VISION

A limestone landscape revitalised...

Working with nature, people have revitalised the White Peak enhancing its unique natural and cultural heritage.

Farming, business and communities work in harmony for a landscape that is healthy, fit for the future and for all to enjoy responsibly.

The networks of special habitats, wildlife and access are enhanced, enlarged and linked up, providing vital connected corridors across the landscape.

Links to the past and layers of landscape above and below ground are valued and conserved.

Sustainable land management is an integral part of this limestone landscape producing high quality food and delivering a full range of public goods including clean water.

A White Peak Partnership and 25 year vision - why now?

The White Peak is a special landscape with a wide range of people working to care for and protect it. Yet it's habitats are some of the most fragmented within an English national park[1]. The rich natural and cultural heritage of the White Peak is at risk from further changes in agriculture and land management, increasing recreational pressure and climate change.

Uncertainty around future policies and support systems is leading farmers to consider different options for a sustainable and resilient farm business. Land in agri-environment schemes in the White Peak fell from 80% in 2015 to 50% in 2017. It is unclear how Brexit will impact future land management, however, clear goals have been set out in the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan[2].

People are increasingly aware that landscape is more than just the view; it provides a wide range of essential public goods. Now is the crucial opportunity for those who live, work in and visit the White Peak to work in partnership, not just to meet individual objectives but to achieve the wider common vision.

Background to the Vision

The White Peak[3] is an upland area defined by its underlying limestone geology, providing distinctive grey and white stone and contrasting sharply with surrounding areas. The landscape is made up of undulating plateau incised by both grassy and wooded dales, most with seasonal waters[4].

There is a rich human history in the White Peak, with centuries of farming and industry creating a higher density of settlements compared to the rest of the Peak District. Characteristic dry stone walls, farmsteads, scattered field barns, lead rakes, dew ponds and ridge and furrow tell the story of how people have interacted with this limestone landscape for generations. The White Peak has an impressive 217 scheduled monuments, 803 listed buildings, 46 conservation areas and over 6,300 non-designated heritage assets[5]. There is still more to be discovered, with many opportunities for people to better understand and support these cultural treasures.

Taddington ©PDNPA

The White Peak's special habitats have been shaped by this cultural heritage, as well as the underlying topography. Remnant species-rich grasslands cover only 5% of the White Peak, mostly on steeper slopes where agricultural improvement has been impractical. Woodlands are mainly in the dales, with small plantations, shelterbelts and individual trees iconic to the plateau landscape. All the Peak District's internationally important upland ashwoods are in the White Peak, collectively forming the largest extent of ravine woods in Britain. Ash Dieback will likely have significant negative impacts, but also offers opportunities for long-term management including species diversification.

Only 6% of the White Peak is designated[6] for wildlife, compared to 45% of the Dark Peak. These diverse and special habitats are often small, linear, fragmented and in variable condition. Lawton's[7] principles of *'bigger, better, joined up and more'* are particularly relevant, as this would allow habitats and species to be more resilient.

The White Peak's deep gorges are nationally important 'cool spots' potentially able to weather the impacts of climate change for longer[8]. However, some species which are at their northern or southern limits are still vulnerable. Species-rich grasslands store and sequester more carbon[9] than any other grassland type, offering significant carbon management potential.


Monsal Dale and Thor's Cave ©PDNPA

A further 3% of the White Peak is designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest for Earth Heritage, with a network of caves, caverns and disused quarries offering opportunities for wildlife, recreation and education. Historic and current mineral workings are common, and leave their own unique cultural and ecological legacies. There are still around 30 active quarries in the White Peak, which can provide increased understanding of the unique geology of the area and valuable wildlife habitats for the future.

Of the main rivers[10], only two are in good condition[11]. The remaining 12 are moderate or poor. The underlying fissured limestone of the White Peak creates a special water environment which is sensitive to pollution. Restoring the natural function of water corridors, including Natural Flood Management, along with tackling invasive non-native species, could benefit wildlife, reduce pollution, enhance recreational and educational opportunities and contribute to flood alleviation.

Around 89%[12] of the White Peak is a farmed landscape and 99% of this is grassland, predominantly used to support livestock, with more intensively managed dairy farms on the plateau. There is a wide diversity of farm holding size: 143 are larger than 100 hectares and cover 47% of the White Peak, with an estimated 900 being less than 100 hectares[13]. 85% of the White Peak is classed as Severely Disadvantaged, with the plateau land rising to over 400 metres above sea level. As in much of the UK, the plateau grassland is increasingly intensively managed to grow productive ryegrass for grazing and silage, although small areas of arable crops are now also reappearing in the landscape.

Land is predominantly privately owned and occupied, with only 6% owned by public or conservation organisations. Farm diversification is widespread as farm businesses have responded to government and market forces. The White Peak landscape is a major contributor to the Peak District's worth to the regional economy (assessed as £135 million in 2008).


©PDNPA

There is a strong network of rights of way and trails, many taking advantage of ancient roads and disused railway lines. The steep-sided dales offer havens of tranquillity. An evolving network of access with better links to open access land and existing rights of way will provide opportunities for a more accessible countryside and responsible visiting, with almost unrivalled potential to increase understanding of the public goods delivered by the White Peak.

