

Date: 29 May 2007

Report: DALES WOODLAND STRATEGY

Purpose of the report

1. To adopt formally the revised Dales Woodland Strategy.

Strategic Planning Framework

2. The information and recommendation(s) contained in this report are consistent with the Authority's statutory purposes and its approved strategic planning framework:

National Park Management Plan objectives

L1 Maintain and enhance the quality and distinctive character of the Yorkshire Dales landscape.

NC4 Support farmers and landowners to increase the area of Local Biodiversity Action Plan priority habitats by 7% by 2011 including creating 450ha of upland ash woodland by 2010 (as part of increasing the overall coverage of native broadleaved woodland to over 5,000ha by 2020)

L10. Support and encourage small-scale renewable energy developments, such as local hydro-electric generation, small scale wind turbines, and wood-fuelled heating systems linked to managed woodland, that meet local needs and do not adversely affect the distinctive character of the Yorkshire Dales landscape.

Best Value Performance Plan 2007/08

Adopt and publish the revised Dales Woodland Strategy

Background

3. The first Dales Woodland Strategy was published in 1994 and was endorsed by the National Park Authority and the Dales Woodland Forum. The Strategy is used to guide the woodland work of the Authority and the members of the Forum. It is reviewed every 5 years by the Forum.
4. The Forum draws its membership from a wide range of organisations and individuals. All of the members have an interest in the woodlands within the National Park and they all support the Dales Woodland Strategy. The Forum meets approximately 3 times a year and discusses issues relevant to trees and woodlands issues within the National Park.

5. The Authority is represented on the Forum by the Natural Environment Champion who is presently Deborah Millward.
6. A draft strategy was approved in principle by the Forum in September 2006. However, it was agreed to delay its adoption pending completion of the National Park Management Plan (to ensure there were no last minute amendments to the woodland objectives). The objectives of the Strategy exactly match those in the National Park Management Plan, and it is now brought to members for endorsement (see **Annex**).
7. The Dales Woodland Strategy 2007–2012 reconfirms the objectives to protect and enhance all semi-natural woodland, including scrub, to restore all ancient replanted woodland to a semi-natural state and to increase the overall coverage of semi-natural and mixed woodland by 2000 hectares, by the year 2020.
8. In the past year, the creation of new native woodland has been achieved using funding called 'Countdown 2010' from English Nature (now subsumed into Natural England). This funding, along with grants from the Forestry Commission, Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust and, crucially, the Authority, has meant that about 80 hectares of new woodland was funded in and around the National Park during 2006/7.
9. If we are to meet the long-standing objective of planting 2,000 hectares of new woodland in the National Park by 2020, then approximately 90 hectares need to be planted each year. In order to achieve this, new funding, in addition to that provided by the Authority, needs to be identified. We will be working with partners, notably the Forestry Commission, Natural England and the Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust in order to identify and draw down new funding streams.

RECOMMENDATION

10. That the Authority adopts the revised Dales Woodland Strategy 2007-2012

Geoff Garrett
Trees and Woodlands Officer

15 May 2007

DALES WOODLAND STRATEGY – 2007-2012

FORWARD

In 1999 the second revision of the Dales Woodland Strategy had strong links with the Yorkshire Dales National Park Management Plan. In 2007 this third revision of the Dales Woodland Strategy not only continues to maintain links with the new National Park Management Plan (2007 – 2012) but also supports and reflects the Regional Forest Strategies for both Yorkshire and Cumbria. This strategy lays out the Dales Woodland Forum's policy towards the trees and woodlands within the National Park. It will continue to guide and support the National Park Authority and its partners on the use of resources and on applications for external funding in order to achieve the objectives of the strategy.

INTRODUCTION

Deciduous woodland is identified in the National Park Management Plan as being one of the special qualities of the Yorkshire Dales National Park:

“Woodland is a scarce yet important component of the landscape, and of its mosaic of habitats. Areas of woodland are generally small, representing remnants of former more extensive broadleaved woodland or later plantings. They are crucial to scenic beauty and contribute to the different character of each dale. The surviving areas of ancient woodland are of particularly high biodiversity value”

- Yorkshire Dales National Park Management Plan 2007-20012.

