

Matter 5 - Natural, Built and Historic Environment – Matter 5

(We will be attending and would like to participate at the Hearing on this Matter)

Question 1

The distinctive character and natural beauty of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) make them some of the most special and loved places in England. We believe that Princes Risborough is the 'Gateway' to the Chilterns AONB. It is partly within it and partly within its setting.

The NPPF policies at paragraphs 115 and 116 require great weight to be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty. This applies to developments within the AONB and also in its setting, similarly the conservation of wildlife and cultural heritage. The NPPF requires that permission be refused for major developments in these areas except in exceptional circumstances and where it can be demonstrated they are in the public interest.

There are positive statements in the Plan, recognizing that (P 32) '*any allocation that would result in major development in the AONB would strongly conflict with the NPPF*', and for developments not considered major '*great weight should still be given to any adverse impacts on the AONB.*'

We are particularly concerned with Princes Risborough and WDC's Plan for 2650 new homes in Princes Risborough within the setting of the AONB (some in Green Belt), and according to the Plan '*Major new road infrastructure in the form of a relief road*' within the AONB and Green Belt at Culverton farm. We don't believe that this fits with the legislation and the good intentions expressed.

The Princes Risborough Expansion - Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Study (Sept 2017) raises concerns. It notes that '*Views across the town and wider countryside from the AONB are available from popular viewpoints on the Chiltern escarpment such as Whiteleaf Cross and from the Ridgeway National Trail*'. Going on to point out that with regard to, Park Mill Farm, the land north of Longwick Road, Mill Lane, Crowbrook stream, Alscot, and the Culverton area, views to and from the Chiltern escarpment are an important characteristic feature with risk of adverse impacts. With regard to Alscot it states '*Any development would either adversely impact on the conservation area or its setting or adversely affect the habitat value*'.

The Princes Risborough Relief Road, Southern Options, Ecological Appraisal (Aug 2017), points out that the Culverton arable field is '*within the Bird Conservation Targeting Project (BCTP) for declining and rare farmland birds*'. All would be at risk. The Green Belt Assessment Part 2 (July 2016) notes that the Culverton field has very long distance landscape views, and is well connected to the wider countryside. The site has a strong, unspoilt rural character and because of '*its visual exposure in short- and long-distance views, and its contribution to the amenity of the AONB and a National Trail, the site has a very low capacity for development.*' In addition visual intrusion caused by the introduction of new transport corridors and associated loss of tranquillity through the introduction of lighting, noise and traffic movement can only have a negative impact.

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The proposed development behind Poppy Road in Princes Risborough impacts on the Pyrtle Spring a chalk headwater and as such a UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) priority habitat. The relief road, further access road, and the planned housing development at this location would constitute major development in the AONB, which would be subject to further public interest tests under the NPPF.

The Chilterns AONB setting is a major asset for Princes Risborough, 10 million people live within an hour of the Chilterns. There is massive tourist potential.

There are a lot of cumulative negative impacts in the Plan. It does not provide a framework for the management of the Natural, Built and Historic Environment. It is not soundly based, justified or consistent with the requirements of national policy

Suggestions:

- Locate more of the homes in the centre of Princes Risborough, avoiding new expanses of development that are visible and out of context.
- Minimize adverse impacts on the setting of the AONB through avoidance in the first place. Our lanes are an important source of recreation for walkers, joggers, cyclists and horse riders. These should be protected not destroyed.
- Promote our AONB, including the opportunities to improve our health and wellbeing – walking in our AONB is free! According to Public Health England (Aug 2017). *'4 out of 10 (41%) adults aged 40 to 60 in England walk less than 10 minutes continuously each month at a brisk pace.'*
- The Poppy Road/Pyrtle nature conservation area in Princes Risborough should be left alone and not destroyed. We should be enhancing the important chalk stream running through this site and associated areas of vegetation - instead of fragmenting this scarce habitat. It complements the surrounding AONB area. We must maintain the Green Belt protection for this site.

The Government has recently announced a review of National Parks and AONBs, including scope for their expansion. With this review due to report in 2019 and a strong possibility that the Chilterns AONB may become a National Park we would suggest that any planned development of the Chilterns AONB or its setting be avoided at this time.