



**Mendip Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
Management Plan 2019-2024**

Strategic Environmental Assessment Screening Report

November 2018

Report by Mendip Hills AONB Unit

Mendip Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2019-2024 Strategic Environmental Assessment Screening Report - November 2018

Introduction

- 1.1 This Screening Report considers if a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) will be required for the revised Mendip Hills AONB Management Plan 2019-2024. This Management Plan is a review of the previous Management Plan 2014-2019. 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.
- 1.2 A SEA was undertaken for the Mendip Hills AONB Management Plan 2009-2014. With the review of the Management Plan 2014-2019, a Scoping Report was undertaken and consulted on (consultees included Natural England, Environment Agency and English Heritage) and subsequently it was concluded that a Screening on the revised Mendip Hills AONB Management Plan 2014-2019 take place. The revised Management Plan 2014-2019 was a review of the Mendip Hills AONB Management Plan 2009-2014 rather than a fundamental rewrite. A Strategic Environmental Assessment Screening Report dated November 2013 was produced and it concluded that in terms of overall level of significance that the revised Management Plan 2014-2019 was 'unlikely to exhibit significant effects on the environment' and thus an SEA was not required.

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 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 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’.

That same guidance goes on to state that:

‘Given that all the extant AONB Management Plans have been assessed under the regulations, the AONB Partnership / Conservation Board (protected landscape managing body) may decide that the proposed changes to the extant plan are not likely to have a 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’.

- 2.3 This Screening Report has been drafted to enable a judgement to be made on whether an SEA should be undertaken. In line with the guidance outlined above, it discusses whether the Mendip Hills AONB Management Plan 2019 - 2024 is likely to exhibit significant environmental effects, and documents supporting reasons for the report’s conclusions. A further screening report, to establish whether appropriate assessment under the Habitats Regulations is necessary, is also published alongside this report.

3. The Mendip Hills AONB Management Plan 2019-2024

- 3.1 The draft Mendip Hills AONB Management Plan 2019-2024 sets out a vision for a living landscape as well as a series of objectives that relate to topics of relevance to the AONB. The vision, linked to the Management Plan themes, sets out the ideal state of the AONB in 15 years’ time.
- 3.2 The Vision sets out that *‘The Mendip Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty offers a wealth of opportunities for both people and wildlife to benefit from the nationally protected landscape. The living landscape conserves and enhances natural beauty, supporting the economy, health and well-being of our society’.*

Landscape Quality

Wide understanding and appreciation of the Mendip Hills as a protected area of distinct character created overtime by the interaction of people and nature. Its ecological, biological, cultural and scenic value conserved and enhanced.

Biodiversity and Geodiversity

Resilient and coherent ecological networks in place providing bigger, better and joined up habitats with no loss of characteristic species. The areas diverse geology is understood and managed for its importance both to the biodiversity and ecosystem services that benefit business, people and wildlife.

Historic Environment and Cultural Heritage

Enhanced understanding of the AONBs historic environment and cultural heritage with appropriate management in place to ensure all sites, structures and landscapes are conserved and enhanced and local communities and visitors enjoy a rich experience of sense of place.

Recreation, Access and Tourism

Provision for enjoyment by a diverse population, from both within and beyond the AONB boundary, through a wide range of active and quiet pursuits that the area can sustain. The area will be accessible, regardless of individual mobility, wealth or background.

Natural Resources

Integrated land use management that has restored and continues to enhance the areas natural capital including soils, food, and water supply.

Land Management

As the main land use agriculture continues to contribute to enhancing landscape character including ecological networks and the provision of benefits such as clean water. The area of woodland managed for fuel as well as wildlife and recreation has increased.

Development and Transport

Development in or near to the Mendip Hills AONB is sustainable and enhances and respects the special qualities of the area, including tranquillity, and contributes to the social and economic needs of the area.

