



Neighbourhood Planning Guidance on the Dark Night Sky



Cornwall Council supports measures to protect and enhance the dark night sky throughout Cornwall, with additional emphasis where there are dark sky designations. This guide note provides information about the dark night sky, how you can include a policy in your neighbourhood plan, the evidence you need, sources of information and examples of projects you can include in your plan.

Importance of the dark night sky

The benefits of a dark night sky are wide-ranging and include:

- Enjoyment and appreciation – improving quality of life and providing creative inspiration
- Health – promoting better sleep patterns and reducing stress
- Wildlife – supporting a more natural environment for both nocturnal and diurnal animals
- Tourism – boosting numbers in the quieter, darker months, including outside traditional visitor hotspots
- Educational outreach – potentially including formal education and more informal activities
- Scientific advantages – enhancing conditions for astronomy
- Energy efficiency – reducing wastage from unnecessary or excessive lighting

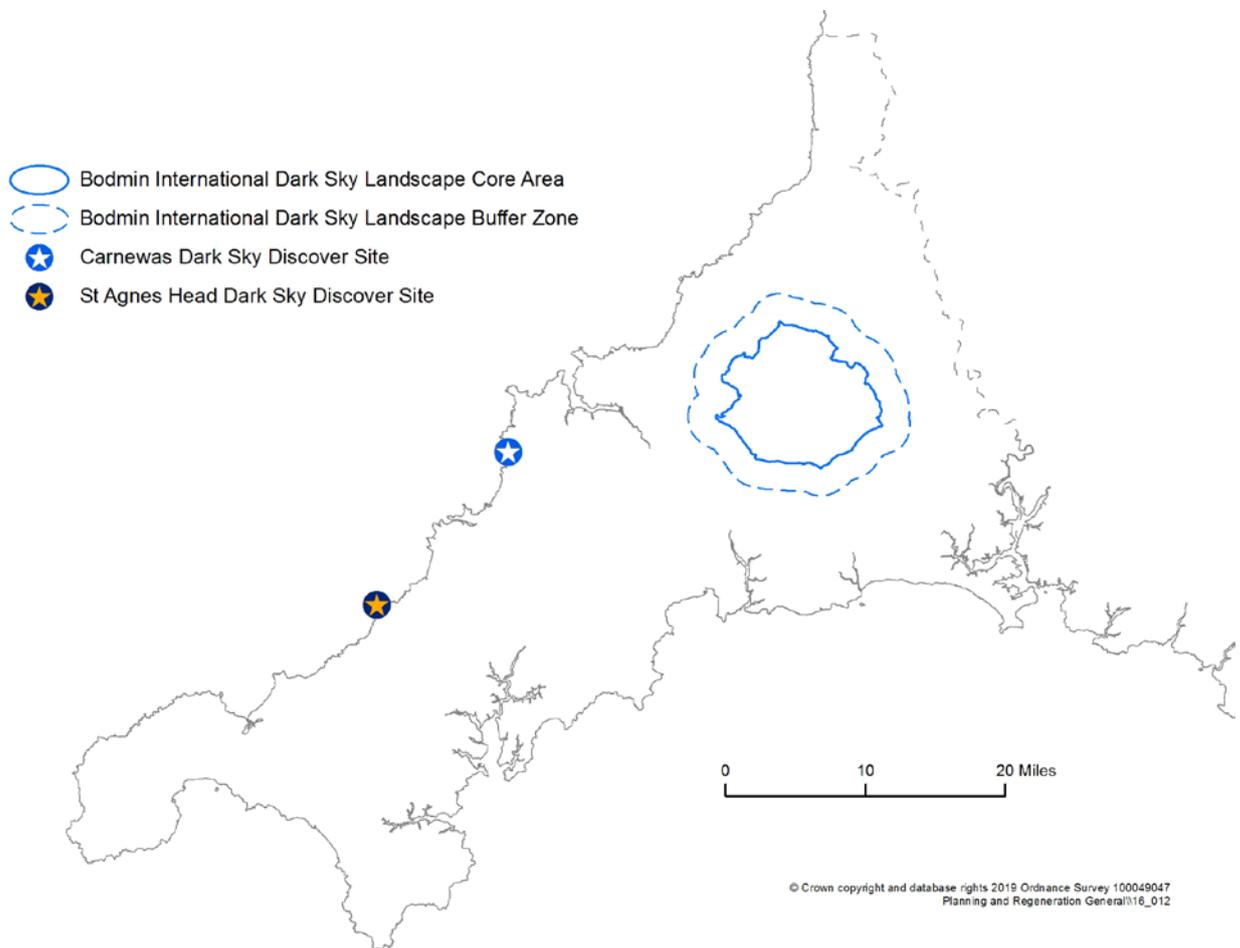
Existing Policy and Legal Framework

Planning policies and guidance make provisions to control light pollution. The [National Planning Policy Framework \(2019\)](#) states that planning policies and conditions should “limit the impact of light pollution from artificial light on local amenity, intrinsically dark landscapes and nature conservation”. This is supported by [National Planning Policy Guidance on Light Pollution \(2014\)](#) which is especially worth reading as it explains how light pollution considerations should be applied in planning decision-taking.

