

Current thinking - Have your say...

The Local Plan is the set of policies that we use to help decide applications for planning permission. It guides the scale, nature, and broad location of development in the National Park and shapes how it should be designed. Its aim is to balance the needs of local communities with the conservation and enhancement of this nationally important landscape.

Here, we set out our 'current thinking' about how our Local Plan may change. We are asking 10 questions where we would like an early steer from anyone with an interest in this National Park on what our next Local Plan needs to say.

Some context

Planning in a National Park is different to planning in most parts of the country. By law, the National Park Authority must give priority:

- To conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife, and cultural heritage of the National Park; and
- To promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the National Park by the public.

In pursuing these purposes, there is also a legal duty for us to:

- Seek to foster the economic and social wellbeing of local communities.

Where there is an irresolvable conflict between these purposes and duty, the first purpose comes first. Planning in a National Park is focused on enabling development that supports conservation and public enjoyment and preventing development that would cause harm to the landscape, wildlife, or heritage of the National Park. This means that planning within the National Park is fundamentally landscape and conservation led and the next Local Plan will be prepared in this context.

The [North York Moors Management Plan](#) is a statutory document that sets a vision for the North York Moors as a place and identifies six overarching outcomes which provide a framework for policies within the National Park. The Local Plan is a key policy document that helps achieve these outcomes:

- A resilient landscape, at the forefront of addressing climate change and nature recovery
- A nature rich, more biodiverse landscape
- A landscape rich in heritage and highly valued for its sense of remoteness and tranquillity
- A place that lifts the nation's health and wellbeing
- A place that supports a diverse and innovative low carbon economy.
- A place of great beauty where local communities thrive

Our starting point for a vision for the next Local Plan is:

“The North York Moors will be a resilient landscape at the forefront of addressing climate change and nature recovery where development is carefully managed to conserve and enhance the National Park’s special qualities. The Local Plan will guide sustainable development that delivers a biodiverse, beautiful, and varied place that’s proud of its cultural heritage and which lifts the nation’s health and well-being. It will be a place with a diverse, innovative, low carbon economy and home to thriving, welcoming local communities.”

How is the current Local Plan performing?

We think that the current Local Plan, adopted in July 2020, is working well. We check how our policies are performing and publish an [Annual Monitoring Statement](#) each year.

We think our environmental and design policies are doing a good job of conserving the natural beauty and wildlife of the National Park, although we will need to put greater emphasis on policies that support nature recovery, greater environmental resilience to climate change, advances in renewable energy technology. New tourism and recreational development allows people to enjoy what the National Park has to offer. In particular, a main aim of the Plan - to increase housing delivery to help to address population loss – appears to be working. However, the delivery of affordable housing in our villages has slowed and pressures from second homes and holiday lets continue to grow.

Why are we reviewing our Local Plan?

We think that much of our existing Local Plan remains fit for purpose. We are, however, required by law to review our Plan every five years. There have also been changes in policies and priorities both locally and nationally since the Plan was adopted in 2020. There is now a greater emphasis on nature recovery, environmental resilience to climate change, advances in renewable energy technology and a national recognition of a housing crisis. Consequently, there are a number of policy areas that will need to be reviewed.

The Government has also proposed setting **National Development Management Policies (NDMPs)** that will carry the same weight as local policies. As these are not yet finalised, it is not possible at this stage to assess the full implications of these changes and so this will be addressed later in the plan review process. These national policies however should not be replicated in Local Plans, so it is likely that the new Local Plan will contain fewer policies than the present one.

There are also a number of significant changes and emerging challenges that mean some policies require review and, in some cases, updating. This “Current Thinking” consultation focusses on a number of key issues with the current Plan, with further consultation to follow on other policies and matters not currently included in this consultation.

Current thinking

We will be asking for views on the Plan a couple of more times. At this initial stage, we are focussing on four key ‘conversations’:

Conversation 1 – Nature recovery and climate action at a landscape scale

Conversation 2 – Recreation, health, and wellbeing

Conversation 3 – How do we decide which villages are appropriate for new development?

Conversation 4 – Housing, including overall numbers, locations and tenure

Conversation 1: Nature recovery and climate action at a landscape scale

National Parks are at the forefront of leading on large-scale nature recovery and climate change. Both are closely interconnected and are core priorities for the Authority, landowners, and local communities. Healthy, resilient ecosystems play a vital role in addressing the climate emergency by storing carbon, reducing flood risk, supporting adaptation, and sustaining the special qualities of the National Park.

In parallel, national policy and legislation, notably the Environment Act 2021 place increasing emphasis on the role of National Parks in leading nature's recovery. The National Park Authorities are bound by strengthened duties to seek to further National Park purposes, consider what we can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity and support the delivery of Local Nature Recovery Strategies.

