

Application Reference: S.15/0281/OUT

Application Address: Land Off Hardings Drive, Dursley, Gloucestershire

Application Description: Outline application for residential development of up to 27 units with access and associated works.

The Cotswolds Conservation Board* raise an **objection** to this development for the following reasons:

This proposal is for 27 dwellings on a greenfield site, in the AONB outside the settlement boundary on the western edge of Dursley. The site is on steeply rising ground on a field between the existing settlement edge and woodland above (Westfield Wood).

The site (as demonstrated by the submitted Landscape and Visual Appraisal) is highly visible from the surrounding landscape and it is accepted by the applicant that the development would be likely to result in moderate to significant visual impact.

The development would result in a clear urbanisation of an area of land that currently forms an important green gap of countryside between the settlement and woodland beyond and this negative impact would feature in a variety of sensitive public locations from the AONB including from the Cotswold Way. The sensitivity of the AONB designation and views from these key public viewpoint receptors has been undervalued within the application. This proposal if supported, would also result in an undesirable precedent for additional development in similar exposed locations within the locality.

In conclusion the development will not meet the requirements of conserving and enhancing the AONB (as required by the CRoW Act 2000). The AONB is afforded "great weight" in the decision making process and it is recognised as having the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty (NPPF paragraph 115). The "presumption" in favour of sustainable development does also not apply in this case by reason of Paragraph 14 Footnote 9 of the NPPF due to the restrictions applied by the AONB designation.

Accordingly the Local Authority should also consider whether Paragraph 116 of the NPPF applies in this case. The NPPG (6.3.14) states that *"Whether a proposed development in these designated areas should be treated as a major development, to which the policy in paragraph 116 of the Framework applies, will be a matter for the relevant decision taker, taking into account the proposal in question and the local context."*

Given the *"local context"* in this case is an exposed hillside site in the AONB the Board recommends that the Council as the *"relevant decision taker"* do consider Paragraph 116 of the NPPF to be relevant in this case, which recommends the refusal of applications of this nature except in exceptional circumstances and where it can be demonstrated to be in the public interest. In this case the Board considers there are no exceptional circumstances that can be given weight to overcome the harm the development will bring and the conservation and enhancement of the nationally protected AONB is of greater public interest. The Framework is clear that great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in these designated areas irrespective of whether the policy in paragraph 116 is applicable.

**The Cotswolds Conservation Board ('the Board') was established by Parliament in 2004. The Board has two statutory purposes:*

- a) to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB); and*
- b) To increase the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the AONB*