

# Mike Rigby

T 01823 430852  
M 07800 858828  
E [mike@mikerigby.org](mailto:mike@mikerigby.org)  
W [www.mikerigby.org](http://www.mikerigby.org)  
f @CouncillorRigby  
t @MikeSRigby  
y TheRealMikeRigby

Bourne House, High Street, Bishops Lydeard, Taunton, TA4 3AX, UK

Cllr D Hall  
Business Inward Investment & Policy  
Somerset County Council  
County Hall  
Taunton  
Somerset  
TA1 4DY

17<sup>th</sup> July 2014

Dear Cllr Hall,

## PROPOSED 95% FUNDING CUT – QUANTOCK HILLS AONB SERVICE

I have just watched on YouTube your response to my question at yesterday's Council Meeting about why you have now excluded some of the County Council's funding partners and whether you would reconsider that regrettable decision. Your response bore so little relevance to the question that I wondered whether you had heard it correctly. Everyone is well aware that the decision has yet to be taken; I have heard no-one say that it has, so your obsession with emphasising this is bizarre. As you know there is a proposal or 'possible idea' as you seem to prefer to call it, set out in the MTFP, to drastically reduce the County Council's funding for Somerset's AONBs. If you do not wish to talk about the substance of the proposal, please can I suggest that you formally remove the 'possible idea' from the MTFP and confirm that you have dropped the plan. If you have not dropped the plan, then I will ask the question again. **"Why have you uninvited some of the County Council's AONB funding partners from the consultation meeting in July if you are serious about finding new funding arrangements for the AONB Services?"** The effect of this absurd decision is there for all to see in the response from the Chairman of funding partner West Somerset Council, which I have forwarded to you. In it he complains of SCC 'disenfranchising' those who might be in a position to assist. He goes on to accept that this is your prerogative but that you should not expect those now uninvited 'to harbour feelings of openness and co-operation towards SCC.' So, at a stroke and for no good reason, you have succeeded in alienating our partners whom I assume we would like to at least maintain funding, if not increase it as the County Council steps back.



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Given that the AONB Service is capable of levering in £15 for each pound put in by the County Council, this must be one of the most efficient forms of investment available to us and conversely one of the most damaging cuts we could make. And all this in the context of an additional 17,500 homes being planned for Taunton, which will massively increase pressure on the Quantock Hills.

It is indeed your prerogative to examine cutting the County Council's funding of AONBs if you think that is a good idea. What is not acceptable is the ham-fisted way in which you are going about it and the additional, wholly unnecessary damage that it is causing. I would urge you to answer properly the question above (it's in bold) or, better still, perhaps you could just confirm that you will drop the whole 'possible idea'.

Yours sincerely,



**Mike Rigby**  
County Councillor, Lydeard Division

