



NORTH WESSEX DOWNS AONB POSITION STATEMENT DARK SKIES & ARTIFICIAL LIGHT



Wilton Windmill by Craig Harvey

Position Statement status

The purpose of this Position Statement is to inform local planning authorities, landowners, applicants and other interested parties regarding the provision of lighting likely to affect the North Wessex Downs AONB, both within the AONB and its setting.

This document is intended to guide policy makers, to assist in the preparation of planning applications involving lighting and to assist in the decision-making process. More detailed guidance can be found in *Dark Skies of the North Wessex Downs AONB: A Guide to Good External Lighting*.

The Position Statement has been prepared in consultation with the North Wessex Downs AONB Management Working Group and Council of Partners. It has been formally approved by the Council of Partners including all the constituent local authorities. This guidance forms an extension of the principles laid out within the *North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan (2019-2024)*.

The primary purpose of AONB designation is to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area, as confirmed by Section 82 of the *Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000* (CRoW Act). Section 85 of the CRoW Act places a duty on all relevant authorities to have regard to this purpose in exercising or performing any functions in relation to or affecting land in AONBs.

Why dark skies matter

1. Dark skies add to the beauty, tranquillity and sense of remoteness of a place. The North Wessex Downs has areas as dark as any in the country. One long-term goal for the AONB is to be a place:

Where a sense of remoteness and tranquillity predominates and where vast night skies can thrill the eye, unaffected by light pollution; where these special qualities are recognised in development decisions within in the setting of the AONB, so that the natural beauty of the North Wessex Downs is protected.

2. As well as being integral to the special qualities of the AONB, dark skies are important for the health of people, wildlife and heritage:

- Humans have evolved with the natural cycle of light and darkness and naturally adhere to a circadian rhythm or body clock. Darkness is important for overall **health**, especially maintaining sleep and the immune system.
- Wasted light or light pollution is a waste of energy and money and contributes to the impacts of climate change.
- There is increasing public interest in the night sky. Dark skies are increasingly important for people to experience, **enjoy and understand** natural darkness and night skies.
- **Wildlife** has evolved with the natural cycle of day and night and to take advantage of natural darkness.
- Dark skies are an important aspect of the setting of the AONB's historic monuments and places and how people experience and appreciate our **heritage**.

AONB purposes and the North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan

3. Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) are designated by the Government for the purpose of ensuring that the special qualities of our finest landscapes are conserved and enhanced. In planning policy terms, they have the same status as National Parks.

4. The primary purpose of the AONB designation is to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the North Wessex Downs AONB. In addition, there are secondary purposes to increase awareness and understanding of the special qualities of the AONB.

5. Dark skies are a special quality of the North Wessex Downs but in practice they are seldom afforded the same protection as the land of the AONB. They are under increasing pressure from light pollution from commercial and domestic security lighting, development and street lighting.

6. Dark skies and minimising light pollution form part of the Strategic Objectives and Policies of the statutory North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan.

Strategic Objective S.17: Ensure that the formulation and implementation of planning policies across the North Wessex Downs takes full account of the purposes for AONB designation, the character of the special qualities of the North Wessex Downs and its setting.

Policy DE08: Avoid and reduce light pollution, including control of lighting schemes or other developments that threaten the integrity of dark night skies over the North Wessex Downs.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and Guidance (NPPG)

The NPPF sets down national policy for local planning authorities and decision-takers both in drawing up plans and as a material consideration in determining planning applications.

7. Paragraph 172 of the NPPF states:

Great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which have the highest status of protection ...

and that

Planning permission should be refused for major developments in these designated areas except in exceptional circumstances and where it can be demonstrated they are in the public interest.

8. Paragraph 180 of the NPPF deals with pollution, including light:

Planning policies and decisions should also ensure that new development is appropriate for its location, taking into account the likely effects (including cumulative effects) of pollution on health, living conditions and the natural environment, as well as the potential sensitivity of the site or the wider area to impacts that could arise from the development. In doing so they

should: ... limit the impact of light pollution from artificial light on local amenity, intrinsically dark landscapes and nature conservation.

