

# Stronger, Greener, Healthier: Our plan for the North West

A summary of our Business Plan  
for Cumbria  
2025–30



Pictured: Lake Windermere, Cumbria

## Introduction

# Welcome to the summary of our Business Plan for Cumbria

The North West is an exciting and diverse region; it's where we live, work and play.

We've built a plan for the next five years which has been shaped by, and adapted to meet, the diverse needs of the region. Adopting this approach means we will deliver outcomes which are tailored for customers in the places where they live.

Because delivering locally is important to you and us, we've been working with stakeholders and customers to better understand the unique needs for each North West county so we develop plans that are more relatable to the communities we serve.

It's a hugely ambitious plan that will support 30,000 jobs across the region, and we've engaged with 95,000 people in Cumbria, Lancashire, Merseyside, Greater Manchester and Cheshire, to make sure we get it right, shaping our plans for each county to address the things that you've told us matter most. These include:

- Providing great quality water every time you turn on the tap
- Improving the region's natural environment and tackling storm overflows
- Doubling our financial support for those who need it, making sure nobody gets left behind
- Driving benefits for the North West's economy

In this document, we have summarised the challenges and opportunities in Cumbria. We hope that by setting out our plan this way, we make our investment programme and the benefits it delivers more meaningful to customers.

We call it place-based planning. It involves us working in partnership with other organisations to develop cost-effective investment and planning in local areas. This approach means we can identify the right solutions and develop tailored outcomes which deliver for local people and the needs of the environment.

At the same time as improving services and investing in the security of infrastructure to respond to the challenges of climate change and population growth, we are also able to deliver real opportunities for the North West too, a chance to drive inward investment, provide great quality skilled jobs and ignite a regional economy.

While we recognise that the plan necessitates an increase in bills, we also recognise the economic challenges facing our communities. That's why we're proposing an industry-leading support package of over £500 million, meaning that one in six customers will receive financial support so we reduce the risk of anyone being left behind by the costs of rising bills.

Now, more than ever, we need to rise to the challenge, deliver improved services for our customers, the environment and our communities in Cumbria. It matters to customers, to regulators, to shareholders and it matters to us, and we are determined to deliver the step change we all want to see. We look forward to the opportunity of delivering this ambitious plan.

**Louise Beardmore**  
Chief Executive

## Highlights from our ambitious plan

Supporting over 10,600 people who are struggling to pay their bills. Our support will double by 2030.

Investing £914 million to reduce spills from 158 storm overflows and improving 219 kilometres of rivers.

Restoring peatland across 2,144 hectares of land to improve water quality and reduce carbon emissions.

Employing 650 people across Cumbria. Our increased investment will create more green jobs.



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# Cumbria's unique characteristics

Cumbria is home to some of the wettest areas in England. Over one third of the North West's water supply originates in Cumbria, captured in reservoirs and transported across the region.

Cumbria is home to a wide variety of special landscapes: two national parks, two world heritage sites, three areas of outstanding natural beauty and hundreds of designated sites of special scientific interest. We will continue to invest, working alongside partners, including landowners, NGOs and community groups, to protect these landscapes and manage our owned catchment land.

Cumbria has finely balanced needs across the tourist economy, food production and delivering for protected environments, so preserving this balance is critical over the long term. We will provide services which respond to changing needs throughout the year and work with other partners to preserve the environment.

Keeping rivers and lakes clean and beautiful is hugely important for Cumbria. Our investment will ensure great river water quality, protect biodiversity and contribute to achieving bathing water standards across coastal and inland bathing waters in Cumbria. Beyond our own operations, we'll support sustainable agricultural practices by working with partners to maximise benefits for river water quality.


We will work to increase the resilience of supplies during dry weather events and ensure that in doing so the environment is protected. We will improve the catchments which protect raw water quality, delivering sustainable abstraction now and for the future.


## Cumbria



 We support **9,000 customers** through affordability schemes and **21,000 people** with additional needs through Priority Services

 Over a third of the North West's water originates in Cumbria. We need to ensure that all of our assets are **resilient to drought and flooding**

Over **500,000 hectares** of land across Cumbria are farmed. We work with farmers to manage river water quality, such as in the River Petteril where our work with dairy farms is improving the rivers 

 Cumbria is home to **Britain's Energy Coast**, where 5.6% of the nation's electricity is generated. Our infrastructure is critical in supporting this and the growing **'green energy'** sector

Much of Cumbria's environment is protected, nationally and internationally:

- two national parks;
- two world heritage sites;
- three areas of outstanding natural beauty; and
- hundreds of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).



