



**Chilterns
National
Landscape**

**Screening Report for Habitats Regulations Assessment of
the AONB Management Plan for the Chilterns National Landscape 2025-2030**

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Screening Report for Habitats Regulations Assessment of the AONB Management Plan for the Chilterns National Landscape 2025-2030

1. Executive Summary

1. The purpose of this screening report is to determine whether there is a need to carry out a full Appropriate Assessment of the AONB Management Plan for the Chilterns National Landscape 2025-2030 ("the Plan") with regard to its impact on internationally recognised sites of nature conservation interest (also known as 'Natura 2000' or 'European' sites). The sites in question are all, in this case, Special Areas of Conservation (SACs). This report considers potential impacts arising from the Plan alone and in combination with other plans, and with respect to the conservation objectives of these SACs.
2. Production of the Plan is a statutory duty of the Conservation Board under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. The Plan sets out the Board's policy for the management of the National Landscape and fulfilment of its statutory purposes, which are in summary to promote the conservation, enhancement, understanding and enjoyment of the natural beauty of the National Landscape.
3. The Plan under assessment is a 'refresh' of the Chilterns AONB Management Plan 2019-2024, which was extended to 2025 by the Defra Secretary of State. The new Plan largely rolls forward the objectives and policies of the 2019-2024 Plan, with minor updates, an increased emphasis on nature recovery, climate adaptation and equality, diversity and inclusion, as well as embedding the government's Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework. The equivalent assessment for the 2019-2024 Plan was that a full appropriate assessment was not required.
4. There are three SACs within the National Landscape boundary, and two more that lie within 12km of the boundary as follows:
5. Special Areas of Conservation within the National Landscape boundary:
 - Aston Rowant
 - Chilterns Beechwoods (a composite of nine sites, eight of which are within the National Landscape)
 - Hartslock Wood
6. Special Areas of Conservation within 12km of the National Landscape boundary:
 - Burnham Beeches
 - Little Wittenham
7. The report concludes that all policies and proposals in the AONB Management Plan for the Chilterns National Landscape have been screened, and it is considered that there are no significant environmental effects on the SACs either within the National Landscape or within 12 km of its boundary. Consequently, the conclusion of the screening is that a full appropriate assessment of the Plan is not required.

2. Introduction

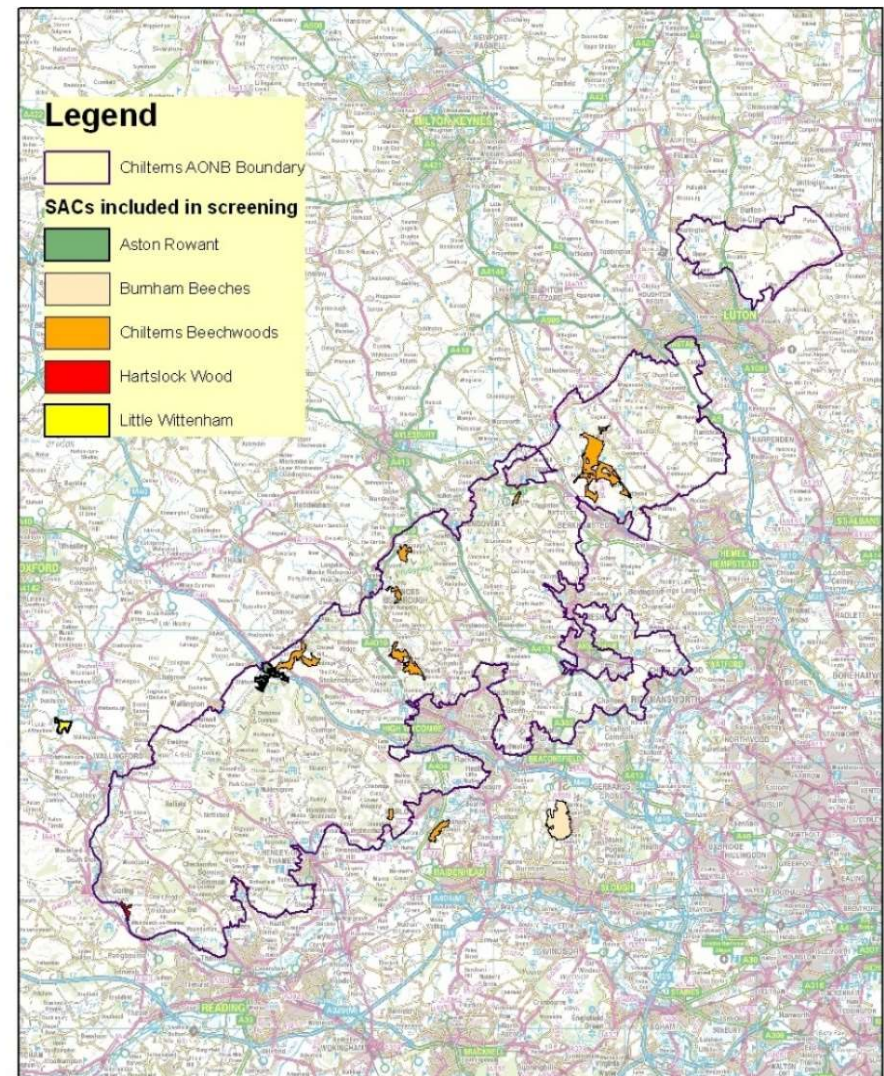
8. Section 89 of the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000 places a duty on Conservation Boards to produce a plan which sets out their policy for the management of the National Landscape, and to review that Plan at least every five years.
9. The Plan under assessment, titled the AONB Management Plan for the Chilterns National Landscape 2025-2030, is a 'refresh' of the Chilterns AONB Management Plan 2019-2024; at the time of assessment the Plan is presented as a set of proposed changes to the previous Plan. That Plan was extended to 2025 by order of the Defra Secretary of State in 2024. The new Plan largely rolls forward the objectives and policies of the 2019-2024 Plan, with minor updates, an increased emphasis on nature recovery, climate adaptation and equality, diversity and inclusion, as well as embedding the government's Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework. The equivalent screening assessment for the 2019-2024 Plan was that a full appropriate assessment was not required.
10. The Plan sets out strategic objectives for the management of the National Landscape, with policies giving detail of how these objectives will be achieved by the Board its partners. In formulating the objectives and policies of the Plan, the Board has sought to fulfil the purpose of the designation of the National Landscape, which is that of **conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area**.
11. The Plan's contents also reflect the Board's duties under section 87 of the CROW Act, where they would not conflict with the primary purpose, to:
 - Seek to further the understanding and enjoyment by the public of the special qualities of the area;
 - Seek to foster, in co-operation with other public bodies, the economic and social well-being of communities within the National Landscape;
 - Have due regard to the needs of agriculture and forestry and to the economic and social interests of the National Landscape's rural areas; and
 - Have due regard to the protection against pollution of any water, whether on the surface or underground, which may be abstracted for use by the public.
12. The purpose of this screening report is to determine whether there is a need to carry out an Appropriate Assessment of the Plan and its policies in relation to internationally recognised sites of nature conservation interest (otherwise known as 'Natura 2000' or 'European' sites), which are all in this case Special Areas of Conservation (SACs).
13. The European Habitats Directiveⁱ states: "*Any plan or project not directly connected with, or necessary to, the management of the [European site], but likely to have a significant effect thereon, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects, shall be subject to appropriate assessment of its implications for the site in view of the site's conservation objectives*" (Article 6(3)).
14. It is accepted practice to adopt a staged approach to the assessment, Stage 1 being screening.
15. This screening report seeks to determine whether the policies and actions of the draft Plan are likely to have a significant adverse environmental impact on the European sites and consequently whether an appropriate assessment is required under the Conservation (Natural Habitats) Regulations 1994

