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5 October 2021

To whom it may concern,

**B&NES Pre-submission Draft Local Plan Partial (Regulation 19) LPPU2 Update – response on behalf of the Mendip Hills National Landscape Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Partnership.**

Thank you for giving the Mendip Hills National Landscape Designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Partnership the opportunity to comment on the above Local Plan partial update (Regulation 19) consultation.

The Mendip Hills AONB Partnership welcomes Bath and Northeast Somerset Council's climate and ecological emergency declarations, and the '*review of core policies with the intentions of enabling carbon neutrality in the district by 2030*'. The Partnership consider that the Council's overriding purpose to improve people's lives must not be at the expense of either climate and nature recovery, or the designations of the Mendip Hills AONB and Cotswold National Landscape. We welcome raising awareness of these nationally important protected landscapes, and through conserving and enhancing their natural beauty for future generations in perpetuity, the role of the AONBs in meeting the Council's intentions of the both the climate and ecological emergencies declarations.

We welcome the Council's intention to support sensitively located and designed renewable energy systems to conserve and enhance designated landscapes, and the intention to actively address the challenges of climate change as a priority.

Bath and Northeast Somerset Local Plan (Regulation 19) Partial Update Jun-Oct 2021 consultation	Mendip Hills AONB Partnership Comments
	<p>Overarching Comments</p> <p>The Mendip Hills AONB and the ‘setting’ of the Mendip Hills AONB</p> <p>The nationally protected landscape of the Mendip Hills AONB covers 198 square kilometres from Bleadon in the west to Chewton Mendip in the east. The AONB partly lies within the North Somerset to the south-west of the wider Bristol area and south-east of Weston-Super-Mare. Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty are some of the UK’s most cherished and outstanding landscapes.</p> <p>The Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000 confirmed the significance of the AONBs and Section 85 places a statutory duty on all relevant authorities to have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing natural beauty when discharging any function in relation to, or affecting land within as Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Potential development proposals outside of the boundaries of AONBs that may have an impact within the designated area, are also covered by the ‘duty of regard’.</p> <p>The concept of ‘setting’ is often used to describe the area of land within which activities or changes could affect the associated AONB. The Government’s Planning Practice Guidance draws attention to the concept of ‘setting’ and the Section 85 duty of regard to AONBs stating that:</p> <p><i>‘Land within the setting of these areas often makes an important contribution to maintaining their natural beauty, and where poorly located or designed development can do significant harm. This is especially the case where long views from or to the designated landscape are identified as important, or where the landscape character of land within and adjoining the designated area is complementary. Development within the settings of these areas will therefore need sensitive handling that takes these potential impacts into account.’</i></p>

	<p>(PPG, Natural Environment (Landscape) section Paragraph: 042 Reference ID: 8-042-20190721 Revision date: 21/07/2019</p> <p>Development outside of an AONB is capable of affecting the AONB and as such, the potential for effects on the AONB special qualities and distinctive characteristics are a consideration.</p> <p>Furthermore, PPG Natural Environment states;</p> <p><i>‘All development in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Beauty will need to be located and designed in a way that reflects their status as landscapes of the highest quality. Where applications for major development come forward, paragraph 172* of the Framework sets out a number of particular considerations that should apply when deciding whether permission should be granted.</i></p> <p>Paragraph: 041 Reference ID: 8-041-20190721 Revision date: 21 07 2019</p> <p>* Paragraph 176 &amp;177 in revised NPPF 2021.</p>
<p><b>B&amp;NES Landscape Sensitivity Assessment Renewable Energy Development. Final report LUC (August 2021).</b></p>	<p>The Mendip Hills AONB Partnership supports the principle of low carbon and renewable energy. To ensure that wind and solar energy schemes are delivered in a way consistent with the purposes of the AONB designation, we wish to highlight that the duty of regard to <i>‘conserve and enhance natural beauty’</i> within the Mendip Hills AONB and that this duty also applies to proposals outside the boundaries of AONBs that may have an impact within the designated area.</p> <p>We welcome that the landscape sensitivity analysis has been updated (previous dated 2010), which clearly identifies the boundaries of the AONBs, enabling clearer analysis of any impact of the AONBs from development outside the boundaries but within the ‘setting’, as well as within the AONB boundaries. We also welcome the comprehensive Landscape Sensitivity Assessment and strategic landscape guidance given in Appendix A.</p> <p>The DEFRA 25 Year Environmental Plan sets out under paragraph 2.2.1 that <i>‘Some of England’s most beautiful landscapes and geodiversity are protected via a range of</i></p>

