

**AGENDA ITEM No. 8**

PEAK DISTRICT NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY MEETING

6 FEBRUARY 2009

CHIEF EXECUTIVE

PART A

**1. THE FUTURE OF SPITS (A8536/TN)**

**Proposal**

1. That the Authority withdraws from the South Pennines Integrated Transport Partnership (SPITS), from the end of this financial year, with consequential recommendations withdrawing the Authority's role as the accountable body and Project Officer host.

In addition the report proposes a new way of working, with a focus upon the emerging National Park Sustainable Transport Action Plan.

**2. RECOMMENDATION:**

**That**

1. **Members approve the Authority's withdrawal from the SPITS Partnership on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2009.**
2. **Members approve the Authority's withdrawal as the accountable body and project officer host for SPITS on 8<sup>th</sup> April 2009.**
3. **Members approve the transfer of any remaining funds from the SPITS partnership to the original funding partner or, should one be interested, another accountable body for the partnership.**
4. **Members approve the transfer of any remaining funds from the SPITS partnership due to the Authority, to the Peak Connections Partnership.**
5. **Members approve the same level of funding for the Sustainable Transport Action Plan in 2009/10 as Authority's contribution to the SPITS Partnership in 2008/9 (£5,400).**

**Policy/Legal Background**

3. The South Pennines Integrated Transport Strategy owes its origins to the Peak Park Transport Forum (PPTF), which was established in light of the transport issues contained within the Peak National Park Structure Plan (1994). SPITS was established to counter the issues arising from the combination of local, visitor and cross-Park traffic, and comprises a partnership based on the Authority and the Transport and Highway Authorities of the Peak District and surrounding area. The first SPITS Business Plan was established in 2000 and was based on five distinct elements to be achieved within the SPITS area<sup>1</sup>: -

<sup>1</sup> The SPITS area comprises a lozenge bounded by the M62 to the North, the M1 to the East, the A50 to the South and the A34 to the West.

- Traffic restraint measures on all trans-Pennine routes and class A and B roads, south of the M62 and north of the A50, except the A57/A628/616 corridor.
- Traffic restraint measures on the minor road network, to prevent diversion.
- Improved/reinstated rail routes.
- Improved/new bus/coach services.
- Improvements to the A57/628/616 core trunk route across the National Park

Following a review in 2005, the five elements of the Business Plan were extended to eight, with four additional elements and the combination of the two original traffic restraint elements. The new elements were: -

- Managing and influencing the implementation of fiscal demand measures.
- Creation of a network of 'safe roads' within the South Pennines area offering improved access for non-motorised users.
- The development of measures to influence travel behaviour in and around the South Pennines area.
- Improvements to local bus and rail services through improvements to marketing, ticketing, and the provision of information.

4. The Business Plan 2005-15 is based around the attendant benefits to SPITS partners resulting from the implementation in combination of the eight elements within the Plan. The delivery of these combined elements has proved problematic: -

- Little has been achieved with relation to traffic restraint measures.
- A Study into the potential reopening of the Matlock to Buxton railway found the proposal unfeasible in the short-term.
- There has been some success in the enhancement of the Trans-Peak Route, and the delivery of a Rural Transport Study.
- A Bypass for the villages of Mottram, Hollingworth and Tintwistle entered the Targeted Programme of Improvements in 2003. However, the proposed bypass with associated traffic restraint measures has since proved contentious, with no agreed joint position from the SPITS partnership on the scheme.
- A Transport Innovation Fund bid was made by Derbyshire County Council in 2005 to investigate options for an Environmental Levy within the Greater Peak District area. This bid was unsuccessful, and ultimately lacked buy-in from SPITS Authorities.
- SPITS has proved successful in the formulation of the Peak Connections Project to promote public transport in the area. However, this project is able to operate independently of the SPITS Partnership.
- There are other areas of work, where the elements of the SPITS Business Plan are being delivered, but this is largely due to influences outside of the SPITS partnership.

5. Following a joint report by the Authority and Derbyshire County Council in November 2006, the SPITS Officer Working Group (OWG) acknowledged that the SPITS partnership was not delivering as many benefits to partners as it had previously. It was recognised at the time, that this was evidenced by low officer attendance at the OWG meetings. Since that time, the OWG have attempted to carry out a 'health check' on the Business Plan and to reinvigorate the OWG meeting to improve partner attendance. It is fair to say that this exercise has not had as much of an impact as it was hoped in 2006, and unfortunately attendance at meetings and 'buy in' to the SPITS Business Plan from partners has continued to reduce. In part due to these reasons, but more importantly, due to the emerging National Park Sustainable Transport Action Plan, SPITS OWG representatives for the Authority (as the

accountable body for the Partnership) and Derbyshire County Council (as a key partner) took prepared a report to the SPITS OWG Meeting of 19<sup>th</sup> January 2009, recommending the termination of SPITS, (including the Business Plan), at the end of the 2008/09 financial year.

