

Solway Coast
National
Landscape

Solway Coast National Landscape:

an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Management Plan 2027-32



Front cover image: Geese over Moricambe Bay. ©Judith Rogers

Chair's foreword

As Chair of the Solway Coast National Landscape, I am delighted that at the start of my term in office we have a new Management Plan for the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty of the Solway Coast over the next five years. The Plan is a strategic document, which guides the policy and practice of relevant authorities and provides a positive and proactive management framework for all partners, agencies and groups working across our landscape. It is designed to inspire action for everyone who has this beautiful coastline and very special part of Cumbria at heart.

The National Landscape Partnership has reviewed this Management Plan on behalf of Cumberland Council, with the support of Defra, Natural England and the National Landscapes Association, but also with a range of partners, all who have input into the content of this plan, have helped to set the direction and reviewed the draft text. I am very grateful to everyone involved with this and would like to take this opportunity to thank them for their work.

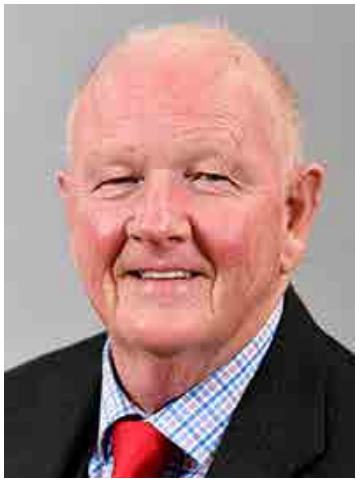
The Management Plan starts by setting out the reasons for designation, looking at why the Solway Coast is significant and importantly, why people think it is special. It identifies outcomes for our landscape but also sets out how delivering actions within the Plan links to national targets. It identifies forces for change for both natural beauty and people, and for each component a set of shared measures that everyone can help deliver, from the largest statutory body to the smallest local group.

In this Management Plan, we have continued to address many issues that were key to our last Plan. Our landscape still needs help to mitigate and adapt to climate change, and the associated problem of coastal erosion is a particular threat. Wildlife needs more space to thrive and we have to be proactive to ensure the recovery of nature. The built and historical character of our coastal settlements needs to be better understood, and there is still much about the rich archaeological heritage of this quiet corner of Cumbria that we have yet to unveil.



Andy and the Solway Coast National Landscape team at Wolsty Beach

One of my great passions is ensuring that we support the needs of local communities as well as ensuring that we provide access for all and provide a warm welcome to people who do not normally spend time on the Solway Coast. Since the last Management Plan, we have experienced a global pandemic, and we understand how important access to green and blue space is to people for their health and wellbeing. It is important that in this Management Plan cycle, we encourage communities to play a part in landscape conservation and we find new ways to help people explore and appreciate the Solway.



Councilor Andrew Semple
Chair, Solway Coast National Landscape

Our 2040 vision

It is 2040. The Solway Coast is a more resilient landscape, richer in wildlife, with declines in biodiversity being reversed. Our saltmarshes and mudflats have stable populations of wildfowl and waders, benefiting from well-managed habitat, free from disturbance. Our sand dune systems are thriving, with a richer diversity of plants and animals.

The Solway Mosses have been restored, and they are well-managed for nature; surrounding land use is sympathetic to their conservation. They are valued by the public for their distinctive wildlife and as part of what makes the Solway special.

Our lowland farmland and marshy grasslands are richer in biodiversity than twenty years prior. Through agri-environment schemes that work and are stable long-term prospects, farmers are rewarded properly for providing a range of species-rich habitats, better-managed and connected kested hedgerows, and cleaner, more wildlife-rich watercourses.

Our historic environment, especially our legacy of traditional building styles and our rich historical legacy from the pre-Roman to the twentieth century, is better understood, conserved and celebrated. Our cultural heritage is widely recognised and valued and is continually evolving and growing richer. Local communities have a strong sense of what's special about where they live, they celebrate their heritage together creatively and feel involved in its management.

Where new development occurs, it is well-sited and designed, and meets community need, whilst actively furthering the purpose of National Landscape designation.

People increasingly value the Solway Coast's natural heritage for its own sake and for all that it provides for us. The Solway Coast is a natural choice as a place to live, work, explore and enjoy. Well-managed, expertly interpreted and open to all, our natural and cultural assets underpin an increasingly environment-led local economy.



Drumburgh Moss viewing tower

Contents

Introduction 5
A National Landscape 9
Legislative, policy and operational context 10
Core principles for the production and implementation of this Plan 18
An ecosystems approach – what does nature do for us? 20
Natural assets, services and benefits on the Solway Coast 22
Priority habitats, services and benefits 23
Outcomes framework 24
Broad short-term outcomes and their links to natural beauty 25
The Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework (PLTOF) 26

Natural beauty 27

Components 30
Seascapes and intertidal landscapes 34
Low-lying inland landscapes 40
Coastal Mosses 43
Coastal lowland farmed landscapes and their settlements 46

People and place 51

A natural place to explore and enjoy 55

A landscape for learning 59

Targets and monitoring 63



Starling murmuration

Background and context

The nature and purpose of this plan

This plan is produced under provisions in Section 89 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000), which itself was subject to amendment in this context by the Levelling-Up and Regeneration Act (LURA) (2023).

The plan, which is in practice a strategy, has several primary functions. It:

- formulates the policy of local authorities (in this case, Cumberland Council and any new Cumbria-wide authority created through the devolution process) in relation to their National Landscape
- guides the policy and practice of partners and Relevant Authorities under LURA
- sets out what might constitute 'seeking to further the purpose of designation' through the implementation of work in support of the plan's outcomes and measures
- aims to inspire action for nature, climate, people and place, including guiding the team's work and that of key partners, Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) applications, and the content of Landscape Recovery and other Environmental Land Management (ELM) scheme proposals.

The plan provides a positive and proactive management framework for the many bodies that form the Solway Coast National Landscape Partnership, and others. It identifies the components of natural beauty – those things which should be the focus of conservation and enhancement – and outlines an integrated vision for the future of the Solway Coast as a National Landscape. The plan identifies the drivers of change in the landscape today and looks at how they can be best managed and/or accommodated.

As well as the components of natural beauty, the plan also addresses how people use and interact with the landscape for their enjoyment and health and wellbeing.

A series of desired outcomes are identified, alongside measures to achieve them. Although the actions underpinning these measures are frequently undertaken by several organisations, often working together in partnership, a catalyst is listed for each measure as the most appropriate body with the expertise to accelerate change.

The primary audiences for the plan are therefore:

- Local Authorities at all levels- relevant Authorities under LURA
- Nature related Arms-Length bodies – Natural England, Environment Agency, Forestry Commission
- Farmers and land managers, their representative bodies and providers of farm advice
- Conservation NGOs and other partners
- Historic England
- Local groups of place and interest

In short, everyone who has an influence over or a stake in this nationally protected landscape.



Marsh fritillary

Introduction

The River Eden at Old Sandsfield

In 2019, as part of developing the previous plan, people were consulted in meetings, at events and online, on what matters to them about the Solway Coast, their concerns and priorities. This brief introduction to this special landscape builds on and amplifies some of the things people said as part of that consultation – where better to begin this document that sets out what makes the Solway special and how it can be conserved.

At just 115km^2 , the Solway Coast, designated in December 1964, is one of the smallest designated landscapes in the country. Other places might be bigger, or better known than this narrow strip of coastline between Carlisle and Maryport, but the Solway is in some ways a well-kept secret. "Everyone knows about the Lakes but it's surprising how many people outside the area have no idea what wonderful beaches and coastal areas there are." It is understated in many ways, and what it lacks in relative size it makes up for in the beauty and wildness of the estuary, the mysterious feel of the mosses and the subtle nature of its farmed landscapes. As one resident said, "I love it. It's so unspoilt, it feels like going back in time."

"I love it. It's so unspoilt, it feels like going back in time."

The Solway Coast is perhaps most celebrated for its estuary landscapes – its saltmarshes, mudflats and dunes – that provide winter refuge for thousands of wintering wildfowl and waders. For many of us, the birdlife of the estuary provides "the natural soundscape" to the Solway. These are wide open landscapes, with outstanding views into and out of the designated landscape. Nature and wide-open spaces feature prominently in what people value, with one resident simply saying, "I love to watch the skies and the wildlife."

If the estuary landscapes are wild and dramatic, the Solway Mosses (lowland peatland) are perhaps the most enigmatic part of the coast. They are easily dismissed as 'wasteland' and this can hamper their conservation, but they provide vital services to us all – carbon storage and sequestration in particular. They are also rich in wildlife, especially dragonflies, butterflies (notably the rare large heath), birds and specialist plants like sundews.





Cyclist at Boustead Hill

Set back from the coast, a gentle, rolling, pastoral landscape of improved and semi-improved grasslands is enclosed by 'kested' hedgerows and cut through by sunken lanes and narrow roads. Here, and on the grazing marshes, farming remains an important part of the life of the Solway, whilst in the estuary there is a rich heritage of harvesting the fruits of the sea. This is captured well by someone who sees clearly what makes the area special: "The Solway Plain has a rich agricultural and marine heritage which should be encouraged."

Settlements and the wider landscape have a complex mixture of vernacular buildings, reflecting a long history of occupation and include fortified houses and churches, longhouses, 'clay dabbins' and cruck-roofed buildings. In these buildings and structures, and in the field and settlement patterns, place names and archaeological features, the past is with us all the time.



Sundew

Local people and visitors love to walk and cycle through this landscape and to enjoy its natural wonders and its cultural heritage, feeling that the Solway Coast can provide "a more balanced way of life where everyone can benefit from slowing down and tuning into nature for wellbeing and appreciation." A visitor to the area summed up the impact the Solway has on their health and wellbeing, saying simply, "I feel I breathe better there."



Tawny owl

People value "the sheer beauty and essentialness of this area" and want to see it conserved and enhanced where possible. But looking ahead, they are concerned about the future of our landscape and its wildlife and habitats, about climate change and for people's continued ability to explore and enjoy the area sustainably and learn more about it. They are also concerned about a potential increase in development pressure; the possible loss of special views; the loss of traditional buildings; the potential decline of farming and fishing. They see an increase in fly-tipping and litter. And they want to make sure these concerns are not realised and that the area has a bright future.

Put simply, they want to, "ensure that the Solway Coast remains an area of outstanding natural beauty." That is what this Management Plan is all about, and if everyone can get behind the kinds of actions it promotes, we can achieve the Vision outlined on page 2, together.



Belted Galloway cattle Mawbray Banks

A National Landscape

Together with National Parks, National Landscapes are unique and irreplaceable national assets, each with such distinctive character and natural beauty that it is in the nation's interest to safeguard them for present and future generations and manage them in the interests of all of us in society. They are also recognised globally as Protected Areas under the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN Category V).

The 38 National Landscapes in England and Wales cover approximately 1/8th of the land surface. They are some of the most special and cherished places in our country. Like all IUCN Category V Protected Areas, they are also living, working landscapes that contribute billions of pounds every year to the local and national economy. Although home to less than half a million people (under 2% of England's population), over two thirds of England's population live within half an hour's drive of a National Landscape and around 150 million people visit the country's National Landscapes every year, investing billions in the local economy.

Natural beauty

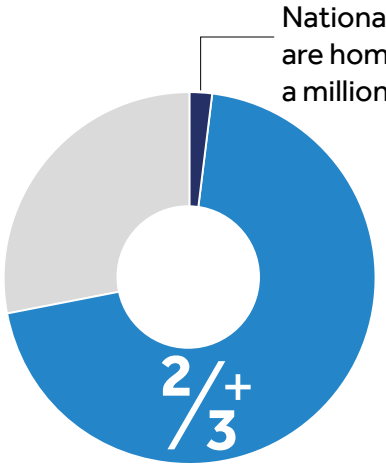
The term 'natural beauty' first gained currency in a legislative context in the 1907 Act, which gave legal status to the National Trust ('for Places of Historic Interest and Natural Beauty'). It has been the basis for the designation of both National Landscapes and National Parks since the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act in which, however, the term was not defined and it has not really been so since.

In the 1949 Act, 'natural beauty' replaced other phrases such as 'landscape beauty' and 'characteristic landscape beauty', providing a clue to the importance of landscape character and beauty as an aesthetic experience. Later the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 clarified that land used for agriculture, woodlands, parkland or with physiographical features partly the product of human intervention in the landscape, is not prevented from being treated as an area of 'natural beauty' too. Government Guidance on AONBs in 2001 (Countryside Agency publication CA24) offers a useful non-technical definition, stating that "Natural Beauty is not just the look of the landscape, but includes landform and geology, plants and animals, landscape features and the rich history of human settlement over the centuries." So natural beauty goes well beyond scenic or aesthetic value and is to do with the relationship between people and place. It encompasses everything – 'natural' and human – that makes an area distinctive, including its cultural associations, and the people who live in it, past and present.

For National Landscapes, their natural beauty should have the potential to be 'outstanding,' both in terms of the quality of the components of character and the human aesthetic experience of the landscape. Although our perception of landscape and its value may be driven by our background, our culture or the level of engagement and understanding we have, it is not enough to simply say that 'beauty is in the eye of the beholder'.



England's population



Over two thirds of England's population live within half an hour's drive of a National Landscape

Legislative, policy and operational context

Legislative background

National Landscapes exist within a legal framework which has been progressively strengthened since the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act first established the 'AONB' designation, provided what were termed AONBs with protection under planning law against inappropriate development and gave local authorities permissive powers to take action for 'preserving and enhancing natural beauty' in them (S.88).

The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CRoW) subsumes and strengthens the provisions of the 1949 Act. It confirms the purpose and significance of AONBs, clarifies the procedure for their designation, and created a firm legislative basis for their designation, protection and management. In particular:

Section 82 reaffirms the primary purpose of AONBs: to conserve and enhance natural beauty.

Section 83 establishes the procedure for designating or revising the boundaries of an AONB, including Natural England's duty to consult with local authorities and to facilitate public engagement.

Section 84 confirms the powers of local authorities to take 'all such action as appears to them expedient' to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of an AONB, and sets consultation and advice on development planning and on public access on the same basis as National Parks in the 1949 Act.

Section 85 (which placed a statutory duty on all 'relevant authorities' to 'have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty' of AONBs when coming to any decisions or carrying out activities relating to or affecting land within these areas) has been amended by the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023.



Archaeological dig Drumburgh

The Protected Landscapes duty

The Levelling-up and Regeneration Act (2023) amended S.85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act (2000) to place a new duty on Relevant Authorities to seek to further the purpose of designation in National Landscapes, rather than simply having a duty of 'regard' as previously. This is a significant, beneficial change. The list of Relevant Authorities runs to several thousand, but chief among them are all public bodies (including local authorities and arms length bodies) and utilities. Seeking to further the purpose is not a passive duty and is not 'business as usual'. It actively requires those to whom it applies to take positive action to seek to further the purpose, and to be able to evidence how they have done so.

This management plan provides outcomes and measures that help to identify what constitutes 'seeking to further the purpose'.

Activities and developments outside the boundaries of National Landscapes that have an impact within the designated area are also covered by the 'duty to seek to further the purpose'.

Sections 86 to 88 of CRoW 2000 allow for the establishment of a Conservation Board to which the AONB functions of the local authority (including development planning) can be transferred. Conservation Boards have the additional but secondary function of seeking to increase public understanding and enjoyment of the AONB's special qualities. They also have an obligation to 'seek to foster the economic and social wellbeing of local communities' in co-operation with local authorities and other public bodies.

Sections 89 and 90 create a statutory duty on all AONB partnerships (local authorities and Conservation Boards) to prepare a Management Plan 'which formulates their policy for the management of their area of outstanding natural beauty and for the carrying out of their functions in relation to it', and thereafter to review adopted and published plans at intervals of not more than five years. Where an AONB involves more than one local authority they are required to do this 'acting jointly'.

Section 92 makes clear that the conservation of natural beauty includes the conservation of 'flora, fauna and geological and physiographical features.'



Holme Cultram Abbey

Planning policy context

National planning policy is set out in the latest iteration of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2024.

The NPPF applies as a whole to National Landscapes as it does to non-designated areas and sets out that planning policies and decisions should [inter alia] recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside. However, two paragraphs refer specifically to AONBs: paragraphs 189 and 190. The NPPF and the accompanying Planning Practice Guidance form important material considerations with regard to development management and confirm that:

"Great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and National Landscapes, which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues, and the scale and extent of development within these areas should be limited." (Para 189)

"When considering applications for development within National Parks, the Broads and National Landscapes, permission should be refused for major development other than in exceptional circumstances, and where it can be demonstrated that the development is in the public interest. Consideration of such applications should include an assessment of:

a) the need for the development, including in terms of any national considerations, and the impact of permitting it, or refusing it, upon the local economy;
b) the cost of, and scope for, developing outside the designated area, or meeting the need for it in some other way; and
c) any detrimental effect on the environment, the landscape and recreational opportunities, and the extent to which that could be moderated." (Para 190)

Local planning policy

Cumberland Council has planning and other policies aimed at supporting the conservation and enhancement of the Solway Coast's natural beauty and cultural heritage. As this management plan 'formulates the policy of local authorities in relation to their AONB' (as worded in CRoW 2000) this plan as a whole forms local authority policy in relation to the Solway Coast National Landscape and will guide further National Landscape-specific policy in any reviews of Local Plan, and guide the day to day approach of the Council to issues affecting the National Landscape.

