



The Ribble Coast and Wetlands

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A Regional Park **Vision**

A large type format edition
is available upon request

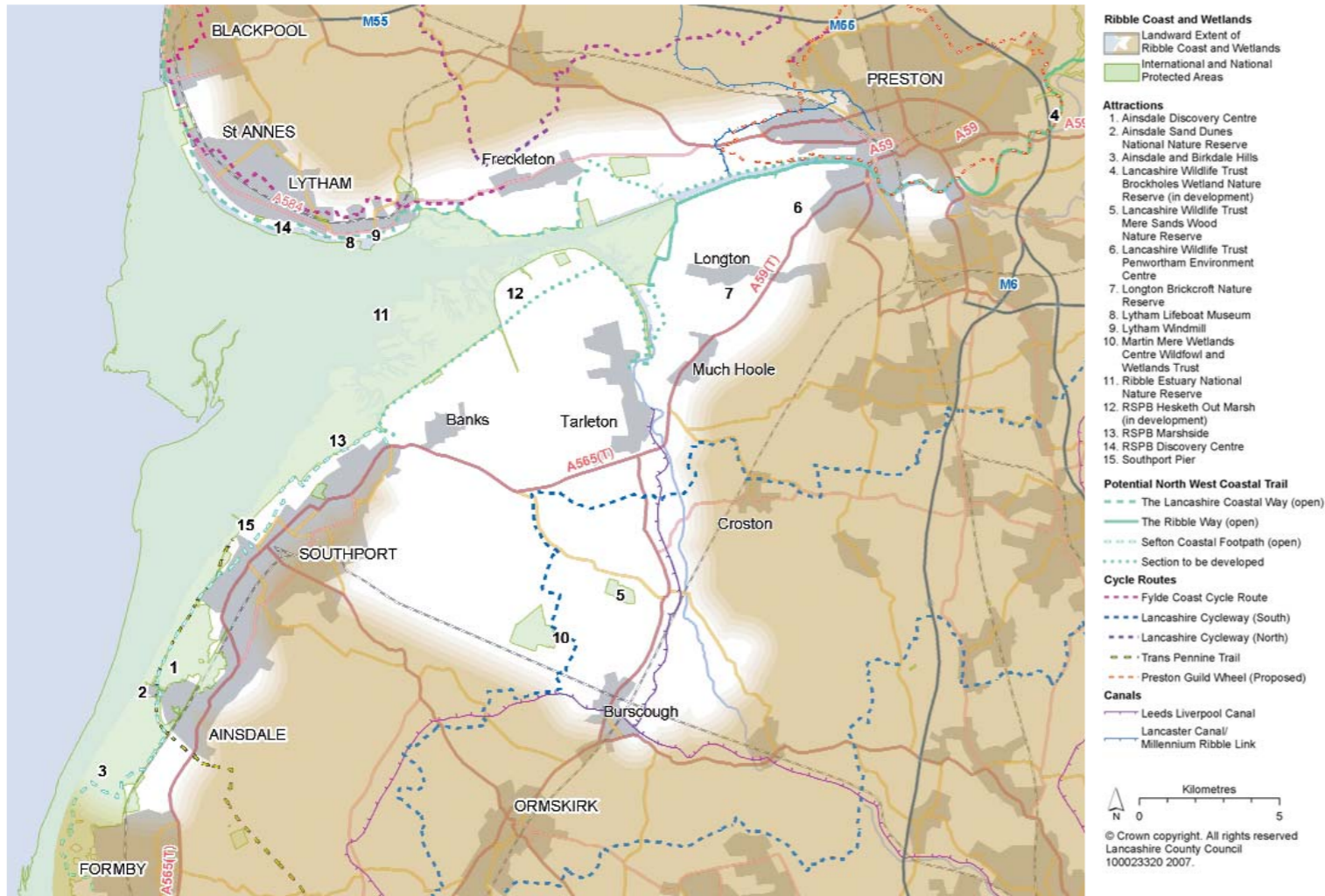
A new asset for England's North West

The Ribble Coast and Wetlands is one of the most important places in Europe for wildlife.

