



**Forest of
Bowland**
National
Landscape

**Forest of Bowland Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
Management Plan 2026-31**

Strategic Environmental Assessment Screening Report

January 2026

Report by Forest of Bowland National Landscape Partnership
Forest of Bowland Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2026-2031
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Introduction

- 1.1 **A note on nomenclature:** This document refers to the 'AONB' Management Plan, as that is still the legal name of both the designation and the management plan itself. Any other references to the place / designation / Partnership use the term National Landscape.
- 1.2 This screening report has been produced to determine whether it is necessary to undertake a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of the Forest of Bowland Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Management Plan for 2026 to 2031. This is to ensure compliance with European Directive 2001/42/EC on 'the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment' ('The SEA Directive') and 'The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations, 2004 (Statutory Instrument 2004 No. 1633), which implements the Directive in England and for relevant non devolved plans and programmes in the UK as a whole.

2. AONB Management Plans and Guidance on SEA

- 2.1 Part IV, Section 89 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 sets out the requirement for Conservation Boards or relevant Local Authorities to publish and review a management plan for their AONB that: *"formulates their policy for the management of the area of outstanding natural beauty and for the carrying out of their functions in relation to it"*. These management plans must be reviewed 'at intervals of not more than 5 years'.
- 2.2 In 2012, Natural England, the National Association for AONBs and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) published an 'Advice Note to AONB Partnerships, the Conservation Boards and Relevant Authorities on Management Plan Reviews', which gave some early guidance on considering the need for SEA:

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

AONBs and National Park Authorities (protected landscape managing bodies) should screen their revised or amended Management Plan to evaluate whether the individual or cumulative effect of the changes which they are proposing is likely to have a significant effect, as defined under the Strategic Environmental Assessment or Habitats Regulations. They may wish to seek informal guidance from Natural England (and Environment Agency, English Heritage for SEA) at this screening stage".

That same guidance goes on to state that:

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

- 2.4 This Screening Report has been written to enable a judgement to be made on whether an SEA should be undertaken. In line with the ‘tripartite’ guidance outlined above, it discusses whether the Forest of Bowland AONB Management Plan 2026 to 2031 is likely to exhibit significant environmental effects, and documents supporting reasons for the report’s conclusions. A further screening report, to establish whether Appropriate Assessment under the Habitats Regulations is necessary, is also published alongside this report.

