

10. LANDSCAPE AND NATURE RECOVERY AIM OVERVIEW

1. Purpose

To inform Members about the Authority's progress in landscape and nature recovery since January 2024 and what this means for the future.

2. Context

2.1 Members agreed at the 22 July 2022 Authority meeting to align the programmes for Programmes and Resources to the National Park Management Plan 2023-28 aims (minute reference 65/22). The same paper also agreed that landscape and nature recovery would be the second aim reported to Programmes and Resources. This paper fulfils that on-going commitment.

2.2 Key issues:

2.2.1 This report is the landscape and nature recovery theme update report in the Programmes and Resources Committee programme for 2024/25. This follows the climate change update report considered by Members in September 2024.

2.2.2 The National Park Management Plan vision includes the Peak District National Park (PDNP) being exemplary in its response to nature recovery and that its special qualities and resilience as a living landscape should be significantly enhanced.

2.2.3 The 25 Year Environment Plan 2018 set out the framework and vision for what the Government wants to do to improve the environment within a generation. The Environmental Improvement Plan 2023 (EIP23) revised the original plan and set out the plan to deliver the ten goals with the "apex" goal of thriving plants and wildlife. In July 2024 the Secretary of State for Defra announced a rapid review of EIP23 with an [interim statement](#) in January 2025 which highlighted further improvements later in 2025.

2.2.4 The Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework (PLTOF) was launched in January 2024. Work on the indicators continues with a focus on the three targets to be set locally: 1. Area of Priority habitats, 7. Area of restored peat, 8. Tree canopy and Woodland cover. National parks are collaborating to produce draft figures for these three targets to assess the scope to meet the overall target. Data to support the measurement and setting of all targets is yet to be formally released by Natural England. The strategy team have been asked to work with NE and colleagues from National Landscapes to sense check both PLTOF target data and the supporting statistics prior to release. It is anticipated that the full data set will be available by the end of April and Members will be given a detailed presentation on the PLTOF targets at the 9th May forum meeting.

2.2.5 Recent Government announcements about changes to agricultural property relief for inheritance tax, the unexpected pausing and review of Environmental Land Management schemes (ELMs) Capital Works Grant and the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) have impacted negatively on farmer and land manager confidence in the direction of travel towards enhanced delivery for nature and climate. The closure of the SFI scheme to new applications without notice has left many farmers now unable to access annual land management payments even if they are managing land appropriately for nature and were planning to make an SFI application. Some farmers are having to consider continuing with a focus on food production in the interim at least.

- 2.2.6 The Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme has continued to be extremely successful both nationally and locally, please see [FiPL National Report 2025](#). This has resulted in additional funding for FiPL advisers and admin officers and a £1.6 Million project fund for Peak District farmers and land managers in 2025/26. The importance of trusted local advice, local flexibility, bespoke projects and the farmer led Local Assessment Panels continues to be recognised. Defra is exploring further project funding for 2026/27 and how the learnings from FiPL can be taken forward in future ELM schemes. However, FiPL is focused on capital projects and has only limited funding for revenue spend i.e. annual land management payments so cannot fill the current gap for SFI or Higher tier.
- 2.2.7 In January 2025 the Government launched a consultation on a new approach to Land Use which provides stakeholders with the opportunity to help shape the proposed new Land Use Framework. The framework will provide the principles, advanced data and tools to support decision-making by local government, landowners, businesses, farmers and nature groups to make the most of our land. This will help deliver the different objectives we have for England's finite land, including growing food, building homes and restoring nature at a time of global uncertainty and a changing climate. A range of Authority officers are supporting National Parks England to produce a response to the consultation which closes on the 25 April 2025. A consultation to require a license to burn on peat over 30 cms depth within Less Favoured Areas (currently over 40 cms depth and only within S
- 2.2.8 SSIs) was launched in March 2025. This would significantly extend the area over which heather/grass burning requires a license, in order to protect carbon stores, biodiversity and water quality. It is proposed that the Authority contributes to a National Parks England response. Officers have also recently contributed to a review of the Heather & Grass Burning Code set up by Defra/NE.
- 2.2.9 Since the January 2024 Programmes and Resources meeting the Authority has undertaken many activities, both on our own and in partnership, that assist in meeting our landscape and nature recovery ambitions. These are outlined at section 3 below the majority of which will continue to be delivered and developed through 2025-26 together with additional actions detailed in the Authority Plan 2023-28.

