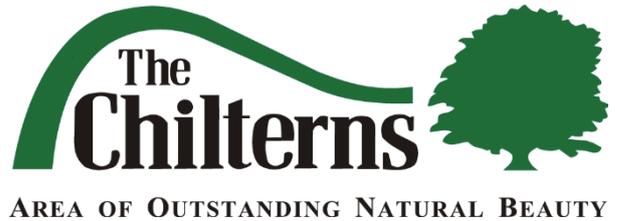


**The Chilterns
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Chilterns AONB in Wycombe District – view from Coombe Hill

Photo: Richard Gillin

**Statement from the Chilterns Conservation Board
Wycombe Local Plan Examination 2018**

MATTER 2 – THE PLAN'S STRATEGY

28th June 2018

Examination statement from the Chilterns Conservation Board

Introduction

1. The Chilterns Conservation Board is grateful for the opportunity to participate at the Wycombe Local Plan examination.
2. The Chilterns Conservation Board (CCB) is a statutory body established in 2004 under the provisions of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 to promote the conservation and enhancement of the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and increase the understanding and enjoyment by the public of the special qualities of the AONB. Further information about the Board and our role is set out in Appendix 1.
3. An Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is an outstanding landscape whose distinctive character and natural beauty are so precious that it is in the nation's interest to safeguard them. The Chilterns AONB was designated in 1965. Its special qualities include the steep chalk escarpment with areas of flower-rich downland, woodlands, commons, tranquil valleys, the network of ancient routes, villages with their brick and flint houses, chalk streams and a rich historic environment of hillforts and chalk figures.
4. Our statement addresses Inspector's questions 1, 2, 3, 5 and 6 of Matter 2.
5. The Chilterns Conservation Board seeks amendments to address deficiencies in the strategy regarding the AONB.

Q1. Is the Vision sufficiently aspirational and locally specific to form the basis for planning in Wycombe over the Plan period?

6. As well as being “economically strong” the vision should refer to the district’s strengths in its rich natural and historic environment.

Q2. Are the Plan’s objectives appropriate, positively prepared and justified and are they capable of delivering the vision for Wycombe District set out in the Plan?

7. The Chilterns Conservation Board welcomes and strongly supports the number one strategic objective being ‘Cherish the Chilterns’. However, the objective is not effective if it is not carried through in the plan proposals.
8. The plan needs to do more to deliver on this, by:
 - 1) deleting proposals for major development in the AONB and
 - 2) identifying, as an infrastructure delivery theme, funding for enhancing the natural beauty of the Chilterns and people’s access to it.
9. The text referring to appropriate management and conservation of the AONB in a holistic and integrated way should have a footnote to the statutory AONB Management Plan, as follows:

“The [Chilterns AONB Management Plan: A Framework for Action](#) provides a comprehensive cross boundary summary of the management policies and actions needed to conserve this special place”

Q3. Is the Plan’s Spatial Strategy (Policy CP2) consistent with the requirement of the NPPF to promote sustainable development?

10. The Chilterns Conservation Board supports the protection of areas where development should be restricted, but for consistency with national policy in NPPF para 115 and 116, bullet (a)(i) should apply not just to the allocations process but to planning applications. The policies of the plan include policies which will apply to speculative planning applications and planning applications for the delivery of allocated sites.
11. Suggested text amendment:
 - (a)(i). Attaching great weight to conserving the landscape and scenic beauty of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty when considering **development proposals** ~~allocating sites~~ in the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and not allocating sites that constitute “major development” in the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty;
12. The Government’s recent consultation on [National Planning Policy Framework - Draft text for consultation](#) contains a definition of major development in the glossary, which would establish for the first time a definition of major development in the AONB. The glossary definition is as follows:

“Major development: For housing, development where 10 or more homes will be provided, or the site has an area of 0.5 hectares or more. For non-residential development it means additional floorspace of 1,000m² or more, or a site of 1 hectare or more, or as otherwise provided in the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015.”