The Cornwall Local Plan: Strategic Policies (2016) requires development to take into account “the wish to maintain dark skies” at Policy 23. The extant Cornwall Design Guide (2013; under review) recommends “reducing light pollution by using directional and appropriate external lighting”.



Dark sky designations in Cornwall



There are currently two (national) [Dark Sky Discovery Sites](#) which are pinpoint locations and one [International Dark Sky designation](#) which has a core area and buffer zone (see Appendix 1). Whilst these are not statutory designations, they are material considerations in determining planning applications. The dark sky designations do not present a barrier to development but form the basis to improve development quality. Cornwall Council applies a planning condition on the lighting of relevant new development in these locations (see Appendix 2 for full condition wording). Typically the condition is applied to permissions for five or more dwellings but it can also be used to mitigate the lighting impact of new commercial and community developments for example.

What can a Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) do?

A neighbourhood plan in any location can introduce a dark sky policy where it has relevant evidence and community support; the parish does not need to coincide with a dark sky designation. A dark sky policy can be used to help minimise light pollution regardless of existing levels.

External lighting policy

Parishes outside a dark sky designation can introduce a policy which would support the Cornwall Council's dark sky condition also being applied to relevant new development in their area. The following wording would enable the condition (see Appendix 2) to be used:



Suggested policy wording:

Proposals for development will be supported where it is demonstrated that, if external lighting is required, it protects the night sky from light pollution through:

- (i) The number, design, specification and position of lamps;
- (ii) Full shielding (at the horizontal and above) of any lighting fixture exceeding 500 initial lumens and evidence of limited impact of unshielded lighting through use of adaptive controls; and
- (iii) Limiting the correlated colour temperature of lamps to 3000 Kelvins or less.

Design-led policy

An option which could be applied in all parishes would be to introduce design measures to reduce internal lighting spilling externally. Traditionally, this has been given limited consideration but there has been an appeal case in West Sussex which recognised the impact of light spill from a small domestic property with relatively large amounts of glazing on the character and tranquillity of the neighbouring South Downs National Park¹.

A design-led policy must be mindful of permitted development rights but can influence light spill in all other cases.

Suggested policy wording:

Proposals for development will be supported where it is demonstrated that, light spill from within buildings will be reduced by:

- (i) avoiding or recessing large areas of vertical fenestration;
- (ii) avoiding glazing which is facing upwards (whether horizontal or angled) including conservatory roofs; and
- (iii) within a site, locating and orientating development as sensitively as possible.

This approach will be more effective where permitted development rights are restricted i.e. in the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, World Heritage Site, conservation areas, Article 4 direction areas or due to certain planning conditions.

What evidence will we need?

Neighbourhood plan groups are not required to collect technical data to support a dark sky policy. If night time conditions are dark a policy can help protect this and if conditions are more impacted by light pollution a policy can help halt/minimise this.

¹ Appeal ref: [APP/L3815/W/16/3163693](https://www.gov.uk/appals/cases/APP/L3815/W/16/3163693)



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The [CPRE Night Blight map](#) is a ready source of information on how dark the night sky is and can be used to provide background evidence. It is also an effective means of communicating the issue to residents. If you happen to have more technical data e.g. from a phone app or a Sky Quality Meter this can also be used but it is not necessary.

What can't a Neighbourhood Development Plan do?

A neighbourhood plan cannot control the following:

- Existing lights – a neighbourhood plan can only influence new development
- The introduction of lights on their own – these are nearly always beyond the remit of the planning system
- The design of works which are permitted development – in many cases this will include the installation of skylight windows, conservatories and modest residential extensions

Example policies

At the time of writing there are no adopted neighbourhood development plans in Cornwall with a dark sky policy however there is keen interest and the emerging Landulph and Lezant neighbourhood development plans are pursuing an external lighting policy in line with the above advice.

Other Projects

Public outreach

As most lights are beyond the remit of the planning system, schemes to boost awareness on minimising light pollution and the benefit of a dark night sky are particularly important. Cornwall Council encourages the provision of community outreach events and can help with publicity where appropriate. Making events engaging and fun will boost uptake and impact. Local observatories and astronomy groups may be able to assist/advise on content and format. Another way to engage residents is through the annual Earth Hour campaign where people are asked to switch their lights off for one hour. Parish newsletters and noticeboards can be utilised to communicate events and campaigns.