Our current thinking

We think that the environmental policies in the current Plan are working and are helping protect the 'special qualities' of the National Park. Policies on tranquillity, remoteness and dark skies have worked well and will remain. There are, however, no specific policies on supporting nature recovery development (such as creation of wetlands) and we think that there are opportunities for a more integrated approach that elevates nature recovery and climate action as shared priorities.

We also think that policies around renewable energy such as solar arrays and wind turbines may need to be reviewed in light of national policy changes. Policies on wildlife and land management including the need for fire breaks and tracks to support land management practices that enhance resilience and biodiversity also may need to be included.

Questions

Q1: How do you think the Local Plan can be improved to meet the challenges of climate change?

Q2: How can planning policies better enhance nature and biodiversity?

Conversation 2: Recreation, health and wellbeing

Tourism and recreation support health and wellbeing and make a major contribution to the local economy. In 2024, the North York Moors National Park welcomed over 9 million visitors, generating £1.1 billion and supporting more than 11,000 jobs. We want to make the National Park an accessible place for outdoor activity and relaxation, which is particularly important for nearby urban communities and champion the concept of regenerative tourism, which seeks to make a positive contribution to communities and the natural environment.

Our current thinking

Overall, we think the current policies are working reasonably well. They support small-scale tourism and recreational development in settlements, and camping, glamping and caravan or cabin sites in locations with little or no landscape impact. However, we are aware that there may be opportunities to improve the Plan by:

1. Being clearer about how planning policies can support health and wellbeing, including accessibility, inclusion and avoiding negative health impacts
2. Making better use of suitably sited tourism and recreation development to strengthen links with nearby towns such as Scarborough, Guisborough, Thirsk and Middlesbrough
3. Allowing more flexibility for low-impact uses, such as the reuse of remoter existing buildings, where these would not harm the landscape
4. Considering whether, in some locations, focused or more strategic recreational developments could be appropriate while still meeting National Park purposes

Questions

Q3: Where do you think recreational development in the National Park should be located and do you think the current levels are at the right scale? Do you have any views on the type of recreational and tourism infrastructure that is needed or is appropriate?

Q4: Does there need to be more flexibility to allow low impact recreational uses in isolated or remoter farm buildings?

Conversation 3: How we decide which villages may see some new development?

Why do we categorise settlements in our Local Plan?

All local plans identify the most appropriate locations for future development. This is usually done through creating a settlement hierarchy, which reflects the size, role, and level of services available in different settlements. The hierarchy helps guide where different scale and types of development should be located. Our current hierarchy can be found on page 40 of the [Local Plan](#).

What is our existing approach?

The current Local Plan identifies three main categories:

1. Helmsley – the sole Local Service Centre and pre-eminent settlement in the National Park, reflecting its role as a market town and focus for a range of housing, (including open market) and employment
2. 16 Larger Villages – settlements with a range of facilities, where small-scale principal residence (where a home is the main home) and affordable housing may be supported
3. 46 Smaller Villages – settlements with limited facilities, where very small-scale development to meet local need may be appropriate. A local connection is required for people to occupy new build housing

All remaining settlements are classed as Open Countryside where development is tightly controlled. In addition, Botton Village is identified separately due to its unique characteristics and role.

Our current thinking

Proposed changes to national planning policy may place greater emphasis on development within settlements and may widen the range of development supported outside them. At this stage we think the current hierarchy broadly works well and are not proposing major changes.

- We think that Helmsley should remain the only Local Service Centre where new housing development should be principal residence (replacing open market housing)
- There may be scope to add to the list of Larger Villages, particularly where settlements are close to larger towns outside the National Park which provide good access to services and facilities
- There is also an option to reinstate some smaller settlements that were removed from the hierarchy, including: Battersby, Cowesby, Ellerby, Goldsborough, High Kilburn, Houlsyke, Kepwick, Kildale, Littlebeck, Nether Siltan, Newton under Roseberry, Old Byland, Oldstead, Over Siltan, Rievaulx, Scawton, Spaunton, Thimbleby, Ugglebarnby and Westerdale

Questions

Q5: Do you think the current hierarchy works well? Should other villages be included? What changes would you like to see?

Q6: Should some villages close to larger urban settlements outside the National Park be designated as Larger Villages, reflecting their sustainable location and access to services?

Conversation 4: Housing, including overall numbers, locations and tenure

Although housing delivery has increased over the past decade, there is still a substantial unmet need for affordable homes. The Management Plan objective of delivering 20 new affordable houses each year has not been achieved through current planning policies which focus on what are known as ‘rural exception sites’ – sites on the edges of villages for 100% affordable housing. This is compounded by ongoing pressures from second homes and holiday accommodation which the planning system currently has no control over. Over time, there has also been a decline in essential local services, such as schools, driven by an ageing population and the use of housing stock as holiday lets and second homes.

