

Date: 31 October 2023
Our ref: 434394
Your ref: London Luton Airport Expansion NSIP



BY EMAIL ONLY

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Dear Chris

Draft Chilterns AONB Special Qualities Assessment (October 2023)

Thank you for your consultation on the above which was received by Natural England on 23 October 2023.

Natural England is a non-departmental public body. Our statutory purpose is to ensure that the natural environment is conserved, enhanced, and managed for the benefit of present and future generations, thereby contributing to sustainable development.

Protected Landscapes – Chilterns AONB

Natural England has reviewed the draft Chilterns AONB Special Qualities Assessment. We have also spoken to our colleagues at the Chilterns Conservation Board about the report and its conclusions.

Natural England advised on the need for this report to support a fully informed determination of the Luton Rising scheme by the Planning Inspectorate and Secretary of State. We are, however, unable to provide a definitive independently produced view on whether the scope of the assessment and its conclusions are correct. It is normal practice in these circumstances for us to look to local partners with direct local knowledge of the designated landscape to provide that level of analysis. That will be based on their detailed understanding of the development site's relationship to the protected landscape, how the area's special qualities are expressed, and stemming from that how the designation's statutory purpose is delivered. In this case that local partner is of course the Chilterns Conservation Board (CCB), which is also a statutory consultee for this Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project.

We have seen the CCB's advice responding to the draft special qualities assessment and endorse all of the points and issues it raises. Headline issues include the need for a more considered approach to tranquillity, assessing effects on more of the area's special qualities, factoring in elements of the SNH methodology and stronger recognition of the limitations of an LVIA based approach, and aligning the assessment and its conclusions with relevant findings in the Environmental Statement (where moderate adverse and therefore significant effects are identified). We therefore recommend that the advice provided by CCB is given full consideration and applied appropriately to produce the next iteration of the special qualities assessment.

Please do not hesitate to get in touch for further advice or information on this matter if required.

Yours sincerely

Alison Collins MCIEEM
West Anglia Area Team