(Habitats Regulation) as amended in 1997 and in 2000 (in England only) as amended in 2017 (SI 1012).

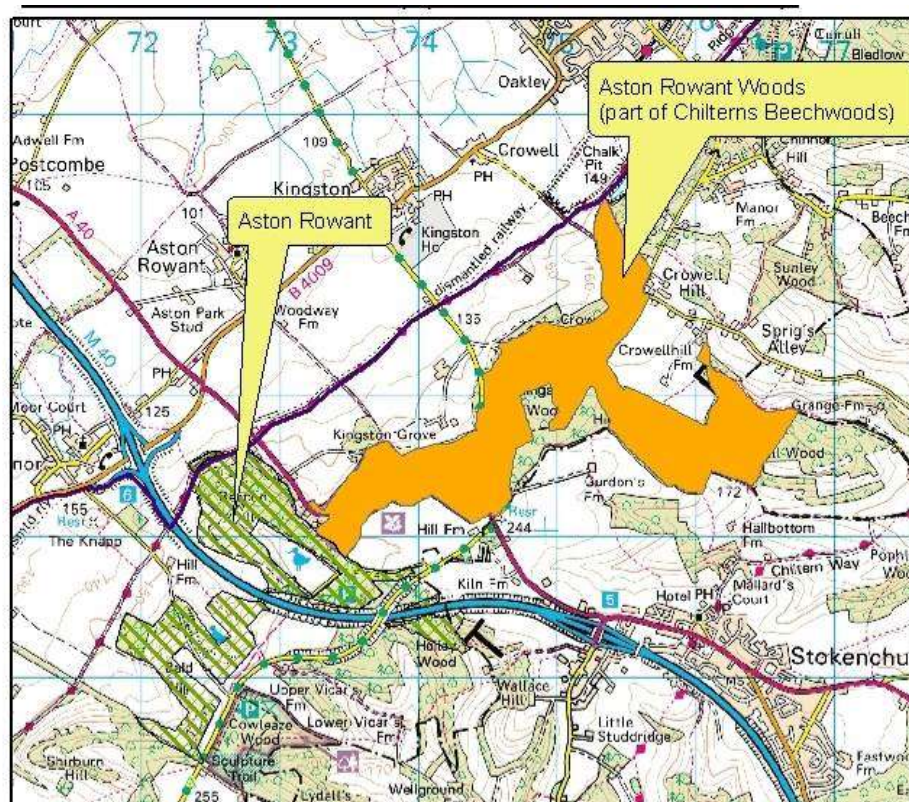
16. The Chilterns Conservation Board (CCB), as the 'competent authority' under these regulations must satisfy itself that, in adopting the plan, there will be no significant adverse effect on European sites. The presence of mitigation measures cannot be considered when screening for appropriate assessment, as established by the EU Court of Justice (*People Over Wind and Sweetman v Coillte Teoranta* and *Sweetman v An Bord Pleanála*).
17. This report is for scrutiny by Natural England, as the statutory consultee for Habitats Regulation Assessment.
18. The Board recognises that the Plan will be implemented in the context of changing spatial patterns and housing growth, as directed by the National Planning Policy Framework, Local Plans, Neighbourhood Plans and national infrastructure projects. These are themselves subject to Appropriate Assessment. The Plan does not propose any growth or development, and its policies promote conservation of the natural environment and sustainable use of it.

3. Sites under consideration

19. There are three SACs within the National Landscape – Aston Rowant, Hartslock Wood and Chilterns Beechwoods. Chilterns Beechwoods comprises nine separate sites, of which eight are within the National Landscape.
20. In addition, Burnham Beeches SAC and Little Wittenham SAC have been considered as they are within 12 km of the National Landscape boundary and could theoretically be affected indirectly by the management plan.
21. All terrestrial SACs in England are also Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs).
22. In assessing the impact of the Plan on these SACs, we have considered their qualifying features, nature conservation importance, and pressures and threats to condition of qualifying features of the sites.
23. The following tables summarise the assessment of likely impacts of the Plan's policies against each SAC.



