

**Appropriate Assessment Screening  
of the Blackdown Hills Area of  
Outstanding Natural Beauty  
Management Plan 2019-24**

Prepared for:

**The Blackdown Hills AONB  
Partnership**

By:

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Group



Appropriate Assessment Screening of the Blackdown Hills Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2019-24 consultation draft (October 2018) under the Habitats Regulations 2010.

Issue 2

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## SUMMARY

Devon County Council Environment Group was appointed by the Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Partnership in September 2018 to undertake the Screening Stage of an Appropriate Assessment (AA) for the Blackdown Hills AONB Management Plan 2019-24.

'Appropriate Assessment (AA)' is required under the EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC), as transposed into the Habitats Regulations 2010, for any proposed plan or project which may have a significant effect on one or more European sites and which is not necessary for the management of those sites. The purpose of AA is to determine whether or not significant effects are likely and to suggest ways in which they could be avoided.

This report summarises the results of the Screening process, carried out to establish whether the Management Plan might have any 'Likely Significant Effects' (LSEs) on any European site and therefore to determine whether a full AA would be required for the Plan.

The assessment is of the draft Management Plan objectives and policies. Following public consultation and responses to the parallel Strategic Environmental Assessment the AONB Partnership will publish its final Management Plan.

Possible effects of the Management Plan were reviewed for the following European Sites:

- Quants Special Area of Conservation (SAC)
- River Axe Special Area of Conservation (SAC)

Provided that the objectives and policies remain unchanged, no Likely Significant Effects (LSEs) are identified for European sites. Indeed, many of the objectives and policies specifically refer to the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty and as such will help to provide protection for European sites. Therefore, there is no need to progress to the full Appropriate Assessment stage and the AONB Partnership may adopt the Management Plan according to the Habitats Regulations 2010.

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## 1 Introduction

This report presents the results of the screening stage of the Appropriate Assessment (AA) process for the Blackdown Hills AONB Management Plan, 2019-24. This entails a review of the proposed Plan to identify any 'Likely Significant Effects' (LSEs) on the conservation objectives of European sites. If, following screening, LSEs are anticipated, subsequent stages of AA would consider these in more detail and determine whether alternative measures could be adopted. If there are no viable alternatives, a Plan can only be implemented if there are 'imperative reasons of overriding public interest'.

### 1.1 The Structure of this Report

This chapter (Chapter 1) explains the requirement for AA for the AONB Management Plan, summarises the AA process and explains the purpose of screening in more detail.

Chapter 2 identifies the European Sites which could be affected.

Chapter 3 summarises the plan to be assessed: the Blackdown Hills AONB Management Plan, 2019-24. It presents the results from screening of objectives and policies and identifies possible effects on European Sites. Screening matrices are provided as Tables 3 and 4.

Chapter 4 explains why in this case potential "In Combination Effects" are not analysed.

Chapter 5 reviews recommendations.

Chapter 6 draws a conclusion for the screening process.

Appendix 1 provides details of the European sites included in screening.

### 1.2 The European Habitats Directive

Habitat Regulation Assessments (HRAs) are required under the UK Habitats Regulations. Under the European Habitats Directive, the Blackdown Hills AONB is required to undertake an HRA of the draft management plan to determine whether its policies and actions are likely to have a significant adverse effect on any internationally recognised sites of nature conservation interest (also known as 'Natura 2000' or European sites). These sites include Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs). If there are significant adverse effects, then there is an examination of alternative policies or avoidance and mitigation measures. The intent is to prevent the plan from detrimentally influencing any European site's conservation objectives.

Article 2 of the Habitats Directive requires the maintenance or restoration of habitats and species of European Community interest, at a favourable conservation status. Articles 3 - 9 provide the legislative means to protect habitats and species of Community interest. In particular, Article 6 (3) of the Directive 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".*

#### **The requirement for Appropriate Assessment of the AONB Management Plan**

Paragraph 102 of the Habitats Regulations 2010 transposes into English Law the requirement to carry out Appropriate Assessment for land use plans. While it is a matter of interpretation as to whether AONB Management Plans constitute land use plans Natural England advise that they should be treated as such for the purposes of this regulation. Therefore the AONB Partnership, as the plan-making authority, must, before the plan is given effect, make an appropriate assessment of the implications for the site in view of that site's conservation objectives where (a) the plan is likely to have a significant effect on a European site or a

European offshore marine site (either alone or in combination with other plans or projects), and (b) is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site.

