

**Appropriate Assessment Screening
of the North Devon Area of
Outstanding Natural Beauty
Management Plan 2019-24**

Prepared for:

The North Devon AONB Partnership

By:

Devon County Council Environment
Group



Appropriate Assessment Screening of the North Devon Area 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 North Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Partnership in October 2018 to undertake the Screening Stage of an Appropriate Assessment (AA) for the North Devon 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:

- Culm Grassland Special Area of Conservation (SAC)
- Braunton Burrows Special Area of Conservation (SAC)
- Tintagel-Marsland-Clovelly Coast Special Area of Conservation (SAC)
- Exmoor Heaths Special Area of Conservation (SAC)
- Bristol Approaches Candidate Special Area of Conservation (cSAC)

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.

Contents

1 Introduction 5

2 European Sites Potentially Affected 8

3 North Devon AONB Management Plan 2019-24 10

4 Other plans and programmes..... 18

5 Recommendations 18

6 Conclusion 18

7 Glossary 19

8 References 23

Figure 1 - European Sites within and close to the North Devon AONB.....8

Figure 2 - 20 year Vision for North Devon AONB10

1 Introduction

This report presents the results of the screening stage of the Appropriate Assessment (AA) process for the North Devon 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 North Devon 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 North Devon 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 of European Sites centred on a review of the JNCC online record of sites within or adjacent to the North Devon AONB boundary. Four European sites and one candidate European Site were identified that might possibly be affected by the North Devon AONB Management Plan and should be subject to Appropriate Assessment Screening.

These are:

- Culm Grassland Special Area of Conservation (SAC)
- Braunton Burrows Special Area of Conservation (SAC)
- Tintagel-Marsland-Clovelly Coast Special Area of Conservation (SAC)
- Exmoor Heaths SAC (outside of the AONB but within 600 metres of the boundary at its nearest point)
- Bristol Channel Approaches Candidate Special Area of Conservation (cSAC)

The following European sites is within 15km of the AONB but is not included in the screening because of the 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 distance at the nearest points are also shown.

- Exmoor and Quantock Oakwoods SAC (3.8km)