6. Owing to the financial and Human Resource implications of the proposal to dissolve SPITS, a Business Case Report was taken to Resources Management Team on 6<sup>th</sup> January 2009 detailing the proposal. This report had three options, the third of which was an alternative option proposed by the SPITS Project Officer: -
  - 1) Option 1 – Do nothing, this option effectively continued the SPITS Partnership until 31<sup>st</sup> March 2010.
  - 2) Option 2 – Preferred Option, this was the dissolution of the SPITS Partnership on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2009, alongside the disestablishment of the Project Officer Post.
  - 3) Option 3 – Proposed by the current SPITS Project Officer, this option was the continuation of the partnership, alongside the development and implementation of the Sustainable Transport Action Plan.

It was the decision of Resources Management Team that neither Option 1 nor Option 3 were feasible, and that approval should be given to Option 2. However, because of the strategic nature of the SPITS Partnership, and the regard with which it has been held in the past, it was decided that the decision to dissolve the partnership should be taken by the Authority.

7. A report was taken to the SPITS Officer Working Group on 19<sup>th</sup> January, with a joint resolution between the Authority and Derbyshire County Council to dissolve the SPITS partnership. Key partners were contacted in advance of the distribution of the report to ensure that all relevant officers within each partner organisation were able to consider the report, and seek advice with regard to their organisation's stance. The meeting was poorly attended, particularly as it was being held to determine the continuation (or not) of the partnership. Both the Highways Agency and Tameside Borough Council were particularly supportive of the continuation of the partnership, albeit focused upon more strategic matters. The question of the legality of dissolving the Partnership and Business Plan without the approval of the Park Area Transport Forum (PATF) was also raised. A majority decision was taken to continue the partnership for another year, provided that sufficient funds were available, and it was resolved to contact partners to ascertain levels of support for continuing the Partnership for a further year.
8. This majority decision to continue the SPITS partnership has led to the current proposal, for the Authority to withdraw from the partnership (and its Business Plan) at the end of the 2008/09 Financial Year. This proposal was ratified by the Resources Management Team at their Meeting on 20<sup>th</sup> January. In the event of the Authority's withdrawal from the Partnership, others may wish to continue the partnership in the Authority's absence, either with or without the current SPITS Project Officer post. This leaves three possible options for the Authority: -
  1. Continue the Partnership for a further twelve months, whilst continuing to act as the accountable body. This option might impact upon the availability of resources to implement the National Park Sustainable Transport Action Plan.
  2. Continue the Partnership, but relinquish the role of accountable body, including the management of the Project Officer. This option would maintain dialogue with SPITS Partners, but might impact upon the availability of resources to implement the National Park Sustainable Transport Action Plan.

3. Withdraw from the Partnership. This option is the preferred option, freeing up resources to implement the National Park Sustainable Transport Action Plan, however it may lead to a lack of buy-in from partners.
9. It is anticipated, that with the concentration of the Authority's resources away from SPITS, that there is an opportunity to refocus all SPITS partners on the emerging National Park Sustainable Transport Action Plan. As Members will be aware, this Action Plan adds detail and more specific actions to the 'Traffic, Travel and Accessibility' Outcome of the National Park Management Plan 2006-11. As the Plan is for the National Park and we need partners support with it from the outset, a stakeholder workshop on will be held on 29<sup>th</sup> January 2009, to which many existing SPITS representatives are invited, in order to help shape the Plan. Feedback from partners at this event, and from Members at the subsequent Member workshop, will be taken into account as the Plan is finalised, with a view to seeking approval for the final plan from Authority in May 2009.
10. Therefore, from May 2009 onwards, the Plan will begin to be implemented, so we have an opportunity to refocus the SPITS OWG partners around the Plan. This is firstly, to assist in implementing relevant parts of the Plan, but as importantly to continue cross boundary dialogue at officer level. It is proposed that the Authority's Transport Policy Team services this group, rather than a specific 'Action Plan' officer. It is also proposed that the £5,400 which would have constituted the National Park Authority's contribution to the SPITS Partnership for 2009/10 be redirected towards the implementation of the Sustainable Transport Action Plan.

### **Key Issues**

#### 11. Human Resource Implications

The Authority's withdrawal from the SPITS Partnership has clear implications for the current SPITS Project Officer, of which they are aware. The postholder is currently on a fixed-term contract, which ends on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2009. Therefore, if the partnership is dissolved, following the Authority's withdrawal, the Officer will be given two months contractual notice and will be eligible for a redundancy payment when their fixed term contract ends. During the two month notice period, the postholder will be eligible for redeployment within the Authority and has been offered outplacement support. Should the Partnership continue with another employer becoming the accountable body, they will need to establish if they need a post or not before the contract ends. If they do, there may be opportunities for the current postholder to be transferred under the Transfer of Undertakings Protection of Employment (TUPE) regulations.

