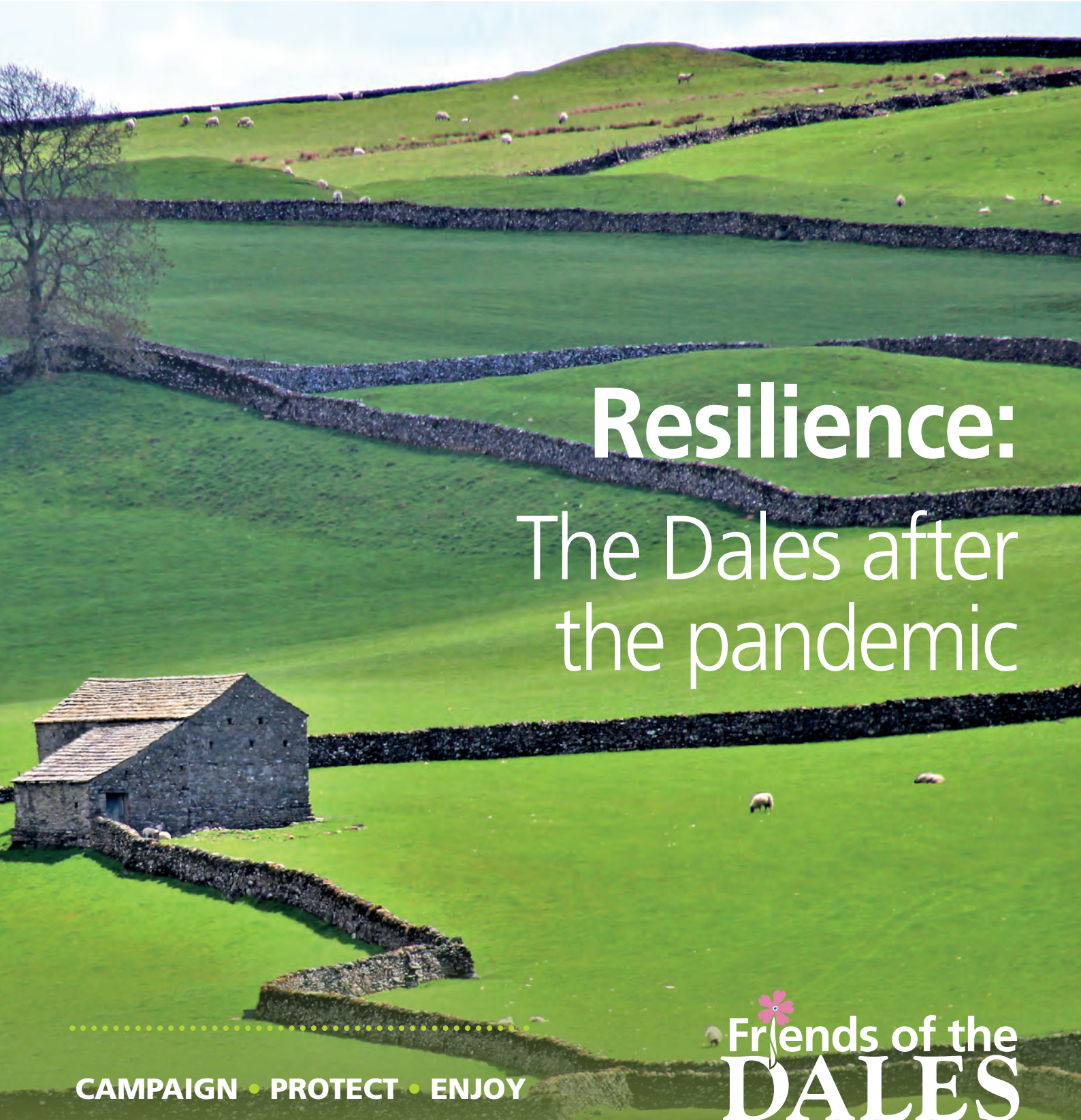


# Yorkshire **DALES** review

Summer 2020 : Issue 151



## Resilience: The Dales after the pandemic

CAMPAIGN • PROTECT • ENJOY

Friends of the  
**DALES**  
YORKSHIRE DALES SOCIETY

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Courtesy of Rick Cowley

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For any contributions or comments concerning this publication, please contact:

**Ann Shadrake**  
Friends of the Dales  
Canal Wharf  
Eshton Road  
Gargrave  
North Yorkshire  
BD23 3PN

Email:  
[ann.shadrake@friendsofthedales.org.uk](mailto:ann.shadrake@friendsofthedales.org.uk)

Office: **01756 749400**

 [www.friendsofthedales.org.uk](http://www.friendsofthedales.org.uk)

 [www.facebook.com/YorkshireDalesSociety](https://www.facebook.com/YorkshireDalesSociety)

