

Committee: AUDIT & REVIEW

Date: 27 June 2008

Report: LESSONS LEARNT FROM 'DALES WOODLAND RESTORATION'  
PROJECT

### **Purpose of the report**

1. To provide an assessment of the two-year 'Dales Woodland Restoration' project, and to identify lessons learnt from it, which should be taken into account in the development of future projects.

### **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**  
NC4. Support farmers and landowners to increase the area of Local Biodiversity Action Plan priority habitats by 7% by 2011, including:
    - d) 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).
  - **Best Value Performance Plan objectives**  
Ensure a robust and accountable Performance Management Framework is in place and is driving improvement,

### **Background**

3. Reports on lessons learnt from up to four major projects each year come to the Audit and Review Committee. They should provide members with an opportunity to hear from the officers about what has been achieved, focus on learning from what worked and what didn't, and make recommendations for future project development and management across the Authority.

### **Dales Woodland Restoration project**

4. A full report of the project's achievements and the way in which they were delivered is set out in the **Annex**. A short presentation on the project will also be made at the meeting – to give Members the opportunity to see some of the work carried out.

## **Conclusion**

5. There is little doubt that the Dales Woodland Restoration project has been very successful. The Authority's contribution (£90,000 in cash and £40,000 in kind over two years) was matched by over £500,000 of other funding – creating 136 hectares of new native broadleaved woodland. In addition, the grants provided through the project have helped to support local farmers, landowners and contractors.
6. The project highlighted clearly the benefit of the strong and supportive partnership that has developed between the Authority, the Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust and the Forestry Commission. Achieving the National Park Management Plan objective for woodland creation remains very challenging, and will depend crucially on continuing this partnership, and levering in more funding. The project has highlighted a number of areas that the Authority should consider when working with partners to develop these future woodland creation projects.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

7. That Members note the achievements of the 'Dales Woodland Restoration' project and endorse the recommendations for future projects.

**Gary Smith**  
**Head of Conservation and Policy**

12 June 2008

# LESSONS LEARNT FROM THE 'DALES WOODLAND RESTORATION (COUNTDOWN 2010)' PROJECT

## INTENTION OF THE PROJECT

### WHY WAS THE PROJECT SET UP?

The Authority and its partners (notably the Forestry Commission and Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust) have made a long-term commitment – through the Dales Woodland Forum – to increasing the broadleaf woodland cover within the National Park. The key objective from the National Park Management Plan is to:

- create 450 ha of upland ash woodland by 2010 (as part of the overall coverage of native broadleaved woodland to over 5,000 ha by 2020).

This is a challenging objective and it was apparent that standard Forestry Commission woodland creation grants would not be anything like sufficient to achieve it.

The Authority had indicated to the Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust (the Trust) that funding for woodland creation was one of our priorities for external funding. In 2006, the Trust was successful in submitting a funding bid (at very short notice) to English Nature's (now Natural England's) 'Countdown 2010' grant programme for creating woodlands.

### WHAT WAS THE PROJECT INTENDED TO ACHIEVE?

The project was intended to create 150 ha of woodland within the National Park and its fringes (including parts of the Nidderdale AoNB).

### ORIGINAL TIMESCALE

Two years - 1 April 2006 to 31 March 2008.

### ORIGINAL RESOURCING

The original project budget is set out below

Source	Type	Status	2006/07 £k	2007/08 £k	Total £k
Forestry Commission	Cash	Expected	25	25	50
<b>YDNPA</b>	<b>Cash</b>	<b>Secured</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>16</b>
Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust	Cash	Expected	100	100	200
Landowners	Cash	Expected	68	68	136
Countdown 2010	Cash	Secured	135	135	270
<b>Total</b>			<b>336</b>	<b>336</b>	<b>672</b>

## MEANS OF DELIVERY

The lead organisation for the project was the Trust, who would receive a management fee (£36k per year) from the Countdown 2010 funding. The actual structure for delivering projects on the ground was not specifically defined in the original grant application:

### “DELIVERY METHOD

*The key issue is that we are trying to deliver “public benefit on private land” as 90% of the National Park is privately owned. Experience has shown that the absolute key to success is “hands-on” project officer time; persuading landowners to join in, assisting with project design, quotations, assembling match-funding on behalf of the partnership, project management, tying the owner into long-term binding maintenance agreements and ensuring future monitoring and support. YDMT been acting as an “honest broker” to the partnership for 10 years, co-ordinating the financial and project management, legal and administration – and fundraising from outside sources such as this fund. Partners variously provide the professional advice and guidance, and the match funding*

Partners will be involved in the following ways:

<b>Name of partnership organisation</b>	<b>Involvement of project</b>
YDNPA	Provision of match-funding, preparation of specifications, advice and guidance.
English Nature	Advice and guidance
Forestry Commission	Provision of match funding, advice and guidance.
Yorwoods	Advice and guidance
Defra	Advice and guidance
Dales Woodland Forum	Advice and guidance

## THE REALITY

### ACTUAL ACHIEVEMENTS TO DATE

The project contributed to creating 136ha of woodland over the two year period 2006 to 2008 within the National Park (171ha in total including the Nidderdale area).