9. More in-depth guidance on light pollution is provided in the NPPG. Under ‘What light pollution considerations does planning need to address?’ it states:

...it is important to get the right light, in the right place and for it to be used at the right time ... Artificial light is not always necessary. It has the potential to become what is termed ‘light pollution’ or ‘obtrusive light’, and not all modern lighting is suitable in all locations. It can be a source of annoyance to people, harmful to wildlife and undermine enjoyment of the countryside or the night sky, especially in areas with intrinsically dark landscapes.

(NPPG Paragraph: 001 Reference ID: 31-001-20191101 Revision date: 01 11 2019)

10. Planning policies and decisions must also reflect relevant international obligations and statutory requirements. Under Section 85 of the *Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000* it is a legal duty for all relevant authorities to have regard to the primary purpose of AONBs: to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area.

11. In its 25 Year Environment Plan, the Department for the Environment, Farming and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) states:

Over the next 25 years, we must significantly cut all forms of pollution and ease the pressure on the environment. We must ensure that noise and light pollution are managed effectively.

A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment, DEFRA chapter 4, page 83

Avoiding harm from light pollution to the North Wessex Downs AONB

12. Artificial external lighting within the AONB or its setting should be kept to a minimum to conserve and enhance dark skies.

13. The North Wessex Downs AONB Partnership recognises that in some circumstances artificial lighting is needed, and that, with good light management policies and practice and careful design, it may be possible to meet these needs whilst conserving dark skies.

14. The AONB Partnership asks all local planning authorities to adopt, apply and enforce policies and standards that conserve the dark skies of the North Wessex Downs and its setting. The AONB Partnership has produced detailed guidance with sample policy and conditions wording for use and adoption in Local Plans, or Supplementary Planning Documents: see *North Wessex Downs AONB: A Guide to Good External Lighting* ; available on our website www.northwessexdowns.org.uk.

15. The AONB Partnership encourages the use of *Dark Skies of the North Wessex Downs AONB: A Guide to Good External Lighting* when considering any lighting [within](#) or in the setting of the AONB.

16. The AONB Partnership will seek to:

- Work with authorities and representatives of local communities and special interest groups to adopt and promote common standards and help establish practical measures

to prevent and reduce light pollution, including through Local Plans, Neighbourhood Plans, Supplementary Planning Documents, site briefs and design codes.

- Work with authorities, including highways authorities to reduce to a minimum the need for street lighting wherever possible
- Work with others to conserve dark skies with the use of well-designed lighting that is directed to where it is needed, when it is needed and not into the sky or across the landscape.
- Work with those developing light management policies to ensure they are sensitive and effective, using latest technology and other means to avoid, minimise and reduce unnecessary light pollution.
- Promote the recognition of light pollution and its impact among residents, businesses and visitors to the area.
- Work with others to monitor and celebrate dark skies as an important aspect of the area's natural beauty.

17. The North Wessex Downs AONB Partnership will strive to ensure that all new planning policy includes reference to dark skies and policies to minimise the impact of lighting on the AONB and its setting.

18. The North Wessex Downs AONB Partnership will seek to enter into any pre-application consultations to ensure full attention is given to the importance of dark skies to landscape character at the earliest opportunity.

19. Some issues in relation to lighting and new development can be resolved through careful design, appropriate materials, location and layout, restricting Permitted Development Rights by condition and mitigation measures from landscaping to use of minimal, well-directed and full cut-off street (and other external) lighting.

20. The North Wessex Downs AONB Partnership will monitor planning applications involving lighting for concerns that they could affect dark skies and comment as appropriate in line with the *North Wessex Downs AONB Good External Lighting Guide*.

21. The surroundings of the North Wessex Downs AONB and the protected landscape of the AONB add value to each other as the landscape and skies are linked. Lighting proposals in the setting should, therefore, have regard to their impact on the landscape character and special qualities of the AONB.