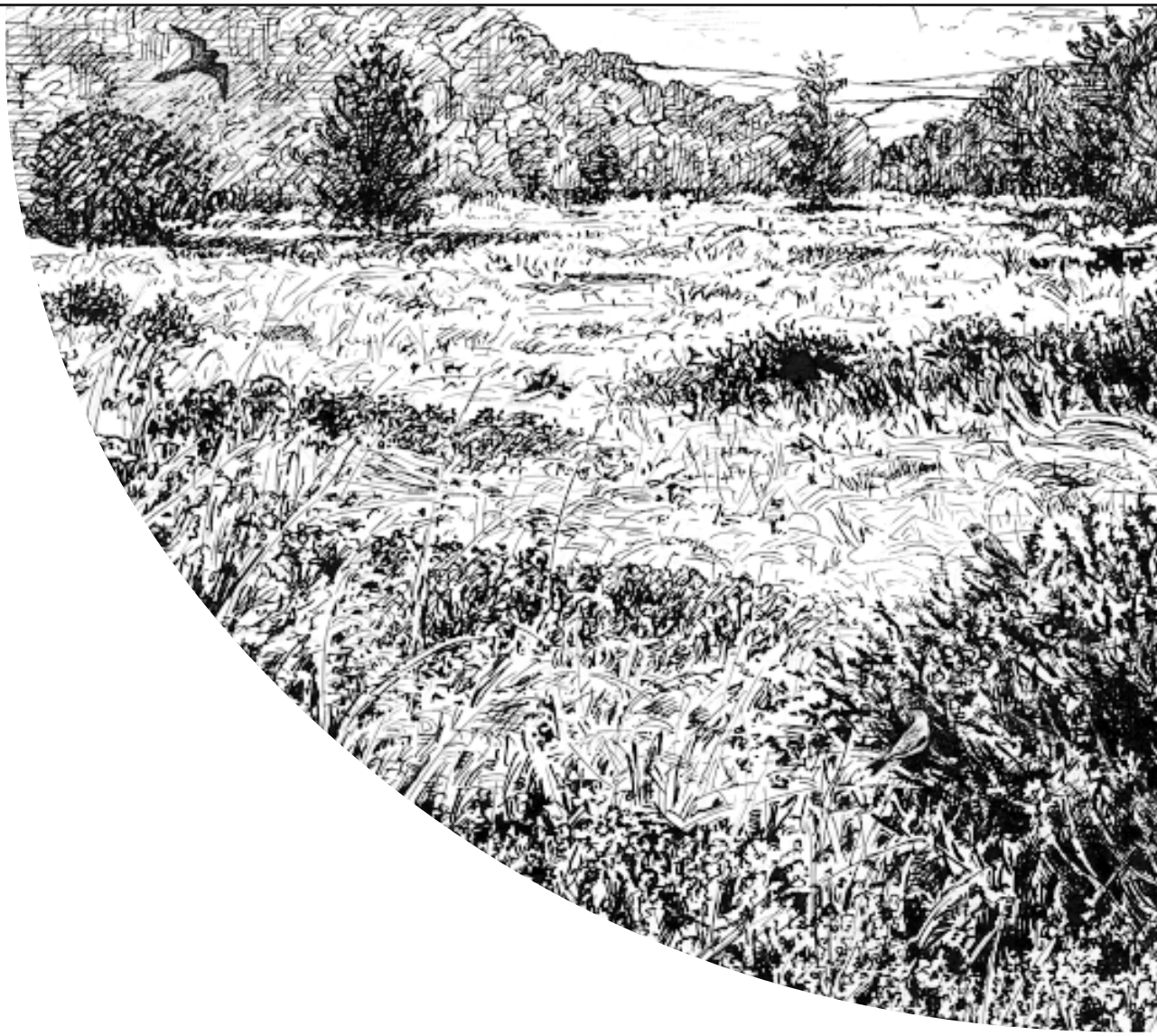

TREND IN THE PEAK DISTRICT:

Declined by 75% 1913 - 1984.

ESTIMATED EXTENT IN THE PEAK DISTRICT:

100 ha in total.

NATIONAL BAP HABITATS:

Upland Heathland (priority habitat).

ASSOCIATED NATIONAL BAP PRIORITY SPECIES:

Linnet, nightjar, brown hare, skylark.

ASSOCIATED PEAK DISTRICT AUDITS:

Limestone Heath.

