

The White Peak Partnership

Steering Group meeting

13:45 – 16:00 Tuesday 1 December 2020 via Lifesize

Minutes

Introductions & apologies

Attendees

Andrew Critchlow (AC) – National Farmers Union (NFU) – Chair

Sarah Bird (SB) – Secretariat

Mark Haslam (MH) – Environment Agency (EA)

Suzanne Fletcher (SLF) – Peak District National Park Authority (PDNPA) – Part

Rebekah Newman (RN) – PDNPA

Tim Allen (TA) – Historic England (HE)

Jon Stewart (JS) – National Trust (NT)

Neil Rudge (NR) – Natural England (NE)

Dan Abrahams (DA) – NE

Ben Rodgers (BR) – NE

Apologies

Dave Savage (DS) – Derbyshire Wildlife Trust (DWT)

Minutes from the last meeting

Minutes from the last meeting accepted as true. Actions from the last meeting that are not covered elsewhere have been completed.

Update Defra ELMs – White Peak Test final report & phase two

The White Peak Test has engaged 72 farmers and land managers from 62 holdings, representing approximately 6% of White Peak holdings and influencing over 6,500ha or 12% of the White Peak. Done through three workshops and 23 1:1s. Final workshop done online, including farmer training for which got a lot of positive feedback.

All participants except two have livestock enterprises. There is high dependency on national funding, four out of five are dependent on BPS, 50% CS/ES as well.

Two themes to answer questions on: spatial prioritisation and land management plans.

Unanimous support for spatial prioritisation but with the presumption that the scheme will be run more locally, with local decision makers and advice. Will be recommending that the NCA is one of the mechanisms used to set and agree local priorities.

Three main functions of land management plans have been identified: to construct the offer of public goods delivery, to form the basis of an agreement or contract, and to demonstrate delivery and progress. Each function will require different information and data, but the underlying principle is that participants want their land management plan to be map-based, ideally with the ability to have a printed version. Also suggesting NCA is a good framework for land management plans, particularly in linking to priorities and clearly stating the relevant public goods that could be delivered.

All participants said advice at some point, when considering whether to enter a scheme or once they have entered, is essential. The role of advisers and skills they would need would be wide-ranging and variable, but key is the role in collaboration. All participants said they would need an adviser or facilitator to be able to collaborate.

Budget ready reckoner has been tested with 12 participants. Half found that ELM at the assumed rates would decrease their gross margin, particularly those that are profitable without national support, most of those being dairy (both traditional and intensive). Only two found that increasing public goods delivery through ELM would be sufficient to make up their BPS payment, which is significant considering the high dependency.

Most had not considered carbon before, most had not done any carbon auditing before. Most found it useful for initiating thinking and increasing their understanding, helping to think wider than just tree planting as a tool to store carbon.

Other issues raised have been the lack of access to IT and technology, or a lack of IT and technology skills; tenancies, particularly short-term tenancies; conflicts between public access and farmers or farming, and the request for an educational element of ELM. There has been a lot of interest in expanding tree cover, and in exploring the potential of silvopasture, which links in with some of the work in the practical field trials.

Key points have been that:

- participants have appreciated the opportunity to input and be part of the co-design, but have struggled at times to engage with the 'blank page',
- it has been useful to bring together farmers and land managers that do not normally interact to share differences in opinion and offer alternative thinking,
- farmers and land managers are feeling huge public pressure from the carbon agenda, particularly the pressure to plant trees.

Defra have agreed that the Test can move to phase two in the Dark Peak and South West Peak. The change request is with Defra, hoping for decision soon. Phase two will be a more virtual model considering Covid restrictions are likely to still be in place. The PDNPA budget situation has meant that more SB time and adviser time for 1:1s and practical trials has had to be included. Online workshops, two in each NCA plus 1:1s for hard to reach. Deep dive Land Management Plans, taking learnings from White Peak phase and influence from other tests. Updating the ready reckoners, including funding from EA for carbon ready reckoner with a SWP additional tab for soil health and soil carbon. Hoping to use what we've done in WP and practical trials. Would have liked to have done visits to the practical field trials, but hopefully can look to do this next year.

