

STANAGE FORUM

A chance to have your say

North Lees Farm Objectives Meeting

Date: 30 November 2005, 6:00 - 9:00p.m.

Venue: National Park Office, Aldern House, Bakewell

Attended by: PDNPA: Matthew Croney (Stanage/North Lees Estate Manager), Bill Gordon (Stanage/North Lees Estate Warden), Paul Harrop (Head of Property Service), Tony Hood (Rangers), John Lomas (Director of Conservation & Development), Chris Manby (Conservation Properties Manager), Ros Tratt (Ecologist), Sarah Whiteley (Archaeologist); Steering Group: Bernard Henwood (walker, aeromodellers, wildlife), Henry Folkard (British Mountaineering Council), Jane Marsden (Outeats Parish Council); Other key stakeholders: Ian Kingman (Derby College), John Le Corney (Heeley City Farm).

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A. Aim & Objectives of the meeting

To agree objectives for the farm, in terms of land management on the ground. This involved reviewing and fleshing out the objectives already in the agreed Estate Management Plan, reconsidering any that were previously ruled out and considering some new suggestions.

B. Previously agreed Vision, Goal and Aims from the Plan:

Vision:

To care for and enjoy Stanage/the North Lees Estate in a way which respects and enhances wildlife, heritage and landscape.

Goal:

To support a farming-based business which provides employment and income to the local economy and the Estate, with mutual benefits for education, recreation and conservation of the landscape, wildlife, habitats and archaeology.

Aims:

- 10.2 For the farm business to be environmentally & economically sustainable.
- 10.3 To work with others to seek to develop local branding and marketing of farm based products
- 10.4 To ensure that farm based activity is not unduly disturbed by visitors
- 10.5 For an appropriate heather-cutting/burning regime to be implemented
- 10.6 To control bracken in an environmentally sound way

C. Recommended objectives

Please note that there was not time to discuss all of the recommended objectives, so please could you indicate whether you support recommendations 7,16,17,19,20,21,24,25 & 27-31 below by 10 March 2006. Thank you.

Recommendation 1:

The management of the Farm should fully embrace the Stange Forum structure/process and the consensus principles of management. The management of the Farm should contribute to as many of the objectives contained within the Estate Management Plan as possible.

Background:

Obvious all-encompassing new suggestion.

Agree/disagree/modify:

Agreed

Recommendation 2:

Retain existing Environmentally Sensitive Area scheme guidelines as a minimum conservation standard. When the ESA ends, the farm should be entered into the new Higher Level Scheme.

Background:

Existing objective:

10.2.2 Implement the new Environmentally Sensitive Area agreement.

A tier 2 agreement has been implemented since the Plan was written. This includes no artificial fertilisers, pesticides, ploughing, re-seeding, etc and sets the current sustainable grazing levels. Once the ESA ends, the scheme will no longer be available and has been replaced by the Environmental Stewardship Scheme, which has two levels: Entry Level and Higher Level.

Agree/disagree/modify:

Agree - as a result of this agreement (along with other management undertaken), the farm's moorland is in favourable condition for SSSI purposes.

Recommendation 3:

Organic farming should be welcomed (but not necessarily insisted upon?)

Background:

Existing objective: 10.2.1 Work towards the standards required for organic certification (although not necessarily go all the way). The farm will continue to pursue environmental principles, which might not necessarily involve going organic.

Agree/disagree/modify:

Change wording to "given preference". It was agreed that this is a good and worthwhile objective but there were questions as to whether it would be achievable for the whole farm, given the unfenced moorland boundary to neighbours land, which is not currently organically farmed. It was pointed out that there may also be animal welfare implications regarding use of preventative injections and with regard to weed/bracken control (but see further recommendations below).

Recommendation 4:

Farming using rare/traditional breeds will be welcomed (but not insisted upon).

Background:

New suggestion: Supporting such breeds is suggested as a worthwhile objective in its own right and often could result in better habitat grazing.

Agree/disagree/modify:

Agree but they should be suitable hill farming breeds, rather than just for novelty value.

Recommendation 5:

Appropriate farm diversification should be encouraged. This must be compatible with the Estate's special qualities, the neighbouring use of the Hall and other objectives in the Plan and would be subject to gaining planning and listed buildings consent.