Despite its international significance it is not yet the local and regional asset it should be.

Strategically located between the Mersey belt and the Lake District, and flanked by historic landscapes, market towns and coastal resorts, the Ribble Coast and Wetlands will be a new regional park for the North West.

This strategic prospectus sets out the vision, some opportunities for change and shows how the region's people and economy can benefit.



A strong and representative partnership

List of partners and advisors

- Action Ribble Estuary
- British Waterways
- Environment Agency
- Fylde Borough Council
- Fylde Vision
- Groundwork Lancashire West
- Lancashire & Blackpool Tourism Board
- Lancashire Economic Partnership
- Lancashire County Council
- Lancashire Rural Futures
- Martin Mere Wetlands Centre
- Mersey Basin Campaign
- Natural England
- North West Development Agency
- Preston City Council
- Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council
- South Ribble Borough Council
- The Wildlife Trust for Lancashire, Manchester and North Merseyside
- The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
- West Lancashire District Council

Maintaining the involvement of current partners and drawing in new support from public agencies, non-governmental organisations, community groups, and education and commercial sectors will be crucial in achieving this vision for the Ribble Coast and Wetlands.

Our goal is clear. A blend of environmental, social and economic benefits, that is significant and sustainable.



Heritage and future: continuous change

Throughout history the wetlands, dunes and mudflats of the Ribble estuary have been shaped and reshaped by nature and by agriculture, fisheries, sea defences and shipping. Both the landscape and the ecology of the river have been changed by its industrial legacy. Change continues today and will go on, as the emphasis shifts back from industrial to recreational use.



The growth of green tourism, the challenge of a changing climate and the need to manage watercourses more sustainably all point to a new role for the Ribble's coast and wetlands and new opportunities for the future.

The Ribble's future lies in its role as part of the green lungs of Central Lancashire and the North West. Working with nature, rather than trying to constrain it, will reconnect local communities and visitors with this stunning natural environment.

Enlivening the landscape

The Ribble estuary's wide open spaces have always been a magnet for wild birds and home to threatened species and habitats. Much of the area is managed for conservation, but much more needs to be developed and managed to restore the estuary's former glory.

The total potential is for nearly 10 sq. km. to form a managed landscape rich in wildlife.

