

Quantock Hills AONB Partnership

Position Statement - Dark Skies and Artificial Light

Introduction

The purpose of this Position Statement is to provide a framework to protect and conserve the night sky over the Quantock Hills AONB. Given the area's significant natural, cultural and historic resources, it is crucial to conserve the natural darkness and limit the adverse effects of artificial light pollution. Dark skies are a Special Quality of the Quantock Hills AONB but are under pressure from increasing light pollution from commercial development, street lighting as well as domestic light installations such as security lighting.

Starry skies are one of the most magical sights the Quantock Hills can offer. Light pollution limits people's views of these skies and also disrupts the ecology of nocturnal animals. Light pollution is a common term referring to artificial light that shines where it is neither wanted nor needed.

Primary objectives:

- To safeguard the dark sky environment thereby conserving this Special Quality of the Quantock Hills to benefit scenic beauty, heritage and wildlife.
- To reduce energy waste associated with unnecessary outdoor lighting.
- To conserve and enhance the conditions for astronomical research and stargazing.
- To raise public awareness about the importance of dark skies and the harmful effects of light pollution.
- To give broad guidance to land managers, farmers, developers, architects, householders, Parish Councils, local authority decision makers and highway authorities.

The Position Statement aims to achieve a consistent approach to conserving and enhancing dark skies by using recognised and respected standards developed by the Institution of Lighting Professionals¹ and the Commission for Dark Skies². The Statement is also intended to be used to help secure appropriate policies on this issue in the Local Development and Neighbourhood Plans of the Local Authority.

Background to the Position Statement

The invention of artificial light and its application in the external environment has done much to safeguard and enhance our night-time environment but if not properly controlled, obtrusive light (sometimes referred to as light pollution) can present serious physiological and ecological problems.

The issue of light pollution has been noted across the globe. In England the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) supported by Land Use Consultants specialist input have been running a campaign, 'Night Blight' which seeks to raise awareness about light pollution and to map relative darkness of the night sky across England at an effective resolution down to 500m. In 2016 the CPRE published their latest Night Blight report and mapping¹ which confirmed that significant part of the Quantock Hills AONB still has high quality dark skies with 37% pristine dark skies and 58% in the next darkest category, see the 2016 Dark Skies, light pollution map of the Quantock Hills in appendix A.

What is the problem with light pollution?

Light pollution of the night sky is an increasing intrusion into the countryside at night and can have negative effects on the health of people and wildlife. Although the Quantock Hills AONB has relatively dark skies at night, compared to other areas of England, being ranked 6th in terms of darkest skies in England, light pollution from the surrounding urban areas and major infrastructure projects does adversely affect the dark skies of the AONB. With ever increasing levels of development especially on the Quantock Hills side of our surrounding major settlements, light pollution is likely to increase unless action is taken to address this issue.

Light pollution is one of the few kinds of diffuse pollution that is capable of being mapped and monitored effectively as demonstrated by the CPRE's Night Blight work and the more detailed measures adopted to monitor the darkness of the night sky in designated Dark Skies areas.

In the face of a large increase in the development mainly of the countryside around existing settlements but also single developments, the case for proactive management, not just passive control, is stronger than ever.

While light pollution may not seem a major threat, as with other forms of diffuse pollution the impacts tend to be insidious. For individual new developments the impact of lighting systems can and should be minimised by good design, but the residual light spill together with other uncontrolled lighting schemes creates a cumulative effect that impacts much more widely through the countryside.

Proposals

Good lighting practice is the provision of the right light, at the right time, in the right place, controlled by the right system. It is clear that the local planning and highway authorities and other decision makers are actively aware of and interested in proactive management of dark skies. However, in the absence of a coordination of

effort it has proved difficult to do much more than influence new lighting systems to reduce light pollution on a case-by-case basis.

