

Wild Peak: Farmers Assembly

In a structured assembly inviting farmers to explore the support they would need to change to nature-guided management practices, we discussed the question:

‘What support is needed for farmers who want to adopt nature-guided management practices or enhance the wild spaces on their land’

Time & Date: Thursday 8th December 2022, 1-3pm

Location: High Leas Farm, Riber, Matlock

Attendees:

Albin Smith	Local Grazier and Woodland Expert
Andrew Critchlow	National Farmers Union
Dave Savage	Derbyshire Wildlife Trust
Gemma Galbraith	Local Farmer, Become Wild
George Galbraith	Local Farmer, Become Wild
Jamie Bird	Derbyshire Dales Climate Hub
Lor Bird	Derbyshire Dales Climate Hub
Peter Voke	Derbyshire Dales Climate Hub
Jane Bassett	Local Farmer, Peak Farmers Group
Karen Hinckley	Local Farmer
Mim Macdonald	Woven Earth
Pen Rashbass	Local Farmer, Pasture for Life
Peter Freeman	Local Resident
Rob Owen	Woven Earth
Rosemary Furness	White Peak Livestock Farmer
Ruth Pilbeam	Derbyshire Wildlife Trust
Sarah Bird	Peak District National Park Authority
Scott Hallam	Local Farmer

Introduction

The Wild Peak: Farmers Assembly was a research and engagement tool employed by Derbyshire Wildlife Trust staff shortly after the launch of the Wild Peak Network, November 2022. This report will publish and discuss the outcomes of the event, including its perceived value to the attendees and to the future development of the Wild Peak Programme⁽¹⁾.

Wild Peak is an ambitious rewilding initiative based in the Peak District that is working in close partnership with landowners, local communities and project leaders to inspire and implement a landscape-scale, nature-led approach to Nature’s Recovery, using nature-based solutions and rewilding principles, wherever possible.

According to Peak District National Park Authorities’ 2021 State of the Park Report⁽²⁾, 87% of the Peak District National Park (PDNP) is classed as Utilised Agricultural Area⁽³⁾. Between 2014 – 2018, average farming income has dropped by 7% in the East Midlands Region, but by 42% for grazing livestock farmers in Less Favoured Areas (LFA), a key dynamic within the PDNP (100% of PDNP is classed as LFA).

Major influences on this decline in farming income are extreme weather conditions and substantially higher feed costs including the increased reliance on supplemental feed provision⁽²⁾. This makes farmers a key stakeholder in the Wild Peak programme, and the priority to support in the transition to nature-focussed land management for the regeneration of their land and the landscape scale restoration of natural processes.

Initial communications with farmers in the PDNP highlighted a perceived divide between farmers and Derbyshire Wildlife Trust, with a history of conflicting priorities and distrust⁽⁴⁾. The Wild Peak programme has been launched during the first period that farmers and conservationists are united by similar incentives for land management.

Successful rewilding initiatives across the country were consulted for their experience working alongside farmers, and local farming representation organisations, including specialists on nature-friendly farming and regenerative agriculture were approached for local advice^(5,6,7,8,9). Consultation with individual farmers was identified as key to engagement.

A structured assembly was identified as a useful engagement tool for its focus encouraging all attendees to engage fully, rather than focussing on the loudest voice in the room. The intention is to identify the opinions of individuals and to avoid focussing on narratives perpetuated in local media, or by organisations with vested interests.

Assembly Method

The assembly was run by members of the Derbyshire Dales Climate Hub⁽¹⁰⁾ who have undertaken Community Assembly training for the facilitation of structured assemblies. Jamie Bird, Senior Lecturer at the University of Derby's School of Psychology, hosted the session and provided a written record of the results. The venue was donated by Woven Earth, an events barn at High Leas Farm, Riber. The hosts provided tea, coffee, biscuits and warm pies as there was no heating in the barn and the temperature reached freezing.

The assembly was listed on Eventbrite and linked to the DWT website events page. Invitations to the assembly were distributed to farming members of the Wild Peak network and externally via DWT social media and newsletters to members of the Nature Friendly Farming Network, Pasture for Life, the National Farmers Union and the Peak Farmers Group.

