

Durham Wildlife Trust 2030 Strategy

October 2026



Durham
Wildlife Trust
From Tees to Tyne



Foreword

Since becoming Chair of the Trust in 2025 I have been hugely impressed by the energy, talent and commitment of our staff, trustees and volunteers. Their work has never felt more important for nature and wildlife in our region. It has been exciting to be involved in the discussions behind this strategy refresh, and it is a pleasure to launch it. It takes a fresh look at the direction of the Trust, at our unique landscapes and at our ambitions for both nature and people. It re-affirms our ambitions while also recognising some emerging priorities. I really believe it's a great foundation for the Trust's work to 2030 and beyond.



Bill Oxbury

Chair of Trustees,
Durham Wildlife Trust



This Document

This document updates the Durham Wildlife Trust 2030 Strategy. Written in 2023 as a living document, the strategy was intended to be reviewed and updated regularly. This refresh refocuses on the Trust's goals and highlights progress to date.

Durham Wildlife Trust has grown since 2023 and now operates in a changing policy landscape, including Biodiversity Net Gain and Local Nature Recovery Strategies, which bring new opportunities and challenges.

The review was a collaborative effort by Trustees, staff and partners, reflecting their shared commitment and enthusiasm for Durham Wildlife Trust's work.



Executive summary

Durham Wildlife Trust's refreshed Strategy 2030 reaffirms the Trust's ambition to restore nature from Tees to Tyne while responding to a changed policy, funding and partnership landscape. Building on the national Wildlife Trusts Strategy 2030 update, the refresh places stronger emphasis on accelerating delivery, widening the movement for nature, increasing influence and strengthening the Trust's long-term resilience.

Photo: Brian Howes



The strategy is organised around four interconnected goals. First, more people, communities, businesses and decision-makers will care about nature and take meaningful action for its recovery. Second, habitats will be restored, expanded and better connected across the Trust's area, with landscape-scale delivery guided by Local Nature Recovery Strategies and delivered through partnerships as well as direct land management. Third, nature-based solutions will be championed for their role in improving health and well-being, reducing flood and climate risks, supporting food systems and strengthening regional resilience. Fourth, the Trust will continue to develop as the trusted leader for nature recovery, with the people, income, data, systems and professional capacity needed to deliver lasting impact.

The refresh sets out priorities across the North Pennines, Magnesian Limestone, Tees and Southern Lowlands, Durham Vale and Coalfields, Derwent Valley and Tyne Lowlands, the Durham coast and seas, our towns and cities and the landscapes beyond administrative boundaries. Across these landscapes, the Trust will combine exemplar reserve management with advocacy, landowner engagement, citizen science, partnership delivery and, where appropriate, land acquisition.

Successful implementation to 2030 will depend on strategic partnerships, continued investment in staff and volunteers, stronger data and evidence, meaningful impact measures, and a community-led approach. A supporting Business Plan, annual budgets, KPIs and impact reporting will help ensure that the Trust remains financially secure, accountable and focused on delivering measurable benefits for wildlife and people.



Introduction

Bringing Nature Back – The Wildlife Trusts’ Strategy 2030



Jim Cokill
CEO,
Durham Wildlife Trust

In 2022, the Wildlife Trusts, led by Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts (RSWT), published Strategy 2030, setting out how the 46 local Trusts could help deliver 30 by 30: protecting 30% of the planet for nature by 2030. Durham Wildlife Trust’s Strategy 2030 drew on this national approach.

In 2025/26, RSWT reviewed the strategy, refreshing the Goals, Transformations, Enabling Priorities and Impact Measures. Durham Wildlife Trust has again drawn on this national thinking, alongside local experience, in this review.

As part of the national strategy update, insights and changes of emphasis have been highlighted which

“reflect a shift from setting ambition to accelerating delivery through building a larger, more inclusive movement, strengthening the federation’s ability to act collectively, and increasing influence.”