Background:

New suggestion: The farm currently only has 330 sheep and relies on grants to make it economically sustainable. If it is to remain a viable single farm unit, it may need to take advantage of diversification opportunities, particularly making fuller use of the buildings. The College gained planning and listed buildings consent to convert part of the cruck barn to provide student bunkhouse accommodation but never developed it.

Agree/disagree/modify:

Agree but change "encouraged" to " will be considered" and add that any proposals should be agreed by the Steering Group.

Possible diversification opportunities might be:

1. To incorporate North Lees Campsite into the farm business, as long as its status/character/client base doesn't change (see camping objectives in the Plan)
2. Niche products from the farm, linked to the use of the traditional barns
3. bunkhouse in traditional barn
4. craft workshop, etc in traditional barn.

NB. It was commented that integration & on-site management are important for the campsite and the Estate.

Recommendation 6:

The farm should achieve the Peak District Environmental Quality Mark and be branded and marketed as high quality, locally produced, environmentally sustainable produce (if this gains maximum income for the farm products).

Background:

Previous objective:

10.3.1 Contact other potentially interested parties in the area and seek to jointly develop local branding and marketing initiatives for farm-based products. A local landowner in Hathersage was thought to be actively pursuing the idea of letting shop space for local produce in Hathersage. This never came to anything but the EQM has been launched since the Plan was drafted.

Agree/disagree/modify:

Agree but delete "(if this gains maximum income for the farm products)" and change emphasis slightly to a presumption for EQM status unless there is a good reason why not. This is because it was questioned whether the finished product needs to meet the standard and North Lees has only produced store lambs, rather than finished (fat) lambs in recent years. This may create difficulty but should be overcome if at all possible. It may present an opportunity to encourage others in the chain of production to meet EQM standards.

Recommendation 7: NOT YET AGREED

Continue to implement measures to stop people parking in the gateways around the farm and leaving gates open. These should include:

1. Maintain routed signs on problem gates (as few as possible). This should include all gates adjoining cattle grids and others to be identified by the Farm Manager.
2. Place advisory notices on the windscreens of offending cars. Other interpretation/education measures should also help to improve understanding (see Education and Access & Rights of Way).

Background:

Existing objective: as above but also included contacting fell runners clubs, who were identified as particular offenders but now understand the issues and don't cause so many problems.

Agree/disagree/modify:

Not discussed as a whole group but the table working on it agreed and commented that this was not a huge problem at North Lees any more.

Recommendation 8:

Carry out rotational heather cutting in strips on the dry heather moor (or burning where cutting is not practical) but leaving at least 20% uncut/unburnt. Details to be agreed in the Moorland Management Plan, currently being drafted in consultation with English Nature.

Background:

Previous objective:

10.5.1 Carry out small burns (as done on grouse moors) on the dry heather moor (as per current guidelines).

Since this was written, we have been favouring cutting on PDNPA Estates as it is easier to control and in many cases has produced better results. Burning is up to date at North Lees but we have carried out one trial cut above Cabin Track, which left no trace of vehicular access and is recovering well.

Agree/disagree/modify:

Modify: there should be a combination of cutting and burning, favouring cutting initially but monitoring results relative to burning. This is because burning often produces better results and there may be some areas of the moor that cutting machinery cannot get to. Also, PDNPA's archaeologists should be added as consultees.

Recommendation 9:

Bracken should only be treated if it is encroaching into other more valuable vegetation and this should be done by spot spraying or other more environmentally friendly methods.

Background:

Previous objectives:

10.6.1 Spot spray the edges of bracken patches, where it is encroaching into other moorland vegetation. NB. This should not be done if the bracken provides an important feeding area for valued birds such as Ring Ouzel.

Since the Plan was drafted, the grazing levels have been reduced and we have found that heather is now out competing bracken, which is actually contracting slightly. However, there are still areas which might benefit from bracken control, which might be considered if more environmentally-friendly methods were proposed, particularly if the bracken could be composted and sold to gain extra income. For example, bracken has been cut in Little Chapel Field on Ecologist's advice and needs to be maintained to ensure it doesn't re-grow.

Agree/disagree/modify:

Agree.

Recommendation 10:

The moorland should continue to be grazed at current levels.