Participation

Significant numbers of the local community accessing training and learning to benefit, their involvement in the conservation and enhancement of the Mendip Hills AONB, either through direct employment in the rural economy, or as custodians of the landscape influencing decision makers or volunteering.

- 3.3 The Management Plan 2019-2024 outlines objectives that relate to the vision which is essentially the same vision as was presented in the 2014 and 2009 Management Plans. Similarly, the themes within the revised Management Plan 2019-2024 reflect those within the previous Management Plan 2014-2019.
- 3.4 Appendix 1 shows how the objectives that underlie themes have changed between the current draft of the revised Mendip Hills AONB Management Plan 2019-2024 and the previous Management Plan 2014-2019. Generally, the divergence between old and new objectives is low.
- 3.5 The Management Plan 2019-2024 defines the 'special qualities' of the Mendip Hills AONB Management Plan. These special qualities reflect those within the Management Plan 2014-2019, however some rewording for clarity and to reflect how these special qualities together create the Mendip Hills AONB sense of place and identity has taken place.

These 'special qualities' include:

- The dark skies, tranquility, sense of remoteness and naturalness of the area.
- The distinctive limestone ridges and scarp slopes, rising from the Somerset Levels and Moors and windswept plateau punctuated by spectacular dry valleys and gorges, ancient sinkholes and depressions, and impressive rocky outcrops.
- Views towards the Mendip Hills and the distinctive hill line. The views out and panoramas, including across the Severn Estuary to Wales, the Somerset Levels and Moors and the Somerset Coast.
- A sparsely populated plateau, with settlements of Mendip stone largely confined to the spring line.
- The diverse and visible geology that ranges from Devonian to Jurassic in a relatively small area making it one of the best areas in the country to appreciate the relationships between geology, landscape and natural history, including the iconic Cheddar Gorge
- Caves, for their wildlife, geological, archaeological importance including Aveline's Hole the oldest cemetery site in Britain and Goughs Cave one of the most important Palaeolithic sites in Europe that provides a breeding site for Lesser and Greater Horseshoe bats.
- The limestone aquifer supplying water to the reservoirs of Cheddar, Chew Valley and Blagdon lakes and providing habitats of local and international importance for birds with Chew Valley Lake designated a Special Protection Area for bird species.
- The Chew Valley and the Yeo Valley - a farmed landscape with distinctive hedgerow patterns and hedgerow trees providing interconnected semi-natural habitats.
- Dry stone walls that criss-cross the plateau farmlands grazed by sheep, beef and dairy cattle are a key feature of the karst landscape and provide a unique habitat for wildlife corridors.
- Steep south-facing slopes of flower rich limestone grasslands including the Mendip Limestone Grasslands Special Area of Conservation and the area known as the Strawberry Belt of horticultural activity producing soft fruits.
- Ancient woodland and wooded combes on the north and south slopes offering varied habitats of national and international importance for a wide diversity of wildlife including dormouse and bats.