3. The Forest of Bowland AONB Management Plan 2026 - 2031

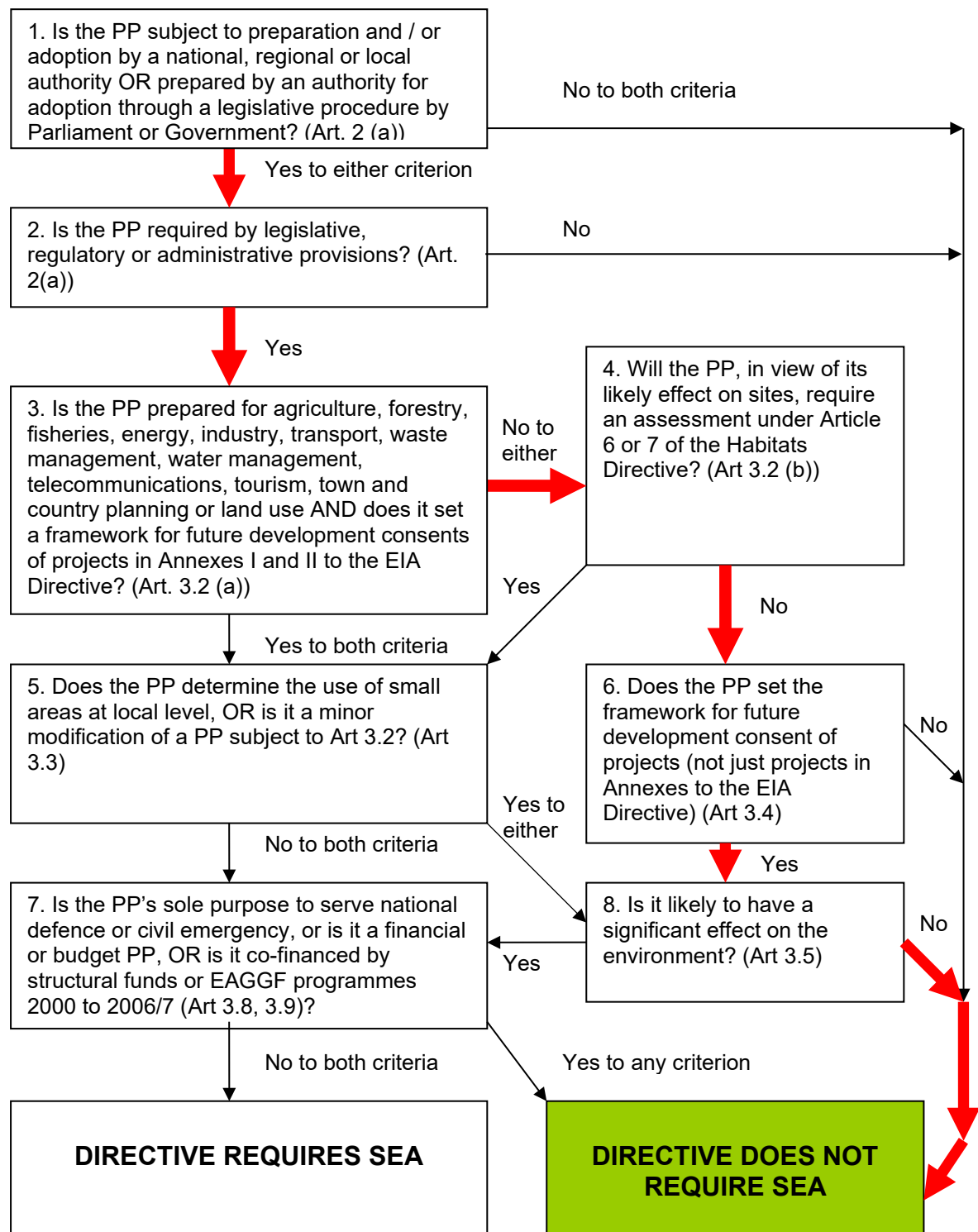
- 3.1 The draft Forest of Bowland AONB Management Plan sets out a vision for a living landscape as well as a series of thematic outcomes and measures that relate to topics of relevance to the area.
- 3.2 Though termed a Management Plan, this is in fact a ‘strategy’. The last iteration removed detailed action plan tables, which were felt to be too prescriptive and narrow and less capable of responding to changing circumstances than might be appropriate. The current ‘outcomes and measures’ approach is seen as a logical way of brigading the necessary subject matter, creating a menu of possible approaches for multiple stakeholders to contribute to plan outcomes.
- 3.3 There is an emphasis on:
- an ecosystems approach and support for bolstering our natural assets and the services and benefits they helps to sustain
 - nature recovery and conserving and enhancing landscape character
 - encouraging responsible access to, and enjoyment of, nature and heritage.
- 3.4 The new plan identifies a revised series of ‘Core Principles’ which run through the document. These principles include the important reference to actions not unconsciously delivering one environmental benefit at the expense of another (e.g. woodland planting on species-rich grassland). This section of the plan, if fully adhered to, is felt to be an important safeguard against unintentionally damaging activity.
- 3.5 What is clear from this assessment is that plans/projects/initiatives arising from only a very small number of outcomes and measures, depending on how they were realised, could conceivably have any negative effect on a European Site. *Even these would, in their development, be subject to individual SEA/HRA where required.*

4. **Screening**

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

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

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



- 4.3 Figure 1 shows a considered view of the status of the AONB Management Plan 2026 - 2031 in relation to the requirements of the SEA Directive. Further explanation of the reasons for selecting the Management Plan's pathway through the flow chart is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Establishing the need for SEA

