

Report to the Local Plan Sub-Committee Meeting, 3rd July 2023

We have prepared this short report to brief Sub-committee members about the Progressive Alliance thinking in relation to the Local Plan and to propose a set of recommendations for consideration at the meeting on 3rd July.

Overall recommendations

The main recommendations are for the Local Plan and its policies:

1. To enable and strengthen flourishing communities within Derbyshire Dales.
2. To ensure that the housing need in the Local Plan arises from the geographic area it covers, and that the proposed number and type of new housing units reflects a careful consideration of the actual likely needs of local people.
3. To provide social and affordable housing where it is needed.
4. To accommodate the requirements of a revised Economic Plan.
5. To ensure a continued improvement in the biodiversity and natural capital of the Derbyshire Dales.
6. To ensure rapid progress towards net zero emissions in Derbyshire Dales within the scope of the Local Plan.
7. To ensure the Derbyshire Dales character in its landscape and townscapes is protected.
8. To meet the needs of a revised economic plan.
9. To ensure the necessary infrastructures (grey, green and blue) and services are available for planned development
10. To ensure that the Plan will enable all residents to understand how their communities will change during the period of the Plan.

Detailed recommendations are made in the sections that follow.

Flourishing Communities

Flourishing communities are, in our view, communities in which people of all ages and income levels have access to facilities and services at a local level; for example a primary school and access to formal and informal community-based activities. They are communities where several generations of a family might reside because housing is available for them to do so, and that enable people to live close to where they work if they choose to do so. Flourishing communities have a “community spirit”, a common history and identity, which unites the residents and leads to pride in the locality and leads to community-based organisations and events. Inherent in this characterization of flourishing communities is the importance of planning for and providing dwellings for all income groups and demographic groups.

The Local Plan is one instrument that may be used by a local authority to develop flourishing communities. Housing is another. Therefore, Derbyshire Dales District Council can claim some responsibility for community development in the Peak District National Park as well as the rest of Derbyshire Dales.

One of the aims of the new administration is to strengthen existing flourishing communities and where necessary and appropriate establish new flourishing communities across Derbyshire Dales including the Peak District National Park. We propose that one of the aims of this Local Plan is therefore to strengthen existing flourishing communities and to establish new flourishing communities within the Local Plan area.

It is important that villages and towns across Derbyshire Dales can develop through new housing commensurate with their size, and to do so in a manner that will engender community support. Small and some medium sized development may detract from existing communities through increased demand on infrastructure, facilities and services. It may also impact on the community itself. Development within existing communities will need to be determined in part in relation to this potential impact.

Larger developments, particularly those outside existing communities, will need to be designed to stand alone, enabling a social fabric to develop and thrive, and with the facilities and services necessary for them to become new flourishing communities. The Ashbourne airfield site is an example of one such new community that needs to be designed in this manner.

It is important that the provision of new homes is not driven solely by commercial demands from developers. There are strong indications that the actual needs of our communities are not for more larger detached houses with four or more bedrooms (sometimes referred to as ‘family’ or ‘executive’ homes). Rather, there is a need to concentrate on more affordable social housing, and smaller homes for older people to downsize into. Building a limited number of these kinds of homes may well allow for the freeing up of the larger homes, still needed to ensure the effective functioning of the housing market and to enable new household formation based on new economic opportunities generated within Derbyshire Dales.

We note that many dwellings in some villages and towns are second homes or holiday lets. We believe these may impact communities and lead to a loss of community resources such as schools and community based organisations. We believe that communities with a large proportion of such dwellings may not flourish. Of course, the opposite may happen, but we don’t believe that to be the rule. Therefore, we feel that there should be policies to constrain second homes and holiday lets where they might otherwise be used as first homes. But we believe that the urgent first step is to determine the size of the problem.

Equally, it is important to recognize the changing pattern of paid employment, and to attempt both to measure, understand and project the impact of multiple household occupations and home working – particularly in terms of how this effects local community, infrastructure and transport needs.

To ensure that the local plan enables flourishing communities, we believe that the introductory paragraphs in the Local Plan which discuss community development need to be strengthened and that the implications need to be made explicit where relevant in local plan policies. These changes would align the local plan with the aim of enabling flourishing communities.

Therefore, with respect to flourishing communities, the following changes to the Local Plan are recommended.

