

# Our Living Landscape

**A vision for the future of the South Pennines**

photo: Steve Morgan

# Welcome



This is our vision for the South Pennines over the next 50 years and beyond.

Our aim is to protect what is vitally important about this living upland landscape and also to help it cope with change and flourish, despite the many challenges we face.

Together with other organisations we share an unbridled passion for this place and its remarkable people. So we have come together to create the South Pennines Local Nature Partnership, a move which I am delighted to say has been endorsed by the Government.

We want to tell you more about our plans for the future. What we want to do and how we will try to achieve these aims.

The South Pennines is an internationally important wildlife haven, a working landscape for farmers, a playground for visitors from surrounding towns and cities and a source of clean drinking water. It also has a major role to play in our fight against climate change.

We need to value this stunning rural landscape for what it provides for our economy and environment and we need to prepare for the future.

### *Find out more about our vision for:*

- *The moors*
- *A working landscape*
- *Inspiring people*
- *Wildlife*
- *Woods and trees*
- *Water*

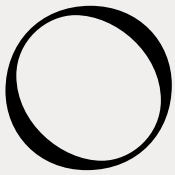
### **Pam Warhurst CBE**

Chair of the South Pennines  
Local Nature Partnership





# South Pennines Local Nature Partnership

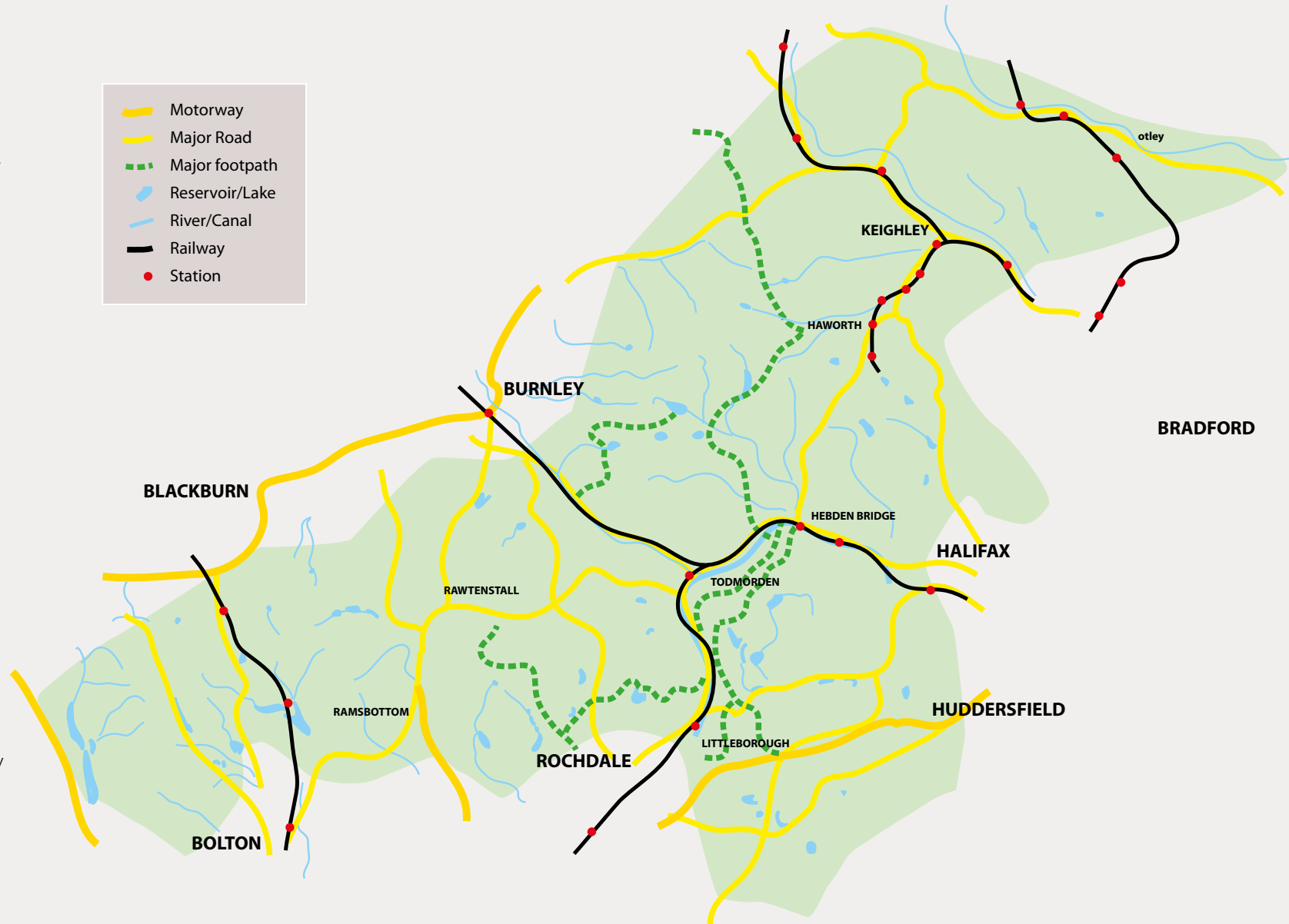


Our mission is to drive positive change within the natural environment and to champion its cause,

both to decision makers and the broader population, especially those living in the city regions of Manchester, Leeds and Lancashire.

- To realise our goals we will work with other organisations, including local authorities, Local Enterprise Partnerships and Health and Wellbeing Boards.
- We will foster close links with our sister partnerships to the north and south, ensuring we share best practice in caring for the Pennine uplands.
- We provide a strategic and joined-up approach to the management of the environment and help deliver the ambitious goals outlined in the Government's Biodiversity 2020 initiative.

The South Pennines Local Nature Partnership brings together Natural England, the Environment Agency, the National Trust, the Woodland Trust, RSPB, Target Wellbeing, AB Consultancy and local authorities across the South Pennines. It is supported by Pennine Prospects – the rural regeneration company for the South Pennines.