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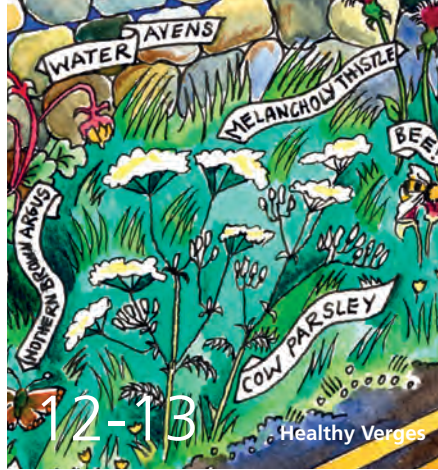
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Additional photos by Jonathan Cunningham, an art student living near Ribbleshead in the Dales, he says, "I walk around my local area with my two Border Collies and a mobile phone. My wildflower photography is totally random, but I do try to make some attempt to think of composition!"



### Expanding FOTD Campaigns on Social Media

Caitlin McLeod is a theatre and film director working for over a decade in both London and New York. Her short PLANTLIFE was a finalist in the London LIFT-OFF Festival 2019. She was born in Iowa in the US and grew up in Yorkshire. *Illustration by Nadira Wallace, Royal Holloway student and Extinction Rebellion member*

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## Living Through the Foot-and-Mouth Epidemic

Given the far-reaching and devastating impacts of the current coronavirus pandemic, we wondered how a previous crisis – the foot-and-mouth epidemic – affected the Dales and what lessons might be learned. We asked Colin and Fleur Speakman to explore this issue using the online archive of the Yorkshire Dales Review magazine – now available to everyone (at [www.dalescommunityarchive.org.uk](http://www.dalescommunityarchive.org.uk)). Colin and Fleur give their personal conclusions below.

It was intriguing to turn back to **spring 2001 (Review 74)** and what we were saying about the foot-and-mouth crisis in the Dales. Then, as now, the government – a Labour administration – did too little too late to contain the deadly disease, thankfully affecting only cattle. It spread at terrifying speed to livestock markets along Britain’s motorway network. Outbreaks were soon confirmed in the Dales, with horrifying televised images of cattle being burned in funeral pyres in the fields.

We reported on “Malham village, looking like a 17th-century plague village, with red warning notices and disinfectant mats to drive over”. We predicted that, as horrifying emotionally and financially as the impact was on the farming community, the impact on the Dales tourism industry would be more devastating. We suggested, correctly, that the impact on the visitor economy of the Dales would be massive and that it would take a decade to recover fully.

In **summer 2001 (Review 75)** we took an even tougher line. In a leader headed “The Forgotten Dales”, we noted that more than 100,000 cattle had been slaughtered in Craven alone, with the 30 farms directly affected and 120 contiguous farms losing their stock. In May 2001, there had been a resurgence. All footpaths and bridleways were closed. Visitors stayed away as walkers were forbidden to leave the tarmac. With all Yorkshire Dales Society (now FOTD) outdoor events cancelled, we urged members to support the Dales economy by buying local to help our businesses.

By **autumn 2001 (Review 76)** we recorded that access to some parts of the national park had reopened. We celebrated by describing an idyllic DalesBus trip into Swaledale. But much of the central Dales remained closed. In a campaigning article “When will it ever end?”, we indicated that we were writing to Prime Minister Tony Blair, key ministers and local MPs to request immediate financial support for Dales communities and a full public inquiry into this catastrophe.

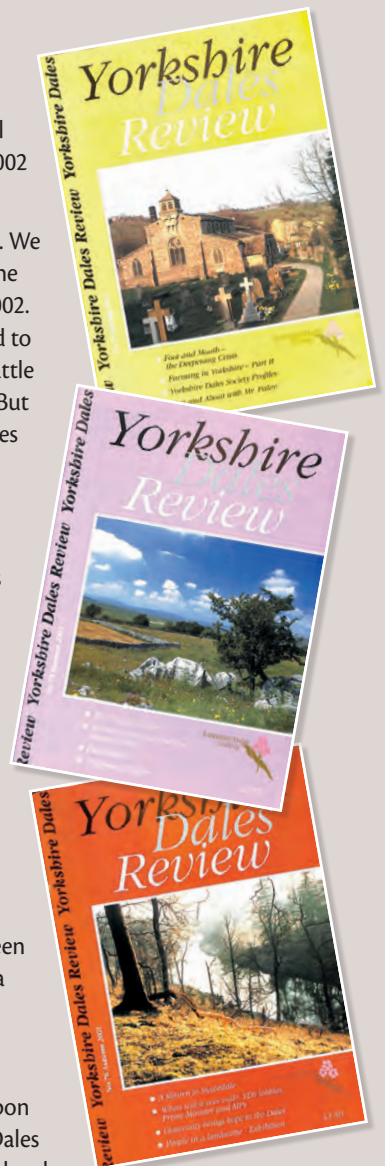
The last outbreaks were on August 31 in Addingham, and in late September near Appleby. Craven was not declared officially open until December 31, and it was February 2002 before all footpaths were reopened.

