

8. THRIVING COMMUNITIES THEME UPDATE

1. Purpose of the report

To inform Members about the Authority's progress since July 2023 with respect to the Aims and Objectives of the National Park Management Plan in relation to Thriving Communities, and what this means for the future.

Key Issues

- The need to ensure sufficient resources to complete our Local Plan review and wider community work;
- The need to consider removal of permitted development rights to control changes to short term holiday lets;
- Prioritising our efforts with respect to sustainable travel

2. Recommendations(s)

- 1. To note progress in delivering to the Peak District National Park Management Plan 2023-28 and Authority Plan Thriving Communities aim.**

How does this contribute to our policies and legal obligations?

3. In pursuing the statutory purposes defined for National Parks in the Environment Act 1995, National Park Authorities have a related duty to seek to foster the social and economic well-being of local communities in the area.
4. The key tool available to the Authority is the adoption of core policies in its Local Plan which can drive appropriate and sometimes exceptional routes for development based on the local needs and circumstances of the area (accessibility, affordability of housing stock, availability of local employment, and aging demographic profile).
5. Beyond its planning function the Authority must work closely with partner organisations through the National Park Management Plan to bring about a more sustainable living and working environment for local people and businesses.

Background Information

6. Members agreed at the 22 July 2022 Authority meeting to align the programmes for Programmes and Resources to the National Park Management Plan 2023-28 aims (minute reference 65/22). The NPMP objectives relevant to this Aim are as follows:
7. **OBJECTIVE 10: TO SUPPORT SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES BY IMPROVING OPPORTUNITIES FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND CONNECTION TO SERVICES;**
8. **OBJECTIVE 11: TO PROMOTE A FLOURISHING ECONOMY IN ACCORD WITH NATURE RECOVERY AND CLIMATE CHANGE MITIGATION**

Proposals

9. The summary below updates Members on the activities we have focussed our resources on since July 2023 and look to continue and develop.

10. **Supporting Sustainable Communities by Improving Opportunities for Affordable Housing and Connection to Services**

11. **Improvements to the Planning Service**

Great progress has been made in recruitment to the Authority's statutory planning function and which has directly led to improvements in performance on the Development Management function. Regular performance reports will be taken to the Authority's Planning Committee to discuss the progress and any further issues arising in terms of the impact of this core service to our communities. Beyond normal planning performance in March 2024 the Planning Service resumed its pre-application advice service. This came on the back of a successful Forum with over 20 local agents where we discussed bringing back the pre-app service, improving our communications, and getting involved in future design review. These additional actions add real value to the way we engage with communities and local businesses

12. **Sustainable Travel**

13. Our Sustainable Travel Officer started work in November and has begun to develop the evidence base (e.g. visitor data) and meet with partners. Key decisions will need to be taken on the priorities for the work as we move forward. We aim to reconvene the bodies who previously attended our Transport Symposium and will discuss the potential for enhanced public transport, EV charging infrastructure as what we can do to support our thinking on recreation hubs and gateways.

14. In March the Authority received £100k additional funding from Active travel England (within the remit of DfT) to support the development of a Peak District National Park Cycling and Walking Investment Plan. This will involve:

- high-level network planning and priorities to build on the Authority's previous Wider Peak District Cycle Strategy;
- data and evidence collection to predict future use and provide opportunities to encourage modal shift; and
- auditing and development of high-quality walking, wheeling, and cycling infrastructure.

15. Our work in conjunction with Active Travel England and the other 9 English National Parks is important to identify what is needed in rural areas. It will also help us to be involved in future funding opportunities for infrastructure development.

16. **Fibre Broadband Roll Out**

17. Project Gigabit is the government's flagship £5 billion programme to enable hard-to-reach communities to access lightning-fast gigabit-capable broadband. In February, Building Digital UK (BDUK) signed a contract with "**Full Fibre**" who have successfully won the contract for the Peak District area. This contract covers some sections of the Peak District to receive Gigabit capable infrastructure. The main areas are Derbyshire Dales and High Peak but it also does have some build in other areas of the Peak District. Full Fibre have 6 months of surveying and planning what is currently contracted and this will go on until September 2024. They will be working closely with Derbyshire County Council to deliver the roll out alongside the Digital Derbyshire initiative. The rural gigabit voucher scheme is also set to re-open at some point over summer alongside the County's own "top up" scheme. This allows small communities and properties to extend lines to more remote locations enhancing the reach of broadband..

18. **Local Plan Review**

19. Our Policy and Communities Team have also made great progress in clarifying current issues for planning policy and developing a range of options to revise, and update our approach. This project will progress several of the objectives and headline delivery areas for the National Park Management Plan. This will ensure the long-term protection for the National Park's special qualities is balanced with appropriate and sustainable development in the right places whilst driving enhancements to our built and natural environment and going further to encourage nature recovery and carbon reductions. Officers aim to bring our draft consultation document into Issues and Options to the full Authority in July ready for consultation in the Autumn. Specific issues include responding to population decline, second homes and giving more certainty to affordable housing delivery.

20. This work is crucial in order to understand the kind of homes and businesses needed, where they may be built and what design requirements are needed to drive enhancements to our special environment while considering the ability to deliver through our partners and by individuals and local businesses.