### 1.3 The Appropriate Assessment (AA) Process

The purpose of AA is to ensure that significant effects on European sites are avoided. The assessment is carried out solely in respect of the 'conservation objectives' for which a European site has been designated and its integrity in relation to its ability to support those objectives. There are four stages:

- *Stage One: Screening*
  - To identify the likely impacts on a European site of a project or plan, either alone or in combination with other projects or plans, and consider whether these impacts are likely to be significant;
- *Stage Two: Appropriate Assessment (where there are likely to be significant impacts)*
  - To consider the impact on the integrity of the European site of the project or plan, either alone or 'in combination' with other projects or plans, with respect to the structure, function and conservation objectives of the site. Additionally, where there are adverse impacts, to assess the potential mitigation of those impacts;
- *Stage Three: Assessment of alternative solutions*
  - To examine alternative ways of achieving the objectives of the project or plan that avoid adverse impacts on the integrity of the European site;
- *Stage Four: Assessment where no alternative solutions exist (where adverse impacts remain)*
  - To assess compensatory measures where, in the light of an assessment of imperative reasons of overriding public interest, it is deemed that the project or plan should proceed.

Each stage determines whether a further stage in the process is required. If, for example, the conclusions at the end of Stage One are that there will be no significant impacts on the European site, there is no requirement to proceed further

#### Stage 1: Screening

The purpose of screening (this stage) is to identify whether any European site might be exposed to Likely Significant Effects (LSEs) and therefore to determine whether further stages of AA would be required.

However, it is important to consider the possibility of impacts for any European site which might be affected, whatever its location, given the activities included in the plan and their range of influence. This may extend some distance from the area within the immediate influence of a plan.

Sites which could possibly be affected were identified and information obtained about designated interest features and associated conservation objectives, largely using information contained on the JNCC website. These were reviewed against the Management Plan policies and objectives that might affect interest features or the ability to achieve favourable condition. The results are summarised in Appendix 1.

### 1.4 Consultation

This report is intended to provide the information required for the AONB Partnership to determine whether further stages of Appropriate Assessment are required for the AONB Management Plan. Consultation will be carried out with Natural England (as the statutory nature conservation body) to confirm sites and issues to be addressed and to review the methodology and approach. The report will also be available to other key stakeholders

including the Environment Agency and local authorities, and available for public comment on the AONB website.

## 2 European Sites Potentially Affected

Initial screening centred on the Appropriate Assessment Screening of the previous AONB Management Plan, together with checks on the JNCC online record of European sites for any additions or amendments that may have been made since 2013. Two European sites were identified that might possibly be affected by the Blackdown Hills AONB Management Plan and should be subject to Appropriate Assessment Screening.

These are:

- Quants SAC
- River Axe SAC (outside of the AONB but within 50 metres of the boundary at its nearest point)

The following European sites are within 15km of the AONB but are not included in the screening because of their distance from the AONB boundary and the absence of any impact pathway that might indicate that activity within the AONB could have an effect on the site. The distances at the nearest points are also shown.

- Beer Quarry and Caves SAC (9.0km)
- Holme Moor and Clean Moor SAC (7.8km)
- Sidmouth to West Bay SAC (8.9km)
- Lyme Bay and Torbay SAC (8.6km)
- East Devon Heaths SPA (11.6km)
- East Devon Pebblebed Heaths SAC (11.6km)
- Somerset Levels and Moors SPA (6.8km)
- Somerset Levels and Moors Ramsar Site (6.8km)
- Hestercombe House SAC (8.1km)

There are no candidate or potential sites or sites identified as or required for compensatory measures for any European site within the AONB or within 15km of its boundary.

The distribution and extent of the two screened European sites in relation to the AONB boundary are shown in Figure 1.



