



**YORKSHIRE DALES**  
National Park Authority



Burtersett

# Annual Monitoring Report 2005 - 2006

## Yorkshire Dales Local Plan

## Summary

- During the monitoring period (March 2005 – April 2006) the new Local Plan policies began to be used to determine planning applications, replacing the previous Local Plan (1996). The new Local Plan is in general conformity with emerging national and regional planning policy.
- The level of development in the National Park continues to be modest by regional or national standards. The number of applications received was the highest for four years with a rush just prior to the implementation of the new plan in April 2005.
- Pre application advice and negotiation frequently lead to improved schemes capable of meeting policy requirements. However the approval rate for planning applications has dropped from 90% to 83%, which equates to the national average.
- Two large applications were permitted during the monitoring period. 58 new dwellings were approved on the site of the former Tannery at Embsay near Skipton and at Dry Rigg quarry, Horton in Ribblesdale, permission was granted to extend the time limit to complete quarrying. Three applications during the period necessitated environmental assessment. No applications were received that could be described as 'major development' in a national sense.
- A draft Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) was published for consultation in December 2005. The emerging strategy contains a zero housing requirement for the National Park. All new housing is required to be for local needs only. The new Local Plan housing policies comply with the RSS although some amendment to Local Plan policy H1 (new housing in key services centres) may be required during 2007.
- The new local needs policy H2 (New Housing in Service Villages) has been tested and upheld at appeal.
- The rate of housing completion has dropped off substantially.
- The shortfall of affordable housing in the National Park is 88 dwellings per annum and is particularly serious in Craven. There is no likelihood that it is going to be met in the foreseeable future by the policies of the new Local Plan alone.
- The housing strategy of the new Local Plan is being pursued, despite a number of departure decisions.
- Brownfield sites are running out as barn conversions and previously used land is developed. This is leading to pressure on greenfield land through the release of rural exceptions sites for affordable housing. Identification of greenfield sites is likely to feature prominently in the forthcoming review of housing (because of the lack of brownfield alternatives).

- There continues to be pressure to change the use of existing employment sites, visitor accommodation and some community facilities, into housing. However the Local Plan policies are being used to resist this. There is a need to release more employment land in Sedbergh.
- Design quality and design detail are the most frequently used areas of policy. The design quality of development proposals is generally improving.
- Pre application interest in micro wind and solar heating remains high although few applications were actually submitted.
- Mineral extraction is at a level consistent with the last 5 years. Because of high levels of mineral reserves there is no sign of any reduction in extraction rates.
- The policies of the new Local Plan appear to be working. The planning system in the National Park is delivering the majority of what applicants seek.
- Progress against the Local Development Scheme (LDS) has slipped, because of delays with adoption of the Local Plan. A revised LDS will be published in the New Year.

## Introduction

This is the second Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) as required by the Planning and Compensation Act 2004. It:

- Reports on the nature of planning applications received
- Analyses the use of Local Plan policies
- Provides a commentary on progress against the Local Plan objectives
- Reviews progress on the production of the Local Development Framework.

## Monitoring Period

On the 12<sup>th</sup> April 2005 the Authority resolved to begin using the new Local Plan policies for decision making on planning applications. This second AMR is therefore a review of the performance of the new Local Plan over its first 12 months, between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2005 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2006.

Work has already begun on a replacement, to be known as the Local Development Framework. The review of policy will be selective beginning with housing and minerals and waste. Issues and Options on these subjects were presented to the Authority in September 2006 with public consultation anticipated to begin in 2007.

## Commentary on the Social and Economic State of the Park

Comparison of the 1991 and 2001 Census reveals that;

- the population of the Park has increased across the three broad age sectors of 0-15, 16-64 and over 65. This however masks declines within narrower sectors, such as school and college age leavers.
- The rate of economic activity has also increased. There is now a higher proportion of the population available and capable of work than in 1991 and this is a useful indicator of the potential for the Park to increase its contribution to the local economy.
- In terms of employment by sector, agriculture has continued to decline sharply but is being replaced by an expanded service sector.
- Unemployment remains low and average district earnings are catching up with average British earnings. However average district earnings may mask lower wages inside the National Park.
- A high proportion of residents work from home or walk to work, although the number of cars within the Park has also increased by 36% in 10 years.
- Average house prices in the National Park have increased from 152,00 in 2001 to £241,297 in 2005.

All of this paints a picture of an area that is performing quite well economically and which is attracting more people in than are leaving. Indeed the latest population estimate for 2004 reveals a further net increase of 570 persons (2.9%) since 2001 with the National Park population now estimated to be 20,110. Not all of this inward migration is by retirees either. Indeed one of the more encouraging social signs is the extent to which the Park population as a whole has not aged significantly (although it is older than the national average) and the fact there are now more children living in the Park than 10 years ago. It indicates that despite the rapid decline in agricultural employment during the 1990s, the Park has been relatively successful, economically and socially.

Serious barriers to improved social and economic wellbeing remain however, not least the high price of housing. But whilst planning policy and planning decisions are not directly responsible for the increase in population or the growth in economic activity, it may perhaps be concluded that they have not harmed them either since the area undoubtedly remains attractive and its economy is reasonably dynamic.

## **Aims of the Local Plan**

The new Local Plan recognises that most development is proposed for reasons of social or economic improvement. Many of the detailed objectives and policies aim to facilitate development in ways that will cause the least harm to the statutory National Park purposes of conservation and public enjoyment. Most applications are therefore permitted subject to conditions, or are negotiated into a form where they can be made acceptable with regard to their impact. This is borne out by analysis of planning applications against each of the Local Plan objectives below.

## **Planning Application Caseload**

Between April 2005 and March 2006 the Authority determined 838 planning applications. That was the highest caseload for 5 years. Householder applications were the most common type received at 38%. The next highest category was a miscellaneous list including access tracks, school extensions, overhead lines, demolition, and most of the agricultural related development. This category was responsible for 24% of all applications, a proportion higher than the previous year. Applications for new dwellings and Listed building consent represented 12% each. Change of use applications constituted 8%. All other applications including minerals, adverts, conservation area consent and removal of conditions represented the remaining 6%.

The most notable change since the last AMR has been the growth in listed building applications.

In terms of decision making 84 applications were refused and 60 were withdrawn. This gave an approval rate of 83%. This is lower than the previous 12 months (90%) but equal to most other national parks and exactly equal to the average for all English Districts. The reduction might be due to the implementation of the new Local Plan policies and pressure to meet national targets for processing planning applications.

If the assumption is made that each planning permission will lead to at least £30,000 worth of development and if the two largest permissions are excluded, then a very simplistic estimate can be made that planning approval was worth £25m, during the monitoring period.

## Policy Usage

The most commonly referred to parts of the Local Plan are the design and building extension policies. This reflects the domestic nature of many applications and the policy emphasis on trying to fit new development sympathetically into the landscape.

