

RE: S.15/0656/FUL Land at the Knapp, Minchinhampton – 31 dwellings and associated infrastructure.

The Cotswolds Conservation Board* have considered the above application and wish to raise an **objection**.

The development will extend the existing edge of the settlement northward, further away from the core of the settlement and into the countryside of the AONB, in an exposed ridge top location where there is a high level of potential visibility. The site can be seen from public locations both locally and from more distant views. The development also directly fronts on to The Knapp with only limited space for mitigation from the wider landscape. There will therefore be a clear change of character from countryside to new urban development that will also impact on the wider landscape of the AONB. The Board therefore considers this proposal does not “conserve and enhance” the character and special qualities of the AONB as required by the CRoW Act 2000.

The Board notes that a limited level of growth to meet local needs may be appropriate for Minchinhampton. However, it considers that the need can be met through more sensitive sites locally (which may be identified through a Site Allocations DPD or Neighbourhood Plan) or indeed as a District through its emerging Local Plan policy, including strategic housing allocations outside the nationally protected AONB.

The Board considers that paragraphs 14 (footnote.9.) and 115 and 116 of the NPPF are relevant in considering this application. Of note Footnote 9 of the NPPF confirms that the “presumption “ in favour of sustainable development does not automatically apply in this case as restrictions apply due to the AONB designation. In particular Paragraph 115 of the NPPF confirms that “great weight” should be afforded to “conserving landscape and scenic beauty” in AONBs that have the “highest status of protection.”

The NPPG 2014 also advises 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. 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.”

Accordingly the Board has attached a recent appeal decision notice for a scheme of 9 houses. Although this proposal within the Cotswolds AONB fell short of what may be considered major development, nevertheless the Inspector considered the impact on the AONB from a 9 house scheme sufficient to dismiss the appeal under paragraph 115 of the NPPF.

**The Cotswolds Conservation Board (‘the Board’) was established by Parliament in 2004. The Board has two statutory purposes1: a) to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the AONB; and b) To increase the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the AONB. In fulfilling these roles, the Board has a duty to seek to foster the economic and social well-being of people living in the AONB.*