

**Mendip Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Comments – North Somerset Local Plan 2023-2038 Regulation 18 Consultation.**

North Somerset Local Plan 2023-2038 Pre-commencement consultation March 2020.	Mendip Hills AONB Comments
	<p><b>Overarching Comments</b></p> <p><u>The Mendip Hills AONB and the ‘setting’ of the Mendip Hills AONB</u>                      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 to AONBs stating that: ‘The duty is relevant in considering development proposals that are situated outside National Park or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty</p>

	<p>boundaries, but which might have an impact on the setting of, and implementation of, the statutory purposes of these protected areas.’ (PPG, Natural Environment (Landscape) section, paragraph reference ID 8-003-201 440306).</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><b>Page 4 paragraph 10 Pre-commencement Document.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Environmental and historic conservation and enhancement:</b> Protection and enhancement of landscapes, wildlife and historic assets, strategic green infrastructure, AONB</li> </ul>	<p>The Mendip Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Unit feel that the special designation of the Mendip Hills AONB should be celebrated and that the first reference to this protected landscape within all Local Plan documentation should be referenced fully. In addition, it is widely recognised that our landscapes and wildlife need to be helped to 'recover' alongside conserve and enhance. We request wording to be amended as follows;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b><i>‘Environmental and historic conservation and enhancement: Protection, recovery and enhancement of landscapes, wildlife and historic assets, strategic green infrastructure, Mendip Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) ‘</i></b></li> </ul> <p>The Mendip Hills AONB Unit wish to highlight that the duty of regard to ‘conserve and enhance natural beauty within the Mendip Hills AONB and that this duty also applies to proposals outside of the boundaries of the AONB that may have an impact within the designated area.</p> <p>The DEFRA 25 Year Environment Plan sets out under paragraph 2.2.1 that ‘Some of England’s most beautiful landscapes and geodiversity</p>

	<p>are protected via a range of designations including National Parks and Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs)...Over the next 25 years we want to make sure 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...'</p> <p>The Mendip Hills AONB Management Plan 2019-2024 was adopted by the joint local authorities in Spring 2019. The Management Plan 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. Recreation is not an objective of designation, but the demand for recreation should be met so far as this is consistent with the conservation of natural beauty and the needs of agriculture, forestry and other uses.'</p> <p>The Management Plan under paragraph 1.4 sets out the Statement of Significance on the special qualities of the Mendip Hills AONB that create the Mendip Hills sense of place and identity.</p> <p>Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) sets out that; 'Management plans for National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty do not form part of the statutory development plan, but they help to set out the strategic context for development. They provide evidence of the value and special</p>
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	<p>qualities of these areas, provide a basis for cross-organisational work to support the purposes of their designation and show how management activities contribute to their protection, enhancement and enjoyment. They may contain information which is relevant when preparing plan policies, or which is a material consideration when assessing planning applications. <i>(PPG, Natural Environment (Landscape) section Paragraph: 040 Reference ID: 8-040-20190721).</i></p> <p>Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) also sets out that ‘The National Planning Policy Framework makes clear that the scale and extent of development in these areas should be limited, in view of the importance of conserving and enhancing their landscapes and scenic beauty. Its policies for protecting these areas may mean that it is not possible to meet objectively assessed needs for development in full through the plan-making process, and they are unlikely to be suitable areas for accommodating unmet needs from adjoining (non-designated) areas. Effective joint working between planning authorities covering designated and adjoining areas, through the preparation and maintenance of statements of common ground, is particularly important in helping to identify how housing and other needs can best be accommodated...’ <i>(PPG, Natural Environment (Landscape) section, Paragraph: 041 Reference ID: 8-041-20190721)</i></p>
<p><b>Page 5 Paragraph 12 Pre-commencement Document: Evidence base</b></p>	<p>Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) sets out that; ‘Management plans for National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty do not form part of the statutory development plan, but they help to set out the strategic context for development. They provide evidence of the value and special</p>

	<p>qualities of these areas, provide a basis for cross-organisational work to support the purposes of their designation and show how management activities contribute to their protection, enhancement and enjoyment. They may contain information which is relevant when preparing plan policies, or which is a material consideration when assessing planning applications.’ (PPG, Natural Environment (Landscape) section Paragraph: 040 Reference ID: 8-040-20190721).</p> <p>Therefore, Mendip Hills AONB Unit wish that The Mendip Hills AONB Management Plan 2019-2024 should be considered as part of the evidence base in the preparation of the North Somerset Local Plan 2023-2038.</p>
<p><b>Local Plan 2038 Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report</b></p> <p><b>Question 1. Have all relevant plans and programmes been referenced?</b></p> <p>Page 33 paragraph 3.52 The assessment provides a broad indication of the landscapes of the District which range from the carboniferous limestone uplands of the Mendips to the level, wet pasturelands of the levels and moors. The significance of the landscape of the Mendip Hills is acknowledged by their designation as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) (Map 3) for which a Management Plan has been produced.</p>	<p>The Mendip Hills AONB Partnership produce the AONB Management Plan every five years. The Mendip Hills AONB Management Plan 2019-2024 was adopted by the joint local authorities in Spring 2019.</p> <p>Mendip Hills AONB Unit consider that providing a link to the Management Plan 2019-2024 would be beneficial to cross referencing <a href="https://www.mendiphillsaonb.org.uk/caring-about-the-aonb/management-plan/">https://www.mendiphillsaonb.org.uk/caring-about-the-aonb/management-plan/</a></p> <p>Suggested amended text to be ‘...The significance of the landscape of the Mendip Hills is acknowledged by their designation as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) (Map3) for which aa Management Plan id produced each five years, the current plan being The Mendip Hills AONB Management Plan 2019-2024 <a href="https://www.mendiphillsaonb.org.uk/caring-about-the-aonb/management-plan/">https://www.mendiphillsaonb.org.uk/caring-about-the-aonb/management-plan/</a>.’</p>

<p><b>2. Is any significant environmental, social or economic data missing or misrepresented?</b></p> <p><b>Page 38 Green Infrastructure</b></p>	<p>The Mendip Hills support opportunities to encourage healthy lifestyles – Green Infrastructure opportunities link into the wider strategic GI movement networks within the AONB would be supported, however impact on inherent sensitivities, special qualities and character of the landscapes will need to be carefully considered and addressed.</p>
<p><b>3. Are there any additional sustainability issues within North Somerset that need to be considered in the development of the New Local Plan document?</b></p>	<p>Mendip Hills AONB Unit wish to highlight considerations regarding forthcoming SHLAA for strategic allocations and transport schemes, highlighting that any considerations must have regards to the purpose of conserving and enhancing natural beauty when discharging any function in relation to, or affecting land within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Potential development proposals outside of the boundaries of the AONB that may have an impact within the designated area are also covered by the ‘duty of regard’.</p> <p>The wider implications of any transport schemes must be considered, with the cumulative impact on the wider road network. One of the issues impacting the Mendip Hills AONB is that routes across the AONB are frequently used as short cuts by through traffic, affecting both tranquillity and the environment of the nationally protected landscape.</p> <p>A further consideration will be the impact of lighting on the protected landscape.</p>