3. Proposals

3.1 As Programmes and Resources will be aware from the reports to this Committee in January 2024 the Authority is already undertaking many activities, both on our own and in partnership, that assist in delivering our landscape and nature recovery ambitions. The summary below updates Members on the activities we have focused our resources on since January 2024 and look to continue and develop.

3.2 Influencing:

- 3.2.1 The work of the Authority's Officers at national stakeholder meetings representing both the English National Park Authorities and the PDNPA.
- 3.2.2 The Peak District Nature Recovery Plan will continue to be used to influence the development and complement the six-future county-based LNRS's. Please see the Nature Recovery Update at Appendix 1 for more details.
- 3.2.3 Policy & Communities, Land & Nature, Legal and Planning officers have been working together to consider the future role of the Authority and future implications of mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG). A future report will be brought for Members to consider whether or not the Authority should become a Responsible Body for BNG.

- 3.2.4 Delivering the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) Programme for Defra, learnings from which continue to feed into the design of the ELM schemes. The future of FiPL beyond 2025/26 is also being considered by Defra. Please see Appendix 2 FiPL Case Studies 2024.
- 3.2.5 Existing Landscape scale partnerships – Moors for the Future, the evolving Morridge Hill Country Landscape Recovery Pilot building on the successful partnership working of the South West Peak Landscape Partnership.
- 3.2.6 The Authority convened a ‘retreat’ with key moorland managers, representatives and stakeholders to explore the role of moorland in nature recovery. The retreat also established principles as to how to work together as part of a refreshed approach and will be followed by site visits during 2025/26.
- 3.2.7 The Authority’s own land continues to demonstrate environmental land management e.g. the Warslow Moors Estate as part of the Morridge Hill Country ELM Landscape Recovery Pilot Project including Pump Farm as a demonstration farm and nature recovery hub. The acquisition, survey and management of a strategic piece of land at Boarsgrove has facilitated enhanced environmental delivery on the Warslow Moors Estate.
- 3.2.8 The European Diploma for Protected Areas, held by the PDNP since 1966 was renewed in 2024. The Diploma is awarded by the Council of Europe (CoE) in recognition of “natural and semi-natural areas and landscapes of exceptional European importance for the preservation of biological, geological and landscape diversity and which are managed in an exemplary way.” There are currently 67 Diploma-holding areas throughout Europe, with just 4 others in the UK. For more info about the Diploma see [European Diploma - Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats \(coe.int\)](https://www.coe.int/en/web/convention-on-the-conservation-of-european-wildlife-and-natural-habitats).

3.3 Delivering:

- 3.3.1 The work of the Authority’s farm advisers with farmers and land managers brokering national agri-environment schemes and supporting the delivery of FiPL has continued. However, the temporary withdrawal of the Capital Grant Scheme (CGS) in November 2024 and the sudden withdrawal of SFI March 2025 has had an impact on delivery and successful applications. Farm advisers completed and/or provided advice and support for 6 SFI applications/claims, 21 CGS applications/claims, 10 Countryside Stewardship Mid-Tier claims and 14 FiPL applications. The FiPL team also supported 14 SFI applications which were mostly FiPL transfers and 4 CGS applications. FiPL also funded between 25-30 1:1 SFI advice visits by external advisers.
- 3.3.2 Existing Landscape scale partnerships – Moors for the Future, South West Peak Landscape Partnership (through legacy projects) and the White Peak Partnership.
- 3.3.3 Landscape Recovery Pilot projects -
 - 3.3.3.1 Morridge Hill Country Landscape Recovery Project – now almost one year into the two-year development phase the project is further developing the relationship between the Authority, Staffordshire Wildlife Trust, the Ministry of Defence, their tenants and private land owners. This in turn will ultimately leading to a longer-term delivery phase with both public and private sector funding. Please see Appendix 3 for details.

