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Our ref: 305033



Wycombe District Council

BY EMAIL ONLY

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Dear Judith Orr,

Planning Consultation: Great and Little Kimble cum Marsh Neighbourhood Plan

Thank you for your consultation on the above dated 8 January 2020.

Natural England is a non-departmental public body. Our statutory purpose is to ensure that the natural environment is conserved, enhanced, and managed for the benefit of present and future generations, thereby contributing to sustainable development.

Natural England is a statutory consultee in neighbourhood planning and must be consulted on draft neighbourhood development plans by the Parish/Town Councils or Neighbourhood Forums where our interests would be affected by the proposals made.

In our review of the Great and Little Kimble cum Marsh Neighbourhood Plan we have a few comments to make which are outlined below.

In the first instance, we would like to refer the Council to our representations on the Wycombe Local Plan (before the location of the Kimble sites were proposed), where we expressed concerns regarding the allocation of 160 dwellings at Great and Little Kimble-cum-Marsh (Policy RUR6). Please see below for extract from our letter dated 4th December 2017.

“Unlike Princes Risborough, Great and Little Kimble are very small conurbations that are surrounded and enveloped by a rural landscape. This area is highly sensitive, with significant views to and from the Chilterns chalk escarpment. It is visible from Beacon Hill and Coombe Hill which are highly visited sites. The requirement for the Parish to find 160 dwellings could considerably alter the look of the villages and negatively impact the landscape character and views of the setting of the AONB. We consider further work is required to ensure the Plan is in line with the NPPF para 115. The number of 160 should be reduced or if possible removed and the provision of infill housing for local residents should be emphasised. As no detail has been provided around the location of development or the mitigation measures proposed the Plan is not consistent with Para 115 in the NPPF and therefore it is unsound in its current form”.

(Former NPPF paragraph 115 is now updated as paragraph 172 in the revised (2018) NPPF).

As the detail of the location of development has now been provided, we are in a better place to offer advice and comment on the Neighbourhood Plan. In short, the sites in KIM3 are all likely to be visible from the escarpment, generate traffic travelling across the AONB and increase water abstraction from the chalk aquifer.

Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)

All the site allocations are located within the setting of the Chilterns AONB. They are all visible to certain degrees and extents from the AONB. Policy DP4 of the Chilterns AONB Management Plan 2019-2024 states *'in the setting of the AONB, take full account of whether proposals harm the AONB. For example, development of land visible in panoramic views from the Chilterns escarpment, or which generates traffic in or travelling across the AONB, or which increases water abstraction'*.

Please see the [Chilterns Conservation Board's Position Statement on Development Affecting the Setting of the AONB](#). It explains how developments outside the AONB but in its setting can affect the AONB. It should be recognised by this Plan that the 'setting' of an AONB is not a demarcated geographic zone within close proximity to the AONB itself. As well as visual impacts into and out of the AONB, the 'setting' may also be affected by such elements as increased noise and traffic, increased light pollution or water abstraction. Indeed, development some miles away from the AONB can affect it and its setting.

We are concerned about the views from the Chilterns AONB to the south of Little Kimble and Smokey Row (Beacon Hill, Coombe Hill Monument open access land). Cumulatively, the site allocations proposed within the Neighbourhood Plan have the potential to impact the open views from the escarpment. This is one of the most spectacular and least developed parts of the AONB and its setting. We recommend you consult the Chilterns AONB Conservation Board and take their comments into full consideration.

It is noticed that several of the sites contained as allocations within the Plan have not been assessed for their landscape and visual impact. Sites 14 and 17a have been assessed in the Wycombe DC Kimble Area Landscape Sensitivity & Capacity Study (2017), but the remaining sites (1,10,15) have not been assessed in this way.

This contravenes Wycombe DC's policy RUR6, which requires:

"The selection of sites should be based on an appraisal of local issues, including an assessment of the capacity of the landscape to:

- Accommodate development without having a major impact of the setting of Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)"*

Site 14 - Land east of Kimblewick Road

We have concerns with this allocation being pursued within the Plan. The site allocation is 1.7ha in size, more than Policy RUR6's requirements that the Neighbourhood Plan's housing allocation to be 'on a range of small sites within or adjacent to the existing villages...' Paragraph 68 (a) of the NPPF defines 'small' sites as being 'no larger than 1 hectare'. The proposed site size of 1.7ha hectares of land therefore clearly contravenes both the NPPF and Policy RUR6.

