

ANNUAL REVIEW

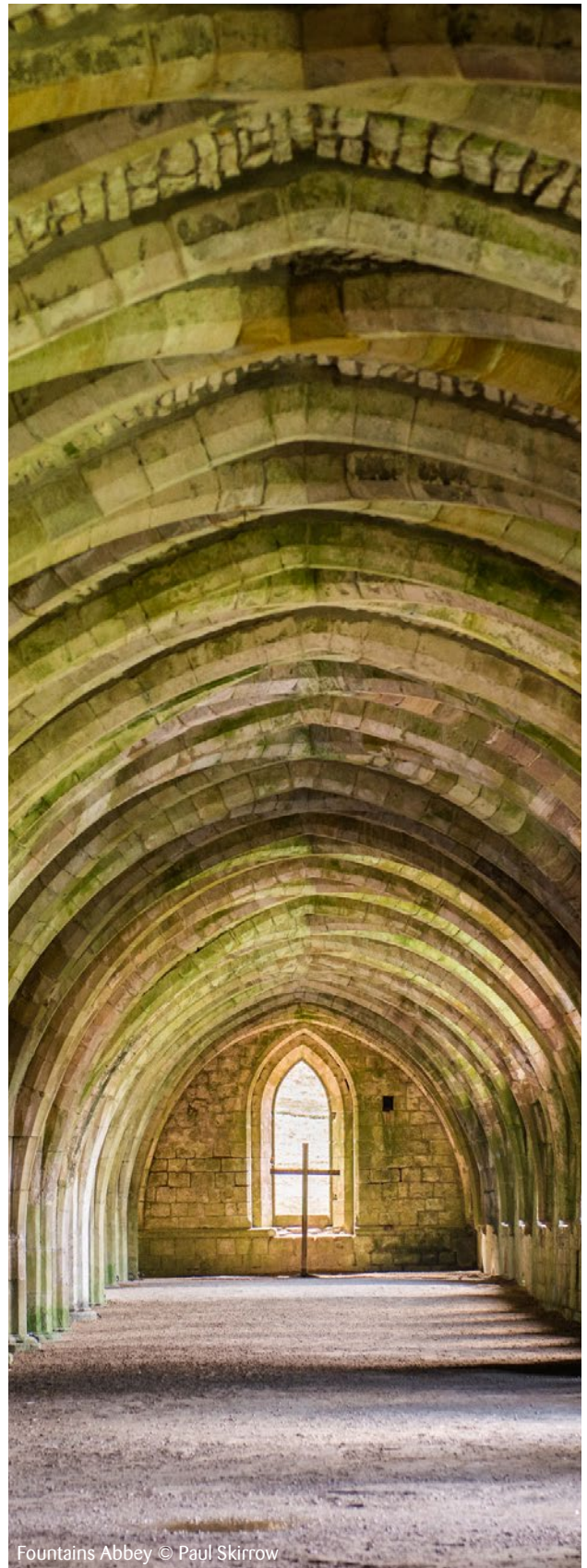
2019/2020



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AONB Facts and Figures

- The AONB covers 603 km² of land in the foothills of the Pennines in North Yorkshire.
- Nidderdale AONB shares its western boundary with the Yorkshire Dales National Park.
- 95% of the AONB falls within Harrogate District with a smaller share in Richmondshire and Hambleton Districts. The AONB is wholly within the County of North Yorkshire.
- The AONB is administered by Harrogate Borough Council. It is overseen by a Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) that in 2019/2020 had 23 members from 15 organisations representing local authorities, parishes, landowning bodies, community groups, business interests and government agencies.
- There were 11 members of the AONB Team in 2019/20 (5 full time equivalents). The team is based in Pateley Bridge, the largest town in the AONB.
- 24,195.91 hectares of the AONB's moorlands are of international importance, and designated as a Special Protection Area and Special Area of Conservation.
- The Fountains Abbey World Heritage Site is situated in the AONB.
- There are 14 Conservation Areas, 126 Scheduled Ancient Monuments and 545 Listed Buildings in the AONB.
- 7.8% of the AONB is woodland including 1,245 hectares of Ancient Woodland. 1,872 ha is planted conifer woodland, 187 ha is mixed woodland and 2,527 ha is broadleaf.
- There are 820 kms of public rights of way in the AONB.
- An estimated 35% of the AONB is accessible to walkers in accordance with provisions contained in the Countryside & Rights of Way Act 2000.