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

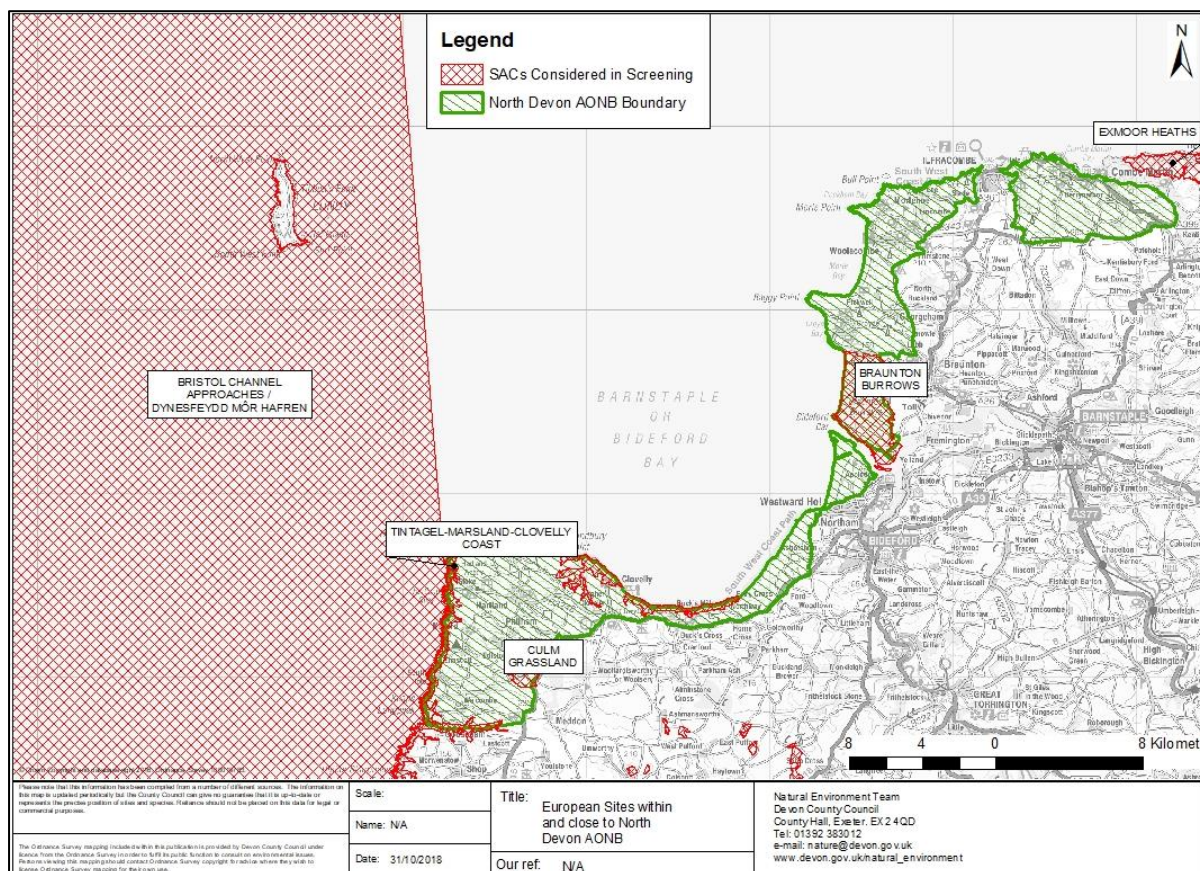


Figure 1 European Sites within and close to the North Devon AONB

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
Culm Grassland SAC	Maintenance and protection of the rare unimproved grassland habitat.
Braunton Burrows SAC	Protection of the dune habitats from rank vegetation and willow scrub and falling water tables due to land drainage and/or abstraction
Tintagel-Marsland-Clovelly Coast SAC	Protection of the hard-coastal vegetated sea cliffs ensuring they continue to be subjected to range of maritime influences.
Exmoor Heaths SAC	The retention and maintenance of mature heather stands by utilising low intensity, traditional agricultural management by grazing and controlled burning.
Bristol Channel Approaches cSAC	Ensuring that Harbour porpoise is a viable component of the site, there is no significant disturbance of the species and the condition of supporting habitats and processes, and the availability of prey is maintained.

3 North Devon AONB Management Plan 2019-24

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

“The North Devon Coast AONB will remain as one of England’s finest landscapes and seascapes, protected, inspiring and valued by all. Its natural and cultural heritage will sustain those who live in, work in or visit the area. It will be valued by residents and visitors alike who will have increased understanding of what makes the area unique and will be addressing the challenges of keeping it special to secure its long-term future”

Figure 2 - 20-year Vision for the North Devon AONB

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

- Landscape and Seascape
- Biodiversity and Geodiversity
- Historic Environment and Culture
- Environmental Quality and Climate Change
- Planning Development and Infrastructure
- Farming and Land Management
- Sustainable Rural and Visitor Economy
- Access, Health and Wellbeing
- Community Action, Learning and Understanding

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.

Effect		Reasoning
None	0	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.
No likely (negative) effect	1	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.
	2	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.
	3	The policy is not likely to lead to activities which are likely to have a negative effect on the Natura 2000 site.
	4	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.
Potential for a negative effect	5	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.
Potential for a negative effect / effects uncertain	6	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.
	7	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.
Likely Significant Effect	8	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

Theme	Objectives	Culm Grassland SAC	Braunton Burrows SAC	Tintagel-Marsland-Clovelly Coast SAC	Exmoor Heaths SAC	Bristol Channel Approaches cSAC
Landscape and Seascape (A)	To conserve and enhance the natural beauty and special landscapes of the AONB.	2	2	2	2	1
Biodiversity and Geodiversity (B)	To conserve and enhance the wildlife and ecological health of the North Devon Coast AONB, in terrestrial, aquatic and marine habitats.	1	1	1	1	1
Environmental Quality and Climate Change (D)	To promote the sustainable management of natural resources and climate change impacts.	3	3	3	3	3
Historic Environment and Culture (E)	To conserve, enhance and understand the historic and cultural environment of the AONB.	2	2	2	2	2
Farming and Land Management (F)	To promote farming, food production and land management practices that conserve and enhance the special qualities of the AONB.	2	2	2	2	2

