



NPA/25/017

Dartmoor National Park Authority

4 April 2025

Plymouth and South Devon Community Forest Plan 2025 – 2050 Public Consultation

Report of the Director of Conservation and Communities

Recommendation: **That Members:**

- (i) Note the requirement of the Community Forest to produce a plan; and**
- (ii) The draft 2025-2050 plan is launched for public consultation during April and May 2025.**

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Plymouth and South Devon Community Forest (PSDCF) was established in 2020 and since then has gone on to support a rapid increase in woodland creation across Plymouth, South Hams, West Devon and Dartmoor.
- 1.2 The PSDCF is a partnership between Dartmoor National Park Authority, Devon County Council, National Trust, Plymouth City Council, South Hams District Council, The Woodland Trust and West Devon Borough Council.
- 1.3 The original 2020 boundary took in all of Plymouth and parts of South Hams, West Devon and Dartmoor. In 2022 it was agreed to extend the Forest to take in all of Dartmoor. It is also general practice that in delivering its work Community Forests work to a 10 mile “halo”.

2. Draft 2025 – 2050 Plan

- 2.1 Along with the other [14 Community Forests across England](#) the PSDCF is preparing a Community Forest Plan for the 2025 – 2050 period. Collectively, the plans will set out an ambitious aim to place trees and woods at the heart of communities across England. Individually, and at a local level, the plans will

set out a local vision, objectives, principles, targets and initial plans for delivery through to 2030.

- 2.2 The Community Forest (CF) Plan is not seeking to develop new land use policy but to facilitate tree planting ambitions across the CF area. It is providing a framework to support other organisations to achieve their agreed planting targets and align with other statutory plans such as Local Plans and Local Nature Recovery Strategies as well as organisational plans such as Climate Emergency Plans.
- 2.3 The Draft Plan will be launched, subject to Member comments, on Monday 7 April 2025. It establishes a proposed vision, objectives, principles and targets for the PSDCF. These are embedded in the plan and summarised in Appendix 1.
- 2.4 The plan has been informed by a wide-ranging preparatory consultation with stakeholders. This has strengthened the plan and built partnership opportunities. Perhaps the most significant outcome from this preparatory work is the proposal to expand the boundary of PSDCF to incorporate Torbay, Teignbridge and all South Hams. The original boundary and proposed extension are shown in Appendix 2 and has the support of the Councils involved and the Forestry Commission.

3. Links to other plans and strategies

- 3.1 The PSDCF draft Plan 2025 –2050 will help deliver the targets and actions in both the current Dartmoor National Park Partnership Plan and the next iteration. However, Members should note that the PSDCF draft plan is non statutory plan with a primary purpose to drive forward woodland creation for the benefit of people, nature and climate. There is a particular focus on the health and well-being benefits of trees and woods and delivering equity of access to these benefits and that the involvement of young people is central to the development and delivery of the plan.
- 3.2 As outlined in the ‘Nature Enhancement on Dartmoor – Approach and progress (NPA/25/018) paper, Defra published the [Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework](#) (2024) which sets out how the targets established within the [Environment Improvement Plan](#) (2023) should be delivered within National Parks and National Landscapes. This includes targets for increased tree canopy and woodland cover.

4. Timetable of Consultation and Adoption

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|-----|--|---|
| 4.1 | April – May
End of May
June
July-September 2025 | Public Consultation
Full document and summary document completed
Forward Plan and respective adoption processes
Adoption of PSDCF Plan subject to DNPA and other partners agreement. |
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5. Equality and Impact Assessment

- 5.1 The draft PSDCF plan 2025 –2050 vision states ‘The Community Forest will connect people to nature, drive equitable access to the benefits of trees and woods, and plant the seeds of a better future for all.’ The involvement of communities and in particular the next generation is central to the draft plan.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1 There are no direct financial implications to the Authority associated with the consultation of the draft plan. There is officer time associated with being on the board of the PSDCF and commenting on tree planting schemes within or adjacent to the National Park.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1 The PSDCF draft plan is a requirement of the Defra support to fund the work of the Community Forests. A public consultation is a recommended stage in the process to agree and adopt a Community Forest Plan.
- 7.2 The adoption of the plan, and subsequent delivery is a positive initiative that will support DNPA in meeting the targets in the Dartmoor Partnership Plan and also the Protected Landscapes Target and Outcomes Framework (PLTOF).
- 7.3 Members are asked to note the requirement of PSDCF to produce a plan and agree that the draft plan is launched for public consultation in April 2025.

