Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority **Item 7**

National Park Authority Meeting

17th December 2024

Yorkshire Dales Local Plan Publication Stage and Report of Consultation No7 (Preferred Housing Development Sites)

Purpose of the report

1. To consider the outcome of the recent public consultation on 'preferred sites for housing' and to make a decision about publishing the Local Plan for formal representations.

Recommendation

2. That Members:
    a. consider the summary of responses to the recent public Consultation on housing site options here
    b. note that officers are of the view that the consultation has not raised any materially new planning considerations that would change the recommendation on any of the preferred housing sites,
    c. authorise the list of preferred housing sites (see **Annex B**) for inclusion in the Publication version of the Local Plan,
    d. delegate authority to officers to finalise and progress the Local Plan text, mapping and background documents to Publication Stage (Development Plans Regulation 19), in the New Year. The draft Local Plan text is available here (paper copies are available from the Authority on request)

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 objective 26:
      "Work with neighbouring authorities to produce a single, updated Local Plan for the whole of the National Park by 2025, which will help achieve the vision and objectives in the National Park Management Plan".

Background

4. The Authority will soon enter the final stages of preparing the National Park Local Plan 2025-2040. The Plan which has been in preparation since 2019 has been the subject of seven informal consultation stages beginning with a discussion about broad issues

and then moving through spatial strategy, housing targets, the re-use of barns, preferred draft policies and, latterly, two consultations on housing site options.

5. Several key reports were commissioned at the start in 2019 investigating population and household change, the local economy, an assessment of the National Park housing market. This provided evidence about current trends and presented Planning strategies for intervening through housing land allocation and support for local economic development. Following the publication of the 2021 Census findings, the Housing Market Assessment was refreshed again, earlier this year.

6. The strategy that has underpinned the development of the Local Plan is summarised in **Annex A**.

Consideration

7. The new Plan will replace 10 existing Local Plans covering the former National Park area and the parts of South Lakeland, Eden and Lancaster that came into the National Park in 2016. The Yorkshire Dales Local Plan 2025–2040 will also replace several other supplementary planning documents.

8. Consultation No. 5 in June 2022 provided the opportunity for stakeholders and the wider public to comment on the draft policies. The detailed responses have been used to help to refine the suite of policies and move the Plan forward to formal publication.

9. Publication of the Local Plan in the new year will be supported by dozens of maps. These are not yet complete but will eventually indicate where the polices apply, such as the allocated sites for house building, the housing development boundaries drawn around each settlement and areas of particular conservation importance.

Local Plan Advisory Group

10. To meet the housing target and give effect to Authority's housing strategy the Authority agreed a process for identifying which sites should be allocated in the new Plan. An extensive search and initial assessments of suitability and capacity resulted in a provisional list of 33 sites being published in Consultation No. 6 – 'Land for housing development'. The consultation generated a significant response, which was reported to the Authority last year.

11. In June 2023 the Authority established a Local Plan Advisory Group to investigate the sites in more detail and make final recommendations to the Authority. The outcome of Group's work – including the recommended housing sites - is summarised in **Annex B**.

Public Consultation No.7: Preferred sites for development

12. The revised list of 23 sites were published for comment in September 2024. Consultees were also free to address other issues, including alternative sites, housing development boundaries, important open space and any wider aspects of policy that underpin the Local Plan's housing strategy.

13. A total of 263 individual responses were received, including from 29 organisations. A summary of these responses is on the Local Plan website. The number of responses is considerably fewer than for Consultation No.6 last year, presumably because the sites in Embsay were subsequently found to be unsuitable.

14. The largest number of objections are to the three proposed sites in Threshfield. Two of the sites are large enough for 60 dwellings - a similar scale to the scheme currently under construction at Station Road, Sedbergh. All three sites remain contentious for a range of reasons, including their cumulative size, potential landscape impact, highways issues and a perceived damage to National Park purposes.