The key role of Local Planning Authorities in conserving and enhancing natural beauty and seeking to further the purpose of designation

In the Local Plan, the Local Planning Authority should establish robust policies which support the purpose of designation and protect the special qualities of the Solway Coast. These policies should reflect the Protected Landscapes Duty (LURA S.245). In particular, these policies, and their application in decision making, should:

- support the conservation and enhancement of the special qualities of the Solway Coast – see Statement of Significance
- protect the Solway Coast and its setting from further visually intrusive development, especially large-scale vertical structures
- promote best practice in building design and energy efficiency
- ensure net gain for biodiversity and increased ecosystem service provision in policy making and development management
- promote the retention of traditional buildings styles
- protect heritage features
- respect the historic pattern of settlements along the coast
- reduce light and noise pollution and promote tranquillity
- encourage a visitor economy predicated on enjoying natural beauty
- promote sustainable transport options, including improved public transport
- promote ease of living and working in the National Landscape (especially retaining local services and facilities) without compromising its environmental qualities

The above principles should also be followed in the production of any Neighbourhood Development Plans during the life of this management plan.



Archaeology tour, Drumburgh

Wider operating context

The Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework (PLTOF) and the Government's Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP)

The new PLTOF identifies metrics that will help show how protected landscapes (as places, not the teams) will contribute to the EIP. Three of the targets (1: new priority habitat restored or created outside SSSIs, 7: restored peatlands, 8: increase in woodland and tree cover) are directly apportioned to each protected landscape; for the rest, Natural England will lead on monitoring the impacts of actions in each place. PLTOF targets and monitoring are reflected in this plan. (see page 63)

The third National Adaptation Programme (NAP3)

Developed under the Climate Change Act (2008) and covering 2023 to 2028, NAP3 states that all protected landscapes must have a Climate Change Adaptation Plan by 2028. Once produced, such a plan, focused on working with nature to adapt to our changing climate, will form a formal appendix to this management plan and will be consulted on accordingly.

Local Nature Recovery Strategies

Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) in England are established under the Environment Act 2021. They are created on administrative (at least county or unitary authority) boundaries and are intended to map out and guide actions for restoring and enhancing nature across the whole country. The Solway Coast National Landscape is a key delivery partner for aspects of the Cumbria Local Nature Recovery Plan. Management Plan implementation monitoring will be used to feed into LNRS monitoring, and vice versa, wherever possible. Cumberland Council and other bodies behind the production of the Cumbria LNRS are members of the Solway Coast National Landscape Partnership. The Council must 'have regard' to the content of the LNRS in discharging its functions.

The North West Marine Plan

Further policy context for the Management Plan can be found in the North West Marine Plan (2020). Marine Plans inform and guide decision makers in development matters affecting marine and coastal areas; there is an overlap with terrestrial plans which generally extend from the mean low water springs mark. Proposals that may have adverse impacts on the objectives of marine protected areas must demonstrate that they will, in order of preference, avoid, minimise or mitigate such impacts. It is considered that the implementation of this Management Plan will support policies in the inshore and offshore marine plans and vice versa. A duty to co-operate with the Marine Management Organisation (author of the Marine Plans) is placed on relevant local authorities.

30x30 – The Solway Coast's contribution

Governments around the world have committed to protecting 30% of their land area by 2030 (hence 30x30). The target requires areas to be effectively conserved and managed while integrated into the wider landscape and respecting the rights of local communities. Protected areas such as the Solway Coast, and their dedicated teams and partnerships, are at the forefront of national work to conserve, protect and restore nature-rich habitats across our landscapes.

Initial mapping from Natural England suggests that 71.5% of the Solway Coast is capable of meeting 30x30 now (2025); this can be used to set realistic targets for the Solway Coast's contribution to 30x30 over the lifetime of this plan.

The National Landscape already has areas of interconnected nature-rich habitat with many areas in sympathetic low input management. Through protecting these areas and their inter-connectivity, along with improving the quality of habitats through investment via agri-environment schemes and other conservation and enhancement programmes, the Solway Coast could further contribute to 30x30 objectives. It is important that the drive for 30x30 does not take nature conservation and recovery back to a site-focused approach, potentially valuing 'protected' fragments of land over work to conserve, enhance, expand and connect habitats which may not count as 'protected' but may on combination be even more valuable for nature.

The approach in the Solway Coast should:

- Identify wildlife-rich areas, protecting them and preventing damage from drainage, pollution, pesticides, 'nature-negative' management, over-exploitation, invasive species, disturbance, and habitat destruction, and manage them to enhance biodiversity
- Buffer and link core sites, and encourage management which supports a connected and resilient ecological network
- Restore wildlife richness across the wider landscape by, for example, fostering management of land for multiple objectives, investing in approaches that maximise nature recovery alongside food production, allowing natural processes to flourish, and creating structural diversity.

Continued uncertainty about the future of farming

Despite the roll-out of elements of ELM, this is still a time of great uncertainty for the farming community. The introduction of ELM is an unrivalled opportunity to rethink agricultural support towards a focus on public money for public goods, with results-based payments directed in the main towards outcomes rather than prescriptions. Only in Landscape Recovery, which needs to expand over the lifetime of this plan, has this outcomes-focused approach been realised. There has been some progress in supporting the farming community to deliver for people and nature, not least through the creation of the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme and the Higher Tier scheme, but not enough. If society is going to change the social contract with farmers, to create more nature-friendly farmed landscapes, farmers must have the tools to do it, supported by access to good quality advice which is focused on providing public goods alongside boosting farm incomes.



Pink-footed goose



Haafnetter fishing in the Solway

The continued decline in our biodiversity – locally, nationally and globally

There is an ever more urgent need to arrest and turnaround the well-documented declines in nature. There must be action, at the biggest scale possible, to conserve, enhance, restore, expand and connect habitats like never before, and to support species recovery with the same urgency.

Adapting to a changing climate

The unpredictability of how a rapidly changing climate will manifest itself can make the impacts hard to plan for. In our protected landscapes, the drive must be for nature-based solutions, and the multiple benefits that can be accrued from restoration of peatlands, low-carbon farming practices, improving soil and water quality, sensitive expansion of tree cover, reducing flood risk and improving the condition of semi-natural habitats.

Planning reform and the growth agenda

In every management plan cycle there are changes to the planning system. While the Planning and Infrastructure Bill may offer local conservation opportunities through its Nature Restoration Fund, it could also weaken protections. Nonetheless, thriving nature is essential for a thriving economy, not a barrier to growth.

Local government reorganisation and devolution

Local government reorganisation means the Solway Coast now sits under one authority, simplifying governance but concentrating responsibility. A future combined mayoral authority for Cumbria could shift some functions relating to the area.

People-nature disconnect

Access to nature is unequal. Everyone should feel welcome in nature-rich spaces, yet barriers remain. These landscapes belong to all and should benefit everyone's health and wellbeing.



Low tide at Maryport

Post-Covid-19 shifts

The pandemic highlighted rural infrastructure and healthcare gaps, bolstering the case for sustainable development and better digital connectivity to support resilient communities and sustainable tourism.

Creation of the Allonby Bay Highly Protected Marine Area (HPMA)

The HMPA is aimed at restoring marine habitats and biodiversity. It could positively influence the Solway Coast by enhancing ecosystem health, supporting fish populations, and boosting sustainable tourism and conservation efforts.

St Cuthbert's Garden Village

While not immediately adjacent to the Solway Coast (8-10km away), this 10,000 home development could still have impacts on the Solway Coast if not managed carefully. These include increased traffic, pollution of watercourses which drain into the Solway and light pollution. Equally it provides a new community for which the Solway Coast may be their local National Landscape – this may bring increased visitor pressure, but also a potential source of volunteers and champions for the area.

The Land Use Framework

This will set out a vision for land use in England and is intended to act as a tool to drive better decision-making on how land is used and managed. maximising win-wins and managing competing demands. In developing this plan account has been taken of the ongoing process towards producing the framework.

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) is now mandatory for new development

There will be opportunities to use BNG to further conservation in the National Landscape. This management plan provides measures that should be incorporated into BNG proposals locally.

Nutrient Neutrality

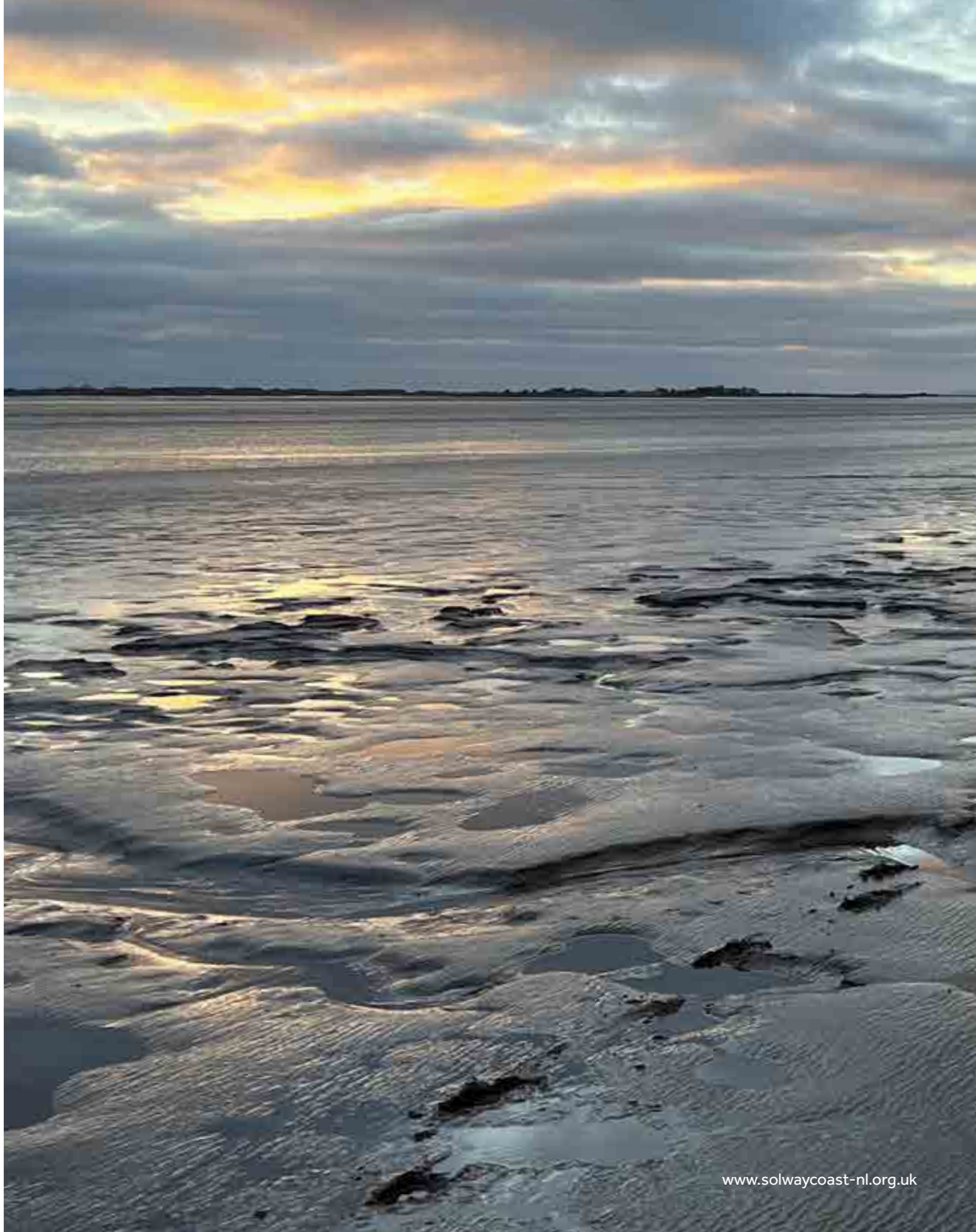
This requires that new development does not increase nutrient pollution (such as nitrogen or phosphorus) in sensitive habitats protected under the Habitats Regulations. Development proposals must demonstrate effective mitigation—such as wetland creation, buffer zones, or off-site offsetting—to avoid harm to nearby rivers, lakes or estuaries. This should be seen in concert with other protections for National Landscapes, ensuring both ecological integrity and landscape character are safeguarded, while balancing the need for sustainable growth.

Green finance

Private finance for nature is growing, but current markets for carbon and biodiversity remain immature. Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) investments show promise but require capacity to nurture relationships and are vulnerable to economic shifts. There is an important role in this work for the National Landscapes Association, local authorities and NGOs, potentially aggregating investible propositions and linking investors with landowners/managers and project developers.

Public sector financial constraints

Public funding remains tight. Protected landscapes are still underfunded—receiving only a third of the £36m (2025 equivalent) once deemed necessary. While this plan extends beyond the Solway Coast team, constrained investment will affect conservation, farming, and public access to nature.





View over the mudflats at Anthorn

Core principles for the production and implementation of this Plan

These core principles run throughout this management plan, forming a framework to guide policy and practice on the Solway Coast, promoting ecological integrity, community wellbeing and economic sustainability.

1 Sustainable land management:

Recognise that farmers and land managers play a key role in conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the Solway. Supporting nature-friendly farming and sustainable coastal and fisheries management is critical for the long-term health of the area and its communities.

2 Focus on outcomes, not prescriptions:

Emphasise results over a standardised, prescriptive approach, especially in agri-environment schemes and other work on the farmed landscape. Except with our most prized natural assets, there should be a greater openness to risk and a greater embracing of ambition.

3 Collaboration and partnerships:

Building meaningful partnerships between farmers, land managers, conservation bodies, local authorities, and residents is essential for ensuring a thriving future for nature and heritage. Establishing consensus, though time-consuming, adds value to limited resources and enhances the effectiveness of conservation efforts. There is always going to be merit in working across the border between England and Scotland on conservation, tourism and recreation activity and every effort should be made to foster this. Readers and users of this plan should assume that a partnership approach is central to achieving its outcomes.

4 Reversing declines in nature through landscape-scale ecological networks:

It is essential to adopt an integrated, whole-landscape approach to nature recovery, that connects habitats, making them larger, better-managed, and more numerous, with collaboration extending to surrounding areas for broader ecological impact. Some species and habitats will need targeted interventions to reverse biodiversity loss or ensure gains of the recent past are maintained.

5 Adapting to a changing climate:

There should be a strong focus on nature-based solutions to adapting to the impacts of a changing climate, rather than infrastructure solutions that may adversely affect the quality and character of the landscape and have an impact on natural beauty more widely.

6 Ecosystem services and benefits:

It is necessary to understand and promote the critical services that the landscape provides, from water filtration to carbon storage, and ensure that conservation actions safeguard these services for future generations.

7 Managing landscape change:

It must be accepted that landscape change is inevitable but needs careful management to ensure conservation outcomes are provided and maintained. Everyone must work with the grain of the landscape to reinforce its special qualities, without seeking to freeze it in time.

8 Economy and environment:

It is important to promote the fact that the Solway Coast's natural beauty and rich wildlife are valuable economic and social assets. Development within this protected area must be environmentally, economically, and socially sustainable, and the actions of Relevant Authorities must seek to further the purpose of designation.

9 Integrated nature and heritage conservation:

Conservation efforts should address the full range of environmental assets, including biodiversity, geodiversity, and the historic environment, recognizing the interconnections between these elements in all projects and programmes.

10 No trade-offs in environmental benefits:

Actions which are intended as beneficial should not have perverse consequences – they must not bring one environmental benefit at the expense of another, such as planting new woodlands on species-rich grasslands or siting climate-friendly infrastructure where it damages nature, heritage and landscape character.

11 Access for everyone:

Everyone should have the opportunity to responsibly access and enjoy the Solway Coast's natural beauty. This doesn't mean 'everyone, everywhere' – but there is a need to democratise access to nature, through measures such as improving access infrastructure (e.g. gates rather than stiles), and broadening the ways in which nature and heritage are promoted.

12 Health and wellbeing:

Delivering this Plan should generate new opportunities for first hand experiences in nature, something that is proven to bring health and wellbeing benefits. Activity which promotes an emotional engagement with nature should be encouraged; this also enhances wellbeing and increases people's care for the world around them.

13 Community participation in conservation:

There should be every effort to support initiatives that both conserve natural beauty and help communities to thrive.

14 Learning and sharing:

Educational activities should be seen as being integral to conservation management. In all work to conserve and enhance nature and heritage, opportunities should be sought for learning and sharing knowledge, to enhance public engagement with the Solway Coast's natural beauty.