As part of the Local Plan review, we need to decide on the appropriate level of new housing provision, how affordable housing delivery can be strengthened, and whether new housing development should reflect a mix of local needs alongside principal residence requirements.

What is our existing housing strategy?

The current Local Plan aims to prevent population decline and has been broadly successful in recent years, with the National Park’s population slightly increasing. The current Local Plan anticipates an average of 29 new homes being built each year. Open market housing is permitted in Helmsley, while development elsewhere is tightly controlled through limits on the number and type of homes permitted in Larger and Smaller Villages. Policies encourage affordable housing to be primarily delivered through rural exception sites, and there is a strong emphasis on smaller, more affordable homes,

efficient use of land, and the sensitive conversion of existing rural buildings that contribute positively to the landscape.

Has the strategy worked?

Overall, the strategy is operating as intended, particularly in relation to population levels. There remain, however, pressures on housing in the National Park. Since 2016, the population has increased by 320 people, but this has required the completion of 405 new homes, indicating a high level of housing delivery relative to population growth. The provision of affordable housing has, however, been slow.

Since the Local Plan was adopted in 2020:

- 165 new homes have been completed - 13% in Helmsley, 35% in Larger Villages, 21% in Smaller Villages and 31% in the Open Countryside
- 59 affordable homes were built in Helmsley
- One rural exception site has been completed (Staithes), delivering 12 affordable homes for local people

Overall, 78% of new homes completed since 2020 are subject to some form of occupancy restriction to support local or permanent residents. The remaining 22% (mostly in Helmsley) are unrestricted and may be occupied as permanent homes, second homes or holiday accommodation.

Our current thinking

A key issue for the Local Plan review is whether the overall level of housing delivery remains appropriate. Unlike most other local planning authorities, National Park Authorities set their own housing figures, using evidence in a Housing Needs Assessment. Our assessment identifies an ageing population, a declining working-age population, high levels of second homes and under-occupation, and housing costs that are high relative to local incomes. Taken together, these factors point towards the need for a carefully balanced housing strategy that prioritises affordability rather than simply increasing the number of new homes. We think that our current housing policies are not delivering enough affordable houses to meet the needs of local communities.

At the moment, the Local Plan is delivering around 33 homes a year, slightly more than the anticipated rate of 29. Our Housing Needs Assessment suggests that up to 77 homes a year may be needed to meet the need for affordable housing alone.

Given this need for more affordable housing in the National Park, and the Government's desire to increase housing supply, we believe we should be more ambitious. We would like your views on whether we should be looking to build housing on the edges of some Larger Villages given the shortage of available sites within existing developed areas. We would also like to know of any sites that would be potentially available and suitable.

Local communities also tell us that they are concerned that new homes do not end up as second or holiday homes. We are proposing to move away from local occupancy conditions and to introduce policies that expand the locations for principal residence housing which are currently limited to the Larger Villages only.

Finally, we are asking for any thoughts on how we can be more innovative when it comes to building new housing – is there any scope for ecovillages, modular construction, or the increased supply of 'self-build' housing?

Questions

Q7: As long as policies fully support landscape protection do you agree that we need to build more homes in the National Park to help meet the needs of local communities?

Q8: Should all new homes be required to be lived in as a main home and be subject to a principal residence condition across the whole National Park (removing the current local connection requirements in Smaller Villages?)

Q9: What are your thoughts about identifying housing sites on the edges of villages?

Q10: Do you have any views on whether we should look to find land for an exemplar project that can demonstrate how best to build green or 'eco' homes, or how we can best encourage self-build housing?

Anything else?

We have tried to keep this initial call for views short. If there are any other matters that we have not covered, or if there are any aspects of the current Local Plan which you think need reviewing, please share them with us. As the new Local Plan will incorporate Minerals and Waste Policies this includes any thoughts on these issues.

Please share any views with us by **Monday 31 August 2026**, by using this form:

Local Plan – First Steps

...or by emailing us at localplan@northyorkmoors.org.uk

...or by writing to us at Policy Team, North York Moors National Park Authority, Bondgate, Helmsley YO625BP.

What happens next?

We are aiming to produce a final Local Plan by May 2029, in line with the Government's 30-month timetable, if not earlier. As part of this we will anticipate producing a draft Local Plan for comment around May next year, and a draft plan that will be submitted to Government in February 2028. This may change, and the latest on this timetable can be found here.

If you want to be added to our mailing list which we use to update our progress, please let us know by emailing: policy@northyorkmoors.org.uk.

Thank you for your time.