Fountains Abbey © Paul Skirrow

Highlights from 2019/2020 - at a glance

During the period from April 2019 to March 2020 we:

- Published, following stakeholder consultation, the 2019-2024 AONB Management Plan.
- Created a new data-driven mapping process to develop a Woodland Opportunity Plan to identify areas suitable for woodland creation.
- Secured £70,000 funding from Defra to deliver a Test and Trials project to feed information into the design of the new Environmental Land Management scheme.
- Delivered Himalayan Balsam control on 16 hectares of affected land as part of a multi-year project to eradicate Balsam from the headwaters of the River Nidd.
- Supported 9 training events for farmer groups in Upper Nidderdale and the Skell Catchment with funding from Natural England's Facilitation Fund programme.
- Ensured the on-going legacy of the Upper Nidderdale Landscape Partnership through survey and maintenance of 9 walking routes, 10 information points, 1 sand martin webcam and 4 flagship heritage sites.
- Engaged with more than 3000 people through a series of wildlife-focused training events and wildlife outreach events as part of The Wild Watch.
- Delivered natural flood management interventions working in partnership with farmers in the Crimble catchment.
- Relaunched NiddFest with Cause UK through 2 events in Harrogate.
- Ran open days at Wath Mill attracting over 300 visitors.
- Provided a pre-application planning advice service and responded to 30 planning consultations, including working closely with NYCC on their plans for the A59 Kex Gill realignment road scheme.
- Worked with Yorkshire Water to promote and develop their Beyond Nature plans across Yorkshire Water farm holdings.
- Helped Friends of Nidderdale AONB win a £8,800 grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund's Resilience Fund to develop the charity's strategic plans and make it more resilient.
- Organised a volunteer training programme.



Steve Backsall with AONB staff at NiddFest 2019
© Cause UK



This year saw the publication of Nidderdale AONB's new five-year statutory Management Plan, following scrutiny by the Joint Advisory Committee and formal endorsement by Harrogate Borough Council and North Yorkshire County Council. Covering the period from 2019 to 2024, the Plan provides a framework for setting priorities across the AONB partnership. Consultation on the scope of the Plan began in 2018 with an exercise to gather local resident's views on key issues. A postcard inviting people to say what they liked about the AONB, and asking them to identify the two most important questions for the Plan to address, was sent to every household in the designated area. The issues most frequently raised were: (i) the need to protect the AONB's landscape and wildlife from inappropriate development; and (ii) opportunities to enjoy the countryside via the rights of way network are important and continued investment is needed to ensure these opportunities are maintained.

Partner organisations and representatives of groups working closely on AONB programmes then took part in thematic workshops on Engagement & Enjoyment, Sustainable Development & Planning, Land Management & Farming and Tourism. A Management Plan Steering Group comprising representatives of key partners met to consider issues raised in more detail. The resulting plan identifies 70 detailed objectives, based upon six guiding principles: the importance of landscape; combatting climate change; sustainable development; managing natural capital and maintaining cultural services; supporting the farming industry; and health and wellbeing.

The Plan can be downloaded from nidderdaleaonb.org.uk/management-plan

Councillor Nigel Simms
Chairman, Nidderdale AONB Joint Advisory Committee

Preface

The Joint Advisory Committee's goal is to ensure that:

- Stewardship of natural beauty is a priority for everyone
- Tranquility and opportunities for quiet enjoyment of nature are protected
- Biodiversity is valued for its own sake
- The legacy of the historic environment is celebrated
- Local distinctiveness is maintained
- The livelihoods of local communities are protected

The purpose of the Annual Review is to record progress made by the Joint Advisory Committee, the Committee's partners including farmers, community groups, local authorities, government agencies and AONB staff.

It contains a summary of work carried out in accordance with priorities set out in the AONB Management Plan that covers the period from April 2019 to March 2024. Detailed targets that underpinned this work were identified in the Business Plan approved by the JAC in July 2019. The Committee received a detailed report on progress towards meeting these targets in July 2020.



Betony © Kelly Harmar

Part 1 - Setting the Scene

AONB Designation

The primary purpose of AONB designation is to conserve and enhance natural beauty - its flora, fauna and geological or physiographical features.

Government's policy on AONB's states that 'In pursuing the primary purpose account should be taken of the needs of agriculture, forestry, other rural industries and of the economic and social needs of local communities. Particular regard should be paid to promoting sustainable forms of social and economic development that in themselves conserve and enhance the environment.'

