# Cumbria community rallies as tortoise found, town regenerates and mental health ward faces closure



In recent developments spanning Cumbria, a mix of heartwarming and pressing community issues has captured local attention. From the joyous reunion of a long-missing tortoise to the controversial closure of a mental health facility, these stories reveal a landscape rich in resilience, challenge, and transformation.

In a delightful turn of events, Leonardo, a tortoise missing for nine months, has been found a mile from his home in Ulverston. His owner, Rachel Etches, feared for his safety during the harsh winter conditions but was pleasantly surprised when a dog walker discovered him wandering the streets and brought him to a local pet shop. Etches, who has owned Leonardo for 13 years, attributed his survival to instinctual hibernation habits, stating, “Tortoises are very adventurous beings” and reflecting on this particular escapade as typical of his character. This incident has united the community, with many participating in a social media campaign to find the beloved pet, showing the local commitment to pet welfare and community spirit.

Meanwhile, the town of Maryport is undergoing a significant transformation aimed at revitalising its economy and community spaces. Following a decade marked by shop closures and diminishing council services, local businesses and residents have taken initiatives to spearhead regeneration projects. One businessman, Sean Parnaby, mentioned how local efforts have led to increased engagement in community-building activities. Recent data indicates that footfall in Maryport has increased by 35%, attributed to a £12 million regeneration project, which includes initiatives like the Love Maryport Living scheme and enhancements to local shopfronts. The UK government’s investment of over £5 million from the Future High Streets Fund is also aimed at creating a more vibrant town centre with new public spaces, attractions like a splash park, and the restoration of residential accommodations.

However, not all news in Cumbria is positive. The Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust has announced the impending closure of the 16-bed Yewdale Ward at West Cumberland Hospital, citing concerns over its isolated location and the quality of care provided. Critics, including Labour MP Josh MacAlister, have called for the closure to be reconsidered, urging the trust to demonstrate reductions in demand for acute services before proceeding. This decision highlights ongoing challenges in mental health service provision in rural areas, where access to care can be limited. With the nearest alternative facilities located over 40 miles away in Carlisle, the implications of this closure raise serious questions about patient welfare and accessibility.

In a separate case, the natural beauty of the Lake District has been put to the test in a lengthy judicial review regarding a proposed zip wire attraction at Elterwater Quarry. Opponents of the plan, including conservationists from the Friends of the Lake District, argue that commercial developments threaten the tranquility of the national park. The Lake District National Park Authority maintains that it followed due processes in granting planning permission, highlighting a broader conflict between tourism development and conservation. This issue underlines the tension between economic interests and the preservation of natural heritage in one of the UK's most cherished landscapes.

Amid these stories, the relationship between community, environment, and wellbeing remains at the forefront in Cumbria. As residents rally together to nurture their local spaces while grappling with changing social services and environmental concerns, the region exemplifies both the struggles and triumphs of contemporary rural life.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.aol.com/cumbria-stories-may-missed-week-133603817.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2025/apr/29/slow-news-cumbria-tortoise-found-a-mile-from-home-nine-months-after-going-missing> - Leonardo, a tortoise from Ulverston, Cumbria, went missing in July 2024. After nine months, he was found about a mile from home, having survived the UK winter outdoors. A dog walker spotted him and took him to a local pet shop, where he was reunited with his owner, Rachel Etches. She believes Leonardo hibernated during the winter months. This was not his first escape; he had previously wandered off but returned after a few days. Etches describes tortoises as 'very adventurous beings' that test their boundaries.
3. <https://www.cumberland.gov.uk/news/2025/footfall-increases-amid-maryports-regeneration> - Maryport, a town in Cumbria, has seen a 35% increase in footfall compared to the previous year, attributed to a £12 million regeneration project. The project includes the Love Maryport Living scheme, which revitalizes empty accommodations above shops, and the Shopfront Scheme, enhancing the appearance of properties and attracting new businesses. Additionally, new public spaces and signage have improved the high street and surrounding areas. The Harbourside area features attractions like the Shiver Me Timbers splash park and the Maryport Activity Centre.
4. <https://www.cumberland.gov.uk/news/2023/government-signs-new-regeneration-investment-maryport> - The UK government has approved a multimillion-pound masterplan to transform Maryport's town centre, harbourside, and promenade. Funded by over £5 million from the Future High Streets Fund, the plan includes a harbourside events area, promenade café and bike hub, splash park, and adventure playgrounds. Additional developments involve creating a Maritime Museum in the historic Christ Church building, opening the Shipping Brow Gallery, and restoring residential accommodations above businesses in the town centre. The investment aims to enhance the town's appeal and economic viability.
5. <https://www.placenorthwest.co.uk/completion-for-flagship-maryport-activity-centre/> - The Maryport Activity Centre, part of a £12 million regeneration project in Cumbria, has been completed. The centre features a bespoke play area with obstacles, slides, a Roman watchtower, and a Northern Lights display, all set against a sea-life-themed backdrop. It also includes a large gym, fitness studio, and community facilities. The project is part of a broader vision to transform Maryport, including improvements to the harbour area and the creation of a splash park and outdoor events space.
6. <https://www.celebitchy.com/921148/leonardo_the_tortoise_on_the_run_for_9_months_found_1_mile_from_home/> - Leonardo, a tortoise from Ulverston, Cumbria, went missing in July 2024. After nine months, he was found about a mile from home, having survived the UK winter outdoors. A dog walker spotted him and took him to a local pet shop, where he was reunited with his owner, Rachel Etches. She believes Leonardo hibernated during the winter months. This was not his first escape; he had previously wandered off but returned after a few days. Etches describes tortoises as 'very adventurous beings' that test their boundaries.
7. <https://cumbriacrack.com/2023/10/18/multi-million-pound-maryport-masterplan-approved/> - The UK government has approved a multimillion-pound masterplan to transform Maryport's town centre, harbourside, and promenade. Funded by over £5 million from the Future High Streets Fund, the plan includes a harbourside events area, promenade café and bike hub, splash park, and adventure playgrounds. Additional developments involve creating a Maritime Museum in the historic Christ Church building, opening the Shipping Brow Gallery, and restoring residential accommodations above businesses in the town centre. The investment aims to enhance the town's appeal and economic viability.