

Report on the Disley and Newtown Neighbourhood Plan 2017- 2030

An Examination undertaken for Cheshire East Council with the support of the Disley Parish Council on the December 2017 submission version of the Plan.

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Date of Report: 17 April 2018

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Main Findings - Executive Summary

From my examination of the Disley and Newtown Neighbourhood Plan (the Plan/NP) and its supporting documentation including the representations made, I have concluded that subject to the policy modifications set out in this report, the Plan meets the Basic Conditions.

I have also concluded that:

- The Plan has been prepared and submitted for examination by a qualifying body – the Disley Parish Council;
- The Plan has been prepared for an area properly designated the Parish of Disley as shown on the map at Figure A of the Plan;
- The Plan specifies the period to which it is to take effect 2017-2030; and
- The policies relate to the development and use of land for a designated neighbourhood area.

I recommend that the Plan, once modified, proceeds to Referendum on the basis that it has met all the relevant legal requirements.

I have considered whether the referendum area should extend beyond the designated area to which the Plan relates and have concluded that it should not.

1. Introduction and Background

Disley and Newtown Neighbourhood Plan 2017 - 2030

- 1.1 Disley is an attractive village, which displays a semi-rural character, sitting as it does on the south side of the Goyt Valley, on the edge of the Peak District. It has a distinctive village centre, which I note is included within the Disley Conservation Area. That part of Newtown which lies within the Parish is largely characterised by traditional terraced housing on the south side of the main road, with more recent housing to the north (for example, Peveril Gardens). It also includes the commercial centre that is identified in Figure Q of the NP. The Parish has a population of over 4,300 people and sits within the Unitary Authority of Cheshire East. The NP covers the whole of the Civil Parish, being the designated Neighbourhood Area (Figure A of the NP).
- 1.2 The decision to embark on the preparation of the NP was agreed at a Parish Council meeting in February 2015. A steering group was formed and a thorough process of consultation and publicity regarding the NP has been undertaken.

1.3 The NP provides a summary of the history and character of the area and its landscape setting. The approach taken towards public consultation is set out. The NP then confirms the vision and objectives for Disley and Newtown and includes a range of policies which it is anticipated by the Parish Council will successfully deliver those objectives.

The Independent Examiner

- 1.4 As the Plan has now reached the examination stage, I have been appointed as the examiner of the Disley and Newtown Neighbourhood Plan by Cheshire East Council (CEC/the Council), with the agreement of the Disley Parish Council (the Parish Council).
- I am a chartered town planner and former government Planning Inspector, with considerable experience in the preparation and examination of development plans. I am an independent examiner, and do not have an interest in any of the land that may be affected by the draft plan.

The Scope of the Examination

- 1.6 As the independent examiner I am required to produce this report and recommend either:
 - (a) that the neighbourhood plan is submitted to a referendum without changes; or
 - (b) that modifications are made and that the modified neighbourhood plan is submitted to a referendum; or
 - (c) that the neighbourhood plan does not proceed to a referendum on the basis that it does not meet the necessary legal requirements.
- 1.7 The scope of the examination is set out in Paragraph 8(1) of Schedule 4B to the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended)('the 1990 Act'). The examiner must consider:
 - Whether the Plan meets the Basic Conditions;
 - Whether the Plan complies with provisions under s.38A and s.38B of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended) ('the 2004 Act'). These are:
 - it has been prepared and submitted for examination by a qualifying body, for an area that has been properly designated by the local planning authority;
 - it sets out policies in relation to the development and use of land;

- it specifies the period during which it has effect;
- it does not include provisions and policies for 'excluded development';
- it is the only neighbourhood plan for the area and does not relate to land outside the designated neighbourhood area;
- whether the referendum boundary should be extended beyond the designated area, should the Plan proceed to referendum; and
- Such matters as prescribed in the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 (as amended)('the 2012 Regulations').
- 1.8 I have considered only matters that fall within Paragraph 8(1) of Schedule 4B to the 1990 Act, with one exception. That is the requirement that the Plan is compatible with the Human Rights Convention.