1. Revise the introductory sections to the Local Plan to emphasize the flourishing communities aim.
2. Review and adapt Plan policies to ensure they are consistent with the aim of enabling flourishing communities and in particular:

- a. Distribute housing growth to maintain/enhance the sustainability of all tier 1 to 4 settlements
 - b. Ensure that housing policies meet the needs of existing and future residents and their families
 - c. Continue to investigate the potential for a new village, to further the aims and objectives of the Local Plan
3. Strengthen policies for second homes and holiday lets following from and consistent with a review to determine the size and locations of the problem.
4. Review housing allocation policies for Tiers 1 to 4 to enable development for local people in all communities.

Alignment of the Local Plan housing allocation with those of the Peak District National Park

The Peak District National Park Authority housing policies have a significant impact on the area of Derbyshire Dales outside the National Park. Other planning authorities adjacent to the National Park will have similar issues. The “duty to cooperate” has been weakened by government, and in addition, the duty to cooperate appears to operate in one direction only: Derbyshire Dales and other planning authorities are obliged to take most of the National Park housing requirements.

This is damaging to the environment, and inconsistent with the development of flourishing communities in the National Park and outside the National Park. It leads to excessive commuting and high house prices in the National Park area. It limits economic development in the National Park since staff are unable to find affordable housing there. It is detrimental to flourishing communities outside the National Park because of the excessive pressure on community facilities and services.

We noted that the local plans for the South Downs National Park and neighbouring planning authorities were based on a jointly developed housing requirement. We proposed that Derbyshire Dales, the PDNPA and neighbouring planning authorities follow a similar approach to ensure that a coherent approach to housing numbers is agreed and that the outcome from that approach is fair and reasonable.

The Derbyshire Dales Local Plan needs to take account of the problems associated with the present arrangement between Derbyshire Dales and the National Park Authority. To this end, we recommend the following.

1. Proceed on the basis that the ‘housing need’ for that part of the District within the National Park is provided for within the settlements in the Park.
2. And in parallel in order to justify the above:
 - a. Review the approach used in determining housing need in Derbyshire Dales in relation to the Peak District National Park by considering the approach used elsewhere, and in particular by the local authorities in and adjacent to the South Downs National Park.
 - b. Jointly develop future housing requirement and housing allocation for Derbyshire Dales, the National Park and other planning authorities adjacent to the National Park to ensure consistency and avoid an over-bearing impact on any individual planning authority and taking account of the capacity of Derbyshire Dales to accommodate housing growth without harm.

- c. Align housing need expressed in the Derbyshire Dales Local Plan with the jointly developed housing requirement.

Social and affordable housing

Affordable housing is seldom affordable for those requiring social housing in Derbyshire Dales. In our view, the present Local Plan doesn't say enough about either affordable or social housing, nor about the imperative to make this carbon neutral (and therefore with negligible energy bills) and of quality design. While these are of course the subject of housing policies and strategies, the availability of such housing in particular locations to meet local needs are, we believe, important elements of the local plan. The means of achieving sufficient social and affordable housing may well be the role of a housing strategy, but the Local Plan has a role to play by bringing together housing need, geographic distribution, available sites and other inputs in one place. Therefore, the Local Plan needs to recognize the Derbyshire Dales housing strategy and set targets for social and affordable housing in Derbyshire Dales. The Local Plan may also enable particular types of development through its policies such as the use of Community Land Trusts.

We recommend to:

- Strengthen policies for affordable, carbon neutral social housing following from and consistent with an independent review of a social housing strategy.
- Consider and understand the need for social housing to reflect requirements for household development and home working (i.e. reviewing the need for two and three-bedroom properties rather than one-bedroom homes)

Protecting our Dales environment

Biodiversity and Natural Capital. As well as addressing our legal obligations with regard to biodiversity, the Local Plan should recognise the values, both intrinsic and for our communities, that nature provides for us. We should also recognise that the Peak District National Park is a cornerstone of the Derbyshire Dales and UK's green infrastructure and that consideration should play an important part of its management. Decisions about land management within the National Park have implications on the communities outside of it, through the flows of ecosystem services that derive from its natural capital. For the Derbyshire Dales, this is particularly significant because of the rivers Derwent and Dove which flow from it, through the District. We will also look to assess natural capital as part of our economic strategy, in order to support the future residents of the Derbyshire Dales. Therefore we recommend:

- The implementation of a natural capital approach, using the information contained in the Derbyshire County Council's Natural Capital Strategy, as the basis for a proactive planning policy approach to the protection and enhancement of the whole District's green and blue infrastructure.
- Collation of evidence, such as through a locally focused Nature Recovery Network, Supplementary Planning Document on nature and natural capital and assessment of suitable sites, owned by DDDC and others, for biodiversity enhancement to allow appropriate decision making by Members on Biodiversity Net Gain and other obligations under the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

Climate emergency. Local Plan policies associated with building standards, social housing, site layout, and site location will need to address the many issues arising from the climate emergency including the need for vastly improved insulation standards, zero carbon heating, on-site electricity generation, wind and solar farms, changes to the weather including extreme weather events and the impact of changing climate on infrastructure requirements. Policies will need to minimize net zero emissions and mitigate the consequences of climate change.

