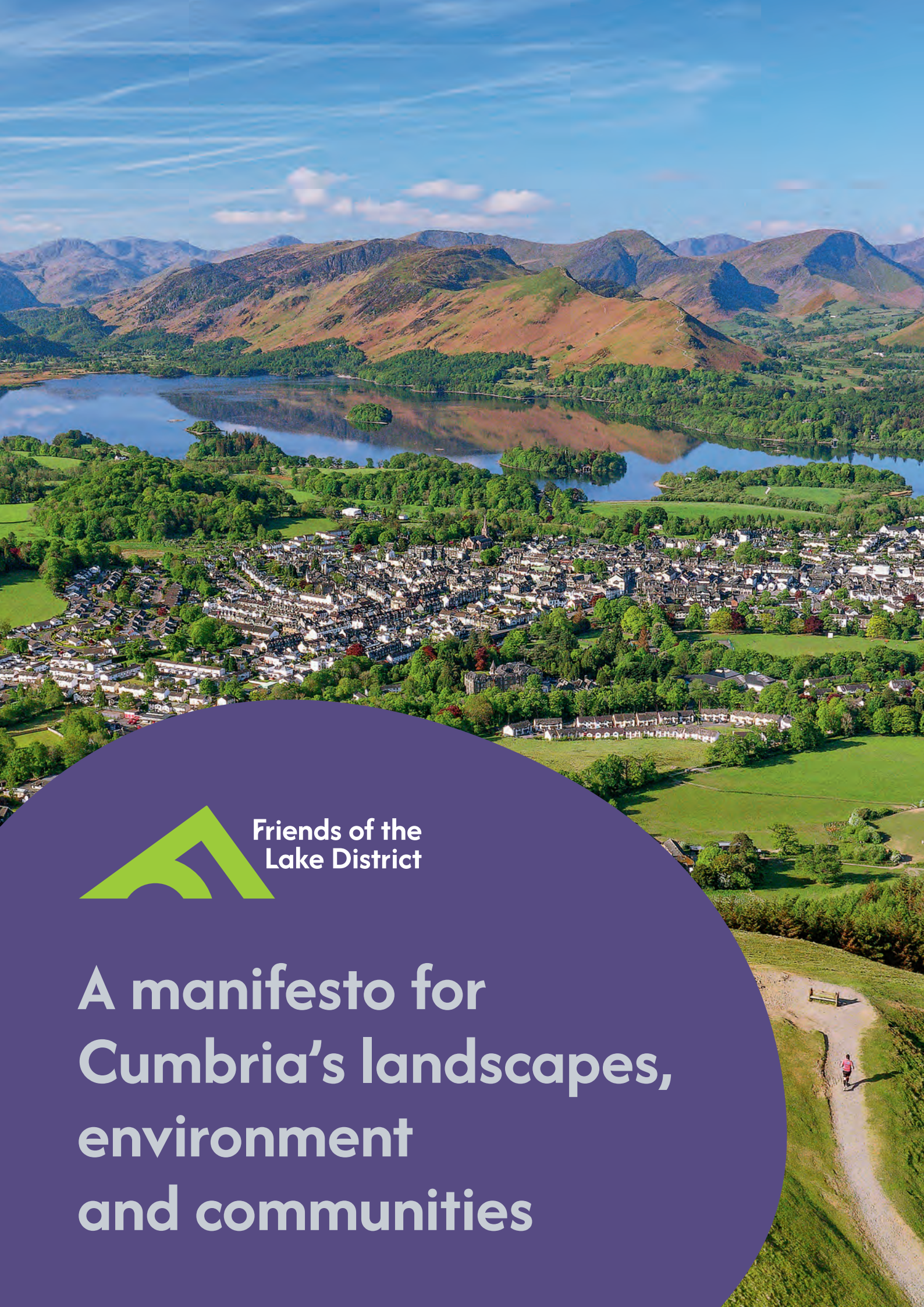

Friends of the Lake District

A manifesto for Cumbria's landscapes, environment and communities

Introduction

Cumbria's unique landscapes are renowned across the world, shaped by the communities that live within them. Millions visit every year, keen to experience everything that the county has to offer, and contributing billions of pounds to the local economy. But Cumbria's landscapes, its environment, its infrastructure and its communities are buckling under the strain of mass tourism, exacerbated by underfunding and management that can be piecemeal and uncoordinated.

The election of a mayor for Cumbria on 6 May 2027 is the chance for a fresh start for the county and an opportunity for a step change in terms of coordination and focus. Friends of the Lake District is calling on mayoral candidates to use their powers and the new funding streams available to them to:

- **Protect Cumbria's landscapes by attaching the same importance to the natural environment as to economic growth.**
- **Champion the shift to a responsible form of tourism where visitors give back to the landscapes they visit.**
- **Apply a visitor levy on overnight stays and set out plans to introduce a charge on visitor vehicles.**
- **Improve public transport and encourage more walking and cycling.**
- **Make the county more resilient to the impacts of climate change.**





Photo: Warnscale Beck and Haystacks © Andrew Locking

1. Equal importance to the natural environment and economic growth

Photos: Tawny owl © Rosamund Macfarlane; Flock of Herdwicks at traditional upland hill farm, Miller Place Farm; Farmer James Robinson © Jonny Gios

Too often positioned in opposition to the needs of the economy, healthy landscapes and a vibrant natural environment are a crucial underpinning of a thriving economy and healthy communities. The new mayor should endorse measures to reduce carbon emissions, increase climate resilience, boost nature-friendly farming, and restore and protect wildlife. Such measures will be good for the local economy, and improve people's lives through better transport, well-insulated homes, lower energy bills and more jobs.

Mayoral candidates should:

- **Embed green infrastructure,[1] carbon reduction, landscape resilience against climate change, and health and well-being into the Spatial Development Strategy for Cumbria – the high-level plan produced by the Combined Authority that will set out long-term policies for growth, housing and major infrastructure.**
- **Work with Cumbria's farmers and press national policy-makers to:**
    - **Secure agri-environment funding that values the multiple benefits of uplands, especially commons.[2]**
    - **Back farming methods that are restorative and work in harmony with nature, culture and people.**
    - **Remove barriers to training and new entry for young farmers.**
    - **Support the well-being of farmers.**
- **Deliver the Cumbria Local Nature Recovery Strategy to restore the wildlife of the county.**







[1] Measures such as green roofs, permeable pavements and urban forests that add to the existing network of green and blue spaces – parks, ponds, gardens and allotments – to help manage the flow of stormwater, reduce flooding, improve air and water quality and enhance the ability of towns and cities to adapt to climate change.

[2] Nearly a third of common land in England is in Cumbria.

2. Responsible tourism

Cumbria's uniquely beautiful and tranquil landscapes draw millions of visitors every year. Tourism is a cornerstone of the Cumbrian economy, sustaining thousands of jobs and contributing billions in income. But many of the benefits of tourism do not trickle down to local communities: the tourist economy provides jobs, but these are often low-paid and seasonal, while many of the profits generated do not go back into the local economy. Tax loopholes mean that some second homes used as holiday lets may not pay any business rates or council tax.

In turn, the environment and communities suffer from the strain that tourism puts them under: high rents and a lack of homes for local people to rent or buy; wear and tear on the landscape; the pollution of our lakes; and antisocial behaviour such as fly-camping, littering, damage to property and habitats, and fly-parking that prevents access for emergency service vehicles, buses and farmers.

A more responsible form of tourism would restore local communities and habitats, and boost the local economy through the actions and contributions of visitors.

Mayoral candidates should:

- **Lead the development of a model of responsible tourism so that the visitor economy has a positive impact on Cumbria's landscapes.**
- **Support the introduction of a licence-and-cap scheme to control the number of holiday lets and rebalance the housing market in favour of those living and working in the county.**
- **Develop a county-wide strategy to deal with the blight of antisocial behaviour.**

Photos:
Key safes for holiday lets in Windermere; Rubbish in Rydal Woods, near Rydal Water





3. A visitor levy for Cumbria

Photos: Ambleside; Bowness-on-Windermere

Cumbria's landscapes, communities and infrastructure are not set up to accommodate the number of people visiting the county: 42 million visitors a year compared to a resident population of just over 500,000 people.

The funding that the Government allocates to the Lake District National Park Authority each year works out at less than 40p per visitor – nowhere near enough to pay for protecting the landscape from the impact of mass tourism. Without a source of income that can fund initiatives designed to offset this impact, we risk irreparably damaging the very landscapes that attract tourists to Cumbria in the first place, presenting a significant threat to the region's tourism-based economy.

Introducing a visitor levy for Cumbria is a move supported by the majority of visitors and residents alike.[3] To meet this demand, the Government is giving new powers to mayors to raise money from a charge on overnight stays. This creates an opportunity for those who stay overnight to contribute to protecting Cumbria's fragile landscapes. Additionally introducing a visitor vehicle charge – a step which is already within the powers of local authorities – would ensure that day-trippers also make a contribution to protecting these landscapes while simultaneously encouraging people to change how they get to and around Cumbria by disincentivising the use of private vehicles.

Mayoral candidates should:

- **Use the new powers available to them to bring in an overnight stay charge.**
- **Set out plans for the introduction of a visitor vehicle charge.**
- **Explain how they propose to deal with the impact of tourism on the landscapes and communities of Cumbria if they choose *not* to introduce either form of visitor levy.**





[3] In a poll of over 2,000 people run by YouGov for Friends of the Lake District, 68% of Cumbrian residents and 64% of past or future visitors to the county strongly support or tend to support a visitor charge to fund ways of protecting and enhancing the landscapes of the Lake District National Park; Poll shows broad support for Lake District visitor charge, Friends of the Lake District, 1 October 2025.

4. A transformational approach to transport

Traffic is one of the biggest challenges facing the Lake District, blighting the lives of residents and undermining the experience of visitors. Large parts of Cumbria have little or no access to buses. Walking and cycling are good for physical and mental well-being but are not easy or safe options for many people. There are only limited cycling networks and few proper, well-delineated footpaths alongside roads.

An increase in public transport, walking and cycling will reduce the number of private vehicles on the road. This will cut emissions, reduce traffic jams and help tackle 'fly-parking', whilst also reducing the impact of traffic on local businesses and communities. Many visitors to Cumbria want to use, and would use, public transport or would walk or cycle if it was available, safe and convenient.

The strategic oversight of transport issues by the Combined Authority will enable a more joined-up approach. A stable long-term funding stream, enhanced by monies from a visitor levy, will give the mayor the resources to put the foundations in place for better public transport for everyone in the county.

Mayoral candidates should:

- **Lay out how they will improve public transport for residents and visitors, reduce traffic and congestion, encourage walking and cycling, and enable more sustainable movement of freight.**
- **Secure additional long-term sustainable funding to deliver improved transport across the county.**

Photos:
Borrowdale bus;
Cars parked by the roadside on the A591







5. Reducing emissions and adapting to climate change

Photos:
Low water levels at Haweswater; Poles on Little Asby Common

Severe weather events caused or exacerbated by climate change are becoming more frequent. It will become more common for communities to be cut off, homes to be flooded and roads and bridges to be damaged.

More extreme weather and changing weather patterns are also reducing farmers' yields. Farmers are forced to give winter feed to their stock as it has either been too wet to harvest or there has not been enough grass growth because of drought. Some farmers who rely on springs have lost their water supply altogether several times over the last decade because of drought.

Cumbria's reservoirs have regularly fallen to critically low levels due to a lack of rainfall, while the heat experienced in summer 2026 is forecast to become more common and intense.

Cumbria's communities, nature and landscapes urgently need to become more resilient to the impact of a changing climate. Mitigating and adapting to climate change will translate into safer communities, less disruption to economic activity, more green jobs and a landscape that is more resilient in the face of extreme weather.

Mayoral candidates should:

- **Invest in making the county's infrastructure, communities and environment more resilient to extreme weather events, including through the undergrounding of electricity and broadband wires.**
- **Embed support for climate resilience and carbon reduction across the Combined Authority's work and ensure that climate change impact is recognised in its Risk Register.**
- **Commit to the actions in the Zero Carbon Cumbria Partnership's Emissions Reduction Action Plan.**





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