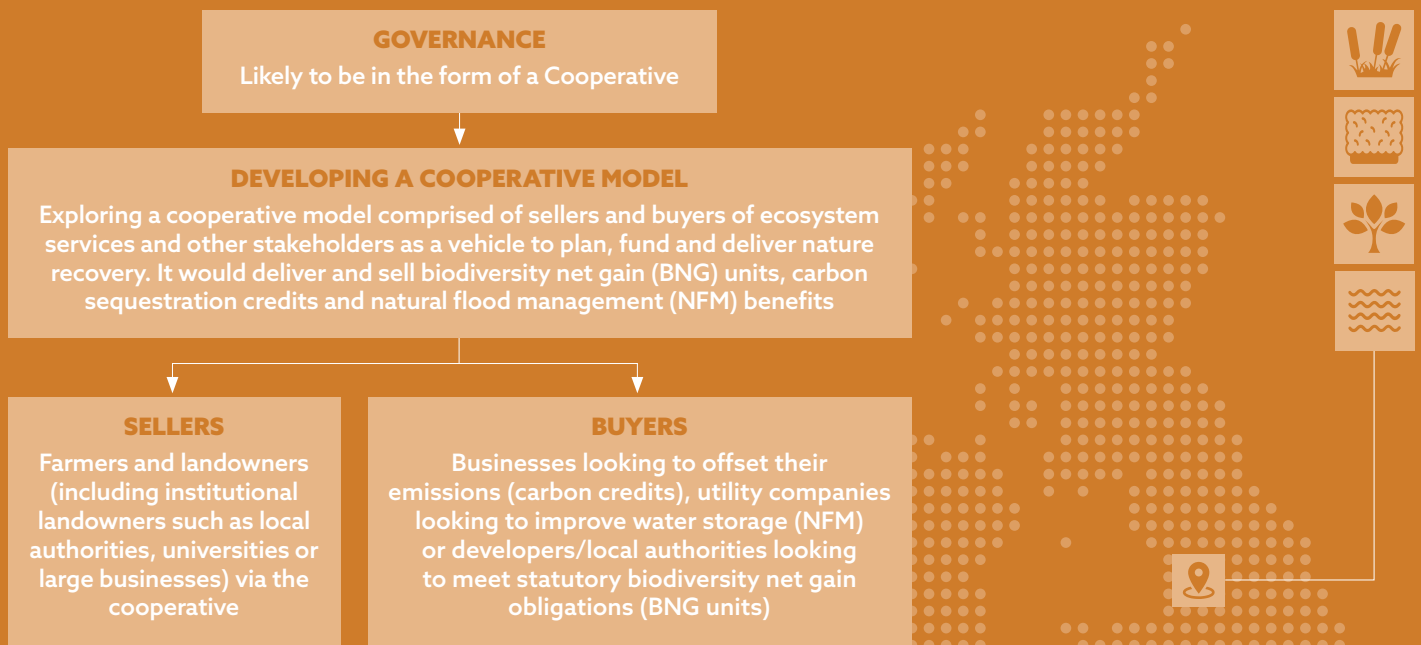


This is one of a suite of case studies of NEIRF funded projects, to highlight efforts to protect and enhance the natural environment, while generating revenue from ecosystem services.

Riparian Woodland, Long Preston Flood Plain  
© Ribble Rivers Trust


# COMMUNITY INVESTMENT AND COOPERATION FOR ECOLOGICAL REGENERATION IN LANCASHIRE (CICERL)

## HIGH LEVEL SUMMARY OF PROJECT



## Habitat and geographical location

-  Lowland hay meadows and natural grassland
  Hedgerows
-  Woodland
  Lowland fens and wetland

 Three River Ribble sub-catchment areas in Lancashire: River Loud, Long Preston and Hyndburn



## PROJECT OVERVIEW

**Only 26% of the River Ribble catchment is deemed to be in good ecological condition. The remainder suffer from a range of pressures including urban, industrial and agricultural pollution and the fragmentation of habitats.**

Floods and droughts associated with climate change and rising temperatures exacerbate these problems, putting further stress on river habitats and endangering species. The Community Investment and Cooperation for Ecological Regeneration in Lancashire (CICERL) project, led by Ribble Rivers Trust, aims to increase the scale of conservation efforts in the River Ribble catchment area to address the region's environmental challenges and deliver environmental benefits through BNG, carbon and NFM markets. This work would also deliver financial benefits to sellers i.e. local farmers and landowners looking to diversify their income whilst supporting efficient and sustainable farm businesses.

The CICERL project aimed to bring together sellers, buyers and other stakeholders in a multi-stakeholder cooperative, where farmers and landowners would provide land for ecosystem services across three locations in the River Ribble catchment. Members of the cooperative would co-design interventions to deliver BNG units, carbon pending issuance units (PIUs), woodland carbon credits (WCCs) and other quantified environmental services such as flood water storage. These services would be delivered by farmers and landowners and paid for by interested members such as developers looking to meet BNG regulations or businesses wanting to offset their carbon emissions.