15 Sustainable funding and resource allocation:

There is an acknowledgment of the financial challenges for public funding and there should be continued effort to diversify conservation income sources, though there will always be a critical role for public funds to support the provision and maintenance of public goods.



Oystercatcher

An ecosystems approach – what does nature do for us?

Nature does not 'owe us a living', yet it provides us with one all the same. So, as well as prioritising the conservation of nature for its own sake, it is vital to understand that our natural assets, properly cared for, provide services and benefits on which society is dependent.

Natural assets, services and benefits

Our natural assets – biodiversity, habitats, landscapes and geological resources – bring multiple benefits for society. As an example, the Solway Mosses are a natural asset that provides water storage services providing the benefit of flood risk mitigation. By conserving and restoring the Mosses and other habitats locally, we are doing something intrinsically valuable for nature but also supporting services and benefits for society. These services and benefits also depend on the wise use of economic and social capital, but at their root is the natural capital that makes their delivery possible.

These services include nutrient cycling, pollination, carbon storage, biomass, erosion protection and water purification; the benefits we derive from them include clean air and water, flood risk reduction, recreation, food, employment opportunities and a source of physical and spiritual wellbeing. We should never have to ask, 'What has nature ever done for us'?

Nature has been seen as limitless and free, and something which has little or no value to business – and usually as a constraint. However, nature is clearly not limitless and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) acknowledged in 2012 that 40% of global gross domestic product (GDP) is dependent on it. We have failed to take account of our impacts on nature to the point where we may have depleted it beyond its capability to support us into the future. We are 'overdrawn at the bank of nature' and unless we start reinvesting quickly, significantly and in the right places, the declines will continue and the many services nature provides for us will be all but lost.



Glasson Moss



Cannibar caterpillars



Blue Damselfly

Taking an ecosystems approach

This Plan highlights some of the services and benefits that flow from our natural assets and identifies desired outcomes and actions to secure their future. The plan takes an ecosystems approach:

- it is place-based, focusing on the whole Solway Coast (and where necessary beyond)
- it combines action for biodiversity and landscape conservation with an understanding of the public benefits this brings
- it is not focused on species, habitats and issues in isolation – rather it promotes an integrated approach to large-scale conservation of biodiversity and ecosystem services, seeking to understand the effects of management on nature and people. One can read through from issue to action to outcome and to the ecosystem services and benefits provided.

This approach attempts to understand, and work within, the acceptable limits of environmental change, in order to meet community need without compromising the natural assets that will support us in the future. It requires a joined-up commitment to delivering the Plan's outcomes and vision, to drive better and more integrated policy and action on the ground across local authorities, agencies, NGOs and the community.



Birdwatching with Natural England at Allonby Bay

Aurora borealis from Port Carlisle

Natural assets, services and benefits on the Solway Coast

This diagram helps to illustrate the flows of services and benefits we get from looking after our natural assets. The matrix on the following page looks at this in a little more detail. It is not an exhaustive list.



Natural assets

- Saltmarsh and mudflats
- Sand dunes and beaches
- Species-rich grasslands
- Woodlands
- Natural processes
- Soils
- Geological features



Services

- Carbon storage
- Biomass production
- Pollination
- Soil stabilisation
- Nutrient retention and recycling
- Crop and tree pest and disease management
- Cultural services



Benefits

- Climate change adaptation and mitigation
- Clean air and water
- Food
- Local employment
- Health and well-being
- Sense of place
- Beauty

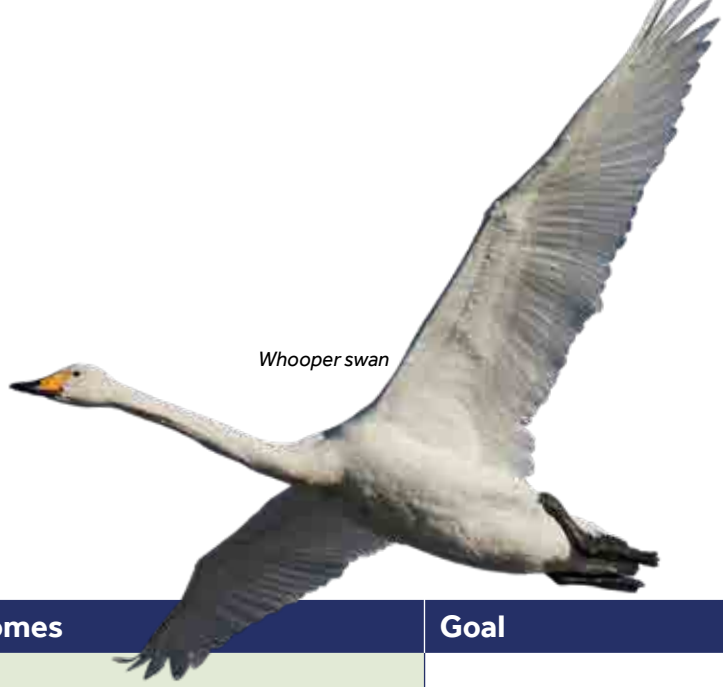
Priority habitats, services and benefits

The table below highlights how conserving the area's Priority Habitats will help to sustain our ecosystem services and their benefits into the future. The greater the number of dots, the greater the contribution to delivering services and benefits.

	Key Services Benefits						
Priority habitat	**1.** Carbon storage/ sequestration and air quality management Climate change adaptation/ mitigation, clean air, health and well-being	**2.** Nutrient dispersal and cycling Ecosystem health and stability, including soil health, clean air and water	**3.** Pollination Food and agricultural products	**4.** Agricultural and non-agricultural biomass production Habitats, biodiversity, food, energy, raw materials, jobs	**5.** Water storage and filtration Flood risk management, clean water for people and wildlife	**6.** Erosion prevention/ hazard protection Soil health, flood risk mitigation, coastal protection, clean water, agriculture	**7.** Cultural services Tourism, recreation, jobs, mental and physical health and wellbeing, tranquillity
Coastal saltmarsh	•••	•••	••	•••	••	•••	•••
Coastal floodplain grazing marsh	•••	••	••	•••	••	•••	•••
Coastal sand dunes	•	•	••	•••	•	•••	•••
Coastal vegetated shingle		•	•	••	•	•••	••
Maritime cliffs and slope						•••	•
Mudflats	•••	•••	•	•••	•	•••	•••
Deciduous woods	•••	•••	•	•••	••	••	•••
Lowland meadows	••	••	•••	•••	•	•	•••
Traditional orchards	••	••	•••	••	•	•	••
Lowland heathland	••	••	••	•••	••	••	••
Lowland dry acid grassland	••	••	••	••	••	••	••
Lowland raised bog	•••	•••	•	•••	•••	•••	••
Lowland fens	•••	••	•	••	•••	••	••

Outcomes framework

How do we know that the roads we set out on will take us where we want to be? This framework works backwards from a goal (a concise expression of the vision) to identify broad outcomes and measures that are necessary steps to realising the goal. Any measures in support of this plan should lead to the achievement of the outcomes. It is then possible to assess how well everyone is collectively working to look after and celebrate this special place and helping people to discover, enjoy and understand all it has to offer. This management plan will, in part, be monitored against how well the short-term outcomes are achieved.



Whooper swan

Theme	Short-term Outcomes	Medium-term Outcomes	Goal
Nature recovery and landscape character	**1.** The management of land and water increasingly promotes natural processes, increased connectivity and greater resilience to the challenges of climate change and other pressures.	A landscape richer in wildlife, with declines in biodiversity reversed, delivers more for nature, farmers and the public and is more resilient to climate change and other pressures. Our cultural heritage is widely recognised and valued and continues to evolve and grow richer. People increasingly value the Solway Coast's natural heritage for its own sake and for all that it provides for us. Communities have a strong sense of what's special about where they live, and they celebrate their heritage together. Well-managed natural and cultural assets underpin an increasingly environment-led local economy.	The Solway Coast is better protected, more resilient to climate change, richer in natural and cultural heritage and increasingly valued by everyone as a place to live, work and visit
	2. Priority habitats and key species are better conserved and enhanced.		
	3. Landscape quality and character is more effectively conserved and enhanced.		
	4. Farmers deliver a wide range of public goods and are appropriately rewarded for doing so.		
People and place	**5.** Built heritage and cultural assets are better understood, conserved and managed.		
	6. There are greater opportunities for people to increase their understanding of the Solway Coast's natural beauty natural beauty.		
	7. More people, from a wider variety of backgrounds, can explore and enjoy the area.		
	8. Skills and knowledge to conserve our natural beauty are increasing.		
	9. People conserving and enjoying natural beauty has an increasingly positive impact on local services and the economy.		

Broad short-term outcomes and their links to natural beauty

The broad short-term outcomes in the previous page can be achieved through delivering the measures in each of the Solway Landscape character types

Outcome	Inner Firth intertidal flats and saltmarsh	Outer Firth beaches and dunes	River floodplain and marshy grassland	Coastal Mosses	Coastal lowland farmed landscapes	Cultural landscape and community	Exploring and enjoying the Solway Coast	Learning, training and skills
1. The management of land and water increasingly promotes natural processes, increased connectivity and greater resilience to the challenges of climate change and other pressures.	X	X	X	X	X			
2. Priority habitats and key species are better conserved and enhanced.	X	X	X	X	X	X		
3. Landscape quality and character is more effectively conserved and enhanced.	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
4. Farmers deliver a wide range of public goods and are appropriately rewarded for doing so.	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
5. Built heritage and cultural assets are better understood, conserved and managed.						X	X	X
6. There are greater opportunities for people to increase their understanding of the Solway Coast's natural beauty.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
7. More people, from a wider variety of backgrounds, can more easily and responsibly explore and enjoy the area.							X	
8. Skills and knowledge to conserve our natural beauty are increasing.						X		X
9. People conserving and enjoying natural beauty has an increasingly positive impact on local services and the economy.	x	X	x	x	x	X	X	

The Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework (PLTOF)

The PLTOF was introduced by DEFRA in 2024 to help identify the contributions made by protected landscapes to the Environmental Improvement Plan and to initiatives such as 30x30, as has been set out elsewhere in this plan. The PLTOF relates to the protected landscapes as places – these are not targets for the National Landscape and National Park teams themselves. Targets 1, 7 and 8 are apportioned to each protected landscape; the others are national.

The table below sets out where the components of natural beauty and thematic aspects of this plan contribute to the PLTOF. See also targets and monitoring, page 63.

PLTOF Target	Inner firth intertidal flats and saltmarsh	Outer firth beaches and dunes	River floodplain and marshy grasslands	Coastal Mosses	Coastal lowland farmed landscapes	Cultural landscape and community	Exploring and enjoying the Solway Coast	Learning, training and skills
1. Restore or create more than 250,000 hectares of a range of wildlife-rich habitats within protected landscapes, outside protected sites by 2042 (from a 2022 baseline). The Solway Coast target is 438 hectares.	x	x	x	x	x	x		
2. Bring 80% of SSSIs within Protected Landscapes into favourable condition by 2042.	x	x	x	x	x			
3. For 60% of SSSIs within Protected Landscapes assessed as having 'actions on track' to achieve favourable condition by 31 January 2028.	x	x	x	x	x			
4. Continuing favourable management of all existing priority habitat already in favourable condition outside of SSSIs (from a 2022 baseline) and increasing to include all newly restored or created habitat through agri-environment schemes by 2042.	x	x	x	x	x	x		
5. Ensuring at least 65% to 80% of land managers adopt nature-friendly farming on at least 10% to 15% of their land by 2030.			x	x	x	x		x
6. Reduce net greenhouse gas emissions in protected landscapes to net zero by 2050 relative to 1990 levels.	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
7. Restore approximately 130,000 hectares of peat in Protected Landscapes by 2050. The Solway Coast target is 672 hectares.				x				
8. Increase tree canopy and woodland cover (combined) by 3% of total land area in Protected Landscapes by 2050 (from 2022 baseline). The Solway Coast target is 1%.					x	x		
9. Improve and promote accessibility to and engagement with protected landscapes for all using existing metrics in our Access for All programme.	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
10. Decrease the number of nationally designated heritage assets at risk in protected landscapes.						x		

Natural beauty



Rainbow over Glasson Moss

Statement of significance – *what makes the Solway Coast special?*

Description

The Solway Coast National Landscape is a place of wide-open estuary views across into Scotland and south to the Lakeland Fells. The landscape is enriched by the influence of Britain's second largest tidal range, covering and exposing vast tracts of saltmarshes and mudflats, an internationally important refuge for thousands of waders and wildfowl. These estuarine landscapes can have a profound sense of wildness, remoteness and tranquillity, heavily influenced by the changing sky, and by the sights and sounds of the sea. A long narrow tract of sand dune and dune heath runs along the coast and supports rare species including the natterjack toad.

This is also a place of inland raised mires or 'Mosses' and their rich biodiversity; this contrasts with coastal marshy grasslands and with pastoral landscapes of beef, sheep and dairy farming, enclosed by hedges and 'kests'. Threaded through the inland landscape is a network of sunken lanes and narrow roads.

The experience of being in the Solway Coast National Landscape is strongly influenced by views out to the surrounding landscapes of the Lake District fells and across the Solway Firth to the hills of Dumfries and Galloway. This is enhanced by long interior views across a landscape which has few vertical features beyond treetop height.

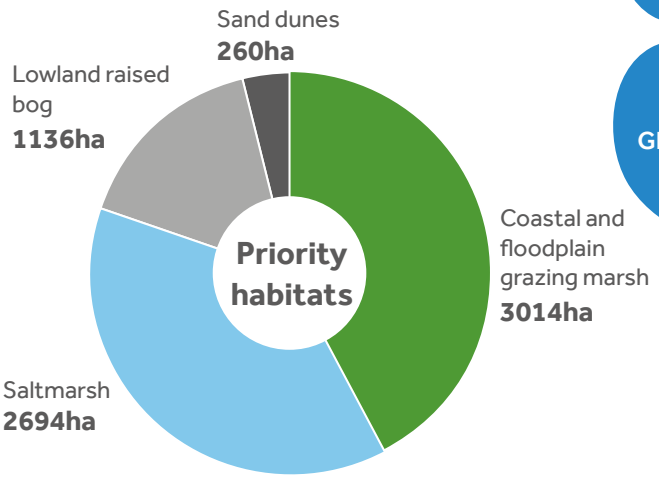
It is a frontier landscape, with a rich archaeological record, most celebrated in being part of the Hadrian's Wall World Heritage Site. Buildings and settlements have risen in response to conflict and trade; vernacular building styles reflect a long history of occupation and include fortified dwellings and churches, longhouses, 'clay dabbins' and cruck-roofed buildings. It is both a living, working rural landscape, and a place to discover, explore, celebrate and enjoy.

Facts and figures supporting the statement of significance



Population: 3,200



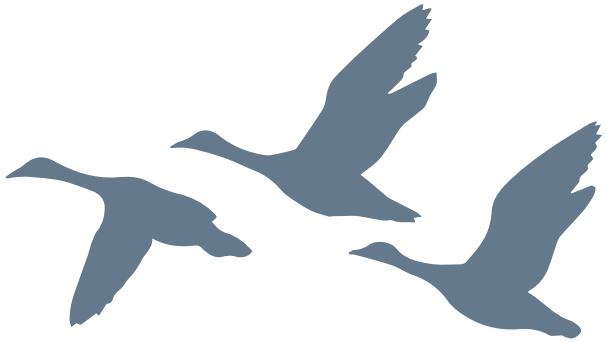


5 Nature Reserves

Campfield Marsh (RSPB)
Bowness on Solway (Cumbria Wildlife Trust)
Bowness Common (NE)
Glasson Moss (NE)
Drumbrugh Moss (NE)

16 County Wildlife Sites

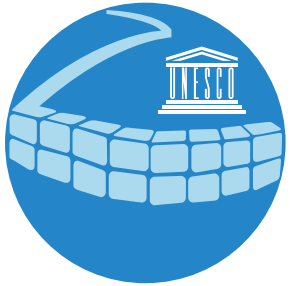
The Solway Coast Marine Conservation Zone



Internationally important birdlife

Over 140,000 overwintering wildfowl and waders. The entire global population of Svalbard barnacle geese overwinters.



