



# CHILTERNNS

AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY

## **Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2019 – 2024**

### **Strategic Environmental Assessment Screening Report**

**October 2018**

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# Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2019-24 Strategic Environmental Assessment - Screening Report October 2018

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1. This screening report has been produced to determine whether it is necessary to undertake a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Management Plan 2019-2024. 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 and for relevant non-devolved plans and programmes in the UK as a whole.

## 2. AONB Management Plans and Guidance on SEA

- 2.1. Part IV, Section 89 of the Countryside and Rights of Way 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”*. These management plans must be reviewed *‘at intervals of not more than 5 years’*.
- 2.2. The previous Chilterns AONB Management Plan (2014 to 2019) and the AONB Management Plan before that (2008-2013) have been subject to Strategic Environmental Assessment. The latest draft plan is a review of the current plan, and there is a question over whether a new SEA is required for the revised plan.
- 2.3. In 2012, Natural England, the National Association for AONBs and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) published an ‘Advice Note to AONB Partnerships, the Conservation Boards and Relevant Authorities on Management Plan Reviews’, which gave some early guidance on considering the need for SEA:

*“The requirements of the SEA and Habitats Directives, and the need for compliance with them, apply to new management plans, and to revisions or re-issues of existing management plans”*.

*AONBs and National Park Authorities (protected landscape managing bodies) should screen their revised or amended Management Plan to evaluate whether the individual or cumulative effect of the changes which they are proposing is likely to have a significant*

*effect, as defined under the Strategic Environmental Assessment or Habitats Regulations. They may wish to seek informal guidance from Natural England (and Environment Agency, English Heritage for SEA) at this screening stage”.*

The same guidance goes on to state that:

*“Given that all the extant AONB Management Plans have been assessed under the regulation, the AONB Partnership / Conservation Board (protected landscape managing body) may decide that the proposed changes to the extant plan are not likely to have significant effect and may conclude that there is no requirement to carry out further assessment. The AONB Partnership / Conservation Board should record the screening decision and supporting reasons for it”.*

- 2.4. This screening report has been written to enable a judgement to be made on whether an SEA should be undertaken. In line with the ‘tripartate’ guidance outlined above, it discusses whether the Chilterns AONB Management Plan 2019 to 2024 is likely to exhibit significant environmental effects, and documents support reasons for the report’s conclusions.
- 2.5 A separate screening report to establish whether Appropriate Assessment under the Habitats Regulations is necessary, is published alongside this report.

### **3. The Chilterns AONB Management Plan 2019 – 2024**

- 3.1. The draft Chilterns AONB Management Plan sets out the following draft vision:

*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.*

- 3.2. The vision is shorter but essentially covers the same ambitions as the 2014 to 2019 Chilterns AONB Management Plan, albeit with greater emphasis on natural capital and the protected landscape as a place of health and wellbeing for visitors.
- 3.3. The Management Plan outlines strategic objectives under each of 6 thematic chapters. The Draft Strategic Objectives are:

### **Nature**

**Diverse communities of wildlife species survive in small pockets and islands. The wider countryside is not as wildlife rich as it was 50 or even 20 years ago. We can change this by prioritising and investing in the natural environment as never before – and in the people and organisations that care for it – to deliver ‘more, bigger, better, more joined up spaces for nature’<sup>1</sup>.**

<b>NO1</b>	<b>Ensure that spaces for wildlife are well connected, well managed and diverse.</b>
<b>NO2</b>	<b>Increase the range and abundance of populations of key wildlife species<sup>2</sup>.</b>
<b>NO3</b>	<b>Minimise impacts on and provide net gains for biodiversity in the AONB and its setting.</b>
<b>NO4</b>	<b>Ensure that chalk habitat management in the Chilterns is widely considered an exemplar of best practice.</b>
<b>NO5</b>	<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 for its own sake.</b>
<b>NO6</b>	<b>Secure protected status for Chalk Streams as a globally rare habitat.</b>
<b>NO7</b>	<b>Encourage people from different organisations, communities and backgrounds, to work together to ‘make space for nature’ in the Chilterns.</b>

### **Historic Environment & Cultural Heritage**

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

<sup>1</sup> Lawton J.H. et al ((2010) *Making Space for Nature: a review of England’s wildlife sites and ecological network*. Report to Defra.

