

Strategy  
2022 to 2030

Watchtree  
NATURE RESERVE

# 1.0 FOREWORD

It is my pleasure to write this foreword to the Watchtree Strategy Plan.

I was brought up on a dairy farm in Nottinghamshire and, as a boy, can recall the catastrophe and fear when, in the late 1960s, good friends of my parents had to have all their cattle slaughtered due to Foot and Mouth Disease. Roll on some 40 years, to 2001, and I well remember the horror of burning piles of cattle in Cumbria. It was also the time of the first appeal successfully launched by a fairly new Cumbria Community Foundation (which I currently have the privilege to Chair).

The fact that out of the ashes of this devastation a wonderful community asset has been created at Watchtree is absolutely brilliant. Over the last 20 years, the site has been developed into a very important nature reserve and a popular visitor attraction. It is well known that access to nature and the environment are very important to our well-being.

The continuing development of the site for educational purposes and for the benefit of visitors (both wildlife and human!) is to be applauded. This has been achieved while making Watchtree operationally financially sustainable. A fantastic achievement.

It is exciting to see the plans outlined in this Strategy to continue to develop the site over the next 10 years for the benefit of all.

Many congratulations to all those involved in what has been achieved over the last 20 years and best wishes to you all in developing Watchtree over the next 10 years. Onward and Upward.

**David Beeby**

High Sheriff of Cumbria & Chair of Cumbria Community Foundation



## 2.0 OUR FIRST 20 YEARS

- 2001 – A former WWII airfield at Watchtree, Great Orton, is used by Defra for the burial of livestock culled during a catastrophic outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease. Defra expect to remain responsible for managing the site for over 50 years, to comply with planning and environmental restraints.
- 2002 – Watchtree Nature Reserve created, following consultation with the local community.
- 2004 – Watchtree Nature Reserve Ltd (WNRL; hereafter, the Company) formed as a Not-for-Profit Company Limited by Guarantee.
- 2005 – The Company assumes the management of the nature reserve on a trial basis.
- 2006 – WNRL management of the reserve confirmed under a 25-year lease and 10-year Land Management & Funding Agreement (LMFA) between the Company and Defra.
  - 2008 – The Company becomes a Registered Charity.
- 2016 – LMFA with Defra expires; the Company sets about achieving financial sustainability without external backing for ongoing running costs. Defra continues to allow access to the management building, for use as a visitor-centre.

Since 2006, WNRL has operated as a social enterprise, developing services to support its charitable objectives (see 3.3 below). A major early initiative was the creation of a cycle-track to access the nature reserve and Watchtree Wheelers was established to make greater use of the trails, providing cycling opportunities for disabled and disadvantaged people. This project later developed into a cycle-hire centre for all abilities and is now a primary income-source for the reserve.

WNRL has developed the habitats and public access facilities, in part, from income earned via the LMFA. Since 2006, added value totalling £638,580 has been achieved by grant-funding from a range of sources; a full breakdown is given in Appendix 1, Grant Income.

Over the 10-year duration of the LMFA, the Company used the reserve's volunteer workforce to deliver its objectives, with the equivalent cost of their services being reimbursed by Defra. The 'Reserve Fund' accumulated in this way enabled the Company successfully to make the transition to self-funding status and has since both provided financial security and assured potential funders that the Company is a financially responsible entity.

Through actively generating income and utilising volunteers, sustainability was achieved within the first 12 months of losing Defra's financial support in 2016 and, with the exception of 2020-21 (due to the Covid 19 pandemic), continues to be maintained. Income is generated through donations, membership, café and merchandise sales, cycle services, agricultural/environmental services, educational services, and events. The reserve employs 13 people across 5 different areas of business. In addition, an active and dedicated team of 40-plus volunteers assists in all areas of the organisation; without them, these outstanding results could not have been achieved.

We have also continued to raise funds for developments and projects over and above our day-to-day running costs. Our fundraising endeavours include grant-applications, crowd-funding, personal fundraising, corporate support, and special events.



3.0 WHERE ARE WE  
NOW?



## 3.1 THE WATCHTREE OFFER

Watchtree currently welcomes over 60,000 visitors per year and ranks 8th on the 2021 TripAdvisor list of 'top attractions' in Carlisle, alongside the castle, the cathedral and Hadrian's Wall.