15. During the consultation the two main housing authorities responded with support for all the sites. That is critical as they have leading roles in delivery.

    a. North Yorkshire Council expressed its support for the approach of accommodating the whole housing target inside the National Park recognising the constraints and consequent imbalance of provision between the former districts of Craven and Richmondshire. The Council is satisfied that the sites are justified, supported by evidence and will contribute towards meeting the identified housing need in the area.

    b. Westmorland and Furness Council confirmed their support for the 8 sites in its area and the contribution they will make to affordable housing and the local economy. The Council support the Authority's intended use of permanent residency clauses to prevent new homes becoming holiday lets.

16. Objectors used the public consultation to question some of the reasoning behind the distribution of sites, their scale and their potential to address housing issues. These broader policy concerns will no doubt be scrutinised at the Local Plan examination. Officers have summarised a response to each of them in **Annex C**.

17. Having considered the consultation responses, including the objections to some of the sites proposed, officers are of the general opinion that the sites are still suitable and capable of development as part of a planned supply of new homes over the next 15 years. Officers consider that the consultation has not raised any substantive new planning issues that would lead them to question their allocation in the Publication Plan.

18. As identified above, strong objections have been raised to some of the sites, and to the implementation of the Local Plan spatial strategy. Officers consider that these fundamental issues are now best dealt with by an Inspector at the Local Plan examination. Removing more sites at this stage could undermine the soundness of the Plan and its ability to address the Authority's stated housing objectives. Removing sites would also further delay the Local Plan timetable. The work of the Local Plan Advisory Group over the last 16 months has demonstrated that there are very unlikely to be suitable, deliverable or available alternatives to replace any sites lost at this stage.

19. Detailed issues have been raised by the consultation around heritage, surface water drainage, sewage capacity, transport assessment and impact on wildlife habitats. These and other site development factors are not considered by officers to prevent their allocation - but they may need further assessment as part of the detailed site design and layout process, further along the development timeline.

Financial Implications

20. Publishing the Plan at Regulation 19 is the next formal step towards submission and examination which will have procedural costs that the Authority will have to bear, mainly during 2025/26. The main expense to the Authority will be the cost of paying for the Local Plan Inspector and the cost of an examination in public (estimated at approximately £80,000). These predicted costs are included in the Medium Term Financial Strategy approved in March 2024.

Legal Implications

21. Publishing the Local Plan is the statutory stage prior to submission to the Secretary of State. At this stage it is still too early for the Planning Committee to give it any weight in development decision making.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Implications

22. Publishing the Plan is a step closer to delivering the housing and other development that is needed to address affordability and other inequalities evident in the area. An Equality Impact Assessment has been published as part of the background documents supporting the Plan.

Climate Change Implications

23. The Plan supports development that is necessary to sustain communities, grow the local economy and deliver National Park purposes. This will generate some additional carbon emissions, but the policies seek to minimise these and to use new development to improve the resilience of the Local Plan area to the impacts of climate change.

Conclusion

24. The Local Plan has reached the end of its long informal consultation and gestation stage. Members are now requested to consider the final list of recommended housing sites and agree to the Plan being published in the New Year. This is the point at which the process will move into its formal stages, starting with a period of formal representations and culminating in a Government-appointed Inspector examining the Plan to determine whether it is fit for purpose and compliant with national policy.

Peter Stockton
Head of Sustainable Development
December 2024

Background Documents
Consultation No7, Preferred sites for development, September 2024
Report of Consultation No7, November 2024
Housing Land Availability Assessment November 2024

Sustainability and Equality Impact Assessment 2024
Housing Market Assessment 2019 and 2014
Socioeconomic Wellbeing Study 2019

Local Plan Strategy

The draft Plan consists of 53 policies divided into seven sections dealing with Core Policy, Infrastructure and Access, Archaeology and Built Heritage, Community, Employment, Landscape and Wildlife. The policies, which will eventually have legal weight for the purpose of determining planning applications, are supported by a justification which explains what they are aiming to achieve and how the Policy is intended to be used. Footnotes to the justification provide references, explanations and links to relevant evidence.

Housing

A key part of the Local Plan strategy is to support the Housing Authorities that cover the National Park to provide enough new homes (particularly enough affordable/social housing) to support community sustainability. This is to help working age households to live inside the National Park and stabilise the population. To achieve this, the Authority is:

- allocating a number of new housing sites that are large enough to provide a mixture of affordable and market (principal residence) homes; and,
- locating these larger developments in places where people want to live and on sites within walking distance of existing services and communities.