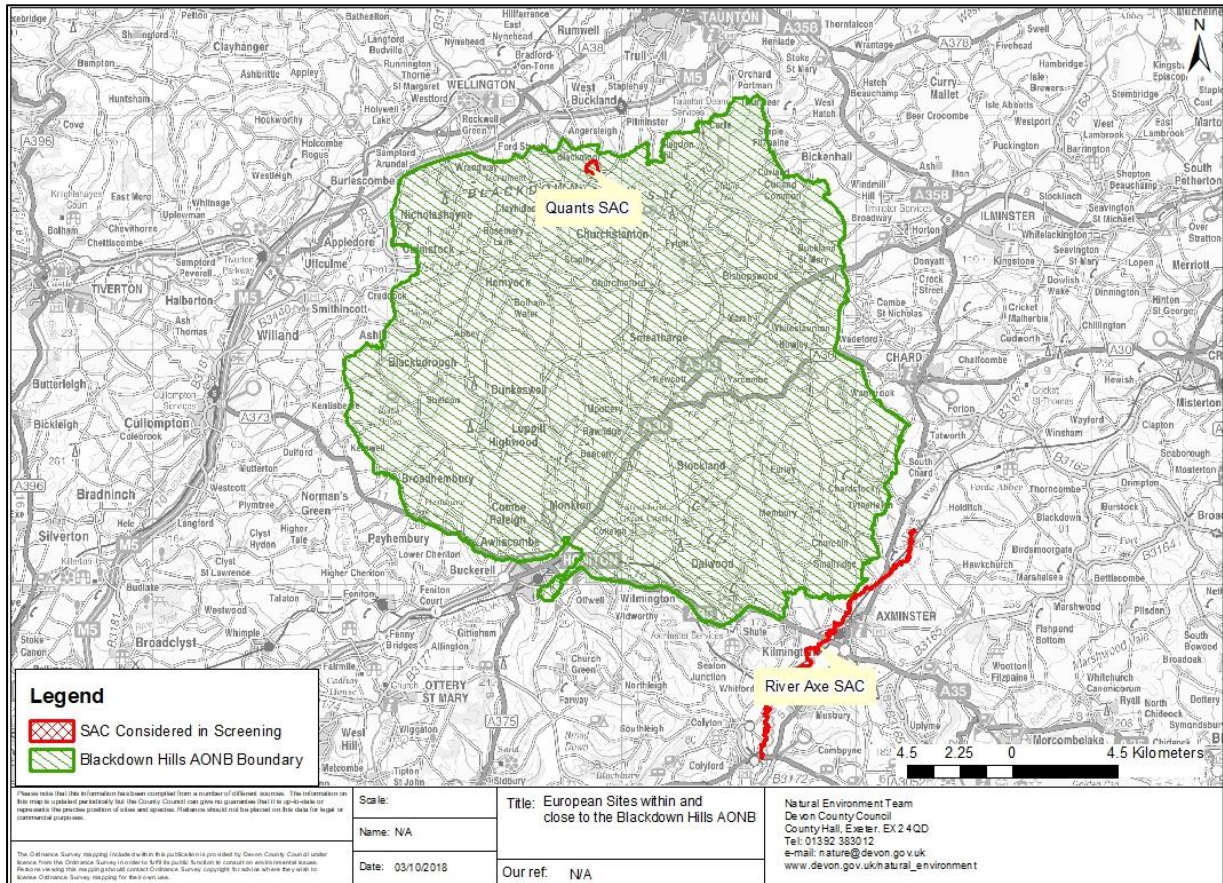


Figure 1 European Sites within and close to the Blackdown Hills AONB

Site descriptions are set out in Appendix 1. This includes the qualifying features, conservation objectives and requirements to maintain the favourable conservation status of the European sites.

Table 1 summarises the conditions necessary to maintain site integrity taking into account the qualifying features and conservation objectives.

Table 1 – Principal requirements to maintain site integrity

European Sites	Requirement
Quants SAC	Maintenance of specialist intensive habitat management for the marsh fritillary butterfly
River Axe	Protection of the water course from raised nutrient levels, most likely deriving from surrounding land use.

### 3 Blackdown Hills AONB Management Plan 2019-24

Figure 2 sets out the 20 Year Vision for the Blackdown Hills AONB as stated in the Management Plan 2014-19. It is understood that this is to remain unchanged for the 2019-24 Plan.

“The Blackdown Hills remains an ancient landscape of small villages and farms, deep valleys and high hedges shaped by its unique geology.

Its sense of tranquil timelessness and lack of change provides reassurance in a polluted, overcrowded world and give a sense of well-being to residents and visitors alike.

Its wildlife is thriving and heritage conserved due to sympathetic management that is keeping alive traditional skills.

Vibrant, diverse communities, with a strong sense of identity, live and work sustainably, supporting the local economy and conserving and enhancing the area’s rich resources for future generations...”

#### Figure 2 - 20-year Vision for Blackdown Hills AONB

In order to implement and deliver the vision, objectives and policies are set out in the Management Plan under the following themes:

- Landscape Character
- Historic Environment & Cultural Heritage
- Biodiversity and Geodiversity
- Natural Capital and Ecosystem Goods and Services
- Farming, Forestry and Land Management
- Access and Enjoyment
- Planning and Development
- Transport and Highways
- Rural Economy and Tourism
- Community and Culture
- Communication, Education and Awareness
- Partnership and Management

### 3.1 Screening of policies to identify Likely Significant Effects

Management plan objectives and policies were assessed to identify any likely significant effects on one or more European sites.

Policies were screened using the 9-point scoring system as outlined in **Table 2**.

For each policy, a score was assigned to each European site according to interpretation of the likely effects as set out in the 'Reasoning' column. The assessment takes account of the conservation objectives of each European site and the conditions required to maintain site integrity.

