

Minutes of Local Plan Review Member Steering Group 16th May 2022

10am at Aldern House

1. Roll Call

Officers	Members
Joanne Cooper (Planning Liaison Officer)	Chris Furness
Adele Metcalfe (Policy and Communities Team Manager)	Annabel Harling
Brian Taylor (Head of Planning)	Robert Helliwell
Sarah Welsh (Policy Planner)	Andrew McCloy
	Ken Smith

Apologies

Yvonne Witter, Janet Haddock Fraser

2. Introduction and Presentation

The minutes of the previous meeting which took place on 25th April 2022 were confirmed as a correct record.

The aims of the session were outlined as follows:

- To inform Members about the process for undertaking Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), Sustainability Appraisal (SA) and Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) of the new local plan, and to advise of the steering group's role in decision making.
- To inform Members about current planning policy for Landscape, Biodiversity and Nature Recovery, and to highlight issues relating to the performance of policy and new challenges.
- For Members to debate these issues around a series of key questions
- For Members to give Officers a clear steer on the key questions, either at the meeting, or subsequently, by email.

3. SEA, SA and HRA

The Policy Planner delivered a presentation outlining the following:

- The SA process, which ensures the principles of sustainable development are enshrined in the strategic approach and policy formation of the Local Plan Review, looking in particular at the planning, and social wellbeing aspects of the Plan
- That this can incorporate the SEA which focuses on the environmental aspects of the Plan.

It was also confirmed that the HRA is essential part of the process as it is necessary to demonstrate that the Local Plan Review will not adversely impact European sites, e.g. by causing pollution.

A discussion of the points raised in the presentation followed.

Officers and Members agreed that any changes necessitated by the transfer from previous European legislation were not yet fully clear, and that the process might have to adapt to reflect any such changes. It will be necessary to have the SEA/ SA framework in place at the Issues and Options stage of the Plan review.

It was noted that there had been recent applications which had been to planning committee as exceptions to policy, which had required HRA's.

Officers confirmed that the process would tie in with the Management Plan Review as baseline data and objectives would be shared. All efforts will be made to ensure that the two processes are coordinated.

Officers advised that the processes set out above are particularly useful at the stage of choosing a preferred option, as they enable the identification and mitigation of any negative effects. This helps in writing policies. They can also provide justification for the direction of travel of said policies. Each option in the Issues and Options will be tested against the identified criteria. The framework developed will be have to be signed off by Natural England, who are a statutory consultee.

4. Landscape, Biodiversity and Nature Recovery

The Policy and Communities Manager introduced a presentation which outlined the current Local Plan objectives on this topic. These are as follows:

- Protection of the Natural Zone,
- Managing development through close consideration of landscape character
- Reducing the amount of road signage in open landscapes.

The key policies in this area were identified, being GSP1, GSP2, DS1, L1, L2, DMC2 and DMC11. The new requirement for mandatory biodiversity net gain was also set out.

Officers advised that the objective around road signage was unusually specific as it was a reflection of a particular issue that was felt to be a priority at the time of writing the current Local Plan.

Members reminded Officers to keep an eye on whether the government makes any changes to National Park purposes in the light of the Landscape Review.

Officers advised that evidence (including 'heat mapping' of permissions) shows that the spatial strategy had been effective in protecting the Natural Zone and that research on applications for agricultural buildings suggested that there had been only a few cases which had raised significant policy issues.

A discussion took place regarding the issue of the conversion of field barns and the approvals of applications contrary to policy at recent planning committees. It was suggested that it is necessary to have evidence of the cumulative impact of these conversions on the landscape, in order to make balanced decisions. Currently anecdotal and subjective evidence was being cited. There was a growing concern that such conversions will erode the differences between the different landscape character areas.

The tension between policy DS1C which allows conversion of traditional buildings and policy L1 which states that development must conserve and enhance landscape, was highlighted. It was suggested that field barns potentially becoming “future archaeology” could be specifically stated in policy. However this terminology could be misleading because traditional farm buildings, i.e. barns, are recognised as designated and non-designated heritage assets – they are archaeology – already. Furthermore the buildings don’t exist in isolation, they are part of the wider historic landscape(s) of the National Park and every impact on these buildings has an impact on the wider landscape; this can be to the longer-term, incremental negative impact on landscape character (what so many people see as scenery) which is what supports important economic contributors such as the tourist industry.