# What's so special about the South Pennines?



photo: Pennine Prospects

Covering 460 square miles the South Pennines straddles the border between Yorkshire and Lancashire, a land of steep sided-valleys, precipitous woodlands, canals, packhorse trails and proud communities with an independent, some say quirky spirit.

It was home to the Brontes and an inspiration for Ted Hughes, Barbara Hepworth and for modern poets like Simon Armitage. Artists continue to flock here.

It has one of England's highest proportions of nature designations, with two Special Areas of Conservation

and 15 Sites of Special Scientific Interest, along with 2,600 miles of rights of way, including two national trails, the Pennine Way and Pennine Bridleway.

Yet for all its rugged beauty, tranquil summits and romantic valleys, seven million people live within just one hour's drive.

For some the land is a spur to creativity, but for all of us it is a vital resource. Our recovering peat moors lock away carbon, which helps mitigate the effects of climate change. It supplies vast quantities of drinking water to our cities and towns and supports hundreds of farms - a

working landscape to be sure. For wildlife it is a haven and for birds like the tiny twite the last breeding location anywhere in England.

The moors may appear untouched, but they contain secrets from the past and hold lessons for the future. Enigmatic inscribed stones from the Bronze Age and earlier pre-historic evidence beneath the peat show that this has been home to people for thousands of years.

This is one of England's greatest unsung landscapes. If people have shaped the land then the reverse is also true. The South Pennines is a work in progress.



# The moors



photo: Steve Morgan

Black Hill  
before  
and after  
restoration



photos: Moors for the Future

Our moorlands are the breeding ground for many iconic bird species, but they are also a life support system in a much wider sense. Peatbogs, which cover one quarter of the Local Nature Partnership area, don't have the 'exotic' appeal of rainforest or ancient woodland, but in terms of nurturing a healthier planet they are just as crucial, especially when they are in good condition. The UK's peatlands alone lock away more carbon than all the forests of Germany, Britain and France.