**Table 2 System for interpretation of likely effects of policies.**

<b>Effect</b>		<b>Reasoning</b>
<b>None</b>	<b>0</b>	The policy relates to activities which are not likely to have an effect on the Natura 2000 site by virtue of their specificity, scale, or distance from the site.
<b>No likely (negative) effect</b>	<b>1</b>	The policy is specifically intended to conserve and enhance biodiversity, and measures under this policy will not be likely to lead to negative effects on the Natura 2000 site.
	<b>2</b>	The policy is intended to conserve and enhance the natural, geological, built or historic environment and measures under this policy will not be likely to lead to negative effects on the Natura 2000 site.
	<b>3</b>	The policy is not likely to lead to activities which are likely to have a negative effect on the Natura 2000 site.
	<b>4</b>	The policy addresses activities which have the potential to affect the Natura 2000 site, but the policy itself is worded so as not to encourage activities or allow projects which would be likely to cause negative effects on the Natura 2000 site.
<b>Potential for a negative effect</b>	<b>5</b>	The policy addresses activities which have the potential to affect the Natura 2000 site, the effects of which may or may not be significant. But the policy itself could be reworded if necessary, so as not to support or encourage activities which would be likely to cause significant effects on the Natura 2000 site.
<b>Potential for a negative effect / effects uncertain</b>	<b>6</b>	The policy encourages activities which have the potential to affect the Natura 2000 site, but the likelihood and risk of significance of effects depends on the location, scale or design (& etc.) of individual schemes or projects. It is therefore more appropriate to screen individual schemes or projects as these come forward.
	<b>7</b>	The policy encourages activities in an area which have the potential to affect the Natura 2000 site, either directly or indirectly. Activities under this policy must be subject to assessment to establish, in the light of the site's conservation objectives, whether it can be objectively concluded that there would not be significant effects on the Natura 2000 site.
<b>Likely Significant Effect</b>	<b>8</b>	This policy makes provision for activities likely to have significant effects on the Natura 2000 site. Activities under this policy must be subject to appropriate assessment to establish, in the light of the site's conservation objectives, whether it can be objectively concluded that the activities would not have significant effects on the Natura 2000 site.

The screening results are shown in Table 3 and 4 below. Scores are colour coded according to the scheme in Table 2.

**Table 3 Assessment of effects of objectives on European Sites**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Quants SAC</b>	<b>River Axe SAC</b>
Landscape Character	The features that make the Blackdown Hills landscape distinctive at a national, regional and local level are conserved and enhanced.	2	2
Historic Environment and Cultural Heritage	To ensure effective conservation, management and understanding of the Blackdown Hills historic environment, including historic buildings, archaeological sites and heritage landscapes	2	2
Biodiversity and Geodiversity	To ensure effective conservation, enhancement, expansion and connectivity of habitats, forming coherent and resilient ecological networks across the Blackdown Hills and beyond, facilitating movement of priority species across the landscape	1	1
Natural Capital and Ecosystem Goods & Services	To conserve and enhance the natural capital stock of the AONB and maximise the flow of ecosystem goods and services they provide.	2	2
Farming, Forestry and Land Management	To support sustainable farming and forestry practices that conserve and enhance the special qualities of the AONB and deliver a range of ecosystem services.	1	1
Access and Enjoyment	To ensure that opportunities to explore and enjoy the Blackdown Hills countryside and special qualities are compatible with conserving and enhancing natural beauty.	2	2
Planning and Development	To conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the Blackdown Hills by ensuring that all development affecting the AONB is of the highest quality, sensitive to landscape setting and conserves its wildlife, historic character and other special qualities.	2	2
Transport and Highways	To ensure that the impact on the landscape, environment and enjoyment of the AONB is considered in the planning, provision and management of transport networks and services.	2	2
Rural Economy and Tourism	To sustain a local economy that is based on the resources of the AONB and conserves and enhances the natural beauty of the Blackdown Hills	4	4
Community and Culture	To foster vibrant, healthy and resilient communities who enjoy a high quality of life and feel connected to the AONB and its special qualities	3	3
Communication, Education and Awareness	To promote a greater understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of the Blackdown Hills AONB and wider recognition of the designation and its purpose.	2	2

Partnership and Management	To ensure that the special qualities of the AONB are quantified, understood, conserved and enhanced through an effective AONB Partnership	2	2
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**Table 4 Assessment of effects of policies on European Sites**

