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All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) Dark Skies Policy Consultation

Written Evidence submitted by the Chilterns Conservation Board (CCB).

The CCB responds to the APPG's call for evidence on *the main threats and challenges that the cause of dark sky preservation faces in the UK, and the most effective and actionable ways in which legislators and policy makers can seek to address these challenges – exploring environmental, economic, energy and health consequences of light pollution.*

The Chilterns Conservation Board was established as an independent body by Parliamentary Order in July 2004 and has 27 members, all drawn from local communities. The Board's purposes are stated in section 87 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW Act), as:

"s 87 (1) It is the duty of a conservation board, in the exercise of their functions, to have regard to: (a) the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area of outstanding natural beauty, and (b) the purpose of increasing the understanding and enjoyment by the public of the special qualities of the area of outstanding natural beauty"

The Chilterns AONB covers a section of England's highly prized natural landscape, running from the Thames in South Oxfordshire, through Bucks and Beds to Hitchin in Hertfordshire. It is one of 34 AONBs as introduced in 1949, which cover some 14% of England.

CCB Summary and Recommendations for Action.

Dark skies should be an intrinsic component found within all nationally protected landscapes (AONBs and National Parks). Guidance published by the Institute of Lighting Professionals (ILP) places AONBs within the defined category of '*intrinsically dark environments*'. The Glover Review (Landscapes review: National Parks and AONBs - *Review to consider the next steps for National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) in England*) Final Report, Sept. 2019, acknowledged the development pressures impacting upon the Chilterns AONB in particular.

The Chilterns Conservation Board (CCB) recommends that the APPG reviews the relative paucity of planning guidance in the area of light pollution / dark skies and tranquillity. We

recommend that the APPG considers the commissioning of new guidance to inform and guide planning professionals. That guidance can potentially include best practice, including guidance on where lighting impacts must be curtailed or resisted to protect and enhance dark sky environments. It may also include details of new technologies that promote low level / low impact ground lighting (for example the Solar Eye 80 cycleway/pathway lighting system) and guidance on appropriate locations. Such guidance should, most appropriately, be in the form of planning practice guidance (hosted by MHCLG), or in a technical publication. The relevance of (weight to be attached to) such documents in the planning system requires elevation and we recommend that the APPG considers the inclusion of new policy text in the National Planning Policy Framework (see below).

Currently planning professionals have to balance these issues, with little steer from planning policy or technical documents.

CCB would, therefore, commend the APPG to consider:

(1) The introduction of new planning practice guidance (to the MHCLG Beta web resource) to provide detailed guidance on intrinsically dark environments. This would include details of where lighting must be resisted, where it is acceptable and how it should be scrutinised by the planning system.

(2) The need for a discrete section on this issue in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). This should be specifically geared to section 15 of the NPPF '*conserving and enhancing the natural environment*'. National policy should establish that AONBs and National Parks must be the subject of very stringent lighting controls and that this must be given great weight in the determination of planning applications.

Nature of the threat. The Chilterns is a highly valued, nationally protected landscape, from which great public benefit is derived through the appreciation of its landscape, ecology, public access and tranquillity. These features are enjoyed by a large population on its doorstep and it is the only AONB served by underground stations (at Amersham, Chorleywood, Chalfont & Latimer and Chesham). Yet the Chilterns is under constant pressures, some incremental and others more immediately apparent - new infrastructure (including HS2), enhanced infrastructure (rail electrification projects and new roads including a major road near Luton), overflying aircraft (Heathrow and Luton), housing growth within and around the hinterland and pressures on habitat loss and water abstraction.

Tranquillity is seriously under threat and, in part, this is due to an incremental development 'creep', with external lighting of sites being an issue of increasing concern. The special qualities of the Chilterns AONB are many faceted and are explored in the AONB Management Plan for 2019 - 2024. These qualities are the subject of national protection in the provisions of the CROW Act and in National Planning Policy. Considerable public benefit is derived from the conservation and enhancement of these special qualities and *relative tranquillity* forms one very important component, itself the product of '*relatively dark skies, of great value to human and wildlife health, unspoilt countryside, secret corners and a surprising sense of remoteness*'. (see AONB Management Plan, page 10). Our own assessment, and the work of CPRE on tranquillity mapping, confirms an erosion of tranquillity, with lighting a major component (the other being traffic movements and overflying aircraft).

The AONB Management Plan 2019-2024 contains a new policy, designed to control lighting. This policy carries weight in planning application decision-making but it is at the lowest tier (of

3), below Development (Local) Plans and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Greater emphasis and weight must be established by embedding this issue, in the NPPF, for example.

CCB's 2019-2024 AONB Management Plan's new policy on dark skies (policy DP8) is as follows:

DP8 Keep skies dark at night by only using light where and when needed. All new lighting should be the minimum required and meet or exceed guidance for intrinsically dark zones. Avoid architectural designs that spill light out of large areas of glazing.

The Chilterns AONB has relatively dark skies for the south east, making it a place people can still experience the wonder of starry skies and good for wildlife. AONBs are intrinsically dark environments (Zone E1 in the Institute of Lighting Professionals guidance) and planning conditions should be applied to restrict and control lighting. Light pollution of all types should be first prevented, by avoiding light where it is not needed, and where it is, by designing lighting to mitigate harm, through shading, height of fixings, beam orientation, LUX, colour temperature and the proposed hours of use. For example, downward pointing, shielded, operated on timer, and with a 'warm white' colour temperature of 2700-Kelvin maximum. Traditional Chilterns vernacular buildings have small windows. Moderns designs with large areas of glazing should be avoided so that buildings do not appear as boxes of light in the countryside at night, and glinting glazing in the daytime

Recent Examples. Notwithstanding major infrastructure projects, such as HS2, in which the exact details of security and line side lighting are yet to be resolved, CCB would draw attention to recent planning applications for sports lighting (including 'MUGAs' - multi use games areas), road infrastructure projects and recent housing developments. All of these projects bring bathed top lit columnar lighting into the AONB, within an otherwise dark sky environment. Of great significance is that some applications are on the edge of settlements, serving to erode the tranquillity of the boundary, while others are in open countryside, where light spill from the design of new buildings and roads jars with the surroundings and greatly detracts from the tranquillity of the area. New roads commonly require roundabouts, with high level top lit columns, resulting in a wide and detrimental impact on the surrounding landscape.

Examples of planning applications with lighting impacts in the Chilterns AONB 2019-2021

4 School (MUGA) applications, all within the AONB, involving floodlit sections and staff and coach parking areas (3 granted and one undetermined).

1 football club proposing retractable lighting columns, wholly within the AONB (granted) and 1 hockey club, also wholly within the AONB (undetermined).

A major new road between the A6 and the M1, in part passing through the AONB (for a 1.6km stretch) (granted).

A new road (required post HS2) near Aylesbury, outside the AONB but in the wider setting (the A413 Aylesbury Wendover Road dual carriageway link) (undetermined).

A new road (serving a Local Plan allocation for new development) at Princes Risborough, outside the AONB but directly overlooked from Whiteleaf (one of the most iconic Chilterns views, looking out from the escarpment) (anticipated 2021).

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michael Stubbs', with a stylized, cursive script.

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