In 2021 the Authority made a number of decisions that set a course for the Local Plan. Two of the emerging objectives specifically concern housing:

- increase the supply of new housing (including affordable and local occupancy) by an average of 50 dwellings per year between 2025 and 2040;
- ensure that a range of new homes are permitted in terms of size, type, tenure, affordability and occupancy to meet local needs and attempt to reverse long term population loss.

The largest sites are proposed in the larger settlements where the remaining services are concentrated and where most people want to live. Unfortunately, despite an extensive search, the distribution is uneven across the National Park. There are fewer sites in the north (and they tend to be smaller) because of some constraints around landform, landscape and flood risk, and because fewer sites were put forward by landowners.

The need for new sites is driven predominantly by the need for more affordable homes. The amount of affordable housing on each site will depend on cross subsidy from market homes. Unfortunately, viability tends to be best in the areas with the highest house prices. This means that sites in the south and east of the National Park should be able to deliver 50% affordable homes whilst in the north and west, where house values are a bit lower, viability for affordable housing is expected to be lower at 30%.

New housing development boundaries have also been drawn around settlements that did not previously have them and existing boundaries have been expanded to allow more flexibility for ‘windfall’ housing, such as self-build. The list of smaller settlements where new housing for local needs will be permitted has also been extended. Single plot permissions will be targeted at local need to live or work in the National Park. On sites of

two or more dwellings, new homes will be restricted to principal occupancy, to maximise the use of new housing and avoid leakage into the second home and holiday market.

Economy and employment

The objective of the new Plan is to support job diversity and resilience inside the National Park, whilst maintaining strong links to the wider opportunities outside. The overall intention is to help to try to make the National Park a more accessible place for young adults and working age households.

The new Local Plan will help support regional and local ambitions for the development of the rural economy during a period of agricultural transition. Development for agriculture and land management uses will be encouraged where they would also help deliver the objectives of the National Park Management Plan. The Local Plan policies also encourage further measures to diversify farm and rural estates towards nature recovery and sustainable tourism that will bring benefits to the local economy. Agricultural development arising from measures to comply with farming standards, environmental processes, or the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, will be weighed positively. The Plan also contains a new initiative to explore 'rural estate development plans' with the larger land-owning estates.

The Plan provides additional flexibility for non-retail high street uses such as offices, food and drink, leisure and health services. In addition to land management and tourism the Local Plan will also support the growth of existing business and allow new business to develop on allocated sites, brownfield land and suitable small sites on the edge of large villages. A wider mix of new uses will be permitted on allocated business sites to stimulate delivery. The planned growth of the housing stock and continued improvements to broadband and data networks could also attract more home-working and improve local access to services.

Climate and nature

In line with recent NPA policy climate change is given much greater prominence in the new Local Plan. The design policy and the proposed design code will require developers and land managers to indicate how their proposals will adapt to a changing climate, how they will reduce energy or generate their own and how they will minimise greenhouse gas emissions within new development.

Alongside climate change nature recovery is also a priority outcome for the new Plan. The biodiversity net gain policy and the design requirements of the new Plan will be expected to contribute to improvements in habitat, aiming to leave wildlife in a better state after development than prior to it.

Other policies

Designated and non-designated heritage assets, including the remarkable network of field barns, will continue to be safeguarded with repair and re-use encouraged or supported

where appropriate. Barn conversions will now only be permitted for residential use (rather than holiday business use), except where they would form part of a farm or rural estate diversification scheme, helping to support appropriate land management.

The strategy for aggregates quarrying inside the National Park is managed decline. The post-war limestone and gritstone quarries are approaching general exhaustion. Permission will however be granted to work final reserves at depth where this will deliver mitigating environmental benefits and the material will be exported by rail rather than road. New aggregate quarries will not be permitted because of the significant and permanent harm they would cause to the environment of the National Park.

The Plan also has a role to play in safeguarding socio-economic assets. As well as protecting heritage, habitat and landscape, the Plan can also scrutinise proposals that would lead to the avoidable loss of jobs, community facilities or valued types of visitor infrastructure.