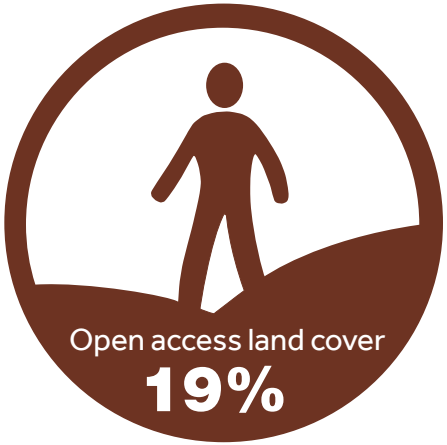


UNESCO World Heritage Sites – Hadrian's Wall

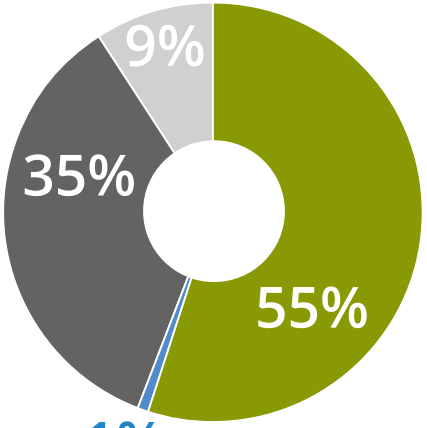


PRoW – 86km of public footpaths and bridleways plus 14km of the Hadrian's Wall Path National Trail

Natural beauty

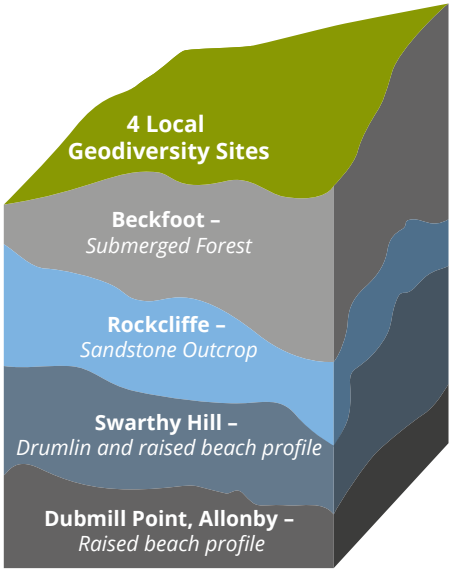


28 Scheduled monuments

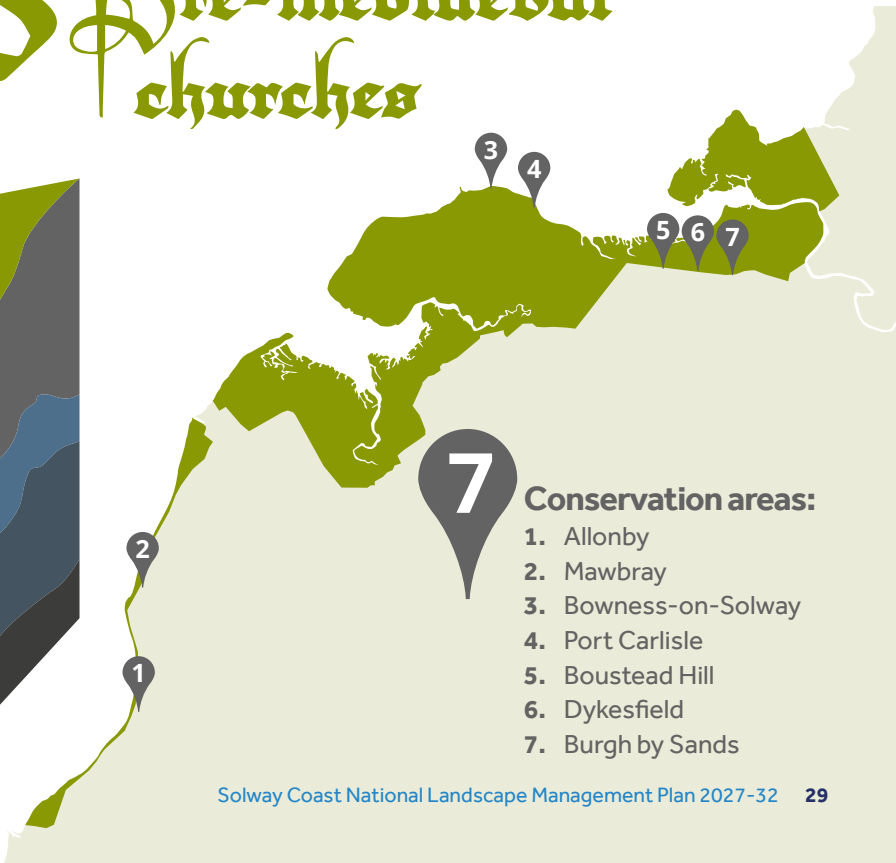


Rural land cover in the National Landscape (approx.)

- Farmland 55%
- Mosses 1%
- Saltmarsh, estuary, dunes, rivers and settlement 35%
- Other 9%



8 Pre-mediaeval churches



7 Conservation areas:

1. Allonby
2. Mawbray
3. Bowness-on-Solway
4. Port Carlisle
5. Boustead Hill
6. Dykesfield
7. Burgh by Sands

Components

The natural beauty of the Solway Coast comprises two main defining components, which themselves can be sub-divided into their characteristic elements

Seascapes and intertidal landscapes

The seascapes comprise extensive areas of both the inner and outer Solway Firth – inner Firth intertidal flats and saltmarsh and outer Firth beaches and dunes.

The Solway Firth's designation as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) reflects the importance of the National Landscape's marine environment and coastal habitats. This dynamic and changing coastline includes flats, intertidal creeks, sands and saltmarshes, and is bounded in places by shingle bays, sand dune systems and low earth cliffs.

The Solway Firth Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ) is designated to protect European smelt, a fish species of conservation importance. It is also an important nursery ground for bass, pollack and some flatfish species. Allonby Bay is now England's first Highly Protected Marine Area (HPMA), offering the highest level of protection for the marine environment. It seeks to remove some of the biggest pressure and damaging activities, conserving a range of important subtidal habitats.

The transition between land and sea is marked by beach and dune systems, generally along the west coast, and the mudflats and saltmarshes of the more sheltered northern areas of the inner Firth. These saltmarsh and intertidal landscapes have a strong sense of wildness and tranquillity.

The designation of the Upper Solway Flats and Marshes Special Protection Area (SPA) recognises the international importance of the area's waders and wildfowl population. The Solway Firth as a whole is the 6th most important site for waterbirds in the UK; the mean wader and wildfowl population between winter 2012-13 and winter 2017-18 was over 140,000 birds. It is internationally important for Svalbard Barnacle geese – supporting the entire population (43,000) over-winter, of which over 11,300 (itself an internationally important number) winter on the English



Frozen beach at Wolsty Banks

side of the estuary. The estuary as a whole is nationally (1% UK population) or internationally (1% East Atlantic flyway population) important for 20 species (with the English Solway important for 14).

The few ungrazed marshes tend to support a high diversity of plant species. Collectively the European designations of the Solway Coast form the Solway Firth European Marine Site. The estuary is also a Ramsar site, designated primarily for overwintering birds and its natterjack toad population, which thrives in dune slacks and on some tightly grazed marshes.

The extent of the saltmarsh is generally increasing, most notably around Bowness on Solway, and especially Rockcliffe Marsh, which has risen and extended in response to deposition.

As well as being the most extensive priority habitat in the Solway basin, the intertidal and floodplain grazing marshes are important grazing land, supporting dairy and meat production. Summer livestock grazing allows inland grasslands to be managed for silage making. On the inner Solway saltmarshes, the grazing regime is important for maintaining the grass sward height for wintering wildfowl and breeding waders.

The marshes also perform an important role in providing coastal protection, carbon sequestration and storage, and food provision. Being out on the wilder parts of the marshes is to capture a significant part of the essence of the Solway Coast.

Low-lying inland landscapes

Compared to the rest of lowland England, the Solway is unusual for its remaining and relatively intact lowland raised mires, or peatlands, (the Solway Mosses). This habitat supports a rich diversity of birdlife, invertebrates and flora, recognised in the South Solway Mosses SAC designation. The SAC comprise Bowness Common, Glasson Moss, Drumbrugh Moss and Wedholme Flow (the latter being just outside the National Landscape). The Mosses contrast with a rolling, pastoral landscape of improved and semi-improved grasslands, enclosed by hedges and 'kests' (raised hedge banks).



Saltmarsh survey, Rockcliffe Marsh

The open expansive raised mires are often hidden behind a fringe of trees. In an otherwise flat, sea-level landscape, the gentle rises formed from the drumlins and mineral ridges left by the glaciers afford panoramic views over the semi natural landscape.

There is rich historic and cultural heritage, closely linked to the Solway's position as a 'frontier' landscape on the border between Scotland and England. Evidence of a long and historic land use is seen in the field patterns, such as ridge and furrow on the grazed marshes, and the medieval pattern of 'infield' and 'outfield' farming linked to the agricultural improvements brought by the Cistercian monks of Holme Cultram Abbey.

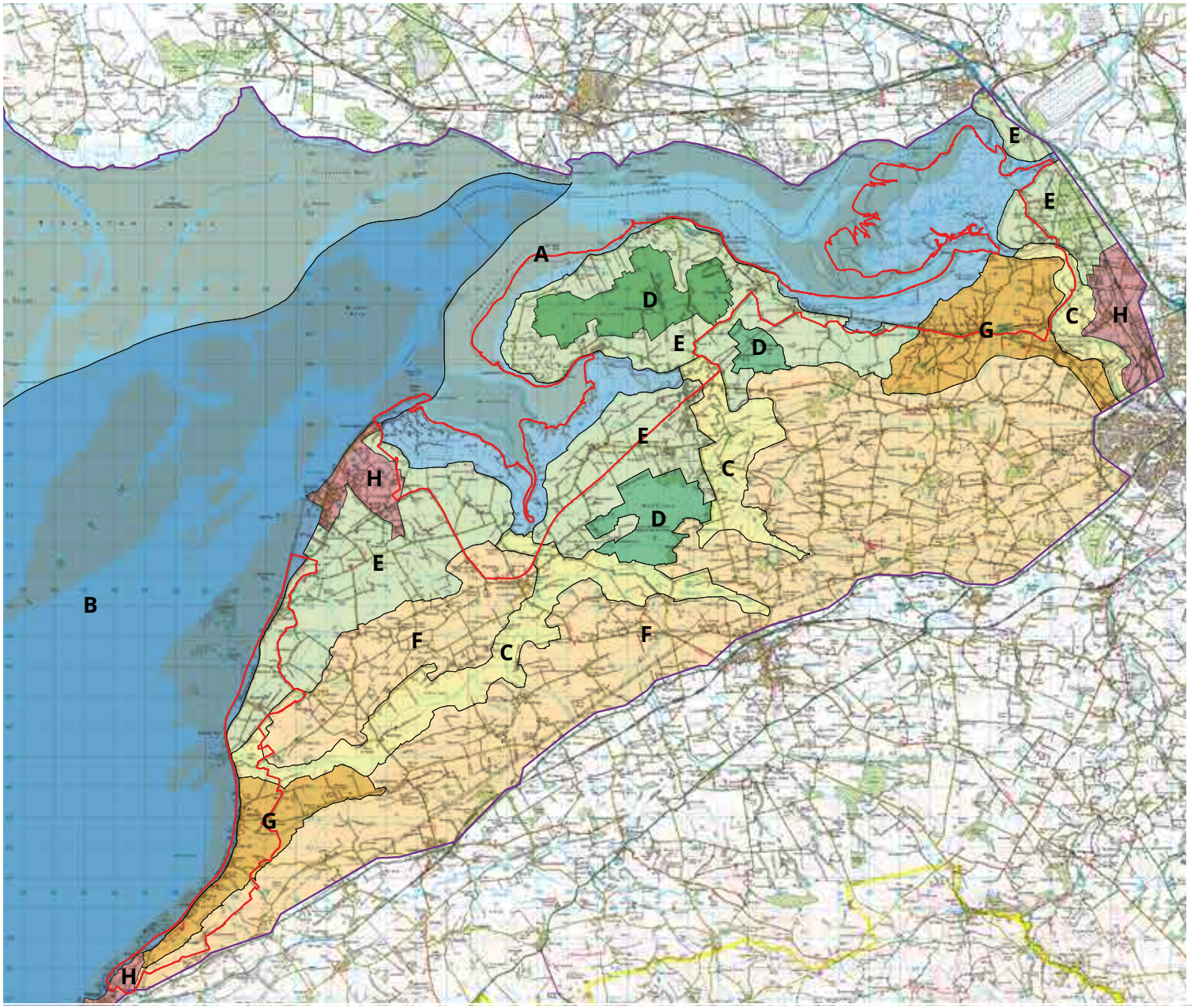
Sunken lanes and narrow roads link settlements dotted along the coast. These settlements and the wider landscape have a complex mixture of vernacular buildings. Vernacular building styles reflect a long history of occupation and include fortified dwellings and churches, longhouses, 'clay dabbins' and cruck roofed buildings.

Settlements on the Solway Coast are small and rural in nature and the character of the area as a whole is partly derived from the lack of development. This contributes to the area's relative sense of wildness and tranquillity.

Dogs on the saltmarsh



Solway Coast National Landscape Character Types (LCT)



Key

- Solway Coast National Landscape
- Wider landscape context

Solway Coast National Landscape LCT

Seascapes and Intertidal Landscapes

- A: Inner Firth Intertidal Flats and Saltmarsh
- B: Outer Firth Beaches and Dunes

Low-lying Inland Landscapes

- C: River Floodplain and Marshy Grasslands
- D: Coastal Mosses
- E: Coastal Plain
- F: Drumlinised Lowland Farmland
- G: Undulating Coastal Farmland
- H: Coastal Town and Urban Fringe

N W E S

0 1 2 3 4 kilometres

0 1 2 3 miles

Seascapes and intertidal landscapes

Key components

Inner Firth intertidal flats and saltmarsh

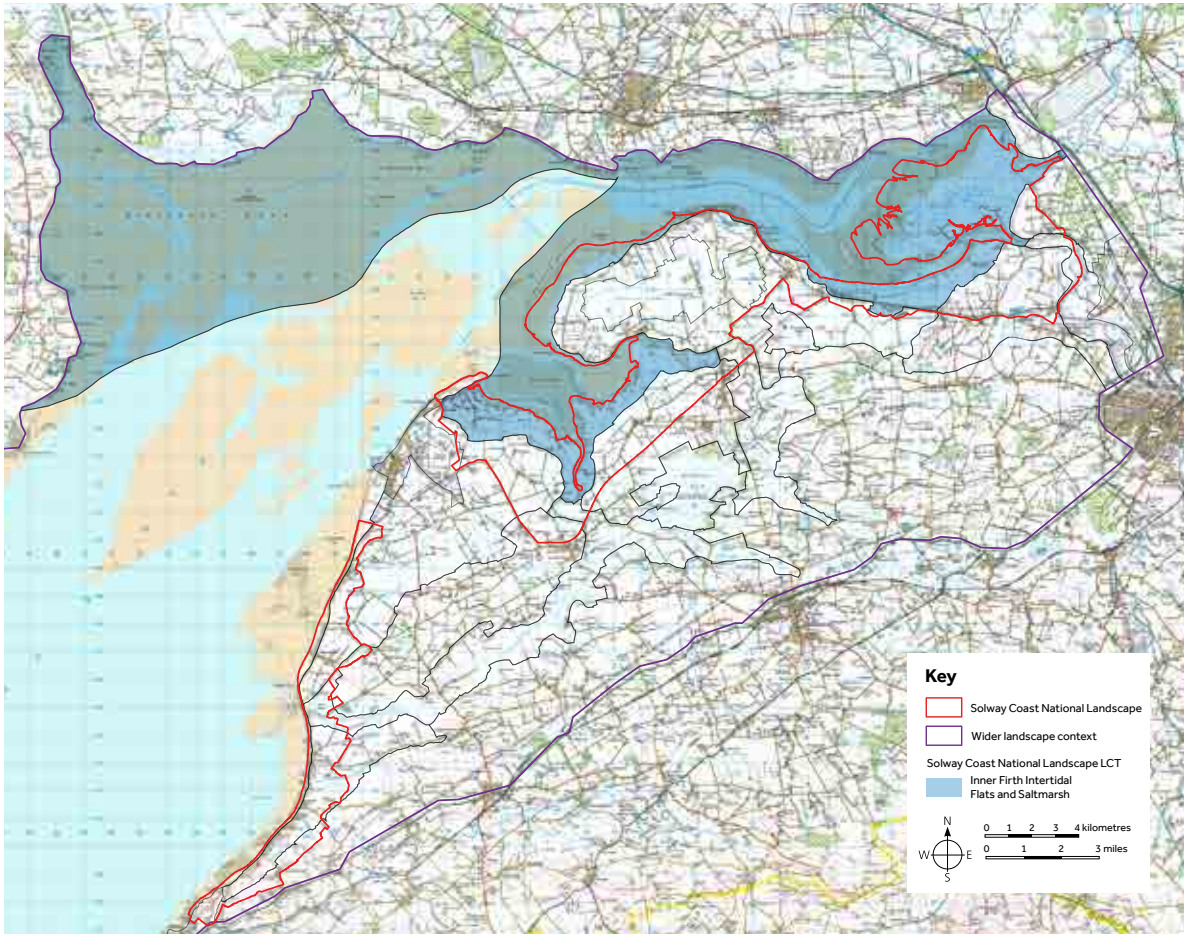
These landscapes have a dynamic character, influenced by the state of the tide and changing with the longer-term cycle of erosion and deposition. Large expanses of fine sands and mudflats are dissected by dendritic creeks and channels. Open, flat expanses of saltmarsh transition to the flat coastal plains, Mosses and enclosed farmland of the inland areas. Saline tolerant plant species dominate, often grazed by sheep and cattle. The landscape we see today is largely a product of this grazing management, alongside the regular saltwater flooding from the tides.

