

17. Additional Issue for the Development Management Policies DPD: Recreation Hubs and Visitor Management (BJT/A.6101)

Purpose of the report

1. For members to reconsider the options for bringing forward an additional development management issue regarding recreation hubs and visitor management.

2. Recommendation:

That:

- 1. Members support option 3 at paragraph 18 as the basis for further work on the issue of recreation hubs and visitor management**

How does this contribute to our policies and legal obligations?

3. Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that planning decisions should be made in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

4. *National Parks Vision and Circular 2010*

The National Parks Vision and Circular 2010 encourages proactive identification and promotion of new access and recreational opportunities and ways of delivering them whilst taking into account that 'activities which would have an adverse impact on the Parks' special qualities and other people's enjoyment of them may need to be excluded (in order to meet the requirements of section 11A (2) of the 1949 Act)'.

5. *National Planning Policy Framework*

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) supports sustainable rural tourism that takes 'account of the different roles and character of different areas, promoting the vitality of our main urban areas, protecting the Green Belts around them, recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and supporting thriving rural communities within it' (NPPF para 17 Core Planning Principle).

The NPPF states in paragraph 35 that developments should be located and designed to 'give priority to pedestrian and cycle movements, and have access to high quality public transport facilities'.

6. *National Park Management Plan*

The National Park Management Plan has enabled process allows the Authority and its partners to refresh the strategic approach to tourism provision in the area. A spatial approach to the management and promotion of key visitor sites will assist a range of partnership projects and programmes driven by the National Park Management Plan 2012-17. The National Park Management Plan provides the framework for a range of related strategies which also drive the need for a spatial policy. Such strategies include those for recreation, landscape, cycling, people and communities and the Core Strategy of the Local Development Plan.

7. *Core Strategy*

In 2011 the National Park Authority adopted its Core Strategy with a high level aim by 2026 that “A network of high quality, sustainable sites and facilities will have encouraged and promoted increased enjoyment and understanding of the National Park by everybody including its residents and surrounding urban communities”. Core policies L1 and RT1 provide a strategic basis for decisions on recreation, environmental education and interpretation in the countryside where they fit well with the environmental capacity of the area and meet other site specific tests. Policy T7 also provides the basis for new car parking provision seeking to limit overall numbers so as not to exceed environmental capacity.

8. **Background**

Since the adoption of the Core Strategy in 2011 and the current National Park Management Plan in 2012 officers have observed that a gap has emerged in the area of tourism strategy and that no other partner is currently thinking about issues of sustainable visitor management holistically or spatially for the National Park or the wider Peak District. Individual site owners may bring forward schemes that meet their own interests, but without an overview officers were concerned about the collective impact this could have on the National Park. The tourist board for instance is increasingly focussed on marketing “the destination” and other councils are more likely to fall back on their own core priorities, whereas this is a statutory purpose of the National Park and warrants closer attention by the Authority.

9. Following a long period of consideration by officers across the Authority, a draft consultation paper was prepared and in August this year (2014) a report was brought before the Planning Committee. The report recommended Member support for a consultation document as a first stage in developing a policy for recreation hubs that could be inserted into the emerging Development Management Policies document and its supporting Policies Map.

10. However, at the meeting Members expressed concerns that the rationale for both the policy and detailed site selection was unclear and that as such it was resolved that (minute ref 105/14) officers to work closely with a small member working group to help overcome these concerns and progress the document for public consultation. The group comprised the Chair and Vice Chair of Planning Committee along with Cllr Brady and Ms McGuire.

11. Following the August Planning Committee meeting, officers received further detailed observations from Cllr Brady and Ms McGuire and a follow-up meeting was held to fully explain the nature of concerns.

12. In addition, officers met with a sustainability consultant (already working with the team on the Development Management Policies document) to discuss what further work would be required to assess the site specific impacts. This meeting found that the existing sustainability framework would need to be refreshed in order to create an assessment tool that could pick up site/location specific impacts as opposed to strategic policy considerations. This would inevitably take time to prepare.