The first Dales Woodland Strategy was published in 1994 and was wholeheartedly endorsed by the National Park Authority and the Dales Woodland Forum. Since then the Strategy has been revised once in 1999. This document is the second revision.

The Dales Woodland Strategy forms the framework for action to focus on the local, regional and national importance of the Dales' woodlands. The Dales Woodland Forum has been instrumental in revising the Strategy and continues to help and to guide the National Park Authority with the delivery of the objectives of the strategy.

POLICY CONTEXT

Woodland and national policy

The England Forest Strategy was launched in 1998 and set a new direction for forestry in England by recognising the wide benefits it could offer society. The 'Implementation progress report' of the England Forest Strategy published in 2006, shows clearly that the breadth of understanding of the public benefit that woodlands and trees can deliver to people and the environment has developed significantly. Creating new woodland is now close to the national target of 30,000ha, set in 1998 and the work by partners within the Yorkshire Dales National Park has significantly contributed to achieving this target.

Woodland and regional policy

Two regional forest framework documents cover the National Park. The first, which covers the Yorkshire part of the Park is called 'The Value of trees in our changing region'. The second, called the "Agenda for growth", covers the Cumbria part of the Park. Both were published in 2005. These frameworks bring together national priorities with local aspirations and identifies where a regional approach can add value. Both documents recognise the value of the trees and woodlands within the Yorkshire Dales National Park and support the objectives of this strategy.

Woodland and local policy

The Yorkshire Dales National Park Management Plan reflects the views and the aspirations of the people who live in the National Park as well as those who visit and work there. The Management Plan focuses on

the delivery of National Park purposes – conserving the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the Park and promoting understanding and enjoyment of its special qualities. This Dales Woodland Strategy is closely aligned to the Yorkshire Dales National Park Management Plan and builds on the importance that the Management Plan puts on trees and woodlands.

‘Nature in the Dales’ is the local Biodiversity Action Plan for the Yorkshire Dales National Park. The Plan reflected the aspirations for woodland management and new woodland and continues to support the objectives of the Dales Woodland Strategy.

YORKSHIRE DALES NATIONAL PARK WOODLAND COVER TODAY

The woodland cover within the Yorkshire Dales National Park has recently been re-calculated. In the past, estimates have relied on a combination of surveys undertaken during the early 1990’s. These included woodland that was 2 hectares or more. The National Park has a significant amount of woodland that is below 2 hectares and which contributes to the wooded appearance of the Dales. With the advent of Geographical Information Systems it is now possible to calculate the total woodland area with much more accuracy. Using data digitised from ‘phase I’ surveys, Forestry Commission mapping etc it is estimated that in September 2006 there were 7,827 hectares of woodland, covering about 4.45% of the National Park. This includes small lines of trees, small groups of trees and small areas of scrub but does not include parkland or hedges.

The amount of **ancient semi-natural woodland** is likely to be the same as previously recorded. However, it is almost certain that there are additional areas of woodland that show ancient woodland characteristics. These are recorded as semi natural woodland at present. The amount of ancient semi natural woodland is 1480ha or 0.84% of the National Park.

Conifer plantations occupy much the same land area as previously. The overall area is 3411ha or 1.94%. Extensive work is being undertaken in order to introduce broadleaves into these conifer areas as well as managing them for BAP species e.g. red squirrels.

The area of **Plantation Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS)**, which is non native woodland planted on ancient woodland sites, remains the same at 408ha or 0.23%

The figure for semi-natural, mixed and plantation **broadleaved woodland** has increased considerably up to 1,868ha or 1.06% (previously 987ha or 0.56%)

In the original Dales Woodland Strategy the aim was to double, what was then calculated to be, the area of existing broadleaved woodland. In order to achieve this, an area of 2,000 hectares of woodland would need to be planted throughout the National Park by 2020. Since 1995, approximately 660ha of **new woodland** has been planted. This has been done through a number of mechanisms but was particularly successful when a combination of grants from the Forestry Commission (Challenge Fund), the Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust (Heritage Lottery), the Woodland Trust (legacy), Yorwoods (environmental grants) and English Nature (Wildlife Enhancement Schemes) meant that the vast majority of the costs of the planting could be covered. These grants have been successfully distributed and are no longer available.