**However, over the past 200 years the moors have been blighted by atmospheric pollution from nearby industrial areas and have also suffered from over-grazing and wildfire. Acid rain killed off the peat-building sphagnum mosses exposing huge tracts of land to erosion. Bogs up to 9000 years old began to crumble to dust.**

But peatlands can be healed. Over the past decade conservation agencies have worked to restore once scarred hectares. Sphagnum has been re-introduced and the gradual process of making good 200 years of neglect is underway. But more needs to be done before our bogs are back to health.

### **We will:**

- Support projects to restore our peat bogs to a healthy condition and work to increase awareness of this vital habitat.
- Back initiatives to reduce threats to moorland, like wildfire, through schemes such as Moorwatch and the South Pennines Fire Operations Group.



# A working landscape

**T**he South Pennines is a working landscape which we share with each other and with nature.

The much-loved dry-stone walls, clough woodland and lush pasture are the result of generations of farmers working the land. Without them, it would all look very different. Shooting has also shaped the moorland habitat and remains an important part of our rural economy.

***But farming is facing unprecedented challenges. Most of the South Pennines is designated as a 'severely disadvantaged area' due to the low productivity of the soils and high rainfall. The workforce is also ageing and grappling with changes in agricultural support.***

A sustainable farming community goes hand-in-hand with a sustainable environment and we will work with farmers and other land managers to shape a better future.

Showing the way Pennine Prospects linked up with the RSPB to advise 100 farmers on hay meadow restoration as part of the South Pennines Twite Recovery Project. More than 200 hectares have been re-seeded, boosting both wildlife and the income for farmers, who were able to benefit from agri-environmental grants.

## ***We will:***

- ***Promote best practice and support a farmers' network.***
- ***Work with all those who earn a living from the land to create a better natural environment.***



photo: Pennine Prospects



photo: Steve Morgan



# Inspiring people



photo: Steve Morgan



photos: Pennine Prospects

Whether it's the thrill of mountain biking, the challenge of a trek to a lofty hill top, discovering the heritage of mills and canals, or indulging in local produce, the South Pennines provides a stunning range of possibilities.

Spurring people to take more exercise is a national priority and few areas can match our network of walking trails, cycle routes and bridleways. Experts also say that mental well-being is improved by spending time in green places. All of which makes the South Pennines a perfect location to have fun and revitalise the mind, body and spirit.

***Yet despite all this we know that our neighbours don't always make the most of the wonderful scenery on their doorstep and fail to appreciate the area's many qualities.***

So our aim is to foster an accessible landscape that can be enjoyed by people from all walks of life.

In particular we will focus on enabling residents of the former mill towns surrounding the South Pennines to benefit from our striking landscape. In part that means raising awareness. People may not have walked the hills or strolled along tow paths, but they still benefit from our stewardship of the area's resources. We have a good story to tell.

### ***We will:***

- ***Promote the opportunities for training and employment in the natural environment.***
- ***Link the rural South Pennines with surrounding urban areas, for example by promoting local produce.***
- ***Maximise the opportunities for people to access and get active in the South Pennines and benefit from spending time in our green spaces.***





photo: Mike Barrett

**N**early 100 square miles of South Pennine moorland is designated as a Special Protection Area because of its importance for breeding birds like merlin, peregrine, golden plover and short-eared owl. Curlew, lapwing, snipe and redshank also bring new life to the hills each spring, adding a major attraction for nature lovers.

***But in many lowland parts of the UK these birds are in decline. Before too long the South Pennines could be their most southerly stronghold.***

So we need to re-double our efforts to restore habitats such as blanket bog and acid grassland. But we also need to restore the links between these habitats and develop buffers around them to give wildlife the resilience to cope with challenges such as climate change and poor breeding seasons.

