The Wensleydale Project

Yore Past, Ure Future

Catchment Plan
Key Partners

- Environment Agency
- Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority
- Natural England
- Yorkshire Dales
  Rivers Trust
- Yorkshire Water
- Yorkshire Wildlife Trust
- Wensleydale Creamery
  Producers Group

Title image: The dramatic Cauldron Falls, West Burton © YDNPA
About the Wensleydale Project Partnership

From an idea by local naturalist, Deborah Millward, has sprung the Wensleydale Project - a catchment-scale landscape initiative within the heart of the Yorkshire Dales National Park. It has become a partnership of organisations, businesses, individuals and groups which have been brought together by the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority (YDNPA) and the Yorkshire Dales Rivers Trust (YDRT) with the sole aim of improving the environment of Wensleydale and its tributary dales for the benefit of people and nature.

About the Wensleydale Project Strategy

The partnership has produced an evidence based catchment plan which identifies the key issues affecting the Wensleydale catchment and their potential solutions. This plan is based on an extensive review of data held by partner organisations, and liaison with the local farming community and other local people. This has guided its development and its focus, ensuring all interest groups are involved and engaged.

From this, we have agreed a shared vision for the catchment and produced a strategy to work towards it. This strategy sets out clear themes, aims, actions and timescales. Both the strategy and the plan are working documents which will be updated as new information becomes available.

For more information please visit: www.wensleydaleproject.com
Wensleydale

Our Vision: To transform the environment of Wensleydale and its tributary dales for the benefit of people and nature.

Soils and Sustainable Farming
Support a thriving farming sector which demonstrates exemplary water and soil management

Space for Nature
Provide a haven for a wide variety of wildlife with a strong network of habitats

Water
Have healthier cleaner rivers, that provide drainage, manage flood risk and support more wildlife
Historic Landscapes
Showcase and conserve its fascinating historic landscape and provide opportunities to celebrate its hill farming traditions.

Enjoying Wensleydale
Offer a wide range of outstanding opportunities to understand and enjoy its special qualities.
To meet the shared vision of the Wensleydale catchment, our strategic themes and aims are:

**A. Soils and Sustainable Farming**

To help secure sustainable farm businesses and engage with farmers and landowners to reduce run-off, nutrient and pesticide loss, and improve soils.

**B. Space for Nature**

To make wildlife habitats bigger, better and more connected so that they are more resilient and adaptable to the effects of climate change.

To increase ways of reconnecting people with nature.

To determine the distribution and status of invasive non-native species prior to identifying appropriate species-specific actions.

**C. Water**

To reduce pollution in watercourses to achieve Water Framework Directive status of ‘Good’ across the catchment, where technically feasible.

To raise standards of private domestic waste storage management, thereby reducing risk of diffuse pollution.

To improve the riparian habitat, ensure good fish passage, and enable connectivity between flood plain and the river system.

To increase the water-holding capacity of the catchment so reducing flood peak further downstream.
D. **Historic Landscape**

To maintain, restore and increase understanding of the historic Wensleydale landscape, and celebrate the history of hill farming.

E. **Enjoying Wensleydale**

To encourage a range of tourism opportunities based on the unique character of Wensleydale.

To manage and communicate effectively with visitors to help ensure the area’s special qualities are maintained.
Soils and Sustainable farming

“And farmers for generations have followed one another on the land until they were part of that land”

Kit Calvert

To help secure sustainable farm businesses and engage with farmers and landowners to reduce run-off, nutrient and pesticide loss, and improve soils.

Why is this important?
The landscape has been shaped by agriculture through the centuries and has contributed to the scenery that we see today. However, farming faces constant economic pressure from external forces such as the changing value of livestock, meat products and the price of milk. It is constrained by the climate, environment and remoteness, giving farmers little opportunity to capitalise on these assets.

Agriculture is responsible for 2.6% of employment within Richmondshire, rising to 19% of employment within the National Park compared with a regional average of 1%. Not only is it a major employer, but is also a major contributor to the local economy.