An essential role of the Plan is to safeguard the special qualities that make the National Park distinctive. Not only do these underpin a significant part of the local economy and enhance the area as a place to live, work and visit, they are also part of the nation's cultural fabric. The Plan provides stronger protection for ancient woodland, ancient trees, water courses and the recently designated international dark sky reserve.

Local Plan Advisory Group preferred housing sites for allocation in the Yorkshire Dales Local Plan 2025–2040

The Local Plan Advisory Group met 10 times and, in addition to the 33 sites previously shortlisted, it considered 118 alternatives made up of previously rejected sites and newly submitted options. From these, a total of 50 sites were subjected to more detailed assessment. The Advisory Group considered hundreds of pages of information looking at such things as the impact on national park purposes (landscape sensitivity, wildlife, heritage etc.) and various practical constraints such as vehicular access and flood risk. Information about infrastructure was provided by the unitary authorities, Government agencies and the water companies.

Full details of every site considered by the Local Plan Advisory Group and other background documents in support of the Publication Local Plan are available here;

Recommended Housing Sites

Following its thorough review of the site options, the Local Plan Advisory Group:

- removed sites in Embsay (EMB2 and 3) because of highway constraints and the cumulative level of development in the village in recent years;
- removed sites in Grassington (GRA1 and 6), Threshfield (THR1 and 3) and Barbon (BAR1 and 2) for landscape and highways reasons,
- reduced the size of sites in Threshfield (THR4 & THR5), Grassington (GRA5) and Sedbergh (SED 2) in order to mitigate landscape and other impacts;
- added a new site in Threshfield (THR 8)
- made small amendments to housing development boundaries to provide additional potential for small scale infill housing across the National Park

This left the 23 sites set out in the Table below, which the Local Plan Advisory Group recommends should be allocated in the new Local Plan. The estimated yield would be 369 dwellings which, together with extant planning permissions (currently 347 units), would give a total planned supply of 716 new dwellings by 2040. This would be just short of the agreed target of 750 (50 dwellings per year over 15 years). The shortfall of 34 dwellings would easily be met by barn conversions, infill housing and other small scale windfall development, although most of these would probably not be affordable to households on local incomes.

Site reference	Site address	Indicative capacity (dwellings)
AIR1	Land at Hallgarth, Airton	5
BOL1	Land west of Mitford Cottages, Bolton Abbey	6
CPY1	Land at East End Farm, Carperby	6
GRA5	Land south east of Aynham Close, Grassington	25
GRA7	Land north of Moody Sty Lane, Grassington	21
HAW1	Land south and west of Woodburn, Burtersett Road, Hawes	6
HAW2	Land south of Northgate House, Burtersett Road, Hawes	16
HAW3	Land east of Northgate House, Burtersett Road, Hawes	6
HAW4	Land at Kirkbrides Way, Hawes	10
HOR6	Land west of B6479 opposite Rowe Garth, Horton-in-	11
LON5	Land rear of Moorfields & Guy's Cottages, Long Preston	12
LON8	Land between Nos 36 and 38 Main Street, Long Preston	10
NAT2	Land opposite Fell View Garage, Nateby	7
NLU1	Land west of Ash Dene, Newbiggin-on-Lune	9
NLU2	Land at The Warehouse, Newbiggin-on-Lune	7
ORT1	Land east of Ashfield Court, Orton	8
SED2	Land south of Station Road and east of Busk Lane, Sedbergh	25
SED9	Land at Kings Yard, Bainbridge Road, Sedbergh	7
SED15	Land west of Guldrey Fold, Sedbergh	25
SED16	Land north of Medical Centre, Sedbergh	12
THR4	Land north of Upper Wharfedale School, Threshfield	60
THR5	Land north of the B6265, opposite Woodlands View, Threshfield	15
THR8	Land east of the B6160, Threshfield	60
Total		**369**

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Consultation No.7 (preferred housing development sites): Housing Policy Comments

Housing target

The initial evidence for the Authority's housing target came from a Housing Market Assessment undertaken by a research company called Arc 4. This looked in depth at the National Park's housing stock, its population trends and projections, house prices, local incomes, data from the housing waiting list and local market intelligence. It reported that if current trends continue the population is projected to decline by up to 9% by 2040 and that the average age of residents in every area of the National Park is heavily skewed towards retirement. These findings were subsequently confirmed by the 2021 Census tables. The Authority held a public consultation in 2021 about the benefits or otherwise of intervening into these trends and setting a local housing growth target. The options presented were 30 dwellings per year or a higher target of 50 or even 70 dwellings per year. The targets would be ambitious but potentially achievable through the release of new sites for housing. Members decided on a target of 50 dwellings per year during the Local Plan period (750 new homes between 2025 and 2040).