	<p><i>designations including National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs)...Over the next 25years we want to make sure that they are not only conserved but enhanced'. Paragraph 2.2.2 further sets out that 'In England, a quarter of our landscape is designated in this way, around 10% as National parks and 15% as AONBs. We will make sure they continue to be conserved and enhanced, while recognising that they are living landscapes that support rural communities...'</i></p>
<p><b>B&amp;NES Landscape Sensitivity Assessment Renewable Energy Development. LUC Report page 19: Solar PV development</b></p>	<p>The Mendip Hills AONB Management Plan 2019-2024 sets out that the primary purpose of the AONB designation is to conserve and enhance natural beauty. In pursuing the primary purpose, account should be taken of the needs of local communities. Particular regard should be paid to promoting sustainable forms of social and economic development that in themselves conserve and enhance the environment.</p> <p>The Management Plan under paragraph 1.4 sets out a Statement of Significance on the special qualities of the Mendip Hills AONB that create the Mendip hills sense of place and identity.</p> <p>These 'special qualities' include:</p> <p><i>'The dark skies, tranquillity, sense of remoteness and naturalness of the area...</i></p> <p><i>Views towards the Mendip Hills and the distinctive hill line. The views out and panoramas, including across the Severn Estuary to Wales, the Somerset Levels and Moors and the Somerset Coast...</i></p> <p><i>The limestone aquifer supplying water to the reservoirs of Cheddar, Chew Valley and Blagdon lakes and providing habitats of local and international importance for birds with Chew Valley Lake designated a Special Protection Area for bird species...</i></p> <p><i>The Chew Valley and the Yeo Valley - a farmed landscape with distinctive hedgerow patterns and hedgerow trees providing interconnected semi-natural habitats...</i></p> <p><i>Ancient woodland and wooded combes on the north and south slopes offering varied habitats</i></p>

*of national and international importance for a wide diversity of wildlife including dormouse and bats...*

*A landscape engaging people in a wide range of interests and outdoor pursuits including caving, climbing, cycling and quieter activities including bird watching and walking, to experience the special qualities of the Mendip Hills AONB.'*

The Management Plan objective D3 states; *'Encourage reduction in Carbon emissions within the AONB through reducing energy consumption, applying energy conservation measures, encouraging more sustainable patterns of development, and utilising renewable energy generation technologies that are of an appropriate type and scale for their siting.*

We support Policy SCR3: Ground-mounted solar arrays, where applications should be sensitive to nationally and locally protected landscape, minimising the visual impact *'and maintain appropriate screening through the lifetime of the project; and that land is returned to its former use at the end of the project'*.

And we support Policy SCR4, where; *'Community renewable energy schemes of an appropriate size, design and screening'* conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the AONBs and their settings.

Whilst we note that the hectareage bandings for solar PV proposed have been chosen to reflect those most likely to be put forward by developers, we consider that even a 5ha site may not be appropriate for the national protected landscapes of the AONBs. Furthermore, we consider that the cumulative impact from more than one development of solar PVs is likely to have a significantly detrimental impact on the AONBs and their settings.

In addition, the summary for LCT2; Rolling Valley Farmland indicates that the contribution of human development including from pylons, roads etc results in a lower sensitivity of that landscape to solar PV development. We question this premise when considering the

	<p>cumulative effect of human development, which may increase the sensitivity of the AONBs and their settings to more development.</p> <p>The Partnership disagrees that the scoring of LCT2 scoring of 2 being the same for both areas within and outside the AONB, as this does not adequately reflect the significance of the AONB designations.</p> <p>Therefore, we request that band A (&lt;5ha) development in '<i>Areas of 2a and 2b within the Cotswolds or Mendip Hills AONB</i>' (page 19, LCT 2: Rolling Valley Farmland) should be reassessed to reflect a more sensitive category of landscape potential, and thus greater care needed in siting of any potential solar development.</p> <p>Likewise, we consider that the rating of 2 for LCT5a '<i>Areas within the Mendip Hills</i>', does not reflect a higher sensitivity of this designated landscape to change as a result of PV development.</p> <p>Views from, and towards the Mendip Hills AONB should be protected particularly when considering the appropriate scale of development, layout, design (including lighting) and landscaping. The impact of the development on the protected landscape and the special qualities of the Mendip Hills AONB would need to be carefully considered and supported by appropriate and acceptable mitigation.</p> <p>We support the principle that it is not appropriate to develop solar PV schemes of over 5ha in the AONBs.</p>
<p><b>B&amp;NES Landscape Sensitivity Assessment Renewable Energy Development. LUC Report page 22: Wind energy development</b></p>	<p>The Mendip Hills AONB Partnership support the assessment that Band C, D and E schemes are <b>not</b> likely to be appropriate in the national protected landscapes or their settings being contrary to the purpose of AONB designation.</p> <p>Please see above for Management Plan Statement of Significance and objectives.</p> <p>The DEFRA 25 Year Environmental Plan sets out under paragraph 2.2.1 that '<i>Some of England's most beautiful landscapes and geodiversity are protected via a range of</i></p>