### ACTUAL TIMESCALE

The project was started almost immediately in May 2006 and was concluded in March 2008 within the original timescale. This was partly driven by a deadline for claiming grant from Countdown 2010 in March 2008.

## ACTUAL COST

The figures below show the cost of the woodland creation within the National Park only.

Source	Type	2006/07 £	2007/08 £	Total £	Difference from original £
Forestry Commission	Cash	87,230	76,843	164,073	+114,073
<b>YDNPA</b>	<b>Cash</b>	<b>38,837</b>	<b>51,163</b>	<b>90,000</b>	<b>+ 97,000</b>
YDNPA (legacy)			23,000	23,000	+ 23,000
Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust	Cash	55,842	0	55,842	-142,310
Landowners	Cash	68,694	52,505	121,199	-7,181
Countdown 2010	Cash	76,143	112,186	188,329	-58,857
<b>Total</b>		<b>326,746</b>	<b>315,697</b>	<b>642,443</b>	<b>+ 48,628</b>

The total project costs including woodland creation in Nidderdale was £720,628

A number of different influences contributed to the final financial picture, namely:

- The project was far more successful in its applications to the Forestry Commission than was originally expected.
- The amount of exchequer money (FC and CD2010) could not exceed 50% of the project costs in each year. Success of so many grant applications to the FC in 2006/7 had the effect of restricting the amount of funding that could be claimed from CD2010.
- Right at the end of the project, Natural England agreed to relax the 50% rule and therefore the whole of the original Countdown 2010 grant for that year could be claimed. This meant that the project was able to deliver its planting targets without using other non exchequer money ear-marked by the Trust. This money has been carried over to support a further Woodland Restoration Project in 2008/9.
- The project funding analysis is complicated by the funding of projects outside of the NPA.

## ACTUAL COST TO THE AUTHORITY

The Authority contributed £90,000 for the two year project. We also passed on to the Trust a £23,000 legacy that had been left to the Authority with the specific stipulation that it be used for woodland creation.

In addition, a significant amount of Authority officer time went into the project. It is estimated that this equated to around £38,000 (including all on-costs etc).

## ACTUAL MEANS OF DELIVERY

The project delivery mechanism was developed over the course of the project!

The Authority and the Trust agreed early on in the project that — given the very tight time constraints — the project would be delivered wholly by existing members of staff at the two organisations.

The overall project and its finances were managed by the Trust, with the Authority providing:

- expert advice and quality control
- first contact with landowners wishing to create woodlands;
- co-ordinated specialist advice on each potential planting scheme (to check impacts on e.g. archaeology, wildlife, landscape, public access etc);
- drafting of applications to the Forestry Commission for funding through the England Woodland Grant Scheme (eWGS);

After the first six months, when the progress of the project was becoming difficult to monitor. It became apparent that a more structured approach to managing the project was needed. Officers from the Authority, Trust and Forestry Commission subsequently began to meet every two weeks to agree actions, follow up progress, discuss site suitability, and consider priorities as well as discussing progress of the overall scheme. The project became more manageable as a result.

Whilst most of the funding was in place (or relatively predictable) at the start of the project, it was not clear how much money might come from the Forestry Commission's eWGS scheme. This was because eWGS is a competitive scheme. This meant that:

- a) a grant application had to be made to the Forestry Commission for each individual woodland; and,
- b) these applications were in competition with all other applications from across the Yorkshire and Humber region.

In the event, the applications submitted were very successful in getting grants from the Forestry Commission. This was partly because of the quality of the projects but also because (fortunately!) there was very little competition from the rest of Yorkshire and the Humber.

## **SUSTAINING THE PROJECT**

The project itself had a finite life, ending on the 31 March 2008. However, the vast majority of the woodlands created by the project are signed up to the Forestry Commission's eWGS. These agreements last for 10 years, and the Forestry Commission will carry out monitoring to ensure that the planting is successful. The Forestry Commission grants are structured so that the landowner receives a payment in the 5<sup>th</sup> year (2013), which will repay any costs incurred in the previous 4 years. Once the eWGS is concluded in 2018, the woodland owner would be eligible to apply for further management grants from the Forestry Commission or the Authority (grants and circumstances permitting).

In order to sustain the creation of 80 hectares of woodland per year it is necessary to obtain funding to offer landowners, over and above the level presently offered by the Forestry Commission. Learning the lessons from the last two years, a new project is being put together using a variety of funding in order to continue woodland creation.

