

Updated 13 April 2006

Agreed Vision, Goal and Aims from the Plan:

General Principle:

The management of the Farm should operate within the framework of the Estate Management Plan and embrace the Stanage Forum structure/process and its consensus principles.

Vision: (as existing)

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

Goal: (as existing)

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: (revised to reflect the new objectives)

- 10.2 For the farm to be environmentally sustainable and maximise its conservation value
- 10.3 In meeting the other aims, the farming based business should strive to be economically sustainable and contribute towards local social and economic well-being where possible.
- 10.4 To positively contribute to the recreational use of the Estate
- 10.5 To enhance the landscape value and fabric of the Estate

Agreed objectives

These have now been numbered under the above aims and divided into objectives and actions.

Aim 10.2 For the farm to be environmentally sustainable and maximise its conservation value

Objective 10.2.1

The land should continue to be grazed at current sustainable 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 (but this requires further discussion). 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 and Gathering Field. Traditional breeds such as Shorthorn, Blue Albion, belted Galloway or highland cattle should be favoured.

Background:

As in 2001 during the drafting of the Plan, the idea of not grazing the moorland at all was discussed and rejected again. (See the full Estate Management Plan for pros and cons). The changes to grazing, including reintroducing cattle are new suggestions from PDNPA's Ecologist.

Objective 10.2.2

Carry out a combination of rotational heather cutting and burning in strips on the dry heather moor (favouring cutting initially but monitoring results relative to burning) 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. However, burning should not be ruled out, as it often produces better results and there may be some areas of the moor that cutting machinery cannot get to. PDNPA's archaeologists should also be consulted on the burning plan. Heather management is one of a range of techniques (also including bracken control, digging scrapes, blocking drains, etc) designed to create a diverse mosaic of habitats.

Objective 10.2.3

Maximise the conservation value of all in-bye fields. They should all be designated as either hay meadows, pastures or flexible (either/or) and enhanced accordingly. The improved fields nearest to the farm may be considered for greater experimentation if appropriate.

Action 10.2.3.1

Hay meadows should be re-created on Ridgewayside, Top Warren, Leveret Fields and Front Field by spreading seed from Ridgewayside North and managing as late cut meadows.

Action 10.2.3.2

The floristic value of other pastures and hay meadows should be enhanced by harvesting and spreading seed from the best conservation fields (but not to the extent that they are impoverished), followed by periods of appropriate low grazing levels to aid improvement.

Action 10.2.3.3

Any drains should also be blocked/broken to provide wetter pastures and meadows, where appropriate.

Background:

Advised by PDNPA Ecologist and partially actioned so far. Further detailed advice to be provided by PDNPA's Ecologist, accompanied by a review of stocking regimes and land management practices.

Action 10.2.3.4

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. This should also be accompanied by a review of stocking regimes and land management practices.

Objective 10.2.4

Any necessary bracken and weed control should be done by mechanical means if possible or weed wiping or spot spraying as a last resort).

Action 10.2.4.1

Bracken should be treated if it is encroaching into other more valuable vegetation (such as heather moorland or species-rich grassland). This should be done by mechanical means where possible, accompanied by tree planting where appropriate. For further guidance, see the Peak District Bracken Code of Practice.

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.

Bracken management is one of a range of techniques (also including heather cutting/burning, digging scrapes, blocking drains, etc) designed to create a diverse mosaic of habitats.

Action 10.2.4.2

Cattisside & Hook's Car bracken beds – clear by hand and plant the very occasional rowan, hawthorn and other suitable native scrub species, to aid bilberry and heather regeneration and

favour birds like whinchat, tree pipit and ring ouzel. Particularly focus on opening up the wet flushes. We should also consider merely scything the bracken annually around grassy/heather patches/boulders to enhance the mosaic of habitats and provide more feeding areas for Ring Ouzel and other birds.

Background:

New suggestion. 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. Needs final approval on site by PDNPA Ecologist.