No.	Policies	Quants SAC	River Axe SAC
LC 1	Approach the conservation and enhancement of the AONB based on landscape character underpinned by comprehensive and up-to-date evidence bases that are also made widely available to decision makers and others	2	2
LC 2	Understand clearly the social, environmental and economic benefits of landscape and natural beauty and ensure this is reflected in decision making at every level, supported by sound evidence	2	2
LC 3	Promote high levels of peace and tranquillity with dark night skies by minimising noise, intrusive development and light pollution	2	2
LC 4	Support local distinctiveness	2	2
LC 5	The character of skylines and open views into, within and out of the AONB will be protected	2	2
LC 6	The deeply rural setting of much of the land adjoining the AONB boundary forms an essential setting for the AONB and care will be taken to maintain its quality and character	2	2
LC 7	Opportunities will be sought to strengthen landscape character by improving condition of landscape features in poor condition and reinstating landscape features identified as missing or fragmented	2	2
HE & CH 1	Conserve and enhance the historic built environment and rural heritage assets and integrate into other land management initiatives in the AONB	2	2
HE & CH 2	Regularly monitor the extent and condition of historic sites, features and landscapes in the AONB and promote the use of Historic Environment Record (HER), historic landscape characterisation and other tools to inform projects, policy-making and management activities	2	2
HE & CH 3	Gain a comprehensive understanding of the reasons for heritage being 'at risk' and in declining condition and make direct interventions to bring Scheduled Monuments and unscheduled sites into positive management and improving condition	2	2
HE & CH 4	Encourage and support training in traditional heritage skills.	2	2
HE & CH 5	Promote the sensitive interpretation of the AONB's historic environment to ensure local communities and visitors gain a good understanding and experience of place	2	2

BG 1	Take a strategic landscape scale-based approach to the creation, restoration and maintenance of habitats within the AONB (focussing on designated and undesignated priority sites) in order to ensure resilience to climate change and other pressures	1	1
BG 2	Connect habitats at a landscape scale and ensure permeability for species movement within coherent and resilient ecological networks	1	1
BG 3	Priority species (including Section 41, Devon Special Species, Protected Species) will be conserved. Targeted action will be taken to support the recovery of priority species	1	1
BG 4	Ensure sites of geological and geomorphological importance are appropriately managed to conserve their special features and reduce impacts of development	1	1
BG 5	Opportunities will be sought to maximise the benefits for wildlife and people from the positive management of all types of land including farmland, gardens, parks and community green spaces	1	1
BG 6	A strategic approach to the control, or eradication where feasible, of invasive non-native species will be taken where they threaten or damage local habitats and species and where action is practicable	1	1
BG 7	Increased recreational pressure will be resisted at locations where unacceptable damage or disturbance to vulnerable habitats or species is likely to arise	1	1
NC 1	Promote a catchment, multiple-benefit, collaborative based approach to soil conservation, water quality and flood alleviation improvements utilising the Otter, Axe, Culm and Parrett/Tone catchments	2	2
NC 2	Improve land management in respect of the control of surface water run-off, to mitigate against flooding during more extreme weather events. Where appropriate within the landscape, seek to reinstate or improve the management of woodland, wetland and hedges to slow and store run-off	2	2
NC 3	Support studies, research and improve understanding of the AONB's rich stock of natural capital and ensure that its value to society (in terms of flow of goods and services) is recognised and understood by decision-makers and others	2	2
NC 4	Encourage local communities, businesses and visitors to respect the environment and minimise their carbon footprint	2	2
FLM 1	A profitable, sustainable and environmentally beneficial farming and land management sector providing a range of public goods and services will be fostered as one of	2	2

	the principal means of maintaining the special qualities and distinctive landscape of the AONB		
FLM2	Encourage a high take-up of agri-environment schemes especially high quality environmental land management that help conserve and enhance the natural beauty through sustainable farming and forestry practices	2	2
FLM 3	Support will be sought for clusters of land managers who sustain land of exceptional landscape and nature conservation interest, in recognition of the value these systems provide to society	2	2
FLM 4	Encourage the production and marketing of local food and other agricultural products where these are compatible with the AONB designation.	2	2
FLM 5	Support and promote initiatives that encourage sensitive environmental management of field boundaries and hedgerow trees, woodlands, particularly those that conserve ancient woodland and veteran trees, orchards and restore the original broadleaved character of plantations on ancient woodland sites.	1	1
FLM 6	Give careful consideration to the landscape and visual impact of new woodland planting schemes	2	2
FLM 7	Control, mitigate and monitor damaging diseases such as ash dieback	3	3
FLM 8	Influence rural farm and rural business support mechanisms and act as a testbed for and monitor the impacts of agricultural policy reform on rural character	2	2
FLM 9	Wider community engagement with the farming and land management sector will enable a deeper understanding of the important role played by land managers in maintaining the AONB's special qualities	3	3
AE 1	Take a co-ordinated, strategic and planned approach to the management of public rights of way and publicly accessible land to achieve an accessible, well-connected network that conserves and enhances the special qualities of the AONB, avoids impact on sensitive sites and minimises conflict between different interests.	2	2
AE 2	Opportunities will be sought to extend and improve the rights of way network, including improving connections with surrounding settlements where this is compatible with conserving and enhancing natural beauty.	4	4



