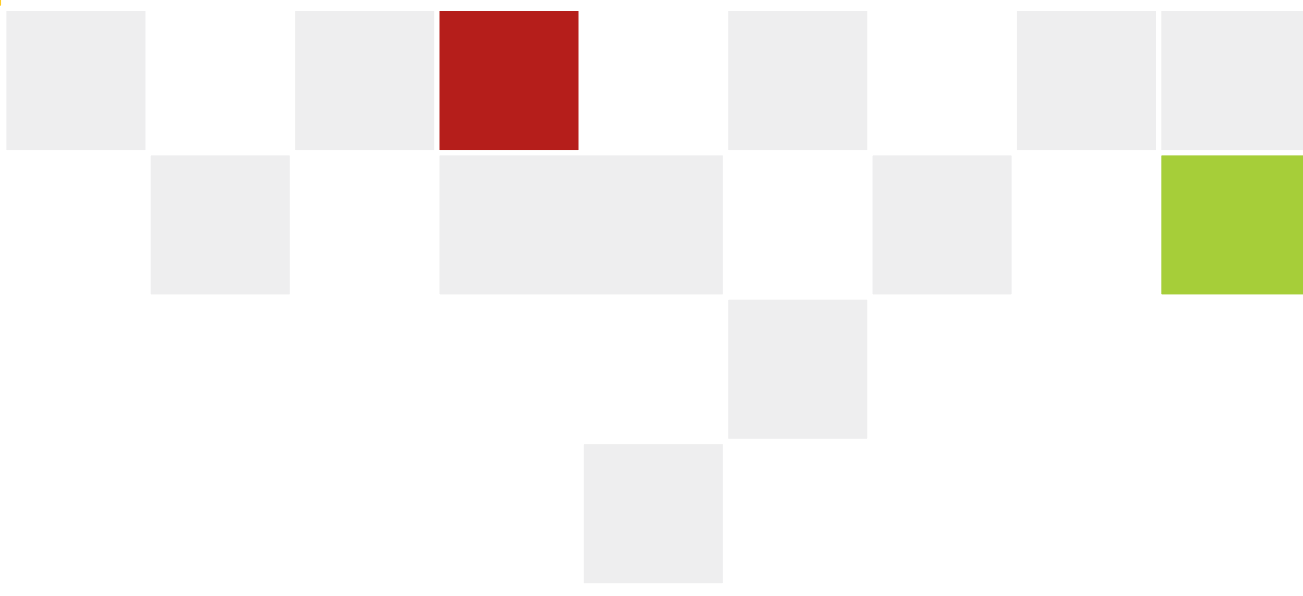


Dartmoor National Park

Local Plan 2018-2036

Regulation 19 (September 2019)



Boyer

DARTMOOR LOCAL PLAN 2018-2036

REGULATION 19 CONSULTATION (SEPTEMBER 2019)

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction	2
2. Courtenay Park, Moretonhampstead	3
3. Housing Policies	5
4. Moretonhampstead	12
5. Site Selection Process	16
6. Conclusions	25

APPENDIX

Appendix One – Site Location Plan

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Boyer is instructed by Cavanna Homes to submit representations in response to the Regulation 19 (Pre-Submission) Local Plan (2018-2036) consultation document.
- 1.2 The publication of the Regulation 19 document represents a key milestone in the formal review of the Core Strategy (2008) and the Development Management and Delivery DPD (2013). Upon adoption, the Local Plan will set the strategic policy framework for the National Park area over the Plan period to 2036.
- 1.3 The National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 defines the purpose of National Parks as being to conserve and enhance natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage and to promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the National Parks by the public.
- 1.4 The English National Parks and the Broads Circular 2010 confirms that the Authorities' primary responsibility is to deliver their statutory purposes. In doing so, the Circular (para 28) states that: *"they should ensure they are exemplars in achieving sustainable development, helping rural communities in particular to thrive."*
- 1.5 Paragraph 70 of the 2010 Circular states that National Parks have an important role to play as planning authorities in the delivery of affordable housing. Through their Local Development Frameworks, they should include policies that pro-actively respond to local housing needs. The Circular confirms that Parks are not considered suitable locations for *'unrestricted'* housing and states that general housing targets should not apply.
- 1.6 This is confirmed in the National Planning Practice Guidance¹ where it states that the Standard Method for calculating housing needs is not imposed on National Parks and that, in such circumstances, the authorities may continue to identify housing need using a method determined locally.
- 1.7 The 2010 Circular (para 78) indicates that the expectation is that new housing will be *'focused'* on meeting affordable housing requirements, supporting local employment provision and key services. It states (para 79) that:

"The Government expects the authorities to maintain a focus on affordable housing and to work with local authorities and other agencies to ensure that the needs of local communities in the Parks are met and that affordable housing remains so in the longer term."
- 1.8 The special status of the Dartmoor National Park provides the context for the strategic planning framework for the area and representations submitted on behalf of Cavanna Homes have been prepared in this light.

¹ National Planning Practice Guidance: Paragraph: 014 Reference ID: 2a-014-20190220

2. COURTENAY PARK, MORETONHAMPSTEAD

- 2.1 Land promoted by Cavanna Homes was identified in the National Park Land Availability Assessment (LAA) in July 2017, as site reference **DNP08/018** (Courtenay Park, Moretonhampstead). The site plan is attached at **Appendix 1**.
- 2.2 This site comprises circa 2.1ha of agricultural land to the south of the centre of Moretonhampstead, adjacent to, but outside of, the defined built up area.
- 2.3 Existing residential development abuts the site to the northwest, north and east of the site. Station Road runs along the eastern boundary with residential development beyond. Agricultural land lies to the southern and eastern boundaries of the site with the open countryside beyond. A Public Right of Way (PRoW) runs through the site providing connections between Station Road (east) and Pound Street (west). The remainder of the site is not accessible to the public.
- 2.4 Moretonhampstead is designated as a Local Centre within existing Policy COR15 of the adopted Core Strategy. This Regulation 19 consultation continues to classify Local Centres as the largest and most sustainable settlements in the National Park and the focus for future development.
- 2.5 Land at Courtenay Park is assessed in the 2017 LAA where it is concluded that the site is **suitable, available** and **achievable** with a potential yield of between 25 and 37 dwellings.
- 2.6 In terms of constraints to delivery, the LAA identifies the setting of the PRoW and nearby listed buildings, together with vehicular access, but it acknowledges that it may be possible to overcome these issues. The LAA therefore concludes that development at the midpoint level should be feasible within the overall site envelope.
- 2.7 It is therefore evident that this site represents a suitable location for development where the identified constraints do not represent a barrier to the delivery of this site. In terms of delivery, the LAA concludes that the site is immediately available and is capable of delivery within 5 years.
- 2.8 Following the LAA, the site was considered in the National Park Sustainability Appraisal (SA), which was produced in June 2019. We deal specifically with the SA at paragraphs 3.36 to 3.42 of these representations. However, it is clear from the SA matrix of site options that Courtenay Park (DNP08/018) performs equally as well as those sites allocated at Moretonhampstead.
- 2.9 Table 6.2 of the June 2019 SA outlines the reasons for selection or non-progression of site options. In the context of Courtenay Park, it states:

