



Landscape, conservation and nature recovery



Headlines

Our understanding of landscapes, conservation and nature recovery is changing

“There is much debate, and not enough data to say for certain, whether the state of nature in national landscapes is better, or no better, or even worse than it is elsewhere. While it is good news that we have retained places of great natural beauty, sometimes alive with wild species . . . what can be agreed is that what we currently have is not good enough.”

Glover Report



What has worked well

Ambitions for landscape have largely been achieved. The vast majority of new build development is within or on the edge of settlements. In open countryside, re-use of existing buildings is the norm. The ‘natural zone’ retains its wilder, open character.

However some development that is harmful to landscape does take place. In the open countryside new-build dwellings, agricultural barns and non-land management businesses have been given planning permission ‘contrary to policy’ (or may be permitted development in the case of agricultural buildings.) There are ‘higher than anticipated’ levels of development in the natural zone and it is not clear that this contributes to conservation and enhancement.

We do not currently have enough evidence to judge the cumulative impact on landscape character of all development – whether according to policy or not. The current landscape review or other research will need to address this.



What has not worked so well

State of Nature report 2019

“Our statistics demonstrate that the abundance and distribution of the UK’s species has, on average, declined since 1970 and many metrics suggest this decline has continued in the most recent decade. There has been no let-up in the net loss of nature in the UK. Prior to 1970, the UK’s wildlife had already been depleted by centuries of persecution, pollution, habitat loss and degradation.”

State of the Park Report 2019: Biodiversity

“The data that is available indicates that the PDNP has not been immune to . . . biodiversity losses (observed at a national scale).”

Planning policies have had a neutral to negative effect on biodiversity. Development itself is not leading to the loss of important sites and where necessary policies support land management for landscape-scale nature-recovery projects.

Intensive agriculture is the prime driver for biodiversity loss so development of farm businesses does not always or not often lead to conservation and enhancement of special qualities.



What are the big issues for the Plan review?

- The catastrophic loss of biodiversity in the UK – to which the Peak District is not immune despite some localized success – and the commitment to zero carbon present a clear challenge for the next local plan.
- The new Environmental Land Management Scheme incentivizes transformational landscape-scale projects.
- The Committee on Climate Change is calling for 22% of land to be taken out of agricultural production.
- The National Planning Policy Framework and The Environment Bill both describe an enhanced role for the planning system in nature recovery, via nature recovery strategies, spatially mapped nature recovery areas and biodiversity net gain.
- The Glover Report urges on national park authorities ‘a renewed mission to recover and enhance nature’ and for national parks to be the ‘backbone of nature recovery networks’.

How can planning policy in the Peak District play its part in this?