Harrogate Borough Council is the accountable body for Nidderdale AONB. Defra provided 35% of funding for the AONB's work in 2019/20. Harrogate Borough and North Yorkshire County Councils provided 20% and the remainder came from a variety of sources including the Environment Agency, Natural England and the Heritage Lottery Fund.

AONB Special Qualities

Landscape character is a distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements in the landscape that makes one landscape different from another, rather than better or worse. It gives rise to a 'sense of place' that defines people's understanding and appreciation of these elements in their surroundings. Protected landscapes like AONBs are designated because they possess special qualities that generations have come to value, and which therefore warrant exceptional safeguards.

The Special Qualities of Nidderdale AONB include:

- Contrasting scenery with dramatic views across remote moorlands to distant horizons together with sheltered valleys and rolling farmland
- Sandstone tors like those at Brimham together with steep crags that mark the edge of many river valleys in the AONB
- Internationally important wildlife habitats characterized by birds such as red grouse, golden plover and merlin
- A rich and diverse historic environment including a World Heritage Site at Fountains Abbey, over a hundred sites contained in the Historic Environment Record and more than five hundred listed buildings
- Extensive woodland including commercial plantations and ancient broadleaved woods with a network of species-rich hedgerows on the eastern edge of the designated area
- Wetlands ranging from the eleven reservoirs with their associated dams, weirs and sluices to the three river catchments, plus numerous ponds and the lakes and water features associated with the AONB's many designed landscapes
- An extensive network of public rights of way incorporating access for people of all abilities and regional walking trails such as the Nidderdale Way and the 'Ripon Rowel'
- Over 125 square miles of open access land where walkers can explore the AONB on foot

Ecosystem Services

Conservation of the AONB's landscape is a priority in its own right, but protected landscapes like AONBs and National Parks have a variety of wider purposes. The idea of ecosystem services originated in the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment that was launched by the United Nations in 2001 to assess the consequences of ecosystem change for human well-being. It identified four categories of ecosystem services:

- Provisioning services
(e.g. water, food, fuel and genetic resources)
- Regulating services
(e.g. flood alleviation and carbon sequestration)
- Cultural services
(e.g. heritage and recreation)
- Supporting services
(e.g. soil formation and nutrient cycling)

The AONB's landscape is a major provider of ecosystem services to the communities that surround the designated area and more widely across the region. The supply of drinking water from the AONB's reservoirs and high quality food produced by farmers are two obvious examples, but it is easier to overlook the strategically important role of the AONB's moorlands that both hold back flood water and act as a huge carbon storage mechanism. The AONB also has a wealth of cultural features, and opportunities for active outdoor recreation that provide inspiration and contribute to the Government's objectives for improving health and well-being.



Girl rock jumping at Brimham
© Mel Riley

The AONB Joint Advisory Committee

The Committee met three times during the year:

30 April 2019 – Spring Meeting

At the Spring JAC meeting, Members scrutinised the Management Plan prior to its formal endorsement by HBC and NYCC. Presentations were then given on future AONB projects, including the Skell Valley and Headwaters for Healthy Rivers. Phil Santos from consultancy WSP provided an update on latest design plans for the realignment of the A59 at Kex Gill.

17 July 2019 – Study Tour

Based at Fountains Hall within the National Trust's Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal World Heritage Site, the meeting began by approving the 2019-2020 Business Plan followed by a workshop that allowed JAC Members to feedback on the proposals being developed for the joint National Trust/Nidderdale AONB Skell Valley Project. After lunch, Members were taken on a guided tour of Eavestone Lake and Hell Wath Local Nature Reserve to see the works planned at these sites as part of the Skell Valley Project.

11 September 2019 – Annual General Meeting

Harrogate Borough Councillor Nigel Simms was elected as Chair and Chris Hawkesworth, one of the Parish Council representatives on the Committee, was elected as Vice Chair. Heather Garnett of the Friends of Nidderdale AONB, and County Councillor Margaret Atkinson were elected to join Councillors Simms and Hawkesworth on the Committee's Executive. After the AGM, presentations were given on Whole Farm Planning by Chris Clarke from Nethergill Associates; the Harrogate Local Plan by Natasha Durham from HBC; and the Birds of Prey Evidence Report by Helen Byron from Nidderdale AONB.

