



**Chilterns**  
National  
Landscape

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

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# Screening Report for Strategic Environmental Assessment of the AONB Management Plan for the Chilterns National Landscape 2025-2030

## 1. Introduction

1. This screening report has been produced to determine whether it is necessary to undertake a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of the AONB Management Plan for the Chilterns National Landscape 2025-2030 ("the Plan"). This is to ensure compliance with European Directive 2001/42/EC on 'the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment' ('The SEA Directive') and 'The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations, 2004 (Statutory Instrument 2004 No. 1633), which implements the Directive in England.
2. In November 2023, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) in England were rebranded as "National Landscapes". The relevant policy and legislation continues to refer to AONBs, and so this report uses both terms as appropriate to the context.
3. Section 89 of the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000 sets out the requirement for Conservation Boards or relevant Local Authorities to publish and review a management plan for their AONB that: *"formulates their policy for the management of the area of outstanding natural beauty and for the carrying out of their functions in relation to it"*, and to review and where necessary amend those plans every five years.
4. 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 SEA was not required.**

## 3. The AONB Management Plan for the Chilterns National Landscape 2025-2030

5. The AONB Management Plan for the Chilterns National Landscape is intended to deliver the same basic vision as the previous Plan: *"Our vision is that the Chilterns will be cared for, forever and for everyone. A place where people can enjoy and be inspired by its distinctive natural beauty, space and tranquillity, we will celebrate and enhance its character and history. There will be more space for nature to flourish; abundant wildlife and a healthy environment will provide us with the ingredients for healthy living. A place where communities can breathe; a haven for nature and recreation."*
6. The Plan continues to include strategic objectives under each of six thematic chapters, as set out below. The only changes proposed to these objectives over the previous Plan are to replace "AONB" with "National Landscape".

## Nature

<b>NO1</b>	Ensure that spaces for wildlife are well connected, well managed and diverse.
<b>NO2</b>	Increase the range and abundance of populations of key wildlife species.
<b>NO3</b>	Minimise development impacts on the National Landscape and its setting; where they are unavoidable, ensure they provide net environmental gains.
<b>NO4</b>	Ensure that chalk habitat management in the Chilterns is widely considered an exemplar of best practice.
<b>NO5</b>	Enable people to understand and be inspired by the natural environment of the Chilterns, ensuring that policies and decisions in the Chilterns recognise its value to society, and in its own right.
<b>NO6</b>	Secure protected status for chalk streams as a globally rare habitat.
<b>NO7</b>	Encourage people from different organisations, communities and backgrounds, to work together to 'make space for nature' in the Chilterns.

## Historic Environment and Cultural Heritage

<b>HO1</b>	Better protect the Chilterns historic environment, both formally designated and unprotected heritage assets.
<b>HO2</b>	Seek new discoveries of unknown heritage assets and improve understanding of those already identified, to reveal

	the significance of the historic environment and cultural heritage of the Chilterns.
<b>HO3</b>	Increase the knowledge and enjoyment of Chilterns heritage and culture by local residents, visitors and the wider public; and bring a love of heritage to wider parts of society.

## Land and Water

<b>LO1</b>	Protect and, where degraded, improve the Chilterns' natural capital resources, including soils, water, clean air, plant and animal life.
<b>LO2</b>	Ensure that the Chilterns remains a functional, working landscape with viable, sustainable and diverse farming, forestry and rural economy sectors.
<b>LO3</b>	Safeguard the Chilterns landscape by maintaining and enhancing all landscape features (such as hedges and trees), important wildlife habitats and cultural heritage at all times.
<b>LO4</b>	Increase resilience to and effective management of pests, diseases, non-native invasive species and climate change.
<b>LO5</b>	Achieve Water Framework Directive (WFD) objectives for the Chilterns water environment – rivers, valleys, wetlands and other riparian habitats.
<b>LO6</b>	Ensure that those who work in the landscape, local and national policy makers, and the public, understand the link between environmentally sustainable farming, forestry, rural economy sectors and a healthy Chilterns National Landscape.