The Basic Conditions

- 1.9 The 'Basic Conditions' are set out in Paragraph 8(2) of Schedule 4B to the 1990 Act. In order to meet the Basic Conditions, the neighbourhood plan must:
 - Have regard to national policies and advice contained in guidance issued by the Secretary of State;
 - Contribute to the achievement of sustainable development;
 - Be in general conformity with the strategic policies of the development plan for the area;
 - Be compatible with and not breach European Union (EU) obligations; and
 - Meet prescribed conditions and comply with prescribed matters.
- 1.10 Regulation 32 of the 2012 Regulations prescribes a further Basic Condition for a neighbourhood plan. This requires that the neighbourhood plan should not be likely to have a significant effect on a European Site (as defined in the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017) or a European Offshore Marine Site (as defined in the Offshore Marine Conservation (Natural Habitats etc.) Regulations 2007), either alone or in combination with other plans or projects.

2. Approach to the Examination

Planning Policy Context

- 2.1 The Development Plan for this part of Cheshire East, not including documents relating to excluded minerals and waste development, is the Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy July 2017 (CELPS) and the saved policies of the Macclesfield Borough Local Plan 2004. CEC is currently preparing the Local Plan Site Allocations and Development Policies Document (CESADP), which will allocate sites for future development and provide detailed policies on land use planning matters. This is timetabled for publication and consultation in the second quarter of 2018¹.
- 2.2 The planning policy for England is set out principally in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) offers guidance on how the NPPF should be implemented. PPG makes it clear that whilst a draft NP is not tested against the policies in an emerging local plan, the reasoning and evidence informing the plan making process is likely to be relevant to the consideration of the Basic conditions against which an NP is tested. Paragraph 184 of the NPPF confirms that the ambitions of a neighbourhood should be aligned with the strategic needs and priorities of the wider area².

Submitted Documents

- 2.3 I have considered all policy, guidance and other reference documents I consider relevant to the examination, including those submitted which comprise:
 - the draft Disley and Newtown Neighbourhood Plan 2017-2030, (December 2017), that includes Figure A which identifies the area to which the proposed neighbourhood development plan relates;
 - the Consultation Statement, (submitted in February 2018);
 - the Basic Conditions Statement, (dated December 2017);
 - all the representations that have been made in accordance with the Regulation 16 consultation;
 - the Strategic Environmental Assessment Screening Opinion prepared by CEC and dated July 2017; and
 - the responses from CEC and the Parish Council to the questions set out in my letter of 5th March 2018³.

¹ CEC Local Development Scheme (October 2016).

² See also PPG Reference ID 41-009-20160211.

³ View at: https://cheshireeast.gov.uk/planning/neighbourhood-plans/neighbourhood-

Site Visit

2.4 I made an unaccompanied site visit to the Neighbourhood Plan Area on 13th March 2018 to familiarise myself with the area, and visit relevant sites and locations referenced in the Plan and evidential documents.

Written Representations with or without Public Hearing

2.5 This examination has been dealt with by written representations. Having read the consultation responses, I considered hearing sessions to be unnecessary because the consultation responses clearly set out the objections to the NP. No specific requests for a hearing were made. Both the Parish Council and CEC responded helpfully in writing to the initial guestions that I posed in my letter dated 5th March 2018.

Modifications

2.6 Where necessary, I have recommended modifications to the Plan (**PMs**) in this report in order that it meets the Basic Conditions and other legal requirements. For ease of reference, I have listed these modifications separately in the Appendix.

3. Procedural Compliance and Human Rights

Qualifying Body and Neighbourhood Plan Area

- 3.1 The Disley and Newtown NP has been prepared and submitted for examination by Disley Parish Council, which is a qualifying body. The NP area was designated by Cheshire East Council on 5th May 2015.
- 3.2 It is the only neighbourhood plan for Disley and Newtown and does not relate to land outside the designated neighbourhood area.

Plan Period

3.3 The NP specifies clearly the period to which it is to take effect, which is from 2017 to 2030.

Neighbourhood Plan Preparation and Consultation

3.4 The NP Consultation Statement (December 2017) clearly sets out the wide range of consultation that has been undertaken, including public meetings, local surveys, exhibitions and web-site up-dates. The processes undertaken have been properly documented and it is clear that the information garnered by the NP Steering Group has been appropriately assessed and considered. A very large number of

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- interested parties were consulted at the Regulation 14 stage and a similar opportunity for those parties to comment was made available at the Regulation 16 stage.
- 3.5 I am satisfied that all the statutory requirements in the 2012 Regulations have been met and that in all respects the approach taken towards the preparation of the NP has been undertaken with appropriate regard to the advice on plan preparation and engagement in the PPG.

