ITEM 1: Publication of the Draft Local Plan for the National Park

1. Purpose of Report
   a. This report asks Members to approve the Publication Draft Local Plan for public consultation and also to delegate authority to the Chief Executive to submit the draft Plan to the Secretary of State for independent examination once this public consultation has been completed.

2. Recommendations
   a. Members approve the draft plan for publication subject to any changes proposed.
   b. Members delegate authority to the Chief Executive (National Park Officer) to make any changes as required to rectify any errors and make minor changes to improve the plan prior to publication under Regulation 19 of 2012 the Local Plan Regulations1.
   c. Members delegate authority to the Chief Executive to submit the draft Local Plan to the Secretary of State following the six week consultation period.

3. Implications
   a. Financial - None at present. The Local Plan review costs are included within the Medium Term Budget.
   a. Equalities – An Equalities Impact Assessment has been undertaken as part of the Local Plan Review process and this will be published alongside the draft Plan for consultation.

4. Background
   a. 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 Plan2 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 requirements3.
      - 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 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

   b. Therefore the 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

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1 Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012
2 In accordance with section 20 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended) and the NPPF.
3 Including unmet requirements from neighbouring authorities where it is reasonable to do so and consistent with achieving sustainable development.
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’ (DM) policies to guide decisions on planning applications;
- Show key environmental designations and include proposals for the conservation and enhancement of historic and natural assets.

c. Three public consultation exercises have already been completed during 2017 and 2018. The Issues Paper public consultation (undertaken in spring 2017); the Policy Options Paper public consultation (undertaken in autumn 2017); and the Preferred Options Draft Plan public consultation (Summer 2018). In addition a significant amount of evidence; a sustainability appraisal; and habitat regulations assessment have informed the preparation of the Publication Draft Local Plan document.

5. 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%.

b. An analysis of past trends, demonstrates that the National Park experienced a decline in employee jobs from 750 in 2006 to the 460 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 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 level. However given more recently published employment data this is likely to have improved slightly since 2016.

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. 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 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 vacancy rate of approximately 20% indicating a significant proportion of holiday and second homes.

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4 Northumberland National Park Demographic Forecasts 2016
5 Northumberland National Park Economic Futures and Employment Demand Study (May 2018)
6 Northumberland National Park Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) (May 2017)
7 Census 2011
6. Vision and Spatial Objectives

a. The Publication 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.

b. The Publication 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 policies 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).

d. 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.

e. One of the challenges to the delivery of the vision of the Publication 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.

f. 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.

g. The Publication Draft Plan proposes to meet as much of the objectively assessed housing need within the National Park as the identified constraints will allow (without harming the Park’s special qualities), whilst taking into account the lack of suitable housing sites and the difficulty of delivering viable housing development without subsidy.

h. This will be achieved by providing an appropriate amount of principal residence and affordable housing within identified settlements; allowing the conversion of buildings in the open countryside to residential use in very specific circumstances; allowing self and custom housebuilding in certain locations; and allowing 100% affordable housing developments in sustainable locations adjoining an identified settlement. This plan will not allocate housing sites nor will it contain a housing delivery target.
7. Publication Draft Plan Preparation

a. This draft is the ‘publication’ or ‘pre-submission’ version of the Local Plan. It will be published according to Regulation 19 of the 2012 Town and Country (Local Planning) Regulations. A six week consultation period will then commence. The purpose of this stage is to collect representations for the forthcoming independent examination during this round of consultation. The Authority is seeking comments on whether the plan is 'sound' as defined by the National Planning Framework i.e. positively prepared, justified, effective and consistent with national policy.

b. The Head of Forward Planning presented a draft of the ‘Preferred Options’ version of the Plan to Members at the Authority meeting in July 2018. Following public consultation, a summary of responses; draft consultation feedback report; schedule of proposed changes and a summary emerging draft policies were presented to and agreed by the Local Plan Task and Finish group on the 27th March 2019.

c. The plan has been modified in light of these comments, and also following comments from Members of the Local Plan Task and Finish Group following the meeting in March. Further details of the proposed changes can be found at Appendix 2 to this report. A schedule of the main representations received to the Preferred Options Draft Plan (as well as officers’ responses) can be found at Appendix 3 to this report.

d. Members of the Authority should note that this version (if approved) is the final draft and cannot be amended by the Authority except in response to a modification suggested by the Local Plan independent Planning Inspector.

e. Changes have mainly been made to respond to consultation feedback. This showed general support for much of the Preferred Options Draft Plan policies, however some respondents did not support the approach set out in some of the draft policies such as draft Policy 30 (Quarrying).

f. Officers received a consistent message from both the consultation responses and at public drop in sessions that residents and businesses are concerned with the long term viability of settlements within the National Park, given the closure of local facilities, the increase in second home ownership, an ageing population and the lack of job and housing opportunities for younger people.' Further detail on feedback to the public consultation on the Preferred Options Draft Plan can be found at Appendix 4 to this report.