13. Wycombe Local Plan Policy CP2 of “not allocating sites that constitute ‘major development’ in the AONB” is not met by the plan. Using either the draft NPPF definition or a bespoke analysis, the Chilterns Conservation Board considers that the plan fails to give great weight and allocates major development in the AONB including:

- housing and employment sites at Stokenchurch,
- Glynswood site, High Wycombe,
- housing sites at Lane End,
- a major new road south west of Princes Risborough, and
- the plan commits the Kimble neighbourhood plan to a level of housing that is likely to harm the AONB and its setting.

14. For consistency with Policy CP6(a)(i) and para 4.12, later proposals in the plan which involve major development or development likely to harm the AONB and its setting should be deleted/modified. Without these changes this policy will not be effective.

Q5. Has the Plan’s Spatial Strategy been positively prepared, is it justified and will it be an effective mechanism for delivering growth over the Plan period? a) Does the Plan’s Spatial Strategy represent an effective approach to delivering sustainable development (Policy CP1) over the Plan period? b) What are the key components of the Plan’s Spatial Strategy and how do they interact?

15. No – the Spatial Strategy in Policy CP2 is not effective in that the plan goes on to allocate major development in the AONB, nor is it compatible with the NPPF or the revised draft NPPF, for the reasons we set out under Q3 above.

Q6. Has the Settlement Strategy (Policy CP3) been positively prepared, justified and will it be effective in delivering sustainable growth? a) How has the settlement hierarchy been defined and what level of growth is proposed for each tier?

16. No, the Chilterns Conservation Board is concerned about the scale and distribution of growth affecting the Chilterns AONB at various tiers/locations including High Wycombe, Princes Risborough, Stokenchurch, Lane End, and more widely in the rural areas.

17. The NPPF explains at para 157 that “Crucially, Local Plans should:

- identify land where development would be inappropriate because of its environmental or historic significance.”

18. The spatial strategy for Wycombe does not identify land where development would be inappropriate because of its environmental or historic significance. Instead at CP2 it protects areas where development should be restricted (not the same thing as where development would be inappropriate), and at CP3 establishes a settlement strategy based purely on the level of the facilities and services. The last category of CP3 states “outside of these area and settlements, development will be restricted to that which is appropriate in a rural area”, meaning that everywhere some type of development will be appropriate. Nowhere is there a policy, map or list of land where development would be inappropriate because of its environmental or historic significance (e.g. within the view from Coombe Hill looking south west on the cover photo of this statement).
19. The figure of 940 homes in the rural areas is of concern; most of this area is in the Chilterns AONB. This quantity of development could materially harm the AONB. Even if individual sites are small (and there is no certainty that they will be), there will be a cumulative effect of new development. Policy CP4 will involve incremental change of many small sites across the rural areas and nibbling at edges of villages in the AONB. On top of the 940 in the rural areas, planning 160 homes at Kimble is likely to harm the setting of the AONB (please see our representation on policy RUR6).
20. The Chilterns Conservation Board recommends reducing the allocation to the rural area downwards from 940 homes in order to reduce the impact of incremental change and cumulative harm to the special qualities, habitats, tranquillity and character of the Chilterns AONB. Housing proposals in the AONB should invariably be small in scale and to meet identified local needs. The [Chilterns AONB Management Plan](#) supports appropriate small scale housing and rural exceptions sites in the AONB through AONB Management Plan Policies D5 and D6:

“Policy D5 Appropriate development (especially affordable housing) should be encouraged, particularly on previously developed land, if it will improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of the area whilst having regard to the special qualities of the AONB.

Policy D6 Where new housing development is proposed this should only be permitted if its scale, massing and density reflect the local context and have regard to the special qualities of the AONB.

The Board will generally support the provision of smaller residential schemes that lead to the provision of affordable and local needs housing. All housing schemes should be sustainably located and should take particular account of the settlement’s and site’s contexts and should reflect densities that are prevalent locally. The operation of nationally agreed minimum densities is not always appropriate and in order to deliver wider benefits and the conservation of the special qualities of the AONB it may be better to operate to lower, maximum, density levels.”