Key changes include:

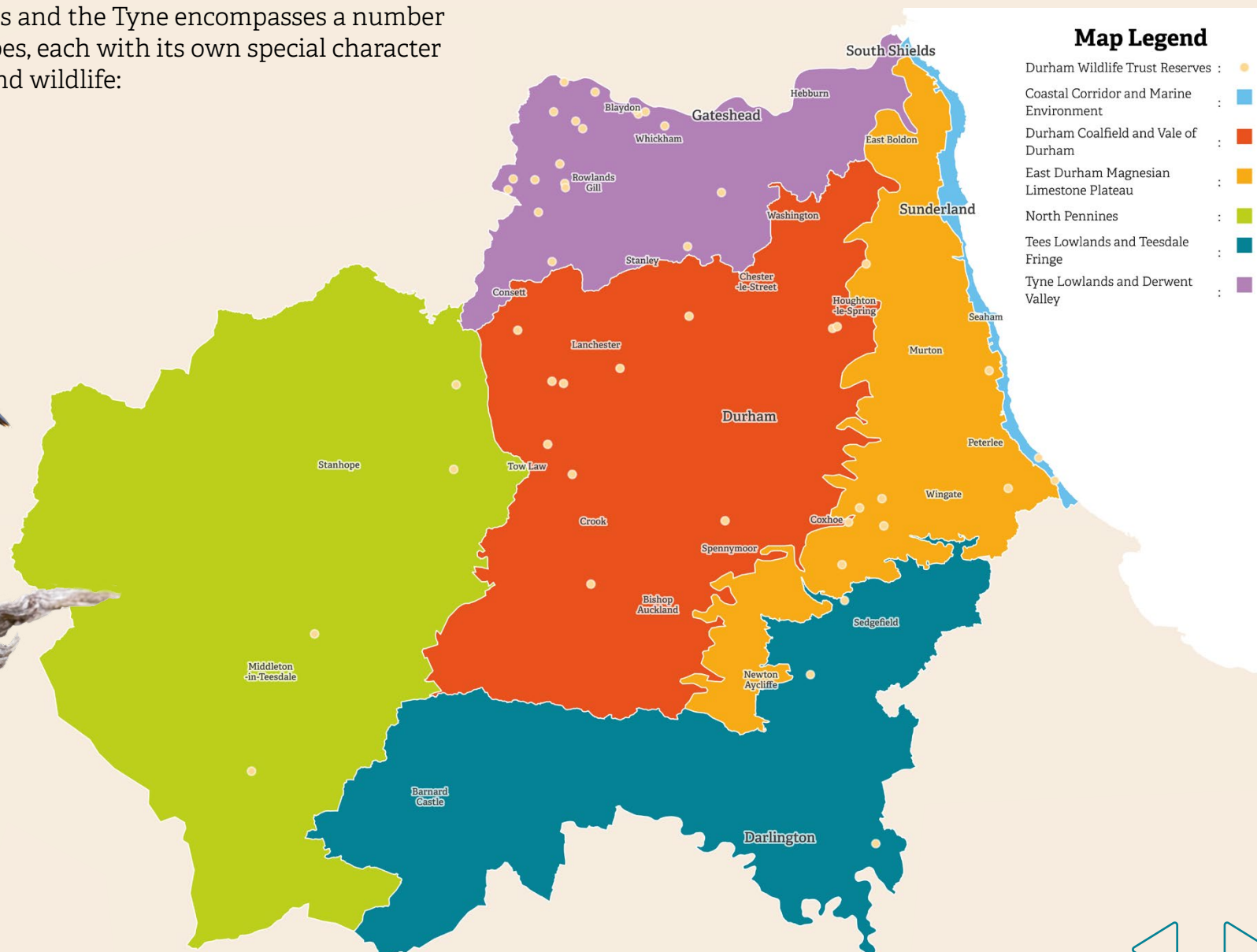
- Stronger emphasis on the importance of restoration and recovery of nature at scale to wider society.
- Greater focus on people and movement-building.
- Clearer articulation of the need for wider systems change.
- Stronger focus on the collective capability and resilience of our federation.
- More confident external positioning and influence.

Durham Wildlife Trust’s Strategy 2030 update reflects these changes in emphasis.



