

Inspector's Note to the Council (1)

Development Within the North Wessex Downs AONB

Following on from the discussion at Hearing Session 2 and prior to the more detailed discussion on the allocated sites in the AONB I thought it would be helpful to set out my current thinking regarding development within the AONB. I must stress that I have drawn no conclusions on the issue and will not do so until I have heard the evidence relating to the settlements and the allocated sites in the AONB.

The Core Strategy (CS paragraph 4.11) confirms that the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty of the protected landscape will be the primary consideration in the allocation of sites in the AONB. In order to achieve this objective CS policy ADPP5 states that provision will be made for up to 2,000 dwellings (as opposed to the 'at least' and 'approximately' referred to in the other ADPPs).

It is clear to me that the CS Inspector considered the 2,000 figure to be a cap and indeed he confirms that this is not a figure that has to be achieved and that delivering a lower number would be acceptable (paragraph 78 of his Report).

Great weight must be given to the conservation of the landscape and scenic beauty of the AONB but I acknowledge that this does not necessarily mean that new sustainable development would be objectionable. However, bearing in mind that overall the Council is proposing a higher level of development than the 'at least 10,500 dwellings' set out in the CS the justification for the 'overprovision' of 91 dwellings in the AONB (as set out in Appendix 4 of the Council's Statement on Issue 1) would have to be robust.

The Council describe the Housing Site Allocations DPD as a 'daughter' document to the CS. As such I would expect the level of compatibility between the two documents to be high. I am not yet convinced that this has been achieved with regard to housing allocations within the AONB.

On this basis I am currently not satisfied that the Council is advocating the most appropriate strategy for the AONB when considered against the reasonable alternatives.

I do not expect a detailed written response at this stage but I thought it would be helpful to set out my current thinking and to invite the Council to consider what options are available in order that these initial concerns can be satisfactorily addressed. A brief preliminary written response to this Note by Monday 4th July would be helpful, as there may be implications for the relevant forthcoming hearing sessions.

David Hogger

Inspector

24th June 2016