Action 10.2.4.3

All weed control should be by mechanical means except where weed wiping or spot spraying is essential to control noxious weeds to comply with current legislation. Field margins should be left uncut.

Background:

New suggestion based on Ecologist's advice.

Objective 10.2.5

Organic farming should be welcomed/encouraged (but is not essential), provided that comprehensive, environmentally friendly conservation objectives can be met.

Background:

It was agreed that this is a good and worthwhile objective but there may be issues to overcome/consider, such as the unfenced moorland boundary to neighbours land, which is not currently organic and animal welfare implications regarding use of preventative injections.

Previous 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.

Objective 10.2.6:

Farming using rare/traditional breeds will be welcomed (but is not essential).

Background:

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

Such livestock should be suitable hill farming breeds, rather than just for novelty value.

Objective 10.2.7:

Enhance all farmland trees and small woodlands and where appropriate, plant new ones.

Action 10.2.7.1

Veteran trees – plant 6-10 new field boundary trees to become future veteran trees and replace existing mature boundary trees (ash & oak). It might be possible to gain “sponsorship” of such trees or plant them in memory of someone.

Action 10.2.7.2

Install small enclosures 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.

Action 10.2.7.3

Far Warren – fence out existing group of mature oaks but allow vehicular access to one side (if necessary). This is to allow natural regeneration of strip of mature oaks which have become separated from the woodland block.

Action 10.2.7.4

Plant a group of native broadleaf trees in the dense bracken top corner of Chapel Field, below the Chapel remains. This is to improve the conservation value of a dense bracken patch which is of little value for anything else in this location. Subject to agreement on site by PDNPA Ecologist.

Background:

All new suggestions from PDNPA.

Action 10.2.8

An application must be made for the new Higher Level Scheme, retaining existing Environmentally Sensitive Area scheme guidelines as a minimum conservation standard.

Background:

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

Previous 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. The farm's ESA will end in April 2006. ESA is no longer available for new applications and has been replaced by the Environmental Stewardship Scheme, which has two levels: Entry Level and Higher Level.

Action 10.2.9

Widen all hedges. When fences are ready for replacement, widen them by around 1m to allow hedge expansion. Subject to agreement on site by PDNPA Ecologist in each case.

Background:

New suggestion. Need to bear in mind impact on land registration for the Single Payment Scheme, etc.

Action 10.2.10

Provide scrapes (small pools) where appropriate to enhance habitat for upland waders, such as lapwing, snipe and curlew. 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.

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 Ecologists and Archaeologists.

Aim 10.3 For the farming based business to be economically sustainable and contribute towards local social and economic well-being

NB. Many of the objectives under 10.2 should also contribute to making the farm economically sustainable, such as organic farming, rare breeds and applying for the Higher Level Scheme.

Objective 10.3.1

Appropriate farm diversification will be considered. 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, listed buildings and any other necessary approvals.

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.

Any diversification proposals need to fit the overall Estate objectives and be subject to full discussion with the Stanage Forum Steering Group.

Possible diversification opportunities might be:

1. niche products from the farm, linked to the use of the traditional barns
2. bunkhouse in traditional barn
3. craft workshop, etc in traditional barn.

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

Objective 10.3.2

The farm should seek to achieve the Peak District Environmental Quality Mark as a viable business and be branded and marketed as high quality, locally produced, environmentally sustainable produce.

Background:

There should be a presumption for EQM status unless there is a good reason why not. 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 also present an opportunity to encourage others in the chain of production to meet EQM standards.

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.

Objective 10.3.3

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

Background:

New suggestion to seek to meet the National Park statutory duty to foster the social and economic well being of local communities. There are no specific objectives for this under the Estate Management Plan, as a strategy has yet to be developed but this is a stated aim of the Economy chapter. Ideas suggested for consideration might include providing visitor facilities at the farm buildings, such as a farming demonstration/ low key visitor centre or local foods retail outlet but these would need planning consent and consideration of their impact on the Hall tenants and local roads and services, etc.