Durham Wildlife Trust – our region

Our region between the Tees and the Tyne encompasses a number of unique heritage landscapes, each with its own special character and high value for nature and wildlife:



Durham Wildlife Trust – our region

North Pennines

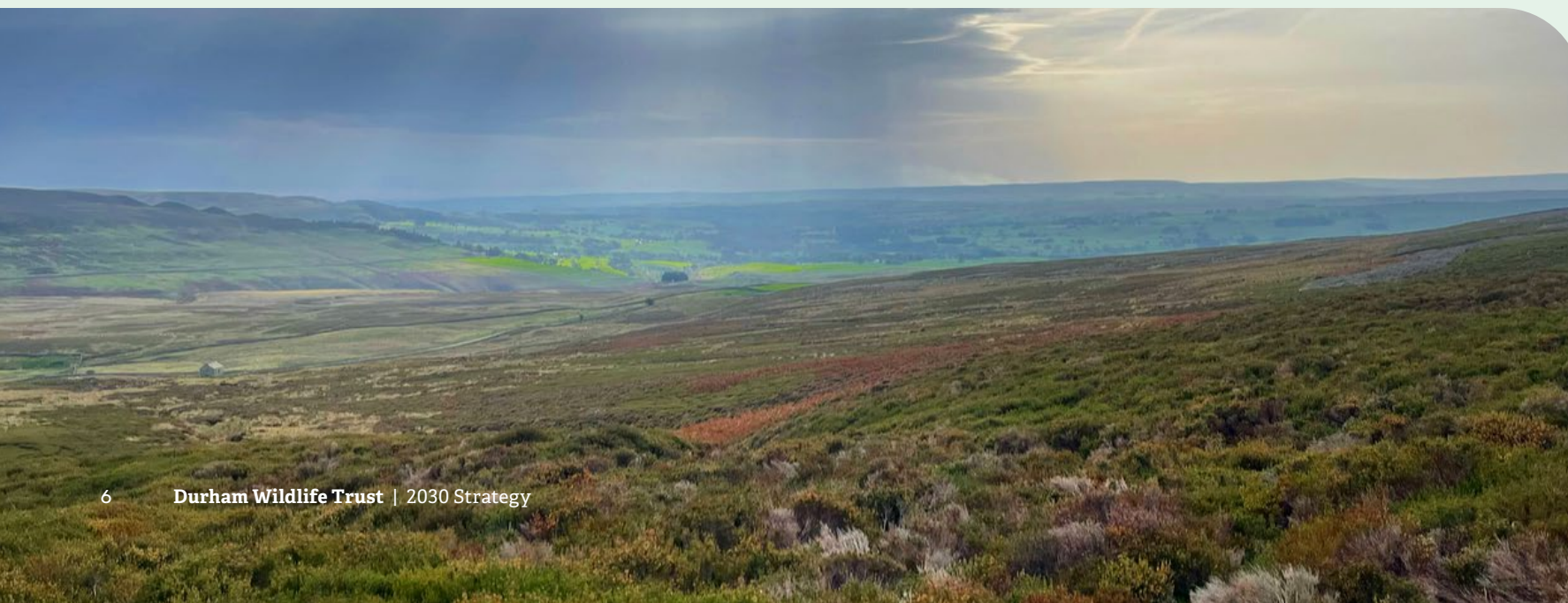
The iconic high moorlands are home to internationally significant blanket bogs and plant assemblages – relics of post-glacial times. The calls of curlew and other upland birds roll across this designated National Landscape and in the Dales traditional flower-rich meadows can still be found. The Trust's nature reserves at Hannah's Meadow and Cuthbert's Moor are characteristic of this landscape and will continue to be exemplars for nature-focused management.

The Trust will encourage nature recovery across the wider landscape, working individually and as part of the North Pennines National Landscape Partnership. If land acquisition opportunities present themselves, existing sites will be enhanced by securing neighbouring land and important sites under threat will be protected.

Magnesian Limestone

A remarkable belt of grassland running north–south through the east of our region. Perhaps unnoticed by some but of great significance because of the range of plants and invertebrates that thrive on the thin limestone soils. Bringing together species with both southern and northern distributions, this area creates a unique assemblage of wildlife found nowhere else. Work to manage these special sites, and where possible to increase their extent through targeted acquisition, will continue.

The Trust's nature reserves, such as Town Kelloe Bank, Herrington Hill and Bishop Middleham Quarry include some of the most important examples of magnesian limestone grasslands in the country. On these sites and others the Trust will continue to conserve species like the northern brown argus butterfly and dark-red helleborine orchid.