It is a large-scale landscape with expanses of tidal flats extending towards open sea and the skylines of Dumfries and Galloway. There is a sense of relative wildness, openness and tranquillity in much of these landscapes, filled with the sights and sounds of large numbers of waders and wildfowl, for which the area has multiple conservation designations and is internationally important. The rare natterjack toad also thrives in saltmarsh pools. The saltmarsh contains a unique mix of salt tolerant plants only found along the coast, such as sea milkwort, scurvy-grass and thrift. Saltmarsh is also important as nursery ground for fish, which utilise small creeks and pools.



Natterjack Toad

The biodiversity of the marine environment is rich. It is important for the passage of migratory fish including lamprey and sea trout. It also provides important nursery areas for skate, shark species and thornback ray and supports salmon, sea bass, pollock, flat fish and especially European smelt, for which the Solway Firth Marine Conservation Zone is designated.



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File: S:\4800\4808 Solway Coast AONB LCA\GIS\Themes\ArcGIS9\4808-01_013_Solway_Coast_AONB_LCT_A3_v4.mxd



Grazing the saltmarsh

Principal issues and/or forces for change

- Increased disturbance of overwintering birds and the need to conserve habitat for wildfowl and waders
- Decline in populations of key breeding and migratory fish species
- Human activity impacting on natural processes of saltmarsh, such as water quality and drainage
- The effects of development on landscape character, and the importance of preserving long views across and out of the landscape
- Over and under grazing of saltmarsh and grazing marsh
- Climate change and rising sea-levels and the increasingly urgent need for adaptive management / addressing coastal squeeze at intertidal areas, whilst protecting priority habitats
- Erosion of the character of coastal settlements through the loss of vernacular architecture
- The potential impact of increasing recreational pressure on habitats and species

Specific outcome and measures – inner Firth intertidal flats and saltmarsh

Outcome: The character and biodiversity of the inner Firth intertidal flats and saltmarsh is conserved and enhanced.

Measures	National / local government	Conservation bodies	Farmers, land managers, fishing community	Catalyst
IF1. Use planning policy to protect the seascape and intertidal landscapes from further visually intrusive development.	x			CC
IF2. Use Environmental Land Management (ELM) schemes and other mechanisms to ensure that grazing and sensitive management of saltmarshes deliver conservation outcomes.		x	x	NE
IF3. Promote sustainable fisheries and shell fisheries management to support species and habitat conservation.	x	x	x	MMO / NWIFCA
IF4. Act to reduce pollution, nutrient and sediment input from farmland and rivers.	x	x	x	EA
IF5. Develop a strategic approach to potential climate change-driven sea level rise, including identifying potential areas for adaptive coastal management.	x	x		CC
IF6. Produce and implement a strategy for managing increasing recreational disturbance, to support species and habitat conservation.	x	x		SCNL
IF7. Act to encourage and protect natural processes on saltmarsh.	x	x	x	NE
IF8. Enhance natural features on the saltmarsh e.g. by increasing the number of pools and blocking drainage ditches.	x	x	x	NE

Contributes to PLTOF Targets: 1-4, 6, 9

Local indicators of success

- **Area of restored habitat**
- **Reduced pollution and nutrient input to rivers**
- **Stable overwinter wildfowl and wader populations and increase in breeding waders**
- **No visually intrusive development significantly harming views across and out of the National Landscape**
- **SSSI condition**
- **Natterjack toad breeding success**
- **Deliverable proposals for adaptive coastal management**



Rockcliffe Marsh

Solway Coast National Landscape Management Plan 2027-32

Outer Firth beaches and dunes

These landscapes occur throughout the open coastal area, the eastern section having more channels and finer deposits due to the low energy tidal regime characteristic of the inner estuary. The western section has open sea and is more characteristic of a traditional 'seaside' landscape with high wave and tidal energy providing movement of larger sediments such as gravels.

These are large-scale dramatic landscapes, with undeveloped flats and open water, open skylines and long views over the Solway Firth to the Scottish coastline and Criffel. The dynamic seascape is characterised by the sights and sounds of the sea, lapping water and large numbers of waders and wildfowl that feed on the flats.

Large and open expanses of intertidal sand flats open out to the sea; these are backed by shingle and pebble beaches and dune systems to the south and mudflats along more sheltered northern stretches of the coastal fringe. 'Scaurs' (post-glacial rock dumps) are distinctive along the beaches and support mussel beds and honeycomb worm reefs, providing important feeding grounds for wading birds. The biodiversity of the marine environment reflects that of the Inner Firth.

Small linear towns and villages are dotted along the coast, seven of which include designated Conservation Areas.

Much of the extensive coastal dune and heath system that fringes the outer Solway Firth is designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and as part of the Solway Firth SAC. Areas of acidic dune grassland and heath support a diversity of dune and maritime heath plant and animal communities such as the rare and endangered natterjack toad. The SSSI and non-designated dune series here form one of only three similar dune systems in north and west Cumbria. In recent times declines or changes in coastal grazing have seen declines in habitat quality in some locations.

The dunes and saltmarsh absorb and dissipate wave energy, together forming an effective coastal defence system.

Coastal squeeze is significant in some locations, with the B5300 road creating an unnatural barrier that inhibits natural dune expansion inland. In places where erosion dominates, dunes are being lost completely and hard engineering has been deployed to protect the road from damage and flooding.

Dune systems are fragile and susceptible to damage from unmanaged access of various kinds.

The dunes and saltmarsh absorb and dissipate wave energy, together forming an effective coastal defence system.

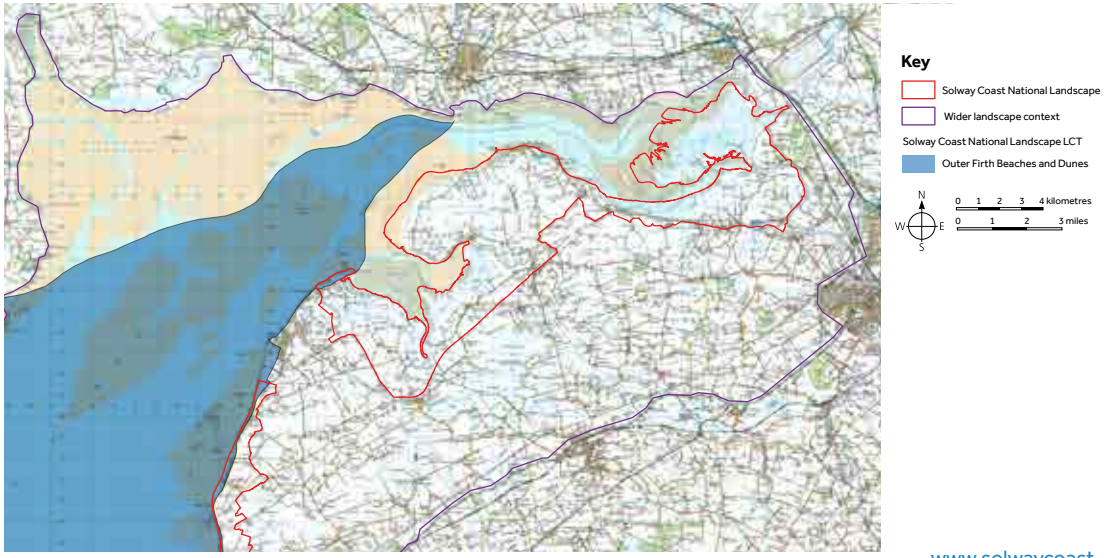
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Natural beauty

Dune systems are fragile and susceptible to damage from unmanaged access of various kinds.

Principal issues and/or forces for change

- Increased disturbance of breeding shorebirds and the need to conserve habitat
- Decline in populations of key breeding and migratory fish species
- Overstabilisation of dynamic sand dune systems, especially relating to the contribution of invasive species and over and undergrazing
- The effects of development on landscape character, especially that associated with industry, housing and tourism
- Climate change and rising sea-levels and the increasingly urgent need for adaptive management / addressing coastal squeeze at intertidal areas, whilst protecting priority habitats
- Erosion of the character of coastal settlements through the loss of vernacular architecture



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Specific outcome and measures – outer Firth beaches and dunes

Outcome: The character and biodiversity of the outer Firth beaches and dunes is conserved and enhanced

Measures	National / local government	Conservation bodies	Farmers, land managers, fishing community	Catalyst
OF1. Restore coastal processes, including dynamic dune systems, where these have been lost due to coastal squeeze.	x	x	x	NE
OF2.Manage land to create space to adapt to climate change and sea level rise, and respond to coastal squeeze.	x	x	x	NE / farmers / land managers
OF3. Restore degraded habitat at the interface of transitional zones between land and sea.		x	x	NE
OF4. Manage/restore dune systems to make them more dynamic where grey dunes have developed, e.g. through controlled grazing by selected livestock.		x	x	NE / farmers / land managers
OF5. Create pools, ponds and scrapes to support key species conservation.		x	x	ARC
OF6. Control invasive non-native plant and animal species and eradicate particular invasive and non-native species where possible.	x	x	x	NE / EA
OF7. Implement fishery orders to effectively manage shell-fishing activity and minimise impacts on habitats.		x	x	NWIFCA / MMO
OF8. Provide visitor information to promote access which respects the fragile nature of coastal habitats and their wildlife, and act to reduce disturbance by people/dogs/vehicles in sensitive areas.	x	x		SCNL
OF9. Rationalise car parks to promote better management of disturbance and reduce habitat damage.	x			SNNL
OF10. Provide wardening, install fencing and undertake education programmes to support breeding shorebirds.	x	x		RSPB

Contributes to PLTOF Targets: 1-4, 6, 9

Local indicators of success

- **Area of dune restored and under more positive management**
- **Measures in place to reduce the impacts of coastal squeeze**
- **Increase in natterjack toad population**
- **Stable overwinter bird populations and increase in breeding waders**
- **SSSI Condition**

Low-lying inland landscapes

Key components

- **River floodplain and marshy grassland**
- **Coastal Mosses**
- **Coastal lowland farmed landscapes (including coastal plain, drumlinised lowland farmland, undulating coastal farmland) and their settlements.**

River floodplain and marshy grassland

These landscapes are characterised by areas of low lying, flat floodplain, marshy grassland and improved pasture. They follow the watercourses of the rivers Waver, Wampool and Eden and the glacial basin of Black Dub, Holme Dub and Crummock Beck. These landscapes are dissected by a network of ditches, channels and watercourses which drain into the Solway Firth.

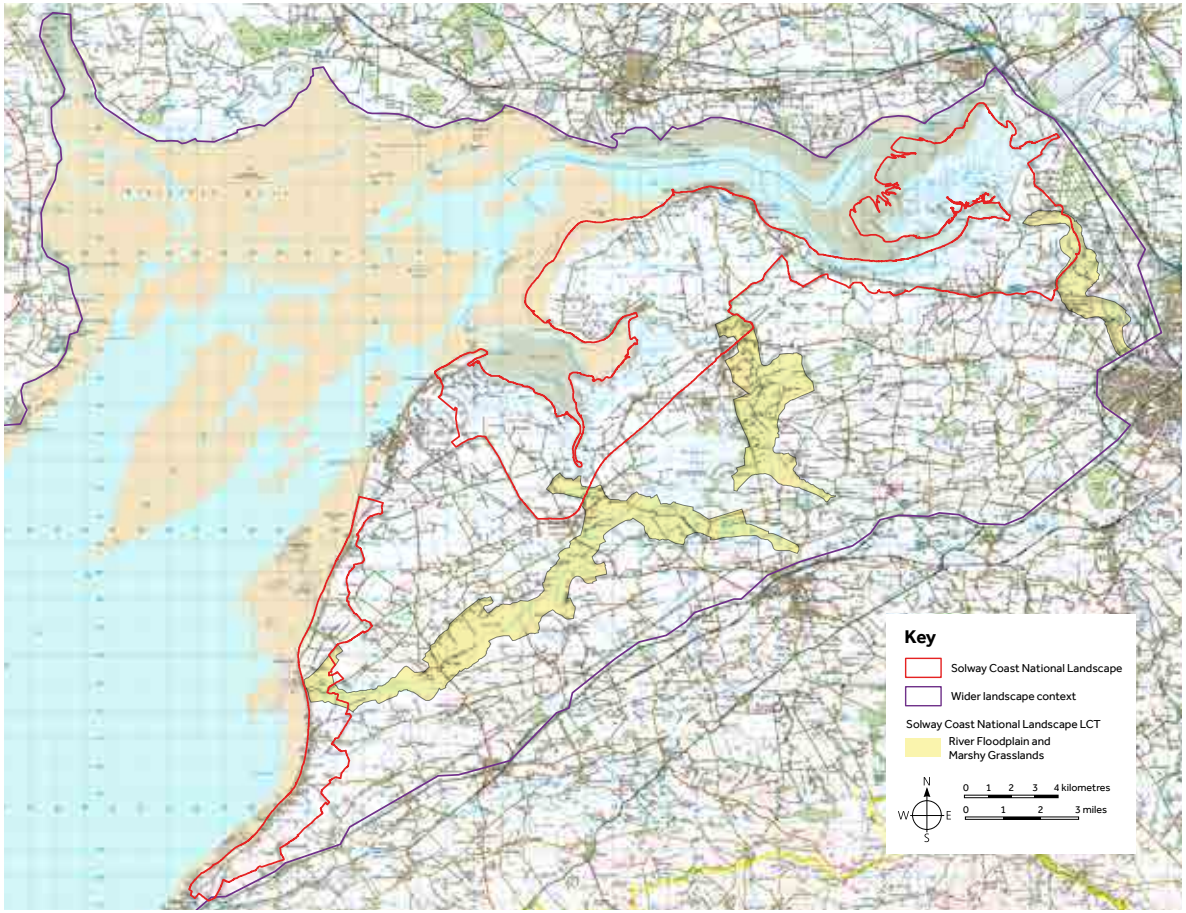
This is an open, flat landscape, contrasting with the undulating and rolling topography of the farmed lowland hills and drumlins surrounding it. Enclosure is partial and irregular, with fencing and occasional, fragmented hedges, creating an open landscape with long views along flat river valleys.

The green marsh grass is grazed by sheep and cattle in some areas, whilst others are characterised by rough grazing, rushes and scrub. Fen peat soils are characteristic in the dubs and upper reaches of the broad and gentle river valleys.

A dense network of streams, ditches and creeks dissect the areas, usually intensively managed and with eroded riverbanks in places. The rivers themselves are not prominent features of the areas and are not particularly visible from within the flat expanses of marshes.

Development is confined to the outer fringes of the areas as the land rises above sea-level, where dispersed farmsteads are scattered.

These grasslands are traditionally grazed in spring and late summer and are cut for hay, a management regime that promotes biodiversity. The primary biodiversity interest of the river floodplains and marshy grasslands is in its birdlife, especially breeding waders such as curlew and lapwing, which rely on damp soils, open pools and muddy hollows for feeding and rearing their young. As well as being a key nesting habitat for curlew, the traditional management of these grasslands promotes wildflowers such as marsh orchids, marsh marigold and ragged robin, specialists of wet meadows.



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View over the River Waver as it enters Moricambe Bay

Principal issues and/or forces for change

- Principal issues and/or forces for change
- Intensification of farming and resultant loss of biodiversity, set alongside opportunities for high nature value farming through Environmental Land Management schemes if tailored appropriately
- Eutrophication caused by agricultural run-off and atmospheric nitrogen pollution
- Increasingly erratic weather patterns that lead to increased flooding, drought and coastal erosion, and their impacts on agriculture, property and conservation
- Loss of species and habitats, including declines in breeding bird productivity and disturbance to wader roosts
- Pumped drainage and its potential impacts and opportunities for changes in land management
- An increase in pests and diseases and invasive non-native species, which have a negative impact on local flora and fauna

Specific outcomes and measures – river, floodplain and marshy grassland

Outcome: Characteristic features of landscape and biodiversity are conserved and enhanced in the context of viable nature-friendly farming.