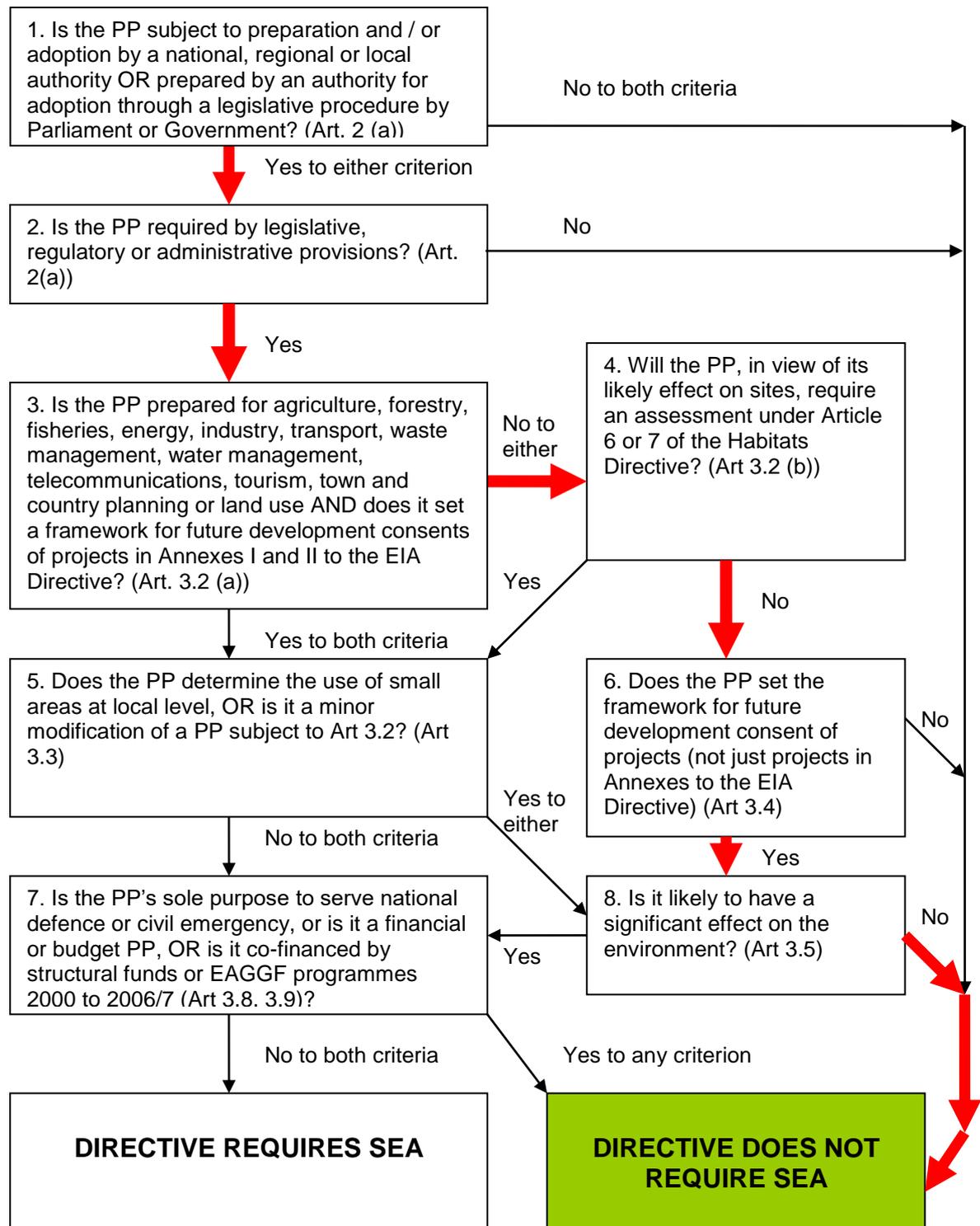
- A landscape tracing human settlement dating back 500,000 yrs. Henge monuments, barrows and hillforts through to World War 2 sites are prominent features on the plateau as are remnants of Roman and Victorian lead mining.
- A landscape engaging people in a wide range of interests and outdoor pursuits including caving, climbing, cycling and quieter activities including bird watching and walking, to experience the special qualities of the Mendip Hills AONB.

4. **Screening**

- 4.1 The SEA Directive and accompanying national regulations describe the types of plans for which the undertaking of SEA is mandatory. There are also several other plans where a decision must be taken on whether SEA should be undertaken.
- 4.2 The Government has set out in a series of steps a means to determine which plans and programmes require SEA¹, as required by the SEA Directive. Figure 1 describes the steps that should be taken to determine the need for SEA. The path taken by the AONB Management Plan is indicated by a series of red arrows.

