A distinctive, living, working, cultural landscape that tells the ongoing story of generations of people interacting with their environment

Facts, figures and trends

- The National Park has a very strong identity, shaped by its distinct landscapes, geology, settlements, habitats, history and the people who live and work there. Its sense of place and history are internationally valuable[1].
- Parts of the National Park fall within 5 National Character Areas (NCAs): 'Yorkshire Dales'; 'Howgill Fells'; 'Orton Fells'; 'South Cumbria Low Fells' and 'North Pennines'[2].
- The most recent quantitative national assessment of landscape character[3] showed that between 2015 and 2019, the quality of the landscape in the Yorkshire Dales NCA was 'mainly improving' (the highest category), and the other 3 NCAs were assessed as 'mixed, mainly improving').
- A simplified and updated Landscape Character Assessment was completed early in 2020. It classifies, analyses and describes the characteristics of the 19 distinctive landscapes found within the National Park[4].
- The Landscape Character Assessment identifies four over-arching forces for change in the landscape of the National Park: demographic change; climate change; changing public attitudes; and economic drivers.
- The predominant land use is farming (166,000ha, 76%)[5], with much of the remaining moorland, heath and unenclosed grassland managed as grouse moor. Only around 4% is woodland, of which around a quarter is commercial conifer plantation[6].
- The farmland is enclosed by over 8,000 km of dry-stone walls and about 2,700 km of hedgerows[7], the latter found predominantly in the Cumbrian part of the National Park.
- In 2015, 84% of the National Park was covered by some form of national agri-environment agreement, rewarding farmers and landowners for managing and enhancing the National Park's landscape. That coverage is now 57%[8].
- The geology of the National Park is internationally significant, including some of the best examples of Karst (limestone) features in Europe. Of all limestone pavement found in England, nearly a third can be found in the Yorkshire Dales[1].
- 99% of geological Sites of Special Scientific Interest are in 'favourable condition'[9].
- There are 5 working quarries. Around 1.75 million tonnes of stone is moved by road each year (down from 2.75 million 10 years ago)[10].

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1 Ecosystem service provision in the Yorkshire Dales National Park, D. R. Shaw Consultancy Ltd (2017)
2 Natural England - National Character Area profiles
3 An approach to monitoring changes in landscape and waterscape character in England (2024)
4 Yorkshire Dales Landscape Character Assessment (2020)
5 Annual statistics on the structure of the agricultural industry in National Parks, Defra 2022
6 Forestry Commission (2022)
7 Rural Payments Agency and Natural England (2024)
8 Rural Payments Agency and Natural England (2024)
9 Natural England (2024)
10 YDNPA (2022)

- The National Park was designated as an International Dark Sky Reserve in 2020, in recognition of the exceptional quality of its starry nights and nocturnal environment.[11]
- The most recent estimate was that there were some 4,250 'field barns' (located outside the farmstead) within the National Park[12] - a distinctive element of the landscape. Over 2,000 of these (45%) were assessed as being in 'poor' or 'very bad' condition[13].
- 123 roadside and farmstead barns have been converted into housing since 2018.
- The Historic Environment Record for the National Park contains references and descriptions of over 44,300 historical features. This includes: 2,143 Listed Buildings; 292 Scheduled Monuments; and, 2 Registered Parks and Gardens.
- 5 Grade I or Grade II* listed buildings are on the national 'Heritage at Risk' Register[14]. A further 65 Grade II listed buildings have been locally assessed as being 'at risk'[15]. The total listed buildings 'at risk' (70) is down from 78 in 2018.
- 10 Scheduled Monuments (3.4%) are on the national 'Heritage at Risk' Register[14], with a further 57 (20%) identified as being 'vulnerable'.
- The National Park contains 46 designated Conservation Areas, including the longest (Settle-Carlisle Railway) and the largest ('Swaledale and Arkengarthdale Barns and Walls') in England. 3 Conservation Areas – including both Barns and Walls Conservation Areas are on the 'Heritage at Risk' Register, and are deteriorating.
- In 2013 it was estimated that England's National Parks provided between £4bn and £6bn in gross value added for the national economy, and that many of these economic benefits are underpinned by the environmental quality of their landscapes[16].

Issues and opportunities

Climate change

- What can be done to mitigate the risks of deterioration of historical and archaeological sites as a result of hotter drier conditions in summer; and increased rain in winter?
- How to enable the widespread take-up of renewable energy to meet local needs, cut fuel bills and reduce emissions within a nationally designated landscape?
- The increased intensity and frequency of rainfall and flooding may lead to damage and erosion of important geological and geomorphological features.
- Potential climate impacts on the wider landscape include: trees becoming more prevalent; increased pressure on water supplies with potential demand for increased reservoir storage; and drier summers causing more erosion, subsidence and wildfires.
- What needs to be done to prevent 'sky glow' on the edge of the National Park to help retain the value of the National Park's 'dark skies'

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11 IDA 2020 https://darksky.org/places/yorkshire-dales-national-park-dark-sky-reserve/
12 Field Barns, A Wasting Asset, R White (1988)
13 A condition survey of traditional farm buildings in the Yorkshire Dales National Park 2006 – 2007, Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority (2008)
14 Heritage at Risk, North and East Yorkshire, Historic England (2023)
15 Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority (2022)
16 Valuing England's National Parks, Cumulus Consultants (2013)

- How to encourage less-intrusive external lighting at non-residential properties (businesses, pubs, village halls etc.)