AE 3	Opportunities to use the Blackdown Hills AONB to benefit the health and well-being of residents and visitors will be sought and promoted, seeking a range of sensitive and sustainable access opportunities for users of all abilities to enjoy the special qualities of the AONB.	3	3
PD 1	All local and neighbourhood plan documents and planning decision-making will have regard to the AONB purpose, the management plan and other AONB statements and guidance, and ensure that conserving and enhancing the special qualities of the AONB is given great weight.	3	3
PD 2	All necessary development affecting the AONB will conserve and enhance natural beauty and special qualities by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Respecting landscape character, settlement patterns and local character of the built environment</li> <li>- Being sensitively sited and of appropriate scale</li> <li>- Reinforcing local distinctiveness</li> <li>- Seeking to protect and enhance natural features and biodiversity</li> </ul>	4	4
PD 3	Support measures to improve energy efficiency and resource use and support appropriate small-scale renewable energy schemes that do not detract from historic character or visual amenity, and do not conflict with the special qualities of the AONB or the conservation of natural beauty.	3	3
PD 4	Support the provision of affordable housing to meet identified local needs in locations with access to employment and local services, ensuring that developments are appropriately scaled and sited to respect landscape and settlement character, and avoiding impacts on nature conservation and historic interests.	2	2
TH 1	Road and transport schemes (including design, maintenance, signage, landscaping and safety measures) affecting the AONB will be undertaken in a manner that is sensitive and appropriate to landscape character, having regard to the purpose of AONB designation and conserving and enhancing the area's special qualities. The landscape and cultural features of the AONB's road network (including hedge banks, flower-rich verges, and locally distinctive historic highway furniture) will be protected and conserved	2	2
TH 2	Traffic management measures will be supported which reduce the impact of large and heavy vehicles on the most minor roads and help to provide a safer environment for walking, cycling and horse riding, where this is compatible with conserving and enhancing natural beauty.	2	2

TH 3	Promote the development of high quality, integrated and sustainable transport services and initiatives in and around the AONB where they can be achieved without compromising the conservation of natural beauty and local character.	2	2
RET 1	Support the principle of local markets and sustainable local products where it adds value to the local economy without compromising the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty and the special qualities of the AONB.	4	4
RET 2	Economic capacity and skills in the area will be supported through training opportunities, community enterprise, business networking and cooperation especially where these assist businesses to contribute to AONB purposes	4	4
RET 3	Tourism and recreation provision will contribute to the local economy without harming the Blackdown Hills landscape, historic environment, biodiversity or tranquillity, and respecting the special qualities of the AONB.	4	4
CC 1	Local communities will be supported to identify, plan, and provide for their own needs, in undertaking community activities to encourage sustainable lifestyles, reinforce local cultural traditions, and in celebrating their achievements and strengths.	3	3
CC 2	Community-led planning tools (neighbourhood plans, parish plans, village design statements and others) that contribute to conserving and enhancing the AONB will be supported.	3	3
CC 3	Support and promote initiatives that help to provide, retain or enhance community facilities and services where compatible with conserving and enhancing natural beauty.	3	3
CEA 1	Through promotion and education make more people aware of what makes the Blackdown Hills special, inspiring them to help care for the area and contribute to its conservation and enhancement.	3	3
CEA 2	Develop and support a range of opportunities for active engagement with the countryside, wildlife and heritage of the Blackdown Hills AONB, promoting the benefits that the natural environment provides to us.	3	3
PM 1	Encourage co-ordination and partnership amongst the wide range of national and regional agencies and organisations to secure funding for the care and enhancement of the AONB	3	3
PM 2	Promote and highlight good practice within the AONB and the role and activities of the AONB Partnership	3	3

PM 3	Monitor the state of the landscape to identify where erosion and enhancement of the quality of the AONB is taking place and develop feedback mechanisms for corrective management	3	3
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It is immediately apparent from the colour coding of the two European site columns in Table 3 and 4, that the screening for all the objectives and policies finds an absence of likely significant effects.

The reasons for the conclusions are variously (a) the objective or policy is specifically intended to conserve and enhance biodiversity (score 1) (b) the objective or policy is intended to protect other attributes of the AONB and will not affect European sites (score 2) (c) the objective or policy is not likely to lead activities that will adversely affect European sites (score 3) or (d) the objective or policy could lead to activities that adversely affect European sites but are already worded in such a way as to avoid this.

#### **4 Other plans and programmes**

As part of the screening process, it is also necessary to consider whether the proposed plan might have any significant adverse effects 'In combination' with other plans. 'In combination' refers to the cumulative effect of influences acting on sites from other relevant plans and projects in the context of prevailing environmental conditions. This process therefore takes account of reasonably foreseeable impacts arising from both plans and projects and from 'background' environmental changes or trends.

However, given that screening of the plan itself concludes that the plan will not have significant effects on one or more European sites then it is not deemed necessary to undertake an in-combination analysis.

#### **5 Recommendations**

Screening of current objective and policy wording in the Management Plan found that none of the objectives and policies has the potential to have significant adverse effects on European sites.