The cooperative model would act as an aggregator to enable investment at catchment scale. Startup capital or investment would be required for at least one year to support cashflow and enable the delivery of woodland projects prior to income being generated by PIUs. Payments would then be made to the cooperative for PIUs, which would support the initial costs of delivering BNG and other ecosystem services such as flood water storage. Subsequent payments from buyers would remain within the cooperative to repay start-up funding/finance, and to maintain the project or intervention (e.g. a hedgerow or wetland) for the term of the agreement or conservation covenant, which is likely to be 30+ years.

NEIRF funding was used to:

- Consult with multiple stakeholder groups to explore the possible design of a collaborative, cooperative governance model.
- Develop a vision for possible ecosystem services across the three sub-catchment areas, based on demand from buyers and local communities.
- Develop an investment and funding plan for the cooperative model.

Through consultations with farmers, landowners and other stakeholders the project identified challenges in securing buy-in and resource to co-design interventions. However, consultations indicated more support for a defined suite of interventions that stakeholders could choose from to deliver or to purchase. The project has therefore identified an initial small group of farmers and landowners to establish a new cooperative which will develop and sell ecosystem services. The next steps for the project include putting forward defined projects for investment and sale to interested buyers, after finalising cooperative recruitment and structure.

**Cross Slope hedgerow above Long Preston Flood Plain**  
© Ribble Rivers Trust



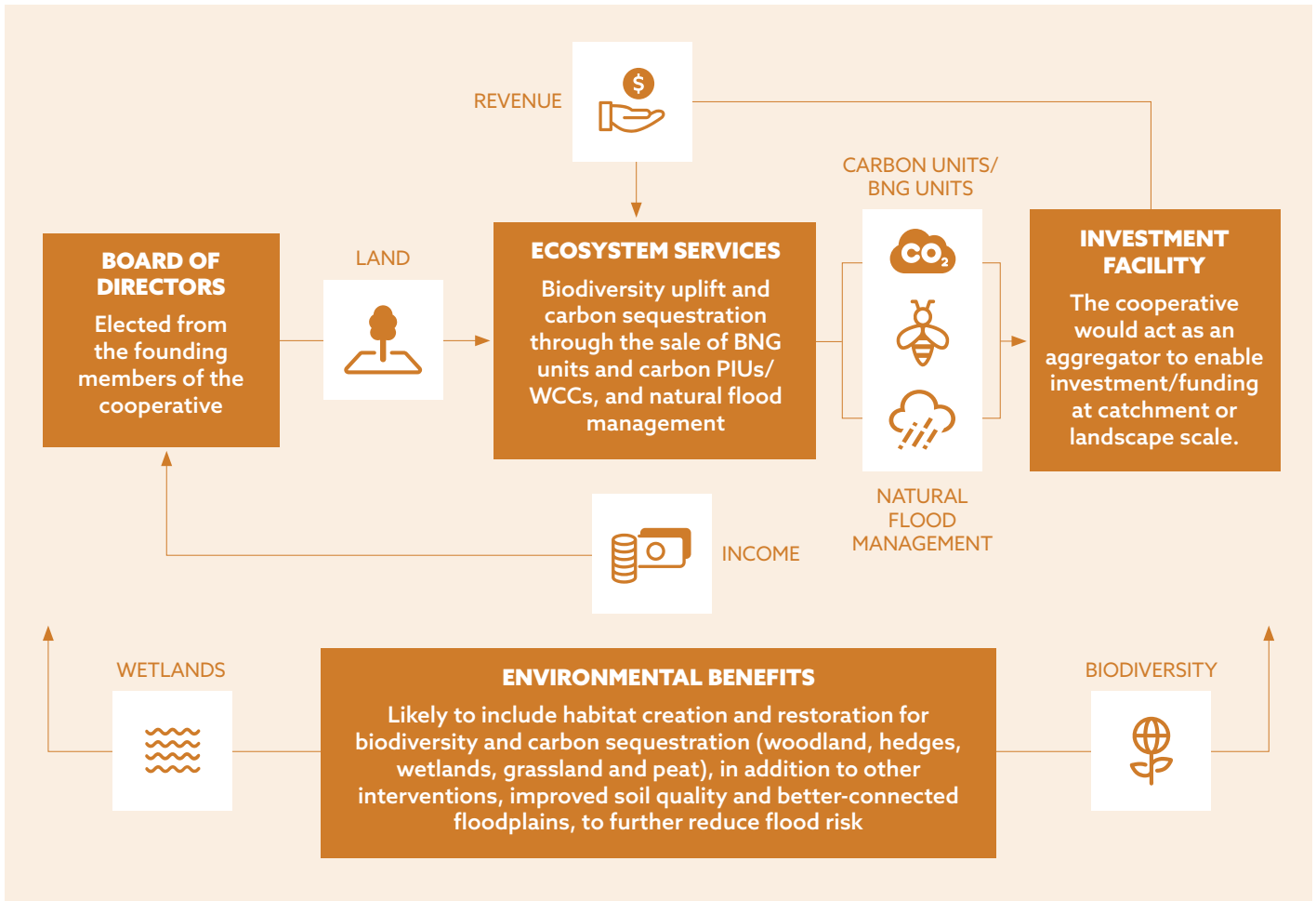
# COMMUNITY INVESTMENT AND COOPERATION FOR ECOLOGICAL REGENERATION IN LANCASHIRE (CICERL)