We have already notched-up successes in species recovery. The seed-eating twite, or Pennine finch, is enjoying a more secure future after work to restore the hay meadows on which it depends for food. We must and will do more for our wildlife.

#### ***We will:***

- ***Restore priority habitats including blanket bogs and champion species recovery.***
- ***Work with farmers to develop high conservation value farming where habitats like hay meadows are restored.***
- ***Monitor wildlife and collect data to help us shape our plans.***
- ***Develop wildlife corridors, buffers and stepping stones between priority habitats.***

***The South Pennines is home to the UK's fastest bird of prey, the peregrine falcon, and its smallest, the merlin. The moorland edge also provides the last national breeding ground of the diminutive twite, or Pennine finch.***



photo: RSPB



# Woods and trees



photo: Mike Barrett

**T**rees are a distinctive part of the tapestry of the South Pennine landscape. Oak clough woodlands rooted in the sheltered upland valleys add stunning visual appeal and represent some of our most vibrant habitats.

***Yet our woods have dwindled over the centuries and now cover just 4% of land area. They are also dangerously fragmented in places.***

The most valuable woodland type for wildlife - ancient semi-natural woodland – represents about a quarter of this total. Like the oaks nestling in the remote cloughs these areas have been continuously wooded since at least 1600 and are exceptionally rich in insects, plants, birds and fungi. But they are a scarce and irreplaceable resource and often in poor condition. Whilst woodland cover may be low, half of it is freely accessible to the public, making it an important recreational asset.

#### ***We will:***

- ***Encourage new woodland planting where appropriate, especially where it can alleviate the severity of flooding and link with existing woods, such as those in cloughs, to create corridors or buffers.***
- ***Promote woodland management that will help regenerate ground flora and reduce damage from grazing.***
- ***Support efforts to bring woodlands back into sustainable management fostering jobs, growth and enterprise.***
- ***Celebrate our woodland heritage through events and projects.***



# Water

**W**ater is everywhere in the South Pennines. Not just in its 35 reservoirs, but in the land itself where it saturates our blanket bogs and feeds many iconic rivers. And we have good reason to be thankful.

Much of the drinking water flowing through taps in Manchester and Leeds is collected in these upland catchment areas and without them life and industry would soon grind to a parched halt.

***Water quality in our rivers and streams is generally good but there is work to do to maintain and improve the quality of water flowing into our reservoirs and to protect communities in our area and beyond from the risk of flooding. Meanwhile, man-made obstacles such as weirs prevent fish like brown trout from migrating upstream.***

More sensitive land management will allow us to better protect and manage this resource and improve reservoir water quality. Targeted tree planting and blocking gullies will also help hold back water on the hills for longer, lessening the severity of flooding in our towns and cities.

## ***We will:***

- ***Work with utility companies, landowners and managers to develop and improve catchment sensitive land management practises.***
- ***Work with partners to continually monitor the health of our rivers and streams, support proposals for the removal of physical modifications or the development of fish passes where practicable, and try to reduce the spread of invasive species like Himalayan balsam and American crayfish.***
- ***Work with farmers and landowners to make the landscape more flood resistant with measures such as small scale woodland planting.***



photo: Pennine Prospects



# Get involved



photo: Steve Morgan

The South Pennines' greatest asset is its people. This is a landscape worth celebrating, sharing and protecting and the Local Nature Partnership will step up efforts to provide ways for people to make their mark. For many it's about putting something back into the environment, for others it is gaining experience towards a rewarding career in countryside management.

***What we do know is that people can make a massive difference.***

Whether it's helping the Rivers Trust monitor the health of streams, planting new woods at events organised by Treeresponsibility or using botanical skills acquired at RSPB and National Trust workshops. The area is already benefiting from the work of 50 participants guided to a formal qualification in dry stone walling by The Conservation Volunteers. And the popular South Pennines Walk and Ride Festival staged each autumn by Pennine Prospects is an open invitation to get involved and participate.

To get involved and to find out more please contact Pennine Prospects:

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