The reserve offers:

- 205-acre Nature Reserve comprising woodland, meadow, scrub, and wetland habitats for the benefit of local wildlife and visitors.
- Parking, visitors centre, café, WC, and access to the reserve for the general public and various organisations.
- Specialist cycle facilities, equipment and training for individual and group use, boasting a range of adapted equipment for disabled riders.
- Network of fully accessible trails for the use of walkers, cyclists, runners, wheelchair-users etc., totalling 4 miles.
- Visitor facilities including picnic area, wildlife viewing hides, pond-dipping platform and garden.
  - Education services including Forest Schools for local education-providers.
  - Health and wellbeing services, including events and activity programme.
  - Employment of 15 individuals equivalent to 7 full time employees.
    - Volunteering opportunities for more than 40 individuals.

## 3.2 MISSION STATEMENT

'To provide a nature reserve which is a haven for a wide range of habitats and species and a community asset for people to enjoy, appreciate and be educated in the values of living with wildlife and nature.'

Strapline alongside our logo:

'A Wildlife Haven and Community Asset for All.'



## 3.3 CHARITABLE OBJECTIVES

Our charitable objectives, as listed on the Charity Commission registration, are:

- to maintain, improve or provide public amenities;
- to promote for the public benefit the Watchtree site in Cumbria (the site, as defined below) and its environs, in particular by associating local community organisations in a common effort to advance education, to relieve poverty, need and hardship, to provide facilities for leisure time occupation in the interests of social welfare, and to conserve and improve the environment.





## 4.0 WHATS NEXT?

To determine the intended future of Watchtree Nature Reserve, the thoughts and opinions of a range of stakeholders were canvassed, via one-to-one interviews with WNRL Directors and reserve Team Leaders, and through a wider stakeholder consultation event. The feedback gained is attached in Appendices 2, 3 & 4. In addition, an analysis of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats was carried out, attached as Appendix. 5.

## 4.1 Vision

Watchtree is a uniquely unusual nature reserve. The history of our land, the matrix of our habitats, our commitment to accessibility and the support from, and for, our community is ingrained in all that we do, and we are immensely proud of what has been achieved.

Our vision for the future is to build on our strengths and lead by outstanding example in our various fields, by:

- Maintaining and monitoring the diversity of habitats and species, to become an acknowledged area of wildlife importance at local and county level.
- Becoming a flagship outdoor centre for accessibility, providing unimpeded access for all, to all our facilities.
- Embedding green credentials in all that we do, minimising our impact on the environment.
- Further developing exemplary opportunities for people to learn, play and explore outdoors.
- Promoting the use of the reserve and its facilities to improve the physical, mental, and social health of local people.
- Providing employment and volunteering opportunities which develop individuals and support the local economy.

## 4.2 Values

Our core values and principles constitute the ethos of how we wish to operate and achieve our goals. We are:

- Passionate about creating and protecting natural habitats, wildlife, and the environment.
- Fully engaged in serving the needs of our communities and being accountable to those communities for our actions.
- Dedicated to the provision of facilities which encourage everyone to enjoy the nature reserve, its associated activities, and its amenities.
- Determined to nurture and support our staff and volunteers to reach their full potential.
- Committed to thinking strategically for our own long-term sustainability.

## 4.3 Behaviours

Our behaviours are the regulations within our organisation which ensure we uphold our values.

4.3.1 We will conduct our general operation in a manner which ensures we...

- use efficiently every penny raised through donations, services, grants etc., in pursuit of our objectives;
  - account for our finances accurately and transparently;
  - recruit and manage our staff and volunteers honestly, supportively, and fairly;
- reduce waste, reuse or recycle everything that we can and considerately dispose of anything else.

4.3.2 As we progress, we will ensure that any new developments...

- assess potential environmental impact and, if necessary, protect important wildlife habitats and species;
- support the local economy through sourcing local products, services, and staff;
  - financially contribute to our sustainability and diversity;
  - are carbon neutral, carbon negative or will develop to be so;
- provide a service or facilities which enhance the local community;
  - are completely inclusive and accessible to all abilities.

## 4.4 Priorities 2021 - 2030

Through assessment of our current activities and consultation with Directors, staff, volunteers, and the wider community, we have identified the following **key areas** for development in the immediate future. Consultation is documented in Appendices 2, 3 and 4.