After design and contextual issues, the next most commonly used policies were those concerning built heritage. This is perhaps unsurprising given the number of traditional buildings and the extent of Conservation Areas in the Yorkshire Dales.

In a change from previous years the next most frequently used area of policy were those regulating new agricultural buildings, protection of employment sites, domestic use of land and vehicular access.

Domestic applications have always represented a large proportion of the Authority's case load. More recently they are an indication of very high house prices, the expense of moving to a larger property and the lack of opportunities to build new housing.

The least frequently used areas of policy have been the nature conservation and transport policies. This is probably because the majority of the nature conservation policies seek to protect national designations and are used rarely because development tends to avoid those areas. The majority of the transport policies are very specific or relate to the sort of large scale development that is rare in the National Park.

## Monitoring Policy

There are hardly any quantifiable targets or indicators in the new Local Plan. Therefore commentary on progress is measured against the objectives for each area of policy.

### HOUSING

- *To help meet the housing needs of the local community, having special regard to their need for affordable housing.*

The North Yorkshire Structure Plan 1996, contained a housing requirement for the Yorkshire Dales of 500 net additions between 1991 and 2006. The table below reveals that this has been exceeded by 191 dwellings. There was no similar requirement in the Cumbria Structure Plan.

HOUSING	North Yorkshire Structure Plan 1996	Cumbria Structure Plan 1996	Total
Requirement 1991 - 2006	500 (33dpa)	-	500 (33dpa)
Completions 1991 to Apr 2006	691 (46dpa)	200 (13dpa)	891 (59dpa)

The Structure Plan requirement has always been regarded as indicative rather than a maximum ceiling. It could be argued that exceeding it has enabled slightly more people to migrate into the National Park than planned, but these numbers are inconsequential within the context of the wider demographic and social changes that have also taken place since the early 1990s.

The purpose for the housing requirement was to retard migration from West Yorkshire and to safeguard the environment of the National Park. However exceeding the Structure Plan by 13 houses per year is unlikely on its own to have affected regeneration within West Yorkshire. Nor indeed is there any evidence that this extra amount of housing has damaged the conservation, enjoyment or special qualities of the Yorkshire Dales, to any measurable degree. Most of the additional housing built over the last 15 years has been on small sites within or adjacent to existing towns and villages.

Allocation of land for house building has never played a significant role in housing policy in the National Park. The 1996 Local Plan identified a single site in the Park's largest town of Sedbergh and the new Local Plan contains only two small allocations in Reeth and Hawes. Therefore the 891 houses that have been built since 1991 have almost entirely been on unallocated 'windfall' sites. They have mostly been conversions of former agricultural buildings, small gap sites of less than 5 units and infill development. The only large housing estates that have been permitted are on the allocated site in Sedbergh (the Sycamore and Woodside estates) and at the former Tannery in Embsay.

Despite the Local Plan restriction on the supply of new sites, 116 dwellings were still permitted during the monitoring period. Most of these were on brownfield land although unusually (because of the Embsay Tannery redevelopment) 79% were for new build housing. In previous years the numbers of new build housing and residential conversion have been more balanced.

A rush of applications prior to the implementation of the new Local Plan led to a high number of permissions during the monitoring period. Since March 2006 the rate of application has dropped off as the new Local Plan housing policies begin to have effect. It is not known what rate permission will eventually settle to although a figure of 20 permissions a year was suggested at the Local Plan inquiry. The effect of the policy will be to prolong the supply of remaining sites. This would meet the regional objective of slowing down construction in this part of North Yorkshire but may put pressure on other areas of housing policy.

Despite the high number of permissions only 17 dwellings were actually completed. This compares to the long term average of 60 dwellings a year.

In the last survey of resident opinion (2004) the lack of affordable housing was cited as the most significant threat to the National Park. Since then district-wide housing surveys have been published by Richmondshire, Craven and South Lakeland District Councils. Amongst other things they reveal the extent of the shortfall in affordable housing across the National Park.

<b>Craven Housing Needs Survey October 2005</b>	<b>South Lakeland Housing Needs Survey January 2006</b>	<b>Richmondshire Housing Needs Survey May 2005</b>
57p/a	16p/a	15p/a

*Annual Affordable housing shortfall, Yorkshire Dales National Park 2005 – 2010*

In April 2005 the Authority granted planning permission for 18 affordable houses on rural exceptions sites in Hawes and Grassington. The permission at Embsay Tannery yielded a further 10 units. All of these units are now under construction and expected to be complete during 2007. A further scheme of 15 affordable dwellings is currently under negotiation in Bainbridge.

Despite these approvals it can be seen that the shortfall is acute, particularly in Craven. In fact during the monitoring period no affordable housing was built at all. Current construction is sporadic but should average about 8 completed units per year between 2004 and 2008. This is less than a tenth of what is probably needed to meet the shortfall. Pre application advice to developers continues in the hope that more sites will come forward. However there is no likelihood that the shortfall will be met without substantial release of additional land and increased public funding.

The review of housing policy as part of the LDF will investigate options to increase the amount of land for affordable housing, including the deliberate allocation of sites. The implications of not doing this will presumably be to risk eroding the social and economic well being of local communities.

With regard to the wider housing demands of existing residents, the Authority permitted some 143 domestic extensions and 32 conservatories during the monitoring period. However an issue for future consultation is the extent to which domestic extension is making the existing stock of housing less affordable to emerging local households.

The introduction of local needs policies for new build housing and residential conversions is the single main difference between the 1996 Local Plan and the new Local Plan. The objective is to target remaining sites at households that need to live or work in the National Park. The mechanism is to restrict occupancy through the use of legal agreements attached to planning consents. A beneficial side affect will be to reduce valuation and make the new housing 'more affordable' (than it would otherwise be).

In his report of Inquiry findings the Local Plan Inspector recommended that policy H2 (Housing in Service Villages) should limit new build local needs housing to a maximum floor area of 90 square metres. He felt that this would better meet the Authority's objectives of matching new housing to the smaller households now being formed and help keep it cheaper on resale.

Prior to April 2005 new housing was not restricted by policy in terms of size or density. Consequently much of what has been built over the last 30 years has been large and detached, gradually narrowing the range of housing available in the National Park.

During the monitoring period 11 local needs dwellings were permitted. Four of these were new build under Policy H2 and seven were conversions (Policy H3) and subdivisions (Policy H6). It is too early yet for any to have been completed and sold. Until they are the extent of their price discount will not be known. It will take time for the policy to filter down and reduce land valuation and probably many years to establish a supply of local needs housing across the Park.

Whilst Policy H2 restricts the size of new build housing there is no similar restriction to conversions or sub divisions. This will limit the extent to which the policy can reduce their price. The effectiveness of the local needs policy, particularly in relation to barn conversions, will be an issue for discussion as part of the LDF housing review.

