

Planning Committee

23 April 2021

Agenda item number 12

Dark skies and the Broads- update

Report by Planning Policy Officer

Summary

This report for information gives an update on protecting the dark skies of the Broads.

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Members may recall that, in the winter of 2015/16, the Broads Authority assessed the darkness of the Broads skies from the ground. At the same time, CPRE (the Countryside Charity) was assessing the darkness of the skies from the sky. Together, the data sets showed that the Broads is mostly an area of good dark skies, with some pockets of very good dark skies.
- 1.2. This information resulted in a strong dark skies policy in the [Local Plan](#) (page 74). The various reports and documents can be found in the background papers to this report.
- 1.3. This report sets out other activities that have been ongoing in relation to light pollution and dark skies.

2. Norfolk Coast AONB Dark Skies Festival

- 2.1. The Authority took part in the [2020 AONB Dark Skies Festival](#). While not all of the planned events were able to take place due to Covid-19 restrictions, our contribution included an art competition and podcast recordings in the Broads (at How Hill).
- 2.2. The 2021 Festival dates are Saturday 25 September to Sunday 10 October 2021. Again, we are working on events so we can take part. It is hoped that the event can go ahead with people attending, but this will depend on Covid-19 restrictions and, accordingly, we will reflect this in what we offer. Initial ideas for events include guided walks, podcasts and a bat and boat event (just before the actual festival begins).

3. UK Dark Skies Partnership

- 3.1. In 2020, a group was set up with representatives from dark sky places in the UK. Led by a Ranger from the South Downs, the group consists of representatives from AONBs and National Parks and the Broads, as well as representatives from the Institute of Lighting Professionals and the All-Party Parliamentary Group for dark skies (see para 4 below).

- 3.2. It is early days for the group, but it seeks to promote dark skies and the benefits of addressing light pollution. The potential outputs from the group will include guides for different audiences and seeking to work with retailers to make sure products help address light pollution.

4. All-Party Parliamentary Group – dark skies

- 4.1. The All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Dark Skies¹ is a new APPG, never before represented in the UK Parliament. The membership includes parliamentarians of all parties from both the House of Commons and the House of Lords. The Group works with major organisations, experts and communities to identify political priorities on dark sky issues, discuss lighting and planning policies and to advocate for them in the UK Parliament. The objectives are to:

- Highlight the importance of preserving the ability for citizens to see a dark sky at night;
- Promote the adoption of dark sky friendly lighting and planning policies;
- Protect existing UK Dark Sky reserves and support potential new reserves; and
- Collaborate with international groups and countries hosting Dark Sky Reserves - currently Canada, France, Germany, Ireland, Namibia and New Zealand.

- 4.2. Recently the Group, following consultation, produced ten dark sky policies for Government². It sets out the major causes of growing light pollution in the UK that threaten dark sky preservation, and advocates policy solutions to mitigate or remedy such issues.

5. Dark Sky Discovery Sites – potential for sites in the Broads

- 5.1. Dark Sky Discovery Sites are sites that have good dark skies and are open to the public all year. There are many such sites in the UK³, with three such sites being located within the Norfolk Coast AONB⁴.
- 5.2. We consider that there are some sites in the Broads with the potential to be part of the network of dark sky discovery sites. We are working to assess their darkness, but Covid-19 restrictions mean we are not yet able to go out and assess the darkness of the skies. We hope to get the sites assessed before summer 2021, in order to progress work over the summer and apply for the status for these sites.

¹ [APPG for Dark Skies \(appgdarkskies.co.uk\)](http://appgdarkskies.co.uk)

² [Policy Plan — APPG for Dark Skies \(appgdarkskies.co.uk\)](http://appgdarkskies.co.uk)

³ [Dark Sky Discovery Sites](http://darkskydiscovery.co.uk)

⁴ [Dark Sky Discovery Sites - Norfolk Coast Partnership \(norfolkcoastaonb.org.uk\)](http://norfolkcoastaonb.org.uk)

6. Neighbourhood Plans

- 6.1. It is noticeable that the Neighbourhood Plans in preparation that we have seen recently tend to have a policy relating to protecting dark skies and tackling light pollution. This is very positive, indicating a strong sense of support to reducing light pollution and protecting and therefore enjoying the dark skies.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1. It is clear that protecting dark skies and addressing light pollution continues to be a local and national issue. We will continue to work with partners to promote and protect dark skies.

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Background papers:

- CPRE Night Blight: [CPRE Night Blight – reclaiming our dark skies \(home page\)](#)
- Broads dark sky study: [CPRE Night Blight – reclaiming our dark skies \(home page\)](#)
- Broads dark sky data combined with CPRE data: [EB6-Assessment-of-Night-Blight-and-Dark-Skies-Survey-Data.pdf \(broads-authority.gov.uk\)](#)