Measures	National / local government	Conservation bodies	Farmers, land managers, fishing community	Catalyst
RF1. Target policy, schemes and funding to support grazing regimes which maximise benefit for biodiversity – e.g. light cattle grazing from spring to autumn, or a late summer hay cut – and reward farmers accordingly.		x	x	NE
RF2. Use ELM schemes and bespoke projects to create scrapes, ponds and pools to support biodiversity.		x	x	Farmers / land managers
RF3. Undertake winter inundation on an appropriate scale across the habitat, to provide refuge and feeding grounds for grazing and dabbling wildfowl such as wigeon and teal.		x	x	Farmers / land managers
RF4. Focus ELMS and other mechanisms (e.g. FiPL, private finance etc.) to improve soil condition and quality, and to improve the quality of air and water.		x	x	NE
RF5. Restore land formerly under drainage to biodiverse wet grassland.		x	x	Farmers / land managers
RF6. Reconnect becks and rivers to their floodplain and naturalise river courses.		x	x	EA / farmers / land managers
RF7. Promote and undertake research into causes of declines in bird productivity in floodplain and grassland habitats.		x		RSPB
RF8. Promote natural flood management through ELM schemes and bespoke projects.	x	x	x	EA
RF9. Produce options for adaptation to climate change, e.g. through coastal road rollback.	x	x		CC
RF10. Act to raise awareness of disturbance of high tide bird roosts.		x		RSPB

Contributes to PLTOF Targets: 1-6, 9

Local indicators of success

- **SSSI condition**
- **Increase in breeding wader numbers and productivity**
- **Area of land formerly under drainage now restored**
- **Area of new wetland habitat created**

Coastal Mosses

The Mosses of the Solway Coast are low lying raised mires with a raised peat 'dome'. Now rare, these habitats have been designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), with parts of the SAC also designated as a National Nature Reserve (NNR).

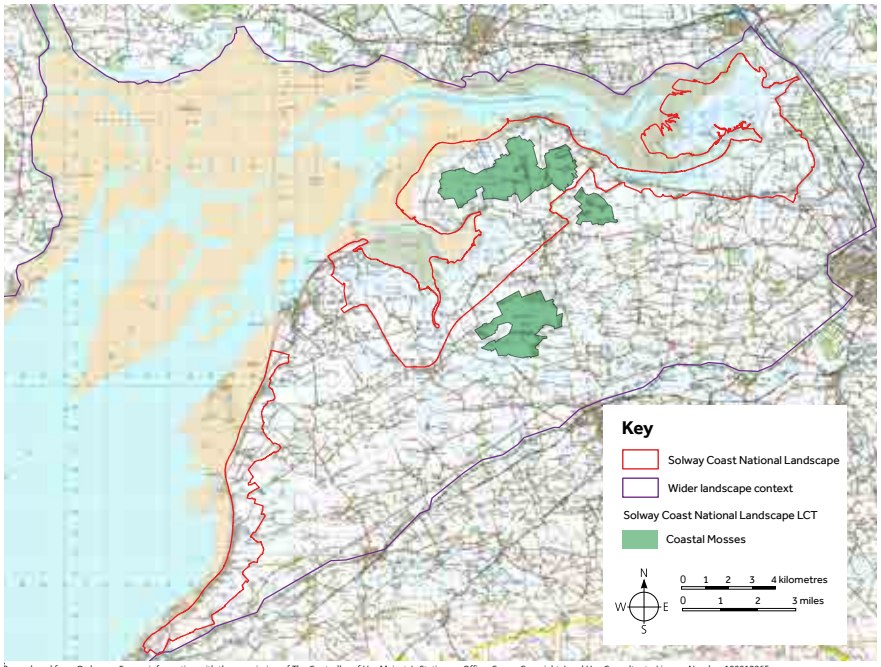
These are visually dynamic landscapes, with considerable seasonal change in colour, and are strongly affected by the state of the light and the weather. There are long views across to the seascape of the Solway Firth and the fells of the Lake District. Though modified by past peat extraction, the landscape has a feeling of naturalness, remoteness and tranquillity, further amplified by a relative absence of human-made structures and visual intrusion.

The Moss landscape comprises flat or slightly undulating hummock-hollow mosaics, including water pools, marsh, moss, reeds and fringing wet woodland; usually stands of birch heather and purple moor grass grow in the slightly drier areas. The characteristic Moss habitat is that of deep peat, over 10 metres in some places, with assemblages of sphagnums, cotton grasses and carnivorous plants, including the uncommon great sundew. These sites also support rare species such as large heath butterfly. Bird species of the mosses include skylark, snipe, marsh tit and willow tit.

The Mosses are much less extensive than they were in the past. Draining, to improve them for pastureland, has caused a significant reduction in their extent and condition. Further such losses have taken place through varied changes in land use such as ploughing and subsequent erosion, and from the impacts of atmospheric nitrogen from agriculture.

In the last decade there has been greater collaborative effort to continue the job of gradually restoring the Mosses and celebrating what makes them special. This has brought about an improvement in the condition of this distinctive part of the landscape, but more work is still required. The overall condition of the Solway Mosses SSSIs is that they are still recovering and this process takes time; there are still missing parts of the hydrological 'jigsaw' of the mosses, notably the transitional 'lagg' zone communities on the shallow peats.

Peat is our best natural store of carbon. When in good condition, the Solway Mosses not only store carbon, but also sequester it from the atmosphere.



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Conversely, if they remain unrestored, with active drains, they continue to release their stored carbon and contribute to C02 emissions when exposed peat reacts with the oxygen in the air. Managing our Mosses as functioning wetland ecosystems is one of the most effective land-management based action to mitigate the impacts of climate change.

In the past the Mosses were highly valued as a source of fuel for the home, a growing medium in the horticultural industry, and perhaps for other purposes such as grazing or hemp retting, bedding for livestock as well as for recreation. Today their value is less obvious, until we appreciate their importance for society in terms of carbon storage, managing run-off after rainfall, and a record of our past, as well as for the rarity of the wildlife community and the landscape it creates.

Though the Mosses can be perceived as 'wasteland' or as unproductive, generally they are valued by local people as places to walk (often with their dogs) and to enjoy nature. Whilst this use of the Mosses is to be welcomed, access needs careful management and responsible visitor behaviour needs to be encouraged.



View over Drumburgh Moss

Principal issues and/or forces for change

- Increased intensity of climate and weather events causing cracking or erosion of the peatland habitat, threatening carbon storage/sequestration, flood risk mitigation and biodiversity
- Opportunities provided by new Environmental Land Management Schemes and other peatland grant schemes to restore peatlands previously reclaimed for agriculture.
- A need to create buffers between bogs and areas of more intensive land management, and better connectivity of more permeable habitat between bogs
- Impacts of nutrient enrichment and nitrogen deposition from air pollution and agriculture (e.g. rising ammonia levels exceeding critical limits)
- An enduring lack of understanding of the importance of peatlands and the need to manage them as wetland ecosystems

Specific outcome and measures – Coastal Mosses

Outcome: The Solway Mosses are restored and/or maintained as functioning wetland ecosystems

Measures	National / local government	Conservation bodies	Farmers, land managers, fishing community	Catalyst
M1. Use planning policy and SSSI management agreements to enable enhancement of existing habitat and ensure no further loss or degradation of habitat on the Solway Mosses.	x	x	x	NE
M2.Restore and enhance raised bog and lagg fen habitats towards 'favourable condition'.		x	x	NE
M3. Buffer and expand fringe habitats around bogs, and create lagg / edge habitat on reclaimed peat around existing Mosses		x	x	NE
M4. Ensure ELM, FiPL and other initiatives prioritise habitats of the Mosses and their restoration.	x	x	x	NE / SCNL
M6. Advocate for the value and importance of habitats of the Mosses and the need to prioritise their conservation.	x	x	x	NE / SCNL
M7. Act to avoid erosion of organic matter into watercourses.	x	x	x	EA, farmers / land managers
M8. Provide and manage access to the Mosses to encourage responsible enjoyment and understanding whilst reducing disturbance to species and habitats.	x	x	x	SCNL / NE
M9.Enable farmers and land managers to improve the management of land around Mosses – e.g. funding, events, training, advocacy, demonstration farms.		x	x	NE / farmers / land managers
M10. Encourage a landscape scale approach to common land on lowland raised mires, over a focus on individual landowner agreements.		x		NE

Contributes to PLTOF Targets: 1-7, 9

Local indicators of success

- **SSSI condition status (minimum 100% in 'unfavourable recovering' condition)**
- **Area of new lagg / edge habitat created**
- **Area of buffering of surrounding landscape**
- **Area of new wetland habitat created**

Coastal lowland farmed landscapes and their settlements

These landscapes are a combination of individually distinctive character types: coastal plain, drumlinised lowland farmland and undulating lowland farmland.

The coastal plain is a landscape of flat or slightly undulating, low-lying farmland. The field structure is largely based around the medieval enclosures with a pattern of narrow strip fields and larger 'outfields' around the villages, as well as the regular geometric pattern of parliamentary enclosures. Wind sculptured trees line the roadsides, including avenues of beech.

This is a landscape with a long history of occupation, reflected in the remains of Roman fortifications as part of the Frontiers of the Roman Empire (Hadrian's Wall) World Heritage Site, and the evidence of medieval cultivation and land use patterns. Later military and industrial heritage is also visible, including World War Two camps and Port Carlisle's canal and railway legacy.

Settlements provide a variety of architectural styles and building materials. Historic villages, such as Newton Arlosh, Kirkbride and Mawbray are clustered within coastal pasture and closely related to the pattern of the fields.

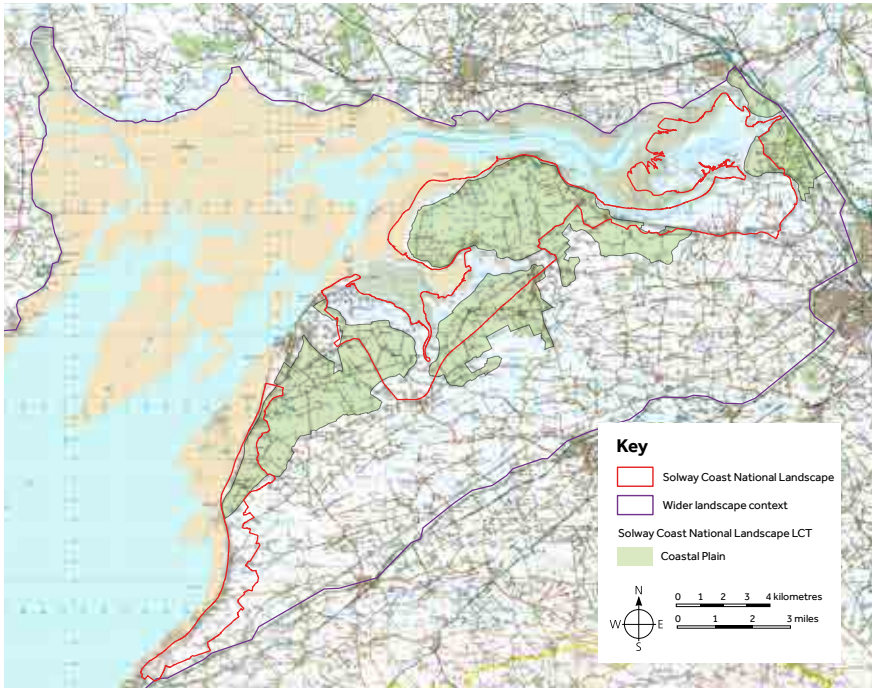
People value the open views across the Firth, intertidal flats and marshes to the north and northwest, with Criffel and the Scottish hills forming key focal points. Views inland across the higher areas of drumlinised farmland accentuate the flat and open character of the plains.



Old AA sign, Drumburgh

The dominant habitats are coastal pasture, enclosed by ditches and 'kested' hedgerows (planted on raised banks), with a distinctive pattern of small 'inner fields', and larger 'outer fields'. A mixture of winding lanes (often lined with wind-sculpted trees) and straight linear roads cross through the farmland, reflecting the localised pattern of fields and drainage ditches.

These flat landscapes contrast with the coastal margins of the marshes and dunes as well as the hills and drumlin landscape.



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Lonning at Rogersceugh



Anthorn

Drumlinised lowland farmland extends across much of the Solway Coast, stretching beyond the designated landscape boundary and playing an important role in defining its setting. The smooth skylines of the rolling green landform and low elongated drumlins are characteristic of views looking inland from many vantage points.

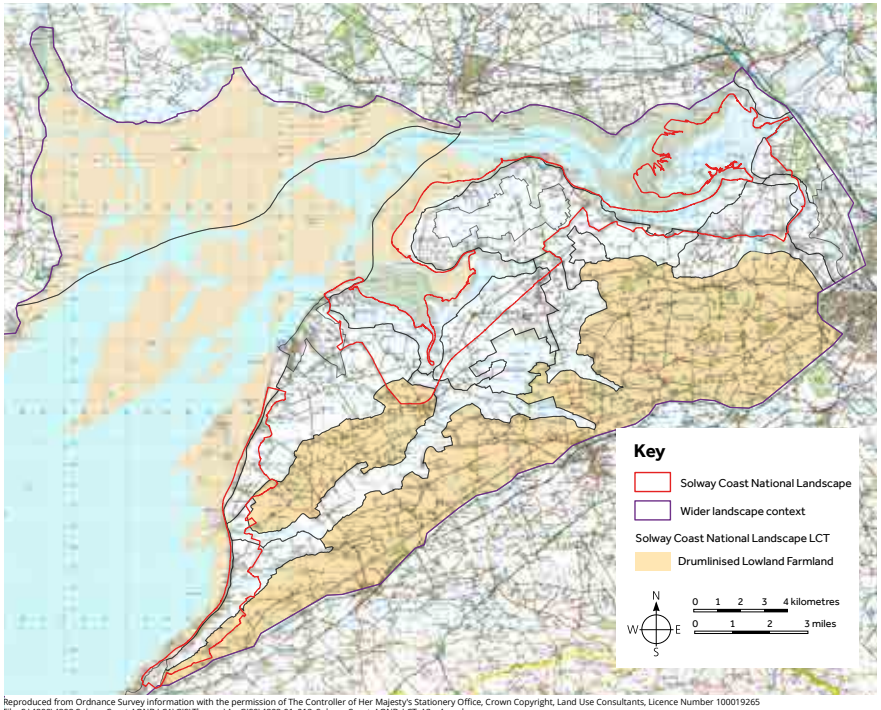
This is a tranquil agricultural landscape, less exposed and influenced by the coastal setting, and more enclosed than the adjacent coastal plains, with an attractive backdrop of upland hills. It is dominated by pasture land and occasional arable crops divided by hedges, draped over the rolling drumlin landforms. Hedgerow trees and small copses are distinctive features in the landscape.

The impact of parliamentary enclosures can be seen in large, regular, geometric fields; these are interspersed with older field enclosure patterns of medium sized irregular fields and long narrow strip fields.

The low relief drumlin landform creates wide views from along the tops of the low hills, and more sheltered and intimate landscapes contained by topography on the lower slopes provide a sense of enclosure.

Distinctive wide and sunken lanes, many that are former drove roads, rise up and down across the farmland, with clear edge profiles of ditches and raised banks topped with hedges, locally known as 'kests '. The pattern of rectilinear roads and winding lanes reflects both a rich mixture of field patterns and the orientation and profiles of the drumlin landform. Traditional finger post road and direction signs are widespread, some of which have been restored.

Scattered linear settlements, villages and hamlets such as Allerby, Westnewton, and Edderside, and farmsteads, comprising clusters of vernacular buildings, follow the orientation of the drumlins. There is a varied mixtures of architectural styles and building materials, with thatched roofs, 'cruck' barns, and long houses built of 'clay dabbin'.



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Guided walk, Drumburgh Farm



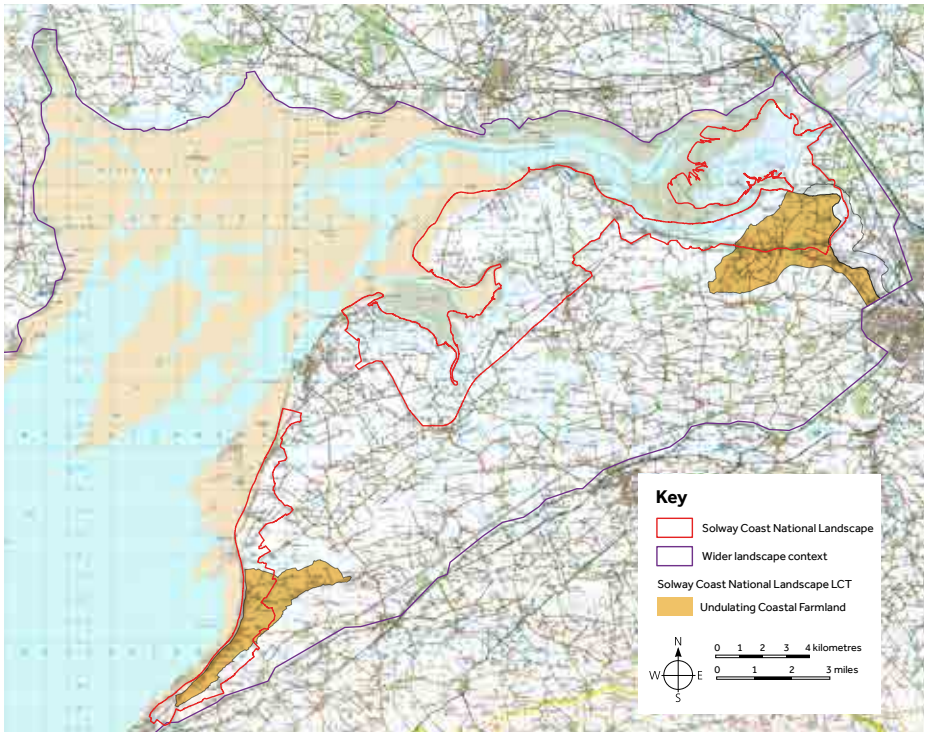
Grune Point

Immediately inland from the coastal margins of the Solway Firth, along a stretch bounding the Inner Firth and along the western coast of the Outer Firth, is a tranquil landscape of low-lying undulating coastal farmland. This landscape shares many of the characteristics of the drumlinised lowland farmland, the principal differences being a lack of narrow strip fields, the winding becks that run through the area and the distinctive linear settlement pattern of villages such as Burgh-by-Sands and Beaumont in the north east and Allonby and Crosscanonby in the south west. These settlements comprise clusters of traditional and historic vernacular buildings, strongly influenced by their coastal setting.

