

North York Moors Local Plan Preferred Options. The Sustainability Appraisal.

A Short (Non-Technical) Summary

Why have we prepared this document?

- 1.1 The North York Moors National Park Authority is preparing a new Local Plan. This plan will set out the framework of rules we will use to help decide planning applications. It will be a long term plan covering the period from 2016 to 2035.
- 1.2 The Local Plan sets out the overall spatial planning framework for the National Park. It contains strategic objectives for the future development of the Park and will include core policies to achieve the objectives, together with proposals for monitoring.
- 1.3 This is the second stage in the Sustainability Appraisal process that the Local Plan goes through. Because Sustainability appraisals are long and complicated documents this short, non- technical summary has been prepared.

What is sustainability appraisal?

- 1.4 Sustainability Appraisal (SA) is a way of checking local plan policies and allocations against a series of economic, social and environmental criteria to see if they are capable of delivering the most sustainable forms of development. The appraisal also incorporates Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), the undertaking of which is required under the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004. Government guidance suggests that Sustainability Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Assessment can be carried out jointly and this is the approach the Authority has taken to appraising the Local Plan Preferred Options.

What has happened so far?

- 1.5 The first stage, known as the 'Scoping Stage' was published in September 2016 and is available on the Authority's web site. The Scoping Report:
 - Reviewed other relevant policies, plans, programmes to establish whether their contents will need to inform the North York Moors National Park Local Plan;
 - Looked at what we know about the North York Moors National Park at the moment to see what issues need to be addressed. In sustainability appraisal terms this is known as 'baseline information'. Identified any particular issues and problems, using the information we have collected, as well as any difficulties encountered, including lack of information. Baseline information about the environmental, social and economic conditions in the Park which the Local Plan must address. These can be summarised as follows:
 - **Environmental** – the diverse and special landscape of the Park is valued highly by resident and visitors but is likely to be subject to a range of pressures as a consequence of global climate change.
 - **Social** – Net outward migration of younger people and restricted services in more remote parts of the Park has implications for the vitality and viability of rural communities.

- **Economic** – Low unemployment rates mask the seasonal nature of employment related to tourism and low agricultural incomes. This coupled with exceptionally high house prices has resulted in a severe affordability problem which is contributing to the issues outlined above.
 - Set out the objectives we will be using to carry out this sustainability appraisal and how the appraisal will be carried out;
 - Set out how we will start to monitor our eventual plan to see if it is working.
- 1.6 In accordance with the statutory requirements the three Strategic Environmental Assessment bodies (Historic England, Environment Agency and Natural England) were asked for their views. Their responses are set out at **Appendix 3**.

What is in this document?

- 1.7 The preparation and production of the SA has been led by officers from the National Park Authority.
- 1.8 This document:
1. Explains what sustainability appraisal is and about the preparation process (Section 2)
 2. Carries out an appraisal of the draft 'Preferred Options' Local Plan, and starts by setting out the twelve **environmental, social and economic objectives** that will be used to appraise the draft plan (Chapter 4);
 3. Assesses whether the separate objectives set out in the draft Local Plan perform well in sustainability terms by assessing **those objectives** against the objectives used by this sustainability appraisal (Chapter 5);
 4. Moves on to carry out an appraisal of the main **spatial strategy** proposed in the plan (known as the settlement hierarchy) and looks at some **alternative options** on how a spatial strategy could be formulated and whether our 'preferred option' performed the best compared to others when assessed against the sustainability objectives (Chapter 6). **It concluded our preferred option for a spatial strategy was the most sustainable of those tested.**
 5. The appraisal then moves on look at **individual policies**. The full appraisal tables are at **Appendix 5**. No site allocations were tested as the draft plan does not include any relating to new development (apart from a couple of small 'environmental enhancement sites' (draft Policy ENV14).
 6. Assessment of policies is handled in two different ways, depending on whether the authors or the draft plan considered that there were alternative options that needed to be generated and considered by testing through the appraisal framework. Article 5(1) of the UE SEA Directive requires that only "*reasonable alternatives should be taken into account the objectives and the geographical scope of the plan or programme, are identified, described and evaluated*" A grey box and the end of each policy in the draft plan explains the approach taken to each one:
 - For some policies such as Policy ENV3 on a strong sense of remoteness or Strategic Policy M on the approach to the housing strategy there were considered to be a number of choices to be made on the overall approach the policy could take. A range of options were therefore generated and

considered within this sustainability appraisal. A summary of whether the preferred option included in the draft plan is the most sustainable when compared to alternative options is included at **Table 2 in Chapter 6**.

- For other policies there is less choice and flexibility on what the policy needs to say. Officers took the view that on some policies (for example Strategic Policy H on Habitats, Wildlife, Biodiversity and Geodiversity where the clear sustainability imperative is to make sure those sites are protected) meant that there were no realistic alternative options that could be tested or that it would not be a good use of time and resources to generate and test alternatives for its own sake. Instead, the policy wording is tested against each sustainability objective and changes are recommended where it is felt that it would result in a more sustainable outcome. Suggested mitigation measures to improve policy outcomes are set at **Appendix 7**.
7. **'Cumulative effects'** were then considered. There are two sorts – how the policies interact with each other and the effect of the whole plan would have in sustainability terms when implemented in combination with other plans and programmes. This information is summarised in **Chapter 6 Table 3** and set out in more detail at **Appendix 6**.

Summary of Sustainability Appraisal

- 1.9 Overall the policy appraisal found that the Local Plan would largely have positive impacts through application of the sixty four policies and associated environmental, social and economic sustainability objectives. No significant negative impacts were identified during the policy appraisal process. Where minor negative impacts were identified, in most cases the negative impacts were outweighed by the positive effects of the policy resulting in overall sustainable policies. Any minor negative impacts arising from the cumulative assessment can be mitigated through the application of policies within the plan.
- 1.10 Where alternative options were generated for policies and then tested against the preferred option set out in this plan all preferred option policies were the most sustainable, although for two there was uncertainty over impacts as it would depend on what development proposals were received and how the policy would be implemented. The preferred option spatial strategy option also performed the best against objectives when compared to other options.
- 1.11 **This report therefore concludes that the planning framework set out in the draft Preferred Options Local Plan represents the most sustainable option when tested against reasonable alternatives.**

What happens next?

- 1.12 Any comments received by them will be incorporated in the next version of this document which will be available to other consultees as part of the consultation on the Issues and Options consultation document. Any other views will also be considered and incorporated as necessary.
- 1.13 All comments should be received by **5 p.m. on the 12th October 2018**.