“Not progressed at this stage because of sequentially preferable sites of lesser landscape character and historic environment concerns (expressed strongly through community concern around development of this site) being available.”

- 2.10 We deal specifically with the site selection process at Section 5 of these representations, but it should be noted that neither the LAA (2017) nor the SA (2019) conclude that the site does not represent a suitable location for development.
- 2.11 The following section provides a response to specific sections of the Regulation 19 consultation document and its associated evidence base and is set within the context of our client’s land interests at Courtenay Park, Moretonhampstead.

3. HOUSING POLICIES

The Spatial Strategy

- 3.1 Paragraph 1.4.3 of the Regulation 19 Consultation Document explains that a key role of the Local Plan is to avoid development in places where it would cause harm to the National Park and to direct it to where there are the best opportunities for sustainable living.
- 3.2 Such an approach is supported in principle and we are encouraged that a stated aim of the Plan (para 1.4.5) is to focus development in the most sustainable locations, where it relates well to existing development.
- 3.3 In this context, paragraph 1.4.6 of the Consultation Document sets out the Spatial Strategy and the classification of settlements. Local Centres, including Moretonhampstead, represent the top tier settlements as these are the largest and most sustainable settlements within the National Park and where sites are allocated to meet local housing and employment needs, or enable redevelopment opportunities.
- 3.4 The classification of Moretonhampstead as a Local Centre is supported and as a result the capacity of this settlement to accommodate development in a sustainable manner is recognised.
- 3.5 Suitable development opportunities at Moretonhampstead, which are capable of addressing identified affordable housing need and supporting the vibrancy of the settlement, whilst protecting the special qualities of the National Park should be supported. Opportunities such as Courtenay Park should therefore be identified and brought forward as allocations to provide for growth throughout the plan period.

Achieving a balance

- 3.6 Paragraph 3.1.2 of the Consultation Document explains that the Local Plan must carefully balance the needs of the National Park's communities with the need to conserve and enhance its internationally important environment. Given the special status of the National Park, the need for such a balance to be achieved is both recognised and supported.
- 3.7 However, for reasons set out below, it is not considered that the plan, as proposed, strikes an appropriate and effective balance.
- 3.8 To achieve this balance, the key environmental considerations must be set within the context of the issues affecting the communities across the Park Area and at individual settlements. These issues are articulated at paragraph 3.1.2 and summarised as follows:
 - High housing unaffordability making it difficult for local people and workers to live locally; It is stated within Topic Paper 9 (Housing – paragraph 6.8.1) that the Dartmoor National Park has a housing affordability ratio of 12.43 which makes it the 28th most unaffordable local planning authority area in England and Wales excluding London.

- A reduction in the working age population, making it increasingly difficult for local business to recruit and retain staff, and reducing the sustainability of communities and local services;
- Continued or increasing under-occupancy of homes; and
- A greater demand for services and facilities to meet the needs of older people alongside a decrease in demand for the services and facilities for younger people, making them increasingly difficult to sustain in smaller communities.

3.9 In response to these issues, paragraph 3.1.3 explains that local communities are looking for the housing policies within the Local Plan to:

- Provide appropriate and flexible opportunities for housing which meets the needs of communities within the National Park at a range of settlements;
- Ensure a mix of house sizes, including affordable housing;
- Provide suitable homes for older people and downsizers;
- Enable local families and working people to live in Dartmoor;
- Work within environmental limits, and achieve more sustainable construction; and
- Support farming, forestry and other rural land-based enterprises.

3.10 It is therefore essential that the Local Plan provides a sufficiently positive policy framework to facilitate appropriate levels of development to address these issues and objectives, whilst ensuring the special qualities of the National Park are not undermined and, where appropriate, enhanced, that is, achieving the balance.

3.11 We deal specifically with the proposed housing figure under separate cover as part of our response to this consultation. However, in general terms it is noted that the Consultation Document (paragraph 3.1.4) explains that the figure of 65 homes each year is “*the level of development evidence suggests is necessary to reduce the trends identified above and provide sufficient housing to meet local housing needs.*” (Boyer emphasis)

3.12 Paragraph 3.1.4 seeks to justify the 65 homes per year figure by explaining that this scale of growth will enable the delivery of affordable homes to meet local needs, allowing sufficient open market housing to cross-subsidise affordable housing delivery and “*bring about a small increase in population intended to reduce the scale of demographic issues described above.*” (Boyer emphasis)

- 3.13 Irrespective of the robustness of the 65-dwelling figure, the Local Plan is being advanced on the basis that it does not seek to put in place measures, through policy, that will respond sufficiently to address issues related to the demographic profile of the Park. Rather, it seeks only to bring about a “*small*” increase in the population to “*reduce*” the challenges associated with an ageing population.
- 3.14 Furthermore, and contrary to the assertions presented in the Consultation Document, there is no evidence provided to demonstrate that 65 homes each year will address the issues identified.
- 3.15 Topic Paper 6 (paragraph 5.3.2) summarises the DNPA Member workshop held in June 2018 where Members confirmed support of an indicative housing delivery figure of 65 dwellings per year. This paragraph then goes on to state that this figure (65dpa) recognises *inter alia*:
- The strategic ambition to avoid the depopulation of the National Park; and
 - The strategic ambition to limit the projected ageing population profile.
- 3.16 There is no specific evidence to explain how Members arrived at this figure, particularly given that this growth scenario was not identified in the evidence base at that time. Critically, the 65 dwelling figure was only considered through additional scenario testing published in June 2019.
- 3.17 As set out within our separate representation on Housing Need, the demographic evidence (Edge 2016) suggest that a housing figure of 73 homes each year would result in a decline in all households under 65 and does not address demographic imbalance between economically active and inactive persons. If this is the case then it is not credible to assert that the evidence bases supports the housing figure of 65 dwellings each year.
- 3.18 Consequently, a housing figure more closely aligned with the 80 dwellings per annum, as a minimum, is likely to be necessary to provide a positive and meaningful response to the population profile challenges present within the National Park and to address the ‘strategic’ ambitions referenced above.