¹ ODPM, 2006. A Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive, ODPM, London

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



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 Anticipated status of the AONB Management Plan 2019-2024
 (Adapted from ODPM, 2006)

4.3 Figure 1 shows a considered view of the status of the AONB Management Plan 2019-2024 in relation to the requirements of the SEA Directive. Further explanation of the reasons for selecting the Management Plan's pathway through the flow chart is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Establishing the need for SEA

Stage	Answer	Reason
1. Is the 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	The AONB Management Plan will be prepared and adopted by Somerset County Council, North Somerset Council, Bath and North East Somerset Council, Mendip District Council, Sedgemoor District Council
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 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 concluded that there are unlikely to be significant negative effects on the network of European Sites in and around the AONB. ²
5. Does the PP determine the use of small areas at local level, OR is it a minor modification of	Not applicable	This question need only be answered if questions 3 or 4 are answered in the affirmative.

² The Habitats Regulations Assessment Screening report is being consulted on in parallel with this SEA screening report. Should the consultation result in changes to the conclusions presented, this SEA screening report will be updated in line with those changes.

a PP subject to Art 3.2? (Art 3.3)		
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) ³	?	<p>A narrower interpretation of ‘framework for development consents’ would exclude the AONB Management Plan as it does not direct projects that would generally fall within the planning system.</p> <p>However, public bodies have a duty to consider the natural beauty of AONBs in their decisions, including in planning decisions⁴. Taking a broader interpretation of ‘framework’ (see footnote 3), the Management Plan may affect the outcome of future development consents, though only in as much as they affect the special qualities of the AONB.</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)?	Not applicable	This question need only be answered if the answer to question 6 is ‘no’. Or the answer to question 8 is ‘yes’.
8. Is it likely to have a significant effect on the environment? (Art 3.5) (See appendix for criteria and	No	The relatively small-scale improvements to the AONB resulting from the strategic direction given by the AONB

³ The Directive is not clear on what constitutes a framework for development consents, but a broad interpretation has been taken in this assessment, informed partly by wider experience of SEA as described in the Resource Manual to Support Application of the UNECE Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment (United Nations draft document, 2006). This describes such frameworks as documents that place limits on types of activity from an area, contain conditions to be met by applicants if permission is to be granted, or that are designed to preserve certain characteristics of an area. (See:

http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/eia/sea_manual/documents/SEA%20Manual%20-%20Chapter%20A3%20-%20slides.pdf)

⁴ Part IV, Section 85 (1) of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 establishes a general duty on public bodies: “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”. Public bodies are listed as relevant authorities.

<p>characteristics determining significance)</p>		<p>management plan are unlikely to have significant negative effects on the environment. In addition, the objectives and actions in general seek to maintain and enhance the special qualities of the AONB, which will have a moderating impact on development and other actions that may seek to modify the environmental character of the AONB.</p> <p>Criteria for significance are presented in Annex II of the SEA Directive, in which a range of characteristics of plans are listed as influencing judgements on significance, as well as a range of characteristics of the area likely to be affected by the plan. Appendix 2 at the end of this report shows the SEA Directive's significance criteria alongside the likely effects of the plan.</p>
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5. Conclusion

- 5.1 The conclusion of this screening report is that a Strategic Environmental Assessment will not be required for the Mendip Hills AONB Management Plan (2019-2024). This is because the plan is unlikely to display significant environmental effects.
- 5.2 Further work is being undertaken via a Habitats Regulations Assessment screening. This HRA Screening Report on the draft Management Plan will consider if there are any significant effects on European Sites and will be subject to consultation⁵ by Natural England to consider whether an appropriate assessment⁶ under the Habitats Regulations is considered necessary.

⁵ Section 61(3 and 4) of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations, 2010 state that “(3) *The competent authority must for the purposes of the assessment consult the appropriate nature conservation body and have regard to any representations made by that body within such reasonable time as the authority specify*”, and “(4) *They must also, if they consider it appropriate, take the opinion of the general public, and if they do so, they must take such steps for that purpose as they consider appropriate*”

⁶ Appropriate assessment is the detailed stage of Habitats Regulations Assessment that is required when significant effects on Natura 2000 sites are likely.