- 3.3.3.2 White Peak Landscape Recovery Project - whilst no Defra funding has been secured through the Landscape Recovery Pilot scheme the farmer Steering Group has been expanded and has worked with an external consultant, Natural England and the Authority to explore the options for green finance in the White Peak and begin the development of a nature recovery plan at a farm level. This has been funded through a grant of £50,000 from Natural England through their Protected Sites Strategy Pilot and £15,000 from the Authority. This work will continue into 2025/26.
- 3.3.4 A range of smaller-scale projects such as the invasive species project, clearing Himalayan Balsam from the Dove catchment.
- 3.3.5 The findings of the Authority led ELM Test & Trial on the role of National Park Authorities as local convener and in local delivery continues to be used and has enabled Authority officers to participate in Defra working groups exploring future farmer advice and facilitation.
- 3.3.6 FiPL has continued to deliver farmer and land manager projects under the four themes of climate, nature, people and place. Successful delivery of FiPL across all 44 protected landscapes has led to additional funding and an additional fifth year for the programme. Please see Appendix 2 FiPL Case Studies 2024. FiPL funding has been used to support 4 traditional building projects of which 2 involved change of use for diversification projects supporting the farm business, 1 building had protected species (bats) with most buildings used by other bird species. FiPL funding also supported 1 project involving a Grade II listed limekiln.
- 3.3.7 The Woodland Trust Partnership extending and growing the arrangements for small-scale woodland creation using Nature for Climate funds. Approximately 81 ha of woodland created to date including 30 ha in 2024/25.
- 3.3.8 Authority owned land is also one of the key delivery mechanisms for landscape and nature recovery for example rewetting of a large proportion of moorland. In 2023/24 over £440,000 was secured for the rewetting and sphagnum planting on seven moorland blocks extending to approximately 250 ha on the Warslow Moors Estate. During 2024/25 £45,000 of sphagnum planting has been delivered with the rewetting works planned for 2025/26.
- 3.3.9 One project to underground overhead electric wires was completed last year, in the historic landscape around Roystone Grange. 4 further schemes are being developed with electricity supply companies, at North Lees Hall/Bronte Cottage, Arbor Low, Gradbach/The Roaches and in partnership with the National Trust at Longshaw. In Longdendale, the Landscape Enhancement Initiative has funded walling, woodland enhancement and improvements to the Trans-Pennine Trail to help offset the visual impact of the high-voltage electricity lines.
- 3.3.10 Recently developed artificial intelligence interpretation (AI) of aerial photographs for land cover monitoring has produced the PDNP Land Cover 2023 Map. This data continues to be used successfully in a number of areas such as funding bids. Natural Capital and species modelling has been developed for the North Lees Estate and the Morridge Hill Country Landscape Recovery Pilot area.

3.4 Regulatory:

- 3.4.1 Regulatory work, notably planning, including developing the Authority's approach for the delivery of Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG). 324 ecological consultations were dealt with in 2024, including a significant number of applications requiring BNG. Work to date suggests that mandatory BNG from development within the National Park is likely to deliver very limited biodiversity enhancement, and officers are exploring ways of maximizing environmental benefits whilst minimizing the burden

on both applicants and the Authority. It is planned to brief Members on BNG at the Member Forum in May and to offer recommendations for Member consideration at a later Authority meeting.