13. **Proposals**

In the context of the above discussions, officers have taken a step back from the paper taken to Planning Committee in August in order to understand the need to engage more closely with members on the policy principle behind the recreation hubs concept. In doing this officers have reconsidered the options to set out more fundamentally why an additional policy for recreational hubs may be of benefit. This allows us to consider what we already have in terms of Core Strategy policy and

consider where the added value would be in terms of forward planning and subsequent development management decisions by giving certainty to investment.

14. It is important for the Authority to be joined up in its overall thinking on sustainable visitor management and asset management in order to be open and accountable in developing policy. For example, some early assessment of sites and their potential has begun through the Trails Options Study. This and other work will helpfully inform such a policy. This can also provide greater certainty about the prospects of delivery, as such sites are more likely to have organisational backing regarding their scope for investment.
15. While initial work could point to those sites currently the subject of assessment at the National Park Authority, a formal consultation process would provide an opportunity for other organisations (including major land owning estates and utilities companies) to put forward their own properties where these meet the principles and criteria laid down in policy. A “call for sites” method could be employed in a similar way to that used for housing proposals. Such sites are then tested and filtered against an agreed assessment criteria.
16. Officers have also been given a clear steer from Members about the need to complete and progress our work on development management policies, which has already suffered delays for a range of staffing and conflicting work reasons.
17. As a result, the options for progressing this work have been refreshed by moving away from detailed site considerations towards the strategic value of such a policy. The following options have now been rehearsed with the member working group.
18. **Options for policy relating to recreational hubs**
 1. Continue to progress public consultation into a detailed site selection policy underpinned by an appraisal of the many possible hub locations, using a refreshed Sustainability Appraisal framework and clearer evidence base. This will need more time to fully undertake and is likely to push timescales back to February/March for joining the work up into our Development Management Policies Document; or
 2. Develop a more focussed policy based on site improvement plans already being considered by land owners. This would entail setting out the criteria for site selection and initiate a “call for sites” to enable land owners (e.g. National Trust, Utilities companies, Chatsworth etc and including the National Park Authority through the Trails Options Study) to respond with other suggested locations that can then be considered alongside the criteria laid down in policy; or
 3. Await completion of the development management policies document and bring forward a focussed Area Action Plan Development Plan Document covering the topic of recreational hubs at a Park-wide scale. This could apply the approach set out in option 2. In the short term existing policy in the Core Strategy may still be utilised as the basis of any new proposals to improve facilities at key recreational hub sites. It is hoped that this work could commence towards the end of 2015; or
 4. Do not pursue further policy at all on the basis that the existing policy framework in the Core Strategy is sufficient to deal with ad hoc responses and site specific issues into the future.

19. **Preferred Approach**

Officers believe that this remains an important piece of policy that warrants inclusion in the Local Development Plan; however, it does require greater work and scrutiny and the current priority of the Policy Planning Team should remain with the completion of the Development Management Policies document. As such, the preferred option from those set out in paragraph 18 above is option 3.

20. Nevertheless, the issue of recreation hubs should be built formally into the future work planning of the team. Current expectations indicate that if the Development Management Document can be submitted in the spring of 2015, then work could commence at the end of 2015. This will require more in depth project planning and will also need to be placed alongside the prioritisation of other topics for possible partial review.

Are there any corporate implications members should be concerned about?

Financial

21. None, the work can progress within existing budgets.

Risk Management

22. None, the existing adopted and saved policies of the Core Strategy 2011 and Local Plan 2001 ensure there is no gap in policy during this time.

Sustainability

23. A Sustainability Appraisal will be undertaken to test the preferred approach.

Consultees: Director of Planning, Assistant Director of Policy and Partnerships, Chair and Vice Chair of planning Committee, Cllr Brady, Ms McGuire, Ms Emma Sayer

Background papers (not previously published)

24. None

Report Author, Job Title

25. Brian Taylor, Policy Planning Manager