

AGENDA ITEM No. 12

PEAK DISTRICT NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY MEETING

28 MARCH 2008

STRATEGY & DEVELOPMENT

PART A

1. PROGRESS REPORT ON THE LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT OF THE NATIONAL PARK (A5912/JC)

Proposal

1. This report summarises the process and methodology used in undertaking the Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) of the National Park in 2007/08, describes the key elements of the LCA and outlines the proposed timetable to develop a Landscape Strategy and Action Plan to be delivered by 31 March 2009.

Members will be given a presentation at Committee by the consultants, expanding on the work undertaken in carrying out the characterisation of the landscape, the results of that work and outlining what still needs to be done.

The series of LCA descriptive reports and accompanying map will be available on the National Park Authority's website at www.peakdistrict.gov.uk/lca from 20 March. Paper copies are available from Lisa Dunsby, EHRS administration officer, ext 396.

2 RECOMMENDATION:

That

1. **Members note and approve the Landscape Character Assessment of the National Park as the descriptive phase of developing the Landscape Strategy and Action Plan.**
2. **Members agree the proposed timetable, process and scope for the development of a Landscape Strategy and Action Plan.**

Policy/Legal Background

3. The international policy context is driven by the **European Landscape Convention** (ELC) which was ratified by the UK Government on 21 November 2006 and came into force on 1 March 2007. The Convention is the world's first landscape treaty and seeks to influence the importance which countries place on their landscapes. Its definition of landscape is "an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors". The Framework for Implementation of the ELC in England was developed by Natural England in partnership with Defra and English Heritage in October 2007. This will provide a structure for preparation of ELC Action Plans by partners and stakeholders. The Framework for Implementation seeks to further strengthen the protection, management and planning of landscape in England. It aims to:
 - Improve performance within the current legal and regulatory system.
 - Influence future legislation, regulation and advice, including identify gaps in

landscape legislation, regulation and advice.

- Improve the understanding of landscape character and dynamics, and the monitoring of change and trends.
- Engage people through comprehensive and accessible awareness and understanding activities as well as through promotion, education and training.
- Share experience and best practice.

The production of a Landscape Strategy and Action Plan for the National Park will form a key contribution to implementation of the ELC in the Peak District.

Natural England is the Government's statutory adviser on landscapes. Natural England's developing policy on landscape is in preparation. The overarching policy states:

"Natural England believes that an understanding of landscape character, systems and dynamics is essential in resource management and planning and in visioning future landscapes. Landscape character and cultural history are key contributors to regional and local identity, influencing sense of place, shaping the settings for people's lives, whether at work or play and providing a critical stimulus to their engagement with the natural environment".

National Planning Policy encourages Local Authorities to adopt a character approach to development planning and control. **Planning Policy Statement (PPS7)** recommends the use of the Landscape Character approach to identify the unique characteristics of different areas, stating that the character approach "should help in accommodating necessary change without sacrificing local character".

The Rural White Paper (2000) reaffirmed the Government's support for the character approach to understand, evaluate and protect countryside diversity and character.

In taking action for **natural beauty**, the National Park Management Plan states that by 2011 the outcome will be "there is a key characterisation of the whole of the landscape and it is conserved and enhanced in accordance with that characterisation". The action linked to that outcome is to "complete landscape character assessment work that integrates landscape, geology, built environment, biodiversity and historic landscape characterisation, and ensure its use for engaging stakeholders in sustainable development".

A **key corporate outcome** for the National Park Authority is that "the landscapes of the National Park are valued for their beauty, character and natural resources and managed to adapt to the effects of climate change". A **key corporate action** linked to that outcome for 2007/08 was "ensuring landscapes are characterised, conserved and enhanced in accordance with their enduring and dynamic qualities".

The Landscape Strategy and Action Plan development will contribute substantially to Corporate Outcomes A1 (landscape characterisation and conservation), A2 (promoting landscape as an asset), B2 and 3 (mineral working impacts), C1 (transport infrastructure), E3 (Biodiversity Action Plan), F2 (Cultural Heritage Strategy targets), G1 (learning opportunities) and J3 (supporting land managers).

The Landscape Character Assessment will also provide a context for the National Park's Design Guide.

