

Strategic Environmental Assessment Screening of the Mendip Hills National Landscape Management Plan (2025-2030)

Final for determination
May 2025



LEPUS CONSULTING
LANDSCAPE, ECOLOGY, PLANNING & URBAN SUSTAINABILITY

Strategic Environmental Assessment of the Mendip Hills National Landscape Management Plan 2025-2030

SEA Screening Document

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Acronyms and abbreviations

A&E	Accident and Emergency
AA	Appropriate Assessment
ALC	Agricultural Land Class
AONB	Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
BMV	Best and Most Versatile
CA	Conservation Area
CP	Country Park
DLUHC	Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
EU	European Union
GP	General Practitioner
HRA	Habitats Regulations Assessment
IRZ	Impact Risk Zone
LB	Listed Building
LCT	Landscape Character Type
LNR	Local Nature Reserve
LSE	Likely Significant Effect
MHCLG	Ministry of Housing, Community and Local Government
MHNLP	Mendip Hills National Landscape Partnership
NHS	National Health Service
NL	National Landscape
NLMP	National Landscape Management Plan
NPPF	National Planning Policy Framework
ODPM	Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
PP	Policy or Programme
PPG	Planning Policy Guidance
PRoW	Public Right of Way
RPG	Registered Park and Garden
SAC	Special Area of Conservation
SEA	Strategic Environmental Assessment
SM	Scheduled Monument
SPA	Special Protection Area
SSSI	Site of Special Scientific Interest
SuDS	Sustainable Urban Drainage System
SWFR	Surface Water Flood Risk
WHS	World Heritage Site

1 Introduction

1.1 About this report

- 1.1.1 The Mendip Hills National Landscape Partnership, referred to hereafter as 'the MHNLP', is in the process of reviewing the Mendip Hills National Landscape Management Plan.
- 1.1.2 National Landscapes are areas legally designated as areas of outstanding natural beauty (AONB) under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949¹ and Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000².
- 1.1.3 The purpose of a National Landscape Management Plan is to identify which aspects of the National Landscape (NL) require conservation and enhancement in order to further support and uphold the distinctive and special qualities of this landscape. The Management Plan seeks to guide national and local policy to further conserve and enhance the purposes of the NL, as well as being a 'material' consideration in the assessment of planning applications.
- 1.1.4 This Screening Report has been prepared to determine whether the emerging Mendip Hills National Landscape Management Plan 2025–2030 should be subject to a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), in accordance with the European Directive 2001/42/EC (SEA Directive)³ and the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (SEA Regulations)⁴.
- 1.1.5 This report screens the Draft Mendip Hills National Landscape Management Plan 2025–2030 (draft version received 11th March 2025)⁵, referred to hereafter as 'the NLMP'.

1.2 Strategic Environmental Assessment

- 1.2.1 The basis for Strategic Environmental Assessment legislation is European Directive 2001/42/EC. This was transposed into English law by the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (SEA Regulations). Detailed guidance of these regulations can be found in the Government publication 'A Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive'⁶.

¹ National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949. Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Geo6/12-13-14/97> [Date accessed: 06/02/25]

² Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/37/contents> [Date accessed: 03/02/25]

³ SEA Directive. Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32001L0042&from=en> [Date accessed: 03/02/25]

⁴ The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (the SEA Regulations). Available at: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2004/1633/contents/made> [Date accessed: 03/02/25]

⁵ Mendip Hills National Landscape Partnership (2025) Mendip Hills National Landscape Draft Management Plan 2025-2030. MHNLP Draft Version provided to Lepus 11/03/25.

⁶ ODPM (2005) A Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/7657/practical_guidesea.pdf [Date accessed: 03/02/25]

- 1.2.2 Under the requirements of the European Directive 2001/42/EC and Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004, certain types of plans that set the framework for the consent of future development projects must be subject to an environmental assessment.

1.3 The Mendip Hills National Landscape

- 1.3.1 The Mendip Hills National Landscape, referred to hereafter as ‘the NL’, is located in the south west of England and covers approximately 198 sq. km. The NL sits across three local authorities including North Somerset, Bath and North East Somerset, and Somerset Council, which has incorporated the districts of Sedgemoor and Mendip. The NL boundary is shown in **Figure 1.1**.