The public reaction to the local needs policy seems to be one of understanding and general agreement that the planning system should attempt to focus remaining housing opportunities at households in local housing need. Officers report that the Authority's deliberate emphasis on providing a pre application service together with a continued media attention, has given the local need policy a high public profile.

An inevitable effect of the new policy is to redirect external pressure for second homes and retirement housing entirely into the existing housing stock. This is not expected to significantly inflate the price of existing housing but the precise impact is unknown.

A specific procedural problem that is being encountered is the difficulty applicants are having in providing evidence in support of local needs housing where the potential occupants are not known to a speculative builder. The Authority requires this information at application stage and relies on applicants to provide it. A flexible approach is therefore being taken with regard to the extent and quality of this information particularly as there seems little likelihood of oversupply, at least in the short term.

Concern that Policy H2 may only deliver houses of 90 sqm has been eased by an approved scheme in Embsay which will deliver a mixture of smaller units. The 90sqm restriction does not seem to be causing significant difficulty for applicants and has now been tested on appeal. Agricultural worker housing is also generally conforming to the 90sqm standard, except where it is demonstrated that a larger property is necessary for the specific purposes of the business.

Despite the Authority's strategy of resisting residential conversion outside settlements, interest nevertheless remains in the use of roadside barns for 'live/work' units. This may be because neighbouring planning authorities permit something similar. Inside the Park the Authority is resisting pressure for live/work conversions in open countryside because of the potential this has to jeopardise other policy objectives such as the conservation of the landscape and built heritage.

Policy H1 provides for 50% affordable housing on sites of 2 or more units in Hawes, Grassington, Sedbergh and Reeth. So far it hasn't delivered any affordable housing although an application with some potential is outstanding in Reeth. It seems that landowners are currently holding onto sites and are reluctant to develop under this policy.

- *To resist new housing development aimed at satisfying demand from outside the National Park, except in Key Service Centres.*

This is likely to be the key success of the new Local Plan. In his report of Inquiry findings the Local Plan Inspector recommended that the Authority pursue a local needs housing policy (see above). This is having the effect of targeting remaining plots and conversion opportunities at housing needs from inside the Park rather than external demand for retirement homes, long range commuting and second homes.

The Inspector allowed exceptions to this strategy to be made within the four towns of Hawes, Reeth, Grassington and Sedbergh and in relation to the reoccupation of former dwellings. However those exceptions were justified by policy objectives such as the provision of affordable housing (a 50% percent contribution) and the conservation of historic buildings. Applications are mainly coming forward in the four towns of Hawes Reeth, Grassington and Sedbergh for individual plots and conversions and that means no restriction over occupancy. The adoption of the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) next year may however have implications for this policy (see RSS section).

- *To secure housing provision on sites that are environmentally acceptable with reasonable access to services and facilities in the interests of sustainable development.*

A list of villages where new build housing would be permissible is set out in the new Local Plan. Their defining criteria included the presence of at least basic services such as a village school, a shop, a pub and public transport.

The issue of residential conversion is an important one in the context of the Yorkshire Dales because of the very large number of traditional barns and because their contribution to the landscape is an endearing quality of the National Park. Consequently the policy on residential conversion is set tightly.

The review of housing in the LDF will provide an opportunity to revisit this strategy and re examine all the Parks' settlements against defined criteria. This might help to meet the Inspector's criticism of the methodology for selecting settlements suitable for new housing. Emerging national and regional spatial strategy and issues of local sustainability will no doubt influence the criteria used.

During the monitoring period, 6 agricultural workers dwellings were permitted. At the Local Plan inquiry the inspector widened out Policy H4 (Housing in the Countryside) to include 'rural based workers' as well as just agricultural workers. Recently a dwelling for a Manager of a kennel business has been permitted under the new policy. Applications that have been submitted under this policy have so far appeared to be adequately justified.

Policy B16 (re occupancy of former dwellings), has yielded 8 permissions during the monitoring period. The objective is to enable residential reuse where this will secure conservation of built heritage and landscape character. Permission should therefore secure environmental enhancement, albeit at the expense of remoteness from public services and facilities.

- *To give priority to re-using previously developed land within settlements, including through the conversion of existing buildings, in preference to the development of greenfield sites.*

Of the 116 dwellings approved, 13 were on greenfield sites. Ten were affordable houses and the other three were agricultural workers dwellings. All the rest were on previously developed land or former buildings. New permissions have therefore comfortably exceeded the regional land recycling target of 60%.

From this point onwards it may be that the amount of greenfield land released for development begins to increase as more rural exceptions sites for affordable housing are released. If the Authority chooses to deliberately allocate land for affordable housing this is also likely to consume greenfield land because of the lack of brownfield alternatives.

There is still pressure for building houses on garden land inside settlements. Garden land qualifies as previously developed land under the PPG3 definition. Its development is encouraged by high house prices and strict policies that control house building outside the defined edge of towns and villages. However it is felt that the harm from this is not yet a significant problem because the Local Plan provides adequate control to protect neighbouring amenity and village character.

The main supply of permissible residential conversion opportunities is now in the north of the Park, usually within the curtilage of existing properties. The supply of future additional opportunities will be the subject of public consultation during the forthcoming review of housing policy.

## **EMPLOYMENT**

- *To support a rural economy that provides diverse employment and maintains thriving, balanced communities.*
- *To support employment opportunities that promote sustainable economic growth, particularly those having their foundations in the National Park's special qualities*
- *To increase the quality and range of jobs in the National Park, particularly for young people.*
- *To protect existing businesses and support their expansion or relocation where these are compatible with the special qualities of the National Park.*
- *To protect and enhance the vitality and viability of retail centres.*

Land is allocated for employment uses in Hawes, Reeth, Grassington (Threshfield Quarry) and Sedbergh. However no recent applications have been forthcoming on any undeveloped parts of these sites.

The monitoring period saw continued general pressure for change of use from office and work spaces to housing. The concern is that unless this trend is tempered it will lead to the loss of future options for employment land and buildings. Policy E3 (Existing Employment Sites) helps by requiring applicants to demonstrate that there is no realistic demand for alternative employment related uses, before non employment uses are considered.

An application to change the use of the Punchbowl Inn, Swaledale to housing has been refused consent. An application at the business parkin Hawes for a retail use has also successfully been resisted. The objective there is to maintain the role of the high street for retail uses and to protect allocated employment land for workshop use. Several new businesses have opened on the estate. Enforcement against unauthorised retail use was also successful during the monitoring period.

The downside of Policy E3 is that it can cause some difficulty where it perpetuates a bad neighbour use rather than permitting enhancement through alternative development. There is a judgement to be made in relation to the criteria as to whether continued employment use is capable of being made environmentally acceptable or not.

