

Date: 18 December 2018

Report: LOCAL DEVELOPMENT SCHEME – THE NEXT REVIEW OF NATIONAL PARK PLANNING POLICY 2022-2040

Purpose of the report

1. To determine the scope of the next review of planning policy and to commission a study into the socio-economic 'state of the Park'.

RECOMMENDATION

2. That the Authority:
 - commits in principle to a review of planning policy across the whole National Park; and,
 - seeks the support of the constituent District Councils to commission an independent socio-economic 'state of the park' study to provide a baseline for future planning strategy and other socio-economic joint working.

Strategic Planning Framework

3. The information and recommendation(s) contained in this report are consistent with the Authority's statutory purposes and its approved strategic planning framework:

Corporate Plan actions

Agree the scope, timetable and resources for the next reviews of planning policy and housing land supply (Local Development Scheme)

Background

4. The process and timetable for reviewing planning policy is set out in the Authority's Local Development Scheme. Its purpose is to set out the framework for making planning decisions and how the Authority will keep that framework up to date.
5. The current Local Development Scheme expired in December 2016 when the Yorkshire Dales Local Plan was adopted. Since then planning policy review work has been paused whilst officers have focused on *implementing* the new plan and the more flexible policies it introduced. Planning policy officers have also been engaged in other projects such as the National Park Management Plan review.

6. National planning policy requires policies in local plans to be reviewed at least once every five years. This means checking that the strategies and policy details is still legally compliant and that the plans are delivering against their objectives and are as up to date and effective as they reasonably can be.
7. In August 2016 the National Park boundary was extended and the Authority inherited 5 additional local plans. These include two minerals local plans prepared by Cumbria and Lancashire County Councils and three other Plans prepared by Lancaster, South Lakeland and Eden Councils.
8. The Cumbria Minerals and Waste Local Plan and the Eden Local Plan are both up to date (see other agenda item today). Unfortunately the development plans in South Lakeland and the Core Strategy in Lancaster have now largely been superseded by changes to national policy and government planning guidance. The problem therefore is that the expanded National Park area does not have a coherent planning strategy or up to date policies. This is causing some difficulty for applicants, officers and members which is only likely to get worse as these plans become more out of date. Now would seem to be a good time to take stock and contemplate how planning policy can be brought up to date across the whole of the new National park area.

Review of planning policy

9. These issues were considered in detail at the Members' Policy Development Forum in September. Three specific options were put forward:
 1. A 'selective' review of the Yorkshire Dales Local Plan 2015-2030 (specifically the housing strategy and policies);
 2. A review of *strategic* planning policy
 3. A review of planning policy across the whole National Park, leading to a single Local Plan.
10. **Option 1** - the Inspector examining the Yorkshire Dales Local Plan in 2016 recommended a review of its housing policies within five years of adoption, to ensure that the land supply and the policy detail is effective. This option would, therefore, merely focus on housing policy in the 'old' area. It could review the housing target and roll forward the supply of land for building having regard to the recent changes in national policy such as the wider definition of affordable housing. It could do this through new site allocations, expanding the housing development boundaries around villages and through a review of the viability of delivering affordable housing, one of the factors holding landowners back from developing their sites. The big disadvantage of this option is that it would not address the new area of the National Park and would not cover any of the emerging non-housing issues, such as the future of farming, or enhancement of the area's natural capital. It would still take four years to complete because housing remains such a contentious planning issue.
11. **Option 2** - the legal minimum would be to establish a set of strategic planning priorities for the whole Park covering such matters as the overall pattern of future development, a housing target, requirements for infrastructure, safeguarding of community services and conservation of the Park's special qualities. This would cover the whole National

Park, and might be prepared quite quickly. It would not, however, review more detailed but critical planning matters such as land allocations, development boundaries or the criteria within existing detailed policies (some of which are now out of date). So, the detailed policies would still have to be reviewed at a later date.

12. **Option 3** - this option would lead to a new, single local plan for the whole of the National Park. It would deal with the recommendations in the Inspector's report from 2016 but would also allow adjustments to be made to other areas of policy where these are needed e.g. a policy on wind energy. It would provide an opportunity to give effect to the vision in the National Park Management Plan. It is the only option that will replace both out of date strategy and policy detail across the whole National Park. However, a review on this scale will inevitably create a period of uncertainty/expectation that may slow some development. Within the newer parts of the National Park (especially in Eden, where a new Local Plan has only just been adopted), there may be a perception of unnecessary and additional bureaucracy being 'imposed'. It is also by far the most expensive and resource-intensive option.
13. At the Policy Development Forum, Members were overwhelmingly in favour of pursuing Option 3, and that has influenced how this report has been drafted. However, before formally committing to this option, it is recommended that discussions be held with South Lakeland and Eden District Councils and Lancaster City Council in relation to the new areas of the National Park.

A new Local Development Scheme

14. The new Local Development Scheme has not yet been written. Depending on the decisions today, it could be prepared for consideration at the March Authority meeting and would contain the following detail:
- An explanation of the area to be covered and its planning period e.g. 2023-2040;
 - A description of what the plan will contain (i.e. the range of policies);
 - A timetable for each stage of preparing the Plan;
 - The resources needed to prepare the Plan;
 - *Any supplementary planning documents* needed (e.g. design guide);
 - Arrangements to meet our *duty to cooperate* with local authority partners and any major pieces of work needed to prepare *Statements of common ground* with them.
 - *Statement of Community Involvement* – setting out how we will consult the public and other interested parties.
 - *Neighbourhood Development Plans*.

Socio-economic study 2019

15. Local plans and the strategies they contain are the subject of public scrutiny. The evidence they are based on is examined by a Planning Inspector at a public inquiry. Officers propose to start the next Local Plan review by commissioning an independent

‘state of the park socio-economic study’. The scope of the study would need to be fairly wide-ranging. It would be steered by the long term vision and ambitions for the National Park set out in the new Management Plan, and would look at the trends surrounding population change, housing, the operation of the local economy, and access to key local services. It would establish the baseline facts within the specific context of this National Park. Some of this data will already be available but will need analysis to separate it from areas outside the Park.

16. It would be a key piece of evidence to inform the ‘issues’ stage of a new Local Plan, and would help shape its options and long term strategy. It would also have a wider influence on e.g. seeking resources and investment through the Local Enterprise Partnerships, from Government and other sources.

Resources

17. Bringing together all the existing Local Plans is a big commitment for this Authority. With every iteration of national policy, the complexity of local plans seems to increase. There is a need to co-operate closely with neighbouring authorities on subjects such as housing and minerals. Most of the costs will be borne by the Authority but the local outputs over decades are worth many millions of pounds in terms of development spending, land valuation and multiplier effects.

18. The current staff resource for planning policy is 1.2 fte. That is not enough to make the sort of progress that would be required to get a new Plan adopted within 3-4 years. It is, therefore, proposed that the vacant (0.7 fte) Senior Policy and Performance Officer post is ‘re-purposed’ to support work on the development of the new Local Plan.

19. The baseline socio-economic study is expected to cost in the region of £30k-£40k. It is intended to seek financial contributions from each of the District Councils (as well as shared agreement on the specification) – as the study will be highly relevant to their statutory socio-economic roles.

20. Other studies requiring specialist consultancy (and therefore budget) may include housing site flood risk assessment, affordable housing viability, housing space standards, wind energy mapping, community infrastructure levy review, visitor accommodation and sport and recreational standards. The costs are likely to be significantly higher than the current budget projections for the ‘Development Planning’ programme and these would need to be reflected in the 2019-20 budget that will come to Finance and Resources Committee in February.

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