Infrastructure

Town and parish councils may wish to consider dark sky friendly infrastructure, including ensuring their own lighting is dark-sky friendly and creation/promotion of suitable dark sky viewing locations. It is recommended that viewing locations are readily accessible in low lighting conditions and do not involve crossing open countryside. Permission should be obtained from the landowner.

Dark sky tourism

Dark sky tourism can be encouraged by working with local accommodation providers and attractions who may be interested in hosting events, providing visitors with information and loaning binoculars/telescopes to their guests. Businesses promoting themselves as dark-sky friendly should also give consideration to their own lighting.

Dark sky designation

Towns and parishes which are particularly dedicated to maintaining the dark night sky may wish to explore a dark sky designation. Please contact us if this is of interest.



Nuisance lighting

In extreme cases of light pollution where light is considered prejudicial to health or a nuisance causing substantial interference with the enjoyment of a person's property, it can be reported to Cornwall Council's Environmental Protection Team as a potential [statutory nuisance](#). Please note that the Team is not able to take action over light that is merely spilling onto someone's property or lights that can be seen in the distance causing a 'visual eyesore' or sky glow.

Street lights

Street lights are not covered by the same legal basis as statutory nuisance lighting. To report an issue with a Cornwall Council street light please make a note of the reference number on the column and use the [online form](#).

Sources of information and data

Contact us or sign up to Cornwall Council's Dark Sky Newsletter by emailing darksky@cornwall.gov.uk

Cornwall Council's dark sky website with information on Cornwall's designations, campaigns and street lights: www.cornwall.gov.uk/darksky

View lighting guidance and find out more about international designations via the International Dark-Sky Association's website: <http://www.darksky.org/>

Learn about national Dark Sky Discovery Sites: <https://www.darkskydiscovery.org.uk/>

Interact with CPRE's Night Blight map: <https://www.nightblight.cpre.org.uk/>

Glossary of terms

The definitions in this glossary are written in the context of this document.

- Adaptive controls – this refers to the use of sensors or timers which help reduce the impact of lighting to when it is needed.
- Correlated colour temperature – this refers to the colour of a lamp and is measured in Kelvins. The advice of the International Dark-Sky Association is that a yellow-white light is preferable over a blue-white light. LED lights have tended to be towards the blue-white end of the spectrum but LEDs can now be found with a more neutral colour.
- Kelvin – this is a measure of the colour of a lamp (see “correlated colour temperature”). The International Dark-Sky Association encourage necessary lighting to be no more than 3000 Kelvins which is a neutral white light.
- Lumen – this is a measure of the brightness of a lamp.



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- Shielding – lamp shielding will generally consist of an opaque case supplied by the manufacturer. To minimise light pollution, this should cover the light to the extent that light cannot shine upwards beyond the horizontal plane.



Appendix 2: Cornwall Council's dark sky planning condition

The following condition is applied to relevant planning consents within a dark sky designation and its buffer zone. It can also be applied where a neighbourhood plan introduces an external lighting policy along the lines recommended in this document.

Planning Condition: Prior to the installation of any external lighting, a lighting scheme shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority (LPA). The lighting scheme shall include:-

- Number, design, specification and position of lamps;
- Full shielding (at the horizontal and above) of any fixture exceeding 500 initial lumens and evidence of limited impact of unshielded lighting through use of adaptive controls; and
- Correlated colour temperature limit of 3000 Kelvins or less.
- Details of the timetable for the installation of any proposed external lighting including the agreed mitigation measures.

The lighting scheme shall be implemented in accordance with the approved details and retained and maintained as such thereafter.

At the request of the LPA, the land owner shall, at their own expense, employ a suitably competent and qualified person to measure and assess, by a method to be approved in writing by the LPA, whether the correlated colour temperature limit of 3000 Kelvins is being exceeded. The assessment shall be commenced within 21 days of the notification, or such longer time as approved by the LPA.

If the assessment requested by the LPA demonstrates that the specified level is being exceeded, the land owner shall take immediate steps to ensure that the correlated colour temperature limit is reduced to, or below, 3000 Kelvins. The land owner shall provide written confirmation of that reduction to the LPA within a time period to be agreed with the LPA.

Reason: To ensure that the development is undertaken in a manner which minimises light pollution in the [Core Area/Buffer Zone] of the Bodmin Moor International Dark Sky Landscape and in accordance with Policy 23 of the Cornwall Local Plan.