Sustainable Rural and Visitor Economy (G)	To promote sustainable development within the AONB that is consistent with the designation.	4	4	4	4	4
Access, Health and Wellbeing (H)	To ensure sustainable access to the AONB for the benefit of the health and wellbeing of local people and visitors, consistent with the designation.	3	3	3	3	3
Planning Development and Infrastructure (I)	To ensure the planning process and infrastructure development protects and enhances the designated AONB and its special qualities.	3	3	3	3	3
Community Action, Learning and Understanding (J)	To support more people to learn about, understand and take action to conserve the AONB.	1	1	1	1	1

Table 4 Assessment of effects of policies on European Sites

No.	Policies	Culm Grassland SAC	Braunton Burrows SAC	Tintagel-Marsland-Clovelly Coast SAC	Exmoor Heaths SAC	Bristol Channel Approaches cSAC
A1	Ensure that the landscape character, natural beauty and special qualities of the AONB are enhanced and fully respected in all decisions affecting the Area.	2	2	2	2	2
A2	Preserve the dark skies, peace and tranquillity of the AONB.	1	1	1	1	1
A3	Ensure developments both onshore and offshore, take account of open views, wilderness and maritime connections.	2	2	2	2	2
A4	Recommend that no development should be permitted inside or outside the AONB that would harm the natural beauty, character or special qualities of the AONB.	2	2	2	2	2
A5	Ensure developments comply with the North Devon Landscape and Seascape Character Assessments.	2	2	2	2	2
B1	Support and promote the conservation and enhancement of habitats and species, to increase wildlife richness and ensure the health of the wider landscape.	1	1	1	1	1
B2	Increase understanding and actions to address impacts on biodiversity from invasive species, disease and climate change.	1	1	1	1	1
B3	Encourage actions to enhance, maintain and promote the	2	2	2	2	2

	geodiversity of the AONB through appropriate site management and public awareness.					
D1	Increase understanding and mitigation of climate change impacts on coastal landscapes and communities, to be sensitive to the need to enhance the special qualities of the AONB.	2	2	2	2	2
D2	Contribute to marine planning and management of marine designated sites, to conserve coastal landscape qualities, coastal species and habitats.	2	1	1	2	1
D3	Improve inland, coastal and bathing water quality through catchment management, natural flood management and litter management.	2	2	2	2	2
E1	Support actions to conserve and enhance the historic and cultural features of the AONB, and their setting.	2	2	2	2	2
E2	Develop approaches to increase understanding and valuing of local heritage and culture.	2	2	2	2	2
F1	Support partners to deliver sustainable and exemplar land management, forestry and farming practices in keeping with the AONB designation.	2	2	2	2	2
F2	Work with landowners and managers to maintain landscape features such as hedgebanks and woodlands	2	2	2	2	2

F3	Support approaches to enhance the Natural Capital within the AONB including carbon storage, clean water, timber, soils, renewable energy and crops, consistent with the designation.	2	2	2	2	2
G1	Take account of the value of the natural environment in economic development decisions using the Natural Capital and Ecosystem Services approach.	2	2	2	2	2
G2	Support partners to develop sustainable tourism opportunities that promote the special qualities of the AONB without damaging protected sites and species.	3	3	3	3	3
H1	Work with partners and landowners to develop improved and safe access to and interpretation of the natural environment.	3	3	3	3	3
H2	Support new opportunities and reduce barriers to improve the health and wellbeing of local people and visitors.	4	4	4	4	4
I1	Provide planning advice and policy guidance to conserve and enhance the natural beauty and special qualities of the designated AONB and its setting.	4	4	4	4	4
I2	Promote and maintain the local distinctiveness and historic character of the built environment.	3	3	3	3	3
I3	Support affordable housing proposals to meet local housing needs, that take full	4	4	4	4	4

	account of the AONB designation.					
I4	Conserve and enhance the coast and marine environment in relation to onshore and offshore developments.	2	2	2	2	2
I5	Support appropriate infrastructure, signage and transport networks in the AONB, for the benefit of local and visiting communities.	4	4	4	4	4
J1	Raise awareness and understanding of the AONB, its special qualities, natural and cultural heritage	2	2	2	2	2
J2	Develop opportunities for people to volunteer and gain appropriate skills and knowledge to deliver AONB priorities	3	3	3	3	3
J3	Support the provision of community facilities and services to improve the quality of life and sustainability of rural and coastal communities.	4	4	4	4	4
J4	Support communities and businesses to reduce carbon emissions from the designated AONB so long as they are complementary to the special qualities of the AONB	3	3	3	3	3

It is immediately apparent from the colour coding of the five 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 North Devon 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