INTRODUCTION

Limestone heaths are defined as any area of dwarf shrub dominated vegetation within the White Peak Natural Area. They are characterised by a dominance of heather with occasionally bilberry and rarely crowberry and cross-leaved heath. The dwarf shrubs grow in association with grasses and herbs typical of acidic soils.

Areas within the White Peak dales which support dwarf shrub dominated vegetation are being considered within the Limestone Dales Action Plan. This Action Plan covers the very varied heathland of the White Peak plateau. This is an incredibly rare resource with a total area of 100 ha confined to 28 sites, most of which are very small. Only four sites are bigger than 5 ha with the heath on Longstone Moor contributing 76 % of the resource.

The limestone heaths of the Peak District are very varied in terms of their size, vegetation and character. Some sites can be dominated by swathes of heather whilst at others the dwarf shrub forms a complex mosaic with acid, neutral and calcareous grassland and scrub. Ecologically each site is unique, a complex reflection of geology and land-use history.

The limestone heaths occur in a variety of situations. There are three extensive sites, which occur on some of the highest land within the White Peak, the largest of which is Longstone Moor. The other two sites are on Castleton and Bradwell Moors. Parwich Moor is a smaller plateau site. Two sites are found in association with woodlands, notably Wisels Wood near Pikehall and Alsop Moor Plantation. All other sites are present as relic areas of heathland along quarry brows and adjacent to other mineral workings, and on road verges. Secondary heath, where the dwarf shrubs have colonised newly exposed soils, is also present at mineral sites and on the sides of railway lines.

Heathland dominated the landscape of the White Peak plateau for hundreds of years, developing on the acid loess derived soils following the extensive woodland clearances in Neolithic times. In Medieval times the heathland around the villages was reclaimed for agriculture. As pressure increased for productive pasture the wastes and commons were enclosed and reclaimed, particularly during the parliamentary enclosure period from 1760 to 1820. Those remnants remaining into the twentieth century have declined by an estimated 75 % since 1915.

Limestone heaths are not only important ecologically but also in their distinct and valuable impact on the landscape. Each site provides a window into the past enabling us to visualise the White Peak prior to the 18th century. They exist as an important link in the historical story of the limestone plateau.

ADVERSE IMPACTS	Historic	Current
Land Management		
Heathland reclamation including ploughing, re-seeding, drainage, liming and artificial fertilisers.	✓✓	
Application of paper pulp.		✓
Inappropriate grazing levels including both over-grazing and neglect leading to scrub encroachment.	✓	✓✓
Pollution		
Sheep dip disposal.		✓
The adverse effects of Ivermectin on invertebrates.		✓
Quarrying and Re-working of Mineral Veins		
Mineral working and quarrying.	✓	✓
Others		
Landfill - in relation to the quarry and sandpit sites.		✓
Fragmentation – risk of species extinctions and negative effect on limestone heath restoration.	✓	✓✓
The use of hollows and small quarries for disposal of waste from building works etc.		✓
Tree planting.	✓	✓

Inappropriate management of roadside verges and green lanes.	✓	✓
Motorbike scrambling and 4x4 trials.		✓

An impact ✓ *Significant impact* ✓✓

CURRENT ACTION

Designated Sites

- There are two SSSI sites, Longstone Moor and Parwich Moor, covering more than 75 % of the resource area.

New Initiatives

- The PDNPA, as part of its Pastures Project, targeted limestone heaths for survey and conservation action in 1998.
- Methods for heathland restoration have been established within the Dark Peak. This method is now being trialed at four acid grassland sites within the White Peak as a project run by the PDNPA in conjunction with EN and the NT and financed with money from Objective 5b. The project was set up in 1999 and it is still in its early stages.

Sites Owned and Managed by Conservation Organisations

- The PDNPA owns and manages small areas of limestone heath on the disused railway trails and at Green Lane Pits, Middleton.
- The NT owns and manages the limestone heath at Alsop Moor Plantation.

Sites Within Conservation Agreements

- Two limestone heaths, one plateau site and one sand pit site, are being managed within the PDNPA's Farm Conservation Scheme (FCS).
- Two limestone heaths on abandoned mineral sites are being managed under voluntary agreements with the PDNPA.
- One limestone heath site is being managed under a voluntary agreement within MAFF's Countryside Stewardship Scheme (CSS).