In the Yorkshire Dales, 82% of farmland receives funding through national agri-environment schemes (Defra statistics, 2015) which encourage and support farming methods that benefit the environment and historic landscape. On average, these schemes provide a quarter of the total farm income and are an essential part of the farm enterprise and a mechanism to support beneficial land management.

What are the specific problems?
From 2015 to 2020, national agri-environment scheme agreements are set to fall by 30%. This will affect farms within Wensleydale as all current agri-environment scheme agreements expire during this time, threatening already fragile farm incomes.

Farmers are concerned about the age and condition of their farm infrastructure, particularly relating to livestock housing and manure storage. Poorly targeted grant funding programmes and low farm incomes have inhibited re-investment and modernisation.

Farm land is saturated for increasingly longer periods of the year. This has led to rush encroachment, unproductive hay meadows and a higher risk of liver fluke in sheep and cattle.

Compaction affects large parts of the catchment, from the dale bottom to within the moorland area. Soil compaction and its effects at farm level, and at a catchment scale are not widely understood by land managers.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that extreme rainfall and flooding events are becoming more common throughout the catchment, affecting farmland, properties, roads, fish populations and important freshwater wildlife habitats.
What are we going to do?

- Develop a more coherent and accessible network of advice delivery by working in partnership with farmers, vets, grant providers, levy boards and research organisations.

- Develop a series of farm based events focusing on solutions to soil compaction, rush encroachment, field drainage and improving forage quality.

- Work with groups of farmers to help them gain access to the national Countryside Stewardship scheme, and support a coordinated approach to landscape scale management. Enable these groups to work together and share knowledge on farming and environmental management.

- Work with the farming community and Natural England, to develop a new type of agri-environment scheme focused on payment by results.
To make wildlife habitats bigger, better and more connected so that they are more resilient and adaptable to the effects of climate change.

To increase ways of reconnecting people with nature.

To determine the distribution and status of invasive non-native species prior to identifying appropriate species-specific actions.

Why is this important?
The Wensleydale catchment contains more than 14,500ha of UK Priority Habitats, 1,232km of Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) Rivers and 57km of historic hedgerows. More than 50% of this priority habitat is outside Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and other designated areas. A review of the current evidence base has shown that rivers and streams, upland and lowland hay meadows, lakes and ponds and blanket bog habitats all have a significant proportion of their Yorkshire Dales National Park resource in the project area and have also been classified as having high or medium sensitivity to climate change. The review also revealed that 100% of the Yorkshire Dales populations of Burnt Orchid and Dormouse and a significant proportion of suitable breeding habitat for upland wading bird species (such as Curlew and Lapwing) lie within the project area, providing unique opportunities.

What are the specific problems?
Over the last three decades Wensleydale has gradually lost many sites where native species thrived and even some ‘protected’ sites are deteriorating. This incremental loss is damaging the intricate web of inter-connected species that is essential for natural processes. The specialist species like the cuckoo are already on the brink but even the cowslip, which was once commonplace, is disappearing. The anonymous insects and fungi that are vital for a functioning ecosystem are also losing space. And it is happening across the habitats of the catchment, both terrestrial and aquatic. John Lawton’s remedy of more bigger, better and joined up wildlife habitats is very relevant to Wensleydale. The distributions of non-native invasive species are unknown; strategies and action to tackle them need to be well considered but swift, while the scale of the problem is still manageable.

What are we going to do?
• Restore and create native woodland designed to reduce diffuse pollution and flooding, increase shade, improve fish stocks and increase the connectivity of the woodland network.

• Develop targeted restoration and management of lowland and upland hay meadows to increase the resilience and functional connectivity of the Wensleydale species-rich grassland network while
also benefiting Burnt Orchid.

• Develop targeted restoration and management of degraded blanket bog to achieve more natural drainage that slows the flow of water, enhances biodiversity and reduces carbon emissions.

• Improve the condition and number of ponds on the floodplain throughout the catchment.

• Increase the area of suitable breeding habitat for upland wading bird species within the moorland fringe, targeted by utilising existing Habitat Suitability Models.

• Facilitate the range expansion of Dormice by ensuring that existing woodlands and hedgerows within a 825ha project area are in appropriate management and increasing the structural connectivity.