### Enjoyment and Understanding

<b>EO1</b>	Secure national recognition for the wealth of accessible recreational opportunities the Chilterns countryside offers to residents and visitors.
<b>EO2</b>	Ensure more high-quality opportunities for outdoor recreation, life-long learning and volunteering for all.
<b>EO3</b>	Ensure more people can enjoy healthier and happier lives by enjoying the Chilterns.
<b>EO4</b>	Make more people aware of what makes the Chilterns special and encourage them to help care for it and contribute to its protection. Inspire young people to build a lasting interest in the Chilterns.
<b>EO5</b>	Reduce barriers to accessing the countryside and encourage more diverse audiences to access and engage with the Chilterns, especially underserved audiences who currently have little connection.

### Social and Economic Wellbeing

<b>SO1</b>	Increase the economic and social wellbeing of local communities and businesses by supporting the development of the visitor economy and improving community facilities.
<b>SO2</b>	Ensure that the Chilterns National Landscape is recognised and valued by residents, visitors and the health sector for the contribution it makes to peoples' physical and mental health, offering connection with nature and a wide variety of recreational opportunities.

<b>SO3</b>	Ensure that the natural capital of the Chilterns and its contribution to society is understood and valued by all decision makers and used to lever funding.
<b>SO4</b>	Ensure that businesses and communities in and around the National Landscape value its special qualities, support initiatives and help raise the profile of the area.

### Development

<b>DO1</b>	Ensure planning decisions put the conservation and enhancement of the National Landscape first.
<b>DO2</b>	Ensure that where development happens, it leaves the National Landscape better than it was before – richer in wildlife, quieter, darker at night, designed to have a low impact on the environment, and beautiful to look at and enjoy.
<b>DO3</b>	Embrace opportunities to restore natural beauty on sites currently degraded by unsympathetic development, infrastructure or dereliction.

7. The Plan sets out the ‘special qualities’ that contribute to the area’s natural beauty and make the Chilterns National Landscape unique. The special qualities described in the Plan are the same as those described in the 2019-2024 Plan, subject to minor updates of some statistics, and again the change from “AONB” to “National Landscape”.

#### 4. The Management Plan and SEA

8. The vision and strategic objectives of the Plan are functionally identical to the Plan for 2019-2024. The changes to the rest of the Plan focus on factual updates, updates reflecting changes to wider policy and legislation, embedding the government’s Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework, and providing greater emphasis and clarity in relation to three key priorities: nature recovery, climate adaptation and equality, diversity and inclusion.
9. In earlier iterations of the Plan, attention was paid to the balance that needed to be struck between the purpose of designating the AONB (i.e. conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area), and the Conservation Board’s additional duties.
10. At that time, the Board had a primary duty under s.87 of the CROW Act 2000 to have regard to the purpose of the designation of the National Landscape (now strengthened to “to seek to further” the same purpose). The Board had (and has) further duties, 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.
11. SEAs conducted on these earlier iterations of the Plan resulted in steps being taken to ensure that activities undertaken in relation to the additional duties would reduce significant adverse effects, and enhance significant positive effects, ensuring that the primary duty in relation to conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area would be prioritised, i.e. ensuring the Plan’s objectives and policies embedded the Sandford Principle. That Principle continues to be observed throughout the revised Plan.

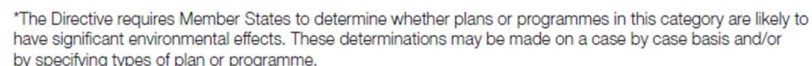
#### 5. Screening

12. The SEA Directive and accompanying national regulations describe the types of plans for which the undertaking of SEA is mandatory. There are also a number of other plans where a decision must be taken on whether SEA should be undertaken.
13. The government has set out in a series of steps a means to determine which plans and programmes require SEA<sup>1</sup>, as required by the SEA Directive, including the steps that should be taken to determine the need for SEA (see extract overleaf).
14. The application of this approach to the AONB Management Plan for the Chilterns National Landscape is summarised with explanation in Table 1. An investigation of the significance of effects can be found in Table 2.

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<sup>1</sup> ODPM, 2006, *A Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive*

This diagram is intended as a guide to the criteria for application of the Directive to plans and programmes (PPs). It has no legal status.