4. Aston Rowant SAC preliminary screening appraisal



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Qualifying features	<p>Juniper on heaths or calcareous grasslands.</p> <p>Beech forests on neutral to rich soils.</p>
Nature Conservation Importance	<p>One of the largest remaining populations of juniper in lowland Britain. Selected as an example of juniper formations on the chalk in the south east of England.</p>

Aston Rowant SAC				
Pressures/threats to condition of qualifying features of the site	Possible impacts arising from Plan	Risk of significant effect?	Other plans to be considered in combination	Risk of significant effect in combination?
Unsustainable on-site population or habitat (juniper/juniper scrub)	<p>No negative impacts.</p> <p>The plan includes policies promoting action to halt and reverse declines in rare, protected and characteristic wildlife species (NP6) and to improve ecological condition, resilience and diversity of semi-natural wildlife habitats (NP10).</p>	No	<p>Local Plans</p> <p>Neighbourhood Plans</p> <p>Strategic Infrastructure plans</p>	No
<p>Changes in species distribution</p> <p>Habitat fragmentation and increasing isolation of juniper populations in the Chilterns.</p>	<p>No negative impacts.</p> <p>The plan includes policies promoting action to halt and reverse declines in rare, protected and characteristic wildlife species (NP6) and to improve ecological condition, resilience and diversity of semi-natural wildlife habitats (NP10).</p>	No	<p>Local Plans</p> <p>Neighbourhood Plans</p> <p>Strategic Infrastructure plans</p>	No

Aston Rowant SAC				
Pressures/threats to condition of qualifying features of the site	Possible impacts arising from Plan	Risk of significant effect?	Other plans to be considered in combination	Risk of significant effect in combination?
<p>Deer</p> <p>Deer continue to impact on beech woodland in parts of the site.</p>	<p>No negative impacts.</p> <p>The plan includes policies to promote management of pest species including deer to meet conservation objectives.</p>	No	<p>Local Plans</p> <p>Neighbourhood Plans</p> <p>Strategic Infrastructure plans</p>	No
<p>Conflicting conservation objectives</p> <p>Management of large parts of the site is no longer compatible with maintenance of self-sustaining juniper. Grazing is incompatible with juniper seedling establishment.</p>	<p>No negative impacts.</p> <p>The plan includes policies promoting action to halt and reverse declines in rare, protected and characteristic wildlife species (NP6) and to improve ecological condition, resilience and diversity of semi-natural wildlife habitats (NP10).</p>	No	<p>Local Plans</p> <p>Neighbourhood Plans</p> <p>Strategic Infrastructure plans</p>	No

Aston Rowant SAC				
Pressures/threats to condition of qualifying features of the site	Possible impacts arising from Plan	Risk of significant effect?	Other plans to be considered in combination	Risk of significant effect in combination?
<p>Disease</p> <p><i>Phytophthora austrocedrae</i> is a disease that infects juniper and can result in rapid decline and death of bushes. Risk of spread of the disease has resulted in advice to avoid transfer of plant material between sites. This reduces the range of options for re-establishment programmes.</p>	<p>No negative impacts.</p> <p>The plan includes policies on invasive non-native species and diseases, (NP7, LP17, LP18) including support for schemes to prevent further spread and to promote good biosecurity.</p>	No	<p>Local Plans</p> <p>Neighbourhood Plans</p> <p>Strategic Infrastructure plans</p>	No

Aston Rowant SAC				
Pressures/threats to condition of qualifying features of the site	Possible impacts arising from Plan	Risk of significant effect?	Other plans to be considered in combination	Risk of significant effect in combination?
<p>Air Pollution</p> <p>Nitrogen deposition exceeds critical loads but the site is considered to be in favourable condition. this requires further investigation.</p>	<p>The plan has several policies that encourage more people to visit the Chilterns countryside (see EP2, EP2, EP6). However, policy NP12 makes clear that where there is a conflict between access and nature conservation, the natural environment must be given priority. EP10 promotes environmentally sustainable use of the Chilterns for recreation.</p> <p>Development of a visitor management initiative which protects the most vulnerable habitats and sites is identified as a Key Action.</p>	No	<p>Local Plans</p> <p>Neighbourhood Plans</p> <p>Strategic Infrastructure plans</p>	<p>No.</p> <p>Although local plans, neighbourhood plans and strategic infrastructure plans propose housing and transport infrastructure development, they will be subject to Appropriate Assessment themselves, and the management plan policies specifically encourage environmentally sustainable access</p>