We believe that the climate emergency related measures in the Local Plan need to be strengthened to make them as near mandatory as possible. Therefore:

- The Local Plan policies associated with net zero emissions will be strengthened to ensure adoption by developers except under exceptional and documented circumstances.
- That there should be a special emphasis on leading by example with a requirement that all new social housing be designed to ensure minimal energy bills by adopting carbon neutral and if possible, passivhaus, standards.

Preservation of the landscape and townscapes outside the Peak District National Park. Much is written about the need to protect the Peak District National Park landscape. But the boundary of the National Park is arbitrary and many beautiful and important landscape features lie outside the boundary, and some areas within the National Park are of indifferent quality. The Local Plan needs to protect the landscape in Derbyshire Dales for itself and for the enjoyment of Derbyshire Dales residents and visitors, and not only for the views that may be had from within the National Park.

Indeed, it is worth noting that highest landscape protection within the District is not within the Peak District National Park, but is afforded to the Derwent Valley Mills World Heritage Site, recognised by UNESCO for its cultural significance.

The towns and villages in Derbyshire Dales are attractive. Their layout and the design of individual buildings have often been driven by landscape, geology and earlier economic activity. Most date from an age before motor vehicles and their layout reflects that. New developments are often built to another architectural grammar which conflicts with this earlier development. Indeed, the NPPF policies may drive the adoption of such an alternative grammar.

The Local Plan needs to take account of what makes each Derbyshire Dales village and town special and resist the encroachment of “cookie cutter” developer-led design solutions. It needs to ensure that the location and design of all housing development makes a positive contribution to the character of individual towns, neighbourhoods, and villages. We recommend therefore that:

- The Local Plan includes policies and references SPDs that protect the Derbyshire Dales characteristics. Where they are present, they should be strengthened to ensure adoption by developers as a default position.

Meeting the needs of a revised Economic Plan

The 2019 Economic Plan is the assumed basis of the revised Local Plan. Given the significant changes that have taken place since that Economic Plan was prepared (particularly in relation to homeworking), there is a need to re-visit the plan and to use a revised version for the revised Local Plan. Also, that Economic Plan did not consider the impact of the National Park Local Plan and particularly its restriction on housing development. We believe that it needs to do so. While the formal approach to developing a housing requirement for a local plan is to map job growth to housing numbers, the inverse mapping from housing numbers to available workforce is also possible.

Therefore, there is a requirement to:

- Revise the Derbyshire Dales economic development plan 2019 with the constraints on house building in the PDNPA, and then map the new economic development plan onto the Derbyshire Dales Local Plan.

Infrastructure development plan

An Infrastructure Plan would provide measures that enable the Local Plan to be delivered without significant adverse impacts on communities and the environment. An Infrastructure Plan typically covers the water, sewage, gas, electricity and telecommunications infrastructure, highways, traffic and public transport, car parking, (footpaths?), and public services including education and health services – but also community facilities that enable people to actively consider living more of their lives – including working time – within their home communities.

We note that the 2017 Local Plan does not have a companion Infrastructure Plan. We understand that such a plan is now a requirement and will be prepared for the revised Local Plan.

This infrastructure plan needs to take address the drainage problems arising along the Derwent and its tributaries, particularly in the Matlock – Darley Dale area where both communities now face regular incidents from an inability of the infrastructure to accommodate rainfall, sewage, and run off above and below ground from the developed areas and the surrounding hills.

The infrastructure plan will need to review present conditions, consider options for continued infrastructure development, and provide a plan agreed with infrastructure providers. This plan will comprise measures to develop infrastructure and services to accommodate additional demand and to mitigate adverse impacts of development and risks. It will need to determine the level of investment, funding sources, level of commitment from the funding agency and the delivery agency and timing for individual measures in the plan. The infrastructure plan will be a pillar of the Local Plan, and the dependencies between development goals and measures in the infrastructure plan should be shown in the Local Plan.

An infrastructure plan must also include green and blue infrastructure, as well as grey infrastructure.

Therefore there is a need to:

- Develop an Infrastructure Plan that will form a pillar of the Local Plan in conjunction with Infrastructure and Service stakeholders.