ITEM 8: Local Plan Preferred Options

Purpose of Report
a. To seek approval from members of the Core Strategy and Development Management Policies Preferred Options Draft Local Plan document for public consultation.

1. Recommendations
b. Authorise the Chief Executive (National Park Officer) to make any minor amendments to the final text of the consultation draft document prior to commencement of the formal consultation.

2. Implications
a. Financial – The Local Plan review costs are included within the Medium Term Budget.
b. Equalities - The process for preparing local development plan documents will be subject to an Equalities Impact Assessment taking into account the provisions of the Equality Act 2010.

3. Background
b. The Authority is currently undertaking a review of the existing statutory development plan (LDF Core Strategy and Development Policies plus associated Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs)) with the aim of producing and adopting a new Local Plan by December 2019. The new Local Plan will contain planning policies guiding future development and the determination of planning applications for a twenty year period from 2017 to 2037. Meeting the government’s tests of soundness are critical to the adoption of the Plan and they stipulate that the Local Plan should be:
   - **Positively prepared:** This means that the plan should be prepared based on a strategy which seeks to meet objectively assessed development and infrastructure requirements.
   - **Justified:** The plan should be the most appropriate strategy when considered against reasonable alternatives, based on proportionate evidence.
   - **Effective:** The plan should be deliverable over its period and based on effective joint working on cross-boundary strategic priorities.
   - **Consistent with national policy:** The plan should enable the delivery of sustainable development in accordance with the policies in the NPPF.

a. Therefore Northumberland National Park Local Plan (2017-2037) will:
   - Set the strategic planning policies for the National Park, taking account of key factors like population trends, economic growth, climate change, resources and environmental character;
   - Direct the scale and distribution of new development (e.g. housing and employment) which is required to meet the National Park’s identified need to 2037;
   - Provide the planning principles, including detailed ‘development management’ policies to guide decisions on planning applications;

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1 In accordance with section 20 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended) and the NPPF.
2 Including unmet requirements from neighbouring authorities where it is reasonable to do so and consistent with achieving sustainable development.
• Show key environmental designations and include site specific proposals for the conservation and enhancement of historic and natural assets.

b. Two significant and comprehensive public consultation exercises have already been completed in 2017. The Issues Paper public consultation (undertaken in spring) and the Policy Options Paper public consultation (undertaken in autumn). In addition a significant amount of evidence work and a sustainability appraisal have informed the preparation of the Preferred Options Draft Local Plan document. In addition a number of the potential preferred policy options were considered and agreed by members at a policy conference held on 23rd May 2018.

4. Key planning challenges facing the National Park

a. The National Park is facing a variety of challenges that can be at least partly addressed through planning policy. A key challenge is the trend of an ageing population. From 2001 to 2014, the profile of the National Park’s population has aged, with the proportion of residents being in the older age groups increasing relative to those in the younger age groups from 16% to 24%3.

b. An analysis of past trends, demonstrates that the National Park experienced a decline in employee jobs from 750 in 2006 to the 460 discussed above in 2016. This represents a decline of 290 jobs, or 39%, compared to a decline of 3% across Northumberland and a growth of 3% in the North East and 9% nationally. This trend of decline is potentially linked to the NPP’s ageing population and low levels of population growth, as identified above, as well as wider macroeconomic factors such as the economic downturn of 2008/09 and sluggish subsequent recovery. Over the period 2006-16, agricultural employment contracted within the NNP, mirroring the trends observed at the regional and national level4.

c. Local wages are also low in relation to house prices. Despite relatively low unemployment, there is still a need to widen out the range of jobs and business opportunities to improve quality of life and maintain people and services in the area. If farming continues to decline as a local employer, the Local Plan will need to help identify more opportunities for agricultural diversification that makes use of the assets available within farm businesses and rural estates.

d. Without positive policy intervention, projections show that there is likely to be an acceleration of the ageing trend of the National Park’s population. This change in the age profile has the potential to have a negative impact on the long term diversity and resilience of our local communities.

5. Vision and Spatial Objectives

a. The Preferred Options Draft Local Plan sets out the spatial portrait of the National Park, highlighting the opportunities and challenges for the Local Plan to address including:

• the importance of the natural and built environment/special qualities and the need for the Local Plan to conserve and enhance it;
• the importance of the National Park to the wider County, regional and national economy;
• that the population of the National Park is ageing, and the significance of this demographic change makes it an important policy issue for the prosperity and resilience of communities across the area.

