

NEW POLICY HARNESSING WIND ENERGY ref DM7

I strongly object to the description of land within an AONB as of 'moderate high' landscape value. AONBs are defined in the Crow Act, Government policy and guidance as areas of national – even international- landscape value. The Crow Act states that an LA must ensure all decisions have regard to the purposes of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of an AONB and para 176 of the NPPF gives the highest status of protection to AONBs together with paras 174,176,179. In June 2021 the Government committed to strengthening the status of AONBs.

Consequently the designation of that part of the Mendip Hills and Cotswold AONBs in BANES landscape plan as medium high – not high-- is perverse.

The slopes of the Mendips form a distinctive line of high limestone hills with small spring line villages nestled at the base. The Chew valley hinterland with large lakes, small fields and stone walls creates a wonderful setting to the higher ground and gives important views both into and out of the area, (see also Chew Valley NP HDE3, HDE4). The slopes are heavily wooded with much ancient woodland, cut by steep coombes with areas designated as of special scientific interest eg Harptree Coombe and of national importance for bats eg Compton Martin Ochre mines. Chew lake is an SSSI and SNCI for birds. Landscape value is not, in my opinion, just a visual assessment but should take account of the importance of the area to wildlife as well as humans.

The Mendip Hills AONB is renowned for its tranquillity and 'naturalness', including natural heritage features. BANES has a duty in the national interest to preserve and protect the area against potential adverse impacts and I consider that the erection of wind turbines in AONB designated land, and particularly within the Mendip Hills area, would be a damaging unnatural intrusion, both visually and because of the noise and disturbance they would cause wildlife, residents and visitors, unjustified and against the public interest.

Climate change mitigation is of course important and the heavily treed slopes of the Mendips are valuable for carbon capture. Tree planting and increased habitat resilience is a more appropriate response to climate change here. And the Mendips provide well -used leisure, sporting and recreational opportunities so important for mental health, an equally important objective for present and future generations.

Option 2 does not satisfactorily address the impact on the landscape and scenic beauty of the Cotswolds and Mendip Hill AONB.

I strongly object to Option 2 of the proposed Policy Harnessing wind energy