The AONB Team

In 2019/2020, the Team comprised:

Elizabeth Bishop	Information Officer (3 days/week)
Paul Burgess	AONB Manager (3 days/week)
Helen Byron	Development Team Leader (2 days/week)
Alice Crosby	Wild Watch Project Officer (3 days/week)
Kelly Harmar	Biodiversity Project Officer (3 days/week)
Christy Irish	Land Management Administrative Support (1 day/week contract post)
Sarah Kettlewell	AONB Manager (2 days/week)
Sarah Kettlewell	Development Team Leader (1 day/week)
Liz Milner	Volunteer Coordinator (3 days/week)
Jackie Smith	Water Environment Grant Project Officer (2 days/week contract post)
Marian Wilby	Land Management Team Leader (5 days/week)



Part 2 - Performance

People, Policy & Partnerships

Planning

The local planning authorities consult the JAC about large-scale residential or commercial development, waste disposal, minerals and telecommunications applications, and about major highway schemes. The JAC also requests details of development proposals that fall outside these categories, but which may have an impact on the AONB.

AONB staff work closely with staff at Harrogate and Richmondshire District Councils, and with staff at North Yorkshire County Council, to ensure that development requiring planning permission does not cause harm to the AONB's special qualities. The JAC's Executive approves all responses to planning consultations made on behalf of the Committee. 30 responses to planning consultations were made during 2019/20 covering a mixture of small and relatively large-scale proposals, including continuing engagement with North Yorkshire Country Council Highways and their consultants, WSP, on their plans for the A59 Kex Gill road realignment. The responses are available for public scrutiny on the relevant planning authority's planning portals.

In March, Harrogate Borough Council adopted the Harrogate Local Plan covering the period to 2035. The AONB's Joint Advisory Committee was consulted on the Plan at the various stages of the process.

The National Lottery Heritage Fund

Nidderdale has been awarded grants worth over £2 million by the Heritage Lottery Fund since 2012, including the successful delivery of the Upper Nidderdale Landscape Partnership and the Wild Watch. In 2018, the AONB in partnership with the National Trust at Fountains Abbey received NLHF funding for the development phase of a landscape-scale conservation scheme for the Skell catchment. Development of the project continued during 2019/20.

Northern Upland Chain Local Nature Partnership

Nidderdale is a founding member of the quintet of protected landscapes at the core of the Local Nature Partnership alongside the Yorkshire Dales and

Northumberland National Park Authorities and the Forest of Bowland and North Pennines AONBs. The LNP's work in 2019/20 was focussed on High Nature Value Farming and developing an LNP-wide Curlew conservation project proposal.

National Association for AONBs

Nidderdale AONB was represented at the May and October 2019 meetings of the Northern AONB network. AONB staff have also maintained close contact with the National Association during the period of the Landscapes (Glover) Review, which has published a series of recommendations for changes to AONBs and National Park Authorities in England.

Dales and Vales Rivers Network

The Partnership was convened by the Yorkshire Dales Rivers Trust in response to Defra's Catchment Based Approach launched in 2013. Its purpose is to coordinate and improve the effectiveness of actions designed to improve the quality of the river environment by a wide range of organisations including community groups and statutory bodies like the Environment Agency, Natural England and Yorkshire Water. The AONB, which is represented on the Partnership's Board, coordinated a sediment fingerprinting survey as part of the Natural Nidd project.

Friends of Nidderdale AONB

Friends is a registered charity that works alongside staff in the AONB. Over recent years, Friends have made substantial financial contributions to projects delivered in the AONB, including the Upper Nidderdale Landscape Partnership and the Wild Watch. In 2019/20 trustees worked with AONB staff on a strategic project to increase the charity's future resilience with funding from National Lottery Heritage Fund.

Media

Three e-newsletters for AONB residents were circulated in 2019/20 and the AONB maintained a strong online profile through regular posts to social media channels.

25,000 copies of the 'Visit Nidderdale AONB' visitor guide were designed and printed ready for distribution to a wide range of shops, cafes, visitor attractions and tourist information points.

Conserving Natural Beauty

Conservation advice for AONB farmers and landowners

AONB staff continued to provide conservation advice for farmers during 2019/20 and supported submission of agri-environment grant applications. AONB staff supported 3 Higher Tier and 16 Mid-Tier Countryside Stewardship grants, as well as 4 management plans for moorland peat restoration works.