3 Northumberland National Park Demographic Forecasts 2016
4 Northumberland National Park Economic Futures and Employment Demand Study (May 2018)
b. The Preferred Options Draft Local Plan proposes a vision which sets out what it intends to achieve over the plan period (2016-2037). The vision, strategic priorities and spatial objectives inform all of the draft policy options in the plan. These have been drafted to reflect the strategic aims, outcomes and objectives contained within the Northumberland National Park Management Plan (2016-2021).

c. The Local Plan also needs to define the level and distribution of development and specific policies that are required to deliver the spatial vision. The vision and spatial objectives highlight the importance of protecting and enhancing the special qualities of Northumberland National Park, but also the need to allow sustainable development to grow and diversify the rural economy in order to support the resilience of our local communities.

d. One of the challenges to the delivery of the vision of the Preferred Options Draft Local Plan is the profile of the National Park population. Without positive policy intervention, projections show that there is likely to be an accelerating ageing of the population and a reduction in the already-depleted working-age population. The impact of this will be a shrinking labour force and fewer working age families within the National Park. This change in the age profile has the potential to have a negative impact on the long term diversity and resilience of our local communities.

6. Spatial Strategy

a. The preferred options draft plan includes a policy that updates extant Core Strategy policy 3 ‘General Development Principles’.

a. A hierarchy of settlements for development is set out with the Preferred Options Draft Local Plan, which gives priority to identified local centres and smaller villages.

b. It should be noted however that the definition of the categories of settlement to be included in the hierarchy will be subject to further work that will be undertaken in order to gather evidence on the merits for the potential inclusion or exclusion of particular locations within the various settlement categories. This evidence will be used to inform the Publication Draft Local Plan which will be completed in May next year.

c. The Preferred Options Draft Local Plan also includes a policy to allow the conversion of buildings outside of settlements to permanent residential use subject to certain criteria (in addition to employment/tourism use).

7. Community Facilities and Infrastructure

a. In order to maximise the potential to deliver sustainable rural growth and sustain our local communities, infrastructure improvements are essential. The Preferred options Draft Local Plan will:

- Support the rollout of effective superfast broadband across the National Park, and improvements to mobile communications.
- Protect existing infrastructure services and facilities unless they are no longer needed, or there is alternative provision elsewhere;

8. Housing

a. A further challenge is the fact that there is not enough housing in the National Park to meet the needs of existing and future residents. Evidence\textsuperscript{5} shows that there is an identified need for a range of housing tenures, types, prices and sizes to be provided in order to help meet local needs for different groups of the population, including meeting the needs of an ageing population. There is also a dwelling

\textsuperscript{5} Northumberland National Park Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) (May 2017)
vacancy rate of approximately 20% indicating a significant proportion of holiday and second homes.

b. Extending housing choice in the local market is a priority for the Local Plan in order to meet the needs of the National Park’s resident population, including the diverse needs of an ageing population, and to provide attractive housing options for those moving into the Park, the plan proposes to extend choice in the housing market.

c. Therefore the Preferred Options Local Plan includes:
   • An overarching housing policy to meet the needs of working people, families, young people and the elderly;
   • A specific policy supporting the provision of housing for rural workers;
   • A specific policy supporting the provision of live/work units;
   • A specific policy supporting the provision of affordable housing via rural exceptions sites (including a local connections test);
   • A more flexible policy for the delivery of affordable housing on other suitable sites;
   • A specific policy dealing with the replacement of residential dwellings;
   • An option to remove the existing local housing needs criteria and their replacement with a generic principal residency housing policy in order to boost the local housing market and increase the number of residents in the Park;
   • A more flexible policy to allow the conversion of buildings outside of settlements to residential use subject to certain criteria; and,
   • A policy for residential extensions.

9. Employment
   a. The Preferred Draft Local Plan will build upon existing strengths while diversifying and realising the potential of the rural and visitor economy. In order to deliver the economic objectives the Draft Preferred Options Local Plan includes:
      • A policy that will enable the sustainable development and diversification of the rural economy; support land-based rural enterprises and home-based enterprises; and, support the growth and diversification of the visitor economy, including the sustainable development of tourism facilities and accommodation in suitable locations.

10. Transport and Access
   a. The Preferred options Draft Local Plan includes an overarching transport and access policy that will:
      • Support improved access to the National Park by means other than the private car (including walking and cycling).

11. Farming and Estates
   a. The Preferred options Draft Local Plan includes policies that will:
      • Permit the development of new agricultural buildings, structures and shooting tracks where they are justified by the scale of farm operation or are essential for sustainable land management, subject to criteria protecting the special qualities of the National Park.
      • Support the further diversification of rural, land-based enterprises.