Responding to Housing Need

- 3.19 In preparing a locally derived housing requirement, this should reflect the size, type and tenure of housing needed for different groups in the community (paragraph 61, NPPF). Moreover, as set out a paragraph 78 of the Framework, to promote sustainable development in rural areas, housing should be located where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities with policies identifying opportunities for villages to grow and thrive.

- 3.20 Consistency with the Framework in this regard, does not dilute or absolve the National Park of its statutory purposes defined in legislation and the 2010 Circular, nor does promoting sustainable development in rural areas automatically result in '*unrestricted*' housing which the Circular obviously seeks to avoid. What this does mean is that the objectives of national policy for rural areas should also be taken on board in terms of the balance which National Park policies are seeking to achieve.
- 3.21 Reviewing the content of paragraph 3.1.4, it confirms that the primary objective of the housing policies in the emerging Local Plan is to deliver affordable housing, which is consistent with the emphasis in the 2010 Circular. However, this emphasis on meeting affordable housing need is applied in a manner which prevents the Local Plan from putting in place sufficient positive policy provision to address wider issues present within the National Park and the achievement of sustainable development in rural areas.
- 3.22 The consequence of which is the imposition of a Spatial Strategy that is ineffective in terms of achieving an appropriate balance against competing pressures and obligations. In doing so, the Plan, driven by a housing figure which is not consistent with the evidence, fails to respond appropriately to address the issues prevailing in the National Park.
- 3.23 Facilitating population growth reduces the proportion of the ageing population and loss of working age people, which would accord with the strategic ambitions summarised above. To address population changes, including the demographic components of the population, policies for housing should provide appropriate solutions to address matters related to population decline and loss of working age population. This should include provision for sufficient housing of all types, sizes and tenures in locations that accord with the Spatial Strategy.
- 3.24 However, the Local Plan is prevented from achieving this due to the Plan being prepared on the basis that any policy driver of population balance should not '*lead to such shift that we lose sight of the principle of affordable housing*' (Housing Topic Paper, page 30).
- 3.25 It continues to express concern that a growth figure driven in response to population change: '*could lead to either an over-delivery of affordable housing, beyond identified needs, or a clear erosion of the priority for affordable housing delivery which leads to greater growth and land take inconsistent with local goals, constraint, and national policy context.*'
- 3.26 It is not explained why it is the case that pursuing higher levels of development would, consequently, result in the *erosion* of the priority for affordable housing delivery. It is not the case that the National Park Authority is presented only with a binary choice in terms of what housing policies should seek to achieve. That is, in terms of meeting affordable housing needs or putting in place a policy framework that addresses the '*strategic ambitions*' to avoid the depopulation of the Park and the need to limit the aging population profile.

- 3.27 The Housing Topic Paper infers that higher levels of development will have de facto negative impact on local goals and the policy context for the National Park. It is not the case that higher levels of growth will result in unrestricted housing which the 2010 Circular clearly seeks to prevent, particularly if the scale and location of such development are provided for through the prism of the protection of the special qualities of the National Park.
- 3.28 It is acknowledged that the 2010 Circular confirms that National Park Authorities have an important role to play in the delivery of affordable housing and that Parks are not suitable locations for 'unrestricted' housing. However, there is serious concern that the National Park has taken this as justification to curtail the delivery of open market housing, irrespective of whether or not such housing, if developed, would undermine the statutory purposes of the National Park Area.
- 3.29 This is best illustrated at Policy 3.1(2) where it states that: "*Development on allocated sites and windfall sites will only be approved where there is a current identified affordable housing need.*" (Boyer emphasis)
- 3.30 In this context the Housing Topic Paper (paragraph 8.2.3) states that;
- 'The Local Plan's strongest safeguard against oversupply at any point in the plan period is the requirement that larger developments are justified by demonstrating that there is a need for affordable housing using an affordable housing needs assessment. This ensures that development in the National Park only occurs where it is meeting an identified affordable housing need and prevents the oversupply of homes which will not meet a local need.*' (Boyer emphasis).'
- 3.31 The need to address and respond positively to affordable housing needs is accepted. However, in doing so, there are significant concerns that the approach of the Plan imposes an overly restrictive approach to housing and, critically, will act as a constraint on the ability of the plan to address wider issues (ageing population, downsizers, growing families, etc.). These matters are not specifically related to affordability; rather the emphasis is on choice of homes, including size and location.
- 3.32 It is stated within Topic Paper 9 (paragraph 7.1.4) that:
- 'Site allocations remain a key means to ensure that development in the National Park meets identified local housing needs and that the National Park's housing number is met. Allocating sites in local centres remains an important way of ensuring the majority of the National Park's housing growth comes forward in planned locations, giving the community certainty.'*
- 3.33 However, the Local Plan fails to provide the certainty that sites allocated for development will come forward. It fails to deal with potential scenarios whereby an allocated site, justified on the basis of an up-to-date assessment of need, is advancing towards an application being submitted, but in the interim an affordable housing exception site gains consent. Such a scenario, and through the provisions of Policy 3.1.(2) would then render the allocated site as unsuitable for development due to the requirement that it will only be consented where there is an identified need.

- 3.34 Paragraph 3.1.8 explains that the strategy is founded upon delivering the development required to meet the needs of the National Park and its communities, sustaining them as vibrant and viable places to live and work, whilst also ensuring that Dartmoor's Special Qualities are conserved and enhanced.
- 3.35 Yet the precursor that any development must be justified on the basis of an affordable housing need renders this objective of the strategy as ineffective as it artificially curtails the provision of open market housing to a delivery vehicle for affordable housing only. It does not recognise or support the provision of open market housing, in suitable locations, consistent with the settlement hierarchy and wider objectives and statutory purposes of the National Park.