River Nidd Catchment Partnership

The AONB administers the River Nidd Catchment Partnership and employs the Catchment Partnership's Farm Adviser on contract to work alongside the AONB's Land Management Team Leader. The objective of the partnership, which comprises Natural England, Environment Agency, Yorkshire Dales Rivers Trust and Yorkshire Water as well as the AONB, is to reduce diffuse water pollution from agriculture. The focus of the work in 2019/20 was on the Nidd and the Crimple (outside the AONB boundary). AONB Farm Advisers carried out 88 catchment sensitive farming advisory visits and also delivered a farm grants update meeting in Harrogate attended by 60 farmers.

Upper Nidderdale Landscape Partnership Scheme

Between 2014 and 2018, Nidderdale AONB led this £1.8M scheme, which had the joint aims of conserving and enhancing Upper Nidderdale's wildlife habitats and historic environment; and enabling people to find out about, enjoy and get involved in looking after this important heritage landscape. The AONB is now ensuring the scheme's legacy through a programme of surveys and maintenance of the infrastructure put in place during the delivery phase, including the flagship heritage sites at Fishpond Wood, Wath Mill, Prosperous Smelt Mill and Scar Village/Lodge. Digital resources are also being maintained and the partnership's website at <http://uppernidderdale.org.uk/> remains as a record of the scheme's achievements.



Walling volunteers
© Paul Harris

Nidderdale Conservation Volunteers

The Nidderdale Conservation Volunteers (NCVs) meet on Tuesdays throughout the year. The numbers attending tasks varied from 2 to 17 during 2019/2020 and overall 3,032 task hours were completed in the year. A varied task programme at key conservation sites throughout the AONB included footpath enhancements at Stean, landscape maintenance at Hackfall Wood, bracken control at Old Spring Wood, Himalayan Balsam control at Azerley and Ellington Banks, woodland maintenance at Fishpond Wood, wildflower roadside verge management at Glasshouses and hedge laying at Longside Farm.

Nidderdale Dry Stone Walling Group

The Dry Stone Walling group meet every Wednesday. The numbers attending task days varied between 3 and 11, giving a total of 166 volunteer days over the year. The group undertook projects at Hillend, Brookside Farm, Fogfield House on the Packhorse Trail and Markenfield Hall on the long-term project restoring the Park Pale.

Financial Summary 2019/2020

Income	£	Expenditure	£
DEFRA	181,183.21	Staff	211,178.44
Harrogate Borough Council	86,468.00	Accommodation & Office Costs	50,287.75
North Yorkshire County Council	14,800.00	Services provided by Harrogate Borough Council	19,760.00
Environment Agency	43,312.85	Partnership budget for Promotion (PR) & Events	25,840.33
National Trust	9,242.79	Partnership Running Costs	19,708.54
Natural England	23,405.00	Wild Watch	75,361.97
Heritage Lottery Fund	162,257.83	Humberstone Farm	12,616.20
Yorkshire Water Services	5,500.00	AONB Enhancement Grant Scheme	5,000.00
Hanson's	1,000.00	River Skell	9,242.79
Hackfall Trust	3,000.00	Water Environment Project	43,312.85
Friends Of Nidderdale AONB	9,495.00	CSF Crimble	17,177.79
Misc. Income/Events Income	5,464.76	Nidderdale CSF	14,434.50
Reserve transfers	-29,514.48	River Laver Project	2,500.00
		Farm Conservation Support	3,875.00
		Washburn Valley	1,000.00
		Test and Trials	3,000.00
		Other project expenditure	1,318.80
TOTAL	515,614.96	TOTAL	515,614.96



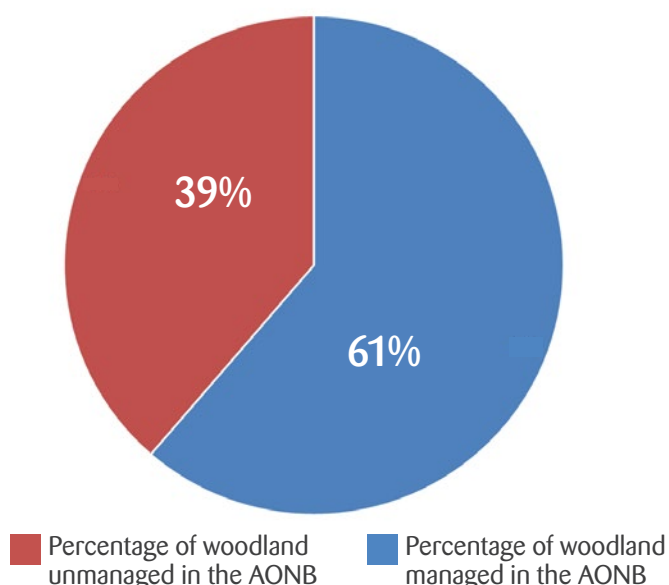
Appendix: Framework for monitoring environmental outcomes in protected landscapes