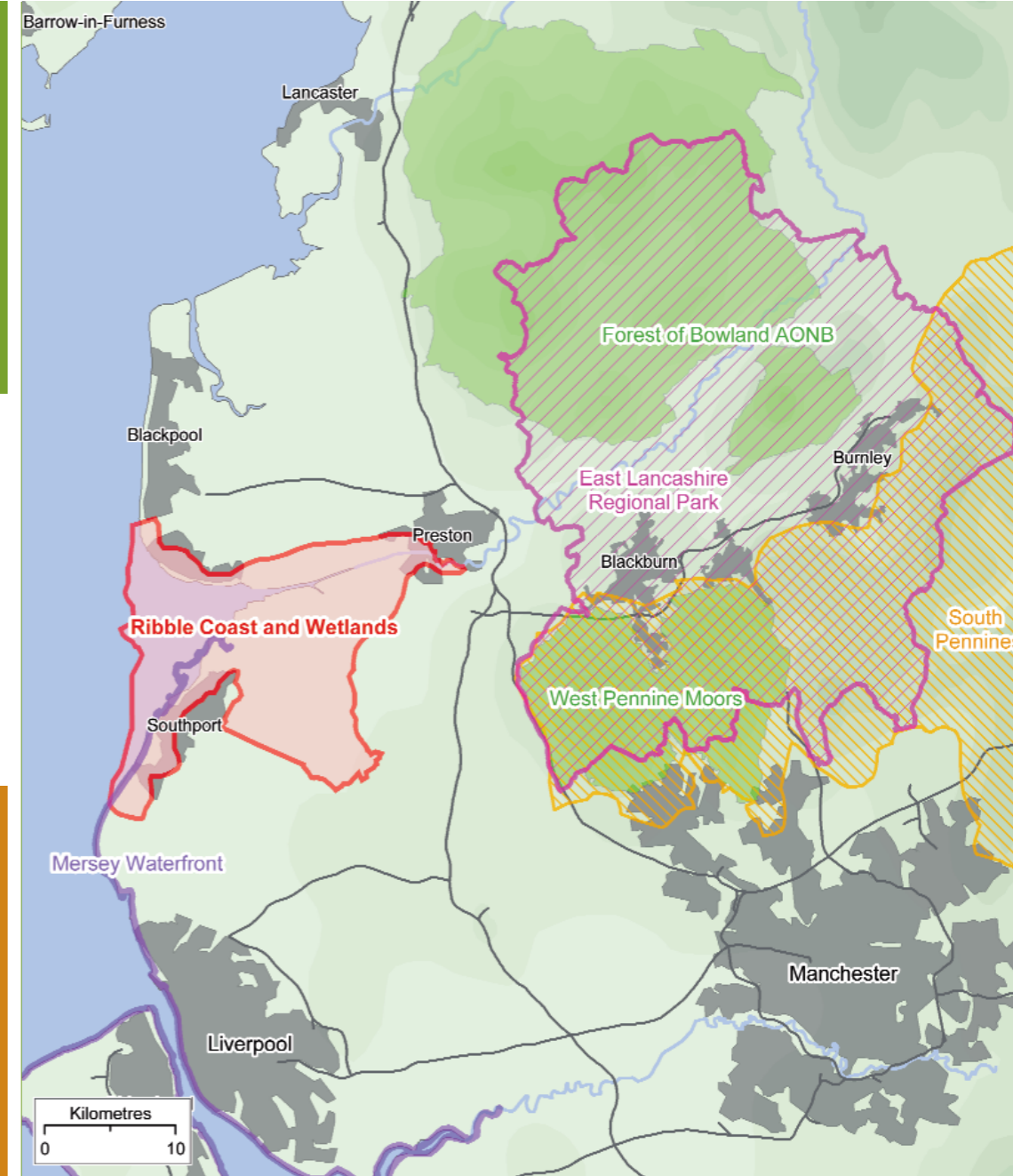
Key actions: restore farmland at Hesketh Out Marsh and Martin Mere back to marshland; work with farmers to ensure sympathetic management of the landscape.

Regional Strategy

- Northwest Regional Economic Strategy
- Northwest Regional Spatial Strategy
- Central Lancashire City Region Development Programme
- Lancashire Economic Strategy

- Ribble Coast & Wetlands**
- Visitor Economy
- Access
- Environment
- Community
- Engagement

- Total Quality Classic Resort
- Market Town Initiatives
- Ribble Link
- River Douglas Crossing
- Linear Park
- North West Coastal Trail
- Partners' volunteer programmes

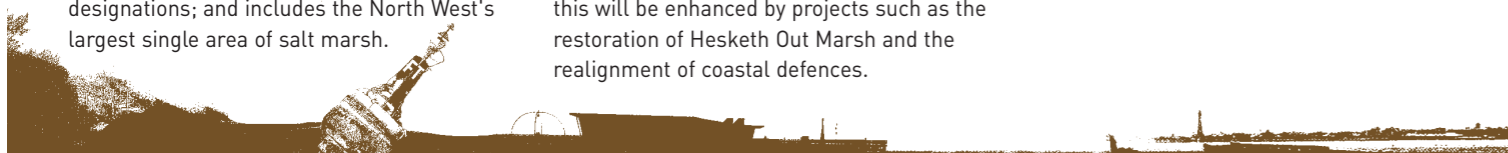




Based on a natural and unique situation...

The development of such a substantial and relatively undiscovered tourist destination is based on its obvious unique attributes: birdlife, rare wetland habitats and unusual landscape.