<sup>2</sup> Including species characteristic of the Chilterns, species for which the Chilterns is important, and rare or notable species found in the Chilterns

<b>HO3</b>	<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.</b>
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### **Land & Water**

<b>LO1</b>	<b>Protect and, where degraded, improve the Chiltern's natural capital resources – soils, water, clean air.</b>
<b>LO2</b>	<b>Ensure that the Chilterns remain a functional, working landscape with viable, sustainable and diverse farming, forestry and rural economy sectors.</b>
<b>LO3</b>	<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>
<b>LO4</b>	<b>Increase resilience to pests, diseases, non-native invasive species and climate change.</b>
<b>LO5</b>	<b>End environmentally unsustainable abstraction from chalk stream catchments.</b>
<b>LO6</b>	<b>Achieve Water Framework Directive objectives for the Chilterns water environment.</b>
<b>LO8</b>	<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 AONB.</b>

### **Enjoyment and Understanding**

<b>EO1</b>	<b>Secure national recognition for the wealth of accessible recreational opportunities the Chilterns countryside offers to residents and visitors.</b>
<b>EO2</b>	<b>Ensure more high-quality opportunities for outdoor recreation, life-long learning and volunteering for all.</b>
<b>EO3</b>	<b>Ensure more people are able to enjoy healthier and happier lives through enjoying the Chilterns.</b>
<b>EO4</b>	<b>Make more people aware of what makes the Chilterns special; inspire them to help care for it and contribute to its protection.</b>
<b>EO5</b>	<b>Encourage much greater use of the Chilterns countryside by people from the towns/urban communities surrounding the Chilterns.</b>

## Social & Economic Wellbeing

SO1	Increase the economic and social wellbeing of local communities and businesses within the AONB by supporting the development of the visitor economy and improving community facilities.
SO2	Ensure that the AONB is recognised and valued by residents, visitors and the health sector for the contribution it makes to peoples' physical and mental health and wellbeing, offering connection with nature and a wide variety of recreational opportunities.
SO3	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 in funding.
SO4	Ensure that businesses and communities in and around the AONB value its specialness, support Chilterns initiatives and help raise the profile of the area.

## Development

DO1	Ensure planning decisions put the conservation and enhancement of the AONB first.
DO2	Ensure that where development happens, it leaves the AONB 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.
DO3	Embrace opportunities to restore natural beauty on sites currently degraded by unsympathetic development, infrastructure or dereliction.

3.4. The Management Plan also defines the 'special qualities' of the Chilterns AONB. These are summarised as:

**The Chilterns is special because of the steep chalk escarpment with areas of flower rich downland, the chalk streams, extensive tracts of ancient woodlands, historic commons, tranquil valleys, a network of ancient routes, villages with their brick and flint houses, and a rich historic environment of grand houses, hillforts and chalk figures.**

**The draft plan also summarises the significant qualities, and together, they are what make the Chilterns an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).**

#### **4. The current plan and SEA**

- 4.1. The vision and strategic objectives can be seen as continuations of the themes in the 2014 to 2019 Chilterns AONB Management Plan. Generally the divergence between the previous and current vision and objectives is considered to be low.
- 4.2. The revised plan is more ambitious in promoting the Chilterns as a place of health and wellbeing for the wider region. However, although the management plan could help shape other strategies and influence delivery mechanisms (e.g. encourage project funding for the Chilterns Walking Festivals), the plan will not directly make more people come. In any event, the plan is careful to couch the ambition of more people enjoying the Chilterns with not harming the environment. This is the Sandford Principle, that if there is a conflict between conservation and recreation and they cannot be reconciled by skilful management, conservation should come first. See for example Policy NP12 of the Draft Chilterns AONB Management Plan 2019-2024:

**“NP12 Help visitors to discover and enjoy wildlife in the Chilterns sensitively while not harming or disturbing it.**

*There are many wonderful wildlife spectacles and fascinating species to be found in the Chilterns. Part of our mission is to inspire many more people with a sense of wonder in the natural world and the confidence to venture out into the countryside to enjoy the health benefits of green and beautiful, wildlife rich spaces. At the same time, some of our most precious habitats are particularly sensitive to impacts of visitors and their pets (including cats and dogs). There needs to be a carefully planned and strategic approach to managing visitors, targeting areas with the capacity and infrastructure to accommodate additional use in order to protect the more sensitive sites from damage. This means better mapping of habitat sensitivity and current hotspots to support development of a strategy. Where there is a conflict between access and nature conservation, legislation requires that the natural environment be given priority.”*

- 4.2. SEA was conducted on the current AONB Management Plan 2014-19 (with processes of Environmental Baseline, Scoping, Consultation, Environmental Report, and Monitoring). The SEA documents are available on the Chilterns Conservation Board’s website at <https://www.chilternsaonb.org/conservation-board/management-plan.html>. The Management Plan 2014-2019 SEA explored the likely significant environmental effects of implementation of the Chilterns AONB Management Plan and put forward recommendations for reducing any significant adverse effects and enhancing any

significant positive effects identified during the appraisal process. Its conclusion was that it was apparent that the AONB Management Plan will make a significant contribution to advancing all aspects of the environment. Since the current and revised plans are similar in approach, the same encouraging conclusions hold. The AONB Management Plan is a force for environmental good, not environmental harm.

