



Tamar Valley
National
Landscape

Tamar Valley National Landscape

Partnership Plan Review

Habitats Regulation Assessment

(HRA)

Screening Report

Introduction

This report summarises the screening and assessment stages of the Appropriate Assessment (AA) for the Tamar Valley National Landscape Management Plan 2025–30. It reviews the draft Plan to identify any ‘Likely Significant Effects’ (LSEs) on European site conservation objectives. If LSEs are found, further AA stages assess them and explore alternative measures. Where no alternatives exist, the Plan can proceed only for ‘imperative reasons of overriding public interest’.

The Habitats Regulations [The Conservation of Habitats & Species Regulations 2017 (as amended)] implement the European Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC), which protects habitats and species of European importance. The Directive created a network of internationally significant sites, known as Natura 2000 or European Sites, comprising Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs).

Any plan or project not directly related to managing a habitat site must be assessed for potential significant effects on that site, including cumulative impacts with other plans or projects. Under the precautionary principle, if likely significant effects cannot be ruled out, the competent authority must carry out an Appropriate Assessment against the site’s conservation objectives. Approval can only be given once adverse effects on site integrity have been excluded.

Case law has clarified key aspects of this process. In *People over Wind & Sweetman v Coillte Teoranta* (C-323/17), the Court ruled that mitigation measures cannot be considered at the screening stage under Article 6(3); they must only be assessed during the Appropriate Assessment. In *Holohan v An Bord Pleanála* (C-461/17), the Court confirmed that AA must consider not only the site’s qualifying features but also any species and habitats present on the site that could be affected, and any functionally linked land outside the site boundary that supports those features. Where expert advice is not followed, the competent authority must provide explicit and detailed reasons that remove all reasonable scientific doubt.

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.

Neither the Habitats Directive nor the Habitats Regulations specify the method of assessment required; only that it must be 'appropriate'. The level and scope of assessment is to be determined by the Competent Authority (in this case the National Landscape Partnership on behalf of the Local Authority(s)).

In the case of National Landscape (AONB) Management Plans, Natural England has provided guidance on what it considers to be an 'appropriate' level and scope of assessment which can be found [here](#). These guidelines were used to inform the Screening methodology. The guidelines can be found [here](#).

This HRA screening is being undertaken in accordance with good practice; the available guidance on process; and using the following principles:

- Use existing information
- Systematic and as simple as possible whilst retaining a robust process
- Proportionate assessment – the management plan is a strategic management plan for conserving and enhancing natural beauty

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 the next stage is needed. For example, if Stage One concludes there are no significant effects on the European site, the process ends and no further assessment is required.

When undertaking HRA on a plan, it is important to ensure that the assessment is carried out at an appropriate scale and level of detail. The Tamar Valley National Landscape Management Plan is reviewed at 5-yearly intervals and provides a strategic framework for partnership working comprising a long-term Vision for a vibrant and sustainable landscape and responding to climate change and nature recovery. It includes targets and policies for guiding management of the National Landscape within the context of conserving and enhancing natural beauty. The management plan does not include allocations for development nor locationally specific plans or projects, which are more likely to have potential significant effects on the protected European sites.

This report documents the AA process to provide the information required for the Tamar Valley National Landscape Partnership to determine whether further stages of Appropriate Assessment are required for the National Landscape Management Plan. The assessment process was undertaken on the Consultation Draft of the Management Plan as amended, and will be subject to confirmation by Natural England (as the statutory nature conservation body).

Approach

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.

This screening assessment comprises three steps:

- Step 1: Describing the Management Plan and possible impacts
- Step 2: Identifying the potential effects on the European sites
- Step 3: Assessing the significance of any effects on the European sites

The actual 'screening' evaluation is being completed as a two stage process:

Preliminary considerations (Step 2 above) considers the vulnerabilities of each site, and what potential impacts may be damaging to the site, this then ‘screens out’ policies that clearly have no possible negative impacts.

For some policies the decision of No Likely Significant Effect will be obvious, and these can be screened out immediately. At the other extreme, some policies may very clearly have a Likely Significant Effect. These policies will need to be taken forward for ‘appropriate assessment’ or removed from the Management Plan.

In other cases the judgement about a Likely Significant Effect will be less clear cut. It is in these cases that it is necessary to consider further the nature of the potential effect. This is the purpose of the fuller considerations (Step 3 above) assesses the potential impacts of each policy on the specific conservation objectives of the site, the significance of such an impact and the degree of risk of it occurring.