Financial help did come to the Dales. We supported a Dales Recovery Fund. The Anderson Inquiry reported in July 2002. Along with the Curry Report, this led to the introduction of vaccination in cattle and stringent biosecurity measures. But they came too late to save many Dales farming and tourism businesses.

Foot-and-mouth lasted 11 months and cost the nation an estimated £8 billion in lost revenue. This pales into insignificance compared with costs of the current Covid-19 pandemic, predicted to lead to the worst economic recession for 90 years. In 2001, shops, pubs and cafes remained open and bus services operated.

How can we as a small voluntary group deal with this? As in 2001, we can urge a return not to business as usual, but to a radically different “green recovery” agenda. Covid-19 may be a wake-up call for climate catastrophe that lies ahead. We need to engage with local communities and young people in more sustainable, low-carbon ways of living in and managing our Dales uplands. As the brilliant response by local volunteers to the lack of PPE provision for NHS and care workers revealed, Britain post-Covid will be a poorer, but in some ways more resilient, country.

We have a duty, in the Yorkshire Dales, to help point the way.



# Helping the Dales Fight Back

Walkers are now returning to the Dales. Courtesy of Rick Cowley

We love the ash tree. Many of us have planted it: organisations have planted tens of thousands of them. But as we did so, we also planted a disease. One of the stalwart, iconic and most numerous trees of our landscape (notably in the Dales), ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), is for the most part set to disappear. Ash dieback (*Chalara fraxinea*) cannot be stopped. Hot on its heels are other diseases. Emerald ash borer, which has yet to reach the UK, is wreaking havoc in the US. Whether we import this threat (and others) is up to us. Ash dieback is not solely attributable to the nursery trade, however, argued the late, great Oliver Rackham: “The greatest threat to the world’s trees and forests is globalisation of plant diseases: the casual way in which plants and soil are shipped and flown around the globe in commercial quantities, inevitably bringing with them diseases to which the plants at their destination have no resistance.”

Like *Chalara fraxinea*, Covid-19 is a symptom of wanton environmental degradation and the global flow of trade and people. The devastation is the result of the priorities of the current economic system, which override the health of humans and of the planet. Rackham urges us: “Get real. Stop letting the anthropology of commerce overrule the practical world. Stop treating plants (and bees) as mere articles of trade, like cars or tins of paint, to be made and brought in industrial quantities from anywhere.” \* With the proper incentives the UK could have grown all the ash we needed and avoided importing disease along with cheap plants. As with the

pandemic, if we want to avoid the spread of deadly pathogens, we must swiftly rethink globalisation: our expectations of travel and our habits of consumption. We will have to reorganise our social structures and restore our natural environments so that they serve our needs – health, education, clean air and water, food security – rather than our wants. In short, we’ll have to become more resilient.

## Covid-19 failures

The spectacular failure of the “free market” to deal adequately with either Covid-19 or the climate emergency is not surprising since collective and ecological wellbeing does

not feature as a goal of the stock market. This failure is, however, cause for hope: it is now obvious that radical systemic change is required if humanity is to survive, if not flourish. The lack of resilience of the current economic model has been starkly exposed. Supply chains that are extremely efficient for stuff we want (consumer goods) break down or simply don’t exist when asked to supply our collective needs. Witness the (ongoing) debacle over PPE supplies. This points to the urgent need to prioritise the local, the sustainable and the ecologically beneficial as well as greater public control over resources and supply chains.

What does this mean for the Dales? How can we become more resilient so that we can combat climate breakdown and be better prepared for crises to come? There is no return to “business as usual” and neither should there be given the mess we’re in. As the Indian novelist and activist Arundhati Roy puts it: “Nothing could be worse than a return to normality.” We now have an opportunity to rethink our modus operandi, to enact a cultural shift, to promote alternatives. Here is my necessarily partial and abstract pitch: let us replace “location, location, location” - an obsessive mantra to do with inflating the property bubble - with “diversity, diversity, diversity”. Let us think less in terms of attractive places and monetised spaces and more in terms of useful, interrelated, mutually reinforcing public goods. Let us aim for a better mix ecologically, socially and economically.

Monoculture, whether in forestry, agriculture, community or business, is extremely brittle, prone to breakdown under pressure. The major economic driver for the Dales, tourism, has been severely hit by such a pressure: the pandemic and resultant lockdown. Tourism accounts for one third of jobs in the Dales; three-quarters of rural businesses are in the hospitality sector. This is a perilous, if not fatal, overdependence on visitors. It also tends to be a high-carbon, low-wage sector. Jobs are precarious, often seasonal; employees in larger hotels usually live outside the national park and must drive to work. Further, it is an industry with a high impact on the environment.