Members were keen to ensure that the National Park benefits from off-site biodiversity gain from its urban neighbours, and from larger developments within the Park. It was agreed that it would be necessary to ear mark land for this pre-emptively. Officers underlined, and members agreed, that biodiversity net gain should never be seen as a justification for development in and of itself.

Members suggested that a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) on biodiversity net gain could be useful.

5. Key Questions

A discussion took place around key themes and questions which had been circulated prior to the meeting.

The key questions were:

- a. Do we need to be clearer (either by developing criteria, by defining areas on a plan, or by a combination of both) about those areas where change of use of buildings is acceptable and where it is less acceptable?
- b. Do you think net gain will make a significant positive difference to the recovery of nature in the Peak District? Discuss

Discussion

- a. **Do we need to be clearer (either by developing criteria, by defining areas on a plan, or by a combination of both) about those areas where change of use of buildings is acceptable and where it is less acceptable?**

Members and Officers discussed whether the landscape policies should be at the beginning of the plan, embedded in the spatial strategy and/or whether elements should be repeated throughout the policy document in order to act as a reminder. It was felt that the second option could help reduce the likelihood of policies being misunderstood or selectively interpreted and would be a reminder of when the circumstances apply.

Members felt that conflict between some policies was inevitable particularly when the issue is development versus landscape impact, and these conflicts have to be balanced when making decisions. It was suggested that regarding barn conversions, adding “unless it is in conflict with landscape policies” to the policy, could be a useful clarification. This was another area where it was suggested that an SPD could be helpful.

The Head of Planning advised that with regard to barn conversions that he was concerned that the Authority is currently approaching the matter on a case by case basis, rather than having a strategic policy approach. Further clarification of the circumstances in which barn conversions would be more likely to be acceptable, e.g. if they are located at the roadside, could be useful. Officers suggested this could form the contents of the SPD.

Members drew attention to what was felt to be a common perception among local residents that the Authority allows conversions for holiday accommodation but not for housing for local people. Possibly there should be more flexibility in future policy if the change of use will not cause harm. DMR3 already enables occupancy restrictions to be lifted in some circumstances.

A discussion followed as to whether the Authority could claw back some of the increased property value brought about by conversions, by requiring a contribution to local affordable housing provision, or to stabilise other barns in the landscape without converting them to residential use.

Members also reiterated their desire for the “in or on the edge of settlements” DS1D policy terminology to be reflected upon and defined more clearly. Officers confirmed that different suggested methods will be presented at the Issues and Options stage. Members asked whether any such settlements would have to have a Neighbourhood Plan. The Policy and Communities Manager confirmed that Parishes would be asked whether they were interested in pursuing a Neighbourhood Plan in the upcoming Parishes Survey

Member Steer

It was agreed that the Authority, in effect, lacks a policy on barn conversions. The current approach (permissive in principle but relying on the landscape strategy to indicate where there would be landscape harm) was insufficient. New policy could be supplemented by an SPD.

b. Do you think net gain will make a significant positive difference to the recovery of nature in the Peak District? Discuss

Discussion

Members agreed that the effect should be positive, and this change has the potential to provide exciting opportunities for all National Parks.

Officers suggested that policy on this should feed into the delivery targets in the Corporate Plan and that any offsite contributions should be geared towards the Local Nature Recovery Plan (which is set by constituent authorities). The importance of working in coordination with internal colleagues and external partners was emphasised as it was felt that this would help to get the biggest benefit from scarce resources.

An SPD could help to steer decision making in this area and this should be considered when details of the Nature Recovery Plan are known. The SPD could make suggestions as to the most easy and effective ways applicants can incorporate biodiversity net gain e.g. ponds, bat boxes, swift boxes. The Authority could take a similar approach to that taken with policy CC1 which requires specific measures to address climate change, so rather than just avoiding harm, a positive contribution could be required. Statutory net gain would not apply to householder developments but this could be influenced by policy. The Lake District National Park already has an SPD which Officers will study.

Parishes will be asked whether they have any land which they think could contribute to biodiversity net gain, in the Parishes Survey.

6. Next Steps

- The Parishes Survey will go out at the end of May.
- An IT platform is being purchased to help to facilitate the local plan review and make it easier for the public to engage in the process
- Staff in the policy team were having to assist with some of the work of other teams which may have an impact on the Local Plan Review Timetable.

The meeting ended at 12.40

7. Date of next meeting

The next meeting of the steering group will be on Monday 20th June 2022 at 10am, and will focus on Recreation.