Objective 10.3.4

In achieving the other objectives, the management of the farm should contribute towards the social well-being of the local area wherever possible. For example, if we decide to re-let any of the Estate, local candidates will be particularly encouraged and welcomed.

Background:

New suggestion to seek to meet the National Park statutory duty to foster the social and economic well being of local communities.

Aim 10.4 To positively contribute to and gain from the recreational use of the Estate

Objective 10.4.1

To enhance the rights of way network on the farm.

Background:

The following actions were either new or suggested in the past and on reconsideration, it was agreed that they should be implemented as soon as possible after 29 September 2006 (when the current farm tenants leave). Wear issues and future maintenance requirements should be assessed in advance. It is felt that these suggestions would fit in with the aim for access & rights of way, which is to: "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".

Action 10.4.1.1

Open a new seasonal concession path across Ridgewayside for a trial period of two years.

Background:

As per 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). Signs to this effect should be present all year, to forewarn people. 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.

Action 10.4.1.2

Designate as concession footpaths, the current informal access to the Chapel and along the hollow-way above the farm to Hollin Bank for a trial period of two years, then designate as public footpaths if no problems.

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. It would also provide a separate footpath to the proposed bridleway along the driveway (see 10.4.1.3 below). We see no reason why such access should not now be formalised. However, it should not be widely promoted other than by normal footpath signing on-site.

Action 10.4.1.3

Re-designate the public footpath from Hollin Bank down the drive past the Hall & Farm as a concession bridleway for a trial period of two years, then designate as a public bridleway if no problems.

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. 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.

Objective 10.4.2

To enhance visitor facilities on the farm.

Action 10.4.2.1

Enhance the area around Hollin Bank Toilets block by providing a bench at the back of the toilet block and restoring the pond in Top Warren (subject to consultation with archaeologists).

Background:

New suggestion. It was discussed as to whether the top corner of Top Warren should be fenced out and planted with native broadleaf trees, providing benches and interpretation but this was felt to be too large a scale and formal for the demand. It was therefore agreed to first provide a minimum of visitor facilities and see how well they are used. If it proves popular we could then consider expanding (but weighing this against objectives for a natural landscape).

Action 10.4.2.2

Seek to provide a room in one of the buildings for use by partner organisations to the Stange Forum – as a “drop in” centre with displays and staff/volunteers from any partner organisation. Such a mini visitor centre could also sell local farm produce.

Background:

Suggested at the last Steering Group meeting. This is not a high priority and could only be provided if it fits in with the overall best use of the buildings as part of the whole estate. PDNPA Development Control officers should be consulted. Security issues should be borne in mind if equipment is to be left in the room.

Objective 10.4.3

The farm should contribute to education about sustainable land management and achievement of the Plan's objectives, acting as a demonstration of best practice about how conservation, farming and visitor activity can co-exist.

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. 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. This links to 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”.

Objective 10.4.4

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 a Management 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”.

Objective 10.4.5

Ensure that farm-based activity is not unduly disturbed by visitor pressure.

Action 10.4.5.1

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

1. Use interpretation/education measures to improve understanding (see Education and Access & Rights of Way).
2. 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.
3. Place advisory notices on the windscreens of offending cars (also asking them not to turn it into litter) and record their details.

Background:

This is not a big problem at North Lees any more but needs to be continued.

Previous objective 10.4.1: similar to 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.

NB. There are many more objectives in the Estate Management Plan to improve understanding and influence visitor behaviour – see Recreation chapters (particularly Access & Right of Way) and Education for All.

Aim 10.5 To enhance the farming landscape and fabric of the Estate

Objective 10.5.1

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

Background:

Much of this is now required by codes of good agricultural and agri-environmental practice. It is also currently covered by ESA and the farm tenancy agreement but needs specifying as both of these will change in September 2006. Bear in mind the Plan’s Landscape chapter presumption against fencing.