**Providing great water for a stronger, greener and healthier North West**

Our plan protects the health and wellbeing of communities and the environment and underpins the economy, enabling sustainable growth.



# A plan that makes Cumbria Stronger, Greener, Healthier

## STRONGER

Cumbria has a number of challenges and opportunities:

### Affordability and supporting vulnerable customers

The working age population across Cumbria is forecast to decline by 15% between 2016 and 2036, so offering support for vulnerable customers in remote communities is important.

### Jobs and growth

Cumbria's Energy Coast is home to over 20% of the UK's wind farm generation capacity, whilst offering potential for future nuclear and hydro-electric generation, resulting in additional water needs for the west coast.

There are pockets of significant growth including St Cuthbert's Garden Village in Carlisle as well as in Penrith, Whitehaven and Ulverston. Each of these comes with additional water needs.

To manage these challenges, we're:



Supporting over 10,600 people who are struggling to pay their bills. Our support will double by 2030.



Employing 650 people across Cumbria. Our increased future investment will create more green jobs.



Helping 21,300 customers with additional needs through Priority Services.



Investing in schemes to unlock development restrictions, as in Carlisle to support the development of St Cuthbert's Garden Village.



# A plan that makes Cumbria Stronger, Greener, Healthier

## GREENER

Cumbria has a number of challenges and opportunities:

### Protecting rivers and catchments

Cumbria is home to almost 2,000km<sup>2</sup> of national park, two world heritage sites and 278 SSSIs, landscapes which are protected under legislation for their importance.

Cumbria has many industries from farming to tourism. A balance must be sustained to meet the needs of farming, the visitor economy and the environment.

The county receives some of the highest levels of rainfall in England. This can lead to flooding and widespread disruption, as experienced during storm Desmond in 2015 and Storm Arwen in 2021.

### Partnerships

Cumbria has well established NGOs and community groups that are passionate about the environment. They want to be involved and support our activities.

To manage these challenges, we're:



Improving 219km of rivers, including removing barriers to **fish and eel migration** at Haweswater and spending **£38 million to return three sites to nature**, one of which is Crummock Water.



**Working in partnership** with stakeholders such as Wild Ennerdale, Love Windermere and the Catchment Partnerships for West Cumbria, Eden and South Cumbria to deliver **better outcomes for the environment**.



Working with stakeholder groups across Cumbria to **reduce pollution at nine locations** by promoting sustainable farming practices.



Investing **£914 million** to reduce activations of **158 storm overflows**.



# A plan that makes Cumbria Stronger, Greener, Healthier

## HEALTHIER

Cumbria has a number of challenges and opportunities:

### Sustainable water supplies:

We look after many areas of countryside across Cumbria including the catchments surrounding Thirlmere and Haweswater. Our investment in the upland catchments will deliver improvements to the environment, benefit water quality and support continued free access to green space.

### Access and recreation:

Cumbria supports a thriving tourism industry. Population fluctuates throughout the year, as 47 million tourists visit the area. Water and wastewater services need to be flexible to meet changes in demand.

To manage these challenges, we're:



**Restoring peatland across 2,144km<sup>2</sup> across Cumbria.** This will improve the quality of the raw water in our reservoirs and rivers, as well as capturing carbon.



**Managing sites to ensure they are freely accessible in some of Cumbria's most beautiful countryside: Haweswater, Thirlmere and Ennerdale.**



## Further information

We've been working with stakeholders and customers to develop our understanding of unique needs across the North West's five counties. This means we can develop plans that are more relatable to the communities we serve.



Visit our microsite at  
[PR24.unitedutilities.com](https://PR24.unitedutilities.com)

## Thank you . . .

We believe this plan reflects the priorities that customers and stakeholders have told us matter most to them. We are most grateful to people across Cumbria, who have given their time to provide us with their views and insight on the delivery of water and wastewater services across the county.

Listening to you isn't something we do just for our business plan – it's something we do all of the time. We have devoted a chapter of our business plan to explain how we gather your perspectives and opinions and we welcome ideas on how we can do this more effectively.

In November 2023, we are holding 'Your water, your say' sessions in each county to provide more details about our plan, in interactive meetings where the Chief Executive and her team will take questions from customers and stakeholders. Details can be found at [unitedutilities.com/corporate/about-us/our-future-plans/listening-to-our-customers/your-water-your-say](https://unitedutilities.com/corporate/about-us/our-future-plans/listening-to-our-customers/your-water-your-say)

The water industry's economic regulator, Ofwat, will now examine our proposals and feed back to us in the middle of 2024, a process which is called a draft determination. This is an assessment of our business plan and offers a view on whether the plan meets regulatory requirements.



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**Water for the North West**