A refresh of the Housing Market Assessment earlier this year has confirmed that 50 dwellings per year is still be an appropriate target that will help deliver more affordable housing and a wider range of modern homes that will benefit population stability, local employment and encourage more working age households to live in the National Park.

Objectors have pointed to the recent Government housing targets, which are proposing a step increase in numbers for local authority areas. It should be noted, however, that these top down targets would not apply to National Parks because of the likely conflict between large scale housing growth and the special qualities of these environments. Instead, Government policy requires that National Park Local Plans assess their own internal housing needs - with the objective of sustaining local communities rather than delivering the national growth agenda.

Housing Needs

The need for more housing is questioned by some objectors. As well as recommending a housing target the Authority's Housing Market Assessment has also quantified the need for affordable housing in the National Park. The current estimated need is 157 dwellings per year (18 homes per 1000 people). The scale of need is also reflected by the number of households on the Housing Register. This has increased dramatically since 2019 with 611 households currently registered for the Parishes within the National Park.

Not all of this need will be met, however, because the delivery of affordable housing in rural areas has proved particularly challenging. Based on the overall target of 50 dwellings a year, the recommended split is 20 affordable/social rented homes, 10

affordable home ownership properties and 20 unrestricted open market dwellings, with a recommendation to seek build-to-rent as part of open market proportion.

More houses are also needed to supply employees for the local economy, to sustain local services and in particular to support local schools.

In terms of the mix of house types the most urgent need is for 2 and 3 bed properties aimed at smaller households and level access homes for the mobility impaired.

Spatial Strategy

Some objectors are suggesting that the Local Plan should aim to spread smaller housing sites more widely across the National Park.

The Local Plan 'Spatial Strategy' was the subject of Consultation No 3 in 2021. In conformity with national policy and good practice it is logical for a Local Plan to direct new growth into the places where people want to live and where they will be near existing services and infrastructure. An alternative strategy that sought to distribute housing more evenly across the villages would be unlikely to deliver sufficient dwellings and would be much less sustainable in terms of access to services, carbon emissions or affordability.

The Authority decided to meet the Local Plan housing target primarily through site allocations and existing permissions. It also decided that local service centres and large villages should be the focus for allocated sites with an expectancy that the largest sites would be in Sedbergh, Hawes/Gayle and Grassington/Threshfield, where they would be most likely to be deliverable and serve large rural areas of the National Park. Additional flexibility would then be provided from windfall plots within housing development boundaries across the National Park. Members agreed that allocated sites should provide a range of house sizes and be developed to a minimum density. Sites need to not only fit with the Plan's spatial strategy but must also be available for development or sale by their owners. Sites need to be deliverable in terms of their financial viability. Larger sites of more than 10 dwellings are more likely to be deliverable because their economies of scale are more favourable. Small sites in isolated locations are less likely to be viable for affordable housing and also unlikely to be attractive to households that want to live within walking distance of facilities.

Settlement Hierarchy

Various objections have been framed around the question "Why are so many houses being planned in Threshfield"*?* The answer is that Threshfield/Grassington is one of the three local service centres identified in the Local Plan Spatial Strategy and is a sustainable place for managed housing growth. It is well located for providing services to mid and upper Wharfedale and also has good road links to Skipton and beyond, for a full range of employment and facilities. It is a place where households are likely to want to live because of its immediate access to local services, its excellent green infrastructure and its proximity to Grassington High Street.