21. The strategy also involves substantial strategic-scale growth in the Setting of the AONB. The setting of the AONB is the area within which development and land

management proposals, by virtue of their nature, size, scale, siting, materials or design could be considered to have an impact, either positive or negative, on the natural beauty and special qualities of the Chilterns AONB. The legal duty on local authorities set out in section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 to have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of AONB does not just apply within the AONB; the only consideration is whether land in the AONB is affected, not where the effect originates. Similarly, the instruction in the NPPF paragraph 115 to give 'great weight' to conserving landscape and scenic beauty applies regardless of whether a development is inside the AONB or on land outside but affecting it. The NPPG also draws attention to proposals 'which might have an impact on the setting of AONBs'. The statutory [Chilterns AONB Management Plan: A Framework for Action 2014-2019](#) addresses the setting of the AONB in its vision and policies¹.

22. The Chilterns Conservation Board has produced a Position Statement entitled [Development Affecting the Setting of the Chilterns AONB](#)² with more information on the Setting on the AONB. It explains that examples of adverse impacts from development in the setting of the AONB include:

- Blocking or interference of views out of the AONB particularly from public viewpoints or rights of way;
- Blocking or interference of views of the AONB from public viewpoints or rights of way outside the AONB;
- Breaking the skyline, particularly when this is associated with developments that have a vertical emphasis and/or movement (viaducts, chimneys, plumes or rotors for example);
- The visual intrusion caused by the introduction of new transport corridors, in particular roads and railways;
- Loss of tranquillity through the introduction of lighting, noise, or traffic movement;
- Introduction of significant or abrupt changes to landscape character particularly where they are originally of a similar character to the AONB;
- Change of use of land that is of sufficient scale to cause harm to landscape character;
- Loss of biodiversity, particularly in connection with those habitats or species of importance in the AONB;
- Loss of features of historic interest, particularly if these are contiguous with the AONB;
- Reduction in public access and detrimental impacts on the character and appearance of rural roads and lanes, and
- Increase in air or water pollution.

¹ Chilterns AONB Management Plan 2014-2019: A Framework for Action, Chilterns Conservation Board (2014) in particular on AONB setting: the third bullet point of the Vision; Key Issue 24 and Policies L4, L5 and L7 in the landscape chapter; Policies B1 and B2 in the biodiversity chapter; Key Issues 3, 5 and 8 and Policies HE3, HE4, HE5 and HE7 in the historic environment chapter, and paragraph 2 in the introduction, Key Issues 2 and 8 and Policies D8, D9, D12 and D13 in the development chapter.

² Position Statement on Development Affecting the Setting of the Chilterns AONB (2011), Chilterns Conservation Board available at <http://www.chilternsaonb.org/conservation-board/planning-development/position-statements.html>

23. Other districts across the Chilterns AONB are also planning housing in the AONB through their local plans, these need to be looked at together to see the full picture and assess long term effects. The cumulative impacts which should be considered include effects on the special qualities of the Chilterns AONB³, loss of habitat, loss of biodiversity, increased abstraction of water from chalk streams, loss of water and air quality, increased light and noise pollution, loss of access/rights of way, harm to scenic beauty and views, loss of cultural heritage and archaeology and the loss of natural capital fundamental to a healthy economy and healthy society. Loss of integrity of the natural environment and incursion by development at settlement edges pose a threat to the AONB. Taken together, housing will have a cumulative as well as an individual effect, not just on landscape and visual impact but on traffic levels, tranquillity, air quality, streams and aquifers, recreation pressures etc. This is the subject of a new Position Statement produced by the Chilterns Conservation Board: [Cumulative Impacts of Development on the Chilterns AONB](#)⁴.
24. The Council's Sustainability Appraisal (Sept 2017, WDLP2) does not adequately explore the levels of growth proposed by neighbouring authorities nor predict cumulative effects (e.g. no mention of neighbouring authorities outside Bucks eg South Oxfordshire, Windsor and Maidenhead, Wokingham). In its brief commentary on cumulative effects (page 124-127) it assumes that no authority will be proposing major development in the Chilterns AONB and implies that only major development needs to be taken into account in considering cumulative effects. This ignores the incremental effects of many small developments in many locations (which policy CP4 enables in the rural areas). It also fails to recognise the impact of major non-housing projects like HS2, noise barriers on the M40 and a third runway at Heathrow airport. The total amount of development needs assessing, as well as whether it is in large ('major') blocks or not.
25. The Chilterns is already one of the most developed of the UK's protected landscapes with a large resident population and significant infrastructure through and within the AONB. Future development planning must take account of the total impact of development across the AONB and cannot only be considered on a district by district basis.
26. The Chilterns has the same protection as the Cotswolds and the Lake District (NPPF para 115) and whilst housing pressures are more acute in the south east, this does not mean that the principles of development in protected landscapes should be compromised here in the Chilterns. If anything the tests should be applied even more rigorously because the 'social value' of the AONB increases as the south east

