

**Cranborne Chase**  
**Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty**



**POSITION STATEMENT**

**NUMBER 10**

**HOUSING WITHIN THE CRANBORNE CHASE**  
**AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY**

*AONB Position Statements aim to provide the public and planning authorities with the likely stance this AONB Partnership will take on particular topics.*

**BACKGROUND**

Houses are predominantly created by commercial house builders and housing associations. There may be a few constructed by community or self-build groups and a small number of new properties are built by private individuals.

The Local Planning Authority has the quite complex role of identifying housing need, deciding on any strategic housing requirements, and overseeing the provision of community facilities and infrastructure to accommodate additional housing. In addition the Local Planning Authority has the role of development management; making decisions on planning applications for housing and other land uses.

The National Planning Policy Framework provides the national setting for sustainable development and local Neighbourhood Plans provide supplementary detail to the Local Plans prepared by the Local Planning Authorities.

In the context of an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, such as Cranborne Chase, the landscape has been designated by government because of its national importance and national status. The statutory purposes of the AONB designation are 'conserving and enhancing natural beauty'. There is, therefore, scope for conflict between provision of housing and the purposes of AONB designation.

**HOUSING NEEDS**

Almost by definition AONBs are not areas that are highly developed or highly populated. In many ways that makes them attractive places to live. A number of items

of research in recent years have consistently identified the fact that housing within an AONB attracts a significant financial premium when compared to similar housing not in a designated area. The background research carried out by Local Planning Authorities for the preparation of their Local Plans consistently shows that the shortage of housing within this AONB is in the affordable sector. That is housing for those that live and work in the AONB and probably are employed in the less remunerative jobs that, nevertheless, contribute significantly to the management of the land and landscapes of the AONB and support community services and facilities.

## **RECENT EXPERIENCE**

### Neighbourhood Plans

During the period of the last AONB Management Plan 2014 - 2019 a number of features have come to the fore in connection with housing in this AONB. Neighbourhood Plans have, with few exceptions, identified relatively small numbers of houses in small groups in locations within, or immediately adjacent to, existing settlements. The process of identification has, in many cases, taken particular note of the landscape character and the ability of the locations to absorb housing development.

### Grand Designs

There have been relatively few proposals for completely new, and substantial, houses. These 'grand designs' in the open countryside are generally covered by the guidance within the NPPF and specific policies in the individual Local Plans of the constituent Local Planning Authorities.

### Replacement Dwellings

A number of large houses that stand out unduly in the landscape have appeared in recent years, under the guise of replacement dwellings. Whilst there are often clear and good reasons to replace poorly constructed dwellings with ones that meet modern standards it appears to the AONB Partnership that there is too much scope for interpretation, misunderstanding, and styles of development that do not integrate with the nationally important landscapes of the AONB.

Issues that arise in connection with replacement buildings often have been associated with the replacement of a bungalow with a two or more storeyed house. The guidelines in Local Plan policies seem to lack consistency between the floor space of the existing building being replaced and the footprint of the ground floor when transferred to a new, replacement building. Whilst most Local Plans acknowledge that a small increase in floor space can be acceptable, the inclusion of garden sheds, garages, greenhouses, and horticultural features seems to be stretching the definition of a footprint of the existing dwelling beyond reasonable limits.

Furthermore, virtually all replaced buildings have been relatively small and could, therefore, be regarded as part of the affordable housing stock. The loss of these smaller dwellings to significantly enlarged ones through converting a bungalow to a

two or three storey house on a similar or enlarged footprint, or converting a 'two down, two up' cottage into a 'four down, four up' house, means the stock of affordable dwellings is decreasing.

It seems, therefore, that replacement dwellings should be much more in the 'spirit of replacement' as envisaged in Local Plans rather than becoming alternative, larger, dwellings. The AONB Partnership is of the view that where a dwelling is appropriate for replacement then the replacement should be of a similar size and the size permitted for the replacement should not exceed 140% of the floor space of the original. The floor space of an existing garage would only be permissible for inclusion in that figure where an integral garage is included within the new building. Outbuildings would not be included within the floor space.

### Essential Workers Dwellings

There also appears to be some scope for misinterpretation of the policies for the provision of dwellings for essential agricultural and forestry workers. The historical intention had been to ensure that there would be sufficient workers on the land to enable the land to be worked effectively and productively. The clear implication behind that is that these would be modest dwellings that would be affordable by such workers. To that extent these dwellings contribute to the affordable housing stock in the living and working landscape of an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. A substantial house for an estate would be more likely to come within the purview of a 'grand design' scale of development.