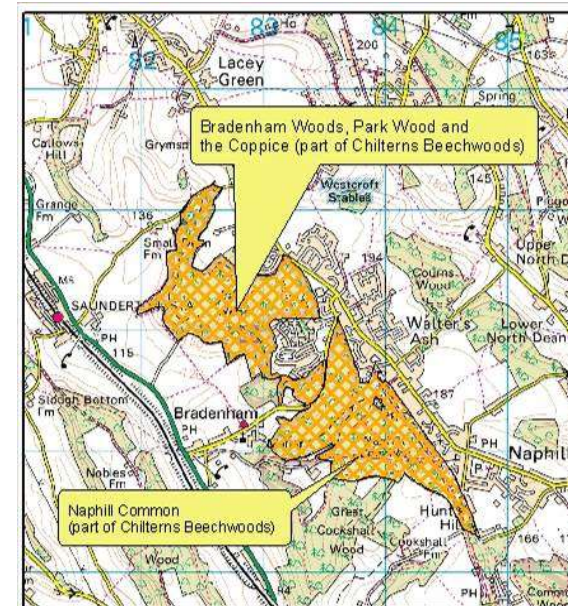
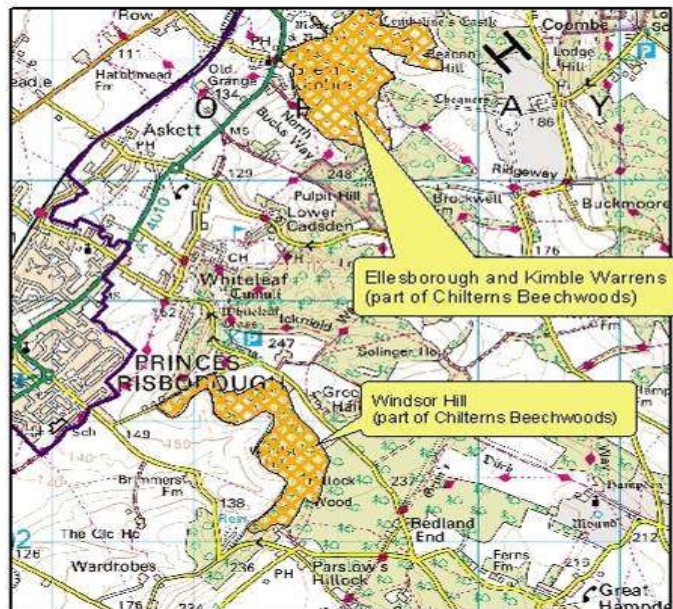
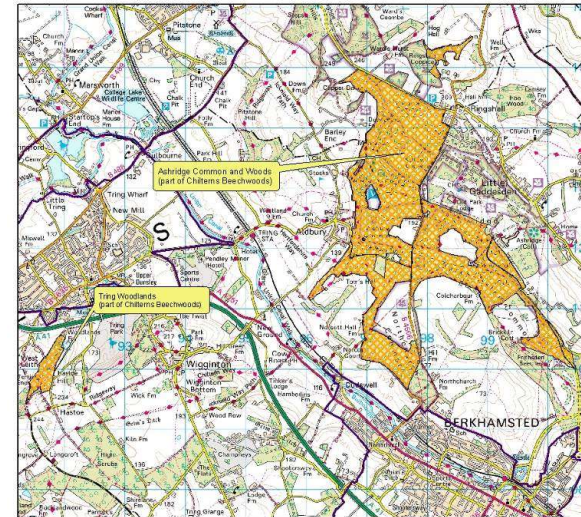
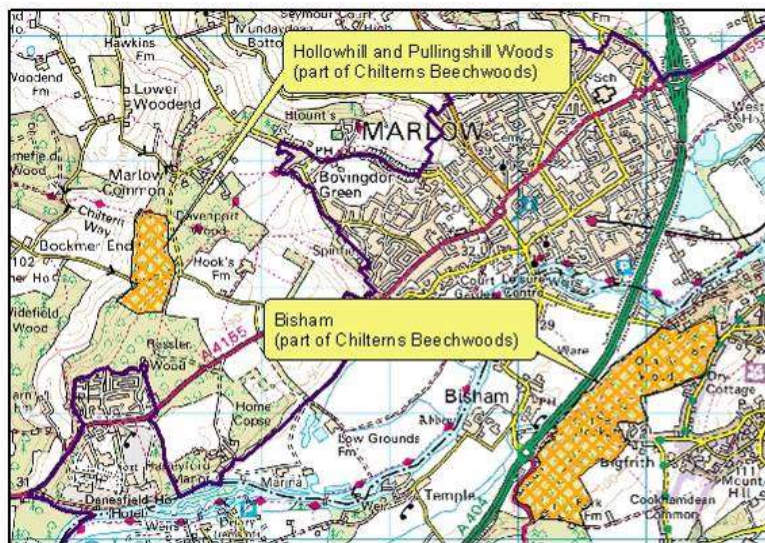
5. Chiltern Beechwoods SAC preliminary screening appraisal

The Chilterns Beechwoods SAC is made up of nine sites, all but one of which lie within the National Landscape – see table below.

Composite sites within the Chilterns Beechwoods SAC

	Within Chilterns National Landscape?
Ashridge Common and Woods	Yes
Aston Rowant Woods	Yes
Bisham Woods	No
Bradenham Woods, Park Wood and The Coppice	Yes
Ellesborough and Kimble Warrens	Yes
Naphill Common	Yes
Tring Woodlands	Yes
Windsor Hill	Yes
Hollowhill and Pullingshill Woods	Yes

Qualifying features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stag beetle (<i>Lucanus cervus</i>) - Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies: on calcareous substrates (<i>Festuco-Brometalia</i>); dry grasslands and scrublands on chalk or limestone - <i>Asperulo-Fagetum</i> beech forests; beech forests on neutral to rich soils
Nature Conservation Importance	<p>The Chilterns Beechwoods SAC comprises nine separate sites scattered across the Chilterns. There are three features of interest: semi-natural grasslands and scrubland on chalk; <i>Asperulo-Fagetum</i> beech woodland (for which this is considered to be one of the best areas in the UK and lies in the centre of the habitat's UK range); and Stag beetle <i>Lucanus cervus</i>, for which the area is considered to support a significant presence. The rare coralroot <i>Cardamine bulbifera</i> is found in these woods.</p>