• Provide a range of opportunities for people to connect with nature, understand its value to society, and encourage support for its continued management.

• Determine the distribution and status of invasive non-native species prior to identifying appropriate species-specific actions.
Why is this important?
Nearly 40% of rivers within the catchment are failing to meet European Water Framework Directive targets due to factors including increased sedimentation, deforestation and pollution from historic metal mines, moorland and agricultural run-off.

The nutrient contribution from off-mains sewage to groundwater and the river network is unknown. Wensleydale has a dispersed rural population, with many dwellings reliant on septic tanks and cess pits for management and treatment of their waste.

Lack of bankside vegetation resulting in low habitat diversity, increased risk of erosion and high water temperatures, which can be damaging to fish and contribute to algal blooms.

The main river and some of its tributaries have been separated from the floodplain by historic embankments, particularly in the lower reaches. This prevents the river from behaving naturally and can exacerbate flooding lower down the catchment.

What are the specific problems?
There is a disparity between anecdotal evidence of water quality within the upper Ure catchment and scientific evidence. Raised levels of ammonia and phosphorus and low levels of dissolved oxygen have been recorded in addition to algal blooms. Seasonal increases in population due to tourism could be putting pressure on sewage treatment works. Anglers have long argued that the fish stocks are poor; recent observations suggest catches have dropped further. There are concerns that changes in roadside verge management encourages erosion of soil which can increase the sedimentation risk in some waterbodies.

To reduce pollution in watercourses to achieve Water Framework Directive status of ‘Good’ across the catchment, where technically feasible.

To raise standards of private domestic waste storage management, thereby reducing risk of diffuse pollution.

To improve the riparian habitat, ensure good fish passage, and enable connectivity between flood plain and the river system.

To increase the water-holding capacity of the catchment and reduce flood peak further downstream.
Sediment loss and contaminated water from historic lead mines is increasing, leading to high levels of toxic cadmium, lead and zinc in a number of tributaries.

High water temperatures have been recorded (over 21°C in 2015), which, together with low flows and low levels of dissolved oxygen, have contributed to fish kills.

Compaction on the upper slopes leads to increased surface water flows, and risk of sedimentation into the water courses.

What are we going to do?
- Increase local community engagement and understanding of rivers through the development of a Citizen Science project focussed on water quality monitoring.
- Seek solutions to metal mine pollution on becks not targeted by the Environment Agency and Coal Authority’s Abandoned Metal Mines Project.
- Develop a holistic monitoring strategy and action plan in partnership with key organisations and universities to better understand the reasons behind algal blooms and fish population crashes.
- Set up a ‘Where does my water go?’ project to raise public awareness of water quality and flood issues, including identifying every landowner/household with an off-mains sewerage system and providing them with appropriate advice.
- Investigate the potential for developing a Natural Flood Management project within the catchment, which will help reduce local flood problems and contribute to reducing downstream flooding.
- Through the Planning system, encourage landowners and households to incorporate Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) into new developments.

Top image: water falling over the iconic Aysgarth Falls in autumnal colours © YDNPA
Image above right: Brown trout found in the River Ure © David Higgins


**Historic Landscapes**

“It remains in your mind as a piece of England where you can forget the noise and rush of modern life.”

*Marie Hartley*

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**Why is this important?**

The historic environment underpins and influences the landscape of Wensleydale at every scale. It is a key draw for tourism within the area, both in relation to specific heritage sites, but also in providing the scenic qualities of the landscape: in particular, the barns and walls landscape. As such, the historic environment underpins the economic success and potential future prosperity of the dale.

The historic landscape of Wensleydale tells the story of the development of farming from seasonal transhumance in later prehistory through settlement and the creation of the first field systems, to the extensive arable agriculture of the Medieval period and the specialised dairying landscape that has developed in recent centuries. The story also involves the parallel development of extractive industry in the Dales, particularly lead mining, but also coal mining and sandstone and limestone quarrying. Lead mining in particular still has an ongoing environmental impact on the catchment today.

**What are the specific problems?**

While the historic environment occurs across the project area, and there are many important historic and archaeological features, there is relatively little formal protection for the historic environment.