As the population of workers actually on the land decreases as mechanisation increases it might be anticipated that fewer dwellings would be needed for essential workers. The prior disposal of existing workers' dwellings on farms/estates on the open market is not accepted as a valid reason for requiring a new, replacement, essential worker's dwelling as that can simply increase the number of dwellings in the open countryside.

There is some variability in the size of permitted essential workers dwellings in the constituent Local Planning Authorities of this AONB and other, nearby, protected landscapes. These appear to vary between 100sqm and 140sqm floorspace. It would, therefore, seem that 120sqm could be appropriate and commensurate with the requirements for an essential building in a protected landscape. To ensure that such buildings are not added to in an ad-hoc way it is the view of this AONB Partnership that permitted development rights for additions and extensions should be removed, meaning that planning permission would be needed for extensions. Where there is no farmhouse on the holding and the farmhouse has not been recently detached from the holding, it would be appropriate to provide additional space for a farm office (in the order of 30sqm) within the building.

### Affordable Dwellings

The loss of smaller, affordable, dwellings through replacements to larger houses has already been mentioned. The shortage of affordable housing within villages appears to be a significant issue in supporting sustainable communities in and around the AONB. Such dwellings would be of a similarly scale to those needed by essential

workers in agriculture or forestry. Furthermore small, energy efficient, properties are likely to be needed as first and last homes for the younger and oldest generations alike.

This AONB has, however, noticed that proposals for new affordable housing tend to be at the extremities of settlements, often outside of the development boundaries, and being brought forward as 'exception' sites. Unfortunately these locations often lack the sustainability that is sought by the younger, older, or less well-off individuals and families who, nevertheless, require ready access to community facilities such as schools, shops, doctor surgeries, and public transport. The AONB Partnership does, therefore, urge both Neighbourhood Plan teams and Local Planning Authorities to make provision for affordable housing within settlements, reasonably close to community facilities.

The revised NPPF (July 2018) indicates that in National Parks and AONBs, together with areas designated as 'rural' under the 1985 Housing Act, the threshold for LPAs to require developments to provide or contribute towards affordable housing is reduced to five dwellings. In order to help them achieve their affordable housing objectives this AONB Partnership expects all its constituent LPAs to require affordable housing on developments permitted in and around this AONB that cross that threshold.

Encouragement could be given to community groups and individuals that are genuinely committed to self-build projects. Self-build is another way to making dwellings affordable and, through the sheer energy of the individuals involved, dwellings can be achieved for an affordable price. Clearly there should be enforceable undertakings that such dwellings would be occupied by those self-builders for a predictable period of time. As the individuals commit personal resources and energy to such projects this AONB takes a more relaxed view towards the limits of scale of self-build development, focussing on ensuring that such dwellings are appropriately designed and constructed to integrate with the local landscape character.

## **OVERARCHING CRITERIA**

This AONB Partnership has consistently sought to reduce light pollution and conserve the dark night skies of this AONB. Lighting associated with any new developments within the AONB should, therefore, have to comply not only with this AONB's Position Statement Number 1 on Light Pollution and its Good Practice Guidance Notes on Good Lighting but also the requirements of the International Dark-Sky Association. The AONB will, therefore, expect proposals for new and replacement dwellings to demonstrate how the proposed lighting will meet those criteria. Furthermore, no additional lighting should be permitted that has not been explicitly approved by the Local Planning Authority in compliance with those criteria.

The AONB is also keen to minimise the use of fossil fuels wherever possible. The adopted AONB Management Plan does, therefore, encourage the incorporation of schemes to capture and utilise renewable energy in all new build and extension projects. Proposals for development within this AONB should, therefore, identify at the

planning application stage how they intend to capture and utilise renewable energy without impacting adversely on the purposes of AONB designation.

The AONB Partnership is acutely aware that in rural areas it is not economically possible to have frequent collections of waste and recyclable materials. Provision should, therefore, be made in all new build and extension developments for space to store waste and recyclable materials.

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, along with the National Parks, have the highest level of protection in terms of landscape and scenic beauty. It is, therefore, quite right that any development proposals in those protected landscapes should address not only the design and materials of the proposed developments to enable them to integrate with the local landscape character but also the location should be selected to facilitate the greatest possible integration within the scene and to minimise the need for mitigation.

## **MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS**

Where major housing development is proposed within or adjacent to the AONB this AONB Partnership will expect significant public benefits, other than simply the provision of dwellings, to accrue from the development. In addition to high quality mitigation of any impacts developers will be expected to contribute compensation for the long term impacts of the additional population of the houses on the character and fabric of the AONB.

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