

Lizzie Fuller

From: Info
Sent: 16 July 2021 10:23
To: Cassie Pinnells
Cc: Graeme Markland
Subject: FW: Chilterns AONB Extension
Attachments: Proposed AONB Extension.pdf

From: Richard Sheehan [redacted]
Sent: 16 July 2021 09:43
To: Info <info@thametowncouncil.gov.uk>
Subject: Chilterns AONB Extension

17 July 2021

To Thame Town Council,

PROPOSAL FOR CHILTERN'S AONB BOUNDARY CHANGE

As you may be aware, Natural England recently announced its renewed commitment to boost nature recovery through plans to designate more natural landscapes. Following recommendations set out in the 2019 'Glover' Landscapes Review, the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is one of the areas being considered for boundary expansion. This opens an opportunity for some areas surrounding the current AONB to benefit from greater environmental protections and to safeguard important landscapes.

Earlier this year I sent a proposal to the Chilterns Conservation Board (CCB) suggesting an area I feel should be considered for inclusion within the bounds of the Chilterns AONB (the proposal in outline is detailed below and is illustrated in the attached map). The CCB were intrigued and supportive of the idea but wanted to wait until the government response to the Glover Review was announced before deciding on their future course. I have been in touch again following the recent announcement and they still seem very open to the suggestion and willing to engage. My view is that this proposal would not only conserve the setting of the Chilterns escarpment but would also preserve an iconic landscape enjoyed by thousands as they travel through the Chiltern gap and beyond (as well as from your current reserve at Aston Rowant). It would also serve as a valuable corridor linking two protected areas - the Chilterns AONB and the Oxford Green Belt - with associated benefits to wildlife.

As your Parish falls within the suggested area of expansion, I am writing to ask if this is a proposal that would likely receive the support of the Parish Council and the wider community? I should state that I am not writing on behalf of the CCB, Natural England or any other influential organisation; I am a private individual conducting my own research. However, I feel that being able to report on the likely attitudes of local communities will, hopefully, help strengthen this proposal and possibly help safeguard the future of a beautiful, and largely unspoiled area of rural England that I am sure we all deeply care for.

I very much hope that this suggestion meets with your approval. Thank you for your time, I look forward very much to hearing your thoughts.

Yours sincerely,

Richard M St J Sheehan MRCVS



PROPOSAL IN OUTLINE

An application was made in 2013 for Natural England to consider adding further areas to the Chilterns AONB; four areas, all of which lie to the East of the area. As a result of Natural England's recent announcement, and given the amount of time that has lapsed since these suggestions were first submitted, these areas are now being reviewed. If a strong enough case were made, this application could be modified to include a further area.

I believe that one of the most striking and special qualities of the Chilterns is the Chiltern escarpment; indeed, the panoramic views from the escarpment are counted as one of the Chilterns' 'Special Qualities'. These views, however, as yet do not fall under the umbrella of the AONB and as such have very little legal protection. I suggest that this area - a loop from the escarpment through Dorchester-Thame-Stoke Manderville (highlighted in the attached map), roughly following the line of the A329/Oxford Green Belt - be included in the application for the AONB boundary change.

A Provisional Case for Inclusion in the AONB

1. One of the aims of the Government 25 year Environment Plan is to conserve and enhance Natural Beauty through a review of National Parks and AONBs, with a 25 year goal to enhance beauty, heritage and management of the natural environment (to be achieved by safeguarding and enhancing the beauty of our natural scenery). The plan states that the Government will 'conserve and enhance the beauty of our landscapes by reviewing National Parks (NPs) and AONBs for the 21st century, including assessing whether more may be needed'.
2. The 25 year plan also promises to identify opportunities for environmental enhancement in all of England's 159 National Character Areas (NCAs) to improve landscapes for people, places and nature. It is worth noting that NCA 108, the area of this proposed AONB extension, has virtually no environmental enhancement schemes, with only the area of the Wittenham Clumps protected (within the North Wessex Downs AONB).
3. In the subsequent review of NPs and AONBs, the Glover Landscapes Review 2019, the Chilterns was identified as one of the UK's most important AONBs - so much so that it was recommended that the Chilterns be considered for NP status. This surely means its wider setting should be worthy of protection.
4. In addition, the Chilterns Management Plan (General Policy 2) commits to review the boundary of the protected area to cover the wider area of the Chilterns landscape that merits it - a commitment that can now be honored due to Natural England's recent announcement.
5. Taking this into consideration, there is a very strong case for proposing to extend the boundary of the Chilterns AONB from Dorchester-Thame-Stoke Manderville (see the attached map in). In terms of fulfilling AONB criteria, this area contains 2 SSSIs, many blocks of ancient woodland, significant areas of 'priority habitat' (deciduous woodland, wood-pasture and parkland) and a number of Local and Community Nature Reserves. The landscape itself has hardly changed in centuries, being composed of blocks of farmland interspersed with woodland and many small, historic villages - all of which contribute the 'natural beauty' of the area, meriting it for consideration for AONB inclusion. Many of the villages themselves hold Conservation status, containing Conservation Target Areas, Registered Parks and Gardens, a vast quantity of listed buildings and areas of historical significance including Registered Battlefields (most notably linked to the English Civil War). In addition, the whole area is overlooked by, and provides the setting for, the Chiltern escarpment, one of the most recognisable 'Special Qualities' of the AONB; the view that one sees looking out from the top of the Chilterns is this area of gentle rolling hills and patchwork of woods and farmland, a landscape that is seen and appreciated by thousands of motorists every day as they drive through the Chiltern gap. Finally, the inclusion of this area would protect a valuable corridor

linking two protected areas - the Chilterns AONB and the Oxford Green Belt - with associated benefits to wildlife and the environment.

References:

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