6. Consultation

- 6.1 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. In addition, this report will be placed on the AONB website with the final draft Mendip Hills AONB Management Plan (2019-2024), which will be circulated to the AONB Partnership in November 2018.
- 6.2 Following this consultation an SEA screening statement will be published to show the conclusions of the screening exercise.

Appendix 1: Comparison of AONB Management Plan Objectives

2019-2024 Management Plan Draft Objective	Is there a similar 2014 Management Plan objective	Divergence	Notes on likely significance of divergence to the environment
Landscape Quality			
L1 Promote appropriate management to ensure that the distinctive Mendip Hills AONB landscape is conserved and enhanced.	L1 Promote appropriate management to ensure that the distinctive Mendip Hills AONB landscape is maintained and enhanced.	Low Slight rewording.	<u>Not significant</u>
L2 provide opportunities to acquire and develop skills required to care for and promote the landscape and its special qualities.	L2 provide opportunities to acquire and develop skills required to care for and promote the landscape and its special qualities.	None	N/A
L3 Increase awareness and appreciation of the purposes of designation and the special qualities of the AONB.	L3 Increase awareness and appreciation of the purposes of designation and the special qualities of the AONB.	None	N/A
L4 Increase awareness of the benefits of supporting local products and services that help conserve and enhance the landscape.	L4 Increase awareness of the benefits of supporting local products and services that help conserve and enhance the landscape.	None	N/A
Biodiversity and Geodiversity			
BG1 Ensure that there is no net loss of characteristic habitats and species.	BG1 Ensure that there is no net loss of characteristic habitats and species.	None	N/A
BG2 Promote a landscape scale approach to the conservation and enhancement of ecological networks within and adjoining the AONB.	BG2 Promote a landscape scale approach to the conservation and expansion of coherent and resilient ecological networks within and adjoining the AONB.	Low Objective amended for legibility reasons following consultation.	<u>Not significant</u>
BG3 Increase awareness and monitoring of the biodiversity resource of the Mendip Hills AONB so that it is sufficiently understood to continue to guide the	BG3 Increase awareness and monitoring of the biodiversity resource of the Mendip Hills AONB so that it is sufficiently understood to continue to guide the	None	N/A

successful conservation of the characteristic habitats and species.	successful conservation of the characteristic habitats and species.		
BG4 promote a holistic approach to implementing the AONB Management Plan objectives and National Character Area Statements of Opportunity.	BG4 promote a holistic approach to implementing the AONB Management Plan objectives, National Character Area Statements of Opportunity and a locally determined Nature Improvement Area's objective.	Low Nature Improvement Areas no longer in use.	<u>Not significant</u>
BG5 Recognise and celebrate geological sites and features of the Mendip Hills AONB to ensure the successful conservation both of the geology and wildlife habitat they provide.	BG5 Recognise and celebrate geological sites and features of the Mendip Hills AONB to ensure the successful conservation both of the geology and wildlife habitat they provide.	None	N/A
BG6 Increase awareness of the Mendip Hills geology, particularly cave systems in relation to the importance they play in water management and water supply.	BG6 Increase awareness of the Mendip Hills geology, particularly cave systems in relation to the importance they play in water management and water supply.	None	N/A
Historic Environment and Cultural Heritage			
H1 Improve the recording, interpretation and understanding of all aspects of the AONBs historic environment to ensure local communities and visitors enjoy a rich experience of the sense of place.	H1 Improve the recording, interpretation and understanding of all aspects of the AONBs historic environment to ensure local communities and visitors enjoy a rich experience of the sense of place.	None	N/A
H2 Increase awareness and communicate the significance of the high quality historic environment of the Mendip Hills AONB.	H2 Increase awareness and communicate the significance of the high quality historic environment of the Mendip Hills AONB.	None	N/A
H3 Promote appropriate management of sites, structures and landscapes designated for their international, national, regional or local importance in the historic environment to ensure no further loss of heritage assets.	H3 Promote appropriate management of sites, structures and landscapes designated for their international, national, regional or local importance in the historic environment to ensure no further loss of heritage assets.	None	N/A
Recreation, Access and Tourism			
R1 Maintain, improve and promote public	R1 Maintain, improve and promote public	None	N/A

