



Cranborne Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty



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Dear Zac

EIA-2020-0418 Forestry Planting Proposal at Bonham Farm

Thank you for your letter of 8th of July in response to mine of the 13th January 2021.

There do seem to be a number of misconceptions and misinterpretations of this AONB's position on this woodland creation proposal. The statutory purpose of the AONB designation is to conserve and enhance natural beauty. It is a national designation, recognising the national standing of the landscapes of this AONB. As you may be aware, landscapes embrace considerably more than simply the visual and experiential elements, relating strongly to the topography and vegetation cover, significantly influenced by the wildlife and heritage as well as human occupation over millenia.

The Integrated Landscape Character Assessment (2003) is a fundamental document which informs this AONB's Management Plan. As doubtless you will be aware, topography plays a significant part in landscape character. In relation to the site at Bonham Farm the proposed woodland planting would be in the Kilmington Terrace landscape character area of the Greensand Terrace landscape character type. This character area is typified by flat aprons of land from which the dramatic chalk escarpments and greensand hills rise. The large, geometric fields and open skies contrast with the smaller scale, enclosed landscape of the adjacent Greensand Hills. It is, therefore, not appropriate to compare the landscape character of the proposed planting area with that of the area to the north west and west of the site which is in the Penselwood – Longleat landscape character area of the Greensand Hills landscape character type. This character area typically forms upstanding ridges and hills that have been eroded by tributaries of the major rivers into a series of rounded knolls and deep valleys. It is acknowledged that extensive woodlands occur across these hills and their eroded valleys.

I see on page three of your letter that you acknowledge that the proposed afforestation is not being integrated into the wider landscape. You describe it as extending into the foreground from a densely wooded backdrop. However, the scale of the proposed planting is not a minor encroachment on the fringe but a significant intrusion that is alien to the general character of the Greensand Terrace. I note that comments are made of a 'visual inspection', but I have not seen a landscape and visual impact appraisal conducted by a qualified and experienced landscape architect to support the assertions that there would be 'very little change'.

There seems to be a degree of misunderstanding about the AONB Management Plan 2019 to 2024. That is a statutory document, required by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 that is approved by the Secretary of State and adopted by the local authorities. That plan is statutorily, those authorities' policies for the management of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Members of the Partnership, including the Forestry Commission, have taken that Management Plan on board.

In connection with planting, paragraph 7.9 of the [AONB Management Plan](#) is quite clear that 'new planting should take full account of landscape character and historic features'. The proposed planting imposes significant changes on the landscape character and creates a dramatic change to the setting of the historic building at Bonham Manor where there is recorded history going back a millennium. Setting back the planting some 20 or 30 metres does not compensate nor offset the impacts of encircling the buildings with forestry planting at an openly a commercial scale. That will change the landscape within which the Manor is perceived and appreciated, as well as changing the predominantly open landscape of the Greensand Terrace.

The AONB Management Plan in chapter 12, [Rural Land Management](#), is clear at paragraph 12.2 that the management of the rural land of this AONB will be sustainable. It will meet the demand for fuel, food, and other produce in ways that conserve and enhance the landscape character of the AONB. Recognising that there may well be opportunities for woodland creation, at paragraph 12.13 is clear that that creation needs to be appropriate to the relevant landscape character. Unfortunately, it seems that even some partners in this AONB do not fully grasp the national significance of the AONB designation or the implications of its primary purpose. The aim of chapter 17 of the Management Plan, in paragraph 17.2, is to ensure that organisations that make up the AONB Partnership and all those that have the responsibility and resources to achieve the primary purpose, fully understand and take responsibility for conserving and enhancing natural beauty of the landscape. It is to that end that the AONB team contribute positively to consultations, focusing on the range of topics covered in the AONB Management Plan. However, contrary to the statement on page three of your letter, the AONB does not have a duty to support the rural economy. Based on advice issued by the Countryside Commission as long ago as 1991 it does have regard to social and economic issues.

Academic research shows that broad-leaved species of trees have many more creatures associated and living on them than imported coniferous species. Broadleaved species do, therefore, have an inherently greater number of species associated with them, and their deciduous nature means that the forest floor benefits from an annual cycle of light and shade, whereas coniferous species produce year round shade. That shade severely limits shrub and herb layer growth and hence habitat diversity is reduced.

I do not see in your letter any change to the scheme from the one originally presented that would comprise 80% conifers and 20% broad-leaved. The proposed scheme is described as merely a fringing extension of the western woodland, when in reality it takes over such a substantial area of land. Furthermore, the scheme fundamentally conflicts with the landscape character in a nationally designated area where the conservation and enhancement of the landscape is the priority. **The AONB Partnership does, therefore, have to disagree with the Forestry Commission and maintain its objection to the planting scheme.**

I hope these comments are helpful to you.

Yours sincerely

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For and on behalf of the Cranborne Chase AONB Partnership Board

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