Background

During the drafting of the Plan, the idea of not grazing the moorland at all was discussed and rejected but you may wish to revisit this issue now. The previous debate recorded that this could only be a possibility if sheep were found not to be necessary for the sustainability of the working farm and the following pros and cons:

For:

- Grazing can restrict public access, e.g. the 2001 closures due to foot & Mouth Disease
- Better heather regeneration
- Dogs have to be kept on a lead with stock around
- Sheep droppings are undesirable to some people

Against:

- The best management of the ecology of the moor is light sheep grazing and burning in small strips. The moor and bog are the most important habitats on the Estate and designated a Special Protection Area (Europe's highest level of protection for rare birds).
- The presence of stock and wildlife does not restrict public access (except in extreme circumstances, such as Foot & Mouth). The tall heather and wet bog makes public access physically difficult to most of the area anyway.
- Even if the area were not grazed, dogs would have to be kept on a lead so as not to cause disturbance to wildlife and other visitors.

- Sheep droppings will be less of a problem when sheep numbers are reduced. It was also argued that this is a minority view. They are also less offensive than dog and human faeces!
- The 118 hectare area of blanket bog and Carr Head Moor will continue not to be burned.

Agree/disagree/modify

Agree but change wording to current levels, or as otherwise recommended by English Nature guidelines. There may also be merit in taking sheep off the moor in spring to avoid overgrazing of bilberry.

Recommendation 11:

Open a new seasonal concession path across Ridgewayside.

Background:

Previous objective: 14b5.3 Conduct a bird survey and seek consensus with Derby College as pre-requisites to opening a new seasonal concession path across Ridgewayside. The path should start alongside the hollow-way from Coggers Lane and pass through a flower-rich hay meadow. It should also be closed to public access during lambing time and part of the bird breeding season (for 6 weeks from 1 April). Dogs must be kept on a lead at all times. However, it could also be used positively to improve people's understanding of ecological issues with regard to hay meadows. This route would connect well with the existing footpath network, avoid a section of road walking, provide outstanding panoramic views and enable people to see a flower-rich hay meadow (which is now a relatively rare opportunity). Due to potential problems with disturbance to farming activity, habitats and birds, it is proposed not to publicise this route but merely to allow access for a trial period of two years, with the proviso that this access may be withdrawn on the Steering Group's recommendation, at any time within that period, should problems occur.

The bird survey was conducted and showed no concerns but consensus was never reached with Derby College.

Agree/disagree/modify:

Agree for a trial period of two years. The signs about the closed period should be present all year, so that people know in advance.

Recommendation 12:

Designate as public footpaths, the current informal access to the Chapel and along the hollow-way above the farm to Hollin Bank.

Background:

Previous objective:

14b5.4 NB. It was agreed that we should do nothing - i.e. neither encourage nor discourage use of the hollow-way above the farm, which is occasionally used by walkers to cut a corner between existing footpaths.

This arrangement works pretty well and no problems have been experienced. We see no reason why such access should not now be formalised.

Agree/disagree/modify:

Agree but open as a concession path for a trial period of two years, then designate if no problems. It would also provide a separate footpath to the proposed bridleway along the driveway. However, it should not be widely promoted other than by normal footpath signing on-site.

Recommendation 13:

Re-designate the public footpath from Hollin Bank down the drive past the Hall & Farm as a public bridleway.

Background:

New suggestion. This would link nicely with the bridleway from Redmires over the Edge to Hollin Bank and may help to take pressure off calls to designate the path along the top of the Edge as a bridleway. It is felt that this suggestion would fit in with the aim for access & rights of way, which is: "Improve the rights of way network where appropriate" and the goal for recreation, which is: "To welcome visitors to the Estate by providing easy and open access for all people and many types of recreation, whilst encouraging responsible use in order to: protect & enhance ecology/wildlife; protect the landscape and "wilderness experience"; avoid conflict within and between user groups; avoid causing disturbance to local residents and farming and to avoid damage to archaeology/cultural history".

Agree/disagree/modify:

Agree but as a concession bridleway for two years trial period first. Ideally, there would also be a link to Hathersage via Baulk Lane (but this is outside our ownership, although the owner should be contacted with the idea). Safety of use and impact on Hall tenants will need to be assessed during the trial period.