Land management

- Much of what people think of as special about the landscape is the result of pastoral livestock farming. Changes to national agricultural support programmes have implications for the viability of these businesses, creating a risk of agricultural intensification and significant impacts on the landscape.
- In view of the imperative to tackle the climate and nature emergencies, how to manage the transition from the historical 'neat and tidy' landscape of closely-grazed fields and drystone walls towards some more diverse and 'messy' landscapes in which nature can thrive?
- How to get 'the right tree in the right place' in the characteristically open Dales landscape, and how to make it easier and quicker to do so?
- The loss of field and hedgerow trees through Ash Dieback will lead to significant landscape change.
- The importance of many historical farming features (e.g. drystone walls, field barns) as wildlife habitats.

Historical and built environment

- How to design modern, energy efficient housing, community and commercial buildings so that they will become valued parts of the Dales landscape in the future?
- Field barns are such an intrinsic part of the landscape. What is the realistic future for those not located by the roadside, and so not suitable for conversion to housing?
- The need to find innovative ways to re-use listed buildings, to unlock the cycle of decline and incentivise the repair of those that are at risk or vulnerable.
- How can the value of historical buildings and features be better used to support local business opportunities and what role can businesses play?
- What opportunities are there for new community uses of redundant buildings that inspires local pride, identity and distinctiveness?
- Can the statutory Historic Environment Record be used more effectively to influence conservation activity and new development and to engage a wider audience?
- How best to support local archaeological and heritage groups to share their reports and archives publicly.
- How to address the maintenance of 'commonplace' historical features and the distinctive cultural landscape they help create?

Landscape features

- What needs to be done to ensure that the two huge 'barns and walls' Conservation Areas (in Swaledale and Littondale) are no longer considered to be at risk?
- How to support and empower more local people to maintain, repair and enhance the heritage assets that they own?
- How to engage people better with the landscape and features of the National Park through arts and culture

- How can the remaining shortfalls in mobile phone and broadband coverage be overcome in ways that minimise the visual impacts on the National Park landscape?

Policy Context

- **European Landscape Convention,** (2007) – sets out the need to recognise landscape in law, to develop landscape policies dedicated to the protection, management and creation of landscapes, and to establish procedures to engage the public and other stakeholders .
- **Environmental Improvement Plan**, Defra (2023) - the Government's national delivery plan for the environment, building a greener, more prosperous country
- **National Planning Policy Framework**, DCLG (2023) – sets out the Government's planning policies for England. It makes clear that "great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks".
- **National Parks Circular 2010**, Defra – provides an overarching statement of the Government's policy for all National Parks.
- The path to ……..: agricultural transition paln (2019-2024)
- **Yorkshire Dales National Character Area Statement (2015); Howgill Fells National Character Area Statement** (2014); **Orton Fells National Character Area Statement (2013); North Pennines National Character Area Statement (2013);** and **South Cumbria Low Fells National Character Area Statement (2015)** – describe the natural and cultural features that make up each distinctive landscape area; analyse the area's characteristics and 'ecosystem services'; and, provide guidance on the critical issues to achieve sustainable growth.
- **Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance for the sustainable management of the historic environment, English Heritage (2008)** – provides guidance on the assessment of the heritage significance of historic features against recognised criteria.
- **Yorkshire Dales Landscape Character Assessment, (2020)** – classifies, analyses and describes the key natural, cultural and perceptual features of the 19 distinctive landscape character areas found within the National Park
- **Joint Statement on the Historic Environment (2015)** – a statement signed by all UK National Park Authorities and the historic environment and countryside agencies..
- **Adapting to Climate Change in the Yorkshire Dales National Park**, YDNPA (2011) - examines the risks and opportunities presented by a changing climate to the special qualities of the National Park, and identifies future action to adapt.
- **The Dales Woodland Strategy 2020-2030**, Dales Woodland Forum (2020)– sets out the ambitions for trees and woodlands within the National Park.
- **Thriving for the Future: Forestry Commission Strategy 2023-28** - developing with central government, policies where trees, woods and forests are an integral part of land use to deliver the 16.5% tree cover target by 2050.
- **Nature Recovery Plan for the Yorkshire Dales National Park 2023** – sets out a vision for an enhanced natural environment in the National Park and includes a plan that describes what is needed and what could be achieved by 2040.