JS – timescales? Only put in change request few weeks ago. Need ready reckoners done before workshops. Workshops all done before March, 1:1s starting April, done by August.

Will need Eols, will do breakdown in farm type and farmer numbers.

Perhaps national pilot for component two or three. Feasibility study for greater landscape scale delivery.

White Peak practical field trials – first year findings

The Group received the summary of the first year findings before the meeting. The Group received a presentation from BR.

Partnership between NE, PDNPA, NT and six farmers. Addressing habitat fragmentation. Three interventions;

1. Structurally diverse grasslands on high productivity soils strategically placed or along silage margins. Conservation-led approach.
2. Herbal leys. Scatter to act as stepping stones, but also value for farm business. Farming-led approach.

Costs and benefits of glyphosate, methods for establishment, introducing structural diversity, benefits of species varieties, and how to incorporate herbal leys into intensive grassland systems.

Applied the Lawton principles:

Better – High Fields Farm NT 80ha. CS higher tier agreement. Aim to use range of methods to enhance structural diversity without detracting from existing botanical value. Small herd of hardy cattle ranging across block of land to mimic naturalistic grazing. 30 acres green hay to former silage fields.

Bigger – ryegrass silage fields P & K high 2 levels. Targeted locations, structurally diverse pasture, scatter of wildflowers, thin scatter of scrub and small tree species. Split fields into different establishment techniques. Native species slow to come up. Heavy rain impacted on areas that had been ploughed. By June, good cover of native grass and herb species. Can get equally good establishment using spray and overseed technique – less carbon release. Cattle very settled. Now in tussocky state going into winter.

Silage margins: three farms around silage fields. Spraying into short sward and overseeding had better take of herb species. Ploughed and drilled had dock issues. All cut with adjacent silage crop. All developed tussocky structure going into winter.

Stepping stones – herbal leys. Very few in Peak District, none under CS option, put down to eligibility criteria. There is significant interest in herbal leys. Five herbal leys across farms. Aim to get a scatter

across plateau, integrate into farming systems. Flowering across the plateau at landscape scale. Farm one: first cut July for silage, second cut later in the year, then grazed. Farm two: cut late in mid July, rapid regrowth particularly of clovers, stimulated flowering. Pleased with performance and number of bales. Already put in another fields at own expense. Farm three: no glyphosate, patchy early establishment, rabbit damage to ribwort plantain. Ploughing brought up spear thistle seeds. Very good establishment. Dairy cows very settled. Lessons learned from weed control. Farm four: good establishment. Good first cut, good number of bales, good regrowth. Lots of red clover flowering before second cut, left longer for long period of flowering. Farm five: spring sown. Establishment with comb harrowing or power harrowing into glyphosate sward as good as traditional establishment.

Herbal leys are popular, everyone very pleased. Some putting in additional areas or planning on doing so. Learned lessons on weed control and minimal cultivations. Would like to see 10-20% uptake across productive plateau, less prescriptive with approach. Could get considerable uptake. High probability that would end up with good variation in flowering across the plateau.

SLF – margins? Prefer whole field options? RN – This year not representative, to get establishment of flowers farmers were encouraged to cut. Will be a harder sell than herbal leys. Leaving a margin could be something that all farmers do as standard. Get farmers out visiting the trials to show benefits.

JS – monitoring? RN – baseline monitoring of soils and invertebrate monitoring for each year.

JS – how long will a herbal ley last?

JS – Why haven't more people taken it up? AC – techniques and cultivars have developed recently that apply to uplands, and benefits message has spread. BR – interest is there, but seed mixes are expensive and high risk. Trials have assessed the risk, removed a lot of the risk by paying.

TA – tabulate field margins against hectarage of fields. Relationship between scheme payment and level of payment that would make that up. RN – haven't but could do it.

Action: SB to share full report.

Action: All to share findings with national contacts to promote.

Action: BR and RN look to do a webinar for NFU, NT, Defra, policy etc. involving trials farmers.

White Peak nature recovery network – phase one Wye Valley

The Group received a short introduction from DA.