Durham Wildlife Trust – our region

Tees and Southern Lowlands

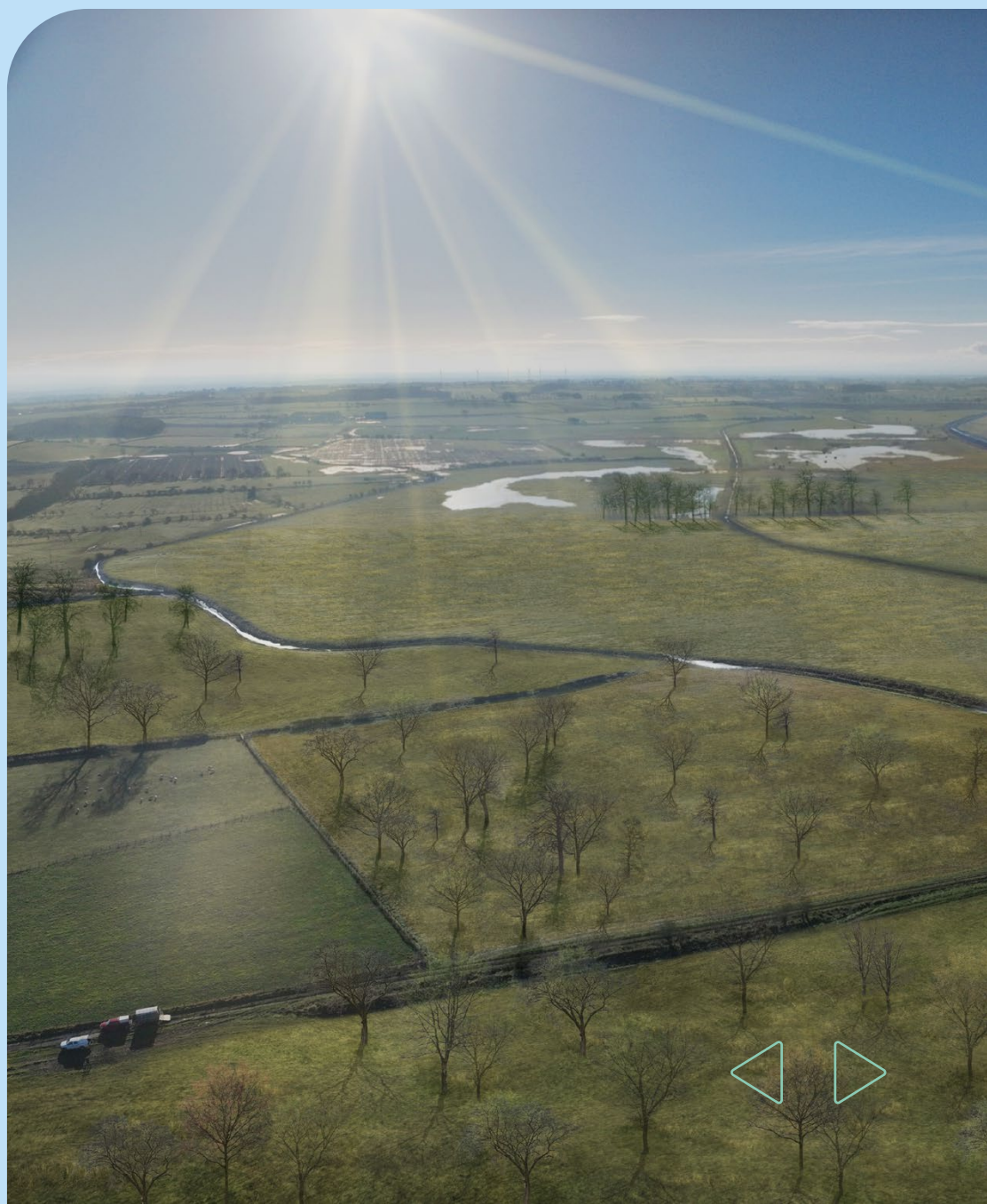
Characterised by low-lying farmland, anchored by the River Tees, significant activity has been delivered in this area over recent years. The Trust began development of the Great North Fen – the restoration of hundreds of hectares of wetlands, grasslands and woodlands on land that was drained in the nineteenth century. That work will continue, re-naturalising rivers like the Skerne and bringing lowland fens and bogs back to the landscape. These are habitats where one day species such as crane and water vole can return and thrive.

If opportunities arise the Trust will expand its land across the Great North Fen area. Land manager engagement, working with both individual farmers and large-scale landowners, will also continue, helping to facilitate nature-friendly and regenerative farming.

Durham Vale and Coalfields

A post-industrial landscape in quiet recovery, in this region many former pit sites have now become fabulous nature reserves. The River Wear winds through, supporting otters and kingfishers and this has become a story of nature reclaiming ground. The Trust's work across Sunderland will continue, bringing the benefits of nature's recovery to communities still suffering the effects of industrial decline.