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6 Census 2011
12. Natural Environment

a. Policies to protect and enhance Northumberland’s distinctive and valued natural environment are included in the Preferred Options Draft Local Plan which will seek to:
   • Direct development away from our most sensitive and valuable natural assets, habitats and species, towards less sensitive locations;
   • Maintain and enhance Northumberland National Park’s Green Infrastructure networks;
   • Protect and enhance the landscape character of Northumberland National Park;
   • Protect and enhance Northumberland National Park’s tranquillity and dark skies;
   • Require new developments to mitigate and where possible reduce flood risk;
   • Support small-scale renewable energy developments.

13. Historic Environment

a. Policies to protect and enhance Northumberland National Park’s distinctive and valued historic and built environment is included in the Preferred Options Draft Local Plan which will seek to:
   • Protect and enhance the landscape character of Northumberland National Park;
   • Protect and enhance features and areas of historical and cultural value, including the sensitive re-use of historical assets and a reduction in buildings at risk;
   • Protect archaeological sites and features;
   • Protect the outstanding universal value of the Hadrian’s Wall World Heritage site from inappropriate development.

14. Leisure and Tourism

a. The Preferred options Draft Local Plan includes an overarching policy that will:
   • Support the growth and diversification of the visitor economy, including the sustainable development of tourism facilities and accommodation in suitable locations;
   • Support recreational opportunities in the National Park particularly the rights of way network, access to open country, other quiet and active recreation based on the National Park’s special qualities;
   • Include a more flexible approach to the development of visitor facilities that would help support a more rounded quality experience that will help keep visitors returning to the area throughout the year (e.g. dark skies activities) and in all weathers to enjoy the primary special qualities of the National Park and importantly, maintain spending in the local economy.

15. Minerals and Waste

a. The Preferred options Draft Local Plan will include policies that will:
   • Only permit mineral extraction in Northumberland National Park where it would have no significant environmental effects and where it is of a scale appropriate solely to meet the identified need where that need could not be met elsewhere outside the National Park;
   • Safeguard finite mineral resources across the National Park;
   • Ensure that minerals extraction, transport and processing does not have unacceptable adverse impacts on the environment or local communities;
   • Support proposals for recycling sites where they meet the needs of local communities and would not have detrimental impacts;
   • Only permit the disposal of inert waste produced within the National Park, where
it can be demonstrated that the material cannot reasonably be re-used or recycled, where proposals are small in scale and otherwise where it will not have detrimental impacts; and,

- Prohibit the disposal of non-inert waste within the National Park.

16. Public consultation

a. The Preferred Options Draft Local Plan public consultation is scheduled to commence on Monday 30th July 2018 for 8 weeks, ending on 24th September 2018. There will be four public drop-in sessions (4pm-7pm) being held during that period at Wooler (21st August), Falstone (29th August), Elsdon (4th September) and Bardon Mill (11th September - T.B.C.). In addition to the consultation documents being available online, hard copies will also be available at NNPA headquarters and some County libraries. Hard copies of the consultation document will also be available to purchase. A CD with the consultation documents will also be available upon request.

17. Next Steps

a. Following the Preferred Options Draft Plan consultation (in accordance with Regulation 18), there will be a period of collation of the representations received and consideration of the issues raised, as well as amending the draft plan where necessary. The timescale for publishing the next iteration of the draft plan under Regulation 19 is May 2019. The current timetable for the preparation of the Local Plan and consultation is set out in the published Local Development Scheme (March 2018). The key stages are set out in figure 1 below:

Figure 1: Local Plan Timetable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Stages</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regulation 18 - Consultation on Preferred Options Local Plan</td>
<td>July - August 2018</td>
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<tr>
<td>Regulation 19 - Publication of Local Plan (Consultation limited to ‘Tests of Soundness’)</td>
<td>May 2019</td>
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<tr>
<td>Regulation 22 - Submission to Secretary of State</td>
<td>August 2019</td>
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<tr>
<td>Regulation 24 - Independent Examination Hearings</td>
<td>October 2019</td>
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<tr>
<td>Regulation 26 - Adoption of Local Plan</td>
<td>December 2019</td>
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18. Conclusions

a. The public consultation on the Preferred Options Draft Local Plan document represents an important next stage in the preparation of the new Local Plan for the National Park. It sets out preferred draft planning policies that will manage future development within the National Park over the next 20 years seeking the views of the public, partners, businesses and other organisations. This Draft Plan represents a key advancement of a number of planning policies in the National Park and aims to secure more sustainable and resilient communities whilst protecting the special qualities of the Park. The consultation will also help to ensure that the key tests of soundness stipulated by government are met and that the relevant regulations are complied with.

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7 NNPA Local Development Scheme (2018-2020)
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Background papers: