Policy X: Dark skies

1) *What is the policy seeking to achieve?*

Dark night skies have been identified through community consultation as a central component of what makes Stoke Gabriel Parish special for residents. Given the relative lack of light pollution in the Parish when compared with surrounding areas, a key aim for the Neighbourhood Plan is to limit light pollution and conserve dark night skies.

This policy therefore seeks to maintain the Parish's dark night skies through limiting light pollution from new development. This is with a view to supporting the rural character of the Parish, enhancing tranquillity, supporting health and wellbeing, facilitating energy efficiency and limiting impacts on wildlife.

2) *What is the evidence behind the policy?*

Stoke Gabriel Parish enjoys significantly lower levels of light pollution than surrounding areas. The map extract below highlights the difference in light pollution between the Parish and adjoining locations, including the Torbay conurbation.[1]

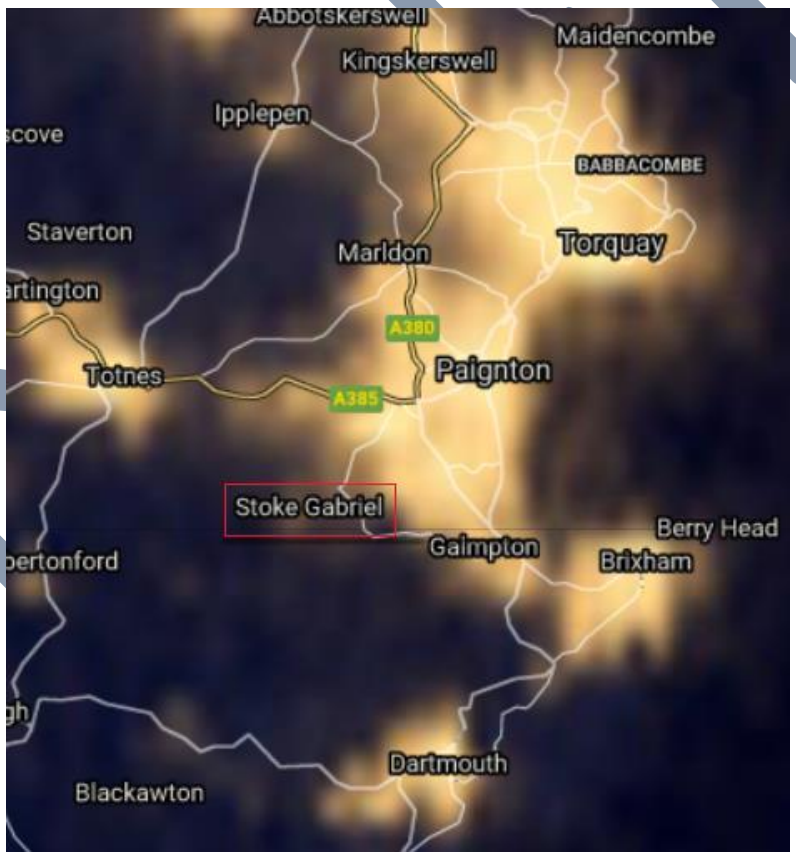

Figure X: Light pollution in the vicinity of Stoke Gabriel Parish

[1] The map extract is from https://blue-marble.de/nightlights/2012 . Using combined data published by NASA from satellite pictures taken in April and October 2012, this project mapped night lighting across the globe.

Light pollution comes in many forms, including sky glow, light trespass, glare, and over illumination. Light pollution undermines enjoyment of the countryside or the night sky, especially in areas with intrinsically dark landscapes such as the Dart Estuary. Research has shown that light pollution has adverse impacts on health and wellbeing, including through contributing to sleep disorders, obesity, depression, diabetes and other issues. Light pollution also indirectly undermines the efficient use of energy and climate change mitigation.

There is also increasing awareness of the impact that light pollution can have on wildlife, by interrupting natural rhythms including migration, reproduction and feeding patterns. In the context of Stoke Gabriel, this is important given the role of ecological corridors in the parish for nocturnal species. For example, in relation to Greater Horseshoe Bats, increased illumination of foraging habitat through internal, external and vehicular lighting sources are a key impact on the species, and increased illumination of sections of hedgerow/tree lines, including from internal, external and vehicular lighting sources impacts on commuting routes.[2]

Currently, street lighting in the Parish is limited to one location in Stoke Gabriel village, Rydon Acres.

3) *What does the community say?*

Consultation undertaken for the Neighbourhood Plan to date has demonstrated the importance of the Parish's dark night skies for the local community.

A significant proportion of those responding to the Neighbourhood Plan questionnaire highlighted the need to conserve the dark skies enjoyed in the parish. A lack of street lighting and low levels of light pollution was highlighted by a large number of respondents as an important part of the Parish's local distinctiveness which should be conserved.

In this respect dark night skies were identified by consultees as a central component of what makes the Parish special.

[2] Devon County Council. South Hams District Council, Teignbridge District Council and Torbay Council (October 2019) South Hams Special Area of Conservation (SAC) Greater Horseshoe Bats Habitats Regulations Assessment Guidance https://www.devon.gov.uk/environment/wildlife/wildlife-and-geology-planning-guidance

4) ***Policy SGX: Dark Skies Policy***

Development proposals in Stoke Gabriel Parish should seek to limit the impact of light pollution from artificial light sources. There will be a presumption against street lighting of new developments or any other lighting that affects the dark night skies of the Parish.

Street lighting:

- There will be a presumption against street lighting of new developments.
- Where street lighting is proposed, a statement setting out why a lighting scheme is required, the proposed users, and the frequency and length of use in terms of hours of illumination should be prepared.
- Proposals for street lighting shall not materially alter light levels outside the development.

Security lighting:

- Security lighting should be controlled by photoelectric switches and should be on the minimum time setting.
- Sensors which can be tripped by road or footway users should be avoided.
- Lighting should be directed down and mounted below the property boundary height.
- Alternative security measures, such as an inside light that is on a time switch, or CCTV should be considered as an alternative to external lighting.

Potential impacts of lighting proposals on wildlife will be considered in association with Policy SG X (Biodiversity).