- 3.4.2 Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations compliance enquiries, advice and support including updated guidance notes. Farm advisers have dealt with 11 compliance enquiries involving loss of habitat and drystone walls and 1 formal screening consultation. A revised EIA Advisory Note specific to the Peak District has been developed and agreed with Natural England, please see Appendix 4. Farm advisers have also had input to a consultation on NE's proposed future revisions to the EIA guidance on GOV.UK.
- 3.4.3 Land management consultations include 24 Felling Licences, 7 England Woodland Creation Offers, 15 other informal woodland consultations, 1 Hedgerow Regulations, 1 Section 156 Land disposal, 1 Environment Agency water discharge/abstraction, 31 SFI/Countryside Stewardship Selected Heritage Inventory for Natural England (SHINE) review requests.
- 3.4.4 Land management consultations include 21 felling Licences, 3 England Woodland Creation Offers, 1 Hedgerow Regulations, 3 EA water discharge/abstraction/other works together with a range of informal consultations for projects such as the White Rose Forest, Sustainable Farming Incentive etc.
- 3.5** Partners also continue to deliver for landscape and nature recovery, often with input from Authority officers, for example:
 - 3.5.1 Sheffield Moors Landscape Partnership.
 - 3.5.2 Sheffield and Rotherham Wildlife Trust managing the recently purchased Ughill
 - 3.5.3 Farm close to Bradfield with a nature recovery focus.
 - 3.5.4 Derwent, Dove and other Catchment Partnerships.
 - 3.5.5 The Natural England (NE) led partnership Ravine Woodland Project continues to mitigate the impacts of Ash Dieback on the internationally designated Ash woodlands of the Peak District dales.
 - 3.5.6 NE continues to work towards our collective ambitions for nature recovery in the White Peak primarily through initiatives delivered by Catchment Sensitive Farming projects and through the Peak District Dales Protected Sites Strategy Pilot. In the Dark and South-West Peak the focus is on the moorland protected sites. NE has initiated the process of supporting farmers and land managers with applications to the newly released Higher Tier Scheme but capacity issues means this will only deliver 12 agreements across the Peak District in the first phase of work in 2025/26.
 - 3.5.7 The National Trust are developing their High Peak Estate ELM Landscape Recovery project with funding from Defra. They are starting a similar process of vision development and tenant engagement in the White Peak.
 - 3.5.8 Wild Peak project led by Derbyshire Wildlife Trust.
 - 3.5.9 Derwent Living Forest (kickstarted by Derwent Connections) led by Derbyshire Wildlife Trust.
 - 3.5.10 Derbyshire Species Recovery Group, and various species or habitat specific groups, e.g. woodland, water vole, beavers, willow tits.
 - 3.5.11 Cheshire Wildlife Trust is delivering small-scale woodland creation with Nature for climate funds in the Cheshire part of the National Park. This includes the first agro-forestry scheme in the Peak District.

- 3.5.12 Derbyshire Wildlife Trust is working with City of Trees to deliver a similar programme of small woodland creation in Derbyshire, in and out of the National Park.
- 3.5.13 Peakland Environmental Farmers is a group of about 70 farmers in the Dark and South-West Peak co-ordinated by the Game & Conservation Wildlife Trust who are looking at the opportunities for attracting green finance to support the delivery of public goods. FiPL funding has helped support the group, funding detailed sample baseline ecological surveys, carbon audits and awareness raising events. They are also in receipt of funding from the National Heritage Lottery Fund.
- 3.5.14 Other farmer groups also support delivery for landscape and nature recovery including the Hope Valley, Bradfield, White Peak, Peak Farmers and Hayfield Groups. The Peak Farmers, Bradfield and Hayfield Groups receive funding from FiPL. The Hope Valley and White Peak Farmer Groups are funded through Defra but have received specific support for development and/or nature/landscape recovery projects through FiPL.

