

*Cranborne Chase & West Wiltshire Downs
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty*

AONB Office, Castle Street, Cranborne, Dorset, BH21 5PZ



Tel: 01725 517417 Fax: 01725 517916
Email: info@cranbornechase.org.uk Website: www.ccwwdaonb.org.uk

Stephen Clark
North Dorset District Council
Norden
Salisbury Road
Blandford
DT11 7LL

20th February 2014

By Email Only

Dear Stephen

2/2014/0079/PLNG request for EIA Scoping Opinion for 150 dwellings with associated landscaping, infrastructure and cycleway link, land south west of Blandford Forum Bypass, Blandford

Thank you for consulting the AONB on this scoping opinion.

The Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB has been established under the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act to conserve and enhance the outstanding natural beauty of this area which straddles three County, one Unitary and five District councils. It is clear from the Act, subsequent government sponsored reports, and the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 that natural beauty includes wildlife, scientific, and cultural heritage. It is also recognised that in relation to their landscape characteristics and quality, National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty are equally important aspects of the nation's heritage and environmental capital. The AONB Management Plan (2009 – 2014) is a statutory document and it has been approved by the Secretary of State and was adopted by your Council early in 2009. The AONB and its Management Plan are material considerations in planning.

The National Planning Policy Framework states (paragraph 109) that the planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by protecting and enhancing valued landscapes. Furthermore it should be recognised that the 'presumption in favour of sustainable development' does not automatically apply within AONBs, as confirmed by paragraph 14

footnote 9, due to other policies relating to AONBs elsewhere within the Framework. It also states (paragraph 115) that great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in AONBs, which have the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty. The conservation of wildlife and cultural heritage are important considerations in these areas.

As noted in the attachments with your correspondence the site is just outside of this AONB. The land slopes in a north easterly direction and faces towards the AONB across the valley of the River Stour. It is likely that the development would be visible from a number of locations in the AONB, **appearing as a substantial extension of the boundary of Blandford St Mary on the south easterly side of the A354.** At the current time the development at Blandford St Mary benefits from some screening that has been established since the A354 was diverted from what is known as Dorchester Hill to the roundabout where it joins with the A350.

The proposed EIA should take into account not only the landscape character of the site but also the landscape character of the site's context. I include within that the Stour Valley and the AONB to the north east. The EIA should, of course, identify landscape and visual impacts, then identify how they could be avoided, and then identify what mitigation there could be of the impacts that could not be avoided.

I note you have already identified the issue of the route of the Spetisbury / Charlton Marshall bypass going through the site and joining the roundabout where the A354 and A350 meet. The AONB would be **very concerned** at any change to the safeguarded route of this bypass as that could result in adverse impacts on this AONB. I note that you have already identified that moving either the road or the development towards higher ground could increase visibility from the AONB and therefore increase the potentially adverse impacts. The AONB would be particularly **concerned** if any development were to go ahead that prevented the bypass making a sensible connection to the main roads as that could impact on the whole of the Spetisbury / Charlton Marshall route and, as I am sure you appreciate, the AONB would **strongly oppose** any potential re-routing of the bypass along the north eastern side of the Stour Valley.

As you know the AONB is **concerned** about light pollution and the EIA should take into account the potential night time appearance of the proposed development and indicate ways that light pollution would be avoided. You may recall that in consideration of other edge of town development proposals the AONB has been **concerned** about the appearance of gable ends of individual properties and also the **presence of tall buildings increasing visibility that is out of character with the locality.**

The AONB is **concerned** to minimise disruptions to tranquillity of the AONB, a key feature. The EIA should, therefore, address the routes likely to be used by

residents of the proposed development so as to indicate the extent to which routes in the AONB would be more used and therefore less tranquil.

I note that the applicant indicates that **the agricultural land classification for the site falls into the category of the best and most versatile agricultural land.** It would appear from paragraph 112 of the NPPF that the EIA should demonstrate the necessity of significant development on land of that quality. The AONB is **concerned** that developing land of that quality without a very robust set of reasons could set an unwelcome precedent. Particularly when the AONB seeks to support the wise use of farmland.

I would **suggest** that it would be prudent to advise the applicants that an EIA should consider the 'worst case scenario' so that any other situation is going to be less adverse on its impacts.

I hope these comments are helpful to you and I would, of course, be happy to comment on any further information that you may receive.

Yours sincerely

RICHARD BURDEN

Richard Burden
Landscape and Planning Advisor (part-time Monday – Wednesday)

On behalf of the CCWWD AONB Partnership

richardburden@cranbornechase.org.uk