The primary purpose of AONB designation is to conserve and enhance natural beauty and it is long established in English law that the concept of natural beauty encompasses wildlife/biodiversity considerations. References to the purposes of AONB designation or the special qualities of the AONB therefore encompass biodiversity values and the inclusion of these words can be taken to ensure that the potential for adverse effects on European sites is avoided in policy implementation.

#### **6 Conclusion**

This Appropriate Assessment Screening has considered the objectives and policies in the draft Blackdown Hills AONB Management Plan 2019-24 for their potential effects on the two European sites inside or very close to the AONB. Provided that the objectives and policies remain unchanged from those listed in Table 4, the competent authority can conclude for the purposes of the Habitat Regulations 2010 that the plan will not have significant effects on any European site, and therefore it is not necessary to proceed to full Appropriate Assessment.

## 7 Glossary

<b>Appropriate Assessment (AA)</b>	An assessment of the affect of a plan or project on the Natura 2000 network. The network comprises Special Protection Areas under the Birds Directive and Special Areas of Conservation under the Habitats Directive (collectively referred to as European sites)
<b>Avoidance</b>	Prevents impacts on European sites from happening in the first place.
<b>Compensation</b>	Off-site offsetting put in place where a significant impact will occur, where there is no alternative, and where the plan is deemed necessary.
<b>Competent authority</b>	The plan-making / decision-making authority.
<b>Conservation Objectives</b>	A statement of the nature conservation aspirations for a site, expressed in terms of the favourable condition required for the habitats and / or species for which the site was selected.
<b>European sites</b>	Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Special Areas of Conservation (SACs). Includes Ramsar sites in this report.
<b>Favourable condition</b>	Designated land is adequately conserved and is meeting its 'conservation objectives', however, there is scope for enhancement.
<b>Habitats Directive</b>	Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and Wild Flora and Fauna.

**Habitats Regulations**

Formally known as The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 (Statutory Instrument 2010 No 490). These transpose the requirements of the Habitats Directive into domestic legislation.

**Imperative reasons of overriding public interest (IROPI)**

The Habitats Regulations require competent authorities to establish that there are no alternative solutions before a plan or project can be considered for imperative reasons of overriding public interest. Judgements involve an assessment of the importance of the proposal and whether it is sufficient to override the nature conservation importance of that site.

**In-combination**

The cumulative effects caused by the project or plan that is currently under consideration, together with the effects of any existing or proposed projects or plans.

**Integrity**

The integrity of a site is the coherence of its ecological structure and function, across its whole area that enables it to sustain the habitat, complex of habitats and / or the levels of populations of the species for which it was classified.

**Member State**

Nation state member of the EU

**Mitigation**

Reduces the impact on site integrity to the point where it no longer has adverse effects.

**Natura 2000**

A Europe-wide network of sites of international importance for nature conservation established under the

	<p>European Community Directive on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora (92/43/EEC; 'Habitats Directive').</p>
<b>Natural England</b>	<p>Natural England is the government's adviser for the natural environment in England, and works for people, places and nature to enhance biodiversity, landscapes and wildlife, and promote access, recreation and public well-being.</p>
<b>Precautionary principle</b>	<p>Prudent action which avoids the possibility of irreversible environmental damage in situations where the scientific evidence is inconclusive but the potential damage could be significant.</p>
<b>Priority Habitat / Species</b>	<p>Habitats and species identified by the Habitats Directive as being of priority importance. Twenty-three of the UK's 76 habitats are highlighted as important under the Habitats Directive priority habitats.</p>
<b>Qualifying Interest Feature</b>	<p>The reasons why the European site has been recommended for designation (e.g. the endangered species that occupy the SAC; rare habitats that occur there; or threatened birds that breed or over-winter in the SPA).</p>
<b>Ramsar sites</b>	<p>Sites designated as internationally important wetland habitats under the International Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (1976) (Ramsar Convention).</p>
<b>Screening</b>	<p>The process of deciding whether or not a plan or project requires an Appropriate</p>

	Assessment
<b>Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)</b>	UK national designation identified under the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) as being important for wildlife and/or geology. Over half of these sites, by area, are internationally important for their wildlife, underpinning the network of Natura 2000 sites, designated as Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Special Protection Areas (SPAs) or Ramsar sites.
<b>Special Area of Conservation (SAC)</b>	Site of European importance for nature conservation designated under the Conservation of Natural Habitats and Wild Flora and Fauna Directive (92/43/EEC).
<b>Special Protection Area (SPA)</b>	Site of European importance for nature conservation designated under the Conservation of Wild Birds Directive (70/409/EEC).



## 8 References

DCLG (2006): Planning for the Protection of European Sites: Appropriate Assessment. Guidance for Regional Spatial Strategies and Local Development Documents.

