

Ms Anne Dunderdale asked the Westbury Area Board to reaffirm its commitment to the designation of the Wellhead Valley as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Councillor Julie Swabey, Chairman of the Westbury Area Board responded as follows:

I would like to respond personally to your email regarding the Westbury Area Board's position on the Wellhead Valley.

At the Area Board meeting held on 7 April 2011, we received a presentation from Maxine Russell, Wiltshire Council's Landscape Officer and Charles Routh from Natural England. The extract from the minutes of the meeting relating to this presentation are as follows:

"Maxine Russell explained that Wiltshire has an extremely rich and valued landscape, from rolling downland and chalk river valleys to low lying vales and ancient forest and parkland it also represents much more than just the scenic beauty of open countryside, it encapsulates Wiltshire's attractive towns, villages, abundant wildlife and habitats, numerous archaeological features and the long historical record of human activity. In recognition of the value of the Wiltshire landscape, almost half of Wiltshire Council's administrative area is considered of national importance and is designated as Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Page 8 of 12 (AONB). Much of the remainder of the County is designated as locally important Special Landscape Area (SLA). Landscape Character Assessment is an objective method for describing landscape, based on the identification of generic landscape types (e.g. Open Downland) and more specific landscape character areas (e.g. Marlborough Downs). The approach identifies the unique character of different areas of the countryside without making judgements about their relative worth. Landscape character areas are classified based on sense of place, local distinctiveness, characteristic wildlife, natural features and nature of change. Landscape

Character Assessment has been undertaken for all of Wiltshire's land area at 1:50,000 scale and for most of Wiltshire at 1:25,000 scale covering the individual Districts and AONBs. Charles Routh explained that Natural England formed in 2006 from English Nature, Countryside Agency and the Rural Development Service, their role had a number of statutory functions revolving around Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSi), AONBs and Protected Species and a more general role of Champion to the natural environment, wildlife, landscape and access to nature. A number of people asked whether the Wellhead Valley could be made an AONB, discussion ensued over the process and potential extension of Cranborne Chase, North Downs, and the potential of Salisbury Plain becoming an AONB. All of these proposals would need further investigation and cross agency consultation. Charles Routh would investigate the criteria for an AONB and then circulate to the Area Board.

Later on in the meeting Cllr Hawker suggested that the Area Board should support the idea of extending the nearby AONB to include the Salisbury Plain escarpment,

including Wellhead Valley. This motion was supported by all the Area Board members.

Decision: To support the extension of the nearby AONB to include the Salisbury Plain escarpment and Wellhead Valley.”

At an Extraordinary Area Board meeting held on Thursday 28 July 2011 held to discuss the Core Strategy, the subject of Wellhead Valley was again discussed and supported as taken from the minutes following:

Landscape Policy

Wiltshire Councils Core Policy on Landscape is detailed at <http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/planninganddevelopment/planningpolicy/wiltshirecorestrategy/wcsconsult2011.htm> (page 144 - 145). Members of the public expressed their concerns over the Government reviewing its policy on Landscape. Cllr Hawker explained the Area Boards position was to support the extension of the nearby AONB to include the Salisbury Plain escarpment and Wellhead Valley. After further discussion the Board agreed the following:

Decision

To support the 10 landscape character assessments (LCA's) in support of the current Special Landscape Areas (SLA's)."

I am certain that the Westbury Area Board would be happy for the whole subject to come up again for debate in the context of an officer update on the whole process and around the issues involved and in the light of progress with the core strategy. The next obvious opportunity would be when the planning inspector has decided the outcome of the core strategy which has just been submitted to him AND when the relevant officers know their timescale for reviewing the special landscape policy that is marked for review in the core strategy.

The position of the Area Board has not changed since then and we await the outcome of the findings of the Core Strategy to enable us to have a clearer view on the future of the Westbury Community Area.