Grew from conversation DWT instigated several months ago, Wye Valley taking a more holistic view. Large contingent of land owned by conservation organisations. Half SSSI land owned by organisations: NE, WT, Plantlife, PDNPA, NT. Work together more coherently along the valley. Discussion about the wider landscape.

Need farmers involved, engaged and interested in nature recovery. Five trials farmers are in the Wye Valley. Next step in nature recovery in WP is to see what we can do in Wye Valley as initial focus. Programme of works and different engagement with wide range of different stakeholders. Defra will probably release new funding for facilitation fund groups in new year. Developing bid for wider Wye Valley. Probably January, short application window. FF would fund PDNPA time, engagement activities, encouraging collaboration, build on what's been done in WP trials. Bring more farmers in to find out about margins and herbal leys. Nature recovery focussed, but could investigate other public goods. Most interventions have other public goods benefits. Opportunity mapping highlights this area. Several other farmers have expressed an interest in 'new' trials. Opportunity to expand to north and south. Opportunity to talk to farmers about transition to ELM, what nature recovery means, public goods, raises profile of WP. Good way to engage with Defra. Also farmers involved in WP Test. Minimum of four farmers, 2,000ha, holdings neighbouring or almost – should be ok with eligibility. Managed jointly NE/ PDNPA. Enhancing engagement activities. Lots of HLS agreements and CS agreements, but losing agreements quicker than take up. WP upland in altitude but not character.

SB – active CSF, priority for the Derwent catchment partnership, Diffuse Water Pollution Plan. Good lead in to potential ELM pilot. Also good to show collaboration, to have that collaborative element in potential pilot.

AC – talk to existing FF groups. Make sure other activities do not affect, farmer-led. Also don't overcommit.

JS – is this the right place? Consensus that it is.

Nature Recovery Networks & Local Nature Recovery Strategies

SLF and NR will arrange meeting about NRN.

PDNPA involved in the Greater Manchester LNRS Pilot. SLF is lead. Still see value in bringing together a strategy for the Peak District, perhaps coordinated by the LNP.

Support for a vision for the NP/ PD.

Scale will be tested in the LNRS pilots.

Only one NRN for England, LNRSs should join up to deliver the NRN.

Production is statutory duty, but implementation isn't.

JS – how will it show actual nature recovery? Needs to be different to what we've been doing already.

Partner and project updates

NE – LIFE in the Ravines Project. Appointed project manager – Becky Plunkett. Will be in post after Christmas, will be convening a meeting of the partners. Work to put project team, governance and finance in place.

Bob Marsden will be CFS Officer for Dove and Wye.

NT – Restructured WEG bid on river Dove. WP lead ranger will be Ian Clemmett.

HE – Historic environment mentioned in Agriculture Act. New FC liaison. Consultation on National Park Local Plan review.

PDNPA – Landscape Strategy review, has led to a Wooded Landscapes Plan, currently out for consultation with key stakeholders. Will be key document for LNRSs, ELM spatial prioritisation etc.

PDNPA currently going through a restructure in response to Defra budgets and Covid impacts. Proposal is for removal of Director layer, reduction in the number of Heads of Service. Report goes to Members 4th December for them to then make a decision. There will also be functional savings, including a reduction in the National Park Grant Scheme, so cannot offer funding for new agreements in WP, and impacts on Farm Adviser capacity.

Agricultural Transition Plan and mention of farming in protected landscapes. Delivery will be by NPs and AONBs but money is for farmers and land managers. Hoping to have more detail in the new year.

EA – no update.

NFU – ag bill, now ag act. Food standards huge win, 1 million signatures. Now working on Agricultural Transition Plan and spin offs, problem is lack of detail including no financial detail.

Funding

No updates. Carry forward to next meeting.

Newsletter - final

Received article from DS.

Action: DA to send LIFE in the Ravines article to SB by 11/12/2020.

Aim to send out newsletter by Christmas.

Farm adviser training

On hold until 2021. Proposed to be in spring, format and actual timing will be dependent on Covid updates.

Date, location & chair of next meeting – (Chair in order: DWT, EA, HE, NE, NFU, NT, PDNPA)

Next Steering Group meeting 09:45-12:00 10 March 2021. Chair NT. Via WebEx.

Any other business

None.