

Planning Policy Cabinet Advisory Group – 17 February 2026

Item 3 - Public Consultation on the Draft Forest of Bowland National Landscape Management Plan 2026-2031

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The Council has a duty as set out in Section 89 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 to prepare and review Management Plans for the two National Landscapes in our area (Arnside and Silverdale NL and the Forest of Bowland NL). This work is delivered on the council's behalf by the relevant National Landscape staff units. The Management Plan for the Forest of Bowland NL has recently been reviewed and a draft produced to guide the management of these protected landscapes for the period 2026 – 2031. Once the consultation is complete and the Management Plan finalised, the Council will need to formally adopt the Management Plan to continue to meet its statutory duties.
- 1.2 This report summarises the scope and content of the draft Management Plan and details of the current public consultation.

2.0 Background

- 1.1 The Forest of Bowland was designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in 1964, and spans 803 square kilometers across Lancashire and North Yorkshire. It is internationally recognised for its heather moorland, blanket bog, and rare upland bird species, including the hen harrier and curlew. The landscape comprises dramatic upland fells, wooded valleys, and undulating farmland, and offers a sense of tranquility and dark skies.
- 1.2 Despite its rural character, over one million people live within a 30-minute drive, making it a vital recreational resource. The area supports a working landscape of farming, forestry, water supply, and tourism, contributing significantly to local and national economies. Governance is provided by a partnership of local councils, agencies, landowners, and community groups. The plan acknowledges Bowland's role in delivering ecosystem services such as carbon storage, flood mitigation, and biodiversity conservation, while addressing challenges like climate change, development pressures, and inequalities in access to nature. Its strategic position near major urban centres enhances its importance for health, wellbeing, and sustainable tourism.
- 1.3 The previous Management Plan for the Forest of Bowland NL covered the period 2019 - 2025. This new draft Management Plan for the period 2026-2031 sets out 5-year strategy for how the landscape should be conserved, enhanced and managed, and how public bodies must now actively further the purpose of designation under the Levelling-Up and Regeneration Act 2023.
- 1.4 Council officers have been involved in the review and preparation of the draft Management Plan through attendance of the Forest of Bowland Joint Advisory Committee (JAC). The draft Management Plan takes account of a focused JAC workshop session in August 2025 where members of the JAC were involved in reviewing and preparing the details of the plan.

- 2.3 This is the first draft Management Plan to be produced since legislative changes in 2023 as a result of the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023 (LURA) which amended the duty on relevant authorities in respect of their functions which affect land in National Parks, National Landscapes, and the Norfolk and Suffolk Broads (collectively referred to as Protected Landscapes) in England. Relevant authorities must now **‘seek to further’** the statutory purposes of Protected Landscapes. This replaces the previous duty on relevant authorities to **‘have regard to’** their statutory purposes.
- 2.4 As set out by Department for the Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) ¹, *“the duty is intended to facilitate better outcomes for England’s Protected Landscapes, which are in line with their statutory purposes. The duty is intended to... [ensure] that the purposes for which Protected Landscapes are designated for are recognised in reaching decisions and undertaking activities that impact these areas”*.
- 2.5 NL Management Plans are meant to be taken as a guide for all partners and stakeholders to refer to when planning their own work within the National Landscape. They set out a range of objectives, desired outcomes and requirements for land management and project delivery within the National Landscape to achieve these outcomes. Some of these required actions and behaviours would be led by the National Landscape Partnership Unit, whilst many of the actions and behaviours would be led by other partners and stakeholders, with support from the National Landscape team where required.

3.0 Content

- 3.1 The draft Management Plan for Forest of Bowland National Landscape is split into four themes for delivery. Each theme represents an aspect of delivering the primary purpose.

Theme 1: Landscape

Theme 2: Nature Recovery

Theme 3: People

Theme 4: Place

- 3.2 For each of these themes the **‘Forces for Change’** which represent the current issues and opportunities in play have been described. There are then **‘Outcomes’**, **‘Measures’** and **‘Targets’** that have been drawn up in response to these predicted changes.
- 3.3 The management plan is also underpinned by 17 core principles that guide policy and practice. These are as follows:
1. Farming and sustainable land management
 2. Focus on outcomes, not prescriptions
 3. Collaboration and partnerships
 4. Reversing declines in upland nature through landscape-scale ecological networks
 5. Adapting to a changing climate
 6. Ecosystem services and benefits
 7. Managing landscape change
 8. Economy and Environment
 9. Integrated Nature and Heritage Conservation

¹ DEFRA Guidance for Relevant Authorities on seeking to further the purposes of Protected Landscapes (December 2024)

10. Balancing benefits
11. Using and valuing regulation
12. Access for everyone
13. Engagement and Inclusion
14. Learning and sharing
15. Arts and creativity
16. Gathering and sharing data and evidence
17. Sustainable funding and resource allocation

3.4 These principles collectively aim to deliver a resilient, inclusive, and economically viable future for Bowland.

4.0 Consultation arrangements

- 4.1 The Draft Management Plan is being consulted on between 19th January until 2nd March 2026. Full details can all be found on the consultation website. Accompanying the MP is the Strategic Environmental Assessment Screening (and Screening report), Habitats Regulations Assessment Screening report, the Equalities Impact Assessment Screening report, Climate Change Adaptation Plan and a Summary of the Landscape Character Assessment.
- 4.2 The consultation aims to collect views on the content of the plan and is open to anyone who lives or works in the area or anyone who visits it. This particularly includes residents, farmers, land managers, schools, businesses, local clubs, partner organisations and Parish Councils. If Members have comments on the Management Plan that they wish to raise, please could these be provided to the Chair of PPCAG.
- 4.3 As a relevant authority, Lancaster City Council will create a consolidated officer consultation response, which will be provided and submitted to the National Landscape team by the Planning Policy & Housing Strategy Team. The Chief Officer for Planning & Climate Change has been provided with delegated authority to formally submit the Council's response following consideration at this PPCAG group, and at Council Business Committee on 19th February.
- 4.4 Once all responses have been received, the Forest of Bowland National Landscape team will produce a consultation report which will reflect feedback that will be published online at the end of March 2026. Production of the final MP will take place by April 2026 and formal approval will be sought from the National Landscape Partnership/Joint Committee which will meet to endorse the revised plan. Final approval will then need to be sought from the relevant authorities² (including Lancaster City Council) prior to formal adoption of the MP, which is currently anticipated for May 2026, at which stage the Secretary of State (for Environment) is notified.

² Relevant Authorities are comprised of the following: Lancaster City Council, Lancashire County Council, North Yorkshire County Council, Pendle Borough Council, Preston City Council, Ribble Valley Borough Council, and Wyre Council.

Background documents

1. Forest of Bowland National Landscape draft Management Plan 2026-2031 consultation documents. Available at <https://www.forestofbowland.com/management-plan-2026>.
2. DEFRA Guidance for Relevant Authorities on seeking to further the purposes of Protected Landscapes (December 2024) [Guidance for relevant authorities on seeking to further the purposes of Protected Landscapes - GOV.UK](#)