

Sustainable tourism key to Cumbria's new carbon neutral plan

Ambition to become the UK's first carbon-neutral county, by 2037, looks to reduce the impact of visitors, especially in the Lakes

5 Across Cumbria local communities, businesses and grassroots organisations are being mobilised to map out ways that they hope will help it become the UK's first carbon-neutral county. The county is aiming to decarbonise by 2037, an ambition initially supported by £2.5m of national lottery funding, awarded last August and to be drip-fed over five years starting this month. Tourism will be an area of focus, alongside housing, transport and agriculture.

10 Achieving decarbonisation poses challenges for a county that in 2019 was visited by 48 million people. Visitors contribute £3.13bn to Cumbria's economy and support 65,500 jobs. Tourism's impact on its carbon footprint is largely linked to transport. In February 2020, the partnership commissioned A Carbon Baseline for Cumbria, which was produced by Professor Mike Berners-Lee, an expert in carbon footprinting – who also happens to live in Kendal¹.

The report found that the driving emissions of visitors to Cumbria are three times the UK average; their emissions from eating out and recreational activities are also higher than residents'. They account for 49% of Cumbria's consumption-based greenhouse gas emissions, although 36% of those emissions come from travelling to and from Cumbria.

15 "Tourism does create significant challenges [to decarbonising], but it's a huge part of the local economy," said Chris Hodgson, owner of Haven Cottage B&B in Ambleside, which is now working towards gold certification with the Green Tourism accreditation body. He believes becoming carbon neutral will offer new opportunities for local tourism, but also that it shouldn't have to mean reducing visitor numbers. "You just have to find ways for people to visit in a more sustainable fashion," he said.

20 This could mean increasing the public transport options, the number of bike hire locations and cycleways, and looking at pedestrianisation. Hodgson is a member of the Ambleside to Zero action group, which is working with CAFS² in some of these challenges.

25 The Lake District national park authority is about to release a new management plan that will tackle transport, one of the biggest causes of emissions in the world heritage site. As well as emphasising the public transport options available within the park, it will promote active travel days that can be undertaken without a car.

30 "Three quarters of visitors already go for a walk while they're here," said Emma Moody, sustainable transport adviser for the national park authority. "It's about getting them to do it more, and also to get them to think about walking from the door of where they're staying rather than feeling they have to jump in the car every morning." In essence, it's about persuading visitors to experience Wordsworth³ country in the same way the poet would have.

The Guardian, Jan. 19th, 2021

1. Kendal is a town in the south of Cumbria. It is considered to be the gateway to the Lake District National Park.
2. CAFS = Cumbria Action for Sustainability.
3. William Wordsworth is a nineteenth-century Romantic poet who immortalised the Lake District with his famous poem *Daffodils*.