access and quiet recreational activities with measures to ensure access for all in accordance with the purposes of AONB designation.	access and quiet recreational activities with measures to ensure access for all in accordance with the purposes of AONB designation.		
R2 Support the development of tourism that benefits the local economy, conserves and enhances the landscape and improves understanding of the Mendip Hills.	R2 Support the development of tourism and day visits that benefits the local economy, conserves and enhances the landscape and improves understanding of the Mendip Hills.	Low Omitted 'day visits' as tourism encapsulates this.	<u>Not significant</u>
R3 Develop and promote more sustainable methods of travel to and around the AONB for enjoyment and recreation.	R3 Develop and promote more sustainable methods of travel to and around the AONB for enjoyment and recreation.	None	N/A
R4 Support healthy lifestyles by encouraging more people to use the Mendip Hills for sustainable outdoor activities.	R4 Support healthy lifestyles by encouraging more people to use the Mendip Hills for sustainable outdoor activities	None	N/A
Natural Resources			
N1 Recognise and promote the benefits and relevance of the AONB as a valuable source of ecosystem services, economic and health benefits.	N1 Recognise and promote the benefits and relevance of the AONB as a valuable source of ecosystem services, economic and health benefits.	None	N/A
N2 Promote conservation of water resources and enhance water quality, taking measures to reduce low flows and flooding by appropriate management and use.	N2 Promote conservation of water resources and enhance water quality, taking measures to reduce low flows and flooding by appropriate management and use.	None	N/A
N3 Promote sustainable management of soils in accordance with best practice to minimise erosion and water pollution and maximise resilience to drought.	N3 Promote sustainable management of soils in accordance with best practice to minimise erosion and water pollution and maximise resilience to drought.	None	N/A
Land Management			
LM1 Support and promote farming to ensure it remains as the principle land and contributes to maintaining the special	LM1 Support sustainable farming to ensure it remains as the principle land and contributes to maintaining the special	Low Updated text to both support	<u>Not significant</u>

qualities of the AONB.	qualities of the AONB.	and promote following consultation.	
LM2 Support and promote rural land management that conserves and enhances natural resources, including biodiversity special to the Mendip Hills, landscape character the historic environment and aids public awareness and enjoyment of the Mendip Hills AONB.	LM2 Support and promote rural land management that conserves and enhances natural resources, including biodiversity, landscape character the historic environment and aids public awareness and enjoyment of the Mendip Hills AONB.	Low Updated text as relates to biodiversity for clarity following consultation.	<u>Not significant</u>
LM3 Support and promote a sustainable woodland economy that enhances the Mendip Hills AONB woodlands and wider landscape with targeted woodland management and creation in appropriate locations supporting wood fuel and local community opportunities.	LM3 Promote a sustainable woodland economy that enhances the Mendip Hills AONB woodlands and wider landscape with targeted woodland management and creation in appropriate locations supporting wood fuel and local community opportunities.	Low Update text to both support and promote following consultation.	<u>Not significant</u>
LM4 Influence the use, restoration and after use of all quarries to minimise the impact on the landscape and to be compatible with the purposes of the AONB designation.	LM4 Influence the use, restoration and after use of all quarries to minimise the impact on the landscape and to be compatible with the purposes of the AONB designation.	None	N/A
Development and Transport			
D1 Ensure that development in the AONB and its setting, is of a nature, scale, location and design that meets community without compromising the special qualities of the Mendip Hills AONB.	D1 Ensure that development in the AONB and its setting, is of a nature, scale, location and design that meets community without compromising the special qualities of the Mendip Hills AONB.	None	N/A
D2 As part of transport planning, ensure that the special qualities of the AONB are fully respected in the design, provision and management of all types of transport and associated infrastructure.	D2 As part of transport planning, ensure that the special qualities of the AONB are fully respected in the design, provision and management of all types of transport and associated infrastructure.	None	N/A
D3 Encourage reduction in Carbon emissions within the AONB through	D3 Encourage reduction in Carbon emissions within the AONB through	None	N/A