## GOVERNMENT ENVIRONMENTAL GOALS

 <p>Clean air</p>	<p>Farmers will create woodland and <b>improve soil quality, increasing carbon dioxide sequestration</b> and uptake of other atmospheric pollutants, leading to cleaner air.</p>
 <p>Clean and plentiful water</p>	<p>Current soil and nutrient management regimes, farmyard infrastructure and loss of habitat has impacted water quality in Lancashire. These issues could be addressed through <b>reduced fertiliser application and riverbank buffering</b> among other interventions.</p>
 <p>Thriving plants and wildlife</p>	<p>Lancashire has significant amounts of degraded habitats. Creating corridors or stepping stones (pockets of habitat that facilitate the movement of species) may help to <b>connect and improve habitats and increase the number of priority species</b>.</p>
 <p>Reducing the risks of harm from environmental hazards</p>	<p>Specific measures to support NFM could be implemented to <b>mitigate flooding</b>, such as flood plain re-connection, woodland creation to buffer watercourses, and <b>water resource improvements</b>.</p>
 <p>Enhancing beauty, heritage, and engagement with the natural environment</p>	<p>There is a lack of access to quality natural spaces for the public across Lancashire. Interventions could address this through <b>habitat creation and restoration of woodland, hedges, wetlands, grassland and peat</b>.</p>
 <p>Mitigating and adapting to climate change</p>	<p>Woodland planting would <b>help to remove carbon dioxide</b>, a major contributor to climate change, from the atmosphere.</p>

# COMMUNITY INVESTMENT AND COOPERATION FOR ECOLOGICAL REGENERATION IN LANCASHIRE (CICERL)

## OPERATING MODEL



The project explored a cooperative model made up of different members including farmers, landowners, buyers of ecosystem services such as local authorities, water companies and other stakeholders. Using a cooperative structure, the project aimed to facilitate multi-interest collaboration for landscape-scale conservation across three locations in the River Ribble catchment, aiming to balance the needs of different stakeholders by co-designing interventions tailored to their needs as well as delivering environmental benefits. The structure would also maximise geographical scope and investment potential, as well as the rate at which projects can be developed.

The project also identified other benefits of the cooperative model including:

- Development of long-term relationships between farmers and landowners delivering ecosystem services, buyers or investors, and other like-minded stakeholders.
- New opportunities for funders and investors looking for larger landscape-scale projects that deliver on strategic or priority environmental issues.
- Possibilities for sellers to secure revenue through different ecosystem services.
- Self-governing, meaning it does not require a third party to instigate and lead activities.

# COMMUNITY INVESTMENT AND COOPERATION FOR ECOLOGICAL REGENERATION IN LANCASHIRE (CICERL)

## INNOVATION

The cooperative approach maintains farmer and landowner control of their land, whilst a multi-stakeholder approach would generate opportunities to deliver on, and generate income from, both the environmental needs of the area and the needs of buyers and other stakeholders who also have input via the model.

The cooperative structure will also provide:

- A high quality, bench-marked, fairly-priced carbon credits and BNG units for buyers.
- Fair remuneration and projects that enhance the land and income diversity for farmers/landowners, while minimising disrupt to other activities.
- Interventions that will measurably improve the catchment, to meet the aims and goals of wider stakeholders such as environmental non-governmental organisations, local authorities and government.



## LEARNING POINTS

- **Approach stakeholders with a clear concept that you can communicate to them.** Engaging stakeholders from inception with a clear vision and a clear picture of what will be needed from them is helpful to gain their buy-in to the cooperative concept and to working through the design of its governance.
- **Build trusted relationships** between land managers and other stakeholders to remove barriers such as diverging views on conservation strategies. This can be done by focussing on common objectives such as improving the catchment area.
- **Be realistic about what can be achieved within timescale and budget.** Working within a cooperative model is a fundamental change from the way many stakeholders are used to working within landscape conservation and requires a greater investment of time. Consider all viewpoints to deliver large scale projects.
- **Consider various governance options based on what you want to achieve.** Cooperatives offer a unique solution to addressing large scale environmental problems that involve a wide range of stakeholders, particularly when smaller-scale arrangements (e.g. landowners and investors working on a one-to-one basis) have not produced the desired outcomes.

## WOULD YOU LIKE TO KNOW MORE?

If you would like to learn more about the CICERL project, please get in touch with Jack Spees, Ribble Rivers Trust CEO, at [jack@ribbletrust.com](mailto:jack@ribbletrust.com), or Harvey Hamilton-Thorpe at the Ribble Rivers Trust. For questions regarding NEIRF, please contact [NEIRF@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:NEIRF@environment-agency.gov.uk).

This case study was produced by Ecorys.