All development applications that could have an impact on the dark skies of the Quantock Hills AONB should seek to either avoid or minimize light pollution by:

- Ensuring that external lighting shall only be installed if essential for security and safety.
- Ensuring that all outdoor lighting should be fully shielded and directed downwards to minimise sky glow and prevent upward, sideways or outward light spillage.
- Ensuring the colour and intensity of lighting is appropriate and wherever possible, employ lighting fixtures that have a correlated colour temperature (CCT) of 3000K or less.
- Utilizing the most energy and pollution-efficient equipment reasonably available and encourage the use of motion sensors and timers.
- Ensuring that no light spillage highlights a structure or feature that would have an impact on the surrounding landscape.
- Ensuring that the quantity of fenestration is carefully designed and selected to minimise light glow and spillage.

The Quantock Hills AONB Partnership (JAC) recognised the importance of the Quantock Hills AONB as a Dark Skies area and will proactively seek to promote this recognition more widely, both for residents and visitors and amongst public authorities and statutory undertakers responsible for relevant aspects of its management.

The Partnership will proactively work with authorities and representatives of local communities and special interest groups to adopt and promote common standard and help establish practical measures to reduce light pollution and enhance the Dark Skies of the Quantock Hills AONB and to work with others to assist in the monitoring of this special quality of the AONB.

Policy context

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) are designated by the Government for the purpose of ensuring that the special qualities of the finest landscapes in England and Wales are conserved and enhanced. In policy terms they have the same planning status as National Parks. The Quantock Hills AONB Management Plan 2019-24 statement of significance notes –

“The hilltop area has a sense of space, wildness and seclusion; it is a place people value for inspiration, spiritual refreshment, exhilarating views, dark skies at night, unpolluted air, tranquillity and quiet enjoyment.”

The Plan also includes a specific Management Policy, DPIP7 – **“Protect the dark skies and tranquilly of the AONB.”**

The Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000, Section 85, upholds the statutory duty on all relevant authorities **‘to have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing natural beauty when discharging any function in relation to, or affecting land within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.’**

The significance of the AONB is set out in the revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF 2023) para 176; **‘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 in relation to these issues.’**

NPPF (2023) para 185 states; **‘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:**

(a) mitigate and reduce to a minimum, potential adverse impacts resulting from noise from new development – and avoid noise giving rise to significant adverse impacts on health and the quality of life

(b) identify and protect tranquil area which have remained relatively undisturbed by noise and are prized for their recreational and amenity value for this reason; and

(c) limit the impact of light pollution from artificial light on local amenity, intrinsically dark landscapes and nature conservation.

The dark skies aspect of lighting, and in some cases specific lighting schemes, also have significant overlaps with statutory landscape, heritage and wildlife requirements to conserve and enhance these aspects of the environment, which carry great weight in planning terms.

The Government’s Rural White Paper published in 2003 observed that: **“It is not just its physical features which give the countryside its unique character; there are also less tangible features such as … dark skies and remoteness from the visible impact of civilisation.”**

The White Paper went on to state that: **“Increased measures will be taken to promote tranquillity”.**

The influences on tranquillity in the countryside as identified in the White Paper include light pollution, para 9.4.4. **“Light pollution’ of the night sky is an increasing intrusion into the countryside at night, and it is an issue that we want all rural local authorities to take into account in their planning and other decisions. Local planning authorities have powers, for instance, to control many external lighting installations.”**

DEFRA’s 25-year plan (2017) states in respect of AONBs and National Parks that: **“Over the next 25 years we want to make sure they are not only conserved but enhanced. Many of the policies set out in the rest of the Plan will contribute to making all areas more beautiful.”**

DEFRA policies commit not just to minimising additional pollution but to **‘cut all forms of pollution’** – including light: **“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.”**

¹ <https://theilp.org.uk/home/>

² <https://britastro.org/dark-skies/>

³ CPRE Night Blight [CPRE Night Blight – reclaiming our dark skies - Home page](#)

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Appendix 1: Quantock Hills AONB Dark Skies map 2018