[1] *Appleton et al. 2015* Habitat Fragmentation Theme Plan: Developing a strategic approach for Natura 2000 sites *Natural England*

[2] A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment *HM Government 2018*

[3] National Character Area profile: 52. White Peak *Natural England 2014* http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/6364771410509824

[4] Landscape Strategy and European Landscape Conservation Action Plan *Peak District National Park Authority 2009*

[5] Figures for the Peak District National Park part of the White Peak

[6] Site of Special Scientific Interest, Special Area of Conservation, Special Protection Area or National Nature Reserve from State of Nature in the Peak District *Penny Anderson of behalf of the Local Nature Partnership 2016*

[7] Lawton, J.H., Brotherton, P.N.M., Brown, V.K., Elphick, C., Fitter, A.H., Forshaw, J., Haddow, R.W., Holborne, S., Leafe, R.N., Mace, G.M., Southgate, M.P., Sutherland, W.J., Tew, T.E., Varley, J. & Wynne, G.R. (2010) *Making Space for Nature: a review of England's wildlife sites and ecological network*. Report to Defra.

[8] *Suggitt et al 2014* Climate change refugia for flora and fauna of England *Natural England Commissioned Reports Number 162*

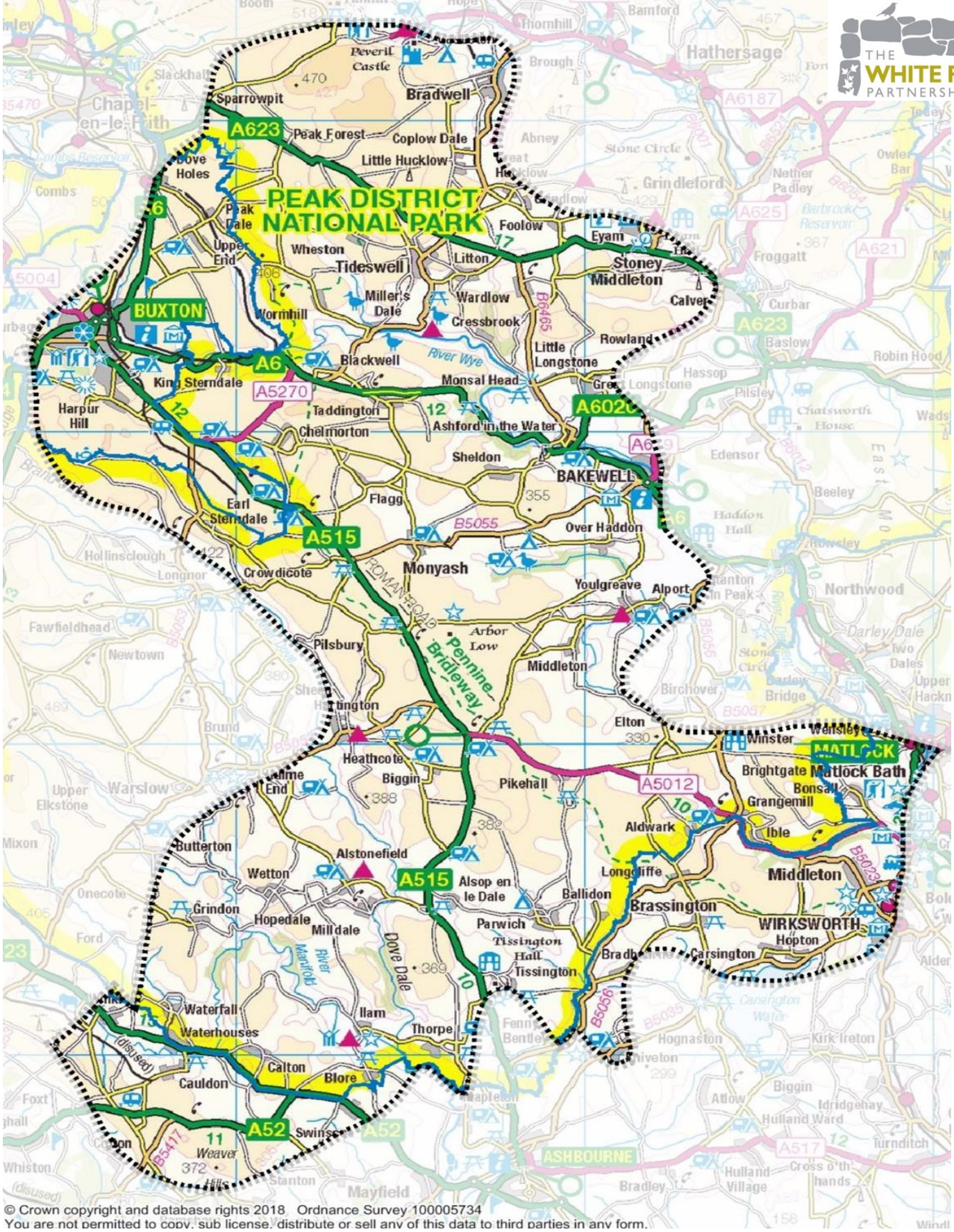
[9] Natural England NERR043 Carbon Storage by Habitat: Review if the evidence of the impacts of management decisions and condition of carbon stores and sources *2010*

[10] Including tributaries

[11] As defined by EU Water Framework Directive

[12] Corine Land Use data 2012 (86% Pastures, 2% Natural Grassland, 1% Moor & Heath, 1% arable, 4% woodland, 4% Mineral Extraction, 2% Discontinuous urban)

[13] Figures from Defra 2016 Commercial Holdings data for the White Peak NCA, estimate includes non–commercial holdings from PDNPA land-holding database.



Key definitions

Sustainable – sustainability is most often defined as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs. It has three main pillars: economic, environmental and social.

Sustainable land management – sustainable land management is the use of land to meet changing human needs (agriculture, forestry, conservation), while ensuring long-term socioeconomic and ecological functions of the land.
http://www.ciesin.org/lw-kmn/slm/slm.html

Public goods – the goods and services provided by the function of the land which benefit the general public. For example carbon sequestration and storage and flood alleviation.

High quality food – food based on quality and provenance, where quality is underpinned by the right environmental regulation and reinforced by animal welfare standards.