So far the amendment to PPG3 (Housing) that permits surplus employment land to be developed for housing has not been used in the National Park. This probably indicates that there is no local surplus of allocated employment land. However wholly new employment buildings are still rare with few applications submitted and very little pre application discussion. One of the notable exceptions has been permission for redevelopment of the old County Council depot site in Bainbridge for the new National Park Head Quarters. This has released the old office site at Yorebridge for use as a hotel.

In the previous monitoring period Hawes Auction Mmart was approved as a sizeable mixed development of retail, work space, training and sales. Permission remains extant but development may not now take place.

Ten applications have been approved to convert barns to new offices, hotels, storage and bunkouse uses. Most of these have been in the south of the Park.

In the west, Langcliffe Paper Mill closed during the monitoring period. No proposals for re use have been forthcoming. A shortage of allocated employment land in Sedbergh is becoming apparent and should now be looked at. In the meantime Policy E2 (New Small Scale Employment Uses) will permit development in appropriate locations, on the edge of the town

The private school in Sedbergh is the largest single employer in the National Park. Over the monitoring period it has inevitably generated a lot of planning activity. Future monitoring periods are likely to see significant proposals as the School seeks to improve its facilities and develop substantial new ones.

In the south of the Park there has been a notable amount of interest in the conversion of agricultural buildings to offices and the expansion of existing diversified farm businesses. This is probably because of favourable access to the A65 and markets just outside the Park boundary.

Retail activity seems particularly buoyant in Grassington where high street shops are being subdivided into smaller units as they become available. However the retail policy does not protect against change of use from shops to cafés. In the four main towns there is a danger that continued change of use may undermine their retail vitality.

There are a few proposals for potentially major redevelopment of farm groups to office and distribution businesses. The scale of some of these may raise issues about conflict with landscape conservation.

During the monitoring period there seems to have been a notable absence of innovative employment proposals. Innovation may however be taking place in the form of home working. Domestic extensions increasingly provide space for home offices so in theory this may be improving the ability of the housing stock to act as workplaces.

## **FARMING**

- *To support the growth and diversification of the farming economy where this is in accordance with the special qualities of the National Park.*
- *To ensure the sensitive siting and design of new farm and forestry buildings and associated structures.*

Farms units continue to be split up, merged or sold off and this seems to be leading to applications for new agricultural buildings which is having an impact on landscape character in some areas.

The policy permits the development of new buildings where it is demonstrated that they are needed. During the monitoring period 46 applications for new buildings and extensions were permitted. Large and prominent farm buildings are still being applied for in some areas. The main issues tend to be siting and scale. Negotiation with applicants usually leads to permission.

Four applications have been approved under Policy F3 (Residential Lets and Self Catering Holiday Accommodation on Farm Holdings) for the conversion of farm buildings to holiday use. This is now the only means of permitting new self catering visitor accommodation within the Park. Permission allows occupancy for either visitor accommodation or local needs housing.

The main interest remains in holiday accommodation. This suggests that there is still capacity in the market for additional self catering. A declining supply of potential barns may however be restricting take up in the south of the Park. In the north, interest in Policy F3 is mainly focused on providing local needs housing. An application has been approved at Sorel Sykes, Wensleydale for 4 residential lets. In Swaledale interest is also firmly focused on local needs housing, often for a family member.

One aspect of policy F3 remains unclear however. Applicants and the Authority sometimes have difficulty in agreeing the amount and type of land that will tie the new dwellings to the farm holding. Legal agreements are used to prevent the new use from being sold subsequently, the objective being to safeguard farming as the predominant landuse in the National Park. Naturally farm businesses are reluctant to tie large parts of their holdings because of concerns about valuation.

Other than Policy F3, there were very few new farm diversification proposals submitted or discussed during the monitoring period. One of the more notable was a scheme at Swinithwaite, Wensleydale to establish a large farm shop and craft units.

## COMMUNITY FACILITIES

- *To protect the range of existing community facilities and services in the National Park and to encourage opportunities to extend, enhance or provide new community facilities where needs are identified.*

Over the monitoring period there has been a trickle of proposals for community school improvements particularly in Sedbergh. No particular problems have been encountered.

Grassington lost its library during the monitoring period because the building could not be adapted for disability access. The service has been replaced by a mobile unit. The former library has changed its use into a shop.

## UTILITIES

- *To ensure a suitable provision of developments to support the expansion of the telecommunication network in the National Park, but in a way which is sensitive to the special qualities and the national landscape importance of the area.*
- *To protect water supplies and the environment to ensure a long-term sustainable water resource.*
- *To encourage adequate and suitable provisions of sewage facilities and to ensure appropriate surface water disposal.*
- *To support small-scale renewable energy schemes to meet local needs.*
- *To encourage the undergrounding of utility service lines where possible.*

Only two applications were received during the monitoring period for communications masts. Both were proposed to be fitted to barns. One was approved and one refused on the grounds of prominence and the inability to demonstrate that less harmful alternatives were available.

Interest is now directed at sharing sites and upgrading existing equipment. Good initial siting has reduced landscape problems, however operators have cited lack of population and major roads as factors which prevent extensive areas of the National Park from receiving the full range of wireless communications.

The monitoring period revealed considerable pre application interest in small scale renewable energy. However only 5 applications were received with one being withdrawn and one refused. The refusal was on the basis of adverse impact to the character of a listed building. Officers are finding that solar heating panels can usually be accommodated within the Park either on modern buildings or less prominent surfaces on traditional buildings.

Micro wind proposals are producing a lot of pre application discussion but not yet many applications. During the monitoring period only one turbine was submitted and approved. There are issues that remain to be solved. For example whether gable mounted micro wind is acceptable or not on traditional buildings. At the moment preference is given to freestanding installation or attachment to a subservient building, in order to minimise harm to character.

Several applications for new sewage works have raised issues of landscape impact and potential pollution concerns.

## **NATURE CONSERVATION**

- *To protect designated nature conservation sites and species of international, national and local importance.*
- *To stop and reverse the fragmentation of habitats and landscapes and the isolation of species populations.*
- *To maintain and, where possible, enhance the biodiversity value of the National Park.*
- *To protect, and where possible enhance, the special natural landscape features of the National Park.*

Despite the extent of national and international nature conservation designations in the Park, planning applications are rarely proposed in these areas. The most frequently used policies therefore tend to be those that deal with protected species and habitats. This can lead to conditions requiring recording or monitoring during construction works. It can also lead to mitigation measures such as the provision of a management plan or specific works such as the provision of nesting boxes.

One particular application has led to a classic conflict between the conservation and recreation purposes of the National Park. The ongoing application at Grimwith Reservoir for a new sailing club house has raised issues of disturbance to a nationally important breeding area for Widgeon and Ringed Plover. This is being resolved through agreement of a management plan which has avoided refusal. A management plan is also being used to resolve nature conservation and other outstanding issues at the former Embsay Tannery site near Skipton.