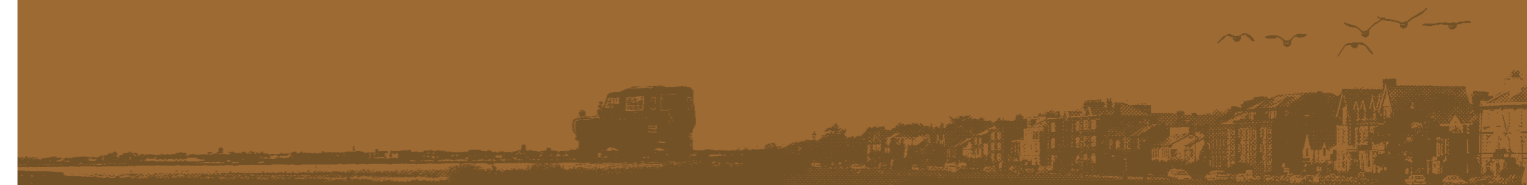
- At the core of the tourism offer is the birdlife and wetland landscape, which has the real potential to be a recognised destination, similar to other UK coastal areas such as the Norfolk Coast.
- Existing major visitor attractions such as Martin Mere Wetlands Centre, Mere Sands Wood, RSPB Marshside and the Ribble Discovery Centre at Lytham St Annes already encourage local interest and visitors from further afield.
- Much of the Ribble Coast and Wetlands is protected by local, national and international designations; and includes the North West's largest single area of salt marsh.
- The area supports internationally significant populations of birds. An average of 340,000 avian visitors a year makes it the most important wetland site in Britain for migratory and breeding birds.
- Enhancement of existing sites and the development of access and new visitor attractions will lead to an even more substantial natural tourism offer, making it highly competitive within the international market.
- The area already plays a significant role in addressing the impacts of climate change; this will be enhanced by projects such as the restoration of Hesketh Out Marsh and the realignment of coastal defences.
- Combining existing networks of foot and cycle paths with the proposed new access routes will complete the region's coastal trails.
- A further unique feature is the potential for 'barrier free access for all' (wheel chair, push chair and less able people) due to the flat terrain and existing infrastructure at key visitor attractions.
- Positive encouragement and raising awareness is key to enhance the enjoyment and recreational potential of the Ribble Coast and Wetlands.



...linking to social benefits & prosperity

Creating new environmental assets whilst enhancing the quality of existing features, offers real opportunities to social benefits & prosperity:

- Local urban and rural communities can enjoy a network of footpaths, cycle and bridleways connecting urban conurbations to the coast and the countryside.
- Additional employment growth in the tourism, hospitality and recreation sectors in urban and rural settings will have positive impact on surrounding areas within Lancashire and Merseyside.
- To retain more younger people through generating better job opportunities
- Enhancing existing and developing new interpretation and education programmes which also actively address social inclusion





A vital part of the region's economic development

The Ribble Coast and Wetlands is more than UK's largest habitat restoration scheme.



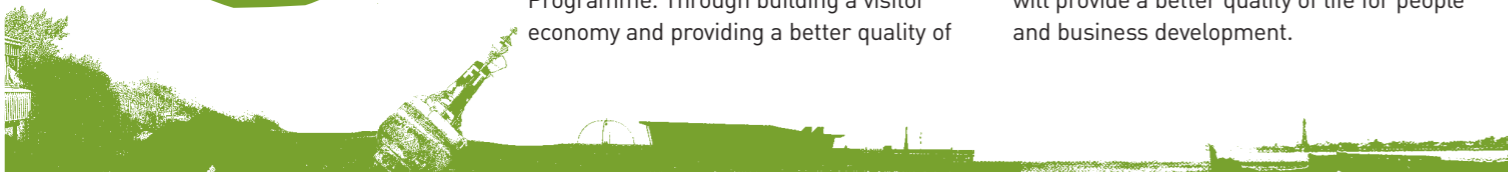
The Ribble Coast and Wetlands supports the vision and objectives of the Northwest Regional Economic Strategy and Regional Spatial Strategy. As a regional park it plays an instrumental role in the economic growth and the enhancement of quality of life in Central Lancashire.