It is also, as recognised in the Sustainability Appraisal, clearly visible from the open views of the AONB escarpment and higher ground. It was also found by the Wycombe DC Kimble Area Landscape Sensitivity & Capacity Study (2017) to have medium landscape sensitivity, value and capacity.

This site is also entirely covered by BMV agricultural land grade 2. Natural England advises these areas of finite resource are avoided in line with NPPF paragraph 170. For more information, see our publication [Agricultural Land Classification: protecting the best and most versatile agricultural land](#).

Our recent planning application consultation response to site allocation 17A (19/08073/OUT) highlights the above concerns. We do however recognise that planning applications will be judged on a case by case basis, alongside provided landscape and visual impact assessments and suggested mitigation measures.

Natural England accepts that some of the allocations may be less harmful to the AONB, but we require a full landscape assessment to be undertaken to form part of the Neighbourhood Plan's evidence base.

In addition, those sites which are identified within the SEA or above landscape assessments as likely to affect the setting of the Chilterns AONB will be required at the planning application stage to provide a full Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA), following the principles set out in the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third edition (GLVIA3).

We advise that all proposed development conforms to the Chilterns AONB management plan standards in terms of design and landscaping – this will be able to be implemented at planning application stage.

Biodiversity

Your parish is rich in biodiversity and habitats of international and national importance. We welcome the inclusion of Policy KIM:8 Protecting International Habitats. However we feel this can be expanded to include the protection of the Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) not included within the Chilterns Beechwoods SAC designation, Local Wildlife Sites and habitats of national importance including ancient woodland and traditional orchards (as mentioned within the Sustainability Appraisal). This could be done within a 'Biodiversity' policy. The parish also contains the largest area of [native box woodland](#) in the country. These designated sites and habitats should be recognised, mapped and protected within the Neighbourhood Plan, in line with paragraphs 174 (a, b) and 175 (c) of the NPPF.

We previously gave representations on the Habitats Regulations Assessment and Appropriate Assessment for the Plan (see letter dated 28 May 2019), and have no further comment to make.

Chilterns Chalk Rivers

The Scotsgrove Brook, which runs through the parish, may well exhibit chalk river habitats. Whilst not obviously mapped as priority river habitat, [this publication](#) allows for the following:

“The formal definition of priority river habitat (JNCC 2011a) includes a wide range of river types including headwater streams, chalk rivers, active shingle rivers and rivers with Ranunculion/Batrachion vegetation (the Habitats Directive Annex I river habitat type occurring in the UK). JNCC has undertaken UK-level work to provide a more explicit definition of priority river habitat that could be used for mapping purposes (JNCC 2011b)”

This Neighbourhood Plan should have due consideration for the rivers, to ensure that the public authority is carrying out its section 40 Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (NERC) duties to conserve biodiversity. New housing should not result in increased pressures on the catchment/s.

Net Gain

You will be aware that the Environment Bill has recently been reintroduced to Parliament. Within this is the mandatory requirement to provide a net gain in biodiversity, to ensure that new developments enhance biodiversity and help deliver thriving natural spaces for communities. Natural England encourage the use of the Biodiversity Metric 2.0 to calculate the biodiversity baseline and raise it by at least 10% post-development.

Prior to the implementation of this, there remains the requirement to conserve biodiversity and provide a net gain in biodiversity through planning policy (Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 and section 170 of the National Planning Policy Framework). Please ensure that any development policy in your plan includes wording to ensure “all development results in a

biodiversity net gain for the parish”. The wording around ‘where practical’ should be removed.

The recently produced [Neighbourhood Plan for Benson](#), in South Oxfordshire provides an excellent example. We are of the opinion that the policy wording around the Environment, Green Space and Biodiversity is exemplar. We would recommend you considering this document, when reviewing yours.

Annex A provides information on the natural environment and issues and opportunities for your Neighbourhood planning.

Yours sincerely

Eleanor Sweet-Escott
Lead Adviser – Sustainable Development
Thames Team

Annex A - Neighbourhood planning and the natural environment: information, issues and opportunities

Natural Environment Information Sources

The [Magic](http://magic.defra.gov.uk/)¹ website will provide you with much of the nationally held natural environment data for your plan area. The most relevant layers for you to consider are: **Agricultural Land Classification, Ancient Woodland, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Local Nature Reserves, National Parks (England), National Trails, Priority Habitat Inventory, public rights of way (on the Ordnance Survey base map) and Sites of Special Scientific Interest (including their impact risk zones)**. Local environmental record centres may hold a range of additional information on the natural environment. A list of local record centres is available [here](#)².