RICHARD DRYSDALE

Attachments: Appendices

1. Draft Vision, Objectives, Principles and Targets
2. Current and Proposed Boundary

Draft Vision, Objectives, Principles & Targets.

Vision. The following vision is proposed:

The Community Forest will be known for its thriving trees and woodlands, connecting the communities and landscapes of Plymouth, South Devon, West Devon and Dartmoor.

It will stretch from the streets and parks of Plymouth to the uplands of Dartmoor and be rich in wildlife; celebrated and cherished by all and delivering natural solutions to climate change.

The Community Forest will connect people to nature, drive equitable access to the benefits of trees and woods, and plant the seeds of a better future for all.

Objectives. These set the framework for P&SDCF actions.

Valuing our trees and woods, inspiring action and engaging communities.

Ensuring the value of existing as well as new trees and woodlands is understood and inspiring action that places young people, equity and access for all at the heart of the forest.

Improving the quality of trees and woodlands. Fostering and delivering thoughtful and high quality management, increasing the natural services trees and woodlands can deliver.

Expanding trees and woodlands. Establishing more, and better connected, trees and woodlands delivering benefits for communities, nature, climate and place.

Delivering through Connection and Co-operation. Working together to deliver the greatest benefits through an inclusive and welcoming partnership.

Principles. Given the vision and the range of objectives the following principles are proposed:

- Enable inclusive community involvement and engagement in all forest work
- Actively involve, and support, young people in the delivery of the plan
- Deliver equitable access to the health and wellbeing benefits of trees
- Establish the right tree in the right place using the right technique (or for the right purpose)
- Deliver nature recovery, climate adaptation and resilience in all activity
- Drive a sustainable woodland economy that embeds the many benefits of trees
- Adopt sustainable management, to industry best practice, for woodlands and trees
- Drive partnership working to grow the impacts and benefits of the forest
- Deliver connections and solutions across the whole forest area.

Targets. The following targets are proposed

- Increasing tree cover by 3%: creating over 3,000 hectares of new woodland
- Planting nearly 6,000 individual trees in the City of Plymouth
- Providing greater access to woodlands and the health benefits they bring
- Supporting landowners to bring all woodlands in healthy management
- Working with over 3,000 local residents every year in their communities
- Supporting 1,000 woodland and forestry jobs
- Working in partnership with those who share our ambition and passion for trees

Current and Proposed Boundary





NPA/25/018

Dartmoor National Park Authority

4 April 2025

Nature Enhancement on Dartmoor – Approach and Progress

Report of the Head of Conservation and Land Management

Recommendation: **That Members note and comment on the Authority’s approach to, and progress towards, nature enhancement targets on Dartmoor**

1. Introduction

- 1.1 England has become one of the most ‘nature depleted’ countries on earth, with more than one in seven species facing extinction. In response, the government outlined in 2018 an ambition to halt and reverse nature’s decline through the [25 year Environment Plan](#).
- 1.2 Dartmoor encompasses huge expanses of wildlife rich habitat, but there are long-standing concerns about the poor ecological condition of many habitats, particularly the moor and blanket bog. The populations of many species for which Dartmoor has been a stronghold (such as the Ring Ouzel, Curlew and several Fritillary butterflies) have also declined alarmingly, and there is a risk of losing them altogether. This report provides a reminder of the strategic and policy context established to help reverse the biodiversity decline and an update of progress against targets.

2. Powers and Policy context

- 2.1 The Authority has limited powers and resources to positively influence nature. We can protect nature through our planning policies and seek enhancement related to our Biodiversity Net Gain framework. The Farming in Protected Landscape programme provides funds to help support nature enhancement (and other objectives) on farmland. The key tool available to the Authority is the convening power and partnership ethos that governs most of our work: acting as a catalyst for ideas and innovation; supporting people and organisations to work together; developing funding bids; and in some instances, project managing practical projects that are funded through external funds. These all rely on professional staff capacity, which is severely limited.