There are few scheduled monuments, most of which relate to relatively small areas. Similarly, very few traditional farm buildings are protected by listing, and in recent years the Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESA) scheme provided the main input into the repair and maintenance of agricultural buildings in the project area.

The ongoing loss and deterioration of traditional farm buildings, one of the special qualities of the National Park and of the project area as a whole, is having a significant impact on the landscape.

A lack of funding for the management and conservation of archaeological sites is leading to the deterioration of significant heritage and the loss of opportunity to interpret that heritage to the public.

There is a lack of detailed information about where intensification is taking place and, specifically, its impacts on earthwork remains. Some former lead mine sites are actively contributing to diffuse pollution within the catchment.
What are we going to do?

- Develop a three-stranded project called ‘The Archaeology of the Dairy Industry’, which will trace the development and specialisation of Wensleydale as a pastoral landscape. This will include:
  1. An investigation into the development of farming and the pastoral landscape with a clear aim to raise public awareness using innovative interpretation.
  2. A strategy to identify and manage archaeological remains most at risk within areas of intensively managed grasslands. Provide targeted detailed management advice to farmers with remains at high risk.
  3. A collaborative project using volunteers to record and create 3D photographic models of field barns most at risk. Make the outputs publicly available online via an interpretative website and available for academic research.

- Develop a water-focused project which will research the history of exploitation and management of water in the catchment and showcase the results in an interpretive exhibition. This will feed into other aspects of the wider project, giving context and providing historical interpretation to complement other project activities. This is a key outcome, enabling the project to balance historic significance against the justification for work in a transparent way. A further strand would look at historic attempts to manage and control water and flooding: flood banks, deepening of channels, incidences of major flooding of roads and bridges, and the impacts on properties and communities.
To encourage a range of tourism opportunities based on the unique character of Wensleydale.

To manage and communicate effectively with visitors to help ensure the area’s special qualities are maintained.

Why is this important?
Wensleydale attracts visitors from across the world. They are drawn here by its special qualities, settlements and outdoor activities. People visit with different interests and levels of knowledge about the area. Most undertake activities without formal management or intervention; this is as it should be.

Apart from providing access to ample open space for different types of outdoor activity, Wensleydale provides a sanctuary from urban pressures, and places for people to connect with wildlife and the natural environment. It provides a cultural identity, a sense of place and well-being for the people who live here.

The contribution tourism provides to the local Dales economy, on average, is worth £210 million per year. It employs 18% of the local workforce which in turn contributes to the Dales economy and helps retain local people within Wensleydale.

What are the specific problems?
The vast majority of visitors and locals make use of the 600km network of rights of way. However, there is relatively limited access to the waterfalls within the project area. Visitors are directed to two areas of the river system to view the waterfalls. At these locations, information for visitors relates to the surrounding woodland, but not to the wider countryside and the river system.

Greater awareness of the existence and value of local suppliers and activities amongst local businesses will create stronger local supply chains and a more self-sustaining local economic base.

Businesses share a common understanding of the important characteristics of the area, but this needs to be presented in a coherent and attractive way in their own promotional material to help visitors understand and appreciate the area more deeply.
What are we going to do?

- Develop a new walking trail so that people can explore Wensleydale, enjoying the water features that are important for the valley and taking in important heritage and land management locations.

- Manage and communicate effectively with visitors to help ensure the area's special qualities are maintained, and work with local businesses to promote local goods and services.
Characteristics of the Wensleydale Catchment

The Wensleydale project area covers the upper Ure catchment – an area of 506km² encompassing the main tributaries of the Ure, including Wensleydale, Coverdale and Bishopdale.

Geology and soils
The Ice Age impacted on Wensleydale by carving out the u-shaped valleys, creating significant glacial and post glacial landforms and features including: drumlins, moraines and the post-glacial lake of Semerwater.

Five hundred metres below the surface of Wensleydale is a bed of 400 million year old granite known as Wensleydale granite. On top of this the Great Scar limestone was deposited 350 million years ago, which was then topped by the Yoredales – a series of limestone, shale and sandstone layers.