The event began with refreshments, then the attendees took seats in a circle and the assembly progressed as follows;

- Each attendee introduced themselves in turn, by name and farming focus.
- Ruth Pilbeam gave a 5 minute introduction to the Wild Peak Programme aims and ongoing activities
- Dave Savage then spoke for 5 minutes about the history of the programme and barriers overcome
- The attendees then split into groups of 5
- Each group discussed the question, 'What support is needed for farmers who want to adopt nature-guided management practices or enhance the wild spaces on their land'
- 1 of each group acted as scribe, writing down notes on the discussion and ensuring each member had the opportunity to speak
- After 60 minutes, each group shortlisted two key points to share with the other groups
- All groups re-joined and each scribe read out their two key points
- Each point was discussed by all attendees and collective responses were agreed and recorded
- All notes were written up by the facilitator
- This report was produced by the Wild Peak team
- This report has been shared with all attendees to ensure it properly reflects the discussions had

Results

The collectively agreed responses to the title question at the end of the session were as follows, with the brackets expanding on the context of each statement;

1. Good examples and figureheads are needed (demonstrating successful nature-guided land management)
2. Farmers should be paid fairly for public goods (including ecosystem services and food production)
3. Paperwork and administration are a serious barrier. A consistent point of contact is needed (for local government and funding bodies)
4. Clarity around finance is required (for long-term public and private funding mechanisms)
5. Government support for local and seasonal food production (redistribution of funding to prioritise nature-friendly production methods)
6. Current incentives are too prescriptive (flexibility is needed to make the best use of land for nature while maintaining a viable business model)
7. Education to change mindsets (engaging farmers and the public with viable alternatives to high-intensity methods)
8. Regulation of private funding (preventing outside investors from purchasing units below market value, and preventing the sale of units farmers may need to retain for their future business viability)

Discussion

The assembly's collective responses suggest that the answer to the question, 'What support is needed for farmers who want to adopt nature-guided management practices or enhance the wild spaces on their land' cover three key areas; education, funding and advice. In addition, the over-arching theme of the discussion related to communication with farmers, including the importance of language used, clarity of advice and longevity of support offered.

In every small group, discussion around the term 'rewilding' was instigated and this topic was carried throughout. Attendees agreed that the term 'rewilding' is perceived as negative, with common understanding of the term relating to poorly controlled, large scale species re-introduction projects that destroy existing ecosystems. It was also suggested that this opinion stems from a lack of knowledge and that a mindset change was needed to reunite the farming community with the growing public adoption of the term. Attendees suggested to move away from the use of the term 'rewilding' and adopt 'nature-guided management' instead. Wild Peak represents a range of stakeholders, and 'rewilding' is proven to be a useful engagement tool with other groups, but a review of our communication with farmers could be key to working with a major stakeholder group.

It was suggested that Wild Peak and Derbyshire Wildlife Trust's (DWT) association with the term 'rewilding' resulted in a low turn out from farmers despite widely distributed invitations. Other reservations related to DWT's history of opposing ecologically damaging farming practices, which farmers felt were necessary in order to fulfil the high-intensity requirements of past funding schemes. This included opposition to the badger cull as DWT have pioneered a vaccination programme. Final notes were made that the location in Riber was not central enough for North

and West Peak Farmers to travel to easily, and that the temperature was uncomfortably cold.

Education

Responses 7 and 1 relate to education, advising on the information that Farmers suggest they need in order to engage with opportunities for nature-guided management and enhancement of wild space. This discussion was complex as the Farmers in attendance stated that they didn't think that they had the necessary information to fully change their practice, however their attendance proved their personal interest, and the majority of them had employed some aspect of change in practice. Education has two purposes in this context; Firstly, the transformation of the farming mindset until enough farmers are open to the adoption of nature-focussed land management; Secondly, the provision of education for Farmers to make an informed decision on the best changes in practice on their land, and the funding and advice available to support that.