## LESSONS LEARNED

### WHAT WENT WELL, AND WHY?

Overall, the project was very successful in achieving its intended outcome (new broadleaf woodland), and was delivered on time and within budget.

#### **Countdown 2010 grant bid**

The Trust and Authority have agreed some very clear objectives that they are both working towards. Consequently when the Trust had an opportunity to make an application to the CD2010 within a very tight time scale the Trust already had information about the amount of woodland the Authority wanted to create, as well as the type and extent. As a result there were very few barriers to submitting the application, on time, with supporting evidence (DWS, NPMP).

#### **Woodlands created.**

The project contributed significantly to the objectives set out in the National Park Management Plan and Dales Woodland Strategy by assisting the creation of 138ha of broadleaf woodland within the Park. As a comparison, had the Authority and the Trust simply pooled our own resources, we would have created about 42ha from probably the same amount of Authority officer time.

#### **Partnership working**

The Authority, the Trust and the Forestry Commission have a long history of working together on woodland matters. The Forestry Commission and the Trust strongly support the Dales Woodland Forum. As a result of the project the partnership arrangements between the organisations have strengthened (see below).

#### **Forestry Commission Grant applications**

In the original budget it was estimated that around £50,000 would be secured from the Forestry Commission over the two years. In fact, they contributed over £160,000 to planting just within the National Park. The Authority was responsible for submitting the applications, and all but one were approved. This unprecedented level of success was due to the partnership working of the three main organisations.

#### **Potential future woodlands**

The project has kick-started the creation of new native woodlands. Whilst some schemes identified could not be brought to fruition within the lifetime of the project, it does mean that there is now a list of potential projects that are ready to be taken forward in future years.

### WHAT WENT LESS WELL, AND WHY?

#### **Planning the delivery arrangements**

The timespan from hearing about the existence of Countdown 2010 to the point where the project had to start was very short, several weeks. As a result, there was little time to plan for delivery in any great detail – and a lot was taken on trust between the Authority and the Trust. While the Trust has a lot of experience with running large projects, it had little expert knowledge about woodlands. The Authority was very pleased to be able to offer the level of specialist support needed. However, that did mean that in 2006/07 the original

action plan/appraisal targets for the Authority's Trees and Woodlands Team had to be changed at short notice, with a number of slightly lower priority projects put on hold.

### **Failure to complete some schemes**

A number of schemes could not be completed within the two year project duration. This is because many parcels of land are subject to complicated land management schemes, which need resolving before any sort of woodland creation can be considered.

### **Finding easy wins**

The first year of the project was able to be accomplished fairly easily with some large woodlands created. The second year was more problematic with fewer opportunities by the way of easy wins. More work was required to develop enough smaller schemes to meet the target. Smaller schemes also had less of a chance of successfully applying for eWGS, which is a competitive process.

### **Uncertainty about Forestry Commission grants**

As described above, the eWGS is a competitive grant scheme. This meant that – although very supportive - the Forestry Commission was unable to guarantee any specific level of funding for the project. Unsurprisingly, this created uncertainty about the amount of woodland that could be created (meaning owners could not be given assurances about the funding of their scheme). It also created some difficulties for the financial management of the project. This was because the CD2010 funding, when added to exchequer funding could not total more than 50% of the project costs. This had two effects. First, the balance of funding had to be kept under constant review (because each successful application affected the 50% limit). Second, the success of the FC grant applications meant that not all the CD2010 grant could be claimed in the first year. The Trust were responsible for ensuring that this criteria was met whilst maximising the grant available to applicants.

### **Timing of Forestry Commission grants**

Applications for eWGS have to be submitted by September each year, with decisions in October. In theory, this creates no problem because decisions are taken before the planting season starts (November-March). However, the grant cannot be claimed until the next financial year (i.e. April). This means that successful applicants tend to wait until later in the planting season (February/March) before undertaking planting. Whilst this is perfectly acceptable it does mean that a significant number of schemes are left until the last minute with attendant risks that the planting isn't completed.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE**

The project has identified a number of issues that should be considered as part of the development of future woodland creation projects:

- a) Keep under review the percentage of grant that can be offered to the landowner in order to encourage new applicants. The targets for planting are getting increasingly difficult to achieve as the 'easy' larger schemes are planted. Varying the amount of grant available could help to draw in schemes for woodland creation.
- b) Ensure that the NPA has a list of potential new native woodland planting projects that can be taken forward in any one year – either on an *ad hoc* basis or as part of another externally-funded programme.

- c) Ensure meetings between partners are regular (every 2 weeks), actions are minuted and the date of the next meeting is agreed.
- d) That the Authority should press the Forestry Commission to 'ring-fence' future funding for woodland creation in the Dales to provide more certainty over the level of activity within the Park, and to act as match funding for future 'external funding' bids by the partnership.
- e) A number of the projects should be used as exemplar projects that could be used to show case woodland creation to other landowners in order to encourage new woodland creation.