Housing sites have been put forward in Threshfield by landowners and by Planning Officers in response to the Authority's call for housing sites in 2021. Each site has been considered through the Housing Land Availability Assessment with sites deleted or changed in area in response to the evidence available. The Local Plan Advisory Group has scrutinised this process. The sites recommended for inclusion have been found to be suitable and largely free from constraints. They are of a scale that will fit appropriately into the landscape but are also large enough to offer a good proportion of affordable homes, which are urgently needed in Wharfedale. If necessary, the development of each of the sites can phased to ensure that the new housing is not being released all at the same time.

Threshfield, Grassington and Wharfedale more generally, have capacity for household growth. The population of this area has declined slightly since 2011 and so the schools have spare places, or in the case of Wharfedale Secondary School, have places that would be available to new households living in its catchment. Household growth would also be good for local business and for Grassington high street, in terms of additional year round footfall and potential employees. Local voluntary, democratic and recreational organisations would also benefit in the longer term from a renewed cohort of younger residents.

It is clearly the case that Threshfield/Grassington has more sites and more potential dwellings going into the Local Plan than Sedbergh or Hawes. That is actually because insufficient suitable sites have been forthcoming elsewhere, for the reasons set out in the Assessment, rather than because there is too much planned development in Threshfield. Had larger and more suitable sites also been forthcoming in Hawes and Sedbergh they too would also have found their way into the preferred list. Only 50% of the housing target will be met on allocated sites despite the Authority's ambition to provide the whole target on suitable allocated land.

Affordability

Some of the consultees are concerned that the housing sites will not deliver affordable homes.

The English Planning system relies on providing affordable housing through cross subsidy from market dwellings, on sites of 10 or more dwellings. The Authority has carried out viability testing based on house values, build costs, and market intelligence which indicate that allocated sites should be capable of financing 30% to 50% affordable housing, depending on where they are located in the National Park. The highest price areas, with the best viability to deliver affordable housing, are in the south and east.

Experience from recent developments demonstrate that policy compliant affordable housing has (eventually) been forthcoming in Sedbergh, West Witton and Long Preston. Where developers have decided not to meet the policy requirement permission has been refused and the Local Plan policy has been upheld on appeal, usually leading to reapplication by the developer. Planning conditions attached to a

permission will stipulate that the affordable housing is completed first, to ensure delivery.

It is accepted that on allocated sites half to three quarters of new dwellings will be for market housing and that these will be unaffordable to most households currently working in the National Park. The new Local Plan policy should, however, prevent new market homes from being used as future second homes or holiday letting businesses. The use of a principal occupancy condition on new permissions should ensure that all new housing is permanently occupied.

In the north of the National Park, where fewer sites are available for allocation, affordable housing will have to rely on Rural Exceptions Sites by Housing Associations and other Registered Providers. These tend to come forward slowly and unpredictably but can at least deliver a high percentage of affordable housing on suitable sites.

The evidence is that affordable housing is more likely to be occupied by working age households because older households are more likely to own their existing home and are therefore more likely to be able to meet their own housing needs.

Unoccupied Housing

The issue of under occupied housing is repeatedly raised by objectors. At the last Census in 2021 it was estimated that the Park already had 22% of its stock 'not permanently occupied'. This was made up of holiday letting properties, second homes and vacant dwellings e.g. empty houses for sale.

The Local Plan can only influence future housing that will receive planning permission. It will attempt to add a principal occupancy condition to all new permissions to ensure that new housing is used as *homes* rather than holiday purposes. Other policies in the Local Plan will also be positive about the subdivision of existing large properties into smaller units and the reoccupation of former dwellings to new housing and these will help diversify the range of new homes.

The Local Plan and the National Park Authority cannot however control the change of use of the existing housing stock e.g. into Air B and B use, because that does not currently require planning permission. Outside of the Planning process, North Yorkshire and Westmorland and Furness Councils are however doubling council tax and this may already be having an effect by bringing more under occupied properties onto the market where they could become permanently occupied homes.

Employment

The lack of employment growth in the National Park has been raised as a ground for objection to new housing growth. In fact, the evidence is that unemployment is low and job vacancies are high. A range of work is available although, of course, the supply of jobs is much smaller than in more urban areas. Some of the largest employers, such as Sedbergh School, have multiple job vacancies and have

struggled over a long time to fill vacancies. In the absence of household growth, particularly affordable housing, there is a risk that employers will leave the National Park because of the lack of available staff. New housing is therefore needed to support local business and provide more locally based labour.