Landscape Character Assessment identifies what is characteristic and locally distinctive. It fits within work at a national level by Natural England on Joint Character Areas which make up a landscape character map of England. The boundary of the National Park provides the initial definition of the scope of the assessment. However, the three principal national Joint Character Areas (JCAs) covering the Peak District (White Peak, Dark Peak and South-West Peak) extend beyond the boundaries of the

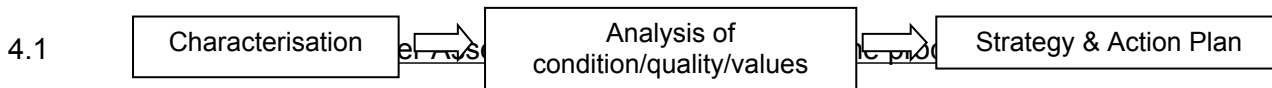
National Park and other JCAs have only a small part within the National Park. The assessment therefore extends slightly beyond the boundaries of the National Park and takes into account issues of setting and visual impact.

As a tool for developing the potential for better understanding of change in the countryside, the Countryside Quality Counts project which is sponsored by Natural England in partnership with Defra and English Heritage assesses how the countryside is changing, helps us to understand where change is occurring and whether change matters to people. This approach may be helpful as an indicator of landscape change used in conjunction with the baseline of the Landscape Character Assessment descriptions.

4. The Overall Process in summary

Characterise, map and describe areas - completed
Assess features, characteristics of importance – completed
Judge landscape condition and identify forces for change – analysis
Confirmation of forces for change and landscape guidelines - Strategy
Identify objectives for each landscape type– Strategy
Identify how to achieve objectives – Action Plan

Consultation and engagement was carried out as part of the characterisation of the landscape. The analysis will include member and community consultation on issues and options, there will be stakeholder and member consultation on the draft strategy, and approval of final strategy by members.



What is Landscape Character Assessment?

Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) tells you what makes a place distinctive. It is a tool for giving a locality its “sense of place”.

LCA provides a framework for describing an area systematically, ensuring that judgements can be made based on knowledge of what is distinctive so that changes can respect local character.

The LCA establishes a baseline audit of the current state of the landscape and develops a system for the measurement of change. The process of LCA maps and divides the landscape of the National Park into a series of distinctive Regional Character Areas and at a more detailed level into Landscape Character Types and assesses features and characteristics of importance for each. This work has been completed. The maps and accompanying descriptions provide a relatively value free summary of the current character of the landscape. They also play a role in appreciation and understanding of the landscape of the National Park.

The follow-on analysis assesses landscape condition and identifies key forces for change for each Regional Character Area and Landscape Character Type. These are the factors which have influenced landscape change in the past and those that are likely to do so in the future – the likely pressures and opportunities for landscape change such as recreational demands, changing agricultural practices and development pressures. The condition assessment and forces for change is still to be completed and will form the preliminary to the next stage of work, the development of the strategy and action plan. To date we have completed the assessment stage of the process and it has been important to get it right, building the right foundations for the work to come. The definition of character is the first phase of the provision of a framework for planning and policy development and to inform translating policy into practice.

4.2 What is it for - To guide and inform all aspects of management of the landscape.

Landscape character is a recognised component of sustainable development and has become a significant material consideration in policy formulation and development control decisions. The character approach also helps to prioritise land management and enhancement measures which can help the economy as well as sustaining the environment. The LCA will be used to:

- Inform the development and implementation of National Park Management Plan policies, conservation and grant aid schemes and land use planning policies
- Act as a tool for spatial planning use within the Park and the development and implementation of the Authority's Local Development Framework.
- Develop future strategies for conserving and/or enhancing the landscape, local distinctiveness and sense of place
- Provide a point of reference for landscape design and management issues
- Provide an assessment that can inform and respond to other landscape, cultural and historical strategies
- Informing and developing land-use policy such as development and targeting of agri-environment scheme measures
- Assessing the sensitivity and capacity of landscapes to accommodate new development
- Planning guidance in determining planning applications and development proposals
- Possible adoption as Supplementary Planning Document within the LDF
- Development of more detailed evidence base at a local level to inform area action plans/village design statements

The LCA also has the long-term potential to form the backbone of various other initiatives and assessments such as sensitivity and capacity studies, tranquillity and wilderness assessments and design policy.

Who is it for

- 4.3 The final report will be a vital tool for the Authority in its work and will be readily available to partners, stakeholders, communities and customers. It will provide essential information for everyone, to inform understanding of the challenges facing the Peak District and improve evidence-based decision making across the National Park.

Consultation

- 4.4 LCA ensures that stakeholders can make better judgements by knowing what is distinctive in the local landscape so that any change can respect local character, add to it or change it if that is desirable.