Consideration of Alternatives

- 3.36 For reasons set out within our representations on Housing Need, the proposed housing figure fails to provide an appropriate scale of development necessary to address wider social and demographic challenges prevailing within the National Park. Notwithstanding this, the proposed housing figure set out in the Consultation Document is not considered to be justified, as the evidential basis has not been informed by an adequate assessment of reasonable alternatives.

- 3.37 Paragraph 4.1.8 of the Housing Topic Paper states:

'A consideration of the alternative scenarios for calculating housing need is inextricably linked with the development of wider policy objectives and the future sustainability of the National Park area.'

- 3.38 It is therefore essential in terms of understanding the implications on the National Park and the formulation of policies that reasonable alternative scenarios for calculating need are considered on a robust and directly comparable basis.
- 3.39 The SA provides the appropriate context within which the likely environmental impacts of alternative housing need requirements can be assessed. However, the SA does not consider the reasonable alternatives of what the housing figure for the National Park Area should be.
- 3.40 It is noted that within the Housing Topic Paper (from 5.2.3) there is a review of the merits of the different projected scenarios, specifically, a lower level of growth, the current level of growth and a higher level of growth. However, none of the alternative housing figures for the National Park Area appear to have been subject to the SA process, specifically in terms of the likely impacts on the SA Objectives.

- 3.41 As explained in National Planning Practice Guidance:

'A sustainability appraisal is a systematic process that must be carried out during the preparation of local plans and spatial development strategies. Its role is to promote sustainable development by assessing the extent to which the emerging plan, when judged against reasonable alternatives, will help to achieve relevant environmental, economic and social objectives.' (Boyer emphasis) (PPG: Paragraph 001 Reference ID: 11-001-20190722)

3.42 The SA is focused on options for the Spatial Strategy alongside options for site allocations, yet there is no comparable assessment for alternative scenarios for the housing growth figure for the National Park. The failure to include an assessment of alternative calculations represents a significant failing of the SA process and indicates that such alternatives have not been appropriately considered.

4. MORETONHAMPSTEAD

- 4.1 Moretonhampstead is classified as a Local Centre and therefore one of the National Parks most sustainable locations capable of accommodating development.
- 4.2 The supporting evidence base includes specific profiles for each settlement, including information on strategic planning policies and constraints affecting each settlement.

Local Housing Need Requirement

- 4.3 In terms of housing need, page 4 of the Moretonhampstead Settlement Profile states that:

'Moretonhampstead's affordable housing needs will be identified from housing need within the following parishes: Moretonhampstead, Bidford, Chagford, Drewsteignton, Dunsford, Lustleigh, and North Bovey.'

- 4.4 It then sets out at Page 5 of the Settlement Profile that the January 2014 Housing Needs Assessment recommends that 13 affordable homes are needed. It is not explained what period this need relates to, but it is understood that this refers to a five-year period and should not be regarded as a plan period requirement.

- 4.5 The lack of an up to date assessment of housing need for Moretonhampstead is of significant concern. The date of the assessment referenced in the Settlement Profile (i.e. 2014) should be considered in the context of paragraph 3.1.10 of the Consultation Document, where it states:

'Housing needs assessments are surveys undertaken in communities which establish the level of current and future housing need. They are a vital tool for understanding a community's housing need, and offer far more detailed information about a community than the Housing Register.' (Boyer emphasis)

- 4.6 Furthermore, it states:

"Housing needs assessments are typically valid for around 3-5yrs and they may be supported by information from the Housing Register. Where a development has taken place since a survey was carried out, this will normally mean that the housing needs assessment's results are less meaningful." (Boyer emphasis)

- 4.7 The Moretonhampstead Settlement Profile explains that neither of the extant allocations have delivered housing to date and that four affordable units have been delivered since 2008. In terms of affordable housing it should also be noted that Topic Paper 9 states that *no new affordable homes (were) delivered (in Moretonhampstead) in the present local plan period.*

- 4.8 The reality for Moretonhampstead is that it has not provided for the housing growth envisaged in the extant Development Plan with neither allocations identified in the 2013 Development Management and Delivery DPD providing for any housing to date. Moreover, in terms of affordable housing, the Authorities' own evidence base confirms that none has been delivered in the current plan period.
- 4.9 The Settlement Profile for Moretonhampstead does not provide information regarding total housing delivery to date in the current plan period. A cursory review of the Council's planning application webpages suggests that the total number of units delivered is in single figures. The evidence base should, in our view, provide information on completions and commitments at all Local Centres, including Moretonhampstead.
- 4.10 As explained within these representations, our client has land interest at Moretonhampstead which, it is considered, represents a genuine suitable and sustainable development opportunity which supports the requirement of the plan to achieve a balance between meeting the needs of the National Park whilst conserving and enhancing those key features which justify the Parks special status.
- 4.11 Topic Paper 9 (page 38-39) explains that Moretonhampstead "*requires a level of local needs development to support the community, in particular newly forming households and downsizing households.*" However, this 'level of local needs' is not quantified in either Topic Paper 9 or the Consultation Document.
- 4.12 Topic Paper 9 advises that whilst there are two allocated sites, which are now coming through the development management process via planning applications, it is advised to allocate at least one future site to enable phasing and ongoing supply of homes for the community.
- 4.13 In response, the Consultation Document includes three land areas allocated for development, two of which (**7.11** – Land at Forder Farm and **7.12** – Land at Thompson's Haulage Depot) are allocations which have been rolled forward from the 2013 Development Management Delivery DPD, with the third (additional) site allocated at Betton Way (**7.10**).
- 4.14 In total these three allocations will provide around 69 dwellings (based on current policy requirements). All allocations proposed at Moretonhampstead include within their respective policies, a requirement to provide not less than 45% affordable homes, which equates to a minimum of c.31 affordable homes.
- 4.15 The absence of any specific evidence to quantify the level of need to be provided at Moretonhampstead represents a concerning failure of the plan-making process. It is explained at Paragraph 7.3.7 of the Consultation Document that allocations at Moretonhampstead are identified '*in order to meet identified local housing need...*', yet there is no specific evidence presented that provides a quantitative requirement which proposed allocations are intended to address.