- 2.2 [Section 245 \(Protected Landscapes\)](#) of the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023 (LURA) amends the duty on relevant authorities in respect of their functions which affect land in National Parks. Relevant authorities must now ‘seek to further’ the statutory purposes of Protected Landscapes. This replaces the previous duty on relevant authorities to ‘have regard to’ their statutory purposes. The new duty requires a positive obligation, and we hope it will reinforce support for nature enhancement on Dartmoor from ‘relevant authorities’ which includes organisations such as South West Water, Devon County Council, the district and borough councils, for example.
- 2.3 Defra published the [Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework](#) (2024) which sets out how the targets established within the [Environment Improvement Plan](#) (2023) should be delivered within National Parks and National Landscapes. This includes collective non-statutory objectives for protected landscapes relating to the protection, enhancement and enjoyment of nature including targets around peatland restoration, increasing tree canopy and woodland cover and broader habitat creation to create wildlife-rich habitats outside protected sites. There are also targets relating to climate change, archaeology and access. It should be noted that these targets are for Dartmoor the place and not specifically for the National Park Authority. If these targets are to have real meaning they will then need to influence the allocation of resources through the new Environmental Land Management Schemes (ELMS), National Park core grant and other competitive funding streams operated by Government. There may also be a need to review the tools available to deliver nature enhancement.
- 2.4 In 2020 the government committed to protecting 30% of the UK’s land for nature by 2030. How this would be achieved was also set out in the Environmental Improvement Plan and in more detail through [delivering 30by30 on land in England](#) (2023). Defra state that areas containing our most important biodiversity should be prioritised through a framework of strengthening designated sites, extending existing sites, creating new sites and investing in delivery by landowners.
- 2.5 [Local Nature Recovery Strategies](#) (LNRS) have been established through the Environment Bill as tools to drive more coordinated, practical and focussed action to help nature. Each strategy will establish priorities for nature’s recovery, map the most valuable existing areas for nature and establish specific proposals for creating or improving habitat for nature and wider environmental goals. Devon County Council are currently preparing a draft in consultation which will be available for initial comment later in 2025.

3. Approach

- 3.1 The DNPA approach to nature recovery on Dartmoor is based simply around three principles:
- **Restoring natural processes**
To reinstate or approximate natural systems such as functioning soils, unaltered watercourses, presence of key species, functioning blanket bogs and reconnected floodplains. This can be distinguished from the practice of ‘conservation’ which fundamentally focuses on the preservation of habitats and species, which often is about holding the line and preventing further degradation. In addition to supporting abundant wildlife, this process can also

provide a range of public goods such as flood alleviation, natural beauty, climate change mitigation and adaptation and recreational opportunities.

- **At scale**

In order to address the ecological challenges outlined in the '[Making Space for Nature](#)' report (often referred to as the Lawton Review) and strive for 'more, bigger, better and joined', a coordinated landscape approach is required. A *catchment* is the area of land drained by a *river* and its tributaries formed naturally by topography, geology and hydrology. The 'catchment-based approach' is a term used to refer to the management of land and surface water as a *system*. This integrated approach provides a recognisable landscape that communities understand, feel part of and to which they can relate.

Furthermore, this ecosystem approach operates within a natural system with an emphasis on actions that reflect how nature works rather than working solely within man-made administrative boundaries.

- **Through collaboration**

In order to achieve the step change needed, working together is more critical than ever. Operating in isolation and protecting fragmented pockets of habitat or species is unsustainable, ecological systems require enhancement at scale to function and help reverse the biodiversity and climate crisis. Landowners and managers will need to work together, stitching holdings with coordinated action in pursuit of a shared landscape vision. To succeed, this must be a co-designed shared vision between community and specialist interests.

In order to deliver against these principles, it is vital that dedicated resource is maintained for a long and sustained period of time to secure meaningful change. Conservation is often delivered through finite, small scale projects centred around specific themes resulting in short term and disconnected outcomes, both geographically and thematically.

4. Partnership Plan

4.1 The current Plan (2021-2026) includes an ambitious vision for enhancing Dartmoor's environment and nature. '[Better for Nature](#)' is the principal section within the Partnership Plan dedicated to reversing the ongoing biodiversity decline and is divided into three sections:

- **Conserve and restore**

This outlines objectives around restoring the building blocks of nature such as soils and water, prioritising protection of existing high value habitats and achieving landscape scale, dynamic ecosystems.

- **Abundant and diverse wildlife**

The identification, preservation and expansion of key priority species and a strategic approach to reintroduction of species once found on Dartmoor

- **Conserve and enhance natural beauty**

The management, restoration and creation of woodland and field boundaries

- 4.2 The plan is set to provide focus and steer across Dartmoor, not just for DNPA, for all those working towards a shared goal of nature enhancement on Dartmoor. The plan also includes metrics to monitor and gauge success.
- 4.3 In order to provide focus and identify opportunities, a comprehensive desk-based audit was carried out on priority habitats and species to better understand the ecological resource on Dartmoor and help to identify potential catchments that could offer the greatest opportunities for ecological enhancement. Seven catchments were identified through consultation as pilots, where resources could be focused to provide support and help encourage and facilitate landscape scale nature enhancement. This approach does not exclude other areas or initiatives if opportunity arose.
- 4.4 The Partnership Plan has an overarching vision of a working, living landscape. It recognises the role that farming and forestry businesses play in delivering a high-quality environment, food and fibre alongside a range of other public benefits.