8. Summary of main changes/strategic policy areas within the Draft Plan

a. A more detailed summary of the main changes to the Preferred Options Draft Plan is included at Appendix 2 to this report. The 'headline' policy changes are summarised as follows:

Spatial Strategy

b. The settlement hierarchy now consists of two categories (see Policy ST4). Firstly, the identified settlements classified as either Local Centres or Smaller Villages (now one joint category) or Open Countryside (the rest of the National Park). It is now also more explicit in saying that housing will be allowed within the settlements and also in the open countryside under very specific circumstances. Rochester has also been re-classified within the hierarchy as a ‘Local Centre’.

Housing and the Rural Economy

c. Revised and simplified local connections criteria have been added (these will only apply to affordable housing and self/custom build housing see supporting text to Policies ST5 and DM3).
d. There is now one combined policy dealing with the provision of affordable housing both on rural exceptions sites and within Local Centres (see Policy DM3).

e. The draft policy dealing with the conversion of buildings in open countryside (DM6) has been revised to specifically include the provision of principal residence housing provided the building is located within an existing group of buildings (including an existing residential unit) and would not be in an isolated location. The reference to ‘family dwellings criteria’ has also been removed as this was considered too prescriptive and inflexible. This policy now also refers to the conversion of buildings within the identified settlements.

f. Principal residence housing and replacement housing are now both referred to within a new strategic housing policy (ST5) rather than having two stand-alone policies.

g. A revised rural economy policy (DM7) is included with specific reference to employment uses in addition to the development and diversification of rural and land-based enterprises. A policy outlining the approach to new agricultural development proposals within the National Park has been added.

Natural Environment

h. The Draft Plan is now more explicit with reference to ecosystem services and net biodiversity gain. It now also includes a hierarchy of protected habitat sites, from international to national to local within a revised ‘Habitats, Biodiversity and Geodiversity’ policy (DM11).

Historic Environment

i. A more detailed policy outlining our approach to development proposals that would affect historic landscape assets and the built heritage of the National Park has been included (with specific reference to Hadrian’s Wall World Heritage Site – see DM15). A new policy dealing with proposals that could potential affect the National Park’s Archaeological Heritage has also been added (see DM16).

Minerals & Waste

j. A more detailed policy (DM18) outlining the approach to new minerals development proposals within the National Park has been included and the minerals safeguarding policy has been updated to include the types of non-mineral development that would be potentially permitted within these areas.


9. Next steps

a. The Draft Plan will be published on the 31st May 2019. The public consultation is scheduled to commence on Friday 31st May for 6 weeks, ending on 12th July 2019. Four public drop-in sessions (4pm-7pm) will be held during this period at The Sill (4th June), Wooler (11th June), Bellingham (19th June) and Elsdon (25th June).

b. 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.
c. Following the statutory six week period of consultation the Publication Draft Plan, all comments made will be submitted to the Secretary of State. From this point the timetable is out of the Authority’s hands, however allowing for a conclusion of school holidays and assuming no delays in appointing an Inspector it is expected that the Examination in Public will take place in October 2019, with final adoption of the Plan in December 2019.

Figure 1: Local Plan Timetable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Stages</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>Regulation 18 - Consultation on Preferred Options Draft Local Plan</td>
<td>July - August 2018</td>
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<tr>
<td>Regulation 19 - Publication of Draft 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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10. Conclusions

a. An up to date Local Plan will support the strategic aims and priorities set out in the Management Plan and will set a framework for ensuring that the objectives can be better delivered. It will also provide a new and updated set of policies to support those wishing to undertake development within the National Park.

b. The publication of the Draft Local Plan document represents the final key stage in the preparation of the new Local Plan for the National Park setting out draft planning policies that will manage future development within the National Park over the next 20 years.

c. The Publication Draft Plan represents a step-change for planning policies within the National Park and aims to secure more sustainable and resilient communities whilst protecting the special qualities of the Park. The public consultation will help to ensure that the key tests of soundness stipulated by government are met and that the relevant regulations are complied with before the Plan is submitted for independent examination.

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Background papers:

Appendix 1 - Publication Draft Local Plan.
Appendix 2 - Summary of Changes to the Preferred Options Draft Plan.
Appendix 3 – Schedule of Representations Received.
Appendix 4 – Preferred Options Draft Plan Public Consultation Feedback Report (Draft).

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8 NNPA Local Development Scheme (2018-2020)