## Priorities 2022 - 2032

- **Habitat & Estates** - Improvement and/or relocation of our habitat and estates workshop and storage facilities to better serve the team responsible for maintaining access and facilities around the reserve and the habitats within it.
- **Public Facilities** - Increasing and improving public amenities, allowing us to manage increasing footfall. Primarily this includes toilet facilities and car parking.
- **Watchtree Wheelers** - The Wheelers facility is regarded as one of the highlights of the reserve. Since the loss, in 2020, of workshop and secure storage space in the Defra water-treatment plant compound, cycle-storage and -workshop facilities have been housed in temporary buildings and shipping containers which were never intended for long term use. Development would include the complete replacement of all cycle storage and workshop facilities.
- **Grasslands** - Investigation into the current diversity and ecological performance of grasslands for native species of fauna and flora. Review of the current habitat management plan and consideration of new management techniques which may improve some areas.
- **Education** - Expanding on current activities, creating a permanent 'home' for education at Watchtree and continually developing interpretation for educational benefit.
- **Health and Wellbeing** - Using existing and new facilities within the reserve to benefit the physical and mental wellbeing of our community.
- **Environment** - Improve our operations to reduce our impact on the environment locally and globally.

5.0 OBJECTIVES AND  
KEY PERFORMANCE  
INDICATORS



## 5.1 General Management

5.1.1 Maximise the effectiveness of Directors, staff and volunteers. This should be achieved through nurturing personnel wellbeing, motivation, and support.

### Objectives

- 🌿 Develop and implement salary bands relating to position in workforce structure, experience, training, and responsibility (2024 onwards).
- 🌿 Pay all staff with a fixed hours contract a minimum of the Real Living Wage (2024 onwards).
- 🌿 Reinvest a minimum 5% of annual turnover (or equivalent value where training is funded) into staff and volunteer training (2025 onwards).

### Key Performance Indicators

- 🌿 Staff and volunteer retention
- 🌿 Staff and volunteer performance
- 🌿 Total number of staff (FTE)
- 🌿 Volunteer Hours

## 5.1.2 Achieve and maintain financial sustainability

### Objectives

- 🌿 Maintain annual financial sustainability for the organisation.

### Key performance Indicators

- 🌿 Annual Profits



## 5.1 General Management Continued

5.1.3 Re-invest the real and financial assets of our organisation to maximise achievement of our charitable objectives and develop existing/new income to improve sustainability.

### Objectives

- Identify priority projects and commit proportion of reserve funds (2023).
- Supplement all future project investment with external funding through grants, donations, sponsorship, crowd-funding etc.
- Minimum contribution of 75% from external funding for all future development projects.
- Maintain reserve funds equal to 1.5 times annual turnover (immediate and on-going).

### Key Performance Indicators

- Annual grant funding achievement
- Sponsorship and donor performance

5.1.4 Develop Board of Directors to attract new talent from a range of fields and interests to secure the future management of the reserve

### Objectives

- Review our Articles and Memorandum to ensure that the Board of Directors is duty bound to evolve with the organisation by 2025 and then at 5-year intervals.
- Recruit one new Director with relevant skills, interest and experience every 2 years.
- Identify skills and experience that are missing from the board of Directors and recruit accordingly.

### Key Performance Indicators

- Number of Directors



## 5.2 Marketing

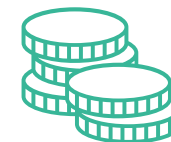
5.2.1 Actively promote our achievements and charitable work. Raise our profile as a charitable organisation in the community.

### Objectives

- 🌿 Engage all available marketing platforms to communicate with our audiences using various forms of content.
- 🌿 Increase donation box contributions by 5% annually for 5 years and then maintain (2023).
- 🌿 Raise awareness of Watchtree Nature Reserve within the business community to increase corporate-supported projects by 1 per year from 2023 for 5 years and then maintain.

### Key performance indicators

- 🌿 Sponsorship and donor performance
- 🌿 Donation box contributions
- 🌿 Number of corporate supporters and value





## 5.3 Events

5.3.1 Increase quantity and quality of events to improve community health and wellbeing, education and raise funds.

### Objectives

- 🍃 Increase number of nature-themed events to a minimum of 1 per month, then maintain (2025 onwards).
- 🍃 Increase participation in health and wellbeing events by 10% per year for 3 years, then maintain (2022).
- 🍃 Increase hosting of events for 3rd party organisers, in line with our own objectives, by 50% (2025).
- 🍃 Increase revenue from all events by 5% per year (immediate and ongoing).

### Key performance indicators

- 🍃 Number of events
- 🍃 Participation in events
- 🍃 Revenue from events



## 5.4 Education

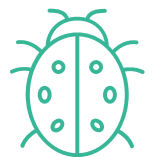
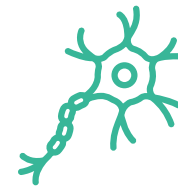
### 5.4.1 Continue to increase the quality and quantity of education for all at Watchtree

#### Objectives

- 🌿 Increase reserve-based interpretation for education of general visitors to include new topics such as Renewable Energy and Habitat Management/Conservation (immediate and ongoing).
- 🌿 Increase participation in formal school visits by 30%, then maintain or increase (2024).
- 🌿 Expand diversity of group use by encouraging participation by alternative education providers such as SEND and home school groups.
- 🌿 Achieve financial sustainability for educational activities through increase of commercial sessions and/or external financial support i.e., grants by 2023.

#### Key Performance Indicators

- 🌿 Number of school session attendees per year
- 🌿 Diversity of education groups
- 🌿 Revenue from education activities



## 5.5 Health and Wellbeing

### 5.5.1 Improve and increase the standard and quantity of formal Health and Wellbeing Services at Watchtree

#### Objectives

- 🌿 Increase participation in formal health sessions to an average of 15 participants per month by 2024 and then maintain or increase.
- 🌿 Introduce new, specific, health sessions to improve physical and mental wellbeing using other facilities within the reserve's spectrum, including but not limited to natural history, cycling and volunteer work by 2024.

#### Key Performance Indicators

- 🌿 Number of specific mental health participants
- 🌿 Introduction of new health sessions
- 🌿 Diversity of session content

### 5.5.2 Improve working relationship with NHS (National Health Service) to increase social prescribing referrals and opportunities

#### Objective

- 🌿 Develop social prescribing pathways to forge a direct link between GP surgeries and Watchtree services by 2024
- 🌿 Diversify prescribing pathways to include other NHS services outside of GP practice, such as amputee services (specialist unit in Carlisle), weight loss and physiotherapy

#### Key Performance Indicator

- 🌿 Setup of direct prescribing pathways
- 🌿 Quantity of direct prescribed patients



## 5.6 Watchtree Wheelers

5.6.1 Improve the cycle fleet to increase the quality and quantity of cycles available for hire.

Objectives

- 🍃 Replace all substandard cycles and adapted bikes, creating a high quality, fully functioning fleet (2024).
- 🍃 Maintain high standard of fleet and keep up with cycle technology by continual servicing and turnover (from 2024).

Key Performance Indicators

- 🍃 Number of high-quality cycles in fleet
- 🍃 Number of new cycles brought into the fleet annually

5.6.2 Improve cycle-hire storage, workshop, and associated facilities to improve beneficiary experience, increase income and improve workforce efficiency.

Objectives

- 🍃 Replace current cycle storage and workshop with new, permanent structure (2025).
- 🍃 Increase indoor, dry storage to include sales areas for new, used, and donated bikes (2025).

Key Performance Indicators

- 🍃 Condition of storage, workshop, and office facilities.



## 5.6 Watchtree Wheelers Continued...

5.6.3 Increase quality and quantity of cycle use to improve/increase beneficiary health and increase income.

Objectives

- 🌿 Increase cycle hire throughput from 7500 to 12000 and then maintain (2026).
- 🌿 Increase cycle hire participants from 3000 to 4800 and then maintain (2026).

Key performance Indicators

- 🌿 Cycle-hire throughput
- 🌿 Number of individual cycle-hire participants

5.6.4 Increase revenue generated through Watchtree Wheelers to support the overall financial sustainability of the reserve.

Objectives

- 🌿 Increase sales of new, ex-hire and donated cycles by 10% each year for 6 years and then sustain.
- 🌿 Increase revenue generated through cycle servicing and repair by 10% each year for 6 years and then sustain.

Key performance indicators

- 🌿 Cycle sales turnover
- 🌿 Cycle service and repair turnover





## 5.7 Habitat and Estates

5.7.1 Improve storage, workshop, and associated facilities to increase ability to maintain reserve, and improve workforce efficiency.

Objectives

- Replace current storage and workshop with new, permanent structure (2025)
- Increase indoor, dry storage to include trailers, all machinery, and materials such as fencing/structural timber (2025)
- Create outdoor work area for hot works, cleaning of machinery, storage of dry substrate materials (2025)

Key Performance Indicators

- Condition and suitability of storage, workshop, and office facilities.

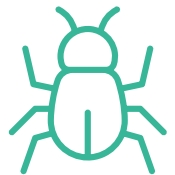
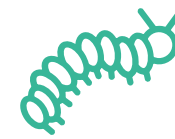
5.7.2 Improve matrix of habitats across the reserve and increase local ecological importance.