Stage	Answer	Reason
1. Is the PP subject to preparation and / or adoption by a national, regional or local authority OR prepared by an authority for adoption through a legislative procedure by Parliament or Government? (Art. 2 (a))	Yes	The AONB Management Plan will be prepared in collaboration with, and adopted by, the area's constituent local authorities,
2. Is the PP required by legislative, regulatory or administrative provisions? (Art. 2(a))	Yes	The AONB Management Plan is being prepared under section 89 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act, 2000
3. Is the PP prepared for agriculture, forestry, fisheries, energy, industry, transport, waste management, water management, telecommunications, tourism, town and country planning or land use AND does it set a framework for future development consents of projects in Annexes I and II to the EIA Directive? (Art. 3.2 (a))	No	Although the AONB Management Plan covers several of these topics, it is unlikely that any work proposed, framed or required by the management plan would fall into Annexes I and II of the EIA Directive.
4. Will the PP, in view of its likely effect on sites, require an assessment under Article 6 or 7 of the Habitats Directive? (Art 3.2 (b))	No	A Habitats Regulations Assessment Screening Report has been completed. This report concluded that there are unlikely to be significant negative effects on the network of European Sites in and around the AONB. ²
5. Does the PP determine the use of small areas at local level, OR is it a minor modification of a PP subject to Art 3.2? (Art 3.3)	Not applicable	This question need only be answered if questions 3 or 4 are answered in the affirmative.
6. Does the PP set the framework for future development consent of projects (not just projects in	Yes	A narrower interpretation of 'framework for development consents' would exclude the AONB Management Plan as it does not direct projects that

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

Annexes to the EIA Directive) (Art 3.4) ³		would generally fall within the planning system. However, public bodies have a duty to consider the natural beauty of AONBs in their decisions, including in planning decisions ⁴ . Taking a broader interpretation of 'framework' (see footnote 3), the Management Plan may affect the outcome of future development consents, though only in as much as they affect the special qualities of the AONB.
7. Is the PP's sole purpose to serve national defence or civil emergency, or is it a financial or budget PP, OR is it co-financed by structural funds or EAGGF programmes 2000 to 2006/7 (Art 3.8, 3.9)?	Not applicable	This question need only be answered if the answer to question 6 is 'no'. Or the answer to question 8 is 'yes'.
8. Is it likely to have a significant effect on the environment? (Art 3.5) (See appendix for criteria and characteristics determining significance)	No	The improvements resulting from the strategic direction given by the plan are considered unlikely to have significant negative effects on the environment. The outcomes and measures seek to conserve and enhance the components of natural beauty, mitigating the impact on development and reinforcing the character and quality of the landscape.

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

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

⁴ Part IV, Section 85 (1) of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 establishes a general duty on public bodies: "In exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in an area of outstanding natural beauty, a relevant authority shall have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area of outstanding natural beauty". Public bodies are listed as relevant authorities.

		Criteria for significance are presented in Annex II of the SEA Directive, in which a range of characteristics of plans are listed as influencing judgements on significance, as well as a range of characteristics of the area likely to be effected by the plan. Appendix 2 at the end of this report shows the SEA Directive's significance criteria alongside the likely effects of the plan.
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5. Conclusion

- 5.1 The conclusion of this screening report is that, in common with the previous Management Plans, a Strategic Environmental Assessment will not be required for the Forest of Bowland AONB Management Plan 2026-31. This is because the plan is very unlikely to drive negative environmental effects.
- 5.2 Further work is being undertaken via a Habitats Regulations Assessment screening report to clarify whether the AONB Management Plan would require assessment under Article 6 or 7 of the Habitats Directive. This HRA Report on the draft Management Plan has concluded that there will be no significant effects on European Sites and is subject to consultation⁵ with Natural England.

6. Consultation

- 6.1 The three statutory bodies for the purposes of SEA screening are Natural England, the Environment Agency and Historic England. These bodies will be consulted for their views on the conclusions of this screening assessment.
- 6.2 An SEA screening statement will be published to show the conclusions of the screening exercise.