4. Recommendations

1. **To note progress in delivering to the Peak District National Park Management Plan 2023-28 and Authority Plan landscape and nature recovery aim and targets.**

5. Corporate Implications

a. Legal

Pursuant to section 65(5) of the Environment Act 1995, the Authority has power to do anything which is calculated to facilitate, or is conducive or incidental to the accomplishment of its statutory purposes. These projects and activities fall within the Authority's statutory purposes. Pursuant to sections 5 and 11A of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949, the Authority must deliver to the statutory purposes and statutory duty, respectively, when carrying out its work. Monitoring the Authority's progress against the aims and objectives set out in the National Park Management Plan will enable appropriate scrutiny and safeguard legal compliance.

b. Financial

Activities in the early years of the Authority Plan and National Park Management Plan 2023-28 had funding and resources identified to deliver them. However, the recent organisational change, the introduction of vacancy control and the 2025/26 budget reduction is impacting capacity. Once the three-year Defra settlement is known a further review of capacity and activities is likely to be needed.

c. National Park Management Plan and Authority Plan

The activities described in this report contribute to a number of our policies and legal obligations:

- The 30 by 30 target through which the Government has agreed to conserve (protect) 30% of land by 2030.
- All seven of the [special qualities](#), Aim One [Climate Change](#), Aim Two [Landscape and Nature Recovery](#), Aim Three Welcoming Place, Aim Four [Thriving Communities](#) including many of the objectives with their targets and headline delivery of the National Park Management Plan particularly for Aims One and Two; and the [Authority Plan](#) Aims One, Two, Three and Four actions.

- The Landscape Strategy 2023 was approved by Members at the Authority meeting in December 2022. It describes what is special about the Peak District landscapes, sets out the issues affecting the landscape and provides management guidelines to address the issues, conserve and enhance the landscape (minute reference 99/22).
- The Peak District Nature Recovery Plan (PDNRP) was developed with constituent Local Authorities and key partners and was [approved by Members in April 2024](#). It has been used to contribute to the six emerging statutory county-based Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRSSs) being developed by County Councils/ Combined Authorities. Input into the LNRSSs has been prioritised above the development of the PDNRP Delivery Plan, so this will need to be progressed in 2025/26, but work on a 'guidance map' and visioning have begun. Once completed the PDNRP will sit as part of the NPMP and the revised Local Plan.

d. Risk Management

The main risk of the Authority being unable to deliver the landscape and nature recovery aim is the resource challenge of both the Authority in terms of reducing revenue budget, key partners budgets and the wider economy. In addition, the various announcements from Government regarding inheritance tax allowances for land-based businesses and ELM scheme detail delays and closures have dented confidence in the future direction of travel. Whilst there is some progress in terms of private/green finance this is still uncertain and for now largely outside the reach of upland family farms. Overall there is now a higher risk that farmers and land managers may continue or return to a greater focus on food production rather than on nature recovery, adaptation and mitigation of climate change. Whilst these risks continue to be mitigated by focusing on the priority aims and objectives in the Authority Plan, FiPL delivery and the development of Morridge Hill Country Landscape Recovery project they are not wholly within the control of the Authority.

e. Net Zero

Many of the activities being delivered for landscape and nature recovery also contribute to the Authority's role in climate change. The work with farmers, land managers and owners supports the conservation and enhancement of moorland, woodland and trees, species rich grassland, regenerative farming techniques e.g. herbal leys, rotational grazing, water corridors. The use of both national and private sector funding are involved. There is growing interest in regenerative farming. FiPL has funded a [Pasture for Life](#) project to deliver 4 events and 4 workshops across the Peak District seeking to increase awareness of the benefits both to the farm business and the environment of rotational or paddock grazing without any inputs.

f. Sustainability

Our work on landscape and nature recovery directly improves the sustainability of the National Park as a place.

g. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

There are no direct implications for equalities in the activities contained within this report. Indirectly, responding to landscape and nature recovery could have a positive impact on the nine protected characteristics by providing a more resilient environment.

6. Background papers (not previously published)

None.

7. Appendices

Appendix 1 - Nature Recovery Update.

Appendix 2 - Farming in Protected Landscapes Case Studies 2024.

Appendix 3 – Morridge Hill Country Landscape Recovery Project Update.

Appendix 4 – Peak District EIA Advisory Note.

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