Response 7, 'Education to change mindsets', was identified as a significant challenge, with barriers including ongoing conflict around badger control, lack of common language between Farmers, conservationists and the public, and the scale of change in mindset needed from the high-intensity farming methods previously championed by government subsidies. Discussion of these barriers highlighted a perceived divide between Farmers and public opinion, with increasing environmental awareness resulting in the recognition of unsustainable farming practices without knowledge of other work done to protect nature on their farms, and with no appreciation for the role of government and available funding in changing practice. This imbalance was suggested to have been perpetuated by advocates of nature-guided management, but it was felt that using these same channels for improved

education would provide the opportunity for farmers to engage with this change of practice.

Response 1, 'Good examples and figureheads are needed', highlighted an opportunity for farmer-led engagement, a strategy recognised as crucial for building trust in the viability of rewilding⁽¹¹⁾. Attendees noted that the current figureheads recognised as spokespeople for nature-guided management were unrelatable to farmers, and culpable in the formerly mentioned imbalance of public opinion. The suggestion was made that a local demonstration of the results of nature-guided management, with examples of good practice and explanation of business model viability would encourage farmers that it could work for them too. Peak District specific issues were raised including the disparity between the vision of landscape-scale restoration and archaeological restrictions, but there were no concerns raised about the potential loss of a cultural landscape, rather frustration at restrictions 'freezing (the landscape) in a particular period of time' when attendees recognised nature-recovery is urgently needed.

Funding

Responses 2, 5, 4 and 8 relate to the innovation in funding Farmers suggest is needed to enable and incentivise the uptake of nature-guided management and enhancement of wild space. These responses address the uncertainty around ongoing changes in government subsidy structure, as well as the inadequacy of funding schemes currently available, and the unknown value of natural capital in the emerging green finance market. Notably, attendees didn't discuss the growing trend in diversification of income through ventures such as eco-tourism, but focussed on farming as defined by the production of food and ecosystem services. It should also be recognised that despite the identification of an inadequate funding structure, most attendees had already accepted some

level of risk to profit in a personal commitment to the pursuit of nature-recovery.

Response 2, 'Farmers should be paid fairly for public goods', acknowledges the ecosystem services that farmers can deliver, and the lack of monetary recognition they have traditionally received. Attendees wanted recognition of the natural capital remaining and conserved on farmland, as well as a proper valuation of potential ecosystem services to the public if they were to restore wild space and regenerate parts of their land. Attendees didn't show a preference for government or private funding but emphasised that funding should truly reflect the services farmers provide and not just cover the bottom line so farmers have to make an ethical decision. Tenant rights were also discussed by some groups but the issue wasn't carried through as a key point, potentially due to lack of tenants in attendance; When discussed the emphasis was put on the Farmer being compensated for their work, so a prioritisation of tenant compensation.

Response 5, 'Government support for local and seasonal food production', addressed lower carbon food production and the consumption of food that can be grown locally to you in each season. Some groups tackled the landscape-scale issues of where food should be grown for optimal success, reducing management cost and resultant waste. This is a difficult issue in the Peak District where 100% of land is classed as LFA, although with wider considerations of rising sea levels, and the potential management of uplands by grazing cattle, this discussion didn't progress. Generally, farmers showed an inclination to allocate part of their land to their local community because of personal connections, but it was noted that community support needed to improve and that those adopting nature-guided management for personal reasons could be open to exploitation, whereas if this decision

was part of a government funded scheme there would be a level of protection.

Response 4, 'Clarity around finance is required', was a major point of discussion in all groups and identified as a priority for delivery. This not only fed into other discussions pertaining to education and advice, but provided a clear example that was used multiple times when attendees spoke about personal experience, concerns and confusion. Understanding that each individual farm has individual needs, there was still no suggestion for a source of advice for farmers to work out what funding scheme was relevant to them. As most attendees had navigated the application of at least one funding scheme, there was an acknowledgement that finance is available, but there was a clear confusion and reliance on expert advice. There was also a fear of being penalised, not just for mis-practice, but also for the adoption of a less financially rewarding scheme.

Response 8, 'Regulation of private funding', is a novel problem, with green finance an emerging market. Attendees were concerned that they wouldn't achieve sufficient value for the natural capital they produce, or that they would miss out on higher rates later on. With private investors already contacting farmers directly, attendees felt they were being pressured and needed protection from someone with more knowledge in the area, or that they would be at risk of exploitation. There was also a concern around the morality of selling natural capital with a lack of regulation on the companies making the purchases.