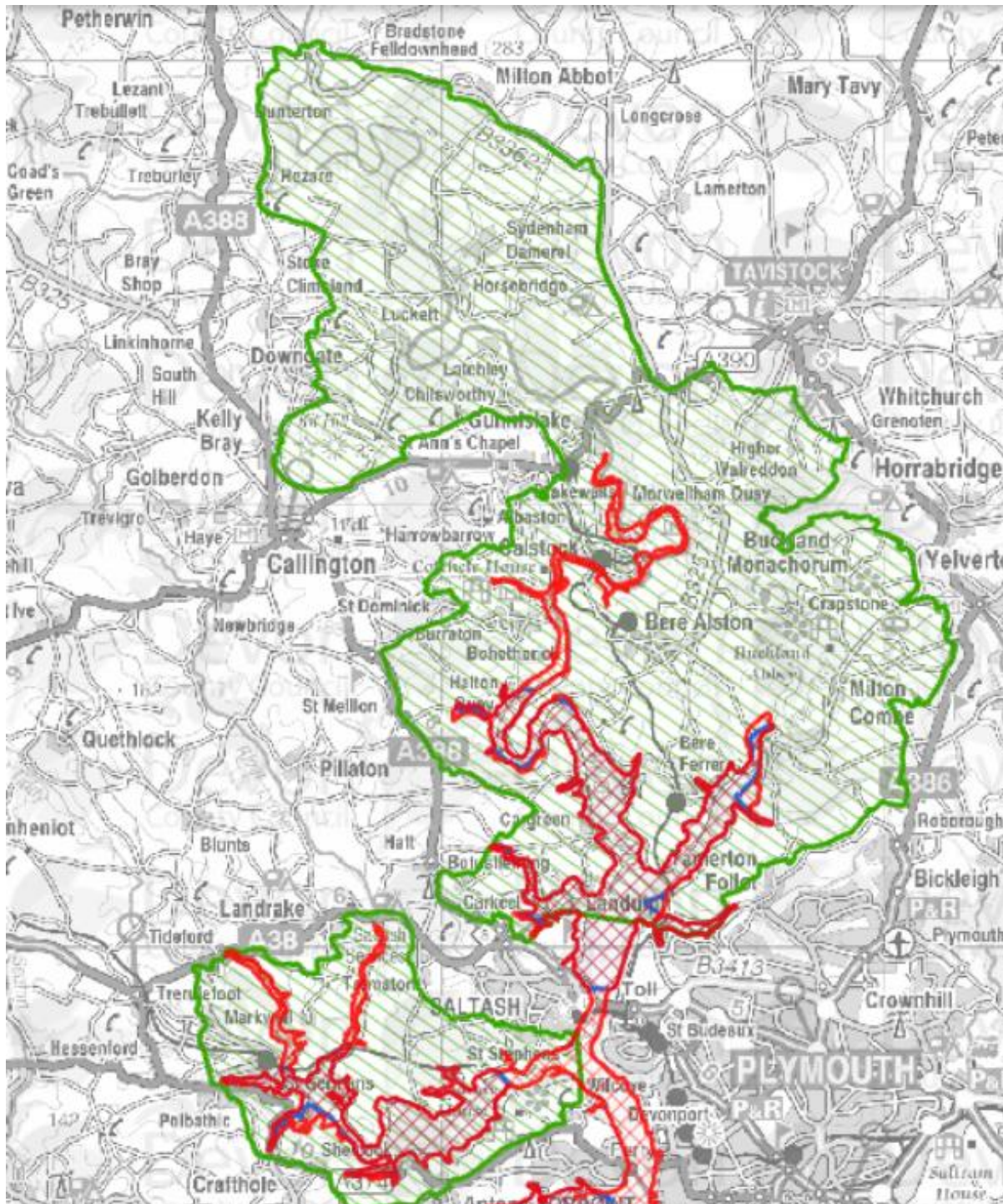
Tamar Valley National Landscape SAC

SAC/SPA EU code	Name	Qualifying features
UK001311	Plymouth Sound and Estuaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • H1110. Sandbanks which are slightly covered by sea water all the time; Subtidal sandbanks • H1130. Estuaries • H1140. Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide; Intertidal mudflats and sandflats • H1160. Large shallow inlets and bays • H1170. Reefs • H1330. Atlantic salt meadows (<i>Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritimae</i>) • S1102. <i>Alosa alosa</i>; Allis shad • S1441. <i>Rumex rupestris</i>; Shore dock
UK9010141	Tamar Estuaries Complex	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A026 <i>Egretta garzetta</i>; Little egret (Non-breeding) • A132 <i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>; Pied avocet (Non-breeding)

Please see Figure 1. for a map of the site.

