



Stanage Forum Steering Group

13 February 2020

Emma Stone

Head of Visitor Experience Development
Peak District National Park
Aldern House
Bakewell

Cc

Andrew McCloy
Zahid Hamid
Sarah Fowler
Adrian Barraclough

Dear Emma

Response to the Options Appraisal consultation

The Stanage Forum Steering Group appreciates the purpose of the review and the thinking behind it. We also appreciate and welcome the efforts to consult with us and with other stakeholders. Our response is a reflection of the passion and care that the members of the Steering Group, and the Stanage Forum, have for the Estate and our concern for its future given government spending cuts and ongoing investment challenges.

We see the Estate as the jewel in the Authority's crown. The review should be an opportunity to demonstrate how we in the Peak District can work in partnership to deliver on the purposes of the National Park in the context of complex agricultural, ecological, recreational and economic pressures.

At the outset of the process we developed a set of principles for the review, which were intended to guide thinking on options, and to identify opportunities for delivery in partnership with the local community, user groups and the wider population who love and care for the Estate. These are attached.

Our intention is to give constructive feedback and make clear our views on how we believe Stanage-North Lees needs to be managed to deliver our vision. However, our feedback must be seen in the context of the fact that we have not seen the consultants' report, we have only seen a small number of options 'packages' that have been distilled from it.

1. The future for these assets cannot be viewed in isolation

It is our strong belief that an appraisal that looks at any part (or parts) of the Estate in isolation from the rest is a mistake.

Even if management of individual parts is separate, they must be managed within a vision and a plan for the character and future of the Estate as a whole. The issues and solutions for the future of any individual asset or part of the Estate must be estate-wide and indeed landscape-wide, and should include consideration of the overall investment plans for the farm, the Edge, the woodlands and the moorland landscape.

The existing vision and management plan for the Estate was developed through a detailed consultation process, involving all relevant partners and stakeholders in the Estate [www.peakdistrict.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/508352/Vision.pdf]. Any appraisal of the future of all or some of the assets on the Estate must sit within this vision; it is not clear from the information we have from the Authority that this has been the case.

By not considering the Estate as a whole, the appraisal does not, for example, consider the impact on the character of the Estate if the Hall, cottage, and cruck barn are all let at the same time, and the campsite is full. This will have a significant impact on parking and road access, and will fundamentally change the character of this part of the estate.

We recognise the desire within the Authority for the North Lees Estate to be a net 'no cost' asset, and to 'wash its own face' in terms of management costs. However, we question whether this is possible for a national asset such as this, and we urge the authority to consider the wider importance of the Estate beyond its position as an expensive 'asset' on the Authority's books.

Finally, we reiterate our position that the estate must not be broken up and effectively sold off 'piecemeal' to meet short term financial objectives. This principle of an holistic approach to the estate has previously been set out clearly to the Authority when we presented our position to the ARP committee in support of the management plan some years ago.

An option that has not been included is for one tenant to manage the whole estate, in the style of Eastern Moors or the Roaches. In our view, if the Authority is not able to provide the necessary investment to maintain and enhance the special character of the Estate, this option should be considered.

2. We have concerns about the way the appraisal was carried out.

Despite the approach set out in our Suggested Principles for the Review, the options presented do not take account of the wider funding opportunities associated with managing a public & community asset of national importance, for example funds available for restoration of the cruck barn as an educational or community asset.

The appraisal did not consider the wider landscape and public value of the buildings themselves or the estate as a whole.

The consultants did not meet the Steering Group or any members of the Stanage Forum in order to gather our views on possible opportunities for funding, building use or wider stakeholder input to management.

In summary while they clearly have expertise in aspects of asset management, we believe that the consultants did not bring the right expertise into their appraisal team to be able to identify & assess the true value of these assets and the full range of opportunities for their future management.

3. We have concerns about the way the online consultation was carried out.

Members of the Steering Group were approached by local residents, climbers, walkers & others all with very similar concerns. The presentation of only three options, without background information on the report and the way the options were put together, and the short deadline, led to local feeling that Option 1 is a foregone conclusion and could lead to breaking up of the Estate, or a change in the character of the Estate which locals would oppose. It's also stoked a local fear that the financial options are so limited that the Estate will be sold.

We therefore support the holding of a public meeting in Hathersage to allow local residents and the Parish Council to give their views and ask questions. We also requested that PDNPA extends the online consultation deadline to allow more people to respond and to allow those who are responding a reasonable amount of time to consider their responses. We welcome that fact that this was done.