Development and Use of Land

3.6 The Plan sets out policies in relation to the development and use of land in accordance with s.38A of the 2004 Act.

Excluded Development

3.7 The Plan does not include provisions and policies for 'excluded development'.

Human Rights

3.8 None of the parties suggest that the NP breaches Human Rights (within the meaning of the Human Rights Act 1998), and from my independent assessment I consider there is no reason to disagree.

4. Compliance with the Basic Conditions

EU Obligations and Prescribed Condition

- 4.1 The NP was screened for Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) by CEC, which found that it was unnecessary to undertake SEA. Having read the Screening Opinion, dated July 2017, I see no reason to disagree and I note that there were no objections from Natural England in this regard.
- 4.2 The NP was further screened for Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA), the need for which also was not triggered. On this basis, it can be concluded that EU obligations have not been breached. The prescribed condition relating to the protection of European Sites of nature conservation value has also been met.

Main Issues

4.3 I have approached the assessment of whether or not the NP complies with the Basic Conditions under two main headings:

- general issues of compliance of the NP, as a whole; and
- specific issues of compliance of the NP policies.
- 4.4 In particular I have considered whether or not the NP complies with the Basic Conditions, particularly in terms of its relationship to national policy and guidance, the achievement of sustainable development and general conformity with the strategic adopted Development Plan policies in the CELPS.

General Issues of Compliance of the NP

National Policy, Sustainable Development and the Development Plan

- 4.5 The policies in the NP are set out under seven main headings: Air Quality; Housing; Countryside and Green Space; Built Environment; Transport; Economy and Village Centres; and Community Facilities and Infrastructure. The accompanying 'Basic Conditions Statement' clearly sets out how individual policies are aligned to national policy.
- 4.6 Support is given to accommodating new housing in accordance with the forthcoming CESADP, whilst affording appropriate protection to the Green Belt. One housing allocation (for older persons' housing) is proposed at Barlow Meadow (policy H4). I am told that this is subject to a planning consent under application number 17/1362M.
- 4.7 The NP provides support for the local economy, seeks to protect the setting of the built environment, directs development to meeting local needs, encourages sustainable travel, protects built heritage and seeks to prevent the deterioration of air quality. Subject to the detailed comments about individual policies that I set out below, I am satisfied that the NP has had regard to national policy and guidance. The NP policies (as modified) also demonstrate that the NP will contribute to the achievement of the economic, social and environmental aspects of sustainable development.
- 4.8 In terms of the Development Plan, the 'Basic Conditions Statement' satisfactorily establishes the relationship between the NP and the Development Plan. As mentioned in paragraph 2.2 above, whilst it is not a statutory requirement for the NP to be in conformity with the strategic policies of the emerging CESADP, it is good practice that where possible the two approaches are aligned and I refer to this matter again in paragraph 4.15.
- 4.9 Overall the NP provides an appropriate policy framework (at this time) in order to achieve the stated aims and objectives of the Parish Council.

Subject to the modifications that I recommend below, the NP meets the Basic Conditions. I am also content that the policies (as amended) are supported by suitable evidence, are sufficiently clear and unambiguous and that they can be applied consistently and with confidence⁴.

Specific Issues of Compliance of the NP's Policies

Air Quality Policy

- 4.10 Policy AQ1 would prevent development that would lead to an increase in traffic unless there was robust evidence that the proposed development would not lead to a further deterioration in air quality. Figure B of the NP identifies the Air Quality Management Area.
- 4.11 Paragraph 124 of the NPPF confirms that policies should contribute towards EU limit values or national objectives for pollutants and that new development in Air Quality Management Areas (AQMA) should be consistent with the local air quality action plan. I consider that the Parish Council is correct to place significant emphasis on this matter. However, the policy as worded is over prescriptive because some forms of development would not give rise to air quality issues and it would be unreasonable to expect the submission of a 'robust assessment and calculation with any appropriate modelling' in such circumstances. Policy AQ1 should therefore be modified to refer to major development (10 or more dwellings; housing sites of 0.5ha or more; floorspace of 1,000 sqm; or 1ha or more⁵), as set out in **PM1**. In the interests of consistency, the policy should also refer to meeting the requirements of the Cheshire East Air Quality Strategy and Air Quality Action Plan, both of which CEC tell me are currently under review, with engagement with those communities affected by AQMAs about to commence. In this way, the policy will be precise, clear and unambiguous⁶ and it can be applied consistently and with confidence.

