



Blackdown Hills AONB

Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding
Natural Beauty Partnership

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Local Plan Review Consultation
Forward Planning
Mid Devon District Council
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By email to: j

24 March 2014



Local Plan Review Options Consultation

This response is made on behalf of the Blackdown Hills AONB Partnership. We welcome the opportunity to contribute to this consultation. Comments are made on behalf of the Blackdown Hills AONB Partnership in respect of its role to safeguard the distinctive landscape, wildlife, historical and architectural character of the Blackdown Hills whilst fostering the social and economic wellbeing of communities. It is recognised that the AONB Partnership comprises a wide range of interests and organisations and that the comments made will not necessarily always be consistent with the views of individual organisations, or responses made by organisations as statutory consultees.

AONBs are designated under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949. They represent England's finest countryside and are protected in the national interest for future generations. The primary purpose of the designation is to conserve and enhance natural beauty and in pursuing the primary purpose account should be taken of the needs of agriculture, forestry, other rural industries and economic and social needs of local communities.

Comments

We welcome to references to AONBs and National Parks in Policy S2 and S10, which reflect the status of these protected landscapes.

Given the high number of potential housing allocations it will be important to ensure that land is not over allocated in rural areas and that there is a robust land use strategy to counter potential speculative applications in these areas. The limited scale of growth described in Policy S14 is supported in this regard.

Potential allocations in Hemyock should take account of the AONB designation; not simply in the ultimate need for good design of any future development, but more fundamentally the principle of development and scale of growth within the AONB. I am not aware that the site selection criteria of the SHLAA process takes account of AONB status. There is a case to suggest that smaller sites and/or sites within the existing settlement limit would better reflect the scale and setting of the village within the AONB.

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The Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is managed by a partnership of national agencies, local authorities, conservation organisations and community groups, who work together to protect this special place.

The work of the Blackdown Hills AONB Partnership is funded by Defra, Devon and Somerset County Councils, East Devon, Mid Devon and South Somerset District Councils and Taunton Deane Borough Council.

I would consider that there are parallels to the following example where during the Examination of the South Lakeland Land Allocations DPD the Inspector raised this point as an issue in respect of the Arnsdale and Silverdale AONB. In a letter to the local authority he highlighted that rather than discounting sites below the threshold of 0.3ha from consideration, in the AONB consideration of smaller sites would amount to a reasonable alternative, that would be more likely to ensure that the landscape and scenic beauty of the AONB is protected in the way envisaged by the NPPF.

Hemyock has seen significant growth in recent years, and its suitability for further housing development should be considered in light of accessibility, infrastructure, services and facilities. There should be robust site selection, of which landscape sensitivity is a key determinant. The AONB Partnership is concerned that any of the proposal sites could be visually intrusive. They are on relatively high, sloping ground and because of this the areas are particularly visible from the surrounding landscape, especially the approach from the north. Development of the sites around Culmbridge Farm in particular will make Hemyock appear significantly larger, adversely affecting its village character.

Although the village is outside the AONB, Culmstock is a key gateway settlement to the Blackdown Hills and any development here should have regard to the setting of the AONB. For example, development at Hunter's Hill may impact on the approach and public views towards Culmstock Beacon (a key landmark site and recreation destination within the AONB). The potential site to the south of the village may also have an impact on the setting of the AONB given its proximity.

Large scale development east of the motorway at either Junction 27 or Cullompton should also be considered within the context of the AONB, and potential impacts of development, or arising from development, should be built in as a key consideration from an early stage.

We trust that you will find our comments and observations helpful. We would be very happy to discuss any points further in due course and welcome continued involvement in the local plan process.

Submitted by email on 24th March 2014

Lisa Turner
Blackdown Hills AONB Partnership