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Chilterns Beechwoods SAC				
Pressures/threats to condition of qualifying features of the site	Possible impacts arising from plan	Risk of significant effect?	Other plans to be considered in combination	Risk of significant effect in combination
<p>Forestry and woodland management</p> <p>The local history of woodland management for beech timber has contributed towards a uniform age structure in some woods. With few gaps in the canopy, regeneration is restricted. To encourage regeneration and conservation of beech woodlands, restoration management is needed to diversify age and physical structure. Current and future threats of climate change are also likely to impact upon woodland regeneration and species composition</p>	<p>No negative impacts.</p> <p>The plan policies promote improved ecological condition, resilience and diversity of semi-natural wildlife habitats (NP10); and management to enhance resilience of key habitats and species to impacts of climate change (NP16).</p>	No	<p>Local Plans</p> <p>Neighbourhood Plans</p> <p>Strategic Infrastructure plans</p>	No
<p>Deer</p> <p>Browsing by deer prevents or hinders natural regeneration of trees and ground flora. Not all parts of the SAC are affected, however, in those that are, current control measures appear ineffective in managing the problem.</p>	<p>No negative impacts.</p> <p>The plan includes policies to promote management of pest species including deer to meet conservation objectives.</p>	No	<p>Local Plans</p> <p>Neighbourhood Plans</p> <p>Strategic Infrastructure plans</p>	No

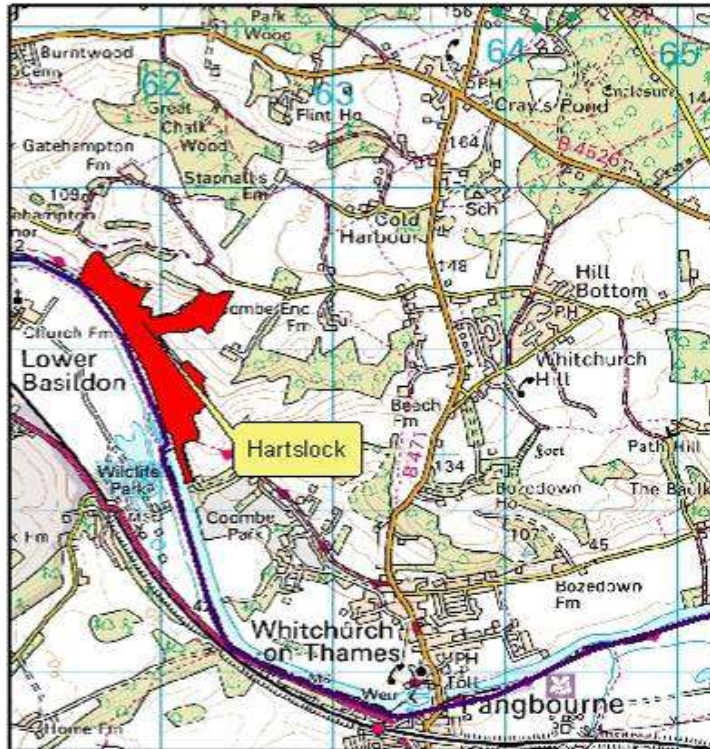
Chilterns Beechwoods SAC				
Pressures/threats to condition of qualifying features of the site	Possible impacts arising from plan	Risk of significant effect?	Other plans to be considered in combination	Risk of significant effect in combination
<p>Changes in species distribution</p> <p>Fit-for-purpose species recording and data to allow monitoring of the stag beetle population is not currently in place, making it difficult to manage the population and its habitat appropriately.</p>	<p>No negative impacts.</p> <p>The plan includes policies promoting action to halt and reverse declines in rare, protected and characteristic wildlife species (NP6) and underlines the need for decision making to be based on robust, up-to-date and readily available ecological information (NP17).</p>	No	<p>Local Plans</p> <p>Neighbourhood Plans</p> <p>Strategic Infrastructure plans</p>	No
<p>Disease</p> <p><i>Phytophthora austrocedrae</i> is a disease that infects juniper and can result in rapid decline and death of bushes. Risk of spread of the disease has resulted in advice to avoid transfer of plant material between sites. This reduces the range of options for re-establishment programmes.</p>	<p>No negative impacts.</p> <p>The plan includes policies on invasive non-native species and diseases, (NP7, LP17, LP18) including support for schemes to prevent further spread and to promote good biosecurity.</p>	No	<p>Local Plans</p> <p>Neighbourhood Plans</p> <p>Strategic Infrastructure plans</p>	No

Chilterns Beechwoods SAC				
Pressures/threats to condition of qualifying features of the site	Possible impacts arising from plan	Risk of significant effect?	Other plans to be considered in combination	Risk of significant effect in combination
<p>Invasive species</p> <p>Grey squirrels and edible dormouse, <i>Glis glis</i>, damage growing trees by bark stripping. Where natural regeneration is occurring the trees are attacked between the ages of 20 and 40, if not before. It is not known if this is impacting on tree health or regeneration but there may be a need for vigilance, and consider increased awareness of likely effects and signs of impacts. Control measures have resulted in little or no ecological change to date.</p>	<p>No negative impacts.</p> <p>The plan includes policies on invasive non-native species including grey squirrels and edible dormouse (NP7, LP17, LP18) including support for schemes to prevent further spread.</p>	No	<p>Local Plans</p> <p>Neighbourhood Plans</p> <p>Strategic Infrastructure plans</p>	No

Chilterns Beechwoods SAC				
Pressures/threats to condition of qualifying features of the site	Possible impacts arising from plan	Risk of significant effect?	Other plans to be considered in combination	Risk of significant effect in combination
<p>Public Access/ Disturbance</p> <p>Removal of dead wood by the public is an issue on some parts of the SAC. This could impact saproxylic invertebrate fauna. Also storm-damaged dead wood may be removed in the interests of health and safety, and tidiness.</p>	<p>No negative impacts</p> <p>The plan has a number of policies that encourage more people to visit the Chilterns countryside (see EP2, EP2, EP6). However, policy NP12 makes reference to the requirement that where there is a conflict between access and nature conservation, the natural environment must be given priority. EP10 promotes environmentally sustainable use of the Chilterns for recreation.</p>	No	<p>Local Plans</p> <p>Neighbourhood Plans</p> <p>Strategic Infrastructure plans</p>	<p>No.</p> <p>Although local plans, neighbourhood plans and strategic infrastructure plans propose housing growth, they will be subject to Appropriate Assessment themselves, and the management plan policies specifically encourage environmentally sustainable access.</p>