Appropriate Assessment (AA)	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)
Avoidance	Prevents impacts on European sites from happening in the first place.
Compensation	Off-site offsetting put in place where a significant impact will occur, where there is no alternative, and where the plan is deemed necessary.
Competent authority	The plan-making / decision-making authority.
Conservation Objectives	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.
European sites	Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Special Areas of Conservation (SACs). Includes Ramsar sites in this report.
Favourable condition	Designated land is adequately conserved and is meeting its 'conservation objectives', however, there is scope for enhancement.
Habitats Directive	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>
Natural England	<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>
Precautionary principle	<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>
Priority Habitat / Species	<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>
Qualifying Interest Feature	<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>
Ramsar sites	<p>Sites designated as internationally important wetland habitats under the International Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (1976) (Ramsar Convention).</p>
Screening	<p>The process of deciding whether or not a plan or project requires an Appropriate</p>

	Assessment
Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)	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.
Special Area of Conservation (SAC)	Site of European importance for nature conservation designated under the Conservation of Natural Habitats and Wild Flora and Fauna Directive (92/43/EEC).
Special Protection Area (SPA)	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 North Devon AONB.

Culm Grassland SAC

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

- **6410 Molinia meadows on calcareous, peaty or clayey-silt-laden soils (Molinion caeruleae)**

Culm Grasslands represents Molinia meadows in south-west England. This site contains extremely diverse examples of the heathy type of M24 *Molinia caerulea* – *Cirsium dissectum* fen-meadow, ranging from short, grazed swards through to stands that are transitional to scrub. Structural diversity accounts for the conservation of a wide range of flora and fauna, particularly of species characteristic of south-western Europe, such as meadow thistle *Cirsium dissectum* and whorled caraway *Carum verticillatum*.

Annex I habitats present as a qualifying feature, but not a primary reason for selection of this site

- **4010 Northern Atlantic wet heaths with *Erica tetralix***

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

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

Culm Grasslands in south-west England contains the largest cluster of sites for marsh fritillary *Euphydryas aurinia* in the south-west peninsula. It is judged to be the most important location for the species in its major south-west stronghold.

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

H4010. Northern Atlantic wet heaths with *Erica tetralix*; Wet heathland with cross-leaved heath
 H6410. Molinia meadows on calcareous, peaty or clayey-silt-laden soils (*Molinion caeruleae*); Purple moor-grass meadows

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

Vulnerability¹

Culm Grassland is the local name given to the unimproved pastures, which support a distinctive array of wildlife on the Culm Measures of northern Devon and north-east Cornwall. The grassland is a result of human activity, and to survive it must continue to be managed. The traditional methods upon which these meadows depend are rough summer grazing, selective burning and topping, and no application of fertilisers. Such management may no longer be economic; therefore, Environmental Stewardship Schemes are being used to promote the continuation of traditional management.

¹ 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.

Braunton Burrows SAC

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

- **2120 "Shifting dunes along the shoreline with *Ammophila arenaria* ("white dunes")"**

This large site in south-west England contains a substantial area of mobile dune vegetation, including representative examples of most of the main variants found in the south-west of the UK. There are good numbers of characteristic specialist plants typical of this region, such as Portland spurge *Euphorbia portlandica*, sea spurge *Euphorbia paralias* and sea-holly *Eryngium maritimum*. Transitions to dune slack and fixed dune are a prominent feature of this site.

- **2130 "Fixed coastal dunes with herbaceous vegetation ("grey dunes")" * Priority feature**

Braunton Burrows, in south-west England, is one of the largest dune sites in the UK and is of particular importance because it is virtually intact and still active. There are very extensive areas of species-rich calcareous dune grassland with good examples of a variety of important communities. The short turf areas are extremely rich in herbs and lichens, including a number of nationally rare species. Flowering herbs such as large thyme *Thymus pulegioides*, common restharrow *Ononis repens* and common bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus corniculatus* are locally dominant.

- **2170 Dunes with *Salix repens ssp. argentea* (*Salicion arenariae*)**

Braunton Burrows is one of the largest virtually intact dune sites in the UK and is representative of dunes with *Salix repens ssp. argentea* in south-west England. The habitat is scattered across the site and form part of a complex mosaic of vegetation containing creeping willow, including early and mature successional stages of dune slack vegetation. There are transitional stages between this type and more mature scrub vegetation.