Stage	Answer	Reason
1. Is the plan or programme (PP) subject to preparation and / or adoption by a national, regional or local authority OR prepared by an authority for adoption through a legislative procedure by parliament or government? (Art. 2 (a))	Yes	<p>The Plan will be prepared and adopted by the Chilterns Conservation Board, a statutory independent corporate body set up by Parliamentary Order under s.86 of the CROW Act. The Chilterns Conservation Board is tasked with preparing the Plan under s.89 of the Act. The Board is made up of 27 members representing national interest as well as all the local authorities of Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire, Oxfordshire and Bedfordshire that cover the Chilterns National Landscape:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Defra (8 in total)</li> <li>• Buckinghamshire, Central Bedfordshire and Luton Borough Councils (unitary authorities):</li> <li>• Dacorum, North Hertfordshire, South Buckinghamshire, South Oxfordshire and Three Rivers District/Borough Councils;</li> <li>• Central Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire and Oxfordshire parish councils (6 elected in total).</li> </ul>
2. Is the PP required by legislative, regulatory or administrative provisions? (Art. 2(a))	Yes	The Plan is being prepared under s.89 of the CROW Act 2000

Stage	Answer	Reason
3. Is the PP prepared for agriculture, forestry, fisheries, energy, industry, transport, waste management, water management, telecommunications, tourism, town and country planning or land use AND does it set a framework for future development consents of projects in Annexes I and II to the EIA Directive? (Art. 3.2 (a))	No	Although the Plan covers several of these topics, it contains no land-use planning allocations or proposals for specific sites, and it is unlikely that any work proposed, framed or required by the management plan would fall into Annexes I and II of the EIA Directive.
4. Will the PP, in view of its likely effect on sites, require an assessment under Article 6 or 7 of the Habitats Directive? (Art 3.2 (b))	No	A Habitats Regulations Assessment Screening Report has been completed. This report concludes that there are unlikely to be significant negative effects on the network of European Sites (Special Areas of Conservation in this case) in and around the Chilterns National Landscape.
5. Does the PP determine the use of small areas at local level, OR is it a minor modification of a PP subject to Art 3.2? (Art 3.3)	N/A	This question would only have applied if questions 3 or 4 were answered 'yes'.
6. Does the PP set the framework for future development consent of projects (not just projects in Annexes to the EIA Directive) (Art 3.4)	Yes	<p>Considering a narrow interpretation of 'framework for future development consent' would exclude the Plan as it does not direct projects that would generally fall within the planning system.</p> <p>However, taking a broader interpretation of 'framework for future development consent', the management plan may affect the outcome of future development consents. This is because AONB Management Plans can contribute to the strategic context for development plans, and may be material considerations in planning decisions.</p>

Stage	Answer	Reason
7. Is the PP's sole purpose to serve national defence or civil emergency, or is it a financial or budget PP, OR is it co-financed by structural funds or EAGGF programmes 2000 to 2006/7 (Art 3.8, 3.9)?	N/A	This question would only have applied if question 6 was answered 'no', or question 8 was answered 'yes'
8. Is it likely to have a significant effect on the environment (Art 3.5) (See appendix for criteria and characteristics determining significance)	No	The relatively small-scale improvements to the National Landscape resulting from the management plan are unlikely to have significant negative effects on the environment. The objectives within the management plan seek to conserve and enhance the special qualities of the National Landscape, which will have a moderating impact on any changes that may alter the environmental character of the National Landscape. See Appendix 1 for further exploration of significance of effects.

**Table 2. Judging Significance in Relation to the SEA Directive**

15. Annex II of the SEA Directive lists criteria for determining the significance of environmental effects of a plan or programme. Taken together these criteria should inform judgements about whether environmental effects can be considered to be significant.
16. The table below shows criteria of significance listed in Annex II of the SEA Directive alongside an assessment of their applicability to the AONB Management Plan for the Chilterns National Landscape 2025 to 2030.

Characteristic of significance	Is it significant?	Likely effect of plan
<b>1. The characteristics of plans and programmes, having regard, in particular, to:</b>		
The degree to which the plan or programme sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to the location, nature, size and operating conditions or by allocating resources	Yes	The National Landscape Management Plan will set a framework for a number of smaller scale projects.