- 4.16 Moreover, there is no correlation between the requirements in site allocation policies to deliver affordable housing totalling c.31 dwelling and up-to-date evidence of need. Such a figure is at odds with the referenced need in the Moretonhampstead Settlement Profile, a figure of 13 affordable units which dates back to a Housing Needs Survey published in 2014.
- 4.17 Due to the lack of an up-to-date, robust evidence base, the level of affordable housing required in Moretonhampstead is not quantified and therefore it is not possible to determine what scale of development is required over the plan period to ensure affordable housing need can be delivered.
- 4.18 It is essential that the quantitative requirements for Moretonhampstead are clearly explained in order to ensure that associated policies in the Local Plan contain appropriate flexibility to respond to changing circumstances, which could include sites not delivering their anticipated contribution to affordable housing delivery.

DMD Site Allocations

- 4.19 In this context, it should be noted that the retained allocation at 'Thompsons' (7.12) is subject to a live planning application (Ref: 0139/19) for the erection of 40 dwellings. This contrasts with the requirement in emerging policy 7.12 for this site to provide for "around 26 homes." Of greater significance is the fact that the proposal subject to the live planning application will **not provide** for any affordable homes owing to the Vacant Building Credit. Consequently, the policy requirements related to this allocation are inconsistent with the reality of the proposals currently before the Park Authority.
- 4.20 This adds further weight for the housing needs for Moretonhampstead to be specifically quantified in policy, including the scale of affordable housing to be delivered over the plan period. As stated previously, the Consultation Document (paragraph 7.3.7) states that the proposed sites at Moretonhampstead are identified in response to local housing need, plaintively this is not the case with the land at Thompson's Depot, which will not provide for the affordable housing required by the emerging policy.
- 4.21 The consequence of which is that a planned source of affordable housing, circa 12 affordable units (based on policy requirement of 45% of around 26 homes), will not be delivered. This therefore necessitates alternative sources of supply, including the inclusion of an additional site to plug the delivery gap resulting from the lack of any affordable housing at site 7.12 over and above that proposed in the Consultation Document.
- 4.22 In such a scenario, Courtenay Park can provide a logical and deliverable opportunity to facilitate the delivery of affordable housing, a need which will not be delivered via proposed allocation 7.12.
- 4.23 At the very minimum Policy 7.12 should be revised to reflect what is actually deliverable and acknowledge that this development will not provide for affordable housing and an alternative source of supply identified.

- 4.24 Land at Forder Farm (7.11) is also subject to a live planning application with the resolution to grant, subject to S106, confirmed in September 2018 (Ref: 0228/18). The application seeks to provide for up to 30 dwellings. The precise scale of affordable housing is yet to be confirmed through the associated S106, but in order to be compliant with extant or emerging policy (50% / 45% respectively) this scheme will be required to provide between 13-15 affordable housing units.
- 4.25 It should also be noted that policy 7.11 refers to the site delivering around “25 homes” demonstrating once again a disconnect between the policy requirements and the reality of what is proposed on an identified development site.

5. SITE SELECTION PROCESS

5.1 The process through which sites are identified and included within the Consultation Document as proposed allocations is an important consideration in terms of understanding the deliverability of and scale of development proposed through the National Park Area and at individual settlements.

SA and Site Selection Process

5.2 Irrespective of the overall housing figure, it is essential that the consideration of site options be based on an objective, fair and comparable process.

5.3 The focus of our comments is on the site selection process for Moretonhampstead and how these options were considered, specifically the decision not to progress land controlled by our client (Land at Courtenay Park, **DNP08/018**)

5.4 Potential site options emerge from the 2017 LAA with those options that were found to be reasonable, suitable and realistic subject to the SA process.

5.5 It is noted that land controlled by Cavanna Homes (DNP 08/018 – Courtenay Park) is listed within the SA, as a site, which meets the criteria for inclusion i.e. it, is **suitable, available and achievable**.

5.6 Paragraph 6.17 of the SA (June 2019) states that sites were assessed individually against the SA objectives. However, in the context of land now proposed to be allocated at Betton Way (7.10), this site is combined with land at Forder Farm (7.11) within the SA Appendix V Assessment Table (site reference 14/095 – Chagford Cross).

5.7 The decision to assess these sites on a combined basis is understood to be because both land areas are under the same ownership. Ownership does not, and should not, dictate the way that physically unconnected site options are assessed through the SA. In doing so, this results in uncertainty as to the specific SA 'scores' for the individual site options, potentially conflating the potential impacts, positive or negative, in a manner which could mask site specific impacts owing to the fact that the score reflects the overall performance of two separate land parcels.

5.8 Table 6.2 of the SA (June 2019) outlines the reasons for selecting or not progressing site options. In the context of proposed allocations at Bretton Way and Forder Farm, Table 6.2 demonstrates that the SA appraised these sites together rather than on an individual basis. These two sites should be separated in the SA process and assessed individually in order to understand their relative performance against the SA objectives and critically, to set out their (individual) comparative performance against alternative site options at Moretonhampstead.

5.9 In respect of our client's land interest at Courtenay Park, Table 6.2 of the SA (June 2019) explains that reason for not progressing the site as follows:

'Not progressed at this stage because of sequentially preferable sites of lesser landscape character and historic environment concerns (expressed strongly through community concern around development of this site) being available.'

5.10 There are serious concerns regarding the justification articulated within the SA for not progressing this site. First, concerning the conclusion that there are sequentially preferable sites of lesser landscape character and historic environment concerns, the comparative assessment of Courtenay Park in terms of landscape and heritage matters set out in the SA is shown below.

Site	Landscape & Settlement Character		Heritage
08/017 Land south of Station Rd (Thompsons Yard)	+	+	-
08/018 Courtenay Park	-	0	-
14/095 – Chagford Cross	-	0	-

5.11 Based on the SA, the relative scoring against the landscape and historic environment objectives show that Courtenay Park is indistinguishable from sites 14/095 in terms of the potential impacts against these objectives, with Thompsons Yard understandably scoring more positively in terms of landscape and settlement character given that this is a previously developed site.

