

Lower Thames Crossing

6.3 Environmental Statement Appendices

Appendix 7.6 - Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Relevant Guidance

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Appendix 7.6 - Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Relevant Guidance

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1 Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2021-2026

1.1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 The Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Management Plan 2021-2026 (Kent Downs AONB Unit, 2021) was adopted in 2021.
- 1.1.2 The overarching aim of the Kent Downs AONB Management Plan is to achieve the principles of the AONB designation. The Management Plan provides evidence to assist in the policy and decision-making process in planning. The status of the Management Plan combined with the thorough process of its production and review means that the AONB Management Plan is a material consideration in planning matters and should be afforded weight in decisions.
- 1.1.3 As part of the revision process, the approach of the plan was altered to recognise that the Management Plan, as a whole, represents the Kent Downs AONB Unit and Joint Advisory Committee policy. What were described as ‘policies’ in previous versions of the plan are now described as ‘principles’ and some previous policies have been removed so as not to repeat national policy.

1.2 Tranquillity and remoteness

- 1.2.1 The topic of tranquillity and remoteness is one of several cross-cutting topics which arise frequently in the aim of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the Kent Downs and is of strategic importance to the landscape management of the AONB.
- 1.2.2 The perception of being away from the noise, sights and smells of modern life is a much valued feature of many parts of the Kent Downs AONB. In the south-east of England, absolute tranquillity is an increasingly rare resource. Tranquillity – An overview (Landscape Institute, 2017) recognises the importance of relative tranquillity:
- 1.2.3 *‘A distinction is made between absolute tranquillity and relative tranquillity. When we refer to tranquillity in the UK, it is therefore almost always relative tranquillity that we are referring to, but in differing degrees. For instance, the tranquillity promoted by a summer sunrise on a calm day on top of a high mountain may be close to absolute, with almost no disturbance of any kind detracting from that state of mind. Yet the benefit to people of the relative tranquillity in an urban greenspace may be very high, despite intrusion from background traffic noise or the presence of many other people. Both sorts are important to recognise and value...’*
- 1.2.4 Research by the Campaign to Protect of Rural England (CPRE) has shown that since the 1960s, England has lost over 20% of its tranquil areas to urban sprawl, traffic and light pollution. The average size of Kent’s tranquil areas has reduced by 73%. As Kent’s population increases, this resource will become more important and increasingly under threat. National tranquillity mapping carried out by the CPRE (2007) has confirmed that the Kent Downs offer important areas of relative tranquillity.

- 1.2.5 One way that tranquillity within the Kent Downs is currently impacted is as a result of several main flight paths passing over the AONB; the impact of overflying airplanes on landscape tranquillity can be significant, especially where background noise is otherwise low.
- 1.2.6 The erosion of tranquillity is an issue that has been emphasised in the public engagement stage of the Kent Downs AONB Management Plan. Tranquillity is an important issue for the public and local authority partners and a part of the special characteristics and qualities of the Kent Downs.

Table 1.1 Threats and principles relevant to the tranquillity of the Kent Downs AONB. Extracted from the sustainable development section of the Kent Downs AONB Management Plan

Sustainable Development – Main issues, opportunities, and threats	Sustainable Development - Principles
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>‘Cumulative loss of landscape features, biodiversity, tranquillity and character and suburbanisation has been experienced in the AONB due to incremental poorly located, designed and badly screened development, visitor pressure and leisure uses, intensive agricultural and forestry and woodland management practices, pressure from traffic and significant levels of urban growth and development’</i> • <i>‘Despite a significant loss and continuing pressure, the Kent Downs still provides important relatively tranquil areas; the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) places a requirement on Local Planning Authorities to identify tranquil areas’</i> • <i>‘Dark night skies are a feature of some parts the Kent Downs and are a valued part of the experience of tranquil rural areas’</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>‘SD6 Activities to increase understanding of the importance and the extent of tranquillity, remoteness and dark night skies within the Kent Downs will be pursued’</i> • <i>‘SD7 New projects, proposals and programmes shall conserve and enhance tranquillity and where possible dark night skies’</i>

2 Kent Downs AONB Setting Position Statement

2.1 Introduction

- 2.1.1 The setting of the Kent Downs AONB is broadly speaking the land outside the designated area which is visible from the AONB and from which the AONB can be seen, but may be wider when affected by intrusive features beyond that. The setting of the Kent Downs is not formally defined or indicated on a map.
- 2.1.2 Proposals which would affect the setting of the Kent Downs AONB are not subject to the same level of constraint as those which would affect the AONB itself. The weight to be afforded to setting issues will depend on the significance of the impact. Matters such as the size of proposals, their distance, incompatibility with their surroundings, movement, reflectivity and colour are likely to affect impact. Where the qualities of the AONB which were instrumental in reasons for its designation are affected by proposals in the setting, then the impacts should be given considerable weight in decisions.
- 2.1.3 The Kent Downs AONB Setting Position Statement (Kent Downs AONB Joint Advisory Committee, 2020) provides helpful further advice supporting the vision, aims and principles of the Plan.