#### 12. Financial Implications

There are no costs to the Authority associated with withdrawing from the SPITS Partnership. If this leads to the dissolution of the Partnership, then it is anticipated that any associated costs will be met by the partnership budget. Should the Partnership cease to exist at the end of this financial year, it is estimated that there will be £30,000 remaining in the budget, which is sufficient to honour all existing commitments and redundancy pay.

Following the Authority's withdrawal from SPITS at the end of the financial year, should the Partnership continue, then an approach will be made to recover the Authority's proportion of any carry-over of funds into the next financial year. It is proposed that these be transferred to the Peak Connections Partnership.

If the Partnership should cease to exist, as a result of the Authority's withdrawal, then any remaining funds, following the completion of the partnership's commitments will be

transferred back to partners in proportion to their contribution to the SPITS partnership.

Recommendation 5 does however have financial implications for the Authority, in that it is proposed that the £5,400 funding which would have constituted the Authority's contribution to the SPITS partnership for 2009/10, instead be used to implement the National Park Sustainable Transport Action Plan. This would directly assist in meeting Corporate Outcome C: Adverse environmental impacts of traffic on the special qualities of the National Park are minimised and in delivering the National Park Management Plan Outcome 5: Traffic, Travel and Accessibility.

13. Peak Area Transport Forum (formerly known as Peak Park Transport Forum)

The implications of this report are for the SPITS Officer Working Group and Business Plan only. Now the Peak Area Transport Forum has a clear remit (with approved Terms of Reference) which is wider than the SPITS partnership, it is felt, that it is a very useful influencing body and sharing of information forum. The Forum will remain a powerful voice alongside other bodies such as the City Regions in communicating with Government over strategic objectives. The Forum is now serviced by the Authority and Derbyshire County Council, so the implications of the Authority's withdrawal from the SPITS Partnership should have no impact on the Forum.

14. Peak Connections

Although Peak Connections was developed as a concept by the SPITS Partnership, it has its own Action Plan, Officer and budget. Therefore, as with the Peak Area Transport Forum, the implications of this report do not directly affect that project. Indirectly, the project will be affected, as since the Authority took on responsibility for the project SPITS has made a significant financial contribution to the project. It is intended to transfer any carry-over funds for which the Authority may be eligible, to the Peak Connections Project. This will leave sufficient funds for the Peak Connections Project to continue for the next financial year. However there will be a requirement to identify additional sources of funding to ensure the valuable work of the project can continue beyond 2009/10.

15. Feedback from SPITS Partners and Project Officer

Derbyshire County Council

Derbyshire County Council accepts that there are now other ways in which the elements of the SPITS Business Plan might more effectively be handled. Should a core of the current SPITS Partners wish to continue the Partnership, the County Council would then need to take a decision as to their future involvement.

Staffordshire County Council

Staffordshire County Council has confirmed that it supports the dissolution of the SPITS partnership at the end of this financial year and that it would not provide any financial assistance to the partnership if it were to continue into the 2009/10 financial year.

Highways Agency

The Highways Agency has stated that it is prepared to continue to support and fund the SPITS Partnership during the next financial year, and has pledged to provide funding of up to £5,000.

SPITS Project Officer

It is the SPITS Project Officer's view that continuance of the partnership would, rather than take resources out a revised plan, enable the continuance of resources from partners to be maintained to develop the aspirations of the PDNPA and other SPITS partners further, including towards the Sustainable Transport Action Plan. If SPITS continues, its Partners could engage around the aspirations of Sustainable Transport Action Plan and a structure would be already be in place to engage with partners for delivery.

## **APPENDIX**

### **Risk Management**

1. The main risk associated with this proposal is the loss of stakeholder involvement in delivering the outcomes of the Sustainable Transport Action Plan. It is anticipated that this will be mitigated through the engagement with stakeholders both prior to and post the Stakeholder Workshop in January 2009. Officers of the Authority are keen to continue dialogue with the current SPITS Partners, in order to shape and deliver the outcomes of the Sustainable Transport Action Plan. The continuance of the Peak Area Transport Forum should allow dialogue between partners to continue, along with the exchange of Best Practice.

The Peak Connections Project is also deemed to be at risk; however the measures outlined within this report should help to mitigate this risk, and lengthen the life and usefulness of this valuable partnership.

### **Human Rights, Equalities, Health & Safety**

2. With regard to the Human Resource Implications of this proposal, all appropriate measures have been undertaken to ensure all actions are in accordance with Authority policies.

There are no other significant aspects that relate to this report.

### **Consultees**

3. Acting Head of Policy, Head of Human Resources and Performance, Chief Executive, SPITS Project Officer.

### **Enclosures**

4. None

### **List of Background Papers** (not previously published)

5. None

### **Report Author**

6. Tim Nicholson, Acting Transport Policy Manager

### **Publication date**

7. 29 January 2009