vision, strategy and delivery plan supported by a communications approach that all partners can adopt and apply

The result would be better quality peatlands (both upland and lowland), improved ecosystem services, more ecological network connectivity, more sensitive and effective management practices, improved engagement with local communities, more intrinsic value placed on peatlands by key influencers and an ability for the public to enjoy Lancashire’s peatlands without diminishing their inherent value.

Plans to continue the work long term

Restoration of peatlands is a long-term business and work will need to continue way beyond the term of this grant. Rejuvenating the Lancashire Peat Partnership will be one of the vehicles to drive this, alongside other partnerships e.g. GM Wetlands Partnership. Further sources of funding will need to be found to continue the LPI team and a legacy plan will be produced in the first year and regularly reviewed. However, a core remit for this project is to investigate longer term, more sustainable sources of funding e.g. corporate sponsorship. The team will be applying for further grants in addition to trying out a range of alternative, innovative funding sources that would provide greater security and continue to sustain the posts.

If we have delivered the outcomes intended, then the benefits in terms of restored peatland, enlightened policy makers, changed purchasing habits, improved skills, increased awareness and involvement of communities will indeed continue to be felt. Our legacy will be:

- Improved peatlands, where erosion has been halted and reversed, vegetation continues to develop and hydrological function is improved. These continue to: provide more and better places for wildlife to thrive, lock up carbon instead of leaking it, slow storm run-off and improve water quality
- Peatlands considered within our wider landscapes, better joined up throughout our uplands and lowlands, and contributing to other agendas
- Decision makers and influencers who now understand, appreciate the value and support the further restoration of peat and who put in place mechanisms to allow better management
- Local communities who feel a connection with their peatlands and want to use and protect them
- Peatland champions and Local Groups who will continue to be our landscape ambassadors
- Greater awareness of the importance of our peatlands.
- Members of the public and retailers who have changed their buying choices on peat products permanently
- Helping to establish viable markets for alternative land use products such as Typha or Sphagnum
- Land owners, managers and conservation bodies who have access to best practice techniques, scientific information and appropriate skills to deliver and maintain further effective restoration
- More effective links with a wide range of networks
- Flexible and secure income streams for delivering peatland improvements and management
- A Lancashire Peat Partnership that is expanded, strengthened and refreshed and up to future challenges
- Continuing to influence through relationships/networks such as the GM Natural Capital Group, Urban Pioneer, Great Manchester Wetlands, and the recognition of our peatlands in key policies and strategies
- Demonstrating and seeking recognition of wider societal and economic benefits, opening up a range of funding options (flood management, water quality, carbon, biodiversity)
- Our peatlands held up as exemplar best practice in the delivery of the Government's peat strategy