ACTION PLAN OBJECTIVES AND TARGETS

National Targets

Limestone heaths most closely relate to the National BAP for Upland Heaths:

- Maintain current resource in favourable condition.
- Increase the total extent of resource by 5 %.
- Achieve favourable condition on all resource within SSSIs by 2010.
- Improve the condition of at least 50 % of resource outside SSSIs by 2010.
- Restoration of 50000 - 100000 ha by 2010.
- Re-creation of 5000 ha by 2005.

A Vision for the Peak District

The proposed targets for securing favourable management and condition are higher than regional and national targets since limestone heaths are a very rare and special resource. Essentially they are all that remain of a landscape that once characterised the White Peak, and now exist as a window into the past. Targets for restoration and creation are also higher than national targets because of the small area of limestone heath remaining in the Peak District. A total increase in resource in the region of 40 – 50 % is proposed. Every effort needs to be made to secure the conservation of every site. Furthermore, energy and resources need to be directed at opportunities for restoration and creation where this will contribute to a rich resource of limestone heath for the future.

OBJECTIVES AND TARGETS

Objective 1

Secure favourable condition on limestone heaths.

Targets

Secure favourable management within an appropriate conservation agreement on 100 % of limestone heaths by 2005. The difficulties of negotiating conservation agreements and favourable management need to be recognised when reviewing the achievement of this target.

Objective 2

Restore heathland on acid grassland sites to reverse the trend of heathland loss and address the problems of habitat fragmentation and isolation, whilst ensuring that ecologically important acid grassland sites are not threatened.

Targets

Survey all areas of acid grassland on the White Peak plateau by 2005 so as to identify appropriate areas for heathland restoration.

Restore a minimum of 40 ha of species-poor acid grassland to limestone heath by 2010, targeting species-poor acid grassland areas adjacent to existing heathland.

Objective 3

Explore the feasibility of creating heathland on arable land or improved grassland. If appropriate create heathland on priority sites to include areas adjacent to existing heathland.

Targets

If appropriate, trial heathland creation on a range of sites in priority areas by 2010.

Identify the opportunities for creation of new limestone heath sites in appropriate locations by 2010.

Main Factors Likely to Affect Achievement of Targets

Land Management

Implementation of the Rural Development Regulation and reform of the Common Agricultural Policy.

Effectiveness of agri-environment and conservation scheme prescriptions.

Resources and Financial Incentives

Limited rewards from agri-environment and conservation schemes and lack of incentives for favourable management.

Lack of funding from national schemes for non-agricultural sites.

Availability of funding for survey, negotiations and agreements.

High land prices – forcing intensive management following purchase of land.

Planning and Regulations

Planning policy.

Lack of planning controls for agricultural operations – Permitted Development Rights (PDRs) allow infilling and levelling of hollows within a farm holding.

Conflicts with Other Priorities

Conflict with other conservation interests, particularly on restoration sites.

Practical Difficulties

Effectiveness of techniques for restoration and creation.

Others

Lack of safeguard or effective conservation mechanisms outside of SSSIs. It is often at the time of change of ownership that limestone heaths, as with other habitats, are most at risk. At present there is no systematic procedure or mechanism for conservation bodies and local authorities to have an opportunity to safeguard such land.

ACTIONS

Limestone heaths are part of the historical mosaic of habitats in the White Peak. Key to their retention as part of the current and future landscape are actions relating to:

- Negotiations to secure appropriate land management (Actions LH22 - 24);
- Ensuring agri-environment and conservation schemes provide adequate financial incentive and appropriate management prescriptions to safeguard, enhance and restore limestone heaths (LH21);
- The survey of White Peak acid grasslands with the aim of identifying suitable sites for expansion of the limestone heath resource (LH4);
- The development and implementation of appropriate restoration and possibly also creation techniques (LH13 - 15), and
- The development of a strategy for safeguarding sites of particular wildlife importance where this cannot be achieved through the normal channels of negotiation, as the current systems are still inadequate to secure the future of some of our best remaining limestone heaths (LH27).