5. Delivery Mechanisms

- 5.1 The Environmental Land Management Schemes (ELMS) have been in development for some years as a replacement to Environmental Stewardship and Countryside Stewardship. With the complete phasing out of the Basic Payment Scheme by 2027, ELMS will be the only substantive support mechanism available to Dartmoor farmers. The rollout of ELMS has been stilted and incomplete, making it difficult for landowners and land managers to make decisions without understanding the full offer. Of the three scheme elements, the base Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) has been partially launched and recently ([11 March 2025](#)) abruptly stopped without notice; Higher Tier (HT) remains delayed with plans to launch later this year and Landscape Recovery (LR) is a fiercely competitive process that has been piloted over two rounds resulting in 50 plus schemes nationwide.
- 5.2 To mitigate delays, most farms and commons on Dartmoor have been offered a series of extensions to existing Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) schemes with restrictions around making any changes to the original agreement. While providing ongoing funding, this system has locked landholdings into 12-14 year agreements with little scope to improve, change or adapt old management prescriptions.
- 5.3 There has also been a drive by government for the private sector to support environmental enhancements through a blended finance model. This includes mechanisms such as Biodiversity Net Gain, corporate sponsorship and philanthropy and is a requirement for all LR schemes.
- 5.4 The development, delays and policy decisions around ELMS has, and is, jeopardising upland farm businesses and making delivery of the ambitions set out in the Partnership Plan increasingly challenging.

6. Progress against Partnership and Business Plan

- 6.1 DNPA is leading, or partners in, a significant array of projects relating to delivery of **Better for Nature**, as outlined in the partnership Plan. In addition, other organisations are independently driving initiatives that will also contribute to Dartmoor's biodiversity targets. Examples of DNPA contribution include:

- **Landscape Recovery (LR)**

Landscape Recovery LR represents the third tier of the new Environmental Land Management Schemes (ELMS) being introduced by Defra to replace existing Agri-environment schemes. LR incorporate the principles of DNPA ambition for nature recovery by offering long term, collaborative funding for the restoration of defined landscapes rather than individual holdings or commons. It also provides a two-year development phase for all those who have signed up to develop a collective vision and business plan.

There are currently three active LR schemes on Dartmoor.

- East Dartmoor covering the Bovey catchment and led by the Wildlife Trust,
- Walkham Valley led by DNPA, and
- Central Dartmoor LR predominantly covering the Duchy estate led by the Central Dartmoor CIC.

Between them they cover about 30% of the National Park and will, if successful unilaterally, meet the government's 30x30 targets.

Each LR scheme is bespoke to the landscape and could offer significant funding opportunities in addition to the other two tiers of ELMs, by encouraging private finance to also invest in these landscapes. East Dartmoor is due to complete the development phase at the end of 2025 while the Walkham and Central Dartmoor will report in late and mid 2026 respectively. Implementation funding is not guaranteed, a strong business case and private finance opportunities will be required to secure a 20-year delivery agreement. This will demand ambition, trust and collaboration from farmers and landowners.

- **Healthy Livestock**

Run by the Hill Farm Project (HFP), as part of the Our Upland Commons (OUC) scheme, looking at ways to improve the wellbeing of livestock, grasslands and soil management. A central theme has been looking at animal health, particularly tick-borne diseases, and understanding dung beetle abundance and diversity as proxy indicators for the biological health of soils. Whilst now complete as a programme under OUC, this is being transitioned into the Dartmoor LR schemes for wider rollout.

- **Dartmoor Headwaters**

A collaboration between DNPA, the Environment Agency, Southwest Water and other partners, this programme has been restoring and emulating natural processes to reinstate blanket bog and reduce flooding to vulnerable communities for six years. These are landscape scale, catchment wide schemes that will provide ecological, water quality, flood resilience, biodiversity and drought resilience benefits to environments that will become increasingly prone to the effects of climate change in the coming years. Funding for peatland restoration has recently been extended and guaranteed for two years until 31 March 2027 and the natural flood management funding extends through to 2033.

- **Boundaries Project**

Funding secured through the Environment Agency Natural Environment Investment Readiness Fund (NEIRF) is enabling the HFP to look at the multiple ecosystems benefits that hedgerows provide to the environment and society

and identify ways that these ubiquitous features can better reward those who manage them. This programme runs until October 2025.