5.12 The detailed assessment on these SA objectives provided at Appendix V, refers to Courtenay Park (site **018**) and Chagford Cross (site **095**) states:

*'Site options **018**, **095**, 102, and the majority of site 019 are within an area which is considered to have a moderate/high landscape sensitivity. The area has a strong historic character, a rural character and a strong visual relationship with the surrounding landscape. The presence of post and wire fencing, field boundaries and modern development lessen the landscape sensitivity of the area. 'The location of the site options is considered to have a detrimental effect on the local landscape character due to their location on the edge of the existing settlement. The site options will result in the loss of pastoral character, which is a key quality for the local landscape, the loss of the existing medieval field pattern, and have the potential for a cumulative urbanising effect on the rural character of the local landscape. Potential for a minor negative effect. Furthermore, there is the potential for all site options to result in a cumulative loss of tranquillity through increased noise and light pollution.'*

- 5.13 Within the SA ,there is a clear distinction on the landscape / character impacts made in terms of site 017 (Thompsons) where it notes that it is a brownfield site and therefore development is likely to have a minor positive effect, compared with a minor negative effect from those greenfield sites. However, as shown above, no such distinction is made in respect of site options 018 and 095. Therefore, to conclude that one site is sequentially preferable other another lacks of justification from the assessment set out in the SA.
- 5.14 Secondly, it is noted that Table 6.2 makes a specific reference to 'community concern' as part of the justification for not progressing land at Courtenay Park. Such concerns are not listed in respect of any other site considered within the SA, whether progressed or not. Moreover, there is a lack of any evidential basis to explain in what forum such concerns were expressed.
- 5.15 It is not the function or purpose of the SA to appraise sites on the basis of perceived local objection, or even support, for a particular development option. The SA is solely concerned with the likely environmental affects, assessed against the 15 stated Objectives, of which 'community concern' is not a relevant consideration.
- 5.16 Reference to 'community concern' raises significant questions regarding the extent to which Courtenay Park was considered on a fair and equitable basis and critically how objective the SA process is regarding this particular site.
- 5.17 Further information as to how sites were assessed in the preparation of the Local Plan is set out in Topic Paper 9 ('Site Assessment & Allocation Recommendations') (September 2019).
- 5.18 The Introduction to Topic Paper 9 explains that it is the purpose of the Topic Paper to consider available sites for development taking into account other evidence base documents, including the SA.
- 5.19 Mindful of the conclusions of the SA not to progress Courtenay Park due to sequentially preferable sites in terms of landscape and heritage considerations, it is noted that Table 3 of Topic Paper 9 provides a summary of the landscape sensitivity assessment for Local Centre sites. In the context of Moretonhampstead, the following is of note:

LAA Site Ref	Address	Landscape Character Type	Sensitivity
MTN1 14/095 A	MTN1 Chagford Cross	2D. Moorland edge slopes	N/a
MTN2 08/017 A	MTN2 Thompson's Yard		N/a
14/095 B	Bradford Meadow, Betton Way		Med-High
08/018	Courtenay Park Field		

5.20 In a similar way to the SA appraisal against the landscape objectives, Courtenay Park is judged to have a landscape sensitivity within the same category as a site now proposed to be allocated (Betton Way – 7.10).

5.21 On this specific issue of landscape, Topic Paper 9, (Section 7.3) refers to the SEA and states that:

'As all sites except Thompson's Depot are greenfield these were judged to have slight negative impacts in relation to landscape, soils and heritage.. .' (Boyer emphasis)

5.22 Yet the table at page 39 of Topic Paper 9 in respect of Courtenay Park states:

'Visually sensitive, significant landscape character impact and community amenity concerns. PRoW bisecting site provides informal recreation and important E/W pedestrian connection. Listed Building adjoining site to the W.' (Boyer emphasis)

5.23 There is clearly an inconsistency in the consideration Courtenay Park in terms of its landscape impact. To conclude that there is a significant landscape character impact, bears no relationship with the SA process or the Council's own assessment of landscape sensitivity summarised within Topic Paper 9

5.24 Section 7 of Topic Paper 9 provides a narrative on Moretonhampstead where it notes that the settlement *"has few strategic environmental constraints"* and as an elevated settlement, *"the surrounding landscape has medium to high sensitivity."* Table 7.1 identifies the issues at Moretonhampstead and in terms of landscape; it states, *"the landscape to the north and east of the town has a higher sensitivity to change."* Land at Courtenay Park is located to the south of Moretonhampstead.

5.25 In terms of the potential impact on heritage assets, it is noted that Topic Paper 9 (page 39) makes reference to “*Listed Building adjoining site to the west*”. Yet there is no specific reference or assessment undertaken to demonstrate or justify why the presence of a listed building is a constraint or obstacle to development at Courtenay Park.

5.26 The LAA (2017) considers the ‘Constraints to Delivery’ where it states:

‘Setting of the PRow and nearby listed buildings, together with vehicular access, but it may be possible to overcome these issues.’

5.27 The proximity of a site to a heritage asset does not in itself providing a defensible basis upon which a site should not be progressed. Previous evidence submitted has demonstrated that a feasible scheme can be developed on site with specific regard to the listed buildings.

5.28 Moreover, if this were then case than such an approach should be applied consistently to all site options and in the case of Thompsons (7.12), which includes the Historic good shed on site with the Grade II listed former engine shed on adjacent plot, the case for progressing this site as retained allocation would be brought in to doubt.

5.29 In terms of presence of a PRow the SA (objective 11) and the impact on PRow, Appendix V states:

‘Site options 017 [Thompsons], 018 [Courtenay Park] and 102 have existing PRow routes, and therefore development at these site options are considered to have the potential for a minor negative effect on green infrastructure through the potential loss or alterations of the PRow network, although this could be mitigated through site-specific requirements..’ (Boyer emphasis)

5.30 Specific features prevailing at, or adjacent to, a site and their impact on the suitability of a site for development should be applied consistently through the site selection process. It is flawed to elevate the significance of a particular feature such that it renders a site as not suitable for progression, where such features prevail on alternative sites which are proposed to be allocated.

5.31 To do so requires a comprehensive and detailed assessment of such features in order to understand the associated impacts and potential for mitigation through the design of development sites. No such detailed assessment exists, rather the site selection process is reliant upon broad assessments which are applied inconsistently in the consideration of site options, such that these matters are applied to justify the decision not to advance specific site options, whereas proposed options are advanced on the basis that such constraints can be appropriately mitigated.

