Special Qualities of the Yorkshire Dales National Park

National Park Management Plan 2025 – 2030

In the Yorkshire Dales National Park, the interaction of people with nature has produced a landscape of remarkable beauty and distinctive character that is cherished and enjoyed by the nation.

The Yorkshire Dales National Park is a home and a workplace for over 24,000 people, with around 95% of the land in private ownership. It is also a place that millions of people visit every year.

The area's unique landscape character is created by the particular combination of many elements - the managed moorland, pastures and valley grasslands; small woodlands; dispersed villages and farmsteads; the local building materials; strong field patterns; and drystone walls and field barns. This is what makes it such a special place.

Natural Beauty

The area straddles the Pennines, the backbone of northern England. The underlying geology, natural processes and human activity have created a **hugely varied landscape** and numerous dramatic features and beautiful views:

Dales with distinctive stepped profiles, produced by the weathering of layers of limestone interspersed with shales and sandstones from the Carboniferous period.

Fells that rise to over 700 metres at High Seat, Great Shunner Fell, Wild Boar Fell and the millstone grit-capped 'Three Peaks', and include the highest peaks in Yorkshire (Whernside) and Lancashire (Gragareth). Glaciers and rivers have cut deep dales into the extensive moorland plateaux, each distinctive in character and atmosphere.

One of the best examples in the UK of classic limestone scenery, with its scars, such as those at Gordale and Attermire, and limestone pavements, such as those above Malham Cove and Great Asby Scar.

The most extensive caving area in the UK, including the longest cave system in the UK - the Three Counties System, and one of the largest caverns and the highest unbroken waterfall in the UK at Gaping Gill.

The Howgills, a series of grassy rounded hills made up of rocks from the older Silurian period, sweeping steeply upwards from deep ravines to broad rounded tops.

Significant glacial and post-glacial landforms and features, including: drumlin fields, such as the one at Ribblehead; erratics, including those at Norber; moraines; and the post glacial lakes of Semerwater, Malham Tarn and Sunbiggin Tarn.

Spectacular waterfalls, such as: Hardraw Force (the longest unbroken drop in England), Uldale Force, and Rutter Force; the Aysgarth Falls series; and, Cautley Spout, with a broken drop of 180 metres.

A traditional pastoral landscape created by livestock farmers over several centuries. This historical landscape is acknowledged as internationally important and includes:

- an intricate network of drystone walls (as well as hedgerows in Lower Bishopdale, the Lune Valley, Dentdale and Sedbergh) that create a patchwork of enclosures across valleys and valley sides;
- traditional stone-built field barns, the density of which in some parts of the National Park notably Arkengarthdale, Swaledale, Wharfedale and Wensleydale, is unique.

A highly *legible* landscape, in which there is still a very clear and evident link between the underlying geology and landform, the historic use and management of the land, the current land uses and land cover.

A landscape of striking contrasts, between the deep, sheltered dales and the open, exposed, sweeping fells above.

Wildlife

Over a quarter (57,000 ha) of the Yorkshire Dales National Park is made up of **nationally and internationally important wildlife habitats** – the largest area of any English National Park.

Over a quarter of England's remaining **flower-rich upland hay meadows and pastures**, produced by traditional, low-intensity management of grazing land over many decades. Outstanding examples can be found in Swaledale and Langstrothdale.

A range of rare limestone habitats linked directly to the geology of the Craven and Westmorland Dales. The area's 'limestone country' is internationally recognised for its biodiversity, which includes rare wet meadows, over half of England's calcareous grassland, and over 30% of England's limestone pavement.

Extensive areas of moorland, much of it (42% of the area of the National Park) managed as grouse moor, that contain upland heath and blanket and raised bog, which are internationally important for wildlife and the carbon they store as peat. These habitats cover vast areas and contain a variety of plant species and important bird populations.

Small areas of broadleaf woodland (2.5% of the area of the National Park) representing remnants of former, more extensive broadleaved woodland or later plantings. Surviving areas of ancient woodland are of particularly high biodiversity value.

Nationally important populations of birds like curlew, lapwing, black grouse, and ring ouzel; rare lime-loving plants such as bird's-eye primrose, rigid buckler fern, globeflower and baneberry; rare and scarce invertebrates such as the northern brown argus butterfly and the Atlantic white-clawed crayfish; and important mammals, notably the red squirrel.

Cultural Heritage

The Yorkshire Dales National Park has been home to communities and industry for several millennia, helping to shape much of what we now think is special. There is an exceptional amount of evidence of these previous generations of occupation, connecting past

communities to the present and providing a highly visible record of the area's social and economic history, including:

A culture of community spirit, self-sufficiency, determination and self-belief, which has been shaped by the area's physical environment and remoteness, nurturing self dependency and close knit communities.

Livestock farming, with distinct sheep breeds like Rough Fell, Wensleydale, Dalesbred and Swaledale that are important for genetic diversity, and a strong tradition of upland cattle rearing, that is still deeply interwoven into local life and culture, and made famous through Wensleydale Cheese. Livestock sales and agricultural shows play an important part in the lives of local people.

An exceptional range of archaeology, which provides the evidence of human activity from the earliest hunters of the Palaeolithic through to twentieth century industrial remains.

The remains of former rural industries, the influences of which on the area's culture and social fabric are still evident today. They include lead and lime extraction and processing sites, as well as water mills.

Powerful reminders of periods of dominance by large estates and religious houses through place names and some surviving structures, such as Bolton Castle, Bolton Abbey, Barden Tower, Pendragon Castle and Marrick Priory.

Distinctive, traditional architecture where the local building materials used link directly to the area's geology.

Numerous **small, attractive villages and hamlets** most of which have been there for over a thousand years.as well as **scattered farmsteads.**

Minor roads along the dales, bordered by drystone walls or hedgerows and flower-rich verges. Higher up, unfenced roads cross open moorland and offer dramatic views.

The Settle-Carlisle Railway Line, opened in 1876, is unique and displays impressive engineering and conserved Midland Railway architecture. It offers a very special way of enjoying the dramatic landscape along its route. Elsewhere, the imposing structures of former railways at Smardale and the Lune Viaduct are testament to earlier feats of engineering

A distinctive linguistic, literary and artistic heritage, inspired by the landscape and by the history of the communities – past and present – who have lived and worked here.

Enjoying the experience of being here

Most of the people who spend any time in the National Park will experience a range of emotions, triggered by the beauty, grandeur and other less tangible qualities. These all help create the 'spirit of place' that is unique to this National Park:

Extensive areas where a true sense of tranquillity, remoteness and solitude can still be found, which is rare in England today.

The natural sounds of wind, water and birdsong, which are important to the recreational experience; the 'spiritual exercise and enjoyment' that is at the heart of National Park designation.

Expansive views that show to advantage the areas beauty and variety.

Ever-changing light, seasonal change and occasional severe weather, which creates visual drama and contrast that enhance personal experience.

Strong, self-reliant communities, each with its own special character, but all with a very close sense of community, reflected in the wide range of local village shows, festivals, social activities, traditional pubs, and entertainment.

Dark night skies - as it suffers little from light pollution, the moon, night sky and atmospheric effects can be fully appreciated. The National Park was designated Dark Sky Reserve Status in December 2020.

A historical and extensive network of footpaths, bridleways and tracks, including the Pennine Trails, Coast-to-Coast, Yorkshire '3 Peaks' and Malham Landscape Trail, some of the best known and loved walks in the country.

Extensive areas of public access, rivers, crags and caves offering outstanding opportunities for outdoor recreation from paragliding to caving, with some of the hardest sport climbing in the World at Malham Cove.