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Stakeholder Workshop Report

Julian Smith MP visit

Fleet Moss, Yorkshire Dales

20/09/19

Peninme PeatLIFE delivery partners



Peninme PeatLIFE is funded by



Date: 20/09/19

Location: Fleet Moss, Oughtershaw, Yorkshire

Topic: Advocacy

Attendees: Julian Smith MP, Ella Murphy (Parliamentary Assistant), Jenny Sharman (Pennine PeatLIFE Officer), Tim Thom (Peatland Programme Manager, Yorkshire Peat Partnership) and Lyndon Marquis (Communications Officer, Pennine PeatLIFE & Yorkshire Peat Partnership).

1. Aims

Nearly 21% of the total area in Julian Smith MP's Skipton and Ripon Constituency are peatlands. This amounts to the largest single area of peatlands in all of Yorkshire.

- A primary aim of this visit was to bring to the MP's attention the importance of peatlands in his constituency.
- To bring to his attention the amount of carbon being lost in his constituency through degraded peatlands.
- The role of peatlands in terms of the ecosystem services they provide within his constituency
- To make him aware of the vital work being carried out by Pennine PeatLIFE (and Yorkshire Peat Partnership) on Fleet Moss and other Yorkshire Dales sites
- To make him aware of the issues and challenges facing peatland restoration including failings in the current Countryside Stewardship scheme
- To make him aware of the need for government support along the lines of LIFE programmes
- To secure his support in government for peatland restoration
(See Appendix 1. for a detailed brief provided to the MP regarding the actions for which we seek support).

2. Overview

Julian Smith MP was given a briefing for the site with maps, and an overview of the issues facing peatland restoration with the relevant political 'asks' (see separate documents).

He walked over an area of Fleet Moss, met and chatted to some of the contractors on the site who demonstrated the techniques used to install coir logs on the bare peat. Throughout the walkover he was briefed by the team on the main issues under discussion.



Figure 1. From left to right, Damon Barrett (Marsdens AES contractor), Tim Thom (Peatland Programme Manager, YWT), Marsden contractor, Julian Smith MP, Jenny Sharman (Pennine PeatLIFE restoration officer), Lyndon Marquis (Pennine PeatLIFE communications officer).

3. Press coverage

A press release was drawn up and sent out by Lyndon Marquis (see Appendix 2).

4. Outcomes

Julian Smith MP followed up this meeting with a letter to Environment Minister Therese Villiers who in turn responded positively to our requests and recommendations..

Appendix 1.

The following brief was provided to the MP following his visit, outlining the role government can play in the future to ensure more effective peatland restoration programmes:

Constraints to Restoration and Considerations for the future

Although YPP is making huge inroads into restoring peatlands in Yorkshire, there are issues which are making the process less effective and efficient, and, at worst, preventing restoration from taking place. If these could be addressed, YPP would be able to maximise the likelihood of returning Yorkshire's damaged peatlands into fully-functioning ecosystems with all the accompanying social and economic benefits that provides.

1. The definition of blanket bog

As all policy and consequently, funding, is determined by the definition of what constitutes a blanket bog, this is critical to what is restored and what is ignored. Currently Natural England follows the ruling that any area that has peat that is 40 cm or over is 'blanket bog'. However in the Craven constituency over 50% of the area surveyed has less than 40cm of peat (see map xx). These sites are losing carbon to the atmosphere, share responsibility for polluting our drinking water, and contributing to the damaging floods in our region. It is our view that these sites should not be over-looked or ignored if we are to maximise the benefits that peatland restoration provides.

2. Funding and Policy

- Most funding received by YPP is for capital works only. While this is highly valuable, it does not account for personnel to run the management and planning of the restoration process (drone surveys, mapping, ground surveys, producing land management plans, tenders and the final contraction work). This, coupled with on-site management during restoration, and monitoring work post-restoration, is essential for an efficient and effective programme. Without funding for the relevant personnel to carry out this work, the capital works cannot be undertaken.
- The long-term nature of restoration requires an equivalent long-term, phased funding stream. Currently, funding is often limited to a one-off capital works payment for individual sites. In order to plan appropriately, and to maximise the public benefits peatlands provide, there is a need for a long-term outlook with corresponding long-term funding streams and policies. Indeed, peatland restoration is ideally suited to the Conservative Party's 25-year Environment Plan.
- Monitoring sites that have had restoration work is a critical component of successfully returning the moor to a fully functioning peatland ecosystem. As well as highlighting successes and failures that will help to improve restoration techniques, it critically identifies what further work is needed if the land is to be returned to its optimal potential. Currently there is no funding for monitoring of work that has been carried out, yet it is often a requirement of funders.