	ACTIONS	TIMESCALE	LEAD AGENCY & Partners
DATA COLLATION AND SURVEY			
	Data Collation		
LH1	Ensure that the existing PDNPA register of limestone heaths is updated and includes 'Wildlife Site' status. (Objective 1)	2001 onwards	**PDNPA**/EN/NT
LH2	Collate existing information on acid grasslands in the White Peak. (Objective 2)	Spring 2002	**PDNPA**/EN/NT/WTs LAs/LRCs
LH3	Compile a register of acid grasslands in the White Peak and update following survey and assessment – to include type and quality of acid grassland, existing conservation value, proximity to existing or historical heathland sites and potential for restoration. (Objective 2)	Spring 2002 onwards	**PDNPA**/EN/NT
	Survey		
LH4	Carry out a basic habitat survey of acid grasslands with the aim of finding appropriate sites for heathland restoration. (Objective 2)	2002 - 2005	**PDNPA**
EVALUATING THE IMPORTANCE AND CONDITION OF SITES.			
	Evaluating Importance and Identifying Key Sites		
LH5	Agree methodology for the evaluation of acid grassland sites in relation to the survey of potential heathland restoration sites. (Objective 2)	Spring 2002	**PDNPA**/GBAPG
	Defining Favourable Condition		
LH6	Agree definition of favourable condition for the complete range of sites. (Objective 1)	2001	**EN**/NT/PDNPA/WTs
LH7	Agree guidelines for the range of appropriate management needed to achieve favourable condition. (Objective 1)	2001	**EN**/NT/PDNPA/WTs
LH8	Agree guidelines on the restoration of limestone heaths. (Objective 2)	Autumn 2002	**PDNPA/EN** (joint leads)/GBAPG
LH9	Agree guidelines for the creation of heathland following completion of trials, aimed at landowners/managers and conservation organisation staff. (Objective 3)	2010	**PDNPA**/GBAPG

RESOURCES

LH10	Seek resources in collaboration with other grassland action plans for a basic survey of acid grasslands on the White Peak plateau. (Objective 2)	2001	**PDNPA**
LH11	Seek resources for the extension of the existing limestone heath restoration project – for field trials and wider implementation. (Objective 2)	2002	**PDNPA**
LH12	If trials for restoration are successful and creation becomes a feasible option, seek resources for heathland creation trials. (Objective 3)	2003	**PDNPA**

RESEARCH

LH13	Continue with heathland restoration project and develop guidelines for the restoration of limestone heath, with the primary aim of extending and linking existing sites. (Objective 2)	2001 – 2002	**PDNPA**/NT/EN
LH14	Assess the feasibility of heathland creation on arable and improved grassland. (Objective 3)	2003	**PDNPA**
LH15	Trial heathland creation on a number of sites and with a range of techniques and develop guidelines for the creation of limestone heath aimed at increasing the resource, particularly targeting historical sites. (Objective 3)	2003 - 2010	**PDNPA**
LH16	Ensure that the results of research into the effects of Ivermectin on invertebrate communities associated with animal dung are implemented at a local level. (Objectives 1 and 2)	2001 onwards	**WEG**

MONITORING

LH17	Agree methodology for and implement effective monitoring of limestone heaths. Ensure that the results of the process are collated and used to update the register. (Objectives 1 and 2)	2001 onwards	**PDNPA**/MAFF/EN/WTs NT

AWARENESS-RAISING

LH18	Share information on the wildlife importance and management needs of key conservation and restoration sites with landowners/managers, including feedback from surveys. (Objectives 1 and 2)	2001 onwards	EN/PDNPA/WTs/NT FWAG/MAFF
LH19	Make guidance available for heathland restoration based on the results of the Limestone Heath Restoration Project, aimed at landowners/managers and conservation organisation staff. (Objective 2)	Autumn 2002	**PDNPA**/GBAPG

CONSERVATION ACTION AND INCENTIVES

Designations

LH20	Review coverage of limestone heath SSSIs and notify further sites as appropriate. (Objectives 1 and 2)	2001 - 2003	**EN**/PDNPA

Grant Schemes

LH21	Consider recommending a review of all conservation schemes to ensure that: *Targeting at national, regional and local level gives adequate priority to limestone heaths *Management prescriptions are reviewed to include		