³ Chilterns AONB's special qualities include the steep chalk escarpment with areas of flower-rich downland, woodlands, commons, tranquil valleys, the network of ancient routes, villages with their brick and flint houses, chalk streams and a rich historic environment of hillforts and chalk figures

⁴ available at <http://www.chilternsaonb.org/conservation-board/planning-development/position-statements.html>

becomes even more populated. At a [Board meeting on 20th June 2018⁵](#) the Chilterns Conservation Board gave approval to request to be made to Natural England for the Chilterns to become a National Park.

Conclusion

32. National policy in the NPPF is clear that “Plans should allocate land with the least environmental or amenity value” (para 110) and that “Great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which have the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty” (para 115). The Wycombe Local Plan’s strategy proposed does not give sufficient weight to the AONB or deliver on the objective to ‘Cherish the Chilterns’.
33. The Chilterns Conservation Board is grateful for the opportunity to make these representations at the Examination.

⁵ Board paper see Item 9 available at https://www.chilternsaonb.org/uploads/files/ConservationBoard/Board_Meetings/CCB_Board_Meeting_Agenda_and_Papers_20.06.18.pdf



The Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

The Chilterns AONB was designated in 1965 for the natural beauty of its landscape and its natural and cultural heritage. In particular, it was designated to protect its special qualities which include the steep chalk escarpment with areas of flower-rich downland, woodlands, commons, tranquil valleys, the network of ancient routes, villages with their brick and flint houses, chalk streams and a rich historic environment of hillforts and chalk figures.

Chilterns Conservation Board

The Chilterns Conservation Board is a statutory independent corporate body set up by Parliamentary Order in 2004 under the provisions of Section 86 of the Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000.

The Board has two statutory purposes under section 87 of the CRoW Act:

- a) To conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the AONB; and
- b) To increase the understanding and enjoyment by the public of the special qualities of the AONB.

In fulfilling these roles, if it appears that there is a conflict between those purposes, Conservation Boards are to attach greater weight to (a). The Board also has a duty to seek to foster the economic and social well-being of local communities within the AONB.

Like all public bodies, including ministers of the Crown, local authorities and parish councils, the Chilterns Conservation Board is subject to Section 85 of the CRoW Act which states under “General duty of public bodies etc”

“(1) In exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in an area of outstanding natural beauty, a relevant authority shall have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area of outstanding natural beauty.”

List of Organisations providing Nominees to the Chilterns AONB Conservation Board

The Chilterns Conservation Board has 27 board members, all drawn from local communities:

- Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire and Oxfordshire County Councils
- Central Bedfordshire and Luton Borough Councils (unitary authorities)
- Aylesbury Vale, Chiltern, North Hertfordshire, South Buckinghamshire, South Oxfordshire, Three Rivers and Wycombe District Councils
- Dacorum Borough Council
- The Central Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire and Oxfordshire Parish Councils (6 elected in total), and
- DEFRA (8 in total).