## Sustainable Tourism

Alfonsina Russo, Director of the Colosseum in Rome, recently said, “We have a chance now to create a tourism culture that is more sustainable.” But what is sustainable tourism? Can this sector become more diverse and therefore robust? Airton’s Town End Farm Shop might serve as a good example for the future. Set up in the wake of the foot-and-mouth crisis, it not only serves visitors but also, increasingly, locals as a place to meet, eat, shop and use the recently installed post office. It stocks locally produced food, art and handicrafts. There are many other similar examples (perhaps you might let us know of them?) where hubs, networks, services and shops both feed into tourism as well as provide for local needs. Ecotourism is another way to diversify tourism; environmental consciousness becomes part and parcel of one’s visit.

In *A Green Reboot After The Pandemic*, the Club of Rome recently urged nations and communities to begin “laying the foundation for a green, circular economy that is anchored in nature-based solutions and geared toward the public good”. It calls for renewable energy, regenerative agriculture and reduced carbon emissions to “create a safe and just operating space for all of humanity”. The UN Secretary General, Antonio Guterres, advises that, “Public funds should invest in the future by flowing to sustainable sectors and projects that help the environment and climate. Fossil fuel subsidies must end, and carbon must have a price so polluters will pay.” Playing catch-up but nonetheless significant is the government’s Agriculture Bill, whereby financial assistance is offered for the purposes of “managing land, water or livestock in a way that mitigates or adapts to climate change”. We are moving into the era of farming rewarded for producing public and ecological benefits. All of this offers us a vision and chance to build resilience - which is to say reducing carbon emissions and reversing the destruction of biodiversity - into our everyday lives in the Dales.

## How can Friends of the Dales help to encourage resilience?

With the help of members, supporters and volunteers we can vociferously raise our voices to demand the protection of what we have and for rapid change in policy and programmes in order to halt further degradation - and make those demands irrespective of the budgetary constraints of the relevant authorities. We can hold these same authorities to account in light of the declarations of a climate emergency. And, finally, we can push on with our current campaigns - against single-use plastics and the untimely cutting of verges - in order to promote natural regeneration and recovery of biodiversity. Ash trees may be doomed but let them be the bellwether: let us redouble our efforts to do and see things differently for the good of the natural world, the public, and generations to come.

Bruce McLeod, Chair, Friends of the Dales



Life goes on in the Dales, despite Covid-19. Courtesy of Mark Corner



# The Strategic Priorities of Friends of the Dales

A small working group led by our Treasurer, Ian Harrison, has recently concluded a review of our strategic priorities. Whilst acknowledging that our overall strategy remains robust, the group re-examined our overall priorities to provide a framework for our activities for the next five years. This framework will also help us determine how to make best use of the generous legacies from which we have recently benefited. Its findings, which were approved at our June Council meeting, are summarised here:

Our **Vision** is

*“To be the leading voice campaigning for a sustainable future for the Dales”.*

We will achieve this by:

- Running focused **campaigns** on specific issues
- Managing and engaging our **membership**
- Publishing informed, regular and consistent **communications**
- Defining **policies** in support of the Vision
- Acting as a **“critical friend”** on landscape, heritage, biodiversity, community and cultural issues in the Dales
- **Raising awareness** of current landscape, heritage, biodiversity, community and cultural issues in the Dales
- Running **events and actions** both for the benefit of members and supporters, and integrated with our campaigns

To be successful it is essential that we have a strong organisational capability underpinning all our activities. We will therefore be investing in the skills and capacity of our people - staff, trustees, volunteers - and ensuring we have a robust financial platform in place.

We can't achieve all of this alone. We will therefore be working closely with the wider Dales community, our members, supporters and the media and with our external partners, such as the Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust, the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority and our own social enterprise, the Dales & Bowland CIC, to help achieve our aims.

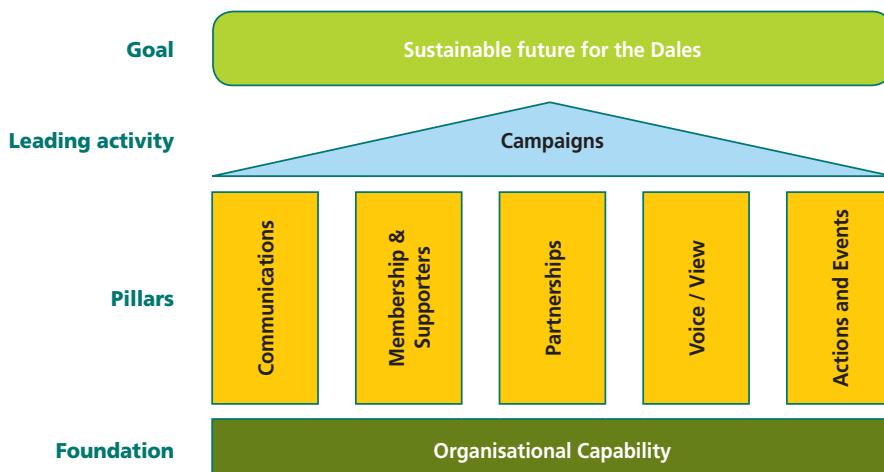
All of these themes, and how they fit together, are best summarised in this diagram.