- 1.3.2 The NLMP area is predominantly rural with small settlements, such as Blagdon and Winscombe. Settlements including Cheddar, Shipham, Weston-super-Mare and Wells also border the NL. The landscape consists predominantly of limestone, with Cheddar Gorge located in the south west of the NL and the lakes of the Chew Valley in the north east.

- 1.3.3 The NL has 13 identified special qualities⁷;
- The dark skies, tranquility, sense of remoteness, and naturalness of the area.
 - The distinctive limestone ridges and scarp slopes, rising from the Somerset Levels and Moors, and windswept plateau punctuated by spectacular dry valleys and gorges, ancient sinkholes and depressions, and impressive rocky outcrops.
 - Views towards the Mendip Hills and the distinctive hill line. The views out, and panoramas, including across the Severn Estuary to Wales, the Somerset Levels and Moors, and the Somerset Coast.
 - A sparsely populated plateau, with settlements of Mendip stone largely confined to the spring line.
 - The diverse and visible geology that ranges from Devonian to Jurassic in a relatively small area, making it one of the best areas in the country to appreciate the relationships between geology, landscape, and natural history, including the iconic Cheddar Gorge.
 - Caves, for their wildlife, geological, archaeological importance, including Aveline’s Hole the oldest cemetery site in Britain, and Goughs Cave one of the most important Palaeolithic sites in Europe that provides a breeding site for Lesser and Greater Horseshoe bats.
 - The limestone aquifer supplying water to the reservoirs of Cheddar, Chew Valley, and Blagdon lakes, and providing habitats of local and international importance for birds with Chew Valley Lake designated a Special Protection Area for bird species.
 - The Chew Valley and the Yeo Valley - a farmed landscape with distinctive hedgerow patterns and hedgerow trees, providing interconnected semi-natural habitats.

⁷ Mendip Hills National Landscape Partnership (2025) Mendip Hills National Landscape Draft Management Plan 2025-2030. MHNLDP Draft Version provided to Lepus 11/03/25.

- Dry stone walls that criss-cross the plateau farmlands grazed by sheep, beef and dairy cattle, are a key feature of the karst landscape and provide a unique habitat for wildlife corridors.
- Steep south-facing slopes of flower rich, limestone grasslands, including the Mendip Limestone Grasslands Special Area of Conservation, and the area known as the Strawberry Belt of horticultural activity producing soft fruits.
- Ancient woodland and wooded combes on the north and south slopes offering varied habitats of national, and international importance for a wide diversity of wildlife, including dormouse and bats.
- A landscape tracing human settlement dating back 500,000 years. Henge monuments, barrows, and hillforts through to World War 2 sites are prominent features on the plateau, as are remnants of Roman and Victorian lead mining.
- A landscape enabling people to experience the special qualities of the Mendip Hills MNL through a wide range of interests and outdoor pursuits and activities.