Chilterns Beechwoods SAC				
Pressures/threats to condition of qualifying features of the site	Possible impacts arising from plan	Risk of significant effect?	Other plans to be considered in combination	Risk of significant effect in combination
<p>Air Pollution</p> <p>Atmospheric nitrogen deposition exceeds the critical loads for ecosystem protection. Some parts of the site are recorded as unfavourable (recovering), but impacts associated with nitrogen deposition are unclear.</p>	<p>The plan has a number of policies that encourage more people to visit the Chilterns countryside (see EP2, EP2, EP6). However, policy NP12 makes clear that where there is a conflict between access and nature conservation, the natural environment must be given priority. EP10 promotes environmentally sustainable use of the Chilterns for recreation.</p> <p>Development of a visitor management initiative which protects the most vulnerable habitats and sites is identified as a Key Action.</p>	No	<p>Local Plans</p> <p>Neighbourhood Plans</p> <p>Strategic Infrastructure plans</p>	<p>No.</p> <p>Although local plans, neighbourhood plans and strategic infrastructure plans propose housing and transport infrastructure development, they will be subject to Appropriate Assessment themselves, and the management plan policies specifically encourage environmentally sustainable access.</p>

6. Hartslock Wood SAC preliminary screening appraisal



Qualifying features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies: on calcareous substrates (<i>Festuco-Brometalia</i>) (important orchid sites); dry grasslands and scrublands on chalk or limestone (important orchid sites)* - <i>Taxus baccata</i> woods of the British Isles; yew-dominated woodland*
Nature Conservation Importance	<p>This site hosts the priority habitat type "orchid rich sites". The steep slopes of this site on the chalk of the Chilterns comprise a mosaic of chalk grassland, chalk scrub and broad-leaved woodland. The site supports one of only three UK populations of monkey orchid, a nationally rare species.</p> <p>The bulk of this site lies on a steep slope above the River Thames. Recent storms and landslips have resulted in a diverse age structure for the yew population. Open patches show a rich flora, including local species such as southern wood-rush <i>Luzula forsteri</i>, wood barley <i>Hordelymus europaeus</i> and narrow-lipped helleborine <i>Epipactis leptochila</i>.</p>

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Hartslock Wood SAC				
Pressures/threats to condition of qualifying features of the site	Possible impacts arising from plan	Risk of significant effect?	Other plans to be considered in combination	Risk of significant effect in combination?
<p>Air Pollution</p> <p>Nitrogen deposition exceeds the site-relevant critical load for ecosystem protection and hence there is a risk of harmful effects, but the sensitive features are considered to be in favourable condition. This requires further investigation.</p>	<p>The plan has several policies that encourage more people to visit the Chilterns countryside (see EP2, EP6). However, NP12 makes reference to the requirement that where there is a conflict between access and nature conservation, the natural environment must be given priority. EP10 promotes environmentally sustainable use of the Chilterns for recreation.</p>	No	<p>Local Plans</p> <p>Neighbourhood Plans</p> <p>Strategic Infrastructure plans</p>	<p>No.</p> <p>Although local plans, neighbourhood plans and strategic infrastructure plans propose housing and transport infrastructure development, they will be subject to Appropriate Assessment themselves, and the management plan policies specifically encourage environmentally sustainable access.</p>

7. Burnham Beeches SAC preliminary screening appraisal



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Qualifying features

Atlantic acidophilous beech forests with *Ilex* and sometimes also *Taxus* in the shrublayer (*Quercion robur-petraeae* or *Ilici-Fagenion*); beech forests on acid soils.

Nature Conservation Importance

Burnham Beeches is an example of Atlantic acidophilous beech forests in central southern England. It is an extensive area of former beech wood-pasture with many old pollards and associated beech *Fagus sylvatica* and oak *Quercus* spp. high forest. Surveys have shown that it is one of the richest sites for saproxylic invertebrates in the UK. It also retains nationally important epiphytic communities, including the moss *Zygodon forsteri*.

Burnham Beeches SAC				
Pressures/threats to condition of qualifying features of the site	Possible impacts arising from plan	Risk of significant effect?	Other plans to be considered in combination	Risk of significant effect in combination?
<p>Air Pollution</p> <p>Epiphytic lichen communities are sensitive to nutrient deposition, promoting the growth of nutrient-tolerant species and reducing overall lichen diversity. NO2 and ammonia deposition levels remain high in the area. Nitrogen deposition may also be affecting tree health, resulting in changes in tree canopy structure and other effects.</p>	<p>No negative impacts.</p> <p>There are no policies within the plan to increase visits to Burnham Beeches.</p>	No	<p>Local Plans</p> <p>Neighbourhood Plans</p> <p>Strategic Infrastructure plans</p>	No
<p>Public Access/ Disturbance</p> <p>Veteran trees are vulnerable to damage as a result of soil compaction due to trampling or vehicle movements in their root zone.</p>	<p>No negative impacts</p> <p>There are no policies within the plan to increase visits to Burnham Beeches.</p>	No	<p>Local Plans</p> <p>Neighbourhood Plans</p> <p>Strategic Infrastructure plans</p>	No