- **2190 Humid dune slacks**

Braunton Burrows is one of the largest virtually intact dune sites in the UK, with an exceptionally large area of Humid dune slack vegetation, representing a significant proportion of the national resource. The slacks have formed in base-rich sand and are rich in species such as marsh pennywort *Hydrocotyle vulgaris*, marsh helleborine *Epipactis palustris* and round-leaved wintergreen *Pyrola rotundifolia*. Vegetation types range from those with almost permanent water to those dominated by scrub. The site contains representative examples of most of the communities of base-rich humid slacks in south-west England, namely those characterised by creeping willow *Salix repens ssp. argentea*, those with bryophytes or those with Yorkshire-fog *Holcus lanatus*.

Annex I habitats present as a qualifying feature, but not a primary reason for selection of this site

- **1140 Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide**

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

- **1395 Petalwort *Petalophyllum ralfsii***

A large population (around 3000 thalli) of petalwort *Petalophyllum ralfsii* is recorded from Braunton Burrows, one of two sites selected for this species in south-west England. There are extensive open dune slack habitats of the types required by this species for survival.

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

H1140. Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide; Intertidal mudflats and sandflats

H2120. Shifting dunes along the shoreline with *Ammophila arenaria* ("white dunes"); Shifting dunes with marram

H2130. Fixed dunes with herbaceous vegetation ("grey dunes"); Dune grassland *

H2170. Dunes with *Salix repens ssp. argentea* (*Salicion arenariae*); Dunes with creeping willow

H2190. Humid dune slacks

S1395. *Petalophyllum ralfsii*; Petalwort

Vulnerability

In recent decades, coarse, rank vegetation and willow scrub have spread on the Burrows due to a lack of grazing, and land drainage and/or abstraction and has caused water tables to fall. In conjunction with the Environment Agency and land owners, Natural England are, through the preparation of a Water Level Management Plan, exploring ways of raising the water level such as the installation of sluices in the perimeter ditch. An agreement is also being sought with the landowner and Ministry of Defence to introduce grazing to the majority of the Burrows.

Tintagel-Marsland-Clovelly Coast SAC

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

- 1230 Vegetated sea cliffs of the Atlantic and Baltic Coasts

This site represents an extensive length of largely hard coastal cliff in south-west England, with a range of maritime influences and vegetation developed on hard neutral to acidic sedimentary rocks. It demonstrates a range of vertical or near-vertical cliffs with intervening slumped sections. The greater part of this very long site, totalling approximately 60 km, is west-facing, fully exposed to Atlantic storms and therefore strongly maritime in character. The section east of Hartland Point faces north and north-east and is relatively sheltered. Inland of the crevice and grassland communities, maritime heath and short coastal grassland with wild thyme *Thymus polytrichus* and spring squill *Scilla verna* are particularly significant, and locally these show transitions to scrub and woodland in the adjacent valleys. This includes an unusual wind-pruned cliff woodland, the Dizzard, with an exceptionally rich lichen flora.

- 91A0 Old sessile oak woods with *Ilex* and *Blechnum* in the British Isles

Stretches of old sessile oak wood occur at various points along this section of coast. The trees are frequently wind-pruned, sometimes to the point where they are barely taller than the heather *Calluna vulgaris*. The oak communities include small patches of richer ash *Fraxinus excelsior* and alder *Alnus glutinosa* woodland. The bryophyte and lichen assemblages are particularly rich, and the Atlantic influence is also shown in the abundance of hay-scented buckler-fern *Dryopteris aemula*.

Annex I habitats present as a qualifying feature, but not a primary reason for selection of this site

- 4030 European dry heaths

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

H1230. Vegetated sea cliffs of the Atlantic and Baltic coasts

H4030. European dry heaths

H91A0. Old sessile oak woods with *Ilex* and *Blechnum* in the British Isles; Western acidic oak woodland

Vulnerability

The sea cliffs support a variety of maritime vegetation that is dependent upon natural processes and climatic influence. The sea cliffs require limited management and are fairly inaccessible in many areas. Maintenance and enhancement of the coastal strip is being pursued in collaboration with the National Trust and other land managers, through the provision of advice and promotion of positive land management Environmental Stewardship Schemes