1.3.4 Cumulatively, these 13 special qualities contribute to the distinctive character recognisable of the NL.

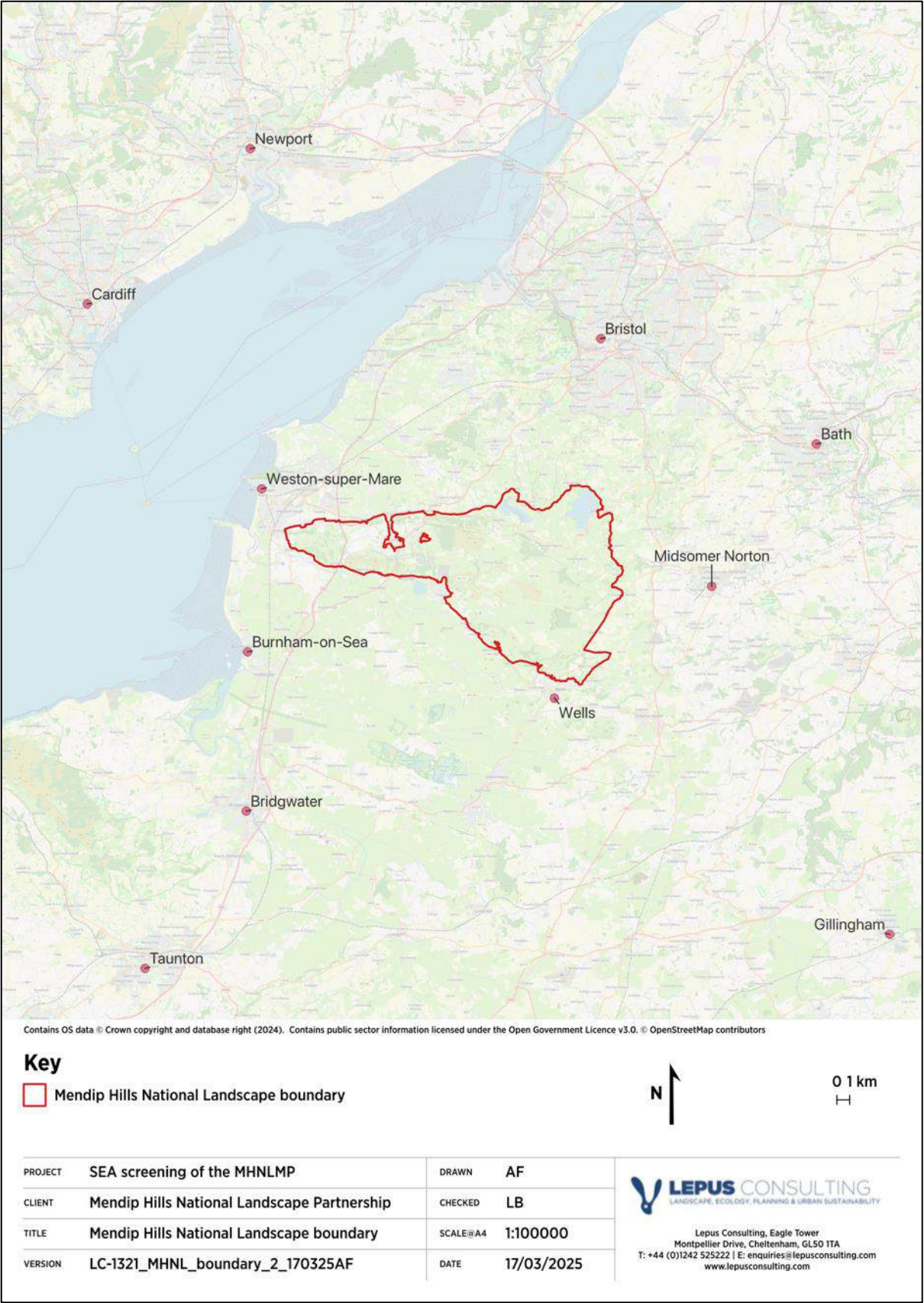


Figure 1.1: Mendip Hills National Landscape Management Plan Area

1.4 The Mendip Hills National Landscape Management Plan

- 1.4.1 The CRow Act 2000 confirmed the significance of AONBs and Section 85 places a statutory and legal duty on all relevant authorities to have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing natural beauty when discharging any function in relation to, or affecting land within an AONB. The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 brought amendment of section 85 (A1) into statute on 26 December 2023, whereby Section 85 of the CRow Act 2000 is amended as follows:

“A1) In exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in an area of outstanding natural beauty in England, a relevant authority other than a devolved Welsh authority must seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area of outstanding natural beauty.”

- 1.4.2 The CRow Act (2000) requires relevant local authorities to produce and adopt a management plan which *“formulates their policy for the management of their area of outstanding natural beauty and for the carrying out of their functions in relation to it.”*

- 1.4.3 Section 90A of the CRow Act states:

(1) *“The Secretary of State may by regulations make provision-*

(a) Requiring a relevant authority other than a devolved Welsh authority to contribute to the preparation, implementation or review of a plan under section 89 relating to an area of outstanding natural beauty in England;

(b) setting out how such a relevant authority may or must do so.”