Burnham Beeches SAC				
Pressures/threats to condition of qualifying features of the site	Possible impacts arising from plan	Risk of significant effect?	Other plans to be considered in combination	Risk of significant effect in combination?
<p>Habitat Fragmentation</p> <p>There is high pressure for new housing developments in the vicinity of Burnham Beeches, which risks isolating the site from the surrounding countryside.</p>	<p>No negative impacts</p> <p>There are no policies within the plan to increase habitat fragmentation within Burnham Beeches.</p>	No	<p>Local Plans</p> <p>Neighbourhood Plans</p> <p>Strategic Infrastructure plans</p>	No
<p>Deer</p> <p>Deer are numerous in the northern parts of the site and causing adverse impacts on tree regeneration and ground flora composition.</p>	<p>No negative impacts.</p> <p>Burnham Beeches is separated from the National Landscape by the M40 and the River Thames. There are no policies within the plan which impact on deer populations within Burnham Beeches.</p>	No	<p>Local Plans</p> <p>Neighbourhood Plans</p> <p>Strategic Infrastructure plans</p>	No
<p>Species decline</p> <p>The number of veteran trees at the site is declining and there is a significant age gap between these and the next generation of future veterans. This could have significant impacts on habitat availability for specialised saproxylic invertebrates.</p>	<p>No negative impacts</p> <p>There are no policies within the plan that impact on veteran trees at Burnham Beeches.</p>	No	<p>Local Plans</p> <p>Neighbourhood Plans</p> <p>Strategic Infrastructure plans</p>	No

Burnham Beeches SAC				
Pressures/threats to condition of qualifying features of the site	Possible impacts arising from plan	Risk of significant effect?	Other plans to be considered in combination	Risk of significant effect in combination?
<p>Invasive species</p> <p>Oak processionary moth is now well-established in sites close to Burnham Beeches. If it reaches Burnham Beeches control measures could pose a threat to native invertebrate populations.</p> <p>Rhododendron is abundant in many adjacent properties and work will be required to prevent re-colonisation. It is of particular concern as it acts as host for the pathogen causing sudden oak death (which also affects beech).</p>	<p>No negative impacts.</p> <p>The plan includes policies on invasive non-native species and diseases, (NP7, LP17, LP18) including support for schemes to prevent further spread and to promote good biosecurity.</p>	No	<p>Local Plans</p> <p>Neighbourhood Plans</p> <p>Strategic Infrastructure plans</p>	No

8. Little Wittenham SAC preliminary screening appraisal



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Qualifying features	Great crested newt <i>Triturus cristatus</i> .
Nature Conservation Importance	One of the best-studied great crested newt sites in the UK, Little Wittenham comprises two main ponds set in a predominantly woodland context. There are also areas of grassland, with sheep grazing and arable bordering the woodland. The River Thames is just to the north of the site, and a hill fort to the south. Large numbers of great crested newts have been recorded in the two main ponds, and research has revealed that they range several hundred metres into the woodland blocks.

Little Wittenham SAC				
Pressures/threats to condition of qualifying features of the site	Possible impacts arising from plan	Risk of significant effect?	Other plans to be considered in combination	Risk of significant effect in combination?
<p>Invasive species</p> <p>Predation by fish, inappropriately released into the ponds by members of the public, is seriously reducing the population of great crested newts.</p> <p>There is a reduction in the great crested newt population and breeding success due to existing fish in one of the main breeding ponds.</p>	<p>No negative impacts.</p> <p>There are no policies within the plan that affect the population of great crested newts or their habitat at Little Wittenham SAC.</p>	No	<p>Local Plans</p> <p>River Basin Management Plan</p> <p>Neighbourhood Plans</p> <p>Strategic Infrastructure Plans</p>	No
<p>Public Access/ Disturbance</p> <p>There is an expected increase in visitor pressure with the expansion of nearby towns and villages.</p>	<p>No negative impacts</p> <p>There are no policies within the plan to increase visits to Little Wittenham SAC.</p>	No	<p>Local Plans</p> <p>Neighbourhood Plans</p> <p>Strategic Infrastructure plans</p>	No

9. Trends and other plans

24. It is important to take account of other strategies, plans and policies that may affect the integrity of the SACs in combination with the management plan including the National Planning Policy Framework and adopted and emerging Local Plans, Neighbourhood Plans and strategic infrastructure plans.
25. **National Planning Policy Framework:** This sets the overarching policy for planning and development across England. It was published in 2012 and revised several times since. It provides the context for Local Authorities to develop their own local land use policies and proposals.
26. **Local Plans and Neighbourhood Plans:** These cover topics such as housing, the economy, health and education, transport and the environment.
27. The Local Plans and Neighbourhood Plans identify major growth (principally housing and employment provision) within various areas and are subject to Appropriate Assessment.
28. The apportionment requirements for waste and minerals are dealt with in the Minerals and Waste Local Plans which are also subject to Appropriate Assessments.
29. Neighbourhood Plans are being prepared in several parishes. These often identify sites for housing and other uses, though at a smaller scale and more local level.
30. All such documents will need to be subject to Appropriate Assessment should any designated sites fall within the areas affected and the effects should be considered in combination with other relevant plans. The management plan itself does not propose any growth or development.
31. **Transport and Infrastructure Plans:** The Local Transport Plans that affect the National Landscape have sustainable transport and the minimisation of traffic growth as key themes. In terms of tackling congestion further development of urban public transport is focused on. Other improvements that are promoted include: a bus and coach network, promotion and increase in rail use, development of cycle routes and taxis are to be used to supplement transport in rural areas.
32. The protection and conservation of the environmental designations of the area will be sought by addressing air quality, noise pollution and by protecting rural areas from negative and disproportionate effects of transport plans. As the SACs are all based in the rural areas this promotion of sustainable transport is an important part of their protection from potential future traffic increases.
33. National projects for infrastructure, such as HS2, which is under construction, and proposals for the growth of local airports, will also change the number of people visiting or travelling through the area. Such plans and projects will be subject to Appropriate Assessment including consideration in combination with other relevant plans.
34. **Population:** For the purposes of development planning, through the National Planning Policy Framework, the government now uses a “standard method for assessing local housing need”, rather than individual planning authorities identifying housing needs using the Office of National Statistics’ household projections as a starting point. The standard method accounts for household projections at the national level in determining a ‘baseline’, but distributes housing need to local authorities using

a calculation based on the relationship between house prices and earnings. This is intended to help account for factors such as projected household growth figures not accounting for 'hidden households' such as those arising from young people living for longer with parents or living in other shared accommodation for affordability reasons, rather than purchasing or renting their own home. The resulting housing needs assessment for each local authority area is a single figure which does not differentiate between needs for different types of housing, nor does it account for the availability or suitability of land for housing development in each local authority area, including areas of land which planning policy seeks to conserve or to use for other purposes.