## 5. Screening

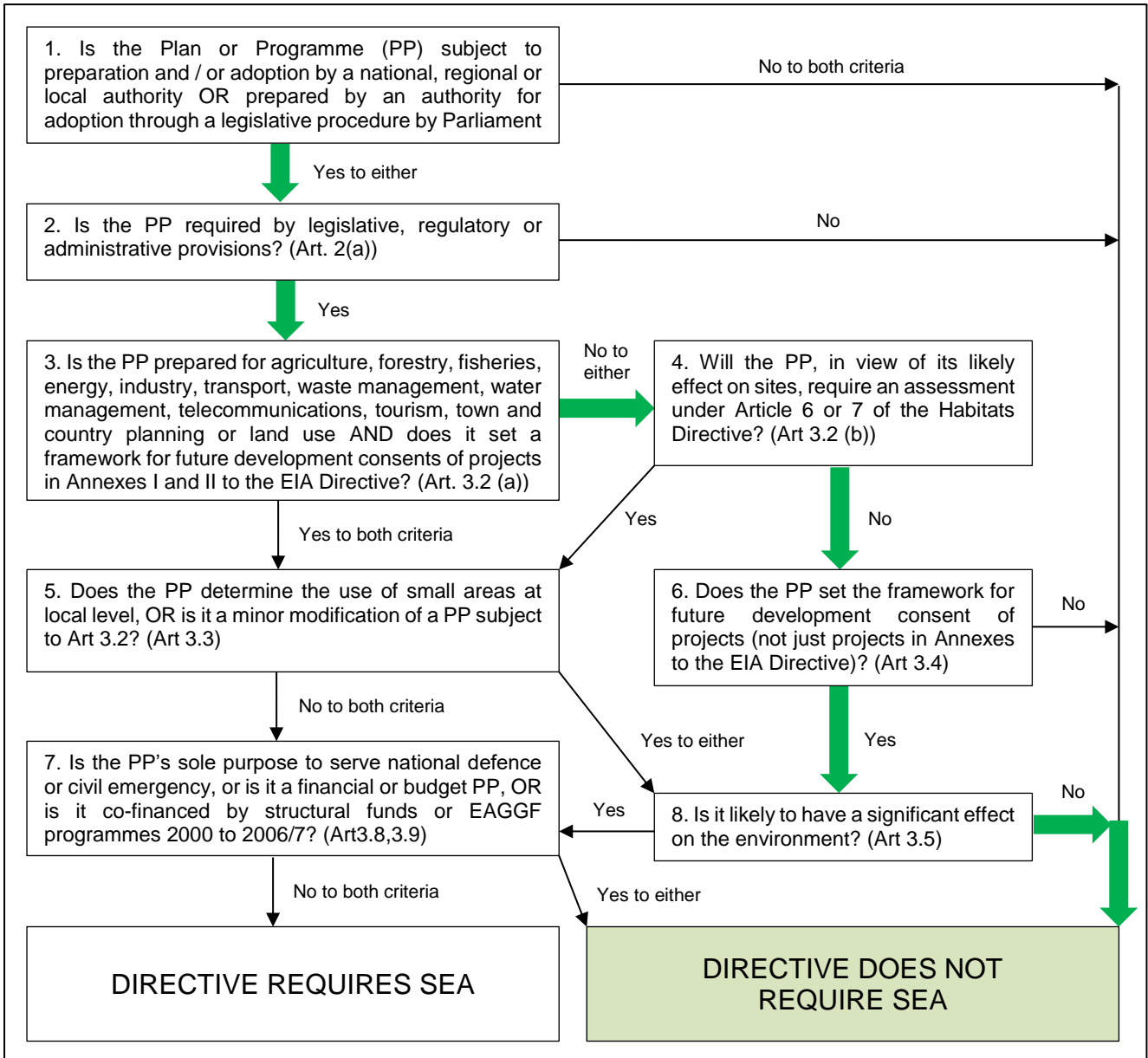
- 5.1. The SEA Directive and accompanying national regulations describe the types of plans for which the undertaking of SEA is mandatory. There are also a number of other plans where a decision must be taken on whether SEA should be undertaken.
- 5.2. The Government has set out in a series of steps a means to determine which plans and programmes require SEA<sup>3</sup>, as required by the SEA Directive. It describes the steps that should be taken to determine the need for SEA.
- 5.3. Figure 1 overleaf shows a considered view of the status of the AONB Management Plan 2019 – 2024 in relation to the requirements of the SEA Directive. The path taken by the AONB Management Plan is indicated by a series of green arrows. Further explanation of the reasons for selecting the Management Plan's pathway through the flow chart is shown in Table 1 (pages 10-11). An investigation of the significance of effects can be found in Table 2 in Appendix 1.