Area of woodland under management

The statistics are suggested as a proxy measure in relation to:

- The Framework's natural beauty indicator of 'landscape elements in good condition':
- The statistics represent management undertaken in accordance with the obligations of various grant schemes. It brings greater confidence that active management is in place and therefore hopefully contributing to the good condition of woodland.
- The Framework's ecosystem services benefit of 'providing wood' (e.g. timber, wood fuel and other wood products)

Total area of woodland in Nidderdale AONB: 5,004 ha

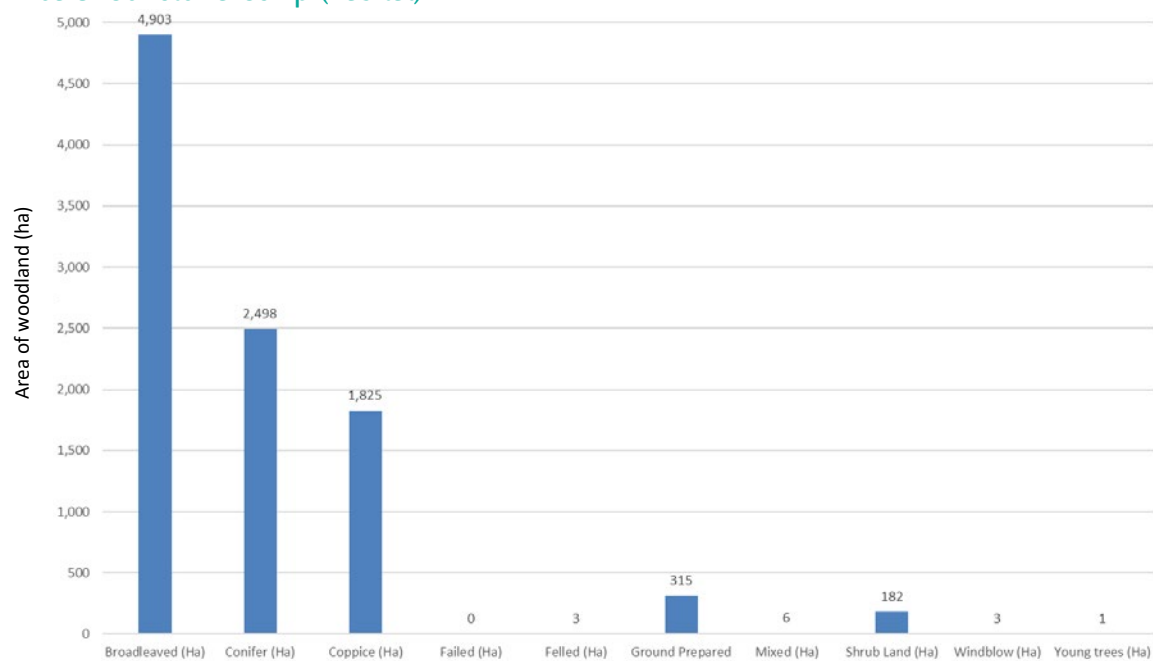


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NFI indicative Forest Types

The statistics are suggested as a proxy measure in relation to climate regulation.

Area under stewardship (habitat)