A new planning application validation procedure began on the 16th October 2006. This has tightened up procedures for bat and bird surveys particularly in relation to traditional buildings. The provision of a survey should help inform decision making and possible mitigation measures.

## **BUILT HERITAGE**

- *To protect, and where possible, enhance the historic and cultural landscape of the National Park.*
- *To safeguard archaeological sites.*
- *To perpetuate the presence in the landscape of buildings and other features which help to explain the social and economic development of the area.*
- *To encourage new development which respects the character and appearance of its setting.*
- *To encourage the reuse of existing buildings where this can be accommodated without harming the character of the building, or its contribution to the character of the area.*
- *To give special protection to listed buildings and buildings within conservation areas.*

- *To protect agricultural land from encroachment by piecemeal development around settlements.*
- *To control the numbers and types of advertisements and signs.*

The 'built heritage' features prominently in the list of the Parks special qualities. Analysis and negotiation of detailed issues of design and materials consume a large proportion of officer time. The Authority's supplementary design guidance remains useful and relevant although there is an intention to revise it within the next three years.

It is considered that during the monitoring period design awareness has improved. This might be because applicants are realising the benefits of greater saleability. The use of materials and design detail are becoming much better understood. The use of stone is universally accepted. The consequence is better applications that are more likely to fit into their context. Continued attention by the Authority to pre application advice is reaping dividends. The recent design competition and the design statements which are now required as part of most applications have helped raise awareness of design quality.

It is notable, however, that the Authority is not being challenged by more innovative designs, except possibly in Sedbergh. Virtually all proposals tend to be 'traditional' and whilst often of good quality they are rarely provoking.

Nor were there any notable proposals for low emission buildings during the monitoring period. This is probably an area where the Authority could help itself by providing design guidance.

Certain aspects of modern domestic detail are becoming common in some areas. In particular UPVC windows and doors are replacing traditional features in some villages. These changes are beyond the current control of the planning system in the park (except on listed buildings) and the Authority therefore continues to have little influence over this trend.

Continued demand for garden extensions has been noted together with pressure for the development of protected open spaces within settlements. Local Plan policies are helping to resist inappropriate development.

Despite the Park having three extensive Barns and Walls Conservation Areas, a Conservation Area running the length of the Settle-Carlisle railway and 34 'conventional' Conservation Areas, demolition has not been a significant issue. Only 4 applications for demolition were approved, all for minor operations. The exception was Embsay Tannery where consent was granted to clear and decontaminate the former mill prior to the construction of new housing. Provision was made for recording the site.

During the monitoring period a new Conservation Area was designated in Hebden, Wharfedale.

Applications that would affect listed buildings take up a lot of officer time. Of the 130 applications submitted during the monitoring period 102 were approved. The Local Plan policies seem to cover all the relevant criteria but there is a problem with the specific assessment of individual schemes. Problems are being encountered with the lack of

detail in some applications and this is delaying decision making. It may be that the new validation procedures will improve this situation.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION**

- *To conserve the natural resources of the National Park including water, land and air quality.*
- *To protect the special qualities of the National Park from damaging effects of all types of pollution, including those caused by noise and light.*
- *To minimise the effect of pollution on the amenities and the health and safety of residents and visitors to the National Park.*

The main issue has been flood risk. The Park is perhaps more of a net contributor to flooding than a victim of it. However it is becoming a more familiar issue as more properties are covered by the Environment Agencies expanded flood risk zones. Flood risk assessments are a requirement of planning applications within flood risk zones. The Authority's experience is that the flood risk zones are not necessarily very accurate however the Environment Agency has not yet recommended refusal for any proposal where the applicant has provided an assessment. During the monitoring period no permissions were granted that were contrary to Environment Agency flood risk advice.

Light pollution has become a more prominent issue particularly in consultations on larger public and private developments.

## **SPORT AND RECREATION**

- *To protect existing sport, recreation and open spaces where their loss would reduce the quality, quantity and accessibility of recreational opportunities for local people.*
- *To support the provision of new or improved community recreational facilities and open spaces where they meet an identified need and do not conflict with National Park purposes.*
- *To encourage sustainable sport and recreation developments for visitors that respect and are compatible with the special qualities of the National Park.*

Small scale applications for community sports facilities continue to be permitted. The main issues have been colour of surface treatment, light pollution and impact on neighbouring amenity. These issues are covered by policy and do not raise any urgent matter for review. Importantly there have been no permissions that have led to the loss of existing playing areas or facilities.

Domestic equestrian development is becoming particularly noticeable in the south and west of the Park. Subdivision of fields into paddocks and construction of stabling is starting to change the character of some landscapes on the edge of villages. Policies are working reasonably well to keep development confined to village edges rather than permit it in open countryside away from the residential context. The monitoring period also saw demand to expand existing trekking businesses including the construction of an indoor arena.

A notable application at Skeb Skeugh Farm above Thwaite in Swaledale has tested Policy SR6 (Equestrian Centres). Planning permission to operate the business has been refused because it was contrary to the Authority's strategy of not permitting uses in the countryside that are likely to lead to demand for new housing. The issue will go to appeal and the Inspector's decision could have consequences for other cases.

A motorbike trial has been refused on Kilnsey Moor SSSI after advice from English Nature. However in Swaledale the advice given is that the temporary nature of motorbike trialling there was not felt to conflict with nature conservation or the noisy sports policy. Archaeology was judged to be the more significant issue.

## VISITOR FACILITIES

- *To support and encourage the development of facilities for visitors, including accommodation that are compatible with the National Park purposes.*
- *To support sustainable levels of visitor movement within the Park in line with the objectives of the Traffic and Visitor Management Strategy.*
- *To recognise 'honeypot' areas within the National Park where the cumulative effect of development needs special consideration, and also those quieter areas which need to be safeguarded.*

A significant application for the development of 40 timeshare and holiday lets at the former evacuation camp at Linton (near Grassington) has yet to be determined. An environmental statement was judged to be necessary and that is now being considered by the Authority. The scheme which seeks to recreate a large country house challenges the Authority's visitor accommodation policies and potentially raises conflict with landscape conservation. The application remains outstanding and will be determined during the next monitoring period.

Interest in bunk barns seems to be resurgent with proposals for additional bedspaces. This would seem to indicate a continuing market for budget group accommodation in the Park. It may also be that the expansion of the policy which now permits roadside barns, has created additional interest. In the west interest tends to be focused on walkers using long distance routes such as the Dales Way.

Despite a seemingly buoyant market for group accommodation there has also been some pressure to convert bunkhouses into housing, presumably because of lack of affordable housing and high house prices. An outstanding application for the partial conversion of a bunkhouse to residential accommodation will test the adopted housing policies.