Stakeholder Views

5.32 Section 7.2 of Topic Paper 9 sets out the views of the local community and it is evident, particularly in the context of land at Courtenay Park, that such views are determinative in the site selection process.

5.33 Topic Paper 9 notes that there is little support for any large scale development in Moretonhampstead and a sensitivity appraisal undertaken “by a group of residents” concluded that “all green space in the town are highly valued.” Given that there is little support for any large scale development, it is unsurprising that all green spaces are highly valued, such positions are undoubtedly aligned to the same agenda to resist additional development.

5.34 Within section 7.2 reference is also made to local residents “consistently” expressing a desire to retain the openness of Courtenay Park field as a southern setting of the town. Yet this is not based on any specific assessment to justify why this site should be protected from future development.

5.35 The only evidence based relating to landscape sensitivity is provided by The Dartmoor Landscape Sensitivity Assessment (July 2017) which forms the basis of the summary table at 3 of Topic Paper 9, explains in the Executive Summary that:

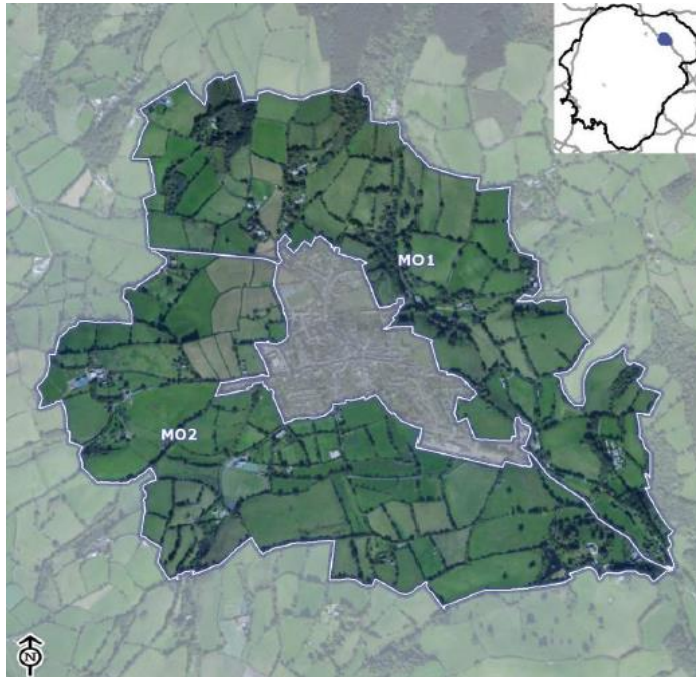
‘Whilst the Landscape Sensitivity Assessment results provide an initial indication of landscape sensitivity, it should not be interpreted as a definitive statement on the suitability of individual sites for a particular development or land use change. All proposals will need to be assessed on their own merits.’

5.36 It goes on to state that:

‘This assessment does not make judgements on the appropriateness of specific developments on individual sites (and does not consider specific development proposals where these might exist), but can provide the context for more detailed studies of individual sites. It also provides an important evidence base to support the policies and proposals within the Local Plan. In particular the information will be used to help inform the site allocations decision making process.’ (Paragraph 1.3) (Boyer Emphasis)

5.37 The purpose of the Sensitivity Assessment therefore appears contradictory. On the one hand, it seeks to make clear that it should not be interpreted as a definitive statement on the suitability of individual sites, yet is intended to be used to inform the site allocations decision-making process.

5.38 The Methodology of the Landscape Sensitivity Assessment is based on defined study areas for each settlement. For Moretonhampstead, there are just two ‘Landscape Assessments Zones as shown below



- 5.39 The sensitivity assessment is therefore based on two large study areas, which will cover a range of different features and sensitivities. To assert therefore the findings of this high level assessment can be applied directly to individual sites runs counter to the clear caveats set out in the 2017 assessment. Critically, it does not support the assertions *‘by a group of residents’* that Courtenay Park is of a particularly high landscape value.
- 5.40 Section 7.3 (Site Appraisal) of Topic Paper 9 provides a summary of the site selection process. In the context of Courtenay Park (DNP08/18) Table 2.1 summarises the LAA findings and states:
- ‘Potential Surface Water Flooding’ area runs along Station Rd boundary. The PROW (Parish Footpath 28) provides informal recreation and is an important pedestrian link from the east of the town to the west and the Leisure centre/recreation ground.’*
- 5.41 It also acknowledges that as all sites except Thompson’s Depot are greenfield these were judged to have slight negative impacts in relation to landscape, soils and heritage. The remainder of concerns were largely similar across sites and largely neutral or slight positive.
- 5.42 This once again demonstrates the inconsistencies in the decision-making process when compared with the evidence base.
- 5.43 Topic Paper 9 concludes by summarising the Potential Allocation Appraisal. When referring to Courtenay Park it states that this site *‘appears as open town greenspace.’* Such terminology is not explained nor is there any specific assessment that provides any sort of qualitative or quantitative analysis to determine whether this ‘town greenspace’ has a particular landscape value that warrants specific protection.

- 5.44 The Topic Paper states that Courtenay Park is proximate to the town centre and with sensitive urban layout could represent a new 'edge' to the townscape. It does not state or imply that the landscape is highly sensitive and therefore unsuitable for development, rather it acknowledges that through appropriate layout, the opportunity exist to provide a new 'edge' to the townscape. This adds further cause for concern in terms of the decision for not progressing this site based on its 'significant' landscape impact (see page 39 of Topic Paper 9).
- 5.45 Notwithstanding the recognition within Topic Paper 9 regarding the potential for development at Courtenay Park to deliver a new 'edge' to the townscape, it goes on to state *"however there is notable local opposition to development of this site and that in considering site alternatives, Courtenay Park and Brinning Lane have the most significant landscape character impact and there are considerable community amenity concerns. The scale of land put forward is out of keeping with local housing need."* (Boyer emphasis).
- 5.46 It is not clear what is meant by the 'scale of land' put forward. Courtenay Park is promoted for a development of circa 30 dwellings, which is consistent with the scale of development proposed at each of the proposed allocations at Moretonhampstead.