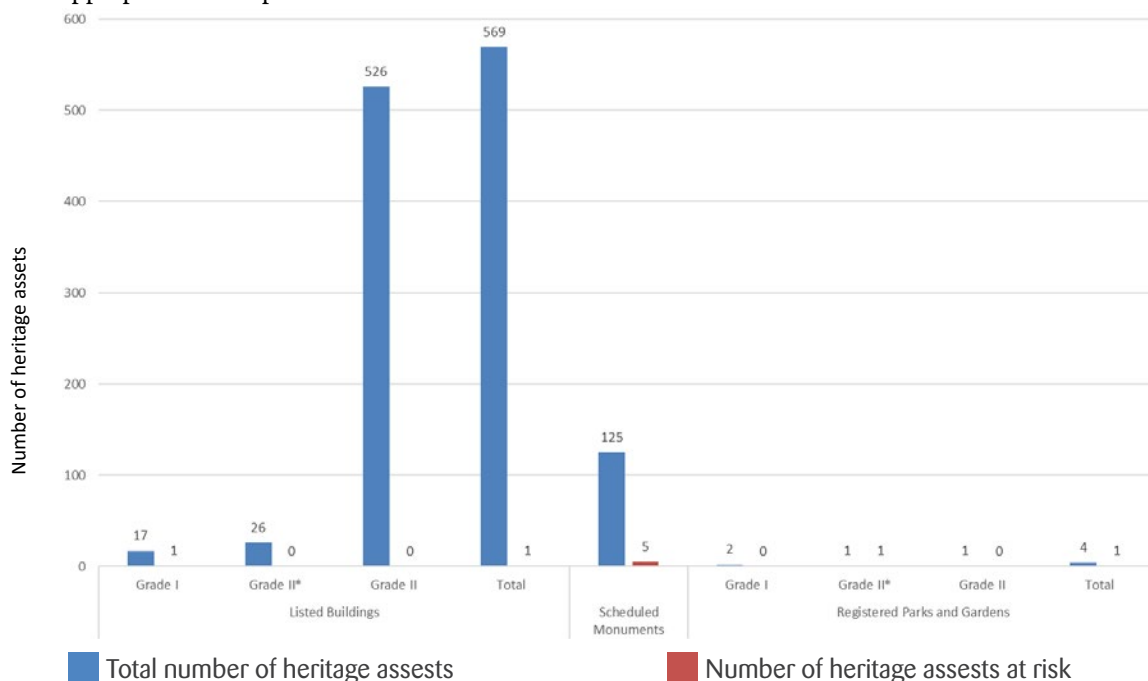


NFI Indicative Forest Types

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Number of Heritage Assets

Number of heritage assets in Nidderdale AONB and number that are 'at risk' of being lost as a result of neglect, decay or inappropriate development.

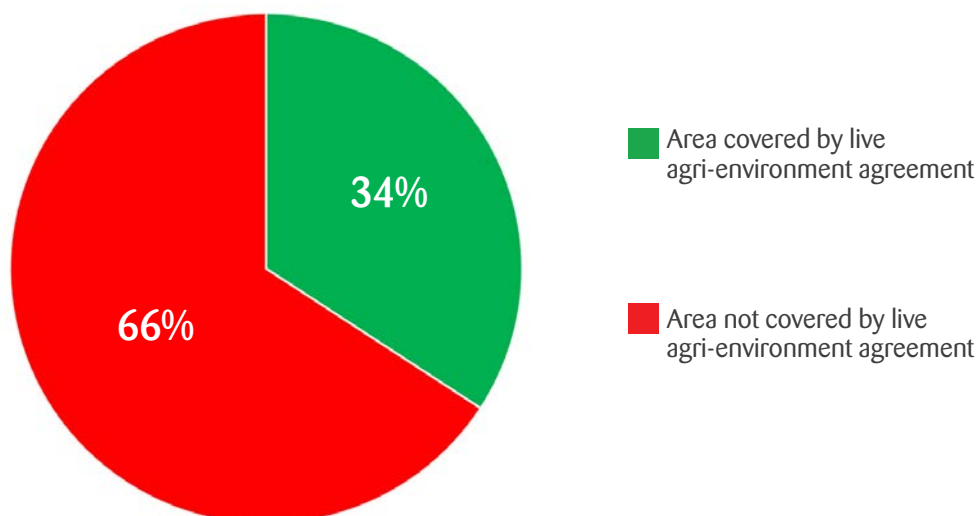


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Agri-environment Schemes

ES data is the best nationally available information relating to the management of the wide range of landscape features and elements. Bringing these under management can, in theory, contribute to their good condition and to an area's landscape character, which are both indicators of natural beauty.