The housing sites in Sedbergh and Threshfield/Grassington will also be accessible to job markets outside the National Park and are not, therefore, dependent solely on local job creation. Planned growth in places like Skipton, the Aire Valley, Kendal, and the A1M corridor will also provide jobs to households living in new homes in the National Park. The ability to work part of the time from home is also making it easier to live and work in deep rural areas such as in the National Park.

Infrastructure

Objectors have pointed to a lack of infrastructure as a constraint to housing growth. The Local Plan Spatial Strategy is directing sites at locations that already have existing infrastructure. Locations that are isolated from services or which are at risk of flooding or are not capable of providing a safe vehicular access have been excluded from the list of preferred sites. It is more sustainable for new households to live close to existing services and to use household growth to sustain existing rural services and try to avoid them closing or relocating further away.

Most settlements in the National Park will have at least some capacity to absorb modest household growth. Ove the last 10 years there have been more deaths than births and the rate of migration into the National Park has slowed. The population has declined slightly and is now heavily skewed towards retirement, which means that local schools have capacity for more children. Indeed, without an increase in pupils schools will close. Wharfedale Secondary School at Threshfield is unusual in being near to its capacity but North Yorkshire Council has advised that more than half of its places are taken up by children from outside the catchment. Future household growth within the catchment would have priority for school places over demand from outside.

The two General Medical practices in Sedbergh and Grassington have been consulted about the preferred sites but have not raised any concerns. The advice from the Highway Authorities, the flood risk agencies and the water companies are that subject to the detailed layout of schemes there are no current infrastructure barriers to the level of growth proposed in the Local Plan.

In terms of green infrastructure, the National Park has plenty of remaining capacity within its rights of way network, its access areas, its extensive moorland and its woodlands to accommodate modest household growth. New households forming in the National Park (and their visitors) may expect to benefit significantly from doorstep access to high quality natural resources.

National Park Purposes and Special Qualities

Objectors point out that housing growth does not seem compatible with National Park purposes. They are also concerned about the impact new housing might have on the special qualities of the area e.g. its farmed landscape, its wildlife and its dark night skies.

As well as delivering National Park purposes the Authority and its partners are also required to foster the social and economic wellbeing of local communities. The Local Plan is an important tool for delivering this through the management of future development needs. The National Planning Policy Framework requires that the Local Plan makes provision for an appropriate amount of development that will help sustain the community during the Plan period.

The Strategic Housing Market Assessment is the tool that the Authority has used to assess how much housing is needed and what type. The Housing Land Availability Assessment (HLAA) is the statutory process the Authority has used to assess the suitability of potential housing sites needed to sustain the population of the National Park. The HLAA has taken a landscape-led approach to housing site selection. Sites within areas of high sensitivity have been rejected. This approach has also led to the reduction in size and density of some sites. Space has been provided for landscape planting to mitigate future impact and ensure that housing will be appropriately integrated into its setting.

Housing sites have also been professionally assessed for flood risk, heritage value, nature value and impact on trees. The impact of the housing sites and the wider Local Plan policies on national and internationally protected wildlife sites is also being examined by an external expert through a 'Habitats Regulation Assessment'. Its draft findings are that cumulatively the preferred housing sites will not undermine the integrity of the Park's designated wildlife sites.

Each housing site has also been the subject of a Sustainability Assessment. This has examined potential house building against 28 sustainability indicators. The sustainability assessment has also considered the cumulative impact of all the sites as well as the impact of not allocating them. The common effects of each site can be summarised as increased waste, additional carbon emissions and impact on the National Park's special qualities. The common advantages are community sustainability, resilience to climate change, and benefits to the economy and to employment.

The sustainability appraisal suggests areas for mitigation. Mitigating measures can be applied through the preparation of development briefs for each site and eventually through pre application discussion around design and layout and eventually conditions supporting planning permission.

The formal examination of the Local Plan by a Government Planning Inspector will also independently come to conclusions and requirements about the housing sites and their effects on National Park purposes and the areas special qualities.