The River Browney will be a priority for action, where the Trust and its partners will create a thriving catchment for people and wildlife supported by citizen scientists. The region is also a stronghold for the willow tit, a species that has suffered serious declines and the Trust will be working as part of a national consortium to protect this threatened species across the Coalfield.



Durham Wildlife Trust – our region



Derwent Valley and Tyne Lowlands

Wooded river valleys with ancient woodland, farmland, and industrial heritage sit within a landscape still rich in wildlife. The rivers Don and Team are expected to be the focus for activity up to 2030, where the Trust will work as part of the Tyne Catchment Partnership to restore habitats and empower communities to act.

The Derwent Valley provides the greatest potential for beaver reintroduction in the Durham Wildlife Trust area and the Trust will explore whether these ecosystem engineers can be brought back to our region.

Coast and Marine

One of England's most remarkable conservation stories. Decades of colliery spoil once blackened Durham's beaches and coastal waters. Nature has now reclaimed those spaces and the challenge up to 2030 is to continue that recovery. There are opportunities to be explored for the restoration of kelp beds and seagrass meadows to create havens for wildlife and protect our coast from erosion. The Trust and its partners along the Durham Heritage Coast, a unique magnesian limestone coastline, will be at the forefront of that effort.

More widely, Durham Wildlife Trust will work with colleagues up and down the east coast as part of the North Sea Wildlife Trusts, helping to protect our coasts and seas.



Durham Wildlife Trust – our region

Urban Nature

Our cities and towns contain more nature than you might expect – river corridors, brownfield sites rich in wildlife and urban green spaces where people and nature meet. By bringing more nature into our towns and cities we can help everyone enjoy the benefits that nature brings.

Durham Wildlife Trust has championed urban nature for many years and projects like Swift City will continue that work and empower people to take action for nature where they live.

Beyond our Borders

Nature doesn't stop at administrative boundaries. The North Pennines extend into Cumbria and North Yorkshire; the Tyne connects to Northumberland. Understanding these connections is key to nature recovery at landscape scale.

The Trust will continue its leadership role in restoring water vole populations across the North of England and support our colleagues across the North to bring nature back for future generations.



Durham Wildlife Trust – Updated Strategy 2030

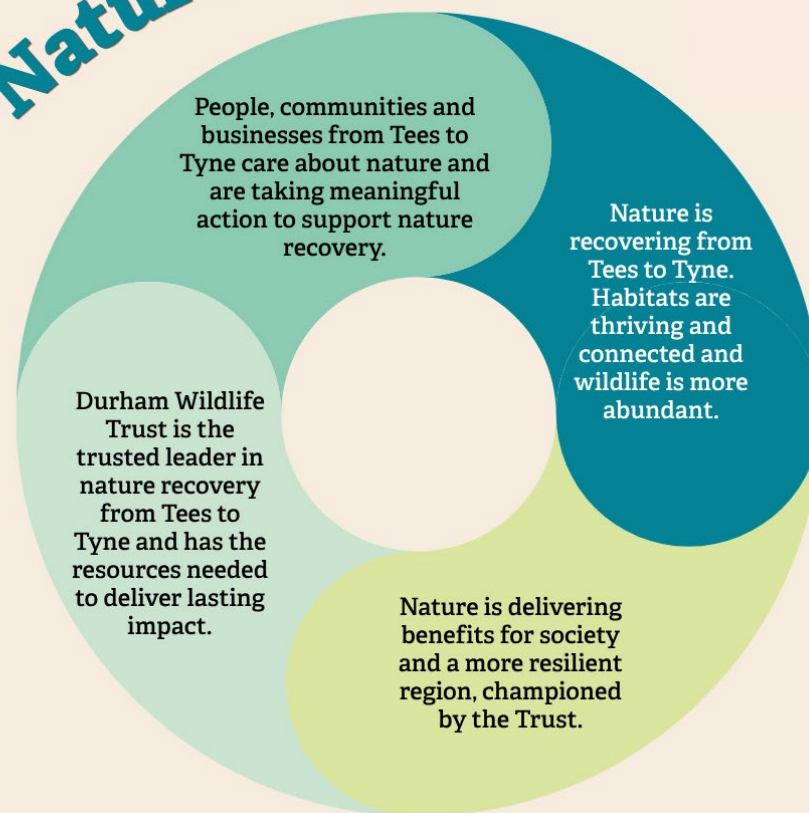
Durham Wildlife Trust's updated strategy has four interconnected Strategic Goals of equal importance, with greater focus on supporting communities, partners and individuals to act for nature recovery.

