

Mrs Christine Self,



19th February 2015

Dear Mrs Self,

Thank you for consulting Dorset AONB Team regarding the examiners questions on North Dorset District Council's draft Local Plan. I herein provide comments in response to two matters that I consider to be most directly relevant to our interests.

1. Is the Council's approach to the protection of the AONBs (as revised) satisfactory and justified (policy 4)?

We consider that the policy is generally sound, but could be further strengthened. We previously advised that policies might include:

- "The plan area's exceptional landscapes will be protected, taking into account the objectives of the AONB Management Plans": We note that the Plan currently refers to seeking advice and considering the objectives of AONB Management Plans.
- "Development which would harm the natural beauty of the AONBs, including their Special Qualities, will not be permitted": We note that this suggested policy is not adopted. It appears that the Plan seeks to balance potential harm with matters of public interest, which is a potentially suitable approach. However, within such an approach we would recommend reference to 'great weight' being afforded to the conservation and enhancement of landscape and scenic beauty, as per NPPF 115. Presently the section on AONBs concludes by stating: "Where development is proposed within an AONB or that may harm the setting of an AONB and is at a scale above the needs of those who live and work in the area, the Council will require developers to clearly demonstrate that the development is in the public interest." This paragraph could be extended to refer to a balancing exercise in which 'great weight' will be afforded to the conservation and enhancement of AONBs, particularly their Special Qualities.
- "Development should be located and designed so that it does not detract from and, where reasonable, enhances local landscape character. Any

development that would otherwise have an adverse impact on the landscape of the area will only be acceptable if the impact will be adequately mitigated": We note that there are references to mitigation, although sometimes these are made only with reference to visual impacts. We recommend that mitigation refers to landscape and visual impacts. Although the policy makes a number of references to local distinctiveness and character, it remains our view that a clear and central policy reference to the importance of maintaining and according with local landscape character would be beneficial.

Dorset AONB Team previously suggested that greater details of the AONB Special Qualities could feature within policy 4. The AONB Special Qualities are particularly important in underpinning the reasons for designation. However, we recognise that to elaborate further on the nature of the Special Qualities of two AONB designations would lengthen the document. We consider that there is scope to augment reference to the AONB Management Plans with an explanation that the Special Qualities are detailed within these Plans.

2. Should the Council be seeking to identify and protect areas of tranquillity (NPPF paragraph 123)?

We presently consider that the answer to this question is likely to be 'no'. However we recognise that this view may conflict with NPPF 123. We consider that tranquillity is a much broader concept than presented within NPPF 123, which seems to only relate to noise. Consequently, NPPF could be interpreted as simply asking NDDC to identify 'quiet' areas and protect these. An exercise to identify more tranquil areas based solely on noise might introduce a locally relative model, which could inadvertently devalue less tranquil (quiet) areas in NDDC just as much as it would protect the more tranquil (quiet) areas, which, in any case, are likely to be remote and therefore less susceptible to intrusive development. It might be possible to avoid a local relative model through reference to the CPRE study. However, it should be recognised that this study considered a wide range of issues and was not solely limited to noise. Furthermore, use of the CPRE national study might result in large areas of NDDC being recognised as being highly tranquil, relative to the UK overall. Whilst we would not oppose such an approach, the practical use of defining large areas within NDDC needs to be understood.

I hope these comments are helpful.

Yours sincerely,

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Richard Brown
Dorset AONB Landscape Planning Officer