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<sup>3</sup> ODPM, 2006, *A Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive*



**Figure 1: Deciding whether the SEA Directive is applicable to the AONB Management Plan**



**Table 1. Explanation of Reasons for Pathway through SEA Flowchart**

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 AONB Management Plan will be prepared and adopted by the Chilterns Conservation Board, a statutory independent corporate body set up by Parliamentary Order under the provisions of Section 86 of the Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000. The Chilterns Conservation Board is tasked with preparing the AONB Management Plan under Section 89 of the CRoW Act. The Board is made up of 27 Board members representing national interest as well as all the local authorities of Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire, Oxfordshire and Bedfordshire that cover the Chilterns AONB:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DEFRA (8 in total)</li> <li>• Central Bedfordshire and Luton Borough Councils (unitary authorities):</li> <li>• Aylesbury Vale, Chiltern, North Hertfordshire, South Buckinghamshire, South Oxfordshire, Three Rivers and Wycombe District Councils;</li> <li>• Dacorum Borough Council:</li> <li>• The 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 AONB Management Plan is being prepared under section 89 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act, 2000
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 AONB Management 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 AONB.
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 AONB Management 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 the National Planning Practice Guidance explains that AONB Management Plans set the strategic context for development plans, and may be material considerations in planning decisions where they raise relevant issue (see <a href="#">NPPG para 004 Reference ID: 8-004-20140306</a>).</p>
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 AONB 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 AONB, which will have a moderating impact on any changes that may alter the environmental character of the AONB. See Appendix 1 for further exploration of significance of effects.

## **6. Conclusion**

6.1. The conclusion of this screening report is that a Strategic Environmental Assessment will not be required for the Chilterns AONB Management Plan 2019 to 2024. This is because the plan is unlikely to have significant effects on the environment.

6.2. 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**

7.1. The three statutory bodies for the purposes of SEA screening are Natural England, the Environment Agency and Historic England. These bodies will be consulted for their views on the conclusions of this screening assessment.

7.2. Following this consultation, a SEA screening statement will be published to show the conclusions of the screening exercise.

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

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.

The table below shows criteria of significance listed in Annex II of the SEA Directive alongside an assessment of their applicability to the Chilterns AONB Management Plan 2019 to 2024

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 AONB Management Plan will set a framework for a number of smaller scale projects.
The degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy.	Yes	The AONB 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	<p>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 AONB. This ensures that environmental considerations are fully integrated.</p> <p>The plan is considered highly beneficial to the achievement of sustainable development.</p>

Environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme	No	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>
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 AONB 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</li> </ul>

		<p>conserving special qualities so actions which are contrary to this are not promoted as part of the plan.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The condition of the AONB will be monitored as part of the management plan</li> </ul>
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 AONB 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.
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 AONB, 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 AONB 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 AONB 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 AONB management plan is unlikely to promote intensive land use, rather it helps promotes less intensive farming.
The value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to the effects on areas or landscapes which have a	No	The AONB is a highly valued nationally protected landscape designation. However,



<p>recognised national, Community or international protection status</p>		<p>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>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Overall level of significance:</b> <b>Unlikely to exhibit significant effects on the environment.</b></p>		



### Conservation Boards

A Conservation Board is a statutory independent corporate body set up by Parliamentary Order under the provisions of Section 86 of the Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000.

Section 87 of the CRoW Act sets out the purposes of a conservation board as:

- a) the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area of outstanding natural beauty, and
- b) the purpose of increasing the understanding and enjoyment by the public of the special qualities of the area of outstanding natural beauty

But if it appears to the board that there is a conflict between those purposes, they are to attach greater weight to the purpose mentioned in paragraph (a).

Furthermore "A conservation board, while having regard to the purposes mentioned in subsection (1) [of Section 87], shall seek to foster the economic and social well-being of local communities within the area of outstanding natural beauty, and shall for that purpose co-operate with local authorities and public bodies whose functions include the promotion of economic or social development within the area of outstanding natural beauty."

Section 85 of the CRoW Act states under "General duty of public bodies etc"

"(1) In exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in an area of outstanding natural beauty, a relevant authority shall have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area of outstanding natural beauty."

### List of Organisations providing Nominees to the Chilterns AONB Conservation Board

- Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire and Oxfordshire County Councils;
- Central Bedfordshire and Luton Borough Councils (unitary authorities);
- Aylesbury Vale, Chiltern, North Hertfordshire, South Buckinghamshire, South Oxfordshire, Three Rivers and Wycombe District Councils;
- Dacorum Borough Council;
- The Central Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire and Oxfordshire Parish Councils (6 elected in total), and
- DEFRA (8 in total).