The Trust will strengthen its role as a trusted local leader and advocate for wildlife, helping more people recognise nature's environmental, economic, social and health benefits.

The four Strategic Goals are shown below, highlighting their connections and the virtuous circle they create.



Nature and people



Durham Wildlife Trust's Strategic Goals

Photo: Les Holburn

The revised Strategic Goals guiding Durham Wildlife Trust's work to 2030 are set out below:

- 1 From Tees to Tyne, people care about nature and are taking meaningful action to support nature recovery.
- 2 Nature is recovering from Tees to Tyne. Habitats are thriving and connected and wildlife is more abundant.
- 3 Nature-based solutions are recognised and valued as making our region more resilient and its people safer and better off.
- 4 Durham Wildlife Trust is the trusted leader in nature recovery from Tees to Tyne and has the resources needed to deliver lasting impact.



Durham Wildlife Trust's Strategic Goals

Goal 1. From Tees to Tyne, people care about nature and are taking meaningful action to support nature recovery.

During the strategy refresh, we have chosen to focus Goal 1 on getting more people engaged with nature – our supporters and visitors, local communities and local businesses. Protecting and restoring nature from Tees to Tyne depends on people caring about the natural world and being inspired and supported to take meaningful action.

Around 1.75 million people live or work between the Tees and the Tyne. Their access to and love of nature is our goal. As the leading wildlife organisation operating across our area, with more than 50 nature reserves providing a valued local resource, the Trust will help more people to experience, care for and take meaningful action for nature, more often.

The Trust will support farmers, land managers, politicians, community groups and councils with advice, partnership, expertise and, where appropriate, delivery support.

The Trust will work within each local authority area to develop projects, education programmes and partnerships that are attuned to local needs. Our nature reserves close to communities will provide inspirational green spaces where people have opportunities to experience nature for recreation, health and wellbeing, and to volunteer to work with us to enhance their local green spaces and learn new skills. The Trust will continue improving engagement with communities it has historically found harder to reach.

Above all, the safety, safeguarding and wellbeing of all who participate in our work and visit our reserves remain the Trust's highest priority.



Durham Wildlife Trust's Strategic Goals

Goal 2. Nature is recovering from Tees to Tyne. Habitats are thriving and connected, and wildlife is more abundant.

Durham Wildlife Trust's area runs from the Tees to the Tyne – the southern and northern boundaries of the historical County Durham – and covers around 270,000 hectares. We have described above the rich natural heritage and landscapes in this region, and our vision is to restore these landscapes and the species that live in them.

The Trust will build and lead flagship landscape projects such as the Great North Fen. But we also recognise that nature recovery at the scale we need requires action far beyond land directly managed by the Trust and we will work in partnership with others to deliver that aim.

As well as managing exemplar nature sites on our reserves we will influence, advise and campaign to encourage other stakeholders to improve land for nature. Our goal is for nature to thrive across the range of landscapes from the Tees to the Tyne, from private homes to large estates and everything in between. Already this goal is shared with many.

We will work with the science community to demonstrate evidence-based and data-led decision-making for nature. As we seek to influence people to take action to improve nature, our sites and our expert ecologists and reserve managers will provide an example needed to help persuade policy-makers, fellow landowners and visitors to our sites to work with us in restoring nature.

Delivery of '30 by 30' (the UN and UK Government target to effectively conserve and manage 30% of our land and seas by 2030) remains central to our nature recovery ambitions and the Trust will work to increase the area of land contributing to this target.

The initial 2030 strategy aimed to double land under Trust management from approximately 1,000 hectares to 2,000 hectares, largely through nutrient neutrality funding. By 31 March 2026 the area of land managed had increased to 1404 hectares, despite significantly lower levels of funding from nutrient neutrality than anticipated. The Trust will still seek appropriate acquisitions, but our focus has widened to stronger working with partners.

Local Nature Recovery Strategies, published in April 2026 with close involvement of the Trust, now provide a spatial framework to guide our recovery work and wider engagement.