Grants that are available at the present time are Forestry Commission (England Woodland Grant Scheme), Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority (New Native Woodland grant) and Environmental Stewardship (Higher Level Scheme). All of this funding is regularly complemented by funding from the Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust which continues to fundraise to support woodland activity within the National Park.

WOODLAND COVER IN THE YORKSHIRE DALES NATIONAL PARK – 2006

<u>Woodland type</u>	<u>Area (hectares)</u>	<u>% of the land cover</u>
Ancient Semi-natural woodland	1480	0.84
Conifer plantations	3411	1.94
PAWS	408	0.23
Broadleaved woodland	1868	1.06
New planting (1995-2006)	660	0.38
Total	7827	4.45

THE STRATEGY

Overall aim

All trees and woodlands are appropriately managed and increased so that they continue to benefit the environmental, economic and social development of the region.

Objectives

The objectives of the Dales Woodland Strategy are those that are set out in the National Park Management Plan 2007-12, namely that, by 2020:

- 1. All semi-natural woodland, including scrub, is protected and enhanced;**
- 2. All ancient replanted woodland is restored to a semi-natural state;**
- 3. The overall coverage of semi-natural and mixed woodland is increased to over 5,000 ha.**

Principles

In order to achieve these objectives the Authority and its partners will be guided by the following principles;

Woodland for Environmental Benefit

- a) The creation of semi-natural and plantation broadleaved woodland are promoted as appropriate woodland types for biodiversity and landscape enhancement and management of trees and woodlands is in sympathy with the individual dale landscape.
- b) Individual trees and groups of trees that have aesthetic and landscape value are protected, managed and restored.

Woodland for Economic Benefit

- a) Assist landowners to create a sustainably managed tree and woodland resource which supports the retention and development of a viable and vibrant forestry sector.
- b) Encourage the future development of an active market, including tourism, recreational and renewable energy opportunities, for both traditional and innovative woodland products that contribute to the economic vitality of the Dales in particular the local production of high quality timber.

Woodland for Society

- a) Create more opportunities within woodlands for recreation, and education activities by promoting and increasing the recognition of the value of trees, woodland and scrub woodland for nature conservation
- b) Archaeological and cultural heritage values of woodland and those within woodland are protected and promoted where it supports other elements of the strategy.

LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES

In 2002, the Authority commissioned a comprehensive assessment of the landscape character of the Park. The report identified 40 distinct 'landscape character areas' on a dale-by-dale basis (and including separately identified upland character areas). It describes their key characteristics and landscape character and the forces that have shaped the landscape of each dale or geographic area.

This landscape character assessment, in combination with the Local Biodiversity Action Plan (and a forthcoming historic character assessment of the Dales) are used by the Authority and its partners to guide future decision-making, policy and management, including in relation to woodland planting. A copy of the landscape character assessment is available on the Authority's website at www.yorkshiredales.org.uk

The Authority intends to use the landscape character assessment to develop detailed landscape character guidelines covering the whole Park. In the meantime, the following represents the Forum's current general guidance on landscape and tree planting.

Three Peaks and Dales Heartland (including Malhamdale, Ribblesdale, Kingsdale and Chapel-le-Dale)

This area of classic karst limestone and rolling grass moorland has a series of features unique to Britain such as limestone pavements, cliffs and scars, cave systems and underground rivers. These features blend into a wide, sweeping landscape of pasture and meadow, in which the isolated Millstone Grit caps of the Three Peaks are dramatic landmarks. There are few woods and trees but the system of stone walls is extensive. This area contains a high proportion of all the protected nature conservation sites within the National Park.