Map of Tamar Valley SAC site

Figure 1. The SAC and SPA sites within the Tamar Valley National Landscape



Hatched green: Tamar Valley National Landscape area

Red outline: Plymouth Sound and Estuaries SAC area

Blue line: Tamar Estuaries Complex SPA

Site Improvement Plans (SIPs)

A Site Improvement Plan (SIP) for a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protected Area (SPA) is a Natural England document that identifies the main pressures and threats to the site's qualifying habitats and species and sets out targeted actions to address them. It supports the achievement of the site's conservation objectives by outlining practical measures, such as habitat management, water quality improvements, and visitor management, rather than policy statements. SIPs are used as evidence in Habitats Regulations Assessments because they highlight vulnerabilities and management priorities, helping determine whether a plan or project could adversely affect the site's integrity.

[Site Improvement Plan: Plymouth Sound and Tamar Estuary - SIP174](#)

This Site Improvement Plan covers both the Plymouth Sound & Estuaries SAC and the Tamar Estuaries Complex SPA.

Broad impacts and examples of possible causal activities

Category of impact	Examples of activity (on and off site) which may cause this impact
Physical loss	Land claim for development – fragmentation and isolation of habitats and populations
	Coastal defence – loss from land take for structure or erosion from alterations to natural processes
	Construction of artificial features – e.g. wind turbines, marinas
	Changes in land management – e.g. cultivation ploughing, felling afforestation etc.
Physical damage/deterioration	Recreation – trampling, erosion, direct disturbance of species e.g. flushing of breeding birds by dogs off leads
	Changes in land management – grazing, cutting, burning regimes etc. leading to changes in species and community composition, Aggregate dredging mineral extraction
	Selective removal of species eg. bait digging, scrub removal
	Changes in hydrological regime – changes in water abstraction for domestic, agricultural or industrial/commercial use
Non- physical damage	Recreation – visual presence leading to disturbance of species
	Noise – disturbance of species

	Lighting – disturbance to diurnal rhythms
Toxic contaminations	Changes in land management – application of pesticides, fertilizers
	Increases in emissions to air, water or land e.g., from transport or domestic and industrial sources
Non-toxic contamination	Changes in land management – addition of manure, slurry etc. nutrient enrichment and sediment from run off
	Waste water treatment Works outfalls – nutrient enrichment
	Mariculture – organic enrichment
Biological disturbance	Changes in management regime – grazing, cutting, burning
	Non-native species introduction or translocation

Potential impact pathways screened

The following potential impact pathways were considered at screening to ensure compliance with the precautionary principle. Each was assessed against the nature and scope of the Management Plan and the conservation objectives of relevant European sites.

Atmospheric pollution (air quality)

The Management Plan does not allocate land for development or include policies that would generate significant traffic or other emissions. As a result, there is no reasonable pathway for atmospheric pollution impacts on European sites at this strategic level. This potential effect has been considered and screened out with justification, but will be revisited if any future project-level proposals introduce relevant activities.

Recreation pressure

Several policies in the Management Plan aim to improve opportunities for people to experience and enjoy the National Landscape and to encourage volunteering. However, these policies are strategic in nature, do not identify specific locations, and include caveats to ensure that access and engagement are managed responsibly. They promote interpretation, codes of conduct, and partnership working to safeguard sensitive habitats, rather than encouraging unrestricted access. Given that the Management Plan does not allocate development or prescribe site-specific interventions, and that detailed access proposals will be addressed in the Delivery Plan (subject to project-level HRA where necessary), the risk of significant effects on European sites from these policies is considered negligible.

Water quality and quantity

The Management Plan does not include any policies that directly influence water abstraction, discharge, or infrastructure affecting water resources. The National Landscape Partnership is not responsible for operational water management but will promote best practice through advocacy and engagement, for example by supporting farm schemes that encourage efficient water use and reduce diffuse pollution. These strategic actions are positive in nature and do not create pathways for adverse effects on European sites. Therefore, potential impacts on water quality and quantity have been considered and screened out at plan level, with any future project-specific proposals subject to separate HRA if relevant.