Characteristic of significance	Is it significant?	Likely effect of plan
The degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy.	Yes	The National Landscape Management Plan does not influence a hierarchy of subsidiary plans; however, actions include the contributing to other plans and programmes of varying significance.
The relevance of the plan or programme for the integration of environmental considerations with a view to promoting sustainable development	Yes	The management plan sets sustainable development at the heart of its vision, and objectives and actions contribute to the maintenance of special qualities in the National Landscape. This ensures that environmental considerations are fully integrated.  The plan is considered highly beneficial to the achievement of sustainable development.
Environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme	No	The management plan is unlikely to cause environmental problems. It is not substantively different from the previous 2014 to 2019 management plan which had been subject to SEA and shown not to exhibit significant environmental effects.  It is likely to lessen problems such as atmospheric, soil and water pollution, loss of biodiversity, loss of landscape character, and deterioration of cultural heritage.



Characteristic of significance	Is it significant?	Likely effect of plan
The relevance of the plan or programme for the implementation of Community legislation on the environment (e.g. plans and programmes linked to waste-management or water protection).	No	The management plan is carried out as a result of national legislation (the Countryside and Rights of Way Act) which is not transposed from higher Community legislation.
<b>2. Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to:</b>		
The probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects,	No	<p>The National Landscape Management Plan is unlikely to exhibit significant long term / frequent / irreversible effects because:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Objectives and key actions generally link to and support national or local initiatives that are designed to enhance the quality of the rural environment;</li> <li>Objectives are linked to conserving special qualities so actions which are contrary to this are not promoted as part of the plan.</li> <li>The condition of the National Landscape will be monitored as part of the management plan.</li> </ul>

Characteristic of significance	Is it significant?	Likely effect of plan
The cumulative nature of the effects	No	<p>The generally positive environmental improvements are likely to negate / offset cumulative environmental effects arising from outside sources.</p> <p>To coordinate partnership working on cumulative impacts, the Chilterns Conservation Board has produced guidance to help our 13 local authorities take account of cross-boundary proposals and identify cumulative effects when preparing their local plans. This Position Statement on Cumulative Impacts of Development on the Chilterns National Landscape is available on our website at <a href="https://www.chilternsaonb.org/conservation-board/planning-development/position-statements.html">https://www.chilternsaonb.org/conservation-board/planning-development/position-statements.html</a></p>
The transboundary nature of the effects	No	There is no likelihood of transboundary effects occurring.
The risks to human health or the environment (e.g. due to accidents),	No	Objectives / actions which aim to manage traffic levels will reduce the risk of accidents occurring.

Characteristic of significance	Is it significant?	Likely effect of plan
The magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected),	No	While the management plan applies to the entirety of the National Landscape, negative environmental effects are not likely to be significant.
The value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to: special natural characteristics or cultural heritage	No	The National Landscape is a highly valued area that contains areas of high biodiversity and cultural heritage value, making the area sensitive to environmental impacts. However, no such impacts are predicted and, due to the protections given to 'special qualities' emphasised in the management plan, would in any case be unlikely to be significant.
The value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values	No	The National Landscape management is highly unlikely to provoke the exceedance of any environmental thresholds and is likely to increase environmental capacity in many instances (e.g. by restoring biodiversity).
The value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to intensive land-use	No	The National Landscape management plan is unlikely to promote intensive land use, rather it helps promotes less intensive farming.

Characteristic of significance	Is it significant?	Likely effect of plan
The value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to the effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, Community or international protection status	No	The National Landscape is a highly valued nationally protected landscape designation. However, the management plan is integral to the maintenance of that status and aims to achieve this through positive interventions that are likely to enhance landscape value. Such interventions are shown to be similar to those in the previous 2014 -19 management plan for which a previous SEA did not identify significant environmental effects.
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Overall level of significance:</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Unlikely to exhibit significant effects on the environment.</b></p>		

## **6. Conclusion**

17. The conclusion of this screening report is that a Strategic Environmental Assessment is not required for the AONB Management Plan for the Chilterns National Landscape 2025-2030. This is because the plan is unlikely to have significant effects on the environment.
18. Furthermore, SEA was carried on the previous Chilterns AONB Management Plan 2014 to 2019. Proposed changes to the extant plan are not likely to have significant effects and there is no requirement to carry out further assessment.

## **7. Consultation**

19. The three statutory bodies for the purposes of SEA screening are Natural England, the Environment Agency and Historic England. These bodies have been consulted for their views on the conclusions of this screening assessment, and all have concurred with those conclusions.