Recommendation 14:

Create new hay meadows, by spreading seed from Ridgewayside North and managing as late cut meadows, in the current pastures at: All of Ridgewayside? (or at least one more hay meadow), Top Warren, Leveret Fields, Front Field.

Background:

Advised by PDNPA Ecologist and partially actioned so far.

Agree/disagree/modify:

Modify: Designate all in-by fields as either hay meadows, pastures or flexible (either/or), including re-creation of hay meadows where suggested but not on all of Ridgewayside. Further detailed advice to be provided by PDNPA's Ecologist. Any drains should also be blocked/broken to provide wetter pastures and meadows, where appropriate.

Recommendation 15:

Create new visitor facility/picnic area in the corner of Top Warren, near Hollin Bank Toilet block. This could include fencing out a corner of the field, planting part with native broadleaf trees, providing benches and interpretation, creating a wildlife pond in one of the hollows in Top Pasture.

Background:

The pond was suggested by PDNPA's Ecologist, footpath suggested by Ramblers but ruled out by Derby College during the plan process and the visitor facility suggested to make more use of the toilet block as a potential interpretation area.

Agree/disagree/modify:

Modify: It was suggested that this scale of visitor facility was not necessary in this location and may cause further roadside parking problems. It was therefore agreed to merely provide a bench at the back of the toilet block and restore the pond (subject to consultation with archaeologists) and see how well it is used. If it proves popular we could then reconsider providing further benches and interpretation.

Recommendation 16: *NOT YET AGREED*

Veteran trees - plant 6-10 new field boundary trees to become future veteran trees and replace existing mature boundary trees (ash & oak).

Background:

Advised by PDNPA Ecologist but not yet actioned.

Agree/disagree/modify:

The table discussing it initially agreed and suggested that they might even be "sponsored" but there was not time to gain agreement from the whole meeting.

Recommendation 17: NOT YET AGREED

Install small exclosures in the boulder strewn Warren field to create an area of "parkland"/"wood pasture" habitat to border the oak woodland. 8-10 trees and 3-4 hawthorn shrubs to become future veteran trees.

Background:

Advised by PDNPA Ecologist but not yet consulted on.

Agree/disagree/modify:

The table discussing it initially agreed but there was not time to gain agreement from the whole meeting.

Recommendation 18:

Harvest and spread seed from the best conservation fields on the others, followed by periods of appropriate low grazing levels to aid improvement.

Background:

Advised by PDNPA Ecologist and partially actioned so far.

Agree/disagree/modify:

Agreed.

Recommendation 19: NOT YET AGREED

Seek to provide a room in one of the buildings for use by partner organisations to the Stanage Forum - as a "drop in" centre with displays and staff/volunteers from any partner organisation.

Background:

Suggested at the last Steering Group meeting. Planners should be consulted.

Agree/disagree/modify:

The table discussing it initially agreed but suggested there may be security issues but there was not time to gain agreement from the whole meeting.

Recommendation 20: *NOT YET AGREED*

Widen all hedges. When fences are ready for replacement, widen by 1m to allow hedge expansion.

Background:

New suggestion.

Agree/disagree/modify:

The table discussing it initially agreed but there was not time to gain agreement from the whole meeting.

Recommendation 21: *NOT YET AGREED*

Cattle grazing should be re-introduced to the in-bye land, in combination with sheep, at the appropriate level. This is particularly important for wet pastures: Little Chapel Field, Leveret Fields, Bottom Pasture, Gathering Field and perhaps Ridgewayside?.

Background:

Ecologist's advice not yet actioned. Traditional breeds such as belted Galloway or highland cattle should be favoured.

Agree/disagree/modify:

The table discussing it initially agreed but there was not time to gain agreement from the whole meeting.

Recommendation 22:

All weed control to be by mechanical means only and field margins to be left uncut.

Background:

New suggestion based on Ecologist's advice.

Agree/disagree/modify:

Modify: use mechanical means except as a last resort, having tried all other options and field margins left uncut as long as this complies with current legislation.

Recommendation 23:

The farm should contribute to education about sustainable land management and achievement of the Plan's objectives, acting as a demonstration of best practice.

Background:

Derby College provided an educational element to their farming and it would be good to really make the most of educational opportunities at North Lees. There are no specific objectives regarding the farm buildings, etc only general ones, summed up by the goal for education for all, which is: "To optimise the educational value of the Estate, whilst protecting / enhancing its ecology and archaeological interest; without undue disturbance to the wildness of the area, other visitors, local people and the working farm".

