

REPORT 2: ADOPTION OF NORTHUMBERLAND NATIONAL PARK LOCAL PLAN

1. Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to advise members of the receipt of the Planning Inspector's final report for the Local Plan and to recommend that Members formally adopt the Northumberland National Park Local Plan.

2. Recommendations

It is recommended:

- 1) **That Members note the content of the Inspector's report and the overall conclusion that the Northumberland National Park Local Plan provides a sound basis for planning within the National Park**
- 2) **The Northumberland National Park Local Plan be formally adopted and brought into immediate effect to form the statutory development plan**

3) Implications

- a. **Financial:** There are no new financial implications for adopting the local plan. The Local Plan Review costs are included within the Medium Term Budget.
- b. **Equalities:** None. The Local Plan was subject to an equalities impact assessment.
- c. **Link to Business Plan: Aim 4: Contributing to Thriving Communities** Develop a new Local Plan for the National Park and actively advocate for the provision and retention of essential community facilities and services, and the development of new homes to meet local needs.

4) Background

- a. The Authority has spent the past four years undertaking a review of the existing statutory development plan with the aim of producing and adopting a new Local Plan. A Local Plan contains planning policies guiding future development and the determination of planning applications for a twenty year period and will supersede those policies set out within the 2009 Core Strategy.
- b. The Northumberland National Park Local Plan (2017-2037) has been developed to:
 - Set the strategic planning policies for the National Park, taking account of key factors like population trends, economic growth, climate change, resources and environmental character;
 - Direct the scale and distribution of new development (e.g. housing, services, tourism development) which is required to meet the National Park's identified need to 2037;
 - Provide the planning principles, including detailed 'Development Management' (DM) policies to guide decisions on planning applications;
- c. Five public consultation stages have been carried out as part of the Local Plan review in 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020. The Issues Paper public consultation (undertaken in spring 2017); the Policy Options Paper public consultation

(undertaken in autumn 2017); the Preferred Options Draft Plan public consultation (Summer 2018); the Publication Draft Plan (May 2019) and then the final Inspector's Main Modifications for seven weeks in March 2020.

- d. Members have been involved prior to each stage of public consultation, through a policy conference in May 2018, as well as a detailed discussion of the whole plan, including policy wording set out in the Publication Draft Plan at the special authority meeting in May 2019.
- e. A number of members played an integral role in shaping the Local Plan by participating in the Local Plan Task and Finish Group.

5) **Examination Process**

- a. The Publication Draft Plan supported by a significant amount of evidence was submitted to the Planning Inspectorate on 30th September 2019 to commence the Examination process.
- b. The Examination process allows an independent Planning Inspector to assess whether the Local Plan has been prepared to meet the government's tests of soundness which are critical to the adoption of a Plan. These tests stipulate that the Local Plan should be:
 - **Positively prepared:** This means that the plan should be prepared based on a strategy which seeks to meet objectively assessed development and infrastructure requirements.
 - **Justified:** The plan should be the most appropriate strategy when considered against reasonable alternatives, based on proportionate evidence.
 - **Effective:** The plan should be deliverable over its period and based on effective joint working on cross-boundary strategic priorities.
 - **Consistent with national policy:** The plan should enable the delivery of sustainable development in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).
- c. After correspondence between the Inspector and the Authority regarding procedural matters in November 2019, a Hearing was held on 30th January 2020. The starting point for the Hearing was the Publication Draft Plan that Members discussed and approved in May 2019. The Hearing lasted one day and discussed the whole range of policies within the Plan, and included representations from the Home Builders Federation and the Mineral Products Association.
- d. At the end of the Hearing the Inspector confirmed that he considered the Authority met the duty to co-operate and the plan could be made sound through modifications.
- e. A consultation was carried out for seven weeks from mid-March to early May 2020 on the main modifications agreed with the Inspector and comments from consultees were forwarded to the Inspector.

6) **Main Modifications to the Local Plan**

- a. During the Hearing and post hearing discussions main modifications to the Plan were agreed by officers. These were not felt to significantly change the plan in anyway but mainly involved some tweaking to ensure compliance with national policy and meet the tests of soundness.

- b. The main modifications can be summarised as follows:
- Including a *housing requirement figure* which corresponds to the identified need of 160 dwellings over the plan period (8 per year) and a clear intention for that requirement to be met in full through small scale development within the National Park and the delivery of housing in gateway settlements outside of but close to the National Park;
 - Removing the separate categories of Local Centres and Smaller Villages given the lack of policy distinction between the two tiers of settlements and renamed all identified settlements as *Named Settlements*;
 - Amending wording of a number of policies and supporting paragraphs to align with the reference to Named Settlements
 - Amending the detailed wording of a number of policies such as the Major Development policy and the Minerals Development policy to accord with the national policy.
- c. The Inspector agreed with our approach to new housing. He agreed that there was no need for the allocation of specific housing sites and acknowledged that the local connection test in the Core Strategy was restrictive and has limited demand for new housing. He considered that the more flexible approach put forward for principal residence was the correct approach and should enable the delivery of new housing whilst preventing new houses from being used as second homes.
- d. It was also recommended by the Inspector to amend the Policies Map to remove reference to local centres and smaller villages and replace with Named Settlements.

7) **Adoption**

- a. The Local Plan (which includes the main modifications) to be adopted can be viewed here: <https://nnp-tacdesign.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/NNP-Local-Plan-June-2020-1.pdf>
- b. Members should note that this version of the Local Plan incorporating the Inspector's Main Modifications is the final version and cannot be amended.
- c. Members must now either formally adopt the Local Plan or effectively withdraw it and re-commence the process of evidence gathering and public consultation. Given the significant amount of work undertaken in this review and the receipt of the positive Inspector's report it is considered that adoption is the most logical option.
- d. Upon adoption, the Local Plan will be the development plan for decision making purposes and the 2009 Core Strategy policies will become superseded.
- e. After adoption hard copies of the Local Plan will be produced and sent to all Members of DMC. Further copies will be available to all other Members on request. All Parish Councils within the National Park will be sent copies of the Local plan too. It is expected that many of our agents and stakeholders will now be using electronic versions of the Local Plan but hard copies will also be available on request.
- f. Training on the new policies will be provided to all Members of Development Management Committee and will also be open to all Members who would like to find out more about these new policies. This is anticipated for the autumn 2020.

8) Conclusions

- a. The receipt of the Inspector's report is a positive endorsement of the Authority's work over the last four years. Officers welcome the Inspector's careful analysis of the main planning issues in the National Park and are pleased that he has agreed with our overall approach and concluded the Plan is sound. The formal adoption of the Local Plan means that the Authority will have an up to date policy framework in place to guide future planning decisions within the National Park.
- b. Following receipt of the Inspectors' report the Authority must now either formally adopt the Local Plan, or effectively withdraw it and recommence the process of evidence gathering and consultation. Given the significant amount of work undertaken since the review commenced over four years ago and the receipt of a positive Inspectors' report, it makes sense to formally adopt the Plan.

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Appendix 1: Inspector's Report

Appendix 2: Appendix to Inspector's Report showing main modifications

Appendix 3: Link to website for Local Plan: <https://nnp-tacdesign.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/NNP-Local-Plan-June-2020-1.pdf>