The Ribble Coast and Wetlands is a key environmental asset for the Central Lancashire City Region Development Programme. Through building a visitor economy and providing a better quality of

life the Ribble Coast and Wetlands will contribute significantly to the green infrastructure and the 'City with room to breathe' within Central Lancashire.

The visitor economy will support the rural economy, particularly assisting business development for green infrastructure and outdoor recreation.

Development of green spaces and access will provide a better quality of life for people and business development.



Greenways

The river, canals and estuary were once vital links between communities and their surroundings. A green network of trails and waterways will restore these links, will connect the urban centres with the wild places of the estuary, and provide healthy, safe unrivalled access to landscapes rich in wildlife.

Key actions: River Douglas bridge to connect coastal footpaths as part of the NW Coastal Trail

The New Destination

The Ribble Coast and Wetlands with its gateways at Lytham St Annes, Preston and Southport will become a new visitor destination. The estuary comes alive during the traditional low season and improved facilities for visitors will attract year-round business.

Key actions: develop visitor infrastructure; off-season tourism promotions

Enriching the rural economy

Rural tourism and environmental management provide new growth opportunities for local businesses. Integrated business advice and marketing will be key to exploiting these emerging trends.

Key actions: use the Ribble Coast and Wetlands as a rationale for integrated business advice services involving existing advisers, banks and business leaders

Celebrating distinctiveness

Raising the profile of the Ribble Coast and Wetlands is key to building a distinctive image. Many organisations run events to interpret and celebrate the estuary. From 2007, a festival of such events will be developed as a first step in creating a new identity.

Key actions: build on a programme of promotions, events and activities to create a new identity; develop the concept of a Ribble Festival

Reconnecting the estuary with its communities

Local communities already have many opportunities to get involved - from volunteering at nature reserves to cleaning up local rivers. The Ribble Coast and Wetlands will create a stronger sense of place for schools, community groups and individuals to rally to.

Key actions: increase the number of active volunteers and create new opportunities and consult with local people to give them a sense of pride in their coast and wetlands.





The progress to date

- The Ribble Estuary Steering Group was established in 2001.
- A feasibility study into developing the area as a Regional Park was completed and produced in 2003.
- The proposed Regional Park area was redefined and new partners from other organisations joined the core interest group.
- A marketing group was set up in 2005 to investigate ways of working together to establish the Ribble Coast and Wetlands image within and beyond the partnership.
- Appointment of a Project Development Manager in 2005 to take the Regional Park proposal forward.
- The purchase and development of Hesketh Out Marsh, funded by Lancashire Rural Recovery Action Plan, DEFRA, and the RSPB in 2006 and supported by the Environment Agency, is a major step in developing new environmental assets.



Inspired by nature: our vision

By 2020 the Ribble Coast and Wetlands will be an internationally recognised destination based on its environmental significance which will be conserved and enhanced.

It will improve the quality of life and enhance a sense of place for local communities and visitors. Sustainable development through tourism will contribute to the region's prosperity and well-being.

The Ribble Coast and Wetlands is renowned for its protected wildlife and threatened habitats, but is relatively underused and under valued. We will create new opportunities for local people, visitors and business to benefit from this hidden asset.

We will increase the area under conservation management and develop new wetland and estuarine habitats. We will create a stronger sense of place by managing, enhancing and promoting the Ribble Coast and Wetlands as a landscape for people as well as wildlife.

We will create new opportunities to visit and enjoy the area's wild places, provide walking and cycling routes and reconnect communities to their natural surroundings.

We will work together with local communities and businesses to develop a Regional Park Plan for the Ribble Coast and Wetlands that will help turn this vision into reality.