	specific reference to limestone heath and to accommodate flexible site-specific measures *Payments are reviewed and increased to at least the level of profits foregone, taking into account that the plateau sites are on potentially productive, accessible soils *Consideration is given to the option of small area and ungrazed site payments *Payments for restoration schemes are set at an appropriate level (Objectives 1 and 2)	2001 onwards	MAFF/EN/PDNPA WEG/GBAPG
	Negotiation and Review of Agreements		
LH22	Review management of all sites within SSSIs. Where necessary agree revised management regimes with owners/managers, through appropriate mechanisms, to ensure maintenance or restoration of favourable condition. (Objectives 1 and 2)	2002 - 2005	**EN**
LH23	Negotiate appropriate agreements with landowners and managers of all key limestone heath for conservation, restoration and creation, outside of existing agreements or SSSIs, in order to achieve maintenance or restoration of favourable condition or limestone heath creation. (Objectives 1and 2)	2001 – 2005 (conservation) 2003 - 2010 (restoration) 2010 (creation)	PDNPA/MAFF (joint leads)/FWAG/WTs/NT
LH24	Review management of limestone heaths in existing agreements, outside of SSSIs. Where necessary agree revised management regimes with owners/managers to ensure that favourable condition is being maintained or enhanced. (Objectives 1 and 2)	Spring 2002 - 2005	PDNPA/MAFF FWAG WTs/NT
	Land Acquisition		
LH25	Consider negotiating purchase/lease of priority sites where this would be the most effective way of achieving conservation objectives and when a negotiated conservation solution has not succeeded. (Objectives 1 and 2)	2001 onwards	PDNPA/EN/WTs RSPB/NT
	Direct Action		
LH26	On land owned by public or conservation bodies, ensure that: *Management maintains and where possible enhances the value of limestone heath *Options for the restoration of limestone heath are considered *Opportunities for involvement of local communities in site management are taken where possible (Objectives 1 and 2)	2001 onwards	PDNPA/WTs/NT/LAs EN/FC
LH27	Agree a strategy for safeguarding sites of particular wildlife importance where this cannot be achieved through the normal channels of negotiation, in liaison with land-owning, farming, and other land management interests. (Objective 1)	2001	**WEG**/NFU/CLA RLMEG

REGULATION

Planning

LH28 Ensure all planning applications and General Development Orders are adequately assessed in relation to their impact on limestone heaths, that loss or damage is avoided and

	that opportunities are taken for enhancement. (Objectives 1 and 2)	2001 onwards	PDNPA/EN/LAs/WTs
LH29	Consider the opportunities for the creation of limestone heaths in relevant planning decisions, including quarry restoration schemes. (Objective 3)	2001 onwards	PDNPA/EN/LAs/WTs
LH30	Ensure that the impact of disposal of waste from new buildings is addressed in the planning process. (Objectives 1 and 2)	2001 onwards	PDNPA/EN/LAs/WTs
	Pollution Control and Waste Management		
LH31	Review procedures and consultation processes in relation to the spreading of paper pulp. (Objectives 1 and 2)	2001	**EA**/LAs/PDNPA/EN WTs
LH32	Ensure good practice is followed in disposing of sheep dip, avoiding limestone heaths. Implement by continuing with an awareness raising strategy amongst land managers; continuing the programme of licensing; extending consultation procedures for disposal applications to the whole of the Peak District and, where necessary, by enforcement action. (Objectives 1 and 2)	2001 onwards	**EA/**LAs/PDNPA
	Other Regulatory Mechanisms		
LH33	Ensure that all woodland planting proposals consider the adverse effects of planting on limestone heaths. (Objective 1)	2001 onwards	**FC**/LAs/PDNPA/EN

RESOURCES

It is envisaged that a significant proportion of the actions proposed will be carried out by the relevant organisations using current resources. These include:

- continuing investment by landowners and managers managing their land sympathetically for wildlife;
- EN's programme of reviewing SSSI management and its grant and management agreement schemes;
- MAFF's Countryside Stewardship Scheme;
- the PDNPA's advisory and grants service for landowners/managers and its rolling programme of special conservation projects;
- Derbyshire Dales District Council roadside verge and green lane management;
- the Limestone Heath Restoration Project run by the PDNPA in conjunction with EN and the NT, with funding from Objective 5b;
- continuing management of limestone heaths owned by conservation organisations and public bodies (LAs, NT, PDNPA).

Additional resources are likely to be required:

- for survey of acid grasslands with a view to limestone heath restoration (2002);
- for the negotiation of restoration management (2003 - 2010);
- to provide adequate financial incentives for the conservation and restoration management of limestone heaths (2001 onwards);
- to aid in the production of the proposed registers (2001 onwards);
- to implement effective monitoring (2001 onwards).

The PDNPA and EN are currently seeking resources for a continuation of the Pastures Project, within which some acid grassland may be surveyed.