Advice

Responses 3 and 6 cover the support that farmers need in order to change practice, and the changes that this would mean making to the existing advisory infrastructure. These responses relate to the experience of attendees, ranging from the longer-lasting experience of early adopters, through to attendees who have recently adopted their first nature-guided funding schemes, or are researching for future applications. Responses included reflections on existing support, and recommendations for better advice and resource provision, highlighting the importance of farming and ecological knowledge as well as bureaucratic experience.

Response 3, 'Paperwork and administration are a serious barrier. A consistent point of contact is needed', can be separated into two issues relating to a lack of education on the application process and insufficient support from funding bodies during the application and the delivery of the scheme. Attendees pointed out that small farmers can't afford specialist advisors so struggle when transitioning to unfamiliar funding schemes. It was suggested that a path of increasing wilder schemes could help minimise the ongoing support farmers would need, and mechanisms for some farmers to lease the land to others for rewilding would help those less able to do the work themselves. One group discussed the frustration around lack of education on available schemes and stated that they wanted to know all of the rules before entering into a scheme; including clarity on the economics of change from high intensity to nature-based solutions.

Response 6, 'Current incentives are too prescriptive', is a significant local issue, with the extra restrictions around land-use within the park from SAC and SSSI designations alongside general management of the park for the maintenance of heritage features. Concerns were raised around the

current landscape not allowing proper nature recovery networks, and it was suggested that some free-range areas could be introduced in certain areas. Taxation on changing land-use was a source of uncertainty as current rules are so prescriptive. Recognising that guidelines around current schemes are very rigid to enforce proper management, it was suggested that they could be more conversational, allowing farmers license to work as suits their land, while still delivering the same measurable outcomes for nature. Attendees agreed that adaptive policies would see greater uptake.

The results of the assembly suggest that the transition to nature-guided management of the Peak landscape will rely on support and advice for farmers, tackling perceived risk through the successful distribution of information and the clarity of funding mechanisms. Governing bodies need to make fundamental changes to infrastructure in collaboration with farmers in order to encourage uptake without putting farm businesses at risk. The adoption of green finance mechanisms will be crucial to the sustained delivery of rewilding and the restoration of natural processes, but importantly, there must be a mindset change within the farming community that accepts the delivery of ecosystem services as a viable alternative to traditional high-intensity farming.

References

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5. Wild Ken Hill: <https://wildkenhill.co.uk/>
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Acknowledgments

With thanks to the following individuals for their contributions in the delivery of the event and the distribution of invitations;

Andrew Critchlow, Derbyshire County Advisor, National Farmers Union

Jane Bassett, Chair, Peak Farmers Group

Lottie Alves, Sustainable Farming Lead, Nature Friendly Farming Network

Pen Rashbass, Peak District Region Facilitator, Pasture for Life

Sarah Bird, Biodiversity Partnership Officer, Peak District National Park Authority

The Derbyshire Dales Climate Hub

The Woven Earth Team

Appendix

Community Assembly notes by J. Bird 23/12/22

Community Assembly notes - DWT

High Leas Farm – 8th December 2022

Question: 'What support is needed for farmers who want to adopt nature-guided management practices, or enhance the wild spaces on their land?'

Group 1:

The word 'rewilding' implicates large scale (negative) re-introduction of species will be poorly controlled (negative). Lack of understanding around management (lack of) when rewilding – destroy what is already there. Lack of knowledge. Mindset change is needed. Preconceptions negative; move away from 'rewilding' to 'nature-guided management' instead.

Bad press: Monbiot, Packham, (Knepp?) all bad. Need a figure head to lead it with demonstration.

Crowded space too big to understand schemes.

'Rewilding' negative. Too many other struggles before this. Lack of demonstration of 'why' with clear successes. Difficult topic to talk about with farmers. Farmers dealing with loads of negative press already across the board.

Need a path of increasing wilder schemes.

Rules first; economics of change from high intensity to nature-based solutions.