An application for the redevelopment of a barn near Reeth as a bunkhouse in association with a proposed bike hire business has tested policy VF1 (Visitor Facilities). This is an example of a development where the principle of the use fits well with National Park purposes but where the scale of the proposal is testing policies that protect the landscape character of the National Park, in this case part of Swaledale Barns and Walls Conservation Area. A decision is due during the next monitoring period.

In a slight turn around from previous years there has been more interest in conversion of buildings to small scale hotels, rather than change of use to housing. The Authority's

former office in Bainbridge is currently being converted as such. Interest seems to be in developing niche markets. Applications to extend and improve existing hotels have also been notable. This would seem to indicate that there is still interest in expanding the serviced sector.

There are however some associated problems. Many operators report difficulties finding accommodation for staff, particularly as many employees are now itinerant rather than local. Extensions are being permitted for staff accommodation but pressure remains for static caravans, barn conversions and the construction of new housing for staff accommodation.

The Authority has a very strict policy against the siting of more static caravans and has stuck to this position, mainly through pre application discussion. However there is still interest in increasing the number of static caravans and in particular replacing existing caravans with double units.

Officers are finding that proposals to remodel sites are generally not offering significant enough benefits to trigger permission. A large extension near Stainforth has been refused and a proposal at the eastern end of Swaledale has been withdrawn for this reason. It may be that many existing sites in the Park are already well enough screened and are not therefore able to offer any further significant enhancement.

There is still pressure from landowners to develop individual and small groups of static caravans as a means of farm diversification. Strong policy resistance leads Officers to advise in favour of the conversion of traditional farm buildings, under policy F3 instead.

An amendment to the new Local Plan permits the replacement of static caravans with wooden chalets. The intention is that wooden chalets will fit more appropriately into the National Park landscape. So far this new policy has not been tested.

The revised policy on camping sites does not seem to have had much take up except in locations where it would be linked to long distance trails.

In Dentedale there is a proposal for visitor accommodation linked to railway travellers, local food and local footpath networks. If successful this might fit well with contemporary initiatives in relation to sustainable tourism.

The closure of Dent, Stainforth and Keld Youth hostels was announced during 2005. This has meant the loss of 127 bedspaces in addition to the 112 lost when Linton and Aysgarth Youth hostels closed in 2002. This is a significant blow to the public's accessibility and enjoyment of the National Park and no doubt to the local economy. However interest has been expressed in retaining some of the buildings in their present use as budget visitor accommodation.

## **TRANSPORT**

- *To support the development of a safe, effective and integrated transport system to serve the needs of local residents and visitors.*

- *To support road improvements that are required for road safety reasons, to address local traffic problems, where their design accords with the special qualities and character of the National Park.*
- *To support opportunities for the expansion of the pedestrian, cycle and horse network.*
- *To reduce the impact of traffic on the special qualities of the National Park.*
- *To reduce dependency on motor cars for travelling to and within the National Park.*

Access and Parking continue to be important considerations in most planning applications. In weighing the conservation of the character of Dales villages against car parking and accessibility standards, the Authority has been frequently prepared to accept lower engineering standards. In line with national guidance the County Highway Authority seems less inclined to recommend refusal for car parking reasons.

The Inspector's report on the detrunking of the A 65 is pending. If the route is detrunked highway matters will pass from the government highways agency to the County Council. Trunk road design standards will not have to be applied and this may release more buildings and land for development.

During the monitoring period work began on the construction of the new Pennine Bridleway through the Park from Long Preston in the south to Mallerstang in the north. A number of equine related applications are under discussion.

## **Appeal decisions**

The number of appeals lodged to the Planning Inspectorate and their decision can be an indicator of the success of planning policy.

During the monitoring period 10 appeals against refusal of planning permission were determined by a planning inspector. Three concerned refusal for new build housing and 2 concerned residential conversion. The others concerned domestic extensions and enforcement appeals.

Only one appeal was allowed, for a domestic extension. One of the housing appeals was withdrawn and 2 of the enforcement appeals were only allowed in part. The other 6 were dismissed.

The conclusion is that the Authority's appeal record remains good and that those planning applications that are refused, are refused for sound reasons.

Immediately after the monitoring period ended an important appeal decision was received. This concerned the Authority's refusal of consent for a new house in Dent on the grounds that it exceeded the 90sqm requirement of local need policy H2. The Inspector dismissed the appeal signalling crucial support for the new policy.

## Enforcement

283 cases were opened during the period. 216 were closed. Of these 36 concerned Adverts/signs 27 concerned unauthorised uses, 22 concerned caravans, 14 related to conditions, 12 to Listed Buildings, 11 to tipping, 3 to trees, and 2 to unauthorised demolition, 67 cases were still active in March 2006.

The case load is therefore very varied with no discernable patterns that provide lessons for policy.

Two notable cases are however worthy of specific mention. The first dealt with an unauthorised trekking business and residential conversion in Swaledale. An enforcement notice seeking removal of the unauthorised business, residential caravan and change of use of barn to dwelling house was issued by the Authority but appealed against by the applicant. The Inspector accepted the trekking business in part but rejected residential occupancy of the barn. Further appeals are now pending.

The other case concerned the unauthorised demolition of a dwelling and subsequent replacement within a prominent part of the Swaledale Barns and Walls Conservation Area. Following enforcement action the developer eventually submitted a reconstruction scheme that was judged acceptable by the Authority.

## Minerals and Waste

During 2005/06 there were six major aggregate quarries and one small building stone quarry operating in the National Park. Total sales from Yorkshire Dales' quarries have been fairly consistent at around 4 million tonnes (mt) over recent years. In 2004, the latest year for which figures are available, the 3.8mt total sales from quarries in the Yorkshire Dales was made up of 2.9mt of limestone and 0.9mt of skid resistant gritstone. From the overall total, 1.7mt was used for roadstone, 1.1mt for concrete aggregate and the remainder for other aggregate uses and constructional fill. Only 41,000 tonnes were sold for non aggregate uses such as flux in iron and steel manufacture. Figures for 2005 have not yet been published by the Regional Aggregate Working Party.

National Park quarries continue to supply one third of total crushed rock sales in the Yorkshire and Humber region. The regional minerals strategy seeks to reduce the amount of extraction from National Parks but, because of the high levels of remaining reserves (137mt in the YDNP), this is only likely to be achieved in the medium to long-term.

In April 2006, new Government regulations were introduced requiring fees to be charged for site monitoring. A system has been put in place for the major aggregate quarries in the National Park to be inspected quarterly and smaller and dormant sites at least once each year.

Most of the quarry companies liaise and work well with Parish Councils. Very few complaints about quarrying have been received by the Authority during the monitoring period.

The existing Minerals and Waste Local Plan was adopted in 1998 and has worked well. However, it is now due for review and work has commenced on the Minerals and Waste Development Plan Document, which will form part of the Yorkshire Dales Local Development Framework.

Permission was granted in July 2005 to extend the life of Dry Rigg quarry in Ribbleshead until the end of 2009. The proposals included an enhanced restoration scheme and arrangements for the management of the restored site.