21. **Influencing Affordable Housing Delivery**

22. Since July 2023 great progress has been made in bringing together the National Park Authority with Derbyshire Dales District Council with a joint commitment to understand and address the issues around affordable housing for local communities. A joint workshop was held at the National Park office in September 2023. From this came a commitment to establish a **joint working group** of members and officers to maintain dialogue on this important issue. The first meeting of this group took place in April 2024.

23. Moreover, a joint letter was sent to **Homes England** seeking understanding of the challenges faced in the Peak District regarding affordable housing delivery. Out of this a further meeting was held at the offices of Derbyshire Dales District Council in Matlock in March 2024 with key officials from Homes England. This highlighted the need for a higher unit rate of subsidy support in order to deliver high quality units in the National Park. This received a positive response from Homes England and has triggered work on understanding the anticipated pipeline of developments. This alignment of work and the shared understanding and vision for delivery is hoped to form a key element of the joint working group moving forward.

24. There is also a stronger commitment by the District Council to preparing a Housing Strategy which will form a key piece of evidence in reviewing our own planning policies.

25. **Second Homes**

26. At the national level the family of National Parks have been calling for changes to the use class system in order to influence the change of use of residential properties to short term holiday lets. This is now due to take place in summer 2024, but will come with an automatic permitted development allowance, unless an article 4 direction is applied to reinstate local planning controls. This may be an action the Authority will need to pursue in particular hot spots where evidence is compelling that the proportion of second homes is undermining local community sustainability.

27. **Community Grants and Neighbourhood Planning**

28. The current focus on the Local Plan Review has impacted upon our capacity to undertake other forms of community development work (surveys, training, village/neighbourhood planning and grants). Despite this the team has supported several local projects with our

community small grants. Engagement with the following projects is currently taking place with:

- Bakewell International day of Dance
 - Butterton Drystone Walling
 - Litton Tree Survey
 - Cressbrook Memorial Plot restoration
 - Grindleford Hot Water Boiler replacement
 - Hartington History Book
 - Youlgrave Car Park planting
29. Two **neighbourhood plans** have also been assisted to adoption These were cross boundary plans at Whaley Bridge and Brampton.
30. Officers facilitated the latest **Annual Parishes Day** in October 2023 and discussions are ongoing regarding the potential for **Planning Training** for Parish Councils. This will be subject to officer capacity but could offer real benefits for raising awareness of core processes and policies and improve communications and relationships.
31. **Promoting a Flourishing Economy in Accord with Nature Recovery and Climate Change Mitigation**
32. **UK Shared Prosperity Fund**
33. Great work is continuing by our District Council partners through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. A pipeline of community and business grants are being awarded and many of these are within the National Park as well as nearby towns and business areas on the fringes which also supports the access to local jobs and services. The UKSPF is supporting many existing business to purchase new equipment and move to cleaner technologies which is reducing costs and allowing greater business efficiency which can allow expansion and more jobs. Great examples of projects directly benefitting businesses in the National Park and driving the NPMP objectives include:
- Solar technology at a campsite business in Monyash;
 - The refurbishment of the Ashford Arms pub
 - Solar panels at a Welding firm based at Calver Crossroads
 - New specialist bikes for a bike hire company in Hope
 - More efficient pizza ovens at a business in Bamford
 - Improved web booking systems for a company in Edale
 - Infrared calibration equipment for a manufacturing firm at Stretfield Mill, Bradwell
 - Restorative works to the community reading room in Peak Forest
 - Support to a new tourism laundry service in Grangemill.

Are there any corporate implications members should be concerned about?

Financial:

34. Resource capacity in our Policy and Communities team is an emerging concern. We are set to lose our Community Policy Planner at a key stage in the Local Plan review process and will struggle to maintain our capacity on wider community development support. We are currently exploring consultant resources as well as recruitment into this post.

Risk Management:

35. Risks facing our Planning Service have reduced as capacity has increased. The Local Plan is well placed to progress and strong partner arrangements are in place to further several of our NPMP objectives. A potential gap in resources within our Policy Team, alongside changes to Local Plan regulations could impact on the overall timetable for our review. This needs to be monitored closely with the Member Local Plan Steering Group.

Sustainability:

36. The enhanced partnership approaches, strengthened resources to Development Management and policy review are all positive steps in moving to a more sustainable approach to Thriving Communities. Concern remains over the ability to influence sustainable travel and the impact this has on access to jobs and services, but we hope to make positive steps through our new Sustainable Travel officer.

Equality:

37. All our initiatives in the NPMP aim to bring about more opportunity for housing and access to leisure, jobs and services. The Local Plan will be assessed for sustainability and equality as part of the review process.

Climate Change

38. Several objectives under this Aim contribute to climate change mitigation. Local Plan policies will drive much of this. The SPF programme is actively encouraging greener business by grant aiding renewables efficient machinery. The sustainable travel initiatives aim to encourage active travel and modal shifts in order to reduce the impact of private car use and by enabling further electrification of the transport infrastructure.

39. **Background papers (not previously published)**

None

Report Author, Job Title and Publication Date

Brian Taylor, Head of Planning, 18th April 2024