Priority habitats are those habitats of particular importance for nature conservation, and the list of them can be found [here](#)³. Most of these will be mapped either as **Sites of Special Scientific Interest**, on the Magic website or as **Local Wildlife Sites**. Your local planning authority should be able to supply you with the locations of Local Wildlife Sites.

National Character Areas (NCAs) divide England into 159 distinct natural areas. Each character area is defined by a unique combination of landscape, biodiversity, geodiversity and cultural and economic activity. NCA profiles contain descriptions of the area and statements of environmental opportunity, which may be useful to inform proposals in your plan. NCA information can be found [here](#)⁴.

There may also be a local **landscape character assessment** covering your area. This is a tool to help understand the character and local distinctiveness of the landscape and identify the features that give it a sense of place. It can help to inform, plan and manage change in the area. Your local planning authority should be able to help you access these if you can't find them online.

If your neighbourhood planning area is within or adjacent to a **National Park** or **Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty** (AONB), the relevant National Park/AONB Management Plan for the area will set out useful information about the protected landscape. You can access the plans on from the relevant National Park Authority or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty website.

General mapped information on **soil types** and **Agricultural Land Classification** is available (under 'landscape') on the [Magic](http://magic.defra.gov.uk/)⁵ website and also from the [LandIS website](http://www.landis.org.uk/)⁶, which contains more information about obtaining soil data.

Natural Environment Issues to Consider

The [National Planning Policy Framework](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2)⁷ sets out national planning policy on protecting and enhancing the natural environment. [Planning Practice Guidance](http://planningguidance.planningportal.gov.uk/blog/guidance/natural-environment/)⁸ sets out supporting guidance.

Your local planning authority should be able to provide you with further advice on the potential impacts of your plan on the natural environment and the need for any environmental assessments.

¹ <http://magic.defra.gov.uk/>

² <http://www.nbn-nfbr.org.uk/nfbr.php>

³ <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20140711133551/http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/conservation/biodiversity/protectandmanage/habsandspeciesimportance.aspx>

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-character-area-profiles-data-for-local-decision-making>

⁵ <http://magic.defra.gov.uk/>

⁶ <http://www.landis.org.uk/index.cfm>

⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2>

⁸ <http://planningguidance.planningportal.gov.uk/blog/guidance/natural-environment/>

Landscape

Paragraph 172 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) highlights the need to protect and enhance valued landscapes through the planning system. Your plan may present opportunities to protect and enhance locally valued landscapes. You may want to consider identifying distinctive local landscape features or characteristics such as ponds, woodland or dry stone walls and think about how any new development proposals can respect and enhance local landscape character and distinctiveness.

If you are proposing development within or close to a protected landscape (National Park or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) or other sensitive location, we recommend that you carry out a landscape assessment of the proposal. Landscape assessments can help you to choose the most appropriate sites for development and help to avoid or minimise impacts of development on the landscape through careful siting, design and landscaping.

Wildlife habitats

Some proposals can have adverse impacts on designated wildlife sites or other priority habitats (listed [here](#)⁹), such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest or [Ancient woodland](#)¹⁰. If there are likely to be any adverse impacts you'll need to think about how such impacts can be avoided, mitigated or, as a last resort, compensated for.

Priority and protected species and habitat

You'll also want to consider whether any proposals might affect priority species (listed [here](#)¹¹) or protected species. Natural England has produced advice [here](#)¹² to help understand the impact of particular developments on protected species. Consideration should also be given to the potential environmental value of brownfield sites, often found in urban areas and former industrial land, further information including links to the open mosaic habitats inventory can be found [here](#).

Ancient woodland and veteran trees-link to standing advice

You should consider any impacts on ancient woodland and veteran trees in line with paragraph 175 of the NPPF. Natural England maintains the Ancient Woodland [Inventory](#) which can help identify ancient woodland. Natural England and the Forest Commission have produced [standing advice](#) for planning authorities in relation to ancient woodland and veteran trees. It should be taken into account by planning authorities when determining relevant planning applications. Natural England will only provide bespoke advice on ancient woodland/veteran trees where they form part of a SSSI or in exceptional circumstances.