An ongoing problem in the National Park is the lack of availability of local roofing and walling stone. Only one quarry still produces roofing stone and this has an inevitable inflationary effect on price. Lack of supply is forcing the Authority to accept artificial materials in some circumstances. The solution is to open more small scale quarries and the Authorities policies would permit this but at the moment there is no commercial interest.

The only waste proposal during the monitoring period has been a very minor application to tip sub soil at Sedbusk quarry, Wensleydale. This was approved with a temporary consent expiring in September 2006. That consent has now been extended for a further twelve months.

## **Departure Decisions**

Concern about planning decisions that were contrary to the local Plan featured in the Authority's Performance Assessment during 2005. An Audit Commission report on departure decisions was published during 2005. A review of progress against the Commission's recommendations is attached to Appendix 1.

The Authority's procedure for dealing with decisions that depart significantly from adopted policy is to refer it back to the next meeting of the Planning Committee.

During the latest monitoring period 15 applications were referred back because of significant departure from policy. Four of the applications were recommendations for approval, the rest were recommended for refusal. The reference back procedure resulted in a reduction of the number of departure decisions from 15 to 12.

Ten of the applications were for residential dwellings, the others concerned domestic extensions, ancillary accommodation and an equine ménage.

The net result is that eleven dwellings have been permitted in locations that departed from policy. To put this in context 116 dwellings were approved during the same period. If this rate of departure represents dissatisfaction with aspects of the newly adopted Local Plan policies then perhaps the review of housing policy next year will provide an opportunity to review some of the issues again.

## **Review of National Planning Policy 2005 - 2006**

Four new statements of national planning policy have been issued during the monitoring period.

### **Draft PPS 3**

A new draft PPS 3 has been issued for consultation. It is supported by companion guidance on housing land availability assessments, housing market assessments and guidance on design.

The thrust of PPS 3 is to try to use the planning system to intervene more effectively into the housing market to deliver a better mixture of housing in sustainable locations. The intention is that planning Authorities will release more land and look further in to the future to help meet the acute shortfall that is apparent.

PPS 3 moves housing targets into the Regional Spatial Strategies. The emphasis remains on attempting to provide for a range of housing needs including affordable housing and focusing sites on brownfield land. The national target for recycling brownfield land is 60%. Planning Authorities are required to have regard to sub regional housing market assessments to determine the balance of house types to be provided to meet the identified household types. Targets for affordable housing are recommended. New housing should be located within market towns or villages

The final version is due for publication in late 2006. its implications for the National Park will be less far reaching than other planning areas because of the lack of a specific housing land target.

### **PPS 9 Biodiversity and Geological Conservation**

Published in July 2005 this sets out government policy on nature conservation and replaces PPG 9 (Nature Conservation). It is accompanied by a good practice guide. Biodiversity is defined as the variety of life in all its forms where as geological conservation relates to sites designated for their geological importance or because they are good examples of geomorphologic processes.

PPS 9 expects the planning system to safeguard and where possible enhance biological diversity. Essentially it puts more emphasis on the positive benefits development can bring to biodiversity rather than simply avoiding or safeguarding designated sites.

In the context of the National Park the scale of development that requires planning permission is such that conflict with designated sites is usually rare. Where it has been an issue it is usually resolved through management arrangements.

Where the Authority is perhaps failing is in the area of positive mitigation, particularly in relation to barn conversion and new agricultural buildings. This is becoming standard practice elsewhere and is an area where the authority could focus more attention. Progress is being made by requiring more thorough pre validation checks for planning applications including ecological surveys, but scope remains to amend standard conditions and perhaps seek more from development.

### **PPS10 Sustainable Waste Management**

This guidance represents a shift away from landfill disposal of waste towards more modern and environmentally friendly forms of disposal. PPS 10 has informed the Authority's Issues and options for waste which will be opened up for public consultation next year.

The implication is even less likelihood of need to identify sites for disposal, incineration or large scale waste transfer within the Park. The Authority's review of waste planning will need to focus on the provision of small scale facilities for local separation of waste for recycling and perhaps small scale sites for inert disposal.

### **Draft PPS 25 development and Flood risk**

A draft PPS on flood risk was issued during the period. Adoption is due during 2006.

It encourages LPAs to frame policies that avoid permitting development on land at risk from flooding and to use the opportunities of development to reduce runoff risks further downstream.

It introduces a sequential test which would only permit development in areas of floodrisk where no alternative sites are available and th benefits of the development outweigh the risks from flooding.

A strategic flood risk assessment has now been prepared for north west Yorkshire including the National Park and that will help inform decisions on land allocation.

### **Draft MPS 1**

Minerals Planning Statement 1 was issued for consultation in November 2004. it was finally adopted in November 2006.

It sets out the governments key policies for minerals planning in England and is supported by a number of annexes dealing with aggregates, brick clay, building and roofing stone and on shore oil and gas.

With regard to National Parks it perpetuates the Silkin test which prevents major minerals development except where it is demonstrated that it would be in the national interest.

### **Rural Housing Commission**

During 2005 the government set up a Commission to investigate the extent of the shortage of affordable housing in rural areas and its implications. Unsurprisingly it revealed an acute shortage across England. In its report the Commission made numerous recommendations including some that could affect planning policy. The government has now responded and presumably any findings will influence the final version of PPS 3.

## **Yorkshire and Humber Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS)**

A draft Regional spatial strategy was published for consultation in December 2005. This will eventually supercede the current regional planning guidance and the County Structure Plans as the upper tier of the Development Plan. An examination into the soundness of the RSS was conducted during September and October 2006. The Inspector's report is anticipated during 2007.

The RSS does not however include any allocations of land for housing, employment or targets for renewable energy that directly affect the National Park. Its implications are therefore less far reaching for the review of policy in the National Park than elsewhere in the region.

The emerging RSS will compliment the policies of the adopted Local Plan. However there are several areas where regional policy will supercede it, notably Policy H1 (New Housing in Key Service Centres). The RSS requires all new housing in the National Park to be for local needs only. In theory therefore Policy H1, which permits 50% of sites or single plots in Hawes, Reeth, Grassington and Sedbergh, to be open market housing, will lapse on adoption of the RSS. It is assumed that sites in H1 settlements will then have to deliver 50% affordable and 50% local needs housing. Single plots and conversions would have to be for local needs. This change of policy will require further consideration during 2007.

Adoption of the RSS will also affect affordable housing policy in the National Park. It will require that all sites larger than 15 dwellings should provide 40% affordable housing. The Local Plan has no specific threshold outside H1 towns. Presumably this would require 40% affordable and 60% local needs housing on larger sites and conversions in H2 villages.

Both of these policy changes will have an affect on development land value in the national park.