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

Appendix 2: Judging Significance in Relation to the SEA Directive

Annex II of the SEA Directive lists criteria for determining the significance of environmental effects of a plan or programme. Taken together these criteria should inform judgements about whether environmental effects can be considered to be significant.

Table 2: Table showing criteria of significance listed in Annex II of the SEA Directive alongside an assessment of their applicability to the AONB Management Plan 2026 to 2031

Characteristic of significance	Is it significant?	Likely effect of plan
1. The characteristics of plans and programmes, having regard, in particular, to:		
The degree to which the plan or programme sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to the location, nature, size and operating conditions or by allocating resources	Yes	The AONB Management Plan will set a framework for a range of activities at a variety of scales.
The degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy.	Yes	The AONB Management Plan does not influence a hierarchy of subsidiary plans, other than to promote conservation interests within the plans and policies of local authorities; actions include contributing to other plans and programmes of varying significance.
The relevance of the plan or programme for the integration of	Yes	The management plan sets sustainable development at the

environmental considerations with a view to promoting sustainable development		heart of its vision, and outcomes and measures contribute to the conservation and enhancement of the of the components of natural beauty on the Forest of Bowland. This ensures that environmental considerations are fully integrated. The plan is considered highly beneficial to the achievement of sustainable development.
Environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme	No	The management plan is highly unlikely to cause negative environmental issues. There are no major shifts in <i>emphasis</i> from the previous management plan, which was subject to SEA screening / HRA and shown not to exhibit significant negative environmental effects. Its implementation is highly likely to lessen problems such as atmospheric, soil and water pollution, loss of biodiversity, loss of landscape character, and deterioration of cultural heritage.
The relevance of the plan or programme for the implementation of Community legislation on the environment	No	The management plan is carried out as a result of national legislation (the Countryside and

(e.g. plans and programmes linked to waste-management or water protection).		Rights of Way Act) which is not transposed from higher Community legislation.
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2. Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to:		
The probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects,	No	The AONB Management Plan is unlikely to exhibit significant long term / frequent / irreversible effects as: -Outcomes and measures generally link to and support national or local initiatives that are designed to enhance the quality of the rural environment; -Outcomes are in part linked to conserving the components of natural beauty, so actions which are contrary to this are not promoted as part of the plan. -The condition of the Forest of Bowland will be monitored as part of the management plan, including using baseline data gathered for a 2025 State of the National Landscape report
The cumulative nature of the effects	No	The generally positive environmental improvements are likely to negate / offset cumulative environmental effects arising from outside sources.

The transboundary nature of the effects	No	There is no likelihood of transboundary effects occurring.
The risks to human health or the environment (e.g. due to accidents),	No	Outcomes / actions which aim to promote physical and mental wellbeing would be of obvious benefit to human health
The magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected),	No	The management plan applies to the entirety of the National Landscape. Negative environmental effects are not likely to be felt.
The value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to: special natural characteristics or cultural heritage	No	The Forest of Bowland is a highly valued area that contains land of high biodiversity and cultural heritage value, making the area sensitive to environmental impacts. However, no such impacts are predicted and, due to the protections given to components of natural beauty emphasised in the management plan, would in any event be unlikely to be significant.
The value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values	No	The AONB management plan is highly unlikely to provoke the exceeding of any environmental thresholds and is likely to increase environmental

		capacity in many instances (e.g. by restoring biodiversity).
The value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to intensive land-use	No	The AONB management plan is unlikely to promote intensive land use; rather it helps promotes less intensive farming.
The value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to the effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, Community or international protection status	No	The Forest of Bowland is a highly valued nationally protected landscape designation. However, the management plan is integral to the maintenance of that status and aims to achieve this through positive interventions that are likely to enhance landscape value. Such interventions are shown to be similar in scope to those in the previous 2019 -2024 management plan for which a previous SEA did not identify significant environmental effects.
Overall level of significance: Unlikely to exhibit negative effects on the environment.		