

## North York Moors National Park Authority Development Plan Working Group

15 July 2016

### Preparation of a New Local Plan for the National Park – Main Issues

#### 1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To discuss with Members some of the key issues which need to be addressed in the forthcoming North York Moors Local Plan, focussing on main issues for review and local occupancy housing.
- 1.2 To discuss with Members the initial consultation arrangements so they can be agreed at the next meeting in August.

#### 2. Introduction

- 2.1 This is the second meeting of the Development Plan Working Group to meet in 2016. The first discussed issues around objectives for housing and changes to policy on affordable housing. The group has now decided to meet monthly.

#### 3. Issues for Discussion (Items 6 and 7)

- 3.1 Papers have been circulated to Members with the agenda and this report to support discussion around some the issues that need to be addressed within a new Local Plan:
  - The first is a list of **policy areas** that may need to be reviewed or revisited. This was tabled at the last meeting. Time constraints meant it was not discussed. The list has been compiled over the last year or two with input from the Development Management team. Members are invited to provide any comments on whether there is anything missing or on any specific issues have arisen over implementation of current policy.
  - The second (also tabled at the last meeting) is a brief discussion paper (*'Five Questions'*) on **affordable housing, local occupancy and the settlement hierarchy**. There was insufficient time to discuss local occupancy (question 5) and to a lesser extent settlement hierarchy (question 3), hence they have been tabled again at this meeting. Views on any aspects of this paper are however welcome; particularly from any Members who are attending for the first time.

#### 4. Initial Consultation (Item 8)

- 4.1 We would also like to discuss with Members possible arrangements for the initial round of consultation on the Local Plan. Consultation needs to be carried out in accordance with our 'Local Development Scheme' (August 2014).
- 4.2 For background, there is no 'set' or legally required way of public consulting on a Local Plan before submitting a final plan to Government, beyond two requirements set out in the 2012 Local Plan Regulations:

- We must notify consultation bodies and ‘such residents or other persons carrying on business in the area’ of our intention to prepare a Local Plan and ask what it should contain (Regulation 18).
- Once we have what we consider to be our final plan we must invite views on its contents before we submit it to Government for examination, so that an Inspector can take a view on the plan in light of those comments (Regulation 19).

- 4.3 It is therefore possible, as a minimum, to move from a stage of asking what should be in a local plan presenting a final version for comment. However, the Plan is important to the future of the Park and we wish to make sure that it benefits from as much outside input and expertise as possible during the early stages. Additional consultation at this stage also helps reduce the risk of the plan being found unsound at examination, as we can be made aware of any particular issues at an early stage.
- 4.4 Typically local planning authorities carry out what’s known as an ‘Issues and Options’ stage (usually a 30-50 page document setting out four or five options for consultation on key areas such as housing, employment, transport etc.) followed by a ‘Preferred Options’ stage which is a full draft plan with the authority’s preferred approach to strategy and policy, with alternatives also presented.
- 4.5 This is the approach we set out in our March 2016 Local Development Scheme. In addition we also proposed a first and additional ‘Key Partner’ consultation which would ask for initial views on what should be in the plan and asking for any views on what some of the main issues may be.
- 4.6 Our current plan for this initial stage of consultation is to carry out a wider and more focussed consultation under the banner ‘First Steps’. We will be seeking any comments in any form at this stage, however, to focus comments onto issues we think will generate the most debate we are preparing the following documents. These will be circulated at the meeting for discussion at the next:

#### **The First Steps Document**

- 4.7 This contains twenty targeted questions around what we think the main issues for the new Local Plan will be. These issues are around the areas which we think will generate the most debate as we progress the plan, and the areas where we have the most choice on how to change policy. Issues have been identified following internal discussions with the development management team and are mostly based on the ‘issues’ document tabled at item 6. It is open to anyone to respond to this document, however it is aimed particularly at people who have engaged or will engage with the planning application process (developers, landowners and agents), Parish and Town Councils and Meetings, and anyone with a particular interest in planning in the National Park.

#### **The Community Aspirations Questionnaire.**

- 4.8 We also have been giving thought as to how we fully engage with the Parishes as part of Local Plan consultation. We began by attending Parish Forum meetings to explain the background to the Local Plan. We are now intending to carry out a consultation exercise aimed at Parish Councils and Meetings designed to gauge their aspirations for new housing, employment and other development. To this end we intend to distribute a separate ‘community aspirations questionnaire’ to Parishes, together with a map to enable them to indicate any areas of development or open space of interest to them. Rather than holding general drop in events our proposal is to offer to visit any Parish who have expressed a view that some limited new development may be desirable.

## **An Open Space Questionnaire.**

- 4.9 The National Planning Policy Framework (paragraphs 76-77) allows for local communities to nominate areas of 'Local Green Space' for inclusion in local and neighbourhood plans. These areas must be close to the community they serve and hold local significance because of their beauty, historical significance, recreational or tranquillity or wildlife value. If designated, such areas gain the same policy protection afforded to Green Belt.
- 4.10 We are planning to ask local communities (including Town and Parish Councils and Meetings) to nominate any areas of Local Green Space where new development would be ruled out except in very exceptional circumstances. We will pass a copy of the form on to Members at the meeting for discussion and possible finalisation at the August meeting.
- 4.11 We are also required to do two other pieces of work at this early stage which will be published alongside our initial consultation material:

## **A Call for Sites Exercise**

- 4.12 One of the pieces of evidence we are required to produce by national policy guidance is a 'Strategic Housing and Employment Land Availability Assessment', commonly known as a SHELA. The SHELA will be a list of housing and employment sites with an assessment of whether they are suitable, available and viable for development. It will also include a list of discounted sites which are considered unsuitable for development. The accompanying practice guidance for the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) makes clear that (Section ID3, paragraphs 009-13):
- *"Plan makers should issue a call for potential sites and broad locations for development, which should be aimed at as wide an audience as is practicable,"*
  - *The expectation is that "the assessment should identify all sites and broad locations regardless of the amount of development needed to provide an audit of available land", and that*
  - *"Sites, which have particular policy constraints, should be included in the assessment for the sake of comprehensiveness".*
- 4.13 A minimum site size threshold of five or more dwellings is suggested for assessment. However, it is now proposed that local planning authorities also maintain a list of small sites for potential housing developments of 1-4 units, which is intended to help possible custom and self-builders find plots<sup>1</sup>.
- 4.14 Coupled to this the Housing and Planning Act (2016) also requires us to compile a register of brownfield sites that may in the future gain 'permission in principle' from their inclusion on such a register.
- 4.15 As a result we do need to undertake some form of call for sites exercise to help us meet these requirements and inform our new Local Plan. A request for a wide scale review of potential housing sites across the whole National Park regardless of constraints does not, however, sit comfortably with Government policy on housing in National Parks as set out in its 2010 Circular 'English National Parks and the Broads' This states that *"the Parks are not suitable locations for unrestricted housing"* and that the expectation is that new housing will be focused on *meeting affordable housing requirement, supporting local employment opportunities and key services"* (paragraph 78).

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<sup>1</sup> Department for Communities and Local Government, Consultation on Technical Consultation on Planning, February 2016.

Whilst we will be open to any site being submitted we feel there is a need to manage expectations to help save the time of anyone sending sites to us and ourselves in assessing them for suitability. We will therefore make clear in the call for sites exercise that:

- National Park policy constraints are likely to apply, meaning that sites in the open countryside or adjacent to smaller villages or hamlets will be accepted, but are highly likely to be discounted or found unsuitable for development;
- We are looking for sites for local needs only or where a significant element of affordable housing can be generated;
- Smaller sites of 1-4 units can be submitted and they will be assessed where they may be available for affordable housing, otherwise they will not be assessed for suitability and will be entered on a small sites register.

### **A Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report**

- 4.16 This report forms the first formal stage in our sustainability appraisal. The appraisal is a legal requirement and is used to evaluate options for policies and sites against a range of economic, social and environmental criteria. We are required to consult with Natural England, Historic England and the Environment Agency on its contents (this scoping stage) under the 2004 Environmental Assessment of Plans Regulations. The scoping report reviews other relevant policies, plans, programmes that may influence our plan, looks at what we know about the National Park to establish 'baseline information' on how things are at the moment and sets out the objectives we will be using to carry out the sustainability appraisal. This report is nearing completion. As this is a long technical report aimed at the environmental agencies we are not proposing to consult widely on this document but it will be made available for comment on the website. Should Members wish to see a draft copy this can be arranged.

### **5. Financial and Staffing Implications**

- 5.1 None at present.

### **6. Contribution to National Park Management Plan**

- 6.1 An up to date Local Plan supports a number of the priorities set out in the Management Plan and sets a framework for ensuring that the objectives can be delivered.

### **7. Legal Implications**

- 7.1 None at present

<h3><b>8. Recommendation</b></h3>
8.1 That: Members note the content of the reports and provide comments to officers for further consideration.



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