- 1.4.4 The NLMP will replace the existing Mendip Hills AONB Management Plan (2019-2024)⁸. Once the NLMP has been adopted by the relevant local authorities, it will form a key part of the conservation and maintenance of the NL.

- 1.4.5 The Mendip Hills National Landscape Management Plan covers the entirety of the Mendip Hills NL (see **Figure 1.1**). The NLMP does not include any policies, but sets out a vision, objectives and targets for the area. The NLMP covers the period 2025 to 2030, a five-year time frame, in accordance with the CRow Act (2000).

- 1.4.6 The MHNLP seeks to conserve and enhance the quality of the NL to support its purpose for the duration of the NLMP, supporting the desired future state of the NL in 15 years. The NLMP sets out a Vision for the Mendip Hills: *“The Mendip Hills National Landscape offers a wealth of opportunities for all people and wildlife to benefit from the nationally protected landscape. The living landscape conserves and enhances natural beauty, supporting the economy, health and wellbeing of our society”*.

⁸ Mendip Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (2019) Management Plan 2019-2024. Available at: <https://mendiphills-nl.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/FINAL-Mendip-Hills-AONB-Management-Plan-Review-2019-v1-1.pdf> [Date accessed: 17/03/25]

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- 1.4.7 Through the NLMP, this vision will be realised via four main themes: Place, Nature, Climate and People, each of which sets out various objectives to be achieved throughout the duration of the NLMP period up to 2030. This will be expected to support nature recovery, as well as informing the future of planning applications. A summary of the NLMP's objectives is listed in **Appendix A**.
- 1.4.8 The NLMP is a cross-authority plan which seeks to conserve and enhance the distinctive qualities of the NL. Its focus is to protect the landscape above all else. The multi-authority nature of the NLMP allows it to cohesively maintain the NL's special features.
- 1.4.9 The MHNLP produces the NLMP on behalf of its local authority partners: Somerset Council; Bath and North-East Somerset Council and North Somerset Council.
- 1.4.10 If the NLMP is revised before adoption, a re-screening of any significant amendments should be undertaken for the purposes of the SEA screening processes.

1.5 Consultation

- 1.5.1 The Draft NLMP is subject to public consultation, which provides an opportunity for the public and organisations to comment on the NLMP. After consultation, the NLMP will be updated and approved with Natural England before the final plan is adopted by the LPAs and sent to the Secretary of State.
- 1.5.2 This SEA report has been consulted on with the three statutory bodies, Historic England, Natural England and the Environment Agency for a period of three weeks, prior the six-week consultation period for the NLMP.

2 SEA Screening

2.1 Strategic Environmental Assessment

- 2.1.1 SEA seeks to ensure that environmental considerations are part of the process of preparing certain plans and programmes. The objective of the SEA Regulations is to provide for the high level of protection of the environment and to contribute to the integration of environmental considerations into the preparation and adoption of plans and programmes, with a view to promoting sustainable development. It helps to ensure that, in accordance with the Regulations, an environmental assessment is carried out of certain plans and programmes which are likely to have significant effects on the environment.
- 2.1.2 The process for determining whether or not an SEA is required is called screening. In order to screen, it is necessary to determine if a plan will have significant environmental effects using the criteria set out in Schedule I of the SEA Regulations (Annex II of the SEA Directive). A determination cannot be made until the three statutory consultation bodies have been consulted: The Environment Agency, Historic England and Natural England.
- 2.1.3 Following consultation, and taking on board the opinions of the statutory bodies, the MHNLP as relevant authority, will make a final determination and share the findings with the statutory bodies not later than 28 days of having made the determination.

2.2 The screening process

- 2.2.1 The CRow Act (2000) requires relevant local authorities to produce and adopt a management plan.
- 2.2.2 Section 90A of the CRow Act states:
- (2) *“The Secretary of State may by regulations make provision-*
- (c) *Requiring a relevant authority other than a devolved Welsh authority to contribute to the preparation, implementation or review of a plan under section 89 relating to an area of outstanding natural beauty in England;*
- (d) *setting out how such a relevant authority may or must do so.”*
- 2.2.3 **Figure 2.1** presents a diagram prepared by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) (2005). This shows the application of the SEA process to plans and programmes. The sequential approach in the flow diagram can be used to screen the NLMP.
- 2.2.4 **Table 2.1** uses the questions presented in **Figure 2.1** to establish whether there is a need for SEA for the NLMP.