- **Species**

DNPA have led a partnership project for the last six years to reduce the impact of specific invasives species (American skunk cabbage and Himalayan Balsam) within targeted catchments. This will be expanded and incorporated into LR schemes in coming years.

- **The Pine Marten Partnership Project** led by Devon Wildlife Trust has completed the feasibility assessment for bringing this iconic mammal back to both Dartmoor and Exmoor as part of a wider southwest reinforcement scheme. With funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, Autumn 2024 saw the reintroduction of 15 Pine martens from Scotland to secret locations around Dartmoor. These are currently being tracked, and a similar process will take place on Exmoor in autumn 2025.
- **The Curlew Headstarting Programme** is a Duchy of Cornwall led initiative now in the final year of five. Eggs that would otherwise be destroyed are incubated and raised on Dartmoor for release in summer to subsequently return each spring. Habitat restoration is also carried out in parallel with the releases to ensure suitable landscapes are available to support an increasing population. While the aim is to help restore the Dartmoor breeding population which is now down to the last pair, unfortunately, to date, few project birds have been returning from overwintering sites to Dartmoor although this will be monitored over the next few years.

6.2 Many of these projects overlap and complement each other within pilot or priority landscapes, providing multiple benefits within complex ecosystems. The aim is that we and partners improve on this coordination and collaboration, ensuring that support and resources are provided to effect long-term and meaningful change that enhances the natural environment and helps promote sustainable businesses.

6.3 While not yet quantified but based on current trajectory, Dartmoor is likely to achieve the Partnership Plan and 30by30 objectives, especially if LR is successful. It is also important to note while this paper has focused on nature enhancement, many of the projects outlined above incorporated and deliver multiple objectives such as business resilience, historic environment and access.

7. Future priorities

7.1 The current iteration of the Partnership Plan concludes at the end of 2026 and the process to draft the next five-year plan begins in summer 2025. A major change will be the ambition to deliver the PLTOF targets as set by Natural England and apportioned across all Protected Landscapes, will be challenging to deliver by 2042 (wildlife-rich habitats) and 2050 (Peatland restoration and woodland cover). The principles set out under the current Plan are long-term and still hold, nature needs protecting and restoring at scale and in contiguous blocks, natural processes should be restored, and with the management aim to achieve dynamic heterogeneous systems. Dartmoor's strength lies with the suite of public goods that it provides and rural businesses that embrace this should be rewarded.

- 7.2 To that end, we continue to explore opportunities with partners for round 3 of LR if launched in 2025. Positive meetings have been held with organisations who are passionate about a full catchment partnership approach on the Dart and Erme and Yealm catchments. If ELMS is overhauled by Defra and LR does not progress, we will endeavour to pursue this approach through other funding opportunities.
- 7.3 The outputs of the Fursdon Review which has now convened the Dartmoor Land Use Management Group (DLUMG) could help further shape and facilitate the delivery of environmental outcomes by helping to overcome some of the perennial barriers to progression.
- 7.4 As outlined in this paper, there are a wealth of acts, targets, plans and strategies that influence nature enhancement on Dartmoor. A key piece of work that is being undertaken this summer alongside the review of the Partnership Plan, the establishment of the DLUMG and the work of the LRs in particular, is to ensure that, where pertinent, all parties are cognisant of the various strategies and initiatives, and these are 'mapped' to show opportunities for nature enhancement.

8. Equality and Impact Assessment

- 8.1 The Environmental Improvement Plan includes a commitment that everyone should live within 15 minutes' walk of a green or blue space. The work outlined in this paper and the wider objectives in the Dartmoor Partnership Plan aims to ensure delivery of this.

9. Financial Implications

- 9.1 Direct officer time for 'nature', supported by our core National Park Grant, now equates to approximately 1.5 FTE. A strategy of targeting external funding for project delivery means that we have been able to expand the natural environment staff capacity from 1.6 FTE to 12.5 FTE in eight years.

10. Conclusion

- 10.1 The climate and biodiversity crisis represents the greatest global threat we face in modern times. Protected Landscapes offer perhaps the best of what remains to our heavily nature depleted country and some of the best opportunities for restoration and enhancement. The Authority recognises the need to do more for nature and is working with partners to deliver a range of projects that will support nature enhancement. We have very limited capacity and powers for 'direct delivery' so have focused our effort on securing external funding for projects that deliver the Partnership Plan vision. Increasing budgetary pressures call for discussion about future priorities, focus and how to achieve the greatest impact against the backdrop of a deteriorating environment.
- 10.2 Members are asked to note progress towards delivery of Dartmoor's nature enhancement objectives.

CHRIS GILES