## **Local Development Scheme Implementation**

The Yorkshire Dales Local Development Scheme was submitted in March 2005 and amended in September 2005. The start of the Local Development Framework was programmed for January 2006 with the gathering of evidence for Housing, Minerals and Waste Development Plan Documents and the drafting of a Statement of Community Involvement.

However those targets have slipped because progress was dependent on finishing the Local Plan. The Local Plan was formally adopted on the 28<sup>th</sup> April 2006 and is currently being prepared for printing during 2007. This has allowed progress to be made on the LDF with the issues and Options reports for housing and minerals and waste being reported to the Authority in September. It is anticipated that public consultation will begin during late 2006. Consultation on housing issues and options will determine whether the Authority progresses an allocations DPD or not.

Work on the Agricultural Buildings Design Guide, the only Supplementary Planning Document programmed in the Local Development Scheme, has been suspended temporarily.

A Statement of Community Involvement in Town and Country Planning is currently being drafted and is expected to be issued for consultation in the new year.

The current LDS is therefore out of date and will be updated following publication of this Annual Monitoring Report.

## Audit Commission Recommendations about the Planning Service Review of Progress 2006

### 4 Planning | Performance Summary Report

## Introduction

- 1 In October 2005 we issued a report on Planning to the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority, which contained 11 recommendations to improve the decision making processes of the Planning Committee. These recommendations were arrived at after an analysis of the Planning Committee's decisions from 2001/02 to March 2005, interviews with members of the Planning Committee and officers of the Authority, interviews with external stakeholders and three round table discussions with members and officers of the Authority. This report reviews the Authority's response to that report. In addition, we have examined the decisions of the Planning Committee over the 12 months April 2005 to March 2006 and compared the pattern of decision making with that found in the earlier report.

## Main conclusions

- 2 The Authority has implemented many of our recommendations and is in the process of implementing the remainder.
- 3 The number and proportion of applications considered by Committee where decisions are contrary to officer recommendations has continued at a similar level to recent years, with some reduction in the proportion of decisions to approve and with some straightforward decisions not being referred back.

## Implementation of audit recommendations

- 4 The Planning Committee considered our recommendations on 9 August 2005 and responded as follows.

**Table 1 Progress in implementing audit recommendations**

Audit Commission recommendation	Planning Committee response	Progress
1. Members and officers should visit completed developments that have been controversial, at least annually.	Agreed, with, where feasible, visits to other sites, including successful developments, to be included into normal site visits by the Committee.	Authority has adopted this procedure and first visits took place on 1 July. Additional visits will be incorporated within normal Committee site visits.
2. An annual monitoring report should be presented to the Planning Committee on progress in implementing Local Plan.	Agreed.	First report produced December 2005. Second scheduled for December 2006.

**Audit Commission Recommendations about the Planning Service  
Review of Progress 2006**

<b>Audit Commission recommendation</b>	<b>Planning Committee response</b>	<b>Progress</b>
3. Officers should work with their counterparts at relevant authorities to ensure that the housing and economic needs of the Park are reflected in policies and that they are consequently taken into account in planning decisions.	Agreed, with officers to seek the continued close involvement of constituent authorities and local strategic partnerships in reviews of economic, housing and recreation policies.	Authority plays part in LSPs of districts. Members and officers briefed on housing needs by housing consultants and officers of district councils. Dialogue on economic development, allocation and development of sites.
4. Regular private and informal meetings between officers and members should be held to discuss policy and procedural issues.	Agreed, with officers to include planning issues in the programme for the Policy Development Forum (PDF) and to liaise with Members on agenda items. In the event that the PDF option is unsuccessful, other alternatives, including the Committee's training days be considered.	Policy Development Forum will include planning items on agenda and Local Development Framework Working Group will liaise to ensure integration of policy development. Planning Performance Working Group has proposed a range of procedural improvements that will be implemented from July 2006.
5. All Members of the Authority attend an open meeting, at least annually, to meet residents of the Park.	This recommendation was not supported. Members considered that the Authority, the Committee and members individually were already involved in a wide range of highly effective consultation and interaction with residents of the Park.	Members have a greater role in the work of the Authority and are involved in a wide range of effective consultation arrangements with residents and other interests in the Park. These include the introduction of Member champions for the strands of Authority business, the Audit and Review Committee to monitor delivery, a strengthened advocacy role for Members, Members representing the Authority on Partnership meetings instead of officers and regular surveys of residents views.

**Audit Commission Recommendations about the Planning Service  
Review of Progress 2006**

Audit Commission recommendation	Planning Committee response	Progress
6. Dialogue between officers and members before committee should be encouraged to ensure all issues are addressed in reports; appropriate training should be given to ensure that officers and members understand the difference between this process and lobbying for a particular recommendation.	Agreed, with further advice to be added to the Members' Code of Conduct for Development Control.	This is working well and instances of items having to be deferred for further information no longer occur. Further advice has been added to Members' Code of Conduct.
7. Committee reports should make explicit whether applications meet policy tests, should address the issue of the sustainability of the proposed development and should indicate how officers have weighed considerations in coming to recommendations.	Agreed, although sustainability tests to be included only in appropriate cases where the issue of sustainability is significant.	The style of reports has been amended to make explicit the policy issues and any other material considerations. Style of presentation to Committee by officers is being adapted to emphasise these points. The Development Control manual has been amended accordingly. Sustainability is required by Local Plan policies, so compliance with policy adequately addresses this issue in most cases. Sustainability appraisal will be used in those cases of major development that specifically require it.
8. Members should demonstrate a proper weighting of agreed policy and substantiated material considerations when coming to decisions.	Agreed. Where material considerations are considered to justify a decision contrary to recommendation or policy, the evidence or reasoning which supports the material considerations will be recorded in the minutes.	Where material considerations are considered to justify a decision contrary to recommendation or policy the evidence that supports the material considerations will be recorded in the minutes - though there have still been cases since the recommendations were agreed where the evidence is weak and the reasoning unclear.

**Audit Commission Recommendations about the Planning Service  
Review of Progress 2006**

Audit Commission recommendation	Planning Committee response	Progress
9. The size of planning committee should be reduced, whilst retaining balance.	In view of the Authority's relatively recent review of its decision-making processes when the issue of the size of the Planning Committee was considered, this recommendation be not accepted.	The Authority has subsequently decided that the Planning Committee will be reduced to 15 and implemented this change in August 2006.
10. The reference back system should then to be to the full Authority	This recommendation was dependent on the Planning Committee being reduced in size. As members have rejected that option, this recommendation is considered to be inappropriate.	The Authority has resolved to continue to refer cases back to the Planning Committee following its reduction in size.
11. The Chairman of the Planning Committee should enforce Members' own agreed standards of behaviour, with mutual respect for others views, when debating applications.	Agreed, with training in the role of Chairman to be made available each year for Chairmen and Deputy Chairmen.	Chairman and Vice Chairman have received training.