Housing Policies

4.12 Policy H1, entitled New Residential Development, refers to a defined settlement boundary which is shown in Figure C. My understanding, however, is that there are currently no formally designated settlement boundaries for Disley and Newtown – only a default one formed by the Green Belt boundaries. In essence, the NP is proposing something 'new'.

⁴ PPG Reference ID:41-041-20140306.

⁵ As set out in The Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2010.

⁶ PPG Reference ID: 41-041-20140306.

- 4.13 The settlement boundary identified on Figure C includes some areas of land which are within the Green Belt. Whilst I agree with the Parish Council that the definition of settlement boundaries is a valuable planning tool, it is not clear what criteria have been used to justify the precise delineation of the proposed boundary a boundary which to me appears to have been tightly drawn around the built-up area. There is also the potential for confusion because the policy explicitly states that 'further residential development will not be permitted' with regard to land within both the settlement boundary and the Green Belt. This is contrary to the advice in paragraph 89 of the NPPF which confirms, for example, that limited infilling and the redevelopment of previously developed sites may be acceptable in such circumstances.
- 4.14 Also relevant to this issue is the level of housing need that will have to be accommodated within the area. The NP summarises the potential level of need and a number of figures are referred to in the policy's supporting text. To my mind, the most pertinent conclusion is that there may be a requirement for 'approximately a further 100 dwellings for the remainder of the plan period (up to 2030)'.
- 4.15 Against this background, work is underway on the CESADP and the Council confirms that there is a need to allocate about 3,750 new dwellings to Local Service Centres, including Disley. The Council is currently assessing all options to accommodate this need and confirm that this may also involve the release of sites from the Green Belt⁷.
- 4.16 There appear to be two options available either the proposed settlement boundary is confirmed with the proviso that it is redrawn once the outcome of the current deliberations about housing numbers and locations is agreed; or the status quo is retained until such time as the CESADP is adopted.
- 4.17 There are three reasons why I conclude that retaining the status quo should be recommended at this time. They are firstly, the lack of clarity regarding the criteria used by the Parish Council to justify the proposed settlement boundary as shown on Figure C. Secondly, I am not confident that policy H1 is supported by suitable evidence. Lastly, the potential confusion caused by not only having built up areas within the Green Belt shown as also having a settlement boundary, but also by there being different approaches advocated in the Green Belt, in the defined settlement, and in circumstances where a development site would be subject to both designations.
- 4.18 I consider that to delineate a settlement boundary which is not supported by suitable evidence would cause a lack of confidence, uncertainty and

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⁷ CELPS paragraph 8.30.

confusion. The approach that I recommend will not have any significant adverse consequences because the locality is already protected from inappropriate development by reason of the Green Belt and other policies in the adopted Local Plan Strategy (and by other relevant saved policies as listed in Appendix B of the aforementioned document).