2.2 Extracts from the Kent Downs AONB Setting Position Statement

Section 5 from the Kent Downs AONB Setting Position Statement

- 2.2.1 Section 5 from the Kent Downs AONB Setting Position Statement discusses development likely to affect the setting of the AONB:
- 2.2.2 *'Scale, height, siting, use, materials and design are factors that will determine whether a development affects the natural beauty and special qualities of the AONB. Incompatibility with surroundings, movement, reflectivity and colour are also likely to affect impact. In most cases, the further away a development is from the AONB boundary, the more the impact is likely to be reduced, however a very large or high development may have an impact even if some considerable distance from the AONB boundary.'*
- 2.2.3 *'A development may avoid direct physical effects, but introduce other impacts, such as a greater level of traffic and noise, and the characteristics of built development; or it may be located outside of the AONB but increase urban fringe pressures on land in the AONB, potentially affecting land management and the Public Right of Way network.'*
- 2.2.4 *'Examples of adverse impacts on the setting of the Kent Downs AONB include:*
- a. *development which would have a significant impact on views in or out of the AONB;*
 - b. *loss of tranquillity through the introduction or increase of lighting, noise, or traffic movement or other environmental impact including dust, vibration and reduction in air quality;*

- c. *introduction of abrupt change of landscape character;*
- d. *loss or harm to heritage assets and natural landscape, particularly if these are contiguous with the AONB;*
- e. *development giving rise to significantly increased traffic flows to and from the AONB, resulting in erosion of the character of rural roads and lanes; and*
- f. *increased recreational pressure as a result of development in close proximity to the AONB.'*

Section 6 from the Kent Downs AONB Setting Position Statement

2.2.5 Section 6 from the Kent Downs AONB Setting Position Statement discusses cumulative impacts upon AONB setting:

2.2.6 *'Cumulative impacts can also arise from multiple developments within the setting of the AONB. Each development may not be harmful in isolation, but taken in conjunction with others proposed, they may result in significant harm. Cumulative impact can occur as a result of increased traffic, noise, vibration, lighting, as well as landscape and visual impacts... Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) can be an effective tool in helping to assess cumulative impacts of development within the setting of the AONB. Where applicable, EIA should consider the in-combination impacts of:*

- a. *built and operational development;*
- b. *development under construction;*
- c. *application(s) permitted but which are not yet implemented;*
- d. *submitted applications not yet determined, and which, if permitted, would affect the proposed development; and*
- e. *development identified in the adopted and emerging development plan.'*

Section 7 from the Kent Downs AONB Setting Position Statement

2.2.7 Section 7 from the Kent Downs AONB Setting Position Statement discusses conserving and enhancing the setting of the Kent Downs AONB:

2.2.8 *'The best way to minimise adverse impacts on the setting of the AONB is through avoidance of harm in the first place by making sure that schemes conserve and enhance the setting of the AONB. Many issues can be resolved through careful design and incorporation of appropriate mitigation and/or management measures, such as:*

- a. *care over orientation, site layout, height, scale and massing of structures and buildings to minimise impact when viewed from the AONB;*
- b. *appropriate densities to allow for significant tree planting between buildings;*

- c. consideration not just of the site but also the landscape, land uses and heritage assets around and beyond it;*
- d. careful use of colours, materials and non-reflective surfaces;*
- e. restraint and care over the installation and use of external lighting including street lighting, to prevent harm to the dark night skies of the AONB. Where essential, lighting should be well-directed and full cut off and of low level in form and lumen intensity;*
- f. the grouping of new structures and buildings close to existing structures and buildings to avoid new expanses of development that are visible and out of context; and*
- g. detailed mitigation and management measures, for example including native landscaping that is locally appropriate (where possible contributing to Biodiversity Action Plan targets) and noise reduction.'*

3 Kent Downs AONB design guidance documents

3.1 Overview

- 3.1.1 The NPPF places considerable focus on the importance of good design, stating that the *'creation of high quality, beautiful and sustainable buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve'* (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2021). Planning Practice Guidance on the natural environment also advises that all development in AONBs *'will need to be located and designed in a way that reflects their status as landscapes of the highest quality'* (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2019).
- 3.1.2 Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000) sets out the statutory duty for public bodies and Statutory Undertakers to *'have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty'* of AONBs. To support this, the following design guidance documents have been produced by the Kent Downs AONB Partnership:
- a. Kent Downs AONB: Guidance on the selection and use of colour in development (Kent Downs AONB Unit, 2019)
 - b. Kent Downs AONB Landscape Design Handbook (Kent Downs AONB Joint Advisory Committee, 2004)
 - c. Kent Downs AONB Rural Streets and Lanes: A Design Handbook (Kent Downs AONB Unit, 2009)

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