4. Our Comments on Specific Assets included in the Review

In the workshop on 4 December 2019, members of the Steering Group were able to comment on the three options for the group of assets covered by the appraisal, as described in the consultation. The notes taken by the facilitators of the meeting reflect views given on these options during the workshop.

Although the notes suggested that the preference of the Forum was for Option 1, in reality **none of the options reflected our views**. We were agreed that Option 3 was not acceptable, as continued lack of investment in the Estate and its assets will lead to its continued deterioration.

We have summarised below our views on the best options for each individual asset, as discussed at the workshop and in our subsequent Steering Group meeting.

We encourage you to listen to the views and input of the Stanage North Lees Heritage Action Group on the options and funding opportunities for the future of the Hall and Cruck Barn in particular.

Cattiside Cottage

We recognise that Cattiside Cottage requires significant investment in order to be used as residential or holiday accommodation, and that this likely precludes some options. The future of the cottage should be determined according to who is best placed to access the initial and ongoing investment required to improve and maintain the asset sensitively and effectively, within the overall vision for the Estate. The Forum may be open to change in ownership of the cottage if required to deliver the best solution for the building and the Estate.

Cruck Barn

We do not believe that all usage, funding and investment options for the Barn have been considered. There is currently no sheltered area for educational or recreational groups – or Ranger Guided Walks – to meet on the Estate. The Barn has already provided an excellent venue for demonstrations and exhibitions for Heritage Open Day. The Ranger Briefing Centre is too small and too poorly equipped to be appropriate for this, although it could provide a useful 'outpost', e.g. for displays of information on the ring ouzel project.

We believe all options for the restoration and community use of the Cruck Barn should be explored, and we will oppose conversion to holiday accommodation. The neighbouring Threshing Barn is a separate consideration and there could be opportunities there for accessible accommodation.

Campsite

First, we want to congratulate Mark & the team for all their work in improving the campsite and increasing income.

Our view is that the campsite should remain an integral part of the Estate, but we would not oppose management being contracted to an organisation with specific expertise & management systems for running a small, wilderness campsite. This could be the tenant farmer, the Hall tenant, or another organisation with similar local facilities. A benefit of this would be to remove management costs from the Authority and free up the Warden role to focus full time on the Estate. It would be important to get the contract right to ensure the character of the campsite with the Estate was maintained.

Increased provision is also needed for camper vans, either within or associated with the campsite, in order to address a growing issue of layby camping on and around the Estate.

North Lees Hall

We support letting of the Hall as holiday accommodation, with the requirement that it is to be available for public use on Heritage Open Days, Open Farm Sunday and other public engagement activities. This option would allow it to be opened up to the largest number of people. Any refurbishment must be done in a way that is sympathetic to the architectural and cultural heritage of the building and Estate, and with a mind to the public interest in the building as well as holiday let accommodation.

In our view the let would be better managed by a local person or organisation. Security and local resident concerns mean we believe it should be actively managed and not managed at arm's length through a portal such as AirBnb

Note that in our view public access to the Hall only works well if there is also access to the Cruck Barn as an interpretation, meeting and event centre.

Parking and car park charges

Parking cannot be seen simply as a revenue generation opportunity, and cannot be seen in isolation from the impact of cars and irresponsible parking on the landscape and its users. It should be part of a wider sustainable transport plan for the Sheffield Moors area.

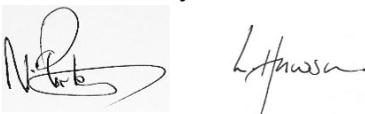
Any proposal to extend the coverage of parking charges will need to take account of existing bye laws, and the lack of means to prevent verge side parking which has a detrimental effect on the roadside vegetation and emergency vehicle access on busy weekends.

In particular, it should be considered that the current approach to providing free parking at Hooks Carr was designed to reduce the damage caused to the wet sitch in previous years by people walking across it having parked on the verge. Any action that leads to more parking on the verge below Hooks Carr is likely to lead to damage to the SSSI re-occurring.

The Authority must therefore be clear whether its priority for car parking provision is revenue generation, or landscape protection & sustainable access. In our view, it must be the latter. We also believe that the 'Ours to Care For' sticker campaign, which enabled people to donate directly to the upkeep of the Estate in return for free parking and discounts at the campsite & some local businesses, should be revisited and revitalised.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss this feedback with you, we look forward to continuing to work with you to secure the future of the Estate.

Yours sincerely

The image shows two handwritten signatures in black ink. The signature on the left is 'Neil Porter' and the signature on the right is 'Louise Hawson'. Both signatures are written in a cursive, flowing style.

Neil Porter (Chair) & Louise Hawson (Secretary)
On behalf of the Stanage Forum Steering Group