Each of these themes has now been allocated to one of our working committees, which will now take responsibility for defining specific **SMART** objectives and implementation plans for each theme.

We look forward to updating you on our progress as we work to establish our position as *“the leading voice campaigning for a sustainable future for the Dales”.*

**Dr Ian Harrison,**  
Treasurer, Friends of the Dales

## Strategic Themes



Note: All components have a degree of interdependence

# Resilience

There's room for everybody in the Dales.  
Courtesy of Rick Cowley

# A Time to Recognise our Interdependence

Interesting word resilience, isn't it? In the 30 years I've lived in the Dales, I've often heard about "resilient, self-sufficient, independent local communities". I've come to the conclusion that if these admirable qualities mean "we can stand on our own two feet and don't need the help of anyone else", they don't really exist, except for some romantic notion that panders to a time that exists no longer.

The reality of living in the national park in 2020 is that there is a total interdependence between rural, semi-urban and urban communities. That's important to remember, as ideas are discussed as to what the future should look like in the Dales.

These issues – and their complexity – really came to the fore as the government began to release the lockdown from the Covid-19 pandemic. For many of those trapped in towns and cities for weeks on end, there was an overwhelming desire to seek out open spaces and reconnect with the countryside. Many of the people who visited the national park had never been here before, and were appreciating it for the first time. A hugely positive experience, you might think.

## Dissension on social media

It was disappointing and disheartening, therefore, to see some of the hostility vented at visitors during this time. The concerns of some communities regarding controlling the disease were understandable, but were often lost in venom. Some "messages", particularly on social media, were as unreasonable as they were unpleasant.

The issues arising from these debates were about a failure from some to recognise just how reliant Dales communities are on "outsiders". That's

not just the obvious fact that our economy – and many local businesses – depends on tourists. There is also the small matter of all the entertainment, education, health and other services that we rely on that are no longer provided locally. And what does "local" even mean in this context?

Two illustrations. The "havoc" caused by visitors at the Blue Lagoon in Threshfield. From the media coverage and reaction, you'd think the troublemakers had all come from Manchester, Liverpool or Newcastle. But the reality is that many of those involved had made a much less epic journey to reach the site.

Second example. Stainforth Foss and the appalling levels of littering. Visitors were called "uneducated"; they didn't know how "to behave in the countryside". I'd agree with some of that analysis, but they hadn't all come from Leeds. Quite a few came from the rather closer metropolis of Settle.

## We need tolerance

Clumsy examples? Possibly. But an illustration of how quickly tolerance and respect can be jettisoned to fit a particular narrative. That's not to say all visitors that came when lockdown restrictions were eased didn't have numpties among them – they did. But my experience was that the vast

majority simply wanted to escape the rigours of lockdown – perfectly legally – with their families.

I was humbled by the levels of gratitude expressed by visitors one morning by the River Wharfe at Grassington. These were people working in the NHS, care services, supermarkets, home delivery services... and wanted to spend time in the glorious Dales to escape their daily roles in keeping the country moving and protecting its people.

For the Dales to thrive in the future, for them to be "resilient", we all need to recognise the interdependence between town and country. More so than ever now, as there seems to be a real danger that, as a nation, we will revert to our pre-Covid, post-Brexit position of division, anger and intolerance. We're better than that. The majority of local people and visitors whom I have encountered over recent months have been fair-minded and decent; they recognise the need for respect, compromise and understanding. Maybe the key for the future is to recognise that these people are the true voices of the Dales, and need to make themselves heard above the shrill intolerance exhibited by the few.

David Butterworth, Chief Executive,  
Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority

# The Marginal Lands Project

## Time for Change in the Yorkshire Dales?

If you followed the trends in the increasingly erratic behaviour of the weather, 2020's extremes come as less of a surprise. That said, this spring has been the sunniest on record in England, as well as being one of the driest. This comes after the wettest February on record. While the longer-term trend has been a warming of average temperatures, more hidden are these fluctuations and others, like late frosts.

Agriculture frequently takes a battering from the vagaries of the weather. But when adverse weather is coupled with a mix of global events (such as continental-scale droughts as witnessed in 2012), or with the current Covid-19 crisis, the effects are compounded.

The problem with the higher parts of the Dales is that, apart from often being a set of very monochrome and denuded landscapes, they are facing increasingly severe environmental pressures. With an increase in the intensity of rainfall over recent winters, flooding, landslips and soil erosion are becoming more of a problem, as are moorland fires. Last year's torrential summer downpours over Wensleydale, Swaledale and Arkengarthdale, which wrecked 12 bridges and damaged crops and farmland, served as a reminder of the devastating power of flash flooding, with little to slow the rapid torrents.

