

## Does beauty exist if no-one's looking? #mendipviews

It's a deep and philosophical question but it's at the heart of our 'special qualities', the elements that make up an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. People walk up to the top of Crook Peak to look out, and people look at the Mendip Hills from afar because they make such a dramatic contrast to the flat surrounding countryside.

Our nation has a rich tradition in valuing views, not in monetary terms, but at a higher level where we intrinsically appreciate the 'beauty'. As a species we're curious, we like to see things from different angles and perspectives. How many times have you walked up a hill and thought 'you can see my house from here' and still been surprised and excited. Seeing our landscape from afar provide us with elevated emotions inside.

Rising from the Somerset Levels the distinctive Mendip Hills with its limestone ridges and scarp slopes are the perfect viewing platforms. The AONB's most popular visitor areas tend to have the best views out. From the southern edge you can see Glastonbury Tor, the Quantock Hills AONB and on to Exmoor National Park. If the weather's bad you'll be lucky to see the nearest drystone wall! But that's part of the fun.

I'd argue that the Somerset Levels and Moors are more visually interesting because they have the backdrop of the Mendip Hills looming ever larger the closer you get. Views in to the Mendip Hills are just as important as views out. That's why we look at planning applications 'in the setting of' the AONB as they can have an adverse affect even if they're not in the boundary.



It's hard putting an economic value on something we know deep down is valuable. A healthy, properly functioning natural environment is the foundation of sustained economic growth, prospering communities and personal wellbeing. The Mendip Hills AONB has a wealth of natural capital and the benefits we get from the AONB's attributes and processes (both natural and cultural features) are often described as 'ecosystem services'.



Taking account of all the economic and non-economic benefits we get from ecosystem services enables decision makers to exercise judgement about how we use our environment. Such an approach is often called an 'ecosystems approach'. In all considerations, it is important that decisions value the natural capital and ecosystem services of the Mendip Hills AONB to the economy.

That's all academically interesting but we know emotionally and physically you'll feel better for a walk up one Mendip's hills to take in the view. Let's celebrate these views and prove beauty does exist as lots of people are looking, if you share an image online use #mendipviews to let everyone else enjoy your view.

To read more about how we've fought for our views over the years read [\*\*'The Fight for Beauty'\*\*](#), Fiona Reynolds, Bloomsbury.