Agree/disagree/modify:

Agree but clarify that the demonstration of best practice should be about how recreation, conservation and farming can co-exist. Also that this should not be a requirement put solely on a new tenant/farm manager but be achieved acting in conjunction with PDNPA and other partners.

Recommendation 24: NOT YET AGREED

Ideas as to how the farm can contribute to a social inclusion strategy for the Estate should be welcomed.

Background:

There are no specific objectives for this as a strategy has yet to be developed but an aim of the Plan is "To develop an Equal Opportunities & Social Inclusion strategy to ensure that everyone has real opportunity to become involved in the management and enjoyment of the Estate".

Agree/disagree/modify:

This was not discussed at all at the meeting.

Recommendation 25: NOT YET AGREED

Ideas as to how the farm can contribute to maximising the Estate's contribution to the local economy should be welcomed.

Background:

There are no specific objectives for this as a strategy has yet to be developed but this is a stated aim of the Economy chapter of the Plan.

Agree/disagree/modify:

This was not discussed at all at the meeting.

Recommendation 26:

The "fabric" of the Estate must be maintained in good condition - including signs, walls, fences, hedges and buildings.

Background:

Covered by ESA and farm tenancy currently but needs specifying as both of these will change.

Agree/disagree/modify:

Agreed but bear in mind the Plan's Landscape chapter presumption against fencing.

Recommendation 27: NOT YET AGREED

Far Warren - fence out mature oaks but allow vehicular access to one side.

Background:

To allow natural regeneration of strip of mature oaks which have become separated from the woodland block.

New suggestion which came from one table at the meeting but there was not time to gain agreement from the whole meeting.

Recommendation 28: NOT YET AGREED

Cattisside & Hook's Car bracken beds - clear by hand and plant the odd rowan, hawthorn and perhaps gorse, to aid bilberry and heather regeneration and favour birds like whinchat, tree pipit and ring ouzel. Particularly focus on opening up the wet flushes.

Background:

New suggestion, linked to recommendation 9 about bracken control but not discussed at the meeting. It was considered that the west facing slope of Cattisside above the cottage is quite akin to Welsh ffrydds (sparsely wooded valley sides), which are a priority BAP habitat in Wales. Trees would help break up the monotony of large deep bracken beds and provide perches and berries for birds.

Recommendation 29: NOT YET AGREED

Plant an orchard and sacrificial fodder crop for birds in Barley Orchard field, which is improved land near the Hall.

Background:

New suggestion to reinstate some variety in habitat on improved land which currently has little conservation value. As the name of the field suggests, an orchard and an arable crop would have existed before the land was sown as grass pasture. Exact details to be agreed on RSPB and PDNPA Ecologists' advice but it is suggested that half the field could be planted as an orchard and the other half split into thirds with turnips, oats and fallow rotated each year. This would benefit farmland birds such as linnet, yellowhammer and finches.

Recommendation 30: NOT YET AGREED

Dig 3 or 4 widely separated scrapes (small pools) on top of Sheepwash Bank and in Little Chapel Field/the improved bit of the Warren field - for curlew and snipe and potentially lapwing.

Background:

New suggestion to continue the successful scrapes digging programme on Gathering Field and near the Buck Stone. NB Siting will need to be agreed with PDNPA Archaeologists.

Recommendation 31: NOT YET AGREED

Plant a group of native broadleaf trees in the dense bracken top corner of Chapel Field, below the Chapel remains.

Background:

New suggestion to improve conservation value of a dense bracken patch which is of little value for anything else in this location.

D. Next steps

The Authority will involve the Steering Group in deciding which management options would best meet the above objectives (once agreed) and achieve the principles of its Asset Management Review, which are:

- Review properties against NPA objectives
- Consider other options to secure objectives
- Verify any legal constraints on disposal
- Examine how alternative management arrangements could release resources
- Consider how to focus resources on retained properties

For further information: Visit the website: www.peakdistrict.org/stanage or contact: Matthew Croney, PDNPA, Aldern House, Baslow Road, Bakewell, Derbyshire, DE45 1AE. Email: matthew.croney@peakdistrict.gov.uk Tel: 01629 816351.