Objectives

- Analyse the Defra ecological reports and other relevant wildlife reports to establish the present status of the key species and habitats by 2025.
- Identify potential for increasing biodiversity and creation of key habitats using the data acquired in historical ecological reports.
- Create and implement new habitat management plan objectives based on the outcomes of baselines and opportunities identified in the two previous points.

Key Performance Indicators

- Ecological survey results
- Quantity of new habitat and species management objectives



## 5.8 Visitors Centre

5.8.1 Continue to improve and increase the standard and quantity of catering services across the reserve to improve beneficiaries' visit experience and increase revenue.

### Objectives

- Increase revenue from catering outlets by 5% annually up to 25% and then maintain.
- Increase catering initiatives to raise revenue, for example catering for kids' club sessions, natural history events, 3rd party events hosted at Watchtree, birthday parties.
- Achieve 5\* environmental health classification and maintain (2022)

### Key Performance Indicators

- Condition of catering outlets
- Environmental Health Score
- Catering revenue
- Catering initiatives

5.8.2 Improve the range of food and drink on offer to incorporate healthy options and 'free-from' range to improve visitor experience and increase inclusivity.

### Objectives

- Develop current menu to include and promote a range of low-calorie meals and snacks by 2023 and then maintain.
- Develop current menu to increase range of meals and snacks which are 'free-from' the 14 most common allergens as identified by Environmental Health, by 2023 and then maintain.

### Key Performance Indicators

- Catering services menu and sales records



## 5.9 Environmental Sustainability

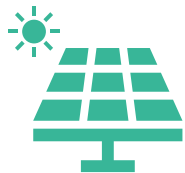
5.9.1 Reduce the impact of our operations on the environment through production of energy.

Objectives

- Reduce reliance on fossil fuels by 70% by 2025, primarily through the replacement of our current ATV.
- Increase production of renewable energy to power all our own electrical demand by 2030.

Key Performance Indicators

- Quantity of fossil fuels used
- Quantity of energy produced



5.9.2 Reduce the impact of our operations on the environment through improved management of waste.

Objectives

- Reduce landfill waste to 20% of all waste by 2025.
- Increase responsible disposal of waste, through reusing or recycling, to 80% of all waste by 2025.

Key Performance Indicators

- Quantity of general waste produced
- Quantity of waste recycled and reused

5.9.3 Reduce the impact of our operations on the environment through improved procurement of consumables.

Objectives

- Produce and embed a consumable product purchasing policy which ensures consumable products adhere to our own ambitious standards of environmental sustainability by 2025.

Key Performance Indicators

- Implementation of consumable products purchasing policy
- Delivery miles of our consumable products

## 6.0 IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING

### 6.1 Implementing Values and Behaviours

Within year 1 we will:

- Review our existing policies to ensure that all the behaviours set out in 4.3.1 regarding our general operation are adhered to.
- Amend our current project proposal and monitoring document, which will enable us to implement the additional behaviours set out in 4.3.2.

## 6.0 IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING

### 6.2 Responsibility for delivery of objectives

It is the overall responsibility of the Manager and Directors to ensure that we work collectively towards the objectives set out in this plan.

Implementation and monitoring of each objective is the responsibility of a specific area of the business, which has a Manager or Team Leader. These areas are:

Management – 5.1 & 5.9

Habitat & Estates Team Leader – 5.7

Watchtree Wheelers Team Leader – 5.6

Visitors Centre Team Leader – 5.8

Education & Wellbeing Team Leader – 5.4 & 5.5

Marketing Team Leader – 5.2 & 5.5



## 6.0 IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING

### 6.3 Monitoring of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

KPI baselines for each objective will be established in year one.

Continual monitoring will be conducted and KPIs will be reported upon in our quarterly Management Team Reports.

An annual assessment of progress will take place and form the basis of our Annual Report.

## A FEW 'THANK YOU'S' ...

A great deal of time and effort has been put into this Strategy Plan, ensuring that it is valuable to our future and remains relevant to fruition.

I would like to thank the following contributors for their work putting this plan together:

- 🌿 David Beeby for his foreword and continued support
- 🌿 WNR Team Leaders and Directors for their time spent in one to one interviews and at our consultation events.
- 🌿 All of the attendees of our Strategy Plan consultation evening.
- 🌿 Sheelagh Ellwood for proofreading and making sense of my jibberish!
- 🌿 As always, all of the Watchtree team, staff and volunteers, for getting us this far and being so enthusiastic about our future.
- 🌿 And last but not least – YOU! If you are reading this, thank you for your interest, we appreciate any support you can give!

Many thanks,  
**Ryan Dobson**  
WNR Manager