Biodiversity net gain

Under section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 Local Planning Authorities are required to conserve biodiversity. The NPPF section 170 states the requirement for *"minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity"*. Suitable methods for calculating biodiversity net gain can include the Defra biodiversity offsetting metric¹³ and the environment bank biodiversity impact calculator¹⁴. Natural England would expect a policy within the Neighbourhood Plan to include wording to ensure that net biodiversity gain is achieved.

⁹<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20140711133551/http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/conservation/biodiversity/protectandmanage/habsandspeciesimportance.aspx>

¹⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/ancient-woodland-and-veteran-trees-protection-surveys-licences>

¹¹<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20140711133551/http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/conservation/biodiversity/protectandmanage/habsandspeciesimportance.aspx>

¹² <https://www.gov.uk/protected-species-and-sites-how-to-review-planning-proposals>

¹³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/biodiversity-offsetting#guidance-for-offset-providers-developers-and-local-authorities-in-the-pilot-areas> Note; the 'Guidance for developers' and 'Guidance for offset providers' documents provide a calculation method.

¹⁴ <http://www.environmentbank.com/impact-calculator.php> , and http://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=3&ved=0ahUKEwi7vcbI0aDQAhVMDcAKHb8IDEUQFggsMAI&url=http%3A%2F%2Fconsult.welhat.gov.uk%2Ffile%2F4184236&usq=AFQjCNFfkbJJQ_UN0044Qe6rmiLffxckg

Best and Most Versatile Agricultural Land

Soil is a finite resource that fulfils many important functions and services for society. It is a growing medium for food, timber and other crops, a store for carbon and water, a reservoir of biodiversity and a buffer against pollution. If you are proposing development, you should seek to use areas of poorer quality agricultural land in preference to that of a higher quality in line with National Planning Policy Framework para 170. For more information, see our publication [Agricultural Land Classification: protecting the best and most versatile agricultural land](#)¹⁵.

Green Infrastructure, Improving Your Natural Environment.

Inclusion of Green Infrastructure (GI) in to development plans can provide multifunctional benefits to the area. These can include opportunities for recreation, health and wellbeing and access to nature as well as providing connected habitats for wildlife.

Your plan or order can offer exciting opportunities to enhance your local environment through inclusion of GI. If you are setting out policies on new development or proposing sites for development, you may wish to consider identifying what environmental features you want to be retained, connected, enhanced or new features you would like to see created as part of any new development. Examples might include:

- Providing a new footpath with landscaping through the new development to link into existing rights of way or other green spaces.
- Restoring a neglected hedgerow or creating new ones.
- Creating a new pond as an attractive feature on the site.
- Planting trees characteristic to the local area to make a positive contribution to the local landscape.
- Using native plants in landscaping schemes for better nectar and seed sources for bees and birds.
- Incorporating swift boxes or bat boxes into the design of new buildings.
- Considering how lighting can be best managed to encourage wildlife.
- Adding a green roof or walls to new or existing buildings.

You may also want to consider enhancing your local area in other ways, for example by:

- Setting out in your plan how you would like to implement elements of a wider Green Infrastructure Strategy in your community.
- Assessing needs for accessible greenspace and setting out proposals to address any deficiencies or enhance provision.
- Identifying green areas of particular importance for special protection through Local Green Space designation (see [Planning Practice Guidance on this](#)¹⁶).
- Managing existing (and new) public spaces to be more wildlife friendly (e.g. by sowing wild flower strips in less used parts of parks, changing hedge cutting timings and frequency).
- Planting additional street trees.
- Identifying any improvements to the existing public right of way network, e.g. cutting back hedges, improving the surface, clearing litter or installing kissing gates) or extending the network to create missing links.
- Restoring neglected environmental features (e.g. coppicing a prominent hedge that is in poor condition or clearing away an eyesore).

¹⁵ <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/35012>

¹⁶ <http://planningguidance.planningportal.gov.uk/blog/guidance/open-space-sports-and-recreation-facilities-public-rights-of-way-and-local-green-space/local-green-space-designation/>

Green Roofs

Natural England is supportive of the inclusion of living roofs in all appropriate development. Research indicates that the benefits of green roofs include reducing run-off and thereby the risk of surface water flooding; reducing the requirement for heating and air-conditioning; and providing habitat for wildlife.

We would advise your council that some living roofs, such as sedum matting, can have limited biodiversity value in terms of the range of species that grow on them and habitats they provide. Natural England would encourage you to consider the use of bespoke solutions based on the needs of the wildlife specific to the site and adjacent area. I would refer you to <http://livingroofs.org/> for a range of innovative solutions.