Durham Wildlife Trust's Strategic Goals

Goal 3. Nature-based solutions are recognised and valued as making our region more resilient and its people safer and better off.

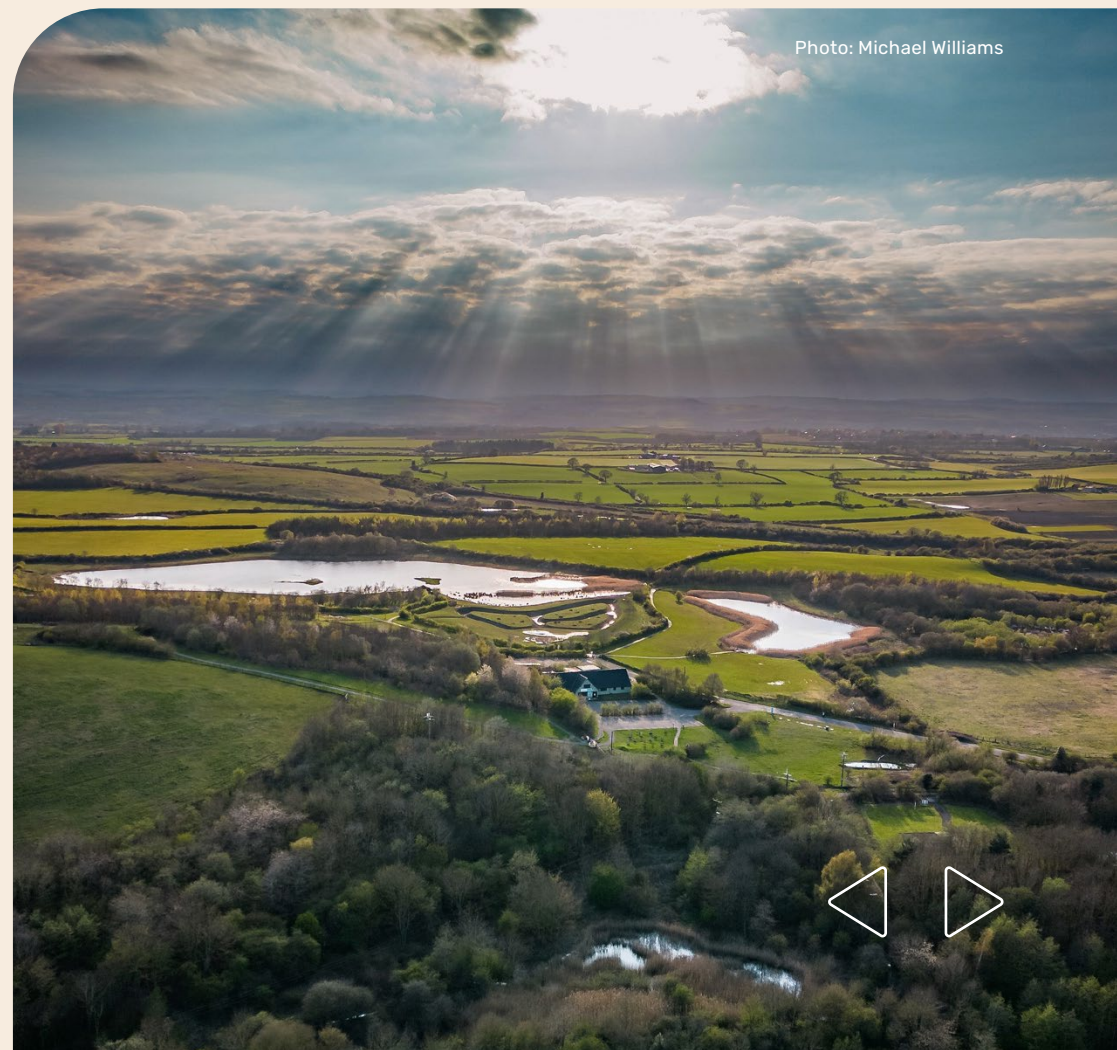
Society faces many challenges from climate change and pollution, from conflict and social polarisation, from inequality and mental health. These challenges are often global and can seem huge and overwhelming. Yet there are reasons for optimism as it is increasingly recognised that reversing nature loss – itself a global challenge that is deeply connected to many of the others – can often provide the simplest and most robust solutions.