English Nature guidance notes:

Habitats Regulations Guidance Note 1, The Appropriate Assessment HRGN 1; The Conservation (Natural Habitats %c) Regulations, 1994;

Habitats Regulations Guidance Note 2, Review of existing planning permissions and other consents HRGN2; The Conservation (Natural Habitats %c) Regulations, 1994;

Habitats Regulations Guidance Note 4; Alone or in combination HRGN4;

European Communities (2000) Managing Natura 2000 Sites: The provisions of Article 6 of the 'Habitats' Directive 92/434/EEC; and

European Commission (2001) Assessment of plans and projects significantly affecting Natura 2000 sites

JNCC (2018) website: <http://www.jncc.gov.uk/>

## **Appendix 1** Qualifying Features, Conservation Objectives and Vulnerabilities of European Sites Within or Close to Blackdown Hills AONB.

### **Quants SAC**

#### **Annex II species that are a primary reason for selection of this site**

##### **1065 Marsh fritillary butterfly *Euphydryas (Eurodryas, Hypodryas) aurinia***

This damp and sheltered site supports a medium-sized but strong **marsh fritillary *Euphydryas aurinia*** population in a neutral grassland/fen mosaic. It is strategically placed close to other smaller sub-populations, with which it forms a metapopulation, and may exchange individuals with the large population at Southey Moor (outside the SAC series).

#### **Conservation Objectives**

With regard to the natural habitats and/or species for which the site has been designated ("the Qualifying Features" listed below);

Avoid the deterioration of the qualifying natural habitats and the habitats of qualifying species, and the significant disturbance of those qualifying species, ensuring the integrity of the site is maintained and the site makes a full contribution to achieving Favourable Conservation Status of each of the qualifying features.

Subject to natural change, to maintain or restore:

- The extent and distribution of qualifying natural habitats and habitats of qualifying species;
- The structure and function (including typical species) of qualifying natural habitats and habitats of qualifying species;
- The supporting processes on which qualifying natural habitats and habitats of qualifying species rely;
- The populations of qualifying species;
- The distribution of qualifying species within the site.

#### **Qualifying Features**

S1065. *Euphydryas (Eurodryas, Hypodryas) aurinia*; marsh fritillary butterfly

#### **Vulnerability<sup>1</sup>**

The marsh fritillary population here is restricted to a comparatively small area (c. 2 ha) and is kept high by a considerable level of management directed at producing 'ideal' habitat in this area. If the highly interventionist nature of management is disrupted or discontinued the population may drop.

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<sup>1</sup> Please note: vulnerability accounts are extracts from original Standard Data Forms submitted by JNCC to the European Commission on designation of the European Sites in the period 1995 to 2001; some references may no longer be current.

## **River Axe SAC**

### **Annex I habitats that are a primary reason for selection of this site**

#### **3260 Water courses of plain to montane levels with the *Ranunculion fluitantis* and *Callitriche-Batrachion* vegetation**

The Axe is a south-western example of sub-type 2. Only the lower reaches of the main river have been designated, where the mixed catchment geology of sandstones and limestones gives rise to calcareous waters where *R. penicillatus* ssp. *pseudofluitans* dominates, giving way to *R. fluitans* further downstream. Short-leaved water-starwort *Callitriche truncata* is an unusual addition to the *Ranunculus* community and gives additional interest.

### **Annex II species present as a qualifying feature, but not a primary reason for site selection**

1095 Sea lamprey *Petromyzon marinus*

1096 Brook lamprey *Lampetra planeri*

1163 Bullhead *Cottus gobio*

### **Conservation Objectives**

With regard to the natural habitats and/or species for which the site has been designated ("the Qualifying Features" listed below);

Avoid the deterioration of the qualifying natural habitats and the habitats of qualifying species, and the significant disturbance of those qualifying species, ensuring the integrity of the site is maintained and the site makes a full contribution to achieving Favourable Conservation Status of each of the qualifying features.

Subject to natural change, to maintain or restore:

- The extent and distribution of qualifying natural habitats and habitats of qualifying species;
- The structure and function (including typical species) of qualifying natural habitats and habitats of qualifying species;
- The supporting processes on which qualifying natural habitats and habitats of qualifying species rely;
- The populations of qualifying species;
- The distribution of qualifying species within the site.

### **Qualifying Features**

H3260. Water courses of plain to montane levels with the *Ranunculion fluitantis* and *Callitriche-Batrachion* vegetation; Rivers with floating vegetation often dominated by water-crowfoot

S1095. *Petromyzon marinus*; sea lamprey

S1096. *Lampetra planeri*; brook lamprey

S1163. *Cottus gobio*; bullhead

### **Vulnerability**

The main threat on this site is the potential nitrification from surrounding land-use. A programme of surveys has been undertaken investigating the sources of potential problems. On completion, management advice will be provided to the perpetrators to minimise impacts.