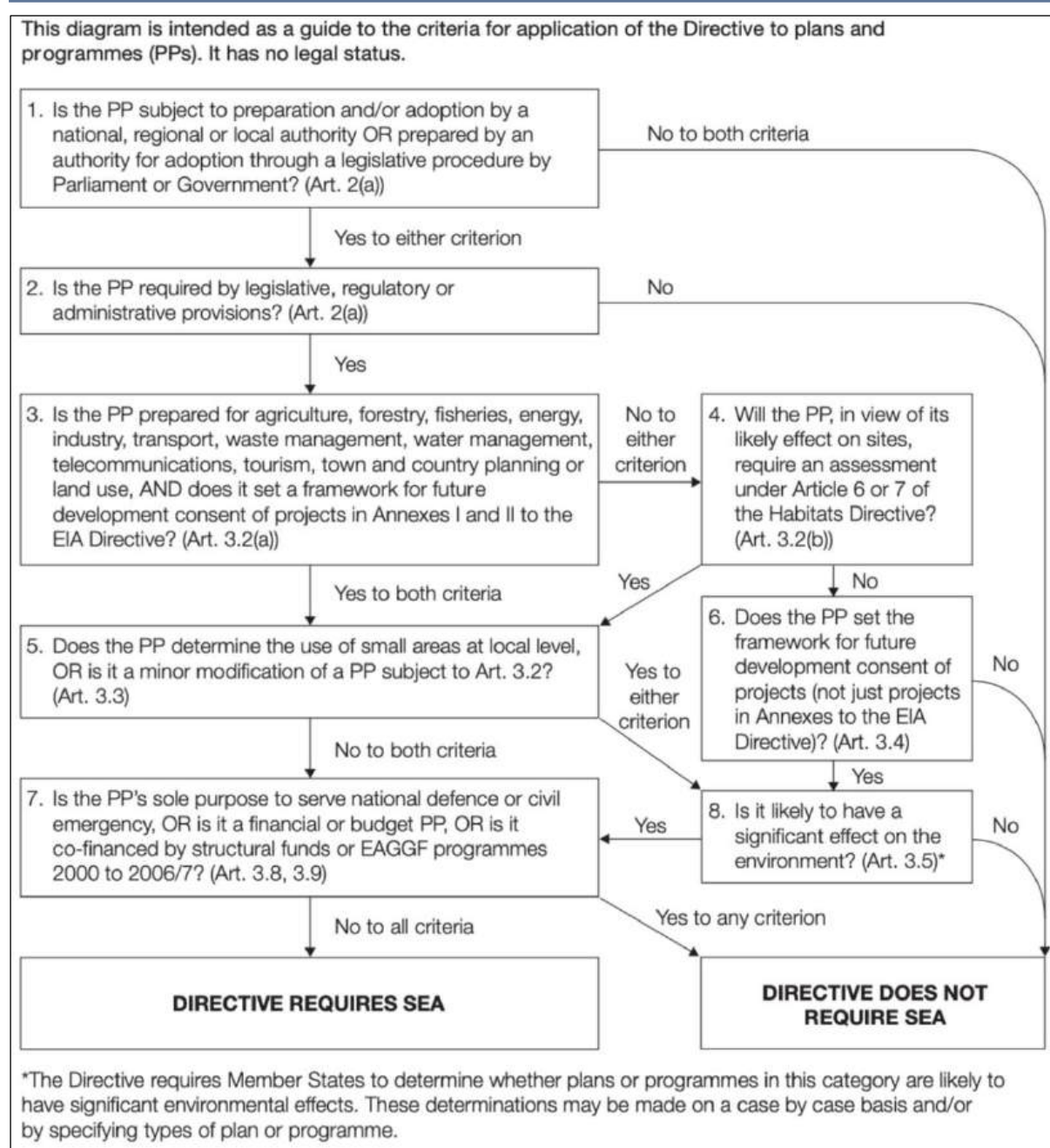


Figure 2.1: Application of the SEA Directive to plans and programmes⁹.