Biosecurity and invasive species

The Management Plan includes a policy to reduce invasive non-native species, primarily through awareness campaigns and volunteer engagement. These actions are protective and do not enable activities likely to harm European sites. Therefore, this pathway has been considered and screened out at plan level.

All pathways have been considered and screened out at plan level. Any future Delivery Plan actions will be subject to project-level HRA where relevant

In combination effects

As the NL Management Plan is non-allocating and focused on high-level principles, no additive effects were identified. Any future Delivery Plan actions will be screened separately for in-combination impacts.

Categories for initial screening of policies during preliminary considerations

Effect		Reasoning
None	0	The Policy relates to activities which are not likely to have an effect on the European site by virtue of their specificity, scale or distance from the site
No likely (negative) effect	1	The policy is intended to conserve and enhance biodiversity and measures under this policy will not be likely to lead to negative effects on the European site.
	2	The Policy is specifically 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 European site.
	3	The policy is not likely to lead to activities which are likely to have a negative impact on the European 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 European site.
Potential for a negative effect	5	The policy addresses activities which have the potential to affect the European 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 European site.
Potential for a negative effect/effects uncertain	6	The policy encourages activities which have the potential to affect the European site but the likelihood and risk of significance of effects depends on the location, scale or design 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 European site, either directly or indirectly. Activities under this policy must be subject to assessment to establish, in the light of the sites conservation objectives, whether it can be objectively concluded that there would not be significant effects on the European site.

Likely Significant effect	8	The policy makes provision for activities likely to have significant effects on the European site. Activities under this policy must be subject to assessment to establish, in the light of the sites conservation objectives, whether it can be objectively concluded that there would not be significant effects on the European site.
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Preliminary screening considerations

Tamar Valley Management Plan Policies	Plymouth Sound and Estuaries SAC and Tamar Estuaries Complex SPA
Landscape Character & Scenic Qualities Policies	
LCSQ1	4
LCSQ2	1
LCSQ3	2
LCSQ4	1
LCSQ5	1
Historic Environment & Local Distinctiveness	
HELD1	2
HELD2	2
HELD3	2
HELD4	2
Biodiversity and Geodiversity	
BG1	1
BG2	1
BG3	1
BG4	1
BG5	1
River & Estuarine Use and Management	
REUM1	3
REUM2	1
REUM3	2
REUM4	2
REUM5	4
REUM6	1
Environmental Quality & Climate	
EQC1	2
EQC2	3
EQC3	4
EQC4	4
Farming, Forestry & Land Management	

FFLM1	4
FFLM2	2
FFLM3	4
FFLM4	2
FFLM5	1
FFLM6	1
FFLM7	1
FFLM8	2
Access, Recreation and Tourism	
ART1	4
ART1	4
ART1	3
ART1	4
Planning & Development	
P&D1	2
P&D2	0
P&D3	4
P&D4	4
P&D5	4
P&D6	0
P&D7	4
P&D8	2
P&D9	2
P&D10	2
P&D11	4
P&D12	4
Communities & Culture	
CC1	2
CC2	2
CC3	2
CC4	2
CC5	2
Communication, Education and Awareness	
CEA1	0
CEA2	2
CEA3	2
CEA4	0

Policy Assessment

All policies were assessed as not requiring further review because they are either beneficial or unlikely to cause negative effects on European sites.

The screening confirms that the proposed policies, as currently worded, have No Likely Significant Effects on identified European sites. The Management Plan sets strategic priorities, but specific locations, scale, and design of future proposals cannot yet be defined. Therefore, any future “plans or projects” arising from these policies should undergo proposal-specific HRA screening if required.

The NL Management Plan should be considered as a whole within its statutory purpose: to conserve and enhance natural beauty, which includes flora, fauna, and physiographical features. This aligns with the conservation objectives of European protected sites. When interpreted within this framework, the policies provide sufficient safeguards, and the risk of adverse effects is negligible.

Conclusion: The Tamar Valley Management Plan, taken in its entirety, is assessed as having No Likely Significant Effects on relevant European sites.

This screening report will be shared with Natural England for review and confirmation prior to adoption of the Management Plan. Natural England will also be engaged in the development and annual review of Delivery Plans, which will undergo separate HRA screening where necessary.

Limitations

This screening applies to policies in the draft 2025–30 NL Management Plan. The Delivery Plan, developed annually by the NL Partnership (including Natural England), should be screened—and assessed where necessary—for impacts on European sites. The assessment was based on consultation draft policies informed by previous SEA recommendations, which further reduces the likelihood of significant impacts.