If policy could reflect these needs, progress in the Dales would be faster, more efficient and more effective.

3. *Agri-environment schemes*

The current Countryside Stewardship schemes are proving to be a huge hinderance to peatland restoration. While there is a significant amount of capital funding available in the system for restoration, the money is largely inaccessible due to the administrative constraints of the scheme. This has meant restoration is not taking place, despite the willingness of all stakeholders to undertake the work. The problems inherent in the current system need to be addressed before any new agri-environment or ELMS scheme is designed with the potential to incorporate the same dysfunctional system.

4. *England's Peatland Strategy*

A recent study reported the extensive loss of carbon from lowland peatland sites. This may have swayed attention away from the uplands – a factor that is likely to be reflected in the upcoming Peatland Strategy. This could be to the detriment of peatland restoration in the uplands and the ecosystem services they provide. It is important to recognise that an intact upland peatland will not only store and sequester carbon, it will also negate the need for expensive water treatment plants, help reduce the heavy financial and social impact of flash floods, protect our historical record and support species dependent on moorland and riverine habitats.

The uplands should be viewed as the lungs of the Dales that, if protected, will continue to supply the county with the life it needs to survive. If it flounders or dies, so will its catchments. If healthy, not only will it continue to perform the ecosystem services on which we depend, it will also help protect the area from the rigours of climate change through the interconnecting web of vital habitats it feeds. The central role of peatlands in the provision of these key public goods should never be undervalued and YPP would like to see their importance reflected alongside their lowland counterparts in the Peatland Strategy.

Appendix 2: Press release

Keeping the peat on the peatlands

Skipton and Ripon MP, the Rt Hon Julian Smith, visited peatland restoration work in the Yorkshire Dales to see how protecting our peatlands can help people and wildlife.

The works at Oughtershaw and Fleet Moss, which commenced in March, 2019, are being carried out by Yorkshire Wildlife Trust through the Yorkshire Peat Partnership (YPP), and the Pennine PeatLIFE project. They will restore 160 hectares of blanket bog on the watershed between the Ure and Wharfe catchments.

The once green, quaking blanket bog habitat is badly eroded by gullies and scarred with bare, exposed peat. In this state, thousands of years of stored carbon is escaping into the atmosphere and being washed off into waterways.

Julian Smith said:

“I really enjoyed seeing the work taking place at Oughtershaw and Fleet Moss during my visit, and meeting the team who are carrying out this fascinating project. This is exactly the kind of innovative, longer-term approach to environmental management that the Government is supporting through our 25 Year Plan for the Environment and I was glad to see the positive impact first-hand.”

Pennine PeatLIFE Project Officer, Jenny Sharman said:

“We’ve started damming the major gullies and replanting the bare peat. It’s thrilling to see how quickly restoration can have an impact. The coir dams are already holding back water and retaining peat sediment on the moors, where it should be.

”The cottongrass we planted is flourishing. Once it’s covering the bare peat, it will help to slow the flow of rainfall across the moor and that will help to manage flooding downstream.”

The work is funded by Pennine PeatLIFE and DEFRA, and delivered on the ground by Yorkshire Wildlife Trust and Marsden AES contractors.

Yorkshire Wildlife Trust’s Peat Programme Manager, Tim Thom, said:

“As well as natural flood management and carbon storage, healthy peatlands are amazing habitats for extraordinary wildlife and they’re beautiful places to visit.

“Despite the progress we’re making on this site, restoring peatlands is a long term process, and needs a long-term outlook with corresponding long-term policies and funding. Peatland restoration is ideally suited to the Government’s 25-year Environment Plan.”

ENDS

Notes for editors:

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[Yorkshire Peat Partnership](#)