'RESET' – tools and resources; education; rules; economics; support. Absolute clarity needed on each point of 'RESET'. Simplify

Resilience as a benefit and mindset of control. More control with resilience. Cost of living crisis and high impact costs.

Recognising what is already done is very important. Mapping what flora, fauna, we've already got. It has to pay (with government support). Lower / changed grazing (negative). Stocking changes – lack of understanding of how 'regenerative' could work.

Need to be clear on economics. Translating economics clearly in a simplified manner. Accepted language very important.

Support network needs to be adaptive stewardship.

Adaptive policies will see greater uptake.

Appreciate the benefits of perma pasture.

Taxation of changing land

Land sharing

Uncertainty around change and future of business model.

BPS causing concern over its removal.

Tenancy ownership of carbon, or landowner?

Younger generation have opened their mind to educating themselves on wildlife. Lack of useful blueprints.

Peak Parks say they want nature recovery but want (walls?)

Farmers pressurised to buy/sell (?) carbon credits. Need protection from 'sharks'; need knowledge and advice; want regulation.

- Good practice examples needed
- Clarity around finance
- Education to change mindsets
- Future lease for conservation farms to ensure they are maintained when work has been done.
- Need to recognise work to date for ecosystem services.

- Could we have a leasing fee from government (semi-nationalisation).
- Must be paid for ecosystem services – government or private.
- Badger cull, rewilding, are creating barriers to farmers.
- Biodiversity.

Group 2

Feel railroaded by agriculture; difficult to do conservation farming.

Always been farming with conservation. What is different with this process?

Pressures are different for large farmers and conservation farmers, but still pressures. Nature friendly farmers can support big farmers.

Conservation farming lowers risk. Diverse groups can work together.

Redefine farming; climate change might change how we need to farm.

Farming does not just mean food production.

Farming for the future – capture carbon, clean water, wildlife.

Balance public involvement – conflict between conservation and public use.

Allocate land for local community.

Capturing carbon is being quantified for carbon credits. Not commercial companies buying carbon credits.

Mechanism for older farmers to lease the land to others for rewilding.

Pays for work to be done but does not pay for them in the future.

Needs to pay for the bottom line.

Dual funding.

Farmers could come together to market independently, not reliant on subsidies.

Money is biggest barrier.

Have to have financially viable business.

How to develop this group?

Peak District challenge to commercial farming. Some of Derbyshire is viable for large farmers.

Should we be growing food where not optimal.

Need to have a proper income.

Who do you work with morally to sell carbon credit. Have to protect against exploitation.

Have to be paid fairly / adequately for the public goods being delivered; more than now and more secure.

Indigenous group – as conservation farmers – open to exploitation and pawn like. Community support for local seasonal food production.

Regulation for private funding.

Group 3

Working blind and need more information on funding.

Need funding

Smaller farms may miss out to big farms

Financial support is needed at the right (land?). CS too prescriptive.

'Wild west' carbon credits

Wider definition of farming

Be able to just be a farmer. Money can be a barrier.

Opportunity to experiment with different measures.

Less micromanagement – e.g. taking animals off by 1st June. Guidelines less rigid – more conversational. It used to be like that!

A background of farming and ecology is needed rather than bureaucracy.

Fear of being penalised

Be paid to let a field go a bit wilder – e.g. reduce number of sheep. Some compensation for doing the right thing.

Hedgerow creation (in a picturesque? Landscape so can't put hedges in as not in character with white? Peak). Freezing in a particular period of time.

Free range areas – no walls.

Conflict of interests / funders – maybe a more conversation.

Little money for planting trees.

Small farmers don't have money to pay specialist advisors.

Issues of these being too prescriptive. Although proper management needed.

Collective Responses to the question 'What support is needed for farmers who want to adopt nature-guided management practices, or enhance the wild spaces on their land?'

1. Good examples and figureheads needed
2. Paid fairly for public goods

3. Paperwork and admin – serious barrier. Need consistent point of contact.

4. Clarity around finance required

5. Government support for local and seasonal food production

6. Current incentives are too prescriptive

7. Education to change mindsets

8. Regulation of private funding