Wensleydale’s soils closely reflect its underlying geology. They range from the rich, fertile loam and clay river alluvium, with coarse loam and sand over gravel along the valley floors, to the fine loam and clayey upland soils with a very acidic peaty surface.

Map: © Crown copyright and database right 2015 Ordnance Survey 100023747. Additional information: © YDNPA
Image: Drystone walls defining the landscape, near Hawes © YDNPA
Historic landscape
Wensleydale has been shaped by the interaction of people with nature since the prehistoric Mesolithic period - with Semerwater an important focus for hunting activity during that era. Bronze Age farmers, Roman settlers and Viking invaders have all left their mark on the landscape in the form of intricate field patterns, terracing and fortifications. The post medieval period saw livestock and dairy farming becoming more dominant and this gathered pace into the 17th and 18th centuries, when the farming landscape became dominated by small meadows and isolated field barns, recognised as a special quality of the National Park today.

The same period saw an industrial transformation with the development of lead mining complexes, woollen mills and the Wensleydale Railway.

This has left behind an archaeological heritage with twenty nine scheduled monuments in the upper Ure catchment and some of the highest densities of traditional field barns in the National Park.

Recreation and tourism
People are attracted to the Yorkshire Dales by its natural beauty and stunning landscapes. They love its sense of freedom, open space and the tranquillity they find here. Visitor numbers are increasing year on year with just over 4.5 million visitor days recorded across the whole of the National Park in 2013. Tourism contributes approximately £210 million a year to the local economy.

There are extensive opportunities for visitors in Wensleydale from fell walking, cycling, wildlife viewing (including the elusive Red Squirrel), wild swimming, sailing and fishing to market towns, museums and local interest visitor centres like Gayle Mill and the Wensleydale Creamery. The lower part of the dale has the added attraction of castles, grottos and abbeys.
Species and habitat
The River Ure and its tributaries are home to Salmon, Brown Trout, River Lamprey and White-Clawed Crayfish. The dale bottoms have a mosaic of lowland and upland hay meadows, calcareous grassland, wetlands and native woodland between more improved grazing. This is where the rare species Burnt Orchid, Dormouse and Northern Brown Argus Butterfly can also be found. The dalesides are important for moorland fringe habitats, which support an assemblage of wading bird species, as well as isolated areas of calaminarian grassland on lead mining spoil and wooded gills, providing important shelter for Black Grouse. The fells consist of upland heathland, blanket bog, acidic flush habitats and occasional mature conifer plantations, which are home to Red Squirrels.

The Wensleydale catchment has extensive areas within North Pennine Moors Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Area (SPA), three North Pennine Dales Meadows SAC sites, Ox Close SAC and nine other SSSIs. Nevertheless, more than half of the nationally important priority habitats in the catchment are outside these protected sites.

Designations and other priority habitats in Wensleydale

The river and its tributaries
The source of the River Ure is Lunds Fell on the border with Cumbria, 305 metres above sea level. From here it drops 215 metres in height over 26 miles where it reaches Kilgram Bridge; about a third of this fall comes in the three miles between Aysgarth and Redmire with a series of picturesque waterfalls.

On average the catchment receives in excess of 130cm of rainfall per month and the river level rises and falls rapidly in response.
Land use
The catchment mainly supports upland agriculture. Hill sheep and beef farms dominate, though the area has a long association with dairy farming, which continues today with the success of the Hawes Creamery and its production of Wensleydale cheese.

The catchment contains a range of managed woodland types, from Hazel coppice in Freeholders’ Wood at Aysgarth to Sitka Spruce plantations in Raydale and Widdale.

On the fells towards the edges of the catchment there is active moorland management.
There are numerous agencies at national, regional and local levels working to improve the landscape and support communities in rural areas. The key initiatives currently working in Wensleydale are listed below.

The Water Framework Directive (WFD) and Humber District River Basin Management Plan focuses on the pressures facing the water environment in the Humber River Basin District and the actions that will address them to meet the WFD. Prepared by the Environment Agency with wide ranging consultation, its first revision ‘Water, Life and Livelihood’ was updated, December 2015.