- 4.19 On that basis, Policy H1 and Figure C should be deleted (**PM2**). Housing is clearly an important issue and therefore it may be appropriate to include some supporting text to explain the relationship between the forthcoming CESADP and the NP. However, this is not essential in order to meet the Basic Conditions and therefore it is not a specific recommendation.
- 4.20 Policy H2 relates to housing for older people (aged over 55) and reference is also made to restricting new housing for older people to those with local connections. However, there is no mechanism available to restrict the sale of market housing in such a way. As far as affordable housing is concerned, the approach to local connections is covered by other legislation and CEC's Common Allocations Policy, which includes provision for local connection to the parish. Therefore criterion (ii) of the policy should stipulate that the 'local connection' requirement only applies to affordable housing (**PM3**), thus ensuring that the policy accords with national guidance and that it can be implemented with confidence.
- 4.21 Policy H3 on Social Housing for Older People is clear. CEC suggests that reference should be made to amenity, highway safety and other siterelated sensitivities but such matters are covered in the adopted Development Plan. As already mentioned, there is a planning permission at Barlow Meadow (policy H4) for accommodation for people over the age of 55. However, as far as I am aware it has not yet been implemented, so the policy should be retained.
- 4.22 The Housing Mix and Type policy (H5) is too restrictive and there may be viability implications, for example by limiting the proportion of detached properties to only one third. Whilst the objective of the policy is clear, there are likely to be circumstances where such precise blanket requirements are not justified. The policy should be re-worded to introduce greater flexibility (**PM4**). In this way, the policy can be applied consistently and with confidence.
- 4.23 It was confirmed by CEC in their response to my letter of 5th March 2018 that the needs of gypsies, travellers and travelling showpeople are being addressed through other channels⁸.

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⁸ See the Regulation 16 response from the National Federation of Gypsy Liaison Groups. View at: https://cheshireeast.gov.uk/planning/neighbourhood-plans/neighbourhood-plans-a-f/disley-neighbourhood-plan.aspx

Countryside and Green Space Policies

- 4.24 Policy C1 clearly sets out the approach to be taken towards footpaths, bridleways and cycleways. Policy C2 relates to the designation of six Local Green Spaces (LGSs) which are afforded protection from most forms of new development. CEC raises potential concerns regarding site LGS5 Disley Dam and adjacent meadow. However, having read the evidence and visited the site I am satisfied that it meets the necessary criteria set out in paragraph 77 of the NPPF. It is close to the community and is of particular significance because, for example, of its beauty, recreational purpose and wildlife value. The area concerned is local in character and I would not describe it as extensive and therefore, in my assessment, it is suitable for LGS designation. The remaining sites proposed for designation, being the Village Green and War Memorial; St Mary's Church Meadow; the Bentside/Goat Road Recreation Area; the Land Behind Scout Hut and the Arnold Rhodes Playing Fields also all meet the necessary criteria in NPPF paragraph 77 and should therefore be designated as LGSs.
- 4.25 Policy C3 establishes a robust and sustainable approach to nature conservation and I understand that no 'new' sites of nature conservation value are proposed the main objective being to protect and enhance those sites already appropriately identified. Similarly, policy C4, regarding trees and hedgerows, is fully justified, especially bearing in mind the large number of trees in the area and the contribution they make to the character of the Parish. However, in order to demonstrate a degree of flexibility, the retention, enhancement and management of field boundaries should be achieved 'where possible'. Clause C of policy C3 should be amended accordingly (PM5).

Built Environment Policies

- 4.26 On my visit I saw the contribution that built form makes to the character of the village. The need to protect and enhance heritage and conservation assets is clear and policies BE1 (Heritage and Conservation Areas) and BE2 (Character and Design) provide an appropriate framework for the achievement of those objectives.
- 4.27 The design and appearance of shopfronts are important factors in the retention and improvement of the village centre character. Policy BE3 (Shopfronts) establishes a thorough and detailed set of principles to follow in Disley village. Having walked through the centre, I consider such an approach to be justified but suggest that, although not required to meet the Basic Conditions, this policy is monitored to ensure that there are no consequences in terms of the viability of local businesses.

4.28 I do not consider that the built environment policies would stifle innovation, originality or initiative⁹ but that they provide the framework through which the character of the area will be reinforced and improved.

Transport Policies

4.29 Policy T1 (Parking) seeks to tackle existing parking problems and policy T2 (Sustainable Transport) aims to encourage cycling and walking and better integration between different modes of transport. Policy T3 supports improvements to Disley Railway Station. These policies raise no substantive issues and pay due regard to national policy and advice.

Economy and Village Centre Policies

- 4.30 Policy E1 seeks to support the local economy subject to (among other things) the impact on landscape character being acceptable. The Peak District National Park Authority is concerned about potential consequences from development in countryside that provides the setting for the National Park. There should, where possible, be a continuity of landscape beyond the Park boundary and it is a requirement that regard is given to development that might have 'an impact on the setting' of a National Park¹⁰. In the interests of clarity and consistency with national guidance, I consider that an explicit reference to protecting the setting of the Peak District National Park should be included in policy E1 and I recommend accordingly (**PM6**).
- 4.31 Proposals for development in village commercial centres are covered by policy E2 and the night time economy is addressed in policy E3. These policies are clear and relevant. Policy E4 relates to Tourism development but does not include a specific reference to potential impacts on the National Park (see paragraph above). The setting of the Park is an important consideration and therefore bullet point three should be amended to include reference to the setting of the Peak District National Park (**PM7**).