35. Application of this standard method currently suggests that in total the local authorities with land in the Chilterns National

Landscape will be expected to plan for at least 57,940 new homes during the period of this Management Plan (2025-2030), an increase of about 8% on existing stock. These figures can only be taken as broadly indicative, since most local authority areas which include land in the National Landscape and/or SACs have significant areas of undesignated land, including urban areas, to exploit; conversely, these figures exclude the influence of neighbouring, often urban, areas such as Reading Borough Council, and the influence of Greater London and nearby growth areas like the Oxford-Cambridge Arc. However, the development plans and planning applications that will deliver this growth will themselves be subject to separate assessments under the Habitat Regulations.

10. Analysis of the Management Plan

37. The management plan is considered to have no significant direct effects on the area's SACs for a number of reasons, both general and site specific.

General Issues

38. The Board's first purpose is to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the National Landscape. Policies and actions relating to this purpose will have only positive or neutral effects on the European Protected Sites. These include policies to:

- Sustain and strengthen ecosystem services (GP4).
- Create bigger, more joined up habitat networks (NP1).
- Halt and reverse declines in rare, protected and characteristic wildlife species. (NP6).
- Control and reduce the impact of invasive non-native pests and diseases in the Chilterns (NP7).
- Ensure no loss of existing semi-natural habitat (NP9).
- Improve ecological condition, resilience, and diversity of semi-natural wildlife habitats (NP10).

39. All of these policies will contribute to addressing the threats identified with regard to the qualifying features of the SACs under consideration.

40. The Board's second purpose is to increase the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the National Landscape. This includes policies to:

- Ensure all young people in the Chilterns and surrounding towns have opportunities to experience and learn about the Chilterns (EP5).
- Broaden public engagement to attract new audiences and increase understanding and enjoyment of the National Landscape (EP6).
- Encourage better provision and take up of car-free visitor experiences in the Chilterns (EP7).
- Promote greater understanding of the Chilterns landscape and respect for other users (EP8).
- Increase the sustainable use of the Chilterns for recreation and physical activity (EP10).

41. Help visitors to discover and enjoy wildlife in the Chilterns sensitively while not harming or disturbing it (NP12).

42. Minimal air pollution is identified as a threat to the condition of qualifying features of all but one of the SACs (Little Wittenham). Although the management plan encourages countryside recreation, the policies are specifically designed to encourage environmentally sustainable access and encourage visits to countryside close to home. There are no policies in the plan designed to specifically increase visits to the European Protected Sites.

Site Specific Issues

Burnham Beeches

- 43. Burnham Beeches is publicly owned, and managed sympathetically by the Corporation of London. A large part of the site is designated as a National Nature Reserve and is managed to restore grazed pasture woodland and heathland.
- 44. The Plan contains no proposals to encourage visits to Burnham Beeches, which is outside the National Landscape, nor is there anything in the plan that the Board considers would result in increased visits to the site.

Chilterns Beechwoods

- 45. Chilterns Beechwoods SAC is a composite of nine sites, each of which is a SSSI. Ownership is a mixture of public and private across the nine sites. Those subject to the greatest visitor pressure – for example Ashridge Commons and Woods - are managed by public bodies such as the National Trust, who are actively developing strategies to seek to disperse visitor pressure away from sensitive areas and to encourage non-car alternatives, for example the Ashridge cycling strategy and the proposed introduction of car park charges.
- 46. The management plan promotes such approaches, for example policy NP12. It is considered that there would be no significant impacts arising out of the general policies in the management plan encouraging countryside access.

Aston Rowant

- 47. The site is managed and largely owned by Natural England and has been designated as a National Nature Reserve. The management of the site is designed to increase public access whilst controlling it to prevent harm to the site's special interest.

- 48. The site is divided into two parts by the M40 motorway. It is considered that there would be no significant impacts arising out of the general policies in the management plan encouraging countryside access.

Hartslock Wood

- 49. The site is mostly in private ownership, with no public access. Part of the site is a local Wildlife Trust Reserve and Open Access land. The chalk grassland is an important orchid site, supporting one of only three populations of the monkey orchid (*Orchis simian*) in the UK.
- 50. Visitor pressure is generally modest, apart from during the orchid flowering season when numbers increase. The local Wildlife Trust manages this through voluntary wardening. The potential for increased visits by car is negligible as there is no parking on the site or in the unclassified road leading to the site. There are public car parks in nearby Goring and opportunities to access by sustainable modes – by walking from Goring or Pangbourne train stations, or from moorings on the River Thames. It is considered that there would be no significant impacts arising out of the general policies in the management plan encouraging countryside access.

Little Wittenham

- 51. The site is managed by the Earth Trust as a nature reserve. The areas that are most important to the population of great crested newts have restricted access, which is designed to prevent conflicts between the visiting public, the newts and their habitat.
- 52. The management plan contains no proposals to encourage visits to Little Wittenham, which is outside the National Landscape.

11. Conclusion

53. The screening process concludes that an appropriate assessment of the AONB Management Plan for the Chilterns National Landscape 2025-30 is unnecessary as its policies will have no significant adverse effects on European Protected Sites within or in close proximity to the National Landscape. Natural England has been consulted for its views on the screening report, and the outcome of this consultation was that Natural England concur with the conclusion that a full appropriate assessment is unnecessary.

ⁱ Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora. Transposed into law by the Conservation (Natural Habitats) Regulations 1994 (Habitats Regulation) as

amended in 1997 and in 2000 (in England only) as amended in 2017 (SI 1012).