The Environment Agency and Defra’s Catchment Based Approach (CaBA) is a community-led approach that engages society to help improve our water environments. The River Swale, Ure, Nidd and Ouse CaBA partnership, Dales to Vales Rivers Network, covers the Wensleydale project area and considers the project as one of the main means to deliver the CaBA objectives within the upper Ure catchment.

Yorkshire Water’s ‘Blueprint for Yorkshire’ is a 25 year strategy for how the water company will operate in relation to water treatment, supply and usage, the environment, customers and climate change.

The Yorkshire Dales National Park Management Plan (NPMP) is the key document that sets out the vision, strategic policies and medium term objectives for the National Park, and guides the delivery of National Park purposes. The Wensleydale Strategy will mirror many of the objectives and actions found within the NPMP.

The Yorkshire Dales Local Plan (2015-2030) is the YDNPA’s strategy for new development in the National Park. It sets out local policy to steer development decisions and guide planning applications. The purpose of this Local Plan is to help deliver sustainable development. It responds to the national growth agenda and is a step change in policy that will extend the scope and flexibility for new development that is needed in the National Park, or which would otherwise be beneficial to it.

Cross compliance is a mechanism that links direct payments for agricultural production to compliance by farmers, with basic standards concerning the environment, food safety, animal and plant health, and animal welfare, as well as the requirement to maintain land in good agricultural and environmental condition.

The UK Forestry Standard (UKFS) is the reference standard for sustainable forest management in the UK.

YDNPA Woodland Siting and Design Guidance encourages the creation of woodlands and plantations that contribute positively to the landscape character and scenery of the Yorkshire Dales National Park. This guidance aims to help those considering planting a woodland or making alterations to existing woodlands to ensure that the woodland design fits into the existing landscape.
Catchment Sensitive Farming (CSF) is a project run by Natural England in partnership with the Environment Agency and Defra to raise awareness of diffuse water pollution from agriculture by offering free training and advice in 'priority catchments'. Since 2010, a CSF programme has been run by YDNPA and Natural England within the Raydale catchment in Wensleydale. The programme was extended to the whole catchment in 2015 and has included some capital grant funding to support changes to farm infrastructure and land management.

Natural England administers the national agri-environment schemes – Environmental Stewardship and Countryside Stewardship on behalf of Defra. At present, these schemes cover 73% of Wensleydale and are the main way of helping farmers to deliver environmental management.

Farm advice and support is offered by a range of specialist consultants, land agents and farm advice officers operating in the Wensleydale area. A number are connected to private consultancies such as ADAS, or national agricultural support organisations, like Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB) and Dairyco. A significant level of support and advice comes from local advisers, including local land agents, YDNPA staff, small private consultancies, National Trust officers and Rivers Trust staff.

Biodiversity 2020 is a Government strategy aimed at halting the loss of biodiversity by 2020 and beyond. The strategy sets out ambitious goals for 2020 and 2050 – intending to provide better, more, bigger and joined sites for nature, as recommended by the Making Space for Nature review. The key sectors where work and actions will be undertaken include agriculture, forestry, planning and development.

The local biodiversity action plan for the Yorkshire Dales National Park, Nature in the Dales 2020 Vision, sets out the aspirations for action between 2010 and 2020, aiming to conserve and enhance the biodiversity within the National Park.

The National Park has adopted an internal Ecological Networks Strategy: 2014-2018. A robust habitat network model and three species Habitat Suitability Models have been built. These models are being used to support development management and land management work, and help establish more coherent ecological networks on the ground.

Heritage 2020 sets out how heritage organisations will work together to benefit the historic environment. It is coordinated on behalf of the whole sector by the Historic Environment Forum.

Special Qualities, Special Experiences brings together the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority's policy and principles for access, recreation, diversity, visitor management and sustainable tourism in the National Park.
## Summary of Actions

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### Water

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### Historic Landscapes

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### Enjoying Wensleydale

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<tr>
<td>E2</td>
<td>Manage and communicate effectively with visitors to help ensure the area’s special qualities are maintained, and work with local businesses to promote local goods and services.</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>