	<p><i>designations including National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs)...Over the next 25years we want to make sure that they are not only conserved but enhanced'. Paragraph 2.2.2 further sets out that 'In England, a quarter of our landscape is designated in this way, around 10% as National parks and 15% as AONBs. We will make sure they continue to be conserved and enhanced, while recognising that they are living landscapes that support rural communities...'</i></p> <p>Therefore, we consider that Bands A and B schemes have the potential to have a significant detrimental impact on conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the AONBs and their settings, being landscapes vulnerable to change, and therefore request that a Landscape potential of 4 is more appropriate for Band A developments, and Landscape Potential 5 for Band B developments, to reflect the 'High' sensitivity of the designation of these nationally important protected landscapes.</p> <p>We recognise that the renewable industry is highly innovative with a rapid time to market for example the development of bladeless turbine systems, and we request that B&amp;NES keeps abreast of latest forms of low profile, low impact technologies (visually, noise/tranquillity and on wildlife) for all size sites.</p>
<p><b>Draft Plan (Reg 19) Consultation August 2021</b></p> <p><b>Topic Paper: Biodiversity Net Gain</b></p>	<p>In the previous LP Partial update (January 2021) we concurred with the Cotswold Conservation Board that there should be an additional BNG requirement of at least 20% in the AONBs.</p> <p>The justification for a higher level of net-gain in the AONBs is due to;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The fact that natural heritage, which includes biodiversity, is one of the factors that contributes to the natural beauty of the AONBs and is, therefore, should be conserved <u>and</u> enhanced, in order to fulfil the purpose of AONB designation.</li> </ul> <p>Some habitats are special qualities of the AONBs, for example flower-rich limestone/calcareous grasslands. The 'Big</p>

	<p>Chalk Proposal' seeks to link up the limestone/chalk grassland between the two designated landscapes of the Mendip Hills AONB and the Cotswold AONB/National Landscape.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paragraph 176 of the NPPF requires that the conservation <u>and</u> enhancement of wildlife is an important consideration in the AONBs;</li> <li>• The proposals of the Landscapes Review Final Report specify that national landscapes, including AONBs, should form the backbone of nature recovery networks.</li> </ul> <p>We request that the B&amp;NES Local Plan should recognise and link the B&amp;NES planned Local Nature Recovery Strategies with our emerging AONB Nature Recovery Plans.</p> <p>To ensure longevity of onsite BNG, we welcome changes to DEFRA's BNG metric 2.0, to 3.0 for a mandatory requirement that development proposals should include BNG management plans for a minimum of 30 years period.</p> <p>We consider that if any compensatory habitat has to be off-site then the AONBs should be recipient landscapes/sites for BNG in line with the Mendip Hills AONB Management Plan 2019-2024 Transport and Development Objective D5 <i>'Promote environmental net gain principle for development, including housing and infrastructure.</i></p> <p>In addition, we consider that any off site BNG could be delivered through West of England's Nature Partnership's Nature Recovery Networks and potentially B-Lines zones.</p>
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Should you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact the Mendip Hills AONB Unit.

Yours faithfully,

Judith Chubb-Whittle

Mendip Hills AONB Unit Landscape Planning Officer on behalf of the Mendip Hills AONB Partnership.



cc Cllr Nigel Taylor, AONB Partnership Committee Chair; Natural England, Mendip Hills AONB Parish Representative, The Mendip Society

*The Mendip Hills AONB Partnership promotes and coordinates the conservation and enhancement of the Mendip Hills AONB*