On the Great Scar Limestone the thin, stony soils preclude much planting but even where suitable soils occur, large scale planting would severely detract from the scenic and scientific value of the landscape.

Any tree planting within the area should be small scale using native and locally traditional broadleaved species. There may be some scope for a greater variety of planting in Ribblesdale south of Horton-in-Ribblesdale and in south Malhamdale.

Southern Fringe

This relatively low lying area faces away from the core of the Park and is dominated by an intricate pattern of undulating hills. The landscape is small in scale and is more diverse in character than many other parts of the National Park. The zone has small areas of traditional parkland, a mixture of walls and hedges and a patchwork of woods and fields, none of which are typical of the Dales as a whole.

Any new planting should reflect local landforms and drainage patterns and scale and form will be important considerations, with emphasis on irregular size and shapes. More broadleaved woodland and mixed woodland could be accommodated within this zone.

Eastern Moors

The acid rock of this area produces moorland vegetation dominated by heather and bracken. Woodlands, including the best oak woods in the national Park, cover many of the lower slopes. The soils on Millstone grit are also suitable for growing non-native softwoods. Commercial plantations already dominate the valley sides of Lower Wharfedale and are features of the countryside around Flasby.

Few areas occur where commercial plantations are likely to be acceptable however where they might be accommodated they should be sited with care. Where new conifer plantations are acceptable for redesign purposes they should include mixed conifers. Special considerations will be given to the potential loss of heather moorland habitat and the effect that this would have on the bird populations. Where new plantations are acceptable, great care will still be needed in siting and design to minimise the impact of the proposal. Where sites and soils allow, native broadleaved species should be used.

The moorlands themselves are important water catchments, which preclude large scale planting. However there is considerable scope for new planting on the moorland fringes in lower Wharfedale. Some conifer and

mixed woodlands could be accommodated in this area to reinforce existing patterns and form will be more important than scale or type. Care should be taken to ensure that the historic landscape is maintained or enhanced by new planting.

Mid-Wharfedale

The valleys of Wharfedale and Littondale are dominated by limestone scars and screes on the upper valley sides and also by their rivers. Flat meadows cover the valley floors, and permanent pasture occupies much of the valley sides. Hanging woods are characteristic features of these dales which may overlie earlier land use. These semi-natural woods are important.

There is considerable scope for new planting and natural regeneration to consolidate and link the sparse, rather fragmented broadleaved woods on the valley sides. Any planting should reflect the existing native woodland structure. This would help safeguard the long-term future of these important woodlands.

Central and Northern Watershed

Millstone Grit sweeps across the Park from east to west, separating Wensleydale from Wharfedale, and enclosing the Northern and Cumbria Dales. This central spine already contains the largest single aged conifer plantation in the National Park at Greenfield in Langstrothdale. Further north, Widdale, Grisedale and Cotterdale also contain large, young conifer plantations.

The overall landscape is of broad, sweeping fells and steep-sided valleys. This is probably the most remote and least visited part of the National Park. Nevertheless this sweeping, open landscape is highly valued in its own right and contains many valuable wildlife habitats.

There may be considerable opportunity however for new planting of broadleaved trees to emphasise natural landscape features such as scars and gill sides and to reinforce remnant gill woodlands. This sort of planting would also provide habitats for wildlife however large seeded broadleaves should be avoided where red squirrels are under pressure from grey squirrels.

Cumbrian Dales.

Both Dentdale and Garsdale are well wooded valleys with a mixture of broadleaved woods and conifer plantations. Wallside and hedgerow trees are also important in these dales.

Isolated blocks of conifer plantations could be brought into a wider forested setting by appropriate planting and sculpturing. Where this is not feasible or where existing plantations are particularly obtrusive, clear felling without replanting those sites may need to be considered as a last resort. Areas may need to be retained as unplanted in order to maintain a buffer zone to prevent incursions of grey squirrels into priority areas.

Some retention of areas of Norway Spruce and Scots pine, and limited new planting, will be acceptable where red squirrel populations occur however careful consideration must be given to their landscape impact.

