

Developing A Green Transport Strategy for Dartmoor National Park Briefing Note to Dartmoor Access Forum – November 2021

Report of the Head of Recreation, Access & Estates

Background and context

The increasing numbers of visitors to the National Park and the challenges and issues associated with travel, parking and congestion this creates were identified through the review of the Management Plan for Dartmoor.

The Authority's National Park Management Plan and Business Plan have the following outcomes in relation to the development of a Green Transport Strategy:

A Green Transport Strategy – to reduce the impact of cars through congestion or inappropriate parking as people arrive and travel around the National Park by other means of transport. Opportunities for those without access to a car are increased.

Visitors are drawn to Dartmoor due to its status as a National Park with walking consistently the primary reason for their visit. Over half of respondents to the National Park's Visitor Survey in 2016 stated this was the primary reason for visit to Dartmoor. Cycling – mountain biking on off road routes" and road cycling have become increasingly popular over recent years which fits a wider trend for more active recreation. We are now also seeing greater use of electric bikes (e-bikes) which is increasing accessibility of Dartmoor and enabling wider participation amongst people who cycle less often or are returning to cycling.

Dartmoor National Park sees 2.31 million visitors annually and is home to more than 35,000 residents. The visitor profile of visitors to the National Park showed that the vast majority (2.05 million) are day visitors, with 263,000 staying visitors in 2017. However, visitors are beginning to see Dartmoor as a destination for longer stays with the number of staying visitors increasing by 17% between 2009 and 2015. The populations of Exeter and Plymouth, Tavistock and Okehampton are located on the periphery of the National Park with typical journey times of less than 30 minutes. There are currently limited public transport options available, especially away from primary routes, with most visitors arriving by car.

There are also local and national targets for reducing carbon emissions which are key drivers for this area of work.

Challenges and opportunities

Most of our visitors arrive by private motor car, with the majority being day visitors rather than for longer stays. At peak times our busier sites often see car parks filling quickly resulting in overspill with displaced and inappropriate parking. As a consequence, this can lead to increased damage to banks and verges, obstructed gateways, and parking along roadsides which restricts access for other road users.

We are not realistically going to be able to provide additional (new) car parks or expand existing ones to any great extent as this is unlikely to be feasible or desirable and would likely only be a short term “solution”. A real challenge for the longer term will be to change the mindset of how people get around the national park and there would need to be viable alternatives available to do so easily and on a cost effective basis. Measures that are put in place also need to take account of the protected landscape status of the National park and are proportionate and appropriate to the issues they are trying to mitigate.

However it is not all doom and gloom! There are some real opportunities that could help reduce the impact of cars on the National Park. Devon County Council has submitted a bid to the Department for Transport to fund a Bus Service Improvement Plan which has the potential to deliver increases in service levels as well as new services and routes. The forthcoming opening of regular rail services between Exeter and Okehampton provides more opportunities for an alternative to using cars. The potential to expand and/or replicate services that have a proven success such as the Haytor Hoppa. The development of integrated transport through town hubs and interceptor sites along with charging networks for e-bikes and electric vehicles.

There are opportunities to develop active travel – both for recreation and utility/transport through more walks and rides from interceptor sites and hubs; building on previous work such as *Granite and Gears*.

Development of a Green Transport Strategy

Officers have started work to develop a Strategy in partnership with other key stakeholders and organisations including Devon County Council, district councils, adjoining Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, National Trust, community representatives and Ramblers. Initial discussions lead to the development of the following aims and scope of a Dartmoor Green Transport Strategy:

The Strategy aims to:

- Reduce the impact of vehicles on the National Park – both landscape /fabric of Dartmoor and local communities
- Support local communities through better public transport for access to services including employment, education, health and leisure
- Reduce carbon emissions - moving towards net zero targets
- Improve access for people without a car or other means of travel

Scope of the Dartmoor Green Transport Strategy

- Active Travel through increased walking and cycling
- Access for those with limited mobility
- Community Transport
- E-bike networks and electric vehicle charger networks
- Promoting opportunities and better information
- Transport Connectivity Vision and town hubs

Transport Connectivity Vision and Town Hubs

Alongside work with the development of the Green Transport Strategy, we are developing a transport connectivity vision. This is a high-level document that will engage stakeholders and partners in the delivery of the Green Transport Strategy to improve transport connectivity to and within the National Park. The vision shows existing transport links and where there are gaps in connectivity, these gaps have been shown as connectivity opportunities and have been identified in discussion with officers, partners and local communities. The vision also includes proposals for town hubs, the development of which is a priority within the National Park Management Plan. Town hubs will help manage visitors by providing recreation opportunities on the periphery of the National Park and access to green transport links and intermodal travel between settlements. The detail outlining the delivery of the vision will be included within the Green Transport Strategy.

The vision document will be fully designed to incorporate the vision map, town hub design and supporting text.

Further work and next steps

Officers will be taking a report to Authority to report on progress with the development of the Green Transport Strategy (timescale to be confirmed). We are currently finalising the Connectivity Vision in readiness for the formal launch of the Okehampton rail service on 20 November.

Officers have progressed work on the A38 corridor to assess the potential for increased walking and cycling between settlements. The A38 corridor is identified in the Recreation Strategy as an area of opportunity and has been prioritised as a focus area.

We have developed an online, map-based consultation tool that will allow the public to add suggestions on where new links or improvements to the existing PROW network would better link settlements and/or improve recreation opportunities along the A38 corridor. We are planning on running the consultation in spring 2022. The development of new routes or improvement of existing routes will help support the delivery of the Green Transport Strategy and Connectivity Vision

We are continuing work with partners through the SW Devon Active Travel Forum to identify opportunities to develop green transport opportunities with a particular focus on improved cycling infrastructure.

We welcome DAF's input and ideas into the process through your working group – in particular to:

- Assist with identifying gaps and deficiencies in the access network (and service provision)
- Insights into likely demand for new routes and services
- Ideas and approaches you think should be considered / explored or good practice you have seen elsewhere