Exmoor Heaths SAC

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

- 4010 Northern Atlantic wet heaths with *Erica tetralix*

Exmoor is representative of upland wet heath in south-west England. M15 *Scirpus cespitosus* – *Erica tetralix* wet heath predominates on gently-sloping and level ground. It is extremely variable in nature and has in places been modified by management, particularly burning. Typically, heather *Calluna vulgaris* dominates, with scattered plants of purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea*, cross-leaved heath *Erica tetralix*, bilberry *Vaccinium myrtillus* and deergrass *Trichophorum cespitosum*. In other areas *Molinia* and *Calluna* are more-or-less co-dominant, with the former forming tussocks. There are transitions to H12 *Calluna vulgaris* – *Vaccinium myrtillus* heath on well-drained, steeper slopes and to M17 *Scirpus cespitosus* – *Eriophorum vaginatum* blanket mire on deeper peat, where the northern species crowberry *Empetrum nigrum* occurs.

- 4030 European dry heaths

Exmoor is representative of upland heath in south-west England. The site is notable because it contains extensive areas of H4 *Ulex gallii* – *Agrostis curtisii* heath, a type most often found in the lowlands, and H12 *Calluna vulgaris* – *Vaccinium myrtillus* heath, a predominantly upland type, together with areas of H8 *Calluna vulgaris* – *Ulex gallii* heath. In wetter situations or on peat there can be a high frequency of purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea* and cross-leaved heath *Erica tetralix*, which results in frequent transitions to wet heaths. The associated valley mires support the oceanic species pale butterwort *Pinguicula lusitanica* and ivy-leaved bellflower *Wahlenbergia hederacea*. The Exmoor heaths are also important as the largest stronghold for the heath fritillary butterfly *Mellicta athalia*, associated with sheltered slopes in the transition to woodland. The site holds a small breeding population of merlin *Falco columbarius* that is the most southerly in the western Palearctic.

Annex I habitats present as a qualifying feature, but not a primary reason for selection of this site

- **1230 Vegetated sea cliffs of the Atlantic and Baltic Coasts**
- **7130 Blanket bogs (* if active bog) * Priority feature**
- **7230 Alkaline fens**
- **91A0 Old sessile oak woods with *Ilex* and *Blechnum* in the British Isles**

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

H1230. Vegetated sea cliffs of the Atlantic and Baltic coasts

H4010. Northern Atlantic wet heaths with *Erica tetralix*; Wet heathland with cross-leaved heath

H4030. European dry heaths

H7130. Blanket bogs*

H7230. Alkaline fens; Calcium-rich springwater-fed fens

H91A0. Old sessile oak woods with *Ilex* and *Blechnum* in the British Isles; Western acidic oak woodland

Vulnerability

These heathlands retain significant areas of mature heather stands. This habitat is dependent upon low intensity, traditional agricultural management by grazing and controlled burning. Such management is becoming less economic, except with agri-environment funds. An Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA) scheme has been useful in promoting traditional grazing management, as have other management agreements and conservation body ownership. Illegal and uncontrolled burning is adversely affecting heathland structure in some areas, and localised winter feeding of cattle and overgrazing has caused some losses to grassland. These problems are particularly apparent on common land. Grazing issues are being tackled by action using the environmental conditions attached to livestock subsidy schemes, as well as the ESA scheme. Incentive payments are currently seen as the only effective means of influencing burning practices. Rhododendron has spread in some areas. Natural England and Exmoor National Park Authority management agreements are being used to eliminate infestations from affected heathland.

Bristol Channel Approaches cSAC

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

- **1351 Harbour porpoise *Phocoena phocoena***

Species occurrence description not yet available.

Conservation Objectives

To avoid deterioration of the habitats of the harbour porpoise or significant disturbance to the harbour porpoise, thus ensuring that the integrity of the site is maintained and the site makes an appropriate contribution to maintaining Favourable Conservation Status (FCS) for the UK harbour porpoise.

To ensure for harbour porpoise that, subject to natural change, the following attributes are maintained or restored in the long term:

- The species is a viable component of the site.
- There is no significant disturbance of the species.
- The supporting habitats and processes relevant to harbour porpoises and their prey are maintained.

Qualifying Features

S1351. Harbour porpoise *Phocoena phocoena*

Vulnerability

Harbour porpoises are impacted by a number of anthropogenic pressures, including, but not limited to: bycatch in static net fisheries; activities that generate impulsive noise (e.g. pile driving and seismic surveys); chemical pollution, notably persistent organic pollutants, and; variability in food resources.