Community Facilities and Infrastructure Policies

4.32 Policy CF1 seeks to secure buildings and facilities used by the community. Whilst this is a laudable objective, there needs to be some consideration of viability in order to ensure that a reasonable approach is taken. To that end, it is recommended that a reference to the need to consider issues of viability is added to the end of policy CF1 (PM8). This will achieve the necessary clarity to enable a decision-maker to apply the policy with confidence.

⁹ NPPF paragraph 60.

¹⁰ PPG Reference ID: 8-003-20140306.

4.33 The approach taken towards allotment provision as set out in policy CF2; play and sports facilities (CF3); Community Infrastructure Levy and Developer Contributions (CF4); and Telecommunications (CF5) are all reasonable, justified and meet the Basic Conditions.

5. Conclusions

Summary

- 5.1 The Disley and Newtown Neighbourhood Plan has been duly prepared in compliance with the procedural requirements. My examination has investigated whether the Plan meets the Basic Conditions and other legal requirements for neighbourhood plans. I have had regard for all the responses made following consultation on the Plan, and the evidence documents submitted with it.
- 5.2 I have made recommendations to modify a number of policies and text to ensure the Plan meets the Basic Conditions and other legal requirements. I recommend that the Plan, once modified, proceeds to referendum.

The Referendum and its Area

5.3 I have considered whether or not the referendum area should be extended beyond the designated area to which the Plan relates. The Disley and Newtown Neighbourhood Plan as modified has no policy or proposals which I consider significant enough to have an impact beyond the designated neighbourhood plan boundary, requiring the referendum to extend to areas beyond the plan boundary. I recommend that the boundary for the purposes of any future referendum on the Plan should be the boundary of the designated neighbourhood plan area.

Overview

5.4 The NP is a clear, well-structured document, the content of which reflects the time and effort that has been spent in bringing it to fruition. I fully endorse the comments of Cheshire East Council in its Regulation 16 response, in which it congratulates the Parish Council on the clarity and comprehensiveness of the NP and on the close involvement of the local community.

David Hogger

Examiner

Appendix: Modifications

Proposed modification number (PM)	Page no./ other reference	Modification
PM1	Chapter 7	Policy AQ1
		Delete first paragraph and replace it with:
		Proposals for major development (as defined in the Town and Country Planning (Management Procedures) (England) Order 2010 must be accompanied by appropriate evidence that demonstrates that the proposed development would not lead to:
		Retain sub-sections (a) and (b)
		Add final sentence to read:
		It must be satisfactorily demonstrated that any development which would have consequences for the Air Quality Management Area, is consistent with the current Cheshire East Air Quality Strategy and Air Quality Action Plan.
PM2	Chapter 8	Delete Policy H1 and Figure C.
		(although not a specific recommendation, it is suggested that the supporting text is replaced by a summary of the current relationship between the CESADP and the NP)
PM3	Chapter 8	Amend the start of criterion (ii) of policy H2 with:
		ii) In the case of affordable housing the dwellings are offered to
PM4	Chapter 8	Delete both paragraphs of Policy H5 and replace them with:
		New residential developments of 10 or more units should seek to deliver a range of property type, tenure and

		size to address any imbalance in the current housing stock and reflect the housing needs of the local market.
PM5	Chapter 9	Insert 'where possible' at the end of clause C of policy C4.
PM6	Chapter 12	In the opening sentence of policy E1, insert 'and the setting of the Peak District National Park' after 'landscape character,'.
PM7	Chapter 12	In third bullet point of policy E4 add: 'and/or, where relevant, the setting of the Peak District National Park'
PM8	Chapter 13	Amend and add to the end of policy CF1: `is replaced elsewhere, it is satisfactorily demonstrated that the facility is no longer required or no longer viable'