### Replanting the landscape

However, the Yorkshire Dales Rivers Trust is now working on reintroducing trees into the landscape, to "slow the flow", with planting work apparent in the upper reaches of Wharfedale, Bishopdale and Coverdale.



Backsbottom Farm: A swale holds back the water on the land to allow for a slow release of water, instead of channelling its way downslope.

Just over the Lancashire border above Wray, at the northern edge of the Bowland fells, Rod Everett at Backsbottom Farm has been pioneering innovative techniques for slowing the rapidly rising water both from summer flash floods and persistent Atlantic winter storms. Check dams on streams, swales to hold back the water and careful placing of boulders in the beck to control the flow have been key components of the approach to land management on the farm. It's not just beckside planting of trees either: low-density stands of native species of trees such as alder and willow have been encouraged to return on the upper pastures to soak up excess moisture. And as well as having livestock, Backsbottom Farm hosts the Lancashire Apple project, which has over 200 local (to Lancashire, Yorkshire and Cumbria) varieties of apples growing in a wet, cloudy climate.

Later I went to see Katie Shepherd's farm, which grows fruit high up in the Dales at 380m (1,250ft). There were vegetables, beans and garlic growing outside, and tomatoes and other exotics in a polytunnel. Katie used permaculture techniques to maximise the capturing and storing of energy available sustainably. Her site in Langstrothdale was at the mercy of frosts occurring even in August, so her solution was to use a hotbox with animal manure to raise the temperature by several degrees, as well as a black-painted water container, a very low-impact means of heating the polytunnel. She grew fruit such as apples, currants and berries, and this inspired her farming neighbours also to experiment.



Backsbottom Farm: Native planting of wetland-loving trees in the upper rushy pastures, with Wharfedale in the background.





**Gunnarside Gill Hillside erosion:** The current state of much of the Dales uplands: A degraded upland landscape showing scars from erosion, over grazing and pollution from lead mining activities.



**High Greenfield:** Raised beds with vegetables growing in upper Langstrothdale. In the background are pastures grazed according to mob grazing principles, where stock is moved to reduce pressure on the grasses.

## Marginal Lands Project

In turn, this inspired me to see what was being done elsewhere in the country's marginal land areas. I researched growers who were employing permaculture techniques. Smallholders don't get agricultural subsidies, and yet they are surviving in the harshest environments in the British Isles, where any type of farming is officially classed as "disadvantaged". I decided to set up the Marginal Lands Project, to study those growing food in the lands affected by a harsh climate and poor soils. Nearly all of the land in the Dales is classed as Agricultural Grade 4 or below (Grade 5 being the poorest).

This meant asking about more than the direct impacts of extreme weather: there are issues such as waterlogging, soil compaction, erosion and moulds. Importantly, the barriers and problems facing growers (such as planning permission constraints or land ownership) were also collected.

So what can be learned from the Marginal Lands Project? There is a wealth of innovative solutions, tried and tested permaculture techniques, agro-forestry, ancient traditions or simple experimentation.

One Pennine site has a new orchard, which includes apple and plum varieties that tolerate wet ground. They have been planted on a damp, rushy part of a north-facing slope, where mean rainfall is about 1,400mm (typical of many Dales locations). Soil compaction is often reduced by avoiding the use of (large) tractors but in Shetland, where soils are very thin, a horse-drawn "kassine" to turn over the weeds is a "light-touch" innovation. The kassine can create ridges and incorporate weeds by turning them over rather than plough the soils. On soils that had been already compacted, green manure has been used to gradually rehabilitate the soil over several years by a site on the Welsh border hills, greatly increasing the soil's water retention.

To deal with frosts, one food grower observed early-flowering locations to identify milder spots in a forest garden. Another has allowed a

clearing in the trees for cold air to flow out along a gentle slope, or more shaded areas can be used to allow for later flowering, to avoid the frosts.

Unsurprisingly trees (and hedges) were cited time and time again as the ideal solution against erosion, soil saturation, flooding and high winds. The most acute losses come from damage from less-frequent, unseasonal, storm-force gales. While securing polytunnels or the staking of crops are common defences from a storm, other solutions include using shorter varieties of crops or the use of layers of shelter belts. Even when a greenhouse was blown away 350m (1,150ft) up on the lee side of the Cambrian Mountains, young apple and pear trees were not damaged by gales when planted using a "forestry notch" (T-shaped slots) planting system – and no staking.

The experience of the growers in the Marginal Lands Project shows that with a close sensitivity to the local environment, innovation and a willingness to experiment, what is regarded as impossible is quite the opposite. Moreover, what we might regard as timeless in the Dales, is not. The loss of diversity in the Dales farming landscape has been relatively recent. The great geologist, Adam Sedgwick of Dent, was ruefully noting the disappearance of older trees and orchards in Dentdale during the 19th century.

