
Suffolk Coast & Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)
Partnership Position Statement
(Endorsed December 2015)

Development in the setting of the Suffolk Coast & Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)

Introduction

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) are designated by the Government for the purpose of ensuring that the natural beauty of the finest landscapes in England and Wales is conserved and enhanced. The AONB Partnership produces occasional position statements outlining its position on specific issues.

Purpose

This Position Statement, endorsed by the Suffolk Coast & Heaths AONB Partnership¹, provides the view of the Partnership to local planning authorities, landowners, residents, developers and others interested in the Suffolk Coast & Heaths AONB.

Background

The Partnership considers the setting, including the views into and out of the AONB, to be the area within which development and land management proposals, by virtue of their nature; size; scale; siting, materials or design can be considered to have an impact, positive or negative, on the natural beauty and special qualities of the nationally designated landscape.

The Suffolk Coast & Heaths AONB Management Plan 2013-18 identifies the following objectives:

- 2.7 There is a consistently high standard of development control decision making. This will prevent significant adverse impact on the landscape and scenic beauty of the AONB as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework*
- 2.8 The special qualities of the AONB are consistently taken into account and enhanced by the planning process*
- 2.9 Avoid, mitigate and offset impacts from major infrastructure developments within or adjacent to the AONB*

Position

The Partnership considers that development in the setting of the AONB that would have a significant adverse impact on the natural beauty and special qualities of the area should not be supported.

The Partnership takes this position as:

¹ Suffolk Coast & Heaths AONB is made up of public, private and third sector organisations with an interest in the area. Details at: <http://www.suffolkcoastandheaths.org/about-us/>

1. Paragraph 115 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) provides specific planning guidance for plan makers and decision takers in relation to AONBs and confirms that great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks and AONBs, which have the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty.
2. Paragraph 113 of the NPPF states that local planning authorities should set criteria based policies against which proposals for any development on or affecting protected wildlife or geodiversity sites or landscape areas will be judged. The phrase “or affecting” landscape areas supports the need for setting as a consideration in policy making.
3. Paragraph 116 of the NPPF notes that applications for major development should be refused in designated areas except in exceptional circumstances and applications should include an assessment of any detrimental effect on the environment, the landscape and recreational opportunities, and the extent to which that could be moderated.
4. Within Section 85 (1) of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 there is a duty on all relevant authorities to have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the AONB in exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect land in AONBs. This Duty of Regard requires all public bodies, down to parish council level, to consider the AONBs nationally protected status in any land use related decisions. This includes planning applications and the formulation of Local and Neighbourhood Plans.

Context

The setting of the Suffolk Coast & Heaths AONB does not have a geographical border. The character, location, scale, materials or design of a proposed development or land management activity will determine whether it affects the natural beauty and special qualities of the AONB.

A very large development may have an impact even if some considerable distance from the AONB boundary. As such, each proposal should be assessed on its own merits and where there is potential to adversely affect the protected landscape, this impact should be assessed.

Examples of adverse impacts will include:

- Development not appropriate to the landscape setting of the AONB
- Blocking or interference of views out of the AONB particularly from public viewpoints
- Blocking or interference of views of the AONB from public viewpoints outside the AONB
- Loss of tranquillity through the introduction of lighting, noise, or traffic movement
- Introduction of an abrupt change of landscape character
- Where development may be classified as temporary but would have long term (10-25 years) or medium term impact as defined by Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment ³
- Loss of biodiversity, particularly species of importance within the AONB
- Loss of features of historic interest, particularly if these are contiguous with features within the AONB
- Reduction in public access to or within the AONB
- Increase in air or water pollution

For further information

Contact the Suffolk Coast & Heaths AONB office on 01394 445225 or schaonb@suffolk.gov.uk

² Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment 3 at:
<http://landscapeinstitute.co.uk/knowledge/GLVIA.php>