Across the country, farmland biodiversity has been declining for decades. This is true of the Solway as much as anywhere else, though there are successes, where sensitive farming is sustaining hares, skylarks and grassland flora. However, the recovery of farmland biodiversity remains one of the biggest challenges for the area.

Even on a windy day we still love the Solway!





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Clay dabbin, RSPB Campfield Marsh



Evening light on birch trees



Edna's Cottage, Burgh-by-Sands



Mawbray Village



Farm support over the life of this plan

Farmers know their land better than anyone else and the future of the farmed environment is, of course, tied to a viable economic future for farming. At the time of writing the last Management Plan, Britain was preparing to leave the EU, and there was an expectation that a revised method of Government support to farming and the farmed landscape would bring multiple benefits. The opportunity to create new Environmental Land Management (ELM) schemes which are not prescription-led, but which are outcomes-focused (rewarding farmers for the public goods they produce – clean air and water, biodiversity, healthy soils etc) has not yet been fully realised; only in the Landscape Recovery programme in certain locations is that promise beginning to be fulfilled. Meanwhile, the loss of the Basic Payment Scheme support casts a long shadow across farm businesses in the context of replacement payments for more nature-friendly farming which are still evolving. If there is to be a change in the social contract with farmers, where society asks them to produce more for nature, farmers have to have the necessary tools, through schemes and programmes that work for farmers, nature and the public.

On the Solway, ELM needs to be specially targeted to support the conservation priorities outlined in this plan. There should be encouragement, and reward, for collaboration across farm holdings aimed at maximising benefits for nature at a landscape scale. Over the five years of this plan, the focus of work in this field should be on collaboration, improving trust, and nature recovery, with an acknowledgment that any new financial system will properly support farmers to actively deliver what the public values. Although there is an increasing focus on the potential role of private finance coming to the aid of farm support during the lifetime of this plan, the markets are immature and the routes from potential doner or investor to the farmer are unclear at present.

Principal issues and/or forces for change

- **Addressing the twin challenges of biodiversity decline and the impacts of climate change on farmland**
- **The effects of development on landscape character, and the importance of preserving long views across and out of the landscape**
- **Erosion of rural character through the loss of vernacular architecture and traditional settlement or farmstead footprints**
- **Loss of farmland biodiversity and the need to ensure that Environmental Land Management schemes deliver for both farming and nature**
- **Lack of environmental based skills training and farm support, especially focused around supporting collaboration across farm holdings on a landscape scale**

Specific outcome and measures – coastal lowland farmed landscapes and their settlements

Natural beauty

Outcome: Characteristic features of landscape, biodiversity and heritage are conserved and enhanced through conservation measures, the planning system and economically-viable nature-friendly farming.

Measures	National / local government	Conservation bodies	Farmers, land managers, fishing community	Catalyst
FL1. Promote and deliver the targeted reversal of old drainage.	x	x	x	EA
FL2. Promote cutting for hay rather than silage when the weather allows.		x	x	NE
FL3. Support and deliver sound conservation management of woodlands, kested hedgerows and field trees, connecting habitats across the landscape.		x	x	FC
FL4. Create a bespoke landscape-scale project to support farmland biodiversity over the life of this plan, e.g. through the Landscape Recovery Scheme programme.		x	x	NE
FL5. Develop targeted projects for key species, such as barn owl and breeding waders.		x	x	RSPB
FL6. Promote and reward good soil management, and promote Catchment Sensitive Farming, grants and initiatives for soils, air and water quality.		x	x	NE
FL7. Expand tree and scrub cover with the principle of the right tree in the right place with the right protection.		x	x	FC
FL7. Monitor and act on tree and plant diseases, notably Chalara and Phytopthera.	x	x	x	FC
FL8. Act to reduce run-off from roads and farmland to help improve the quality of watercourses.	x		x	CC
FL9. Ensure that no sites or features of geological interest are lost to development or inappropriate management.	x	x	x	CC
FL10. Support and encourage measures which reduce or remove visual intrusion such as re-routing or undergrounding of overhead wires.	x			CC
FL11. Use planning policy and decision making to maintain undeveloped horizons, minimise the impact of vertical structures and retain views into, out of and across the landscape.	x			CC
FL12. Use planning policy/decision making, and grant support to conserve traditional buildings and structures.	x			CC
FL13. Ensure Biodiversity Net Gain and the proposed Nature Recovery Fund brings resources to the Solway Coast, including the provision of a bank of possible sites for intervention.	x	x	x	CC
FL15. Act to reduce highway and roadside signage clutter.	x			CC
FL16. Ensure all street lighting (new and replacement) is low colour temperature, fully-shielded, and only on when required. Use the planning system and guidance to influence private lighting schemes.	x			CC

Contributes to PLTOF Targets: 1-6, 8, 9

Local indicators of success

- **Increase in farmland biodiversity**
- **Increasing numbers of farmers benefiting from receiving public money for delivering public goods**
- **No net loss of hedgerows, woodland or field trees / no loss of kests, veteran trees or ancient woodland**
- **Measured benefits from Biodiversity Net Gain**
- **No development takes place which significantly harms views out of and across the landscape**
- **Buildings and structures no longer at risk, due to conservation action**

People and place



Cyclists at Holme Cultram Abbey

Introduction

The Solway Coast, like all of the National Landscapes and National Parks of the UK, is a living, working landscape. This plan does not address issues such as housing provision, transport and broadband provision, which are the proper subject of other strategic documents, notably the Local Plan; instead the focus is on the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty and helping people to understand, celebrate and enjoy the area's rich heritage. This section of the Plan focuses on finding out more about, and celebrating the landscape and its cultural heritage, promoting community action for the environment, responsible tourism, education, training and skills. Some descriptions and actions which relate to farming and fishing, and to buildings and settlements feature in earlier parts of the plan.

A cultural landscape

We can summarise the definition of 'natural beauty' as the coming together of landscape, wildlife and our built heritage; but landscape ought to be seen as much more than just the view. To see it most clearly we need to understand how the land has been used over time, how it has evolved, and to uncover the stories often hidden within it. Our appreciation of that landscape (and crucially in this context our desire to look after it) can be so much greater than when faced with a beautiful view without the time-depth of stories that may go with it.

The historian Simon Schama captured this well, saying,

"Before it can ever be a repose for the senses, landscape is the work of the mind. Its scenery is built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock."

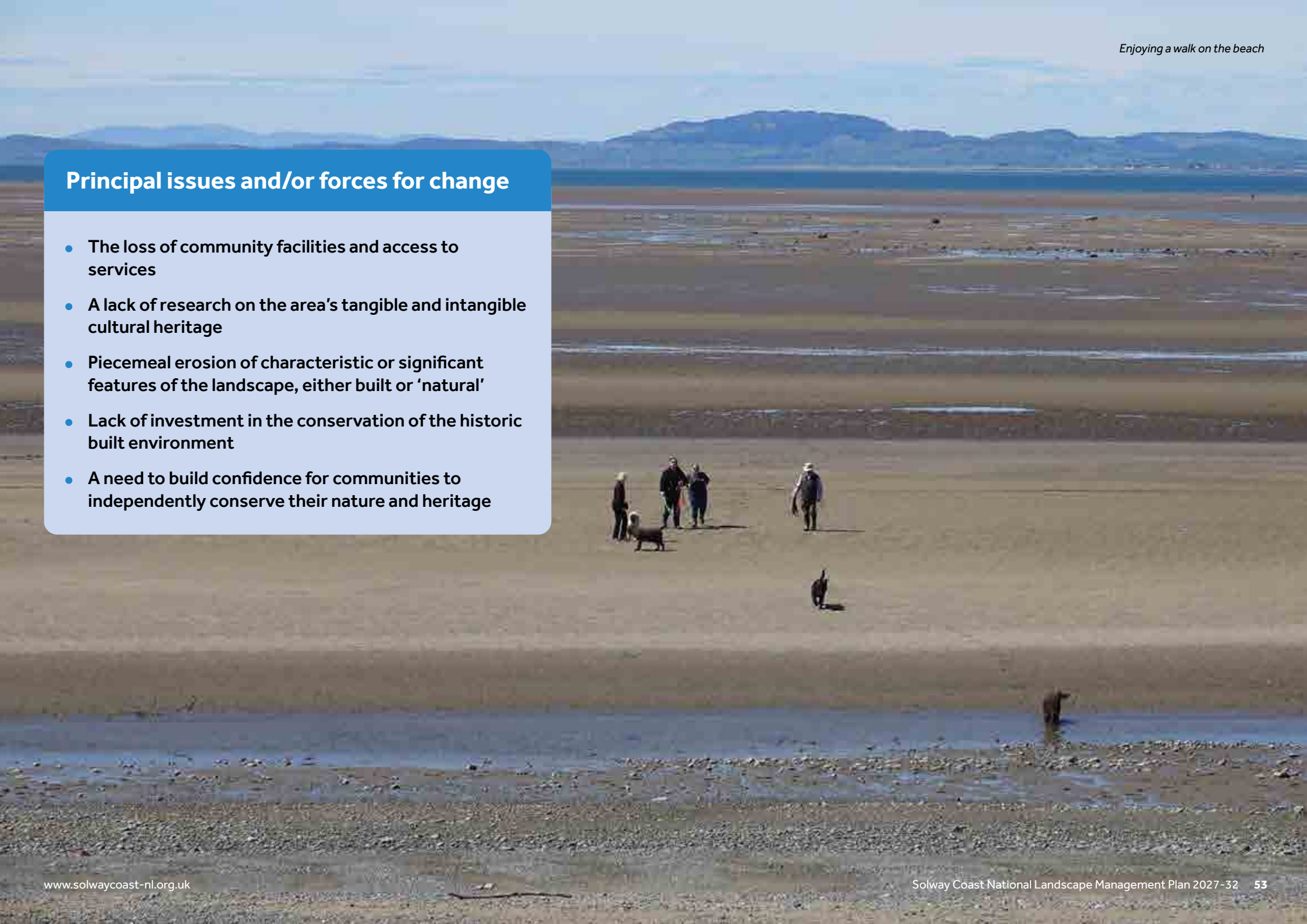
This is a landscape full of memories and stories, and keeping those things alive as well as creating new stories is to many people as much a part of conserving this landscape as looking after our Mosses, mudflats and marshes.

People have made this landscape; to understand it properly it is important to see the human stories alongside, and as part of, those of nature. To conserve it properly, this conservation effort has to be at least in part rooted in the community.

Approximately 3,200 people live on the Solway Coast in the scattered villages and hamlets between Carlisle and Maryport. The long-term future for our natural and cultural heritage lies in these local people caring about it and caring for it. This cannot just be about encouraging local communities to engage in the plans and work of others; it is essential to promote the development of skills, knowledge and resources among community organisations, businesses and voluntary groups, so they can take an increasingly skilled and informed lead in aspects of heritage management. The Solway Wetlands Landscape Partnership Scheme, delivered during the life of the 2015-20 management plan, was an especially good vehicle for developing community capacity and more work of this kind is necessary.

The area's rich historic environment has been referred to elsewhere in this plan in reference to particular landscapes, and the imprint of 5000 years of settlement, from the Bronze Age onwards, can be seen. Perhaps the most notable cultural heritage assets are associated with the Roman period and the Frontiers of the Roman Empire World Heritage Site; this includes Hadrian's Wall itself, and associated forts, milefortlets and earthworks. The Medieval influence is seen in a legacy of abbey ruins, fortified farmsteads, nucleated rural settlements and historic field patterns. More recent historic landscape features include World War Two airfields and the unusual and distinctive 'glider traps' on the marshes. Traditional building materials vary considerably and include red sandstone, limestone, cobbles, clay and slate. The most distinctive local building style is the cruck-roofed, clay-walled buildings known as 'clay dabbins' which can be found across the Solway Plain.

Some cultural practices have survived partly because they have a land management or economic purposes – haaf netting, with its Viking origins, equipment and terminology, is a prime example. However cultural associations with landscape and place are not just about the past; maintaining a living culture is about celebrating life on the Solway today, and in supporting new cultural practices to grow directly from the community.



Enjoying a walk on the beach

Principal issues and/or forces for change

- The loss of community facilities and access to services
- A lack of research on the area's tangible and intangible cultural heritage
- Piecemeal erosion of characteristic or significant features of the landscape, either built or 'natural'
- Lack of investment in the conservation of the historic built environment
- A need to build confidence for communities to independently conserve their nature and heritage

Specific outcome and measures – cultural landscape and community

Outcome: The Solway Coast is a liveable landscape, where viable communities are active alongside others in conserving what is special about the area.

Measures	Local government	Community groups	Conservation bodies	Farmers, land managers	Catalyst
CC1. Build community capacity to take a lead on conserving their natural and cultural heritage.	x	x	x		SCNL
CC2. Continue and expand the programme of volunteering opportunities, including through the provision of training for volunteers.		x	x		SCNL
CC3. Develop opportunities for communities to engage in citizen science projects.		x	x	x	SCNL
CC4. Develop programmes and projects which support the conservation of historic buildings and structures, and tell their stories.		x	x		SCNL
CC5. Undertake research to increase our understanding of the area's tangible and intangible cultural heritage, including historic buildings, structures, routeways, archaeological features, farming, haaf netting and waths, promoting community engagement and community-led activity.		x	x	x	SCNL
CC6. Use the planning system to avoid the piecemeal erosion of the historic character of buildings and settlements, and other characteristic components of the landscape.	x				CC
CC7. Use ELM to conserve and enhance archaeological features and built heritage on private land and promote opportunities for public access to and enjoyment of this aspect of our heritage.			x	x	NE
CC8. Promote sensitive new uses for historic buildings and structures.	x	x	x	x	CC
CC19. Promote small-scale community renewable energy schemes and other local activity on climate change, whilst ensuring the conservation of the area's natural beauty.	x	x			CC
CL10. Act quickly to remove litter and fly-tipping and promote positive messages to encourage prevention and respect for the landscape and communities.	x				CC

Contributes to PLTOF Targets: 1, 4-6, 8-10

Local indicators of success

- **An increase in people volunteering for landscape and heritage projects, and an increase in volunteer hours**
- **More historic buildings and structures undergoing conservation and/or research work**
- **An increase in community-devised and led conservation and heritage projects**
- **Increased community participation in heritage conservation and celebration**

A natural place to explore and enjoy



An evening walk at Mawbray Banks

Introduction

The Solway Coast is a stunning landscape, and the area's natural beauty, in all its forms, is attractive to people. Improving people's experiences in exploring, enjoying and understanding the Solway Coast is not just something that benefits visitors; local people are a crucial audience for the many 'things to see and do' linked to nature and culture that can be made more accessible and more engaging.

For visitors to the area, historically the offer was focused around Silloth and Allonby, for a more traditional 'seaside' holiday. Fitting with the context of this plan, the offer today, for visitors and for local people exploring their landscape, is now partly based on the area's natural and cultural assets and the products, attractions and activities that have developed from them; there is a strong focus on walking, cycling, birdwatching and visiting historic places.

Visitors to the Solway Coast come predominantly from relatively close by: Carlisle and northern Cumbria, and Southern Scotland. The day visitor dominates the market, whilst overnight stays are focused on the more traditional seaside locations, including chalets and caravan/ holiday parks. The vast majority of visitor economy activity takes places in the spring and summer months, which can lead to reduced services for local communities in the quieter months. There is a heavy reliance on the use of private transport to explore the Solway Coast.

Regardless of whether one lives on the Solway or is coming to visit, to explore the landscape on foot and by bicycle requires good access infrastructure. Access highlights on the coast include:

- **nearly 90km public footpaths and bridleways**
- **nearly 22km^2 of open access land (19% of the area)**
- **part of the Hadrian's Wall Path National Trail and the King Charles III England Coast Path**
- **numerous promoted day walks including 11km of easy access walks**
- **excellent cycling opportunities, including road, touring, mountain biking, part of the Hadrian's Wall Cycleway and the Cumbria Cycleway.**

As a destination, the area, like the rest of Cumbria, is dominated by the Lake District. Whilst there is certainly scope for making the Solway Coast better known, recent years have seen a decline in resources to support destination management activities and maintenance of the public realm. There is also currently insufficient information and interpretation available to help people discover, explore and enjoy the Solway Coast. Even now, visitor pressure on some important wildlife sites can lead to conflict with conservation objectives.