The Marginal Lands Project gives a pointer to those looking for sustainable means of adapting to increasingly severe weather outbreaks, and for widening the potential of the land while improving its soil, biodiversity and flood capacity. The bigger picture is that of changing the perception of the "disadvantaged lands" so that a more resilient, productive landscape evolves, linked to a local population desiring locally produced food: a vision where the uplands of the Dales are less marginal lands, and rather more hinterlands.

*More information on the Marginal Lands Project at [www.marginallands.org.uk](http://www.marginallands.org.uk) or Facebook: Marginal Lands Project*

Dr Dorian Speakman

# Settle Set To Be UK's First Rainbow Town



Settle – truly a rainbow town. Courtesy of Anthony Ward

This initiative has seen local businesses of all kinds offering special discounts and offers to frontline NHS staff and care workers, as a practical “thank you”.

The idea, from accommodation provider David Sexton, who owns Woodlands House in Giggleswick, struck a chord as a way to express gratitude and at the same time highlights the caring side of the people of this Dales town.

More than 25 businesses in Settle have signed up – just look for the Settle Rainbow Town logo on their websites or premises to see who's involved.

There's a wide variety of offers available for local and visiting frontline NHS staff and care workers. They can enjoy benefits including free entry to The Folly Museum, money off at Cottontail Crafts and 10% reduction on a stay at Woodlands House.

The Fisherman fish and chip shop is giving key workers priority in the queue while on duty, as well as a discount; Yorkshire Dales Guides is offering money off private and bespoke sessions and Nelson's Footwear has a discount available on repairs.

Others involved in the initiative include the Craven Arms, Wholesome Bee, Limestone Books, Homemaker of Settle, Lay of the Land, Peaks and Pods, The Talbot Arms, Sugar and Spice Eco Café, Forage and Feast, Warren and

Wright, Yorkshire Dales Cottages, Cowper Cottages, Bowland Fell, HRH@The Vintage Corner, 3 Peaks Sports and Barber on the Yard. More are joining in all the time. A full list of participating businesses and offer details is at [www.visitsettle.co.uk/settle-rainbow-town](http://www.visitsettle.co.uk/settle-rainbow-town)

## Vibrant Settle

Settle Rainbow Town is being co-ordinated through Vibrant Settle, a community partnership in the north Craven market town, which runs the website [www.visitsettle.co.uk](http://www.visitsettle.co.uk) and is responsible for the popular annual flowerpot festival and trail. It also organises the annual Christmas lights switch-on.

David said: “Businesses throughout the country are offering special deals and discounts for NHS and other key workers and we thought it would be great if Settle not only joined in, but took the idea further and coordinated our efforts. Individual shops, accommodation providers and others have come together to give frontline health and care workers a meaningful thank you. Settle is becoming the UK's first ‘Rainbow Town.’”

Vibrant Settle is hoping that visitors will return to Settle in the coming weeks and months to bring much-needed input into the local economy. It has developed and is implementing a post-Covid “recovery” plan, which, it is hoped, will encourage people back to the Settle area – or to visit for the first time. Actions taken include a “refreshed” website,

an intensive social media campaign and the creation of a YouTube channel featuring short videos of the Settle area.

Many local jobs depend on tourism and businesses including David's have lost substantial amounts of income throughout the health crisis, having missed crucial Easter and spring trade and bookings.

He said: “Although Rainbow Town is primarily a reaction to a desire to show our gratitude to frontline workers, many often on low wages and working in the NHS and care, it is also a beacon of hope for the future. As people return to the Settle area, and cafés, shops and others are able to resume trading, we hope to bounce back. The coronavirus crisis has brought many to the brink and we want to make sure that we continue to attract holidaymakers and day trippers who will help to keep local businesses viable.”

Steve Amphlett, of Vibrant Settle, said there had been a positive and welcoming response to the initiative.

He said: “People appreciate the opportunity to show support for these critical workers which goes beyond the Clap for Carers. It's also brought our business community together in a supportive way. As soon as we announced Rainbow Town we were inundated with businesses who wanted to get involved.”

Julia Murfin, Visit Settle

# The Real Black Gold

**Our colleagues at Campaign for National Parks (CNP) held a webinar\* in early June for delegates from national park societies, including several representatives from Friends of the Dales, on the topic of peatlands. This was prompted by CNP's intention to develop a position statement on peatlands, particularly on moorland burning. Anne Readshaw, a volunteer member of our policy committee, reports on the event below.**

Richard Lindsay (Head of Environmental and Conservation Research at the Sustainability Research Institute, University of East London) gave a presentation on UK Peatlands.

Richard showed Natural England's maps of peat and peaty soils in the UK, which illustrated how there is a close association between peat areas and our national parks. Surprisingly, there are some significant peatland areas outside the parks, and not necessarily in the uplands.

