

Model Local Plan policy for the AONB and supporting text

Policy x The Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Permission for major developments in the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty will be refused unless exceptional circumstances prevail as defined by national planning policy. Planning permission for any proposal within the AONB, or affecting the setting of the AONB, will only be granted when it:

- a. conserves and enhances the Chilterns AONB's special qualities, distinctive character, tranquillity and remoteness in accordance with national planning policy and the overall purpose of the AONB designation;**
- b. is appropriate to the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of the area or is desirable for its understanding and enjoyment;**
- c. meets the aims of the statutory Chilterns AONB Management Plan, making practical and financial contributions towards management plan delivery as appropriate;**
- d. complies with the Chilterns Building Design Guide and technical notes by being of high quality design which respects the natural beauty of the Chilterns, its traditional built character and reinforces the sense of place and local character; and**
- e. avoids adverse impacts from individual proposals (including their cumulative effects), unless these can be satisfactorily mitigated.**

Model local plan supporting text

1. Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) are designated by the Government for the purpose of ensuring that the special qualities of the finest landscapes in England and Wales are conserved and enhanced. In policy terms they have the same planning status as National Parks¹. The Chilterns AONB was designated in 1965 and extended in 1990. The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 places a statutory duty on local authorities to have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of AONBs when coming to decisions or carrying out their activities relating to, or affecting, land within these areas².
2. The Chilterns AONB covers 13 local authorities and the Councils work together to safeguard the future of this shared nationally protected area

¹ [NPPF paragraph 172](#) "Great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing 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 these issues. The conservation and enhancement of wildlife and cultural heritage are also important considerations in these areas"

² [Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 Section 85](#)

through the Chilterns Conservation Board. The Board prepares a statutory AONB Management Plan which may be a material consideration in planning decisions³.

3. The AONB is a nationally designated landscape and as such permission for major developments will be refused unless exceptional circumstances prevail as defined by national planning policy⁴. National guidance explains that whether a proposal constitutes major development is a matter for the relevant decision taker, taking into account its nature, scale and setting, and whether it could have a significant adverse impact on the purposes for which the area has been designated or defined⁵. 'Major development' is not restricted to the definition of major development in NPPF glossary or to proposals that raise issues of national significance, and will include consideration of whether a proposal has the potential to have a serious adverse impact on the AONB.
4. *Add locally specific paragraph on AONB extent and special qualities and characteristics within each district. For example, for South Oxfordshire: The Chilterns Hills and the North Wessex Downs are part of a broad belt of chalk upland running across England in an arc from Dorset to Yorkshire. The Goring Gap, where the River Thames carves through the chalk escarpment, forms the boundary between the two AONBs in South Oxfordshire. Although both areas are chalk upland, their character differs: the Chilterns AONB is a generally more enclosed and wooded landscape that the broader more open uplands of the North Wessex Downs. The Chilterns escarpment in South Oxfordshire is particularly impressive, and the beech woods are justifiably famous.*
5. In determining compliance with criterion a, actions to conserve and enhance the AONB shall be informed by landscape assessment, having considered any relevant landscape character assessments and landscape and visual impact assessments and shall focus upon:
 - i. the Chilterns AONB's special qualities which include the steep chalk escarpment with areas of flower-rich downland, broadleaved woodlands (especially beech), 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;

³ See the Government's [Planning Practice Guidance 8-004-20140306](#) Paragraph 004

⁴ [NPPF paragraph 172](#) "Planning permission should be refused for major development⁵⁵ other than in exceptional circumstances, and where it can be demonstrated that the development is in the public interest. Consideration of such applications should include an assessment of:

a) the need for the development, including in terms of any national considerations, and the impact of permitting it, or refusing it, upon the local economy;

b) the cost of, and scope for, developing outside the designated area, or meeting the need for it in some other way; and

c) any detrimental effect on the environment, the landscape and recreational opportunities, and the extent to which that could be moderated."

⁵[NPPF footnote 55](#)

- ii. the scope for enhancing and restoring those parts of the landscape which are previously developed, degraded or subject to existing intrusive developments, utilities or infrastructure;
 - iii. locally distinctive patterns and species composition of natural features such as chalk downland, trees, hedgerows, woodland, field boundaries, rivers and chalk streams;
 - iv. the locally distinctive character of settlements and their landscape settings, including the transition between man-made and natural landscapes at the edge of settlements;
 - v. visually sensitive skylines, geological and topographical features;
 - vi. landscapes of cultural, historic and heritage value;
 - vii. important views and visual amenity, including key views from the steep north-west facing chalk escarpment overlooking the low clay vale, and foreground views back to the AONB; and
 - viii. Tranquillity, dark skies and remoteness and the need to avoid intrusion from light pollution, noise, and motion.
6. Development proposals which lie outside the AONB but within its setting can also have impacts on it. The Council's duty of regard applies to development outside but which would affect land in an AONB⁶. For example, views out of the AONB from key visitor viewpoints into surrounding areas can be very significant. Although it does not have a defined geographical boundary, the setting of the Chilterns 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. Advice on development in the setting of the AONB is contained within guidance produced by the Chilterns Conservation Board⁷.

⁶ [Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 Section 85](#) : in relation to, or so as to affect, land in an area of outstanding natural beauty”

⁷ Chilterns Conservation Board [Position Statement on Development affecting the setting of the Chilterns AONB](#)