Birdwatchers on the sea dyke at Rockcliffe Marsh



Dog walker at Allonby

River Eden

Principal issues and/or forces for change

- Limited current marketing of the area as a destination
- Insufficient pre-and post-arrival information
- Under-developed offer of nature and culture-led ‘things to see and do’
- Lack of investment in high quality and accessible interpretation of the area’s landscape heritage
- Difficulty in exploring the area without a private car
- The opportunities provided by the prominence of the health and wellbeing agenda and the benefits of getting more people out into nature
- The challenges of an increase in irresponsible visitor behaviour, such as unregulated camping and fires, leading to damage to sensitive species and habitats

Specific outcome and measures - exploring and enjoying the Solway Coast

Outcome: More people, from a wider variety of backgrounds and experiences, can discover, explore, enjoy and understand the Solway Coast, whilst making a positive contribution to its conservation.

Measures	National / local government	Conservation bodies	Tourism businesses and bodies	Catalyst
EE1. Establish initiatives which support the development of an environmentally, socially and economically sustainable visitor economy based on, and sustaining, the natural beauty of the Solway Coast.		x	x	SCNL
EE2. Develop/expand shoulder season programming which supports the extension of the spring/summer season, focusing on themes such as winter wildlife, stargazing, geology and the historic environment.		x	x	SCNL
EE3.Ensure high standards of management of the public rights of way network, including an emphasis on promoting ease of access for all responsible and legal uses balanced with nature-friendly management.	x			CC
EE4. Promote the sustainable development and use of the King Charles III England Coast Path, Hadrian's Wall Path National Trail and Hadrian's Cycleway, including seeking opportunities for nature recovery / heritage restoration along the trails and promoting user support for the local economy.	x	x	x	CC
EE5. Support the development of new (and enhancement of existing) walking and cycling products linked to public transport hubs and local settlements.	x	x	x	SCNL
EE6. Interpret key sites and features of heritage interest, utilising a variety of techniques.	x	x	x	SCNL
EE7. Provide messaging and support initiatives which encourage responsible, respectful enjoyment of the Solway Coast	x	x	x	SCNL
EE8. Develop activity which encourages a reduction in within-destination car travel e.g. improvements in public transport, car-free days and itineraries.	x	x	x	SCNL
EE9. Develop opportunities for using the Solway Coast as a place to increase people's physical and mental wellbeing, including green social prescribing, health walks, mindfulness activities and others.	x	x	x	SCNL
EE10. Develop a programme to promote the nature and culture offer of the Solway Coast, supported by itineraries, high-quality images and copy, and supporting regenerative tourism businesses.	x	x	x	SCNL
EE11. Generate National Landscape-specific data on visitor numbers, motivations and activity.			x	CT
EE12. Investigate and if feasible deliver an approach to visitor giving on the Solway Coast.	x	x	x	CT
EE13. Develop links with hard to reach audiences, increasing understanding of barriers to accessing the Solway Coast and facilitate involvement and engagement by a broader range of people with the National Landscape.	x	x	x	SCNL

Contributes to PLTOF Targets: 6,9

Local indicators of success

- **An increase in heritage related walking and cycling products / opportunities**
- **Increase in heritage-led shoulder season activity**
- **Successful delivery of joint projects between agencies and tourism businesses**
- **Improvement in the overall condition of the rights of way network, national/ regional routes**
- **Increased user satisfaction in surveys**

A landscape for learning



Pond survey, Mawbray Banks

Introduction

If we are to conserve our natural and cultural heritage, then it is essential that people have to the opportunity to understand how our natural systems function, can appreciate how the past has shaped the present and can engage with our living culture today. The Solway Coast has great potential to be a fascinating outdoor classroom, where schools, universities and the wider public can learn formally and informally about how nature works and how it can be better conserved, how farming can provide both food and public goods and how the area's rich culture has developed and will keep evolving.

Formal education

There has never been a greater need to engage children with nature than there is now, as even many children in rural areas are losing a connection to the natural world that would have been stronger in the relatively recent past. The nature of the education system means that inspiring children about our natural and cultural heritage needs to meet objectives in the curriculum; thankfully this is usually possible and a wide variety of work has been done by many organisations with the schools in and immediately around the Solway. The National Landscape team, Cumbria Wildlife Trust, the RSPB and Natural England work with local schools to introduce children to nature, especially at reserves such as RSPB Campfield Marsh and Finglandrigg Wood. Partnerships with Tullie House Museum in Carlisle have also proved beneficial to helping school children learn about the Solway Coast.

Barriers to engagement with schools include the pressure of the curriculum, the cost of travel, and lack of awareness of the opportunities, allied to continued pressure on conservation organisation budgets. Despite this, there is considerable potential to build on the current offer and in particular to generate better understanding about where our food comes from and how land is farmed and managed.

Lifelong learning

Lifelong learning on the Solway Coast takes many forms including conservation and other heritage skills training of the kind delivered by the National Landscape team and partners, as well as a variety of community archaeology workshops and courses.

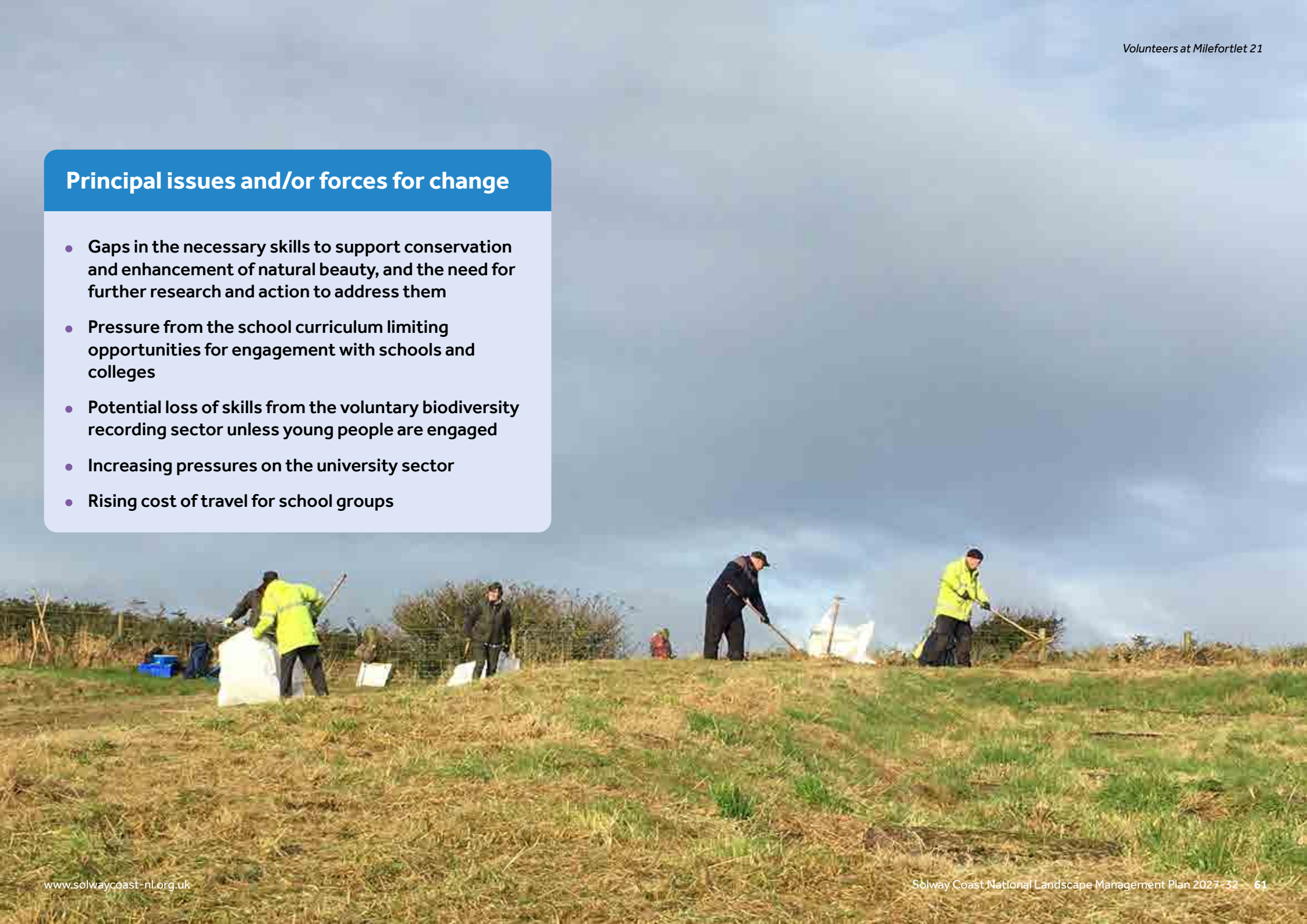
These initiatives create a deeper pool of skills and knowledge in communities, actively supports conservation and serve to connect people and place. The barrier to such provision is usually a lack of resources to make it possible, though bodies such as the National Lottery Heritage Fund, community organisations such as Action with Communities in Cumbria and conservation organisations have provided this support.

Skills training

The future conservation of the Solway will require skills and knowledge in land-based practices as diverse as farming, forestry, ecology and practical field work of all kinds. It is also vital to retain built heritage skills, such as those that will sustain clay dabbins and cruck-roof buildings. Training and skills in this field are provided locally through the University of Cumbria and this has been augmented by the work of conservation bodies such as the National Landscape team, RSPB, Cumbria Wildlife Trust and Natural England. This work actively supports improvements in conservation and increases people's environment sector employability locally. A clear area of need is to enable different sectors to learn from each other, especially farmers and conservation bodies.



Milefortlet 21 and the saltpans



Volunteers at Milefortlet 21

Principal issues and/or forces for change

- Gaps in the necessary skills to support conservation and enhancement of natural beauty, and the need for further research and action to address them
- Pressure from the school curriculum limiting opportunities for engagement with schools and colleges
- Potential loss of skills from the voluntary biodiversity recording sector unless young people are engaged
- Increasing pressures on the university sector
- Rising cost of travel for school groups

Specific outcome and measures – learning, training and skills

Outcome: More people of all ages and backgrounds can learn about the Solway Coast, and are engaged in the skills and knowledge which support its conservation

Measures	Education bodies	Conservation bodies	Farmers, land managers	Catalyst
L1. Support school visits to the Solway Coast, through developing projects and programmes linked to the curriculum.	x	x	x	SCNL
L2. Provide school travel grants where resources allow, and plan for this in project development.	x	x		SCNL
L3. Provide training and other activities with teachers, focused on delivering aspects of the curriculum on the Solway Coast.	x	x		SCNL
L4. Further develop the Solway Coast as a place for fieldwork and research.	x	x	x	Universities
L5. Support organisations to deliver programmes of lifelong learning on conservation and heritage themes, including practical and knowledge-based activity and outreach events in communities within and beyond the National Landscape.	x	x	x	SCNL
L6. Support the work of youth groups by providing informal learning opportunities on the Solway Coast.	x	x	x	SCNL
L7. Provide ecology and land-based skills training on the Solway Coast.	x	x	x	SCNL
L8. Support an increase in professional and volunteer skills in conserving and restoring historic buildings and industrial heritage.	x	x	x	HE
L9. Identify the skills and knowledge gaps in the land-based sector in the area.	x	x	x	SCNL
L10. Support and deliver joint training and knowledge exchange between farmers and conservation bodies and encourage and support collaboration between all parties		x	x	NE

Contributes to PLTOF Targets: 5, 6, 9

Local indicators of success

- **More school children visiting the Solway Coast for curriculum activity**
- **More people taking part in nature-related lifelong learning**
- **Increase in nature and heritage training opportunities**
- **Increase in well-supported collaborative training activity between farmers/land managers/conservationists**

Targets and monitoring

The Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework (PLTOF)

The table on page 26 identifies how the components of natural beauty and thematic sections of this plan map onto the PLTOF.

The Solway Coast National Landscape Partnership is responsible for monitoring (and contributing to the meeting of) those aspects of the PLTOF apportioned to individual protected landscapes:

- **PLTOF target 1** – Restore or create more than 250,000 hectares of a range of wildlife-rich habitats within protected landscapes, outside protected sites by 2042 (from a 2022 baseline). The Solway Coast target is 438 hectares.
- **PLTOF target 7** – Restore approximately 130,000 hectares of peat in protected landscapes by 2050. The Solway Coast target is 672 hectares.
- **PLTOF target 8** – Increase tree canopy and woodland cover (combined) by 3% of total land area in protected landscapes by 2050 (from 2022 baseline). The Solway Coast target is 1%.

The Partnership will, where capacity allows, contribute to the monitoring of non-apportioned targets, as follows.

- **PLTOF target 2** – Bring 80% of SSSIs within protected landscapes into favourable condition by 2042.
- **PLTOF target 3** – For 60% of SSSIs within protected landscapes assessed as having 'actions on track' to achieve favourable condition by 31 January 2028.
- **PLTOF target 4** – Continuing favourable management of all existing priority habitat already in favourable condition outside of SSSIs (from a 2022 baseline) and increasing to include all newly restored or created habitat through agri-environment schemes by 2042.
- **PLTOF target 5** – Ensuring at least 65% to 80% of land managers adopt nature friendly farming on at least 10% to 15% of their land by 2030.
- **PLTOF target 6** – Reduce net greenhouse gas emissions in protected landscapes to net zero by 2050 relative to 1990 levels.
- **PLTOF target 9** – Improve and promote accessibility to and engagement with protected landscapes for all using existing metrics in our Access for All programme
- **PLTOF target 10** – Decrease the number of nationally designated heritage assets at risk in protected landscapes.

Metrics have been provided by Natural England to help with meaningful monitoring of progress towards these targets. These metrics, and more information on the PLTOF, can be found at https://www.gov.uk

Local indicators of success

The Solway Coast National Landscape Partnership, with the involvement of all of its member bodies, will be responsible for gathering the information and data to measure the Local Indicators of Success in this plan.

Implementation plans

This is a strategic level document and is intended to guide the actions and policies of all those who have an influence on the natural beauty of the Solway Coast, and people's interaction with it. The National Landscape Partnership staff team will set out periodically the contribution it will make to plan delivery; it is anticipated that partner organisations, and others, will bend their delivery plans to support Management Plan outcomes. Statutory agencies, NGOs, community organisations, farmer groups and others will all be invited to add their voice to how they have all contributed to plan outcomes, and to making the Solway Coast richer in natural and cultural heritage.



Mawbray fields and Criffel

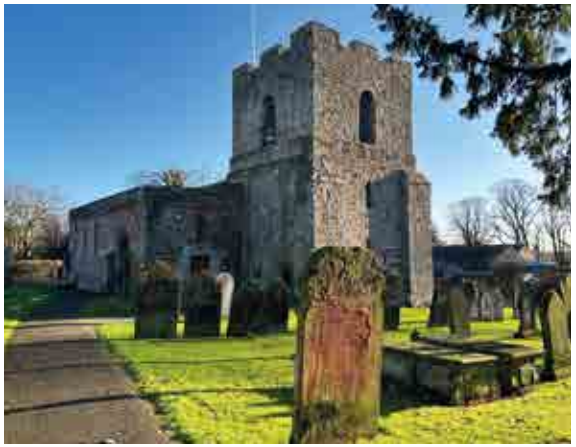


Horse riders, Wolsty Beach

Abbreviations used in this plan

ARC	Amphibian and Reptile Conservation
BNG	Biodiversity Net Gain
CC	Cumberland Council
CT	Cumbria Tourism
CWT	Cumbria Wildlife Trust
DEFRA	Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
EA	Environment Agency
ELM	Environmental Land Management schemes
FiPL	Farming in Protected Landscapes programme
FC	Forestry Commission
HE	Historic England
HPMA	Highly Protected Marine Area
LIG	Local Interest Groups (covering a wide range of interests and geographies)
MMO	Marine Management Organisation
NE	Natural England
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NNR	National Nature Reserve
NWIFCA	North Western Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority
RSPB	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
SAC	Special Area of Conservation
SCNL	Solway Coast National Landscape (staff team)
SSSI	Site of Special Scientific Interest

Dubmill Mudflats



St Michael's Church, Burgh-by-Sands



Common lizard



View from Abbeytown over the Solway Plain and Lakeland Fells



Honeycomb worm reefs, Allonby Bay



Walking on Glasson Moss



Banded demoiselle



Bowness Common



King Edward I Monument, Burgh-by-Sands



Beach litter pick, Mawbray Banks



Aerial view of Port Carlisle and Bowness-on-Solway

Solway Coast
National
Landscape

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Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs

Cumberland Council