A wide range of partners and organisations were involved in an initial workshop and four community workshops were held at locations across the Peak District to engage the public in considering what they valued in their local landscape.

Stakeholders were notified that the landscape descriptions were out for consultation for a period of 6 weeks up to 21st January 2008 and 59 consultation responses were received. These will be shown as an appendix to the LCA reports.

A Steering Group consisting of officers, representatives of key partner organisations and professional experts, was set up to oversee the development of the LCA and will

continue to steer the analysis and the development of the Landscape Strategy and Action Plan. Engagement with stakeholders and local communities will help to define the vision and objectives of the Strategy and promote and raise awareness of the landscape of the National Park.

Methodology for the LCA

- 4.5 The overall approach has been to follow the joint guidance from the Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland (2002) produced by Scottish Natural Heritage and the Countryside Agency. The approach has been integrated, considering all aspects of landscape including geology, soils, landform, landuse, habitats, settlement pattern and character, tree cover, cultural heritage, communication networks, visual and perceptual aspects including tranquillity and wilderness.

The characterisation stages of the LCA have been undertaken – desk study, field survey, classification and description.

The desk study and field survey provided background information, summarising the physical, ecological and human forces that have shaped the landscape.

The desk study reviewed relevant source materials to develop areas of common character. This included identifying any existing and potential links between the Peak District LCA and other existing or planned strategies and ensuring interoperability.

Field survey tested and refined the desk study, gathered information about the visual aspects of the landscape and condition of landscape features.

The classification and description stage involved identification into appropriate landscape character types, mapping their extent and providing concise written descriptions of their character including key characteristic features of the landscape

Following the assessment, analysis of forces for change and recommendations for landscape guidelines will be carried out to inform the future development of the landscape strategy and action plan.

Landscape Strategy and Action Plan completed by 31 March 2009

- 4.6 The Landscape Strategy for the National Park will provide a framework to guide and inform landscape change. It will recognise the character of each landscape, the values placed on them and the activities likely to bring pressure on them. Actions to maintain, conserve or enhance the distinctive characteristics of the diverse Peak District landscapes will be identified

The process will analyse forces for change identified and the Strategy will make recommendations on how to respond to pressures for change. In addition it will identify opportunities for landscape enhancement and for the conservation of key elements of our existing landscape. It will set out the management strategies and guidelines for each of the landscape types (which may require further evidence base analysis). This will provide a framework to help guide and inform the management of the landscape so that key landscapes are conserved and enhanced and opportunities identified for creation of new landscapes. The outcome would be a stable, sustainable landscape where dynamics are understood and managed, considering issues such as biodiversity conservation, carbon management, flood risk mitigation and water quality improvement.

The Action Plan will specify measures to meet land management objectives, taking into account local perceptions from stakeholder workshops.

The output will be a Landscape Strategy and Action Plan with significant stakeholder engagement, to provide a vision for the National Park based on the landscape types identified in the LCA reports. This key document will influence and guide policy,

planning guidance and decisions, land management and agri-environment scheme targeting.

Key stages in preparation of the Landscape Strategy and Action Plan by 31.3.09

Initial analysis and more detailed evidence gathering	April – June 2008
Consultation on draft guidelines and forces for change for each Regional Character Area	July 2008
Draft broad Strategy and Action Plans for each character area	Autumn
Consultation on draft Strategy and Action Plan priorities for each character area	December 2008 – January 2009
Completion of final Strategy and Action Plans to members for approval	March 2009

APPENDIX

Resources

- 5 Resources were allocated to fund the LCA within the Service budget in 2007/08. An additional £20,000 has been set aside within the 2008/09 budget towards the development of a Landscape Strategy and Action Plan. This will fund that part of the work to be carried out by consultants, and the Head of Environment, Heritage & Recreation Strategy will be supported in the work by the Natural Environment Team and the involvement of other staff, to secure wide ownership.

Risk Management

- 6 Partner and community engagement through further consultations and workshops will ensure wide public consultation.
Financial resources have been allocated in the Authority's budget for 2008/09 for the consultants to continue their part of the work and staff time has been allocated as part of annual work programmes.
The work will be completed on time in order to influence future policies, plans and projects.

Human Rights, Equalities, Health & Safety

- 7 There are no implications arising out of the proposal.

Consultees

- 8 LCA Steering Group, Heads of Service

Enclosures

- 9 None.

List of Background Papers (not previously published)

- 10 None

Report Author

- 11 (Jane Chapman, Head of Environment, Heritage & Recreation Strategy)

Publication date

- 12 18 March 2008