

Youth Voice Conference 2026 insights by Hannah Jennison

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At the start of May, I was one of three young members of staff from the Lake District National Park Authority, alongside Abigail Holt (Planning Officer) and Tessa Buckley (Online Officer), who attended the 2026 Youth Voice conference hosted by the North York Moors at 'The Outstation'. It was a varied and full weekend, with plenty of insights to carry forward as we work to establish a Youth Board for the Lake District National Park Authority, alongside other innovations put forward by the Future Generations Action Plan for the next 2 years.

Here are my reflections from an excellent weekend!



All the Youth Voice delegates from across the UK

Day 1

We arrived on Friday for lunch and introductions to the rest of the delegates, who hailed from National Parks and Protected Landscapes across the UK, including Northern Ireland. As well as our hosts from North York Moors, we were joined by young people from the Yorkshire Dales National Park, the Peak District National Park, Exmoor National Park, New Forest National Park, the Ring of Gullion Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and the Belfast Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. A couple of delegates were representatives from the EUROPARC Federation Youth Council. A game of Dobble proved to be an excellent ice-breaker!

Each Park or Protected Landscape had prepared a presentation on youth engagement in their area. This was a fascinating chance to see the different progress that Parks have made in the development of their youth boards. We are still in the early stages, and

there was a lot to learn from Parks such as the North York Moors and the New Forest with more established Youth Voice groups/teams. It was also a chance to talk about the unique qualities of the Lake District and the current opportunities we provide for young people within the Authority, largely through our dedicated Learning and Engagement team.

After presentations, we had a lovely dinner prepared by the NYM team. The Outstation is in a remote area of farmland and woodland, providing lots of opportunities for reflective walks. In the evening, we made our way through the forest for some mindfulness - which was definitely welcome after a dizzying team-building activity that saw us guiding each other through the woods with blindfolds!



Forest walk

Day 2

The next day involved a talk from Ed March-Shawcross, Project Officer for 'Moor to Restore', who shared the devastating effects of a wildfire in August last year that destroyed a wide area of heather moorland. Heather moorland is an important habitat for many species of plants and animals, as well as a grazing site for farm animals. Beneath it lies a reserve of peat, which is a key carbon store.

The fire had been started by a campfire, reminding us of the importance of responsible visitor behaviour. It was eye-opening to visit the site with Ed and Lol, a local grazer, who discussed the impact of the fire on farming in the area and the longer-term restoration project that is now in place to try and mitigate against heavy economic and ecological losses. Against the backdrop of a foggy and drizzly Yorkshire day, the blackened

moorland and stunted heather stems made the area, which was so beautiful and ecologically diverse elsewhere, seem desolate.

After this, we travelled to the coast and were met by Emma and Suzie from [REConnect](#), a project based on connecting people to the River Esk. Emma and Suzie talked to us about the diverse sea life to be found on the NYM coastline. We went rock-pooling and found hermit crabs, periwinkles, shore crabs and many interesting species of seaweed. We searched for shark egg-cases in the seaweed, after seeing a few that had been rehydrated. It was a beautiful spot, and we were able to use the facilities of YHA Boggle Hole, which has been designed to look like a smuggler's hideout.

We travelled back for a general knowledge quiz that was taken on with a healthy sense of competition.



Ed explained ongoing efforts to restore parts of the fire-damaged moorland



The fire damage was both widespread and deep under the soil

Day 3

Sunday was productive and restful in equal measure. Some delegates opted to wake early to hear the dawn chorus (and others enjoyed an extra hour or two in bed), and everyone came together at breakfast for hot rolls and discussions over cups of tea. We were then given a series of talks:

- The first was a talk by Heather McNiff, Head of Engagement and Wellbeing at North York Moors National Park Authority. This looked at the successful Natural Health Service project (a partnership project led by the North York Moors Trust) which has implemented nature connectedness into people's recovery from mental health issues, through the use of a calendar that structures people's involvement of nature in their lives. This involved tasks as simple as going to the window to look at the changes in a tree outside, as well as bigger challenges.

- This was followed by a [Dementia Friends](#) session with The Alzheimer's Society, who gave us all the opportunity to become a Dementia Friend. The talk focused on destigmatizing dementia, which is often misunderstood and hidden in society. This can lead to people acting in ways that do not support individuals and their families, or environments being created unsuitably for them.
- The third talk was on the importance of youth involvement in the green sector by Tom Hind, CEO of the North York Moors National Park Authority. He has played a very supportive role in the North York Moors' Youth Voice initiative, and he was helpful as we asked him for advice on starting our own.

We then started some action planning and goal setting, and discussed ways to keep connected after the conference, before our final workshop...

- Our final workshop was hosted by Campaign for National Parks through their National Parks Reimagined Project, led by Head of Programme and Operations, Anna Bedford. Anna asked us, what would we like National Parks to look like in the future? We were given creative free reign to write or draw what our visions were based on.

The day ended with a campfire and celebration of the weekend with some marshmallow s'mores and stargazing.



Presentation from Tom Hind, North York Moors National Park CEO

Day 4

As some delegates headed off, Emma and Chloe from the REConnect project returned for an arts workshop, showing us some of the techniques they bring to schools and community workshops in their engagement sessions. It was lovely to end the weekend by letting go and embracing some messiness to create art that reflected on the environment and on our experience at the conference.

Final reflections

Huge thanks go to the North York Moors Youth Voice team who put on such a great show of hospitality and facilitated the creation of a growing network of young people from across the country's protected landscapes. I am excited about the future of the Lake District National Park's Youth Board, and using my role within the Communications team to continue to engage young people in matters affecting the Lake District.