reducing energy consumption, applying energy conservation measures, encouraging more sustainable patterns of development, and utilising renewable energy generation technologies that are of an appropriate type and scale for their siting.	reducing energy consumption, applying energy conservation measures, encouraging more sustainable patterns of development, and utilising renewable energy generation technologies that are of an appropriate type and scale for their siting.		
D4 Ensure issues of importance for the management of the AONB landscape are fully reflected in strategies and plans produced by other agencies and local communities.	D4 Ensure issues of importance for the management of the AONB landscape are fully reflected in strategies and plans produced by other agencies and local communities.	None	N/A
D5 The impact of development on the protected landscape and the special qualities of the Mendip Hills AONB would need to be carefully considered, and where supported would require appropriate and acceptable mitigation measures.		Low A new objective included to support opportunities for appropriate and acceptable mitigation measures to support the requirement of conserve and enhance.	<u>Not significant</u>
Participation			
P1 Increase the opportunities for volunteering and the range of people participating, to benefit the environment, peoples well being and the local communities in and around the AONB.	P1 Increase the opportunities for volunteering and the range of people participating, to benefit the environment, peoples well being and the local communities in and around the AONB.	None	N/A
P2 Encourage the involvement of local people and the wider community in the Management of the AONB.	P2 Encourage the involvement of local people and the wider community in the Management of the AONB.	None	N/A
P3 Promote the Mendip Hills as an educational resource for all ages and encourage sharing of research and learning tools.	P3 Promote the Mendip Hills as an educational resource for all ages and encourage sharing of research and learning tools.	None	N/A

Appendix 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 significant.

Table 2: Table showing criteria of significance listed in Annex II of the SEA Directive alongside an assessment of their applicability to the AONB Management Plan 2019-2024

Characteristic of significance	Is it significant?	Likely effect of plan
1. The characteristics of plans and programmes, having regard to:		
The degree to which the plan or programme sets a framework for projects and other activities, either about the location, nature, size and operating conditions or by allocating resources.	Yes	The AONB Management Plan will set a framework for several 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 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 AONB. 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 2014-2019 Management Plan and the 2009-2014 Management Plan which had been subject to SEA and shown not to exhibit significant environmental effects. It is highly likely to lessen problems such as atmospheric, soil and water pollution, loss of biodiversity, loss of landscape character, and deterioration of cultural heritage.
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 a requirement of national legislation (the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000) which is not transposed from higher Community legislation.
2. Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard to:		
The probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects.	No	The AONB Management Plan is unlikely to exhibit significant long term / frequent / irreversible effects as: -Objectives and

		<p>actions generally link to and support national or local initiatives that are designed to enhance the quality of the rural environment.</p> <p>-Objectives are linked to preserving special qualities so actions which are contrary to this are not promoted as part of the Plan.</p> <p>-The condition of the AONB will be monitored as part of the implementation of the Management Plan.</p>
The cumulative nature of the effects.	No	The generally positive environmental improvements are likely to negate / offset cumulative environmental effects arising from outside sources.
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	No	The AONB is a highly valued area that

likely to be affected due to: special natural characteristics or cultural heritage.		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 Plan 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 promote 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 recognised national, Community or international protection status.	No	The AONB 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

		<p>shown to be similar to those in the previous 2014-2019 Management Plan and the 2009-2014 Mendip Hills AONB Management Plan for which a previous SEA did not identify significant environmental effects.</p>
<p>Overall level of significance: Unlikely to exhibit significant effects on the environment.</p>		