New planting should generally be with native broadleaved trees. However plantations using conifers as the main crop may be acceptable in areas of mixed woodlands however large seeded broadleaved trees may need to be avoided because of the risk of attracting grey squirrels into red squirrel territory.

North Western Fells

The small area of the Howgills which lies within the National Park is dramatic and distinctive and is unlike any other part of the Yorkshire Dales. The bare, precipitous slopes and gullies and the rounded profiles of the hills should not be interrupted by blocks of new planting. There may be some parts of the Rawthey Valley and the western edge of the Howgills where new native broadleaved plantations could be planted and small mixed plantations accommodated.

Wensleydale

Wensleydale is the widest of the dales with a series of smaller narrow sided dales on its southern side. The main valley is open and little wooded although the woods on the horizontal scars of the Yordale series and the shelter belts on the drumlins near Hawes are particularly distinctive and should be perpetuated. The smaller side dales are narrow and remote. Those to the east of Hawes have riverside and gill side woods and groups of trees. Further east hedges and small woods are more common.

There is certainly scope for additional planting of mainly broadleaved trees and appropriately designed new mixed plantations.

Northern Dales

Swaledale and Arkengarthdale are valleys dominated by the surrounding sweeping moors. The dales have intricate field patterns and a landscape dominated by stone walls and barns. Good quality agricultural land is limited in the upper dales so existing woods are often found on steep valley and gill sides where grazing is limited. Further down river, near Richmond, the steeper dales sides accommodate more extensive broadleaved woodland.

The main opportunities for further planting in the upper dales would be on the valley sides to link and extend existing areas of broadleaved woodland. New mixed woodland could be accommodated with care but its location should generally reflect existing patterns.

A BRIEF GUIDE TO LANDSCAPE DESIGN

The design of woodland within the landscape can depend upon an appreciation of six key design principles. These are shape, scale, diversity, visual force, unity and 'the spirit of the place'.

Shape

The perception of shape is influenced by the overall proportions, where the viewing position is and the nature of external boundary edges. Diagonal shapes are more likely to produce a satisfactory effect. Lines at right angles to the contour are unlikely to look pleasing because the proportions of the landscape are broadly horizontal however there are areas within the YDNP, such as Bishopdale, where this effect may be part of the landscape. The distinction between natural and geometric shapes is especially significant as witnessed by some areas of conifer planting.

Visual force

Forest, woodland and new native woodland shapes should generally be designed to follow visual forces in landform by rising up in hollows and falling on spurs and ridges to create a well-defined relationship between the two. Occasionally the innovative use of visual force against the landform can create dramatic landscape features.

Scale

The scale of the woodland should reflect the scale of the landscape. In the National Park the scale of landscape is often greater on the upperdale sides and can therefore accommodate larger plantings whereas the scale on the valley floor is smaller and consequently smaller scale woodlands would be more appropriate. In some areas the large scale open areas provides a feeling of remoteness and wildness which may not be enhanced by planting schemes.

Diversity

New native woodlands can introduce landscape diversity into treeless landscapes. Landscape diversity can be linked to ecological diversity but the two are distinct and not necessarily the same. The National Park has large areas where the relative lack of trees are a feature of the landscape such as the Howgills and landscape diversity should not be the driving force for change in these areas.

Unity

Unity is the essential object of landscape design. New woodlands should be designed in relation to the landscape character of the area using shape, visual force and scale so that they unite with the landscape rather than contrast.

'The spirit of the place'

The spirit of the place is often something that is unique to an area after all other design principles have been satisfied. It is an important asset and one which should be conserved and enhanced by good design. Existing features contribute to the sense of place particularly where there is a feeling of wildness and the spirit of the place is easier to conserve than create. The features and qualities that contribute to it should be recognised and incorporated into the designs of individual sites.

Acknowledgement

These landscape design principles have been adapted from the *Forest Landscape Design – Guidelines* published by the Forestry Commission.

THE DALES WOODLAND FORUM

Chair: tbc

Secretary: Geoff Garrett, Trees and Woodlands Officer, YDNPA

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