Peat can form over time anywhere that becomes waterlogged, hence lowland peat areas often correspond to flood-risk areas. Throughout history, many lowland peatlands have been drained and the peat lost. For example, ancient records show that raised bogs existed even in areas like Romney Marsh (hence the name). All peatland areas are important for biodiversity and hydrology.

## Government funding needed

At a global level, we do not really know where all of the world's peatlands are, although mapping and monitoring of peatlands form part of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. It has been shown that a layer of peat 30cm deep can store 300 tonnes of carbon per hectare; a similar amount to that contained in a comparable area of tropical rain forest. There is increasing concern that peatlands' carbon stores are being ignored, and a need for greater monitoring and mapping efforts. The IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) has passed Resolution 43 – aimed at securing the future for global peatlands through country-focussed programmes. However, the problem is lack of government funding (as always).

In the UK, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has produced a UK Peatlands Strategy 2018-2040, aimed at improving the management of the UK's peatlands. There is considerable goodwill and support for peatland restoration at Defra, despite funding being limited. Hence stakeholders are being invited to become more involved, and to contribute.

Many lowland areas of peat have been drained and converted to conventional arable agriculture. Richard has shown that a potato field on peat soil emits 37 tonnes of carbon dioxide per year. This effectively means that crops grown on peat are using fossil resources, rather than sustainable ones. Modern agricultural crops have been adapted historically for arid landscapes, yet wetlands are some of the most productive ecosystems on Earth, capable of producing more biomass than an equivalent area of cultivated wheat. We could change our collective mindset and grow flood-tolerant, sustainable crops on peatlands. Indeed, trials growing sphagnum moss as a crop are under way, and a £1m lottery grant has been awarded to the Fens Project to investigate the potential of growing other crops on wetlands.

## Destruction of peat

Richard reported the sad fact that globally 85-95% of upland peat has been damaged by mankind's activities. Ironically, wind farms represent one of the biggest drivers of destruction of blanket bogs in upland areas around the world, largely because the access roads disrupt the hydrology of the landscape. Another major (and again ironic) threat stems from tree planting, which is currently encouraged through carbon-reduction policy, but which dries and damages the peat so it releases its stores of carbon. Although the Forestry Commission doesn't normally allow planting on deep peat, extensive areas of shallow peat have been targeted for tree planting.

Moorland burning is another key cause of damage to upland peat, and despite the UK government talking about banning deliberate burning, currently only a voluntary agreement is in place (and is being ignored by many moor owners). Wildfires, caused by accident or arson, remain a serious problem. A carpet of sphagnum moss is crucial for a healthy moorland ecosystem, keeping the soil moist and helping to resist fire. However, acid rain (from industrial pollution) has denuded sphagnum on many peatland areas, particularly in the Peak District. Restoration work focusses on re-establishing a robust sphagnum layer wherever possible. It was emphasised that any type of moorland burning, even a so-called 'cool' burn aimed at heather regeneration, does significant damage and should be prohibited.

Going forward, it is hoped that the UK's new, post-EU Agriculture Bill will enable funding for provision of public goods such as high-quality water supplies, which could be directed towards peat restoration programmes.

*\* a webinar is a seminar held digitally over the internet*

# Expanding Campaigns on Social Media

This spring, Friends of the Dales opened a new front in our campaign to galvanise the community and local areas in order to protect wild verges. Caitlin McLeod explains how.

In an attempt to use social media to serve our verges campaign more effectively, the first step was to create a short video for Facebook, highlighting the contrast between mown verges and wild verges, drawing attention to the fact that the former becomes empty of biodiversity when cut, while the latter remains a vibrant home for wildlife.

The call to action for viewers was to “send us photos” of “healthy” verges. However, without a clear indication of how or where to send photos, no members took up the action, and the video attracted lukewarm attention (since then, we have had a number of posts featuring verges). The challenge then became: how do we encourage visitors to our Facebook page, used to viewing picturesque scenes of the Dales, to watch material that’s perhaps longer and more educational, and to take an action at the end of it?

Our second strategy was to pique interest with a question we assumed many viewers would not know the answer to: “What can you find in a natural verge?” We hoped that viewers might be intrigued enough to watch this (second) video that delivered the answer: it showed and named a dozen or so plant species found in one verge.

## How did it work?

This time we signposted how and where our viewers could send photos (“post in Comments below”). In addition, we “boosted” the post (at a cost of £10) as part of Facebook’s facility for



promoting advertisements on its website, and set a radius of 53 miles in the Yorkshire Dales. “Boosting” a post means that Facebook pushes the video or post to a wider audience over a certain number of days, ensuring that it reaches more viewers than might visit the page.

Results were mixed. We did have a few members post beautiful photos of their

verges, but the view count was not as high as we’d anticipated with the “boost”, and didn’t garner as many reactions as hoped. The feedback we received included the fact that videos on social media are rarely watched in their entirety and therefore the “call to action” needs to also be made clear in the main body of the post (upfront), so that regardless of finishing the video, viewers are aware what action is being asked of them.