For example, access to nature and green space can enhance physical and mental health and well-being. Restored habitats can improve air and water quality. Improved tree cover can provide cooling and greater resilience to heatwaves. Agriculture depends on soil health and on pollination, both of which depend on healthy invertebrate communities. Restoring wetlands reduces river flooding and restoring marine ecosystems can create a coastline that is more resilient to storm surges and erosion.

These are all examples of nature-based solutions. They are often long-term and not overnight solutions. They require commitment. But their economic value is growing in recognition, and through them nature restoration has a growing role to play in making society safer and better off.

As a Trust we will champion nature-based solutions and the need for a resilient natural environment and the protections this affords our region. We will champion nature not just as 'nice to have' but as a foundation for the safety and security of our region. We will seek opportunities to work with local and regional authorities to strengthen our natural landscapes and ecosystems, so benefiting both nature and society.

Photo: Michael Williams



Durham Wildlife Trust's Strategic Goals

Goal 4. Durham Wildlife Trust is the trusted leader in nature recovery from Tees to Tyne and has the resources needed to deliver lasting impact.

Durham Wildlife Trust will be a strong, independent and evidence-led voice for nature from Tees to Tyne, influencing decisions, policy and practice and speaking up for wildlife and habitats.

During the review process it was recognised that there needs to be ongoing attention paid to strengthening the charity and its ability to play the leadership role in nature recovery that is required. In response, Goal 4 meets this challenge by setting a high standard of professionalism in how the Trust operates.

We will invest in the recruitment, retention and reward of our staff. We will explore avenues for income growth to support greater delivery and we will spend for maximum impact for nature recovery. We will professionalise our use of data and technology.

Our Goal 4 is an evolution of the three Strategic Transformations and three Enabling Priorities included in the original strategy.

Strategic Transformations

- 1. Community Organising**
- 2. Embracing Digital**
- 3. Step Change in Funding**

Enabling Priorities

- 1. Getting our own house in order**
- 2. Improving data and evidence base**
- 3. Investing in our people**

These Transformations and Priorities have now become embedded in the Trust's work. Biodiversity Net Gain and Habitat Banks, for example, are helping deliver the step change in funding needed for nature recovery.



Implementation

The review identified critical factors for successful implementation to 2030.

Partnerships

We will take a strategic approach to local, regional and national partnerships.

The Trust is active across three LNRS areas and hosts the Delivery Partnership for the combined South of Tyne and Wear and County Durham LNRS delivery area.

The Trust will continue representing and advocating for nature within the North East Mayoral Strategic Authority.

Partnership work will also continue across the Tees, Wear and Tyne catchments and protected landscapes (North Pennines National Landscape and Durham Heritage Coast).



Implementation

Staff and Volunteers

Staff and volunteers are our most valuable assets.

Investment in training has increased and that trend is intended to continue.

Investment in volunteer recruitment and support will continue to 2030, with greater emphasis on developing citizen science initiatives to support the Trust's work.

Salary levels and employment conditions will be reviewed annually with benchmarking against other Wildlife Trusts and charities.

Data and Evidence

Data and evidence are critical for both ecological decision-making and business planning and we will continue to improve our use of data.

Recent investment in staff and technology has improved data collection and assessment. The intention is for that investment to continue, supported by the development of citizen science schemes.

Impact measures

The Trust is beginning the process of developing a set of impact measures under the four strategic goals. These will begin to be rolled out from 2027 with the aim of influencing partners and shaping the direction of nature recovery from Tees to Tyne.

Developing impact measures will be challenging, but the Trust aims to lead within the Wildlife Trusts movement, supported by Board-level expertise.

We will use Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to hold ourselves accountable for delivery and publish our performance against those KPIs in annual reporting.



Implementation

Community Led

Our priority will be to be present in our communities and responsive to their needs.

Rooted in local communities for more than 50 years, the Trust will continue to be community led, listening to local people and enabling more people to take action for nature.

We will ensure that community voices help shape our work and are heard by local and regional authorities.

Business Planning

To achieve its goals, the Trust must maintain a strong financial position. A Business Plan has been produced that sets the parameters needed to safeguard the charity and resource delivery.

The Business Plan includes KPIs for all activity, not just finance. These will evolve as data and impact measures improve and will be reviewed annually.

An annual budget will be set at the beginning of each financial year that will provide detailed financial information for senior management and Trustees.

Annual impact reporting will share progress on delivery of our goals and performance against our KPIs with all our supporters.



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