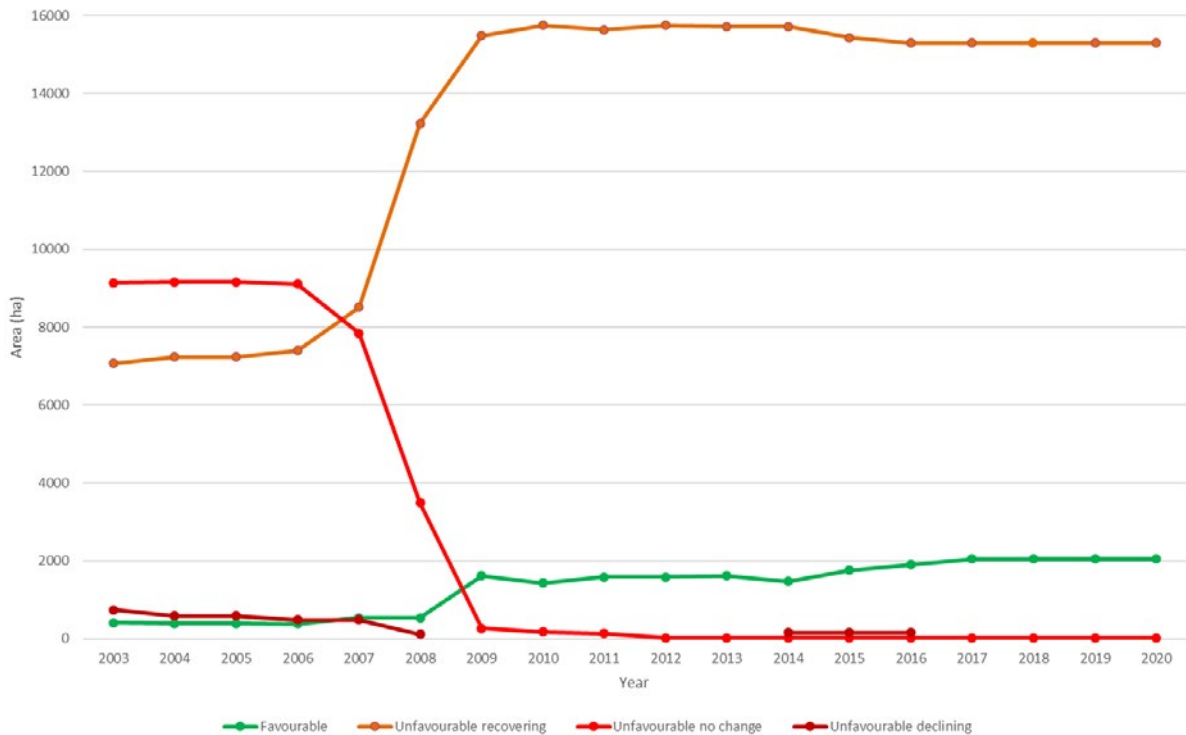
Total area of Nidderdale AONB covering by live agri-environment agreements: 20,563 ha



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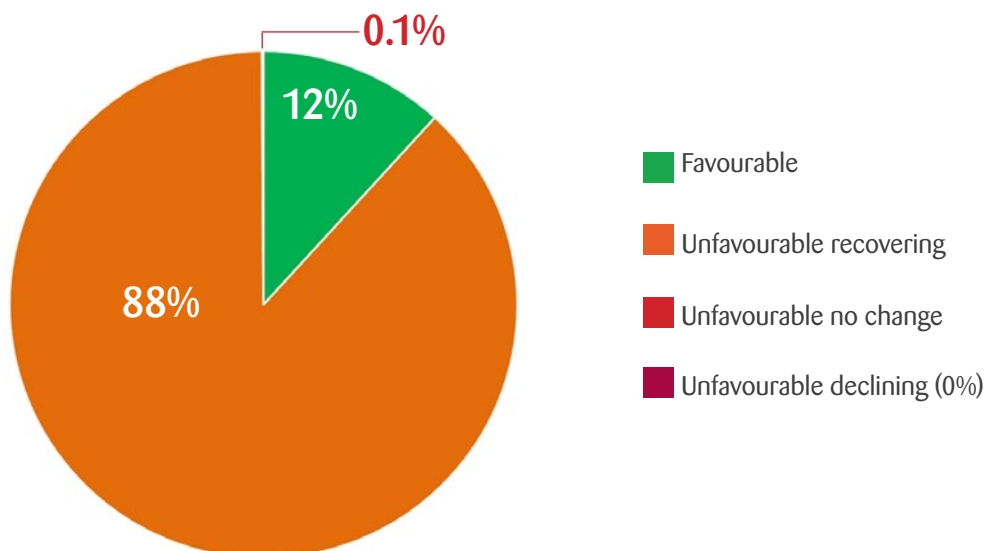
SSSI condition status

SSSI condition in Nidderdale AONB. Data represents the situation as of May 2020.



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Total area of Nidderdale AONB with SSSI designation: 17,364 ha



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Nidderdale

Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

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