Summary

- 5.47 The site selection process as it relates to Moretonhampstead and specifically Courtenay Park lacks consistency and coherence. The evidence base presents contradictory statements on alleged impact, specifically in terms of the landscape and character of the settlement.
- 5.48 The 2017 LAA confirms that the site is **suitable, available** and **achievable** whilst, in the SA, Courtenay Park performs equally as well as those sites proposed to be allocated through the Local Plan Review, when considered against the 15 SA Objectives.
- 5.49 Reference to Courtenay Park not progressing because other sequentially preferable sites (in terms of landscape/heritage impacts) are available is not supported by any evidence to justify why this is the case. Moreover, given the inconsistent and contradictory conclusions on the perceived impacts arising from Courtenay Park on matters related to landscape and heritage, it is difficult to determine what conclusions have been applied when making the conclusion that other sites are sequentially preferable.
- 5.50 Furthermore, for one site to be sequentially preferable other another there should be a clear evidence trail, based on a fair and comparable assessment to demonstrate why this is the case. Such evidence does not exist.
- 5.51 It is clear from our review that the decision not to progress Courtenay Park is based on local opposition and this is the key determinant in the site selection process insofar as it relates to this site.
- 5.52 Local opposition, or even support, of a site, does not take precedence over the objective assessment of site options. In the case of Courtenay Park, such opposition has proved to be the key driver in the decision-making process, resulting in the reasons given for not progressing the site. This does not reflect findings set out in the evidence base.

5.53 Such an approach cannot be considered sound, as this genuine reasonable alternative option has not been considered on a comparable basis. The supporting evidence base does not provide sufficient justification for not progressing this site which has resulted in a site selection process which is contradictory and inconsistent, and applied inappropriately to support the decision not to progress the site, driven principally by local objection.

6. CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1 National guidance in the form of the 2010 Circular makes it clear that National Park Authorities - in addition to conserving and enhancing the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage and promote the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the National Parks – should maintain a focus on providing for affordable housing and ensuring the needs of Park communities are met.
- 6.2 This is of significance to Dartmoor National Park given the issues that it is currently facing, namely, that it has a high level of housing unaffordability, it has an ever decreasing working age population and there is a greater demand for services and facilities to meet the needs of older people.
- 6.3 As such, the National Park Authority should view the provision of housing as being a critical consideration, as it prepares its planning policy that will guide development in Dartmoor over the next fifteen years.
- 6.4 Our analysis of the Regulation 19 Consultation Document and its supporting base suggests further work is required to ensure that the Plan is sufficiently robust to set a true and fair assessment of housing and the level required to support the needs of the National Park. In particular, it is apparent that the level of housing development/growth proposed over plan period does not appear to be sufficient to meet the National Park's aims to reduce the challenges facing Dartmoor such as ageing population, local housing need and employment workforce.
- 6.5 Our representations suggests that there has been no robust assessment of the 65 homes per annum figure (or alternatives) in either the SA or other supporting evidence. Indeed, it is not clear how this figure was reached. It is our view that this level of housing provision is insufficient and needs to be increased. We consider that this can be secured without harming the overarching aims of the Park or resulting in unrestricted growth.
- 6.6 That said many elements of the Plan can be commended such as the continued focus on local centres such as Moretonhampstead to be the focus for new growth. However, the detail of how this 'growth' will be achieved still requires further analysis and justification.
- 6.7 In regards to Moretonhampstead, it is clear that there has been no significant housing development in recent years despite the presence of two allocated sites in the town. Despite their non-delivery over a period of 5 – 7 years, these sites are retained in the Consultation Document and are supported by a further smaller allocation.
- 6.8 However, notwithstanding the lack of delivery in the town, the evidence utilised to justify this approach is neither robust nor comprehensive. It is stated that new housing is only to come forward in Moretonhampstead based on delivering affordable housing even though there is no up-to-date local housing need assessment. Furthermore, one of the allocated sites is not going to provide any provision due to Vacant Building Credit.

- 6.9 In addition, the site assessment does not appear to have been undertaken on equitable basis given that the site at Courtenay Park scores the same as the (new) allocated site at Bretton Way in the SA (there is also the fact that Breton Way was not considered in isolation). However, later, it states that Courtenay Park has not been progressed because of sequentially preferable sites of lesser landscape character and historic environment concerns (expressed strongly through community concern around development of this site) being available.
- 6.10 The critical point here is the comment regarding community concern. It is clear from the evidence base that this has influenced the National Park's approach to the site.
- 6.11 Local opposition of a site should not take precedence over the objective assessment of site options. In the case of Courtenay Park, such opposition has proved to be the key driver in the decision-making process, resulting in the site not being progressed.

Changes Sought

- 6.12 As the Consultation Document currently stands, we do not consider that it is sound. There is a clear requirement to re-visit the demographic analysis used to support the housing requirement figure. The ultimate annual housing requirement figure needs to be reached at the conclusion of a robust supporting evidence assessment. The evidence base should not be used to justify a figure that has been reached first, which appears to have happened in this instance.
- 6.13 As such, further research is required to establish an appropriate housing requirement figure (notwithstanding the unique context of the National Park). At the very least, a sustainability appraisal should be conducted of the different housing provision scenarios.
- 6.14 It is also clear that the National Park Authority has not correctly interpreted the evidence base relating to the allocation of potential housing sites in Moretonhampstead. It is our view that a local housing needs assessment is required immediately to act as the basis for subsequent decision-making. Moreover, the lack of affordable housing delivery on the Thompsons Depot site should be taken into account when determining housing provision in Moretonhampstead while Bretton Way should be considered as a separate site – the fact that it is jointly owned with Forder Farm is immaterial.
- 6.15 Finally, the National Park Authority should re-consider the weight it has clearly given to local neighbourhood objection. This is neither an objective nor logical approach when the merits (and dis-benefits) of a site are being considered. Local views should not take precedence over the objective assessment of site options, as there will inevitably be a bias against development.
- 6.16 Given the above, we consider that there is sufficient justification to review and modify the Consultation Document. The result being that further sites will be required to be allocated and that such allocations should be focussed on local centres such as Moretonhampstead. This, together with a comprehensive assessment of the potential sites around the town and a thorough assessment of local housing need, would demonstrate that Courtenay Park should be allocated for residential development in modifications to the Consultation Document.

APPENDIX ONE – SITE LOCATION PLAN