⁹ ODPM (2005) A Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive

Table 2.1: *Establishing whether there is a need for SEA*

Question	Y/N	Reason
Is the PP (plan or programme) 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 NLMP is being prepared by the Mendip Hills National Landscape Partnership on behalf of Somerset Council, Bath and North East Somerset Council and North Somerset Council.
Is the PP required by legislative, regulatory or administrative provisions? (Art. 2(a))	Yes	The CRoW Act (2000) requires relevant local authorities to produce and adopt a management plan.
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 consent of projects in Annexes I and II to the EIA Directive? (Art 3.2(a))	Yes	Although the purpose of the NLMP is not solely for the topics listed, it is likely to have an effect on several of them. The NLMP does not allocate any development, such as detailed in Annexes I and II of the EIA Directive, however the NLMP will be a 'material' consideration in determining planning applications, and as such is likely to influence future development consent of projects in Annexes I and II of the EIA Directive.
Will the PP, in view of its likely effect on sites, require an assessment for future development under Article 6 or 7 of the Habitats Directive? (Art. 3.2 (b))	No	Not applicable (see also the HRA Screening ¹⁰).
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)	Yes	The NLMP seeks to conserve and enhance the quality of the NL to support its purpose for its duration through which it is likely to determine the use of small areas at the local level.
Does the PP set the framework for future development consent of projects (not just projects in Annexes to the EIA Directive)? (Art 3.4)	Yes	The NLMP does not allocate any development, such as detailed in Annexes I and II of the EIA Directive, however the NLMP will be a 'material' consideration in determining planning applications and as such is likely to influence future development consent of projects in Annexes I and II of the EIA Directive.
Is it likely to have a significant effect on the environment? (Art. 3.5)	No	See Sections 2.5 – 2.12 and Chapter 3 .
Is the PP's sole purpose to serve national defence or civil emergency, OR is it a financial budget PP, OR is it co-financed by structural funds or EAGGD programmes 2000 to 2006/7? (Art 3.8, 3.9)	No	Not applicable.

¹⁰ Lepus Consulting (2025) HRA Screening of the Mendip Hills National Landscape Management Plan (2025-2030), March 2025

2.3 Relevance to the SEA Directive

- 2.3.1 Question 8 within the ODPM guidance (see **Figure 2.1**) refers to whether the NLMP would have a significant effect on the environment. The criteria for determining the likely significance of effects from Annex II of the SEA Directive and Schedule 1 of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004, can be used to screen the NP. **Sections 2.5 – 2.12** consider the likely environmental effects of the plan.

Table 2.2: Mendip Hills National Landscape NLMP and the SEA Directive

Criteria (from Schedule I of SEA Regulations): (1) The characteristics of plans and programmes and (2) Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected	Response for the Mendip Hills National Landscape Management Plan
1.(a) 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	The NLMP does not allocate any development, such as detailed in Annexes I and II of the EIA Directive, however the NLMP will be a 'material' consideration in determining planning applications and as such is likely to influence future development consent of projects.
1.(b) the degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy	Through its objectives, the NLMP seeks to conserve and enhance the quality of the NL. Other plans and programmes which might relate to the NL, such as local plans which are coincident with the NLMP area, will be expected to support and uphold the aims of the NLMP.
1.(c) the relevance of the plan or programme for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development	The NLMP does not allocate any development, but seeks to conserve and enhance the quality of the NL, supporting the NLMP area as well as wider environmental considerations.
1.(d) environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme	No environmental issues were identified relevant to the NLMP.
1.(e) the relevance of the plan or programme for the implementation of Community legislation on the environment (for example, plans and programmes linked to waste management or water protection)	Through its objectives, the NLMP seeks to conserve and enhance the quality of the NL. This will be expected to support wider environmental processes such as ecosystem services relating to water, air and soil for example.
2.(a) the probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects	The NLMP is not expected to result in any significant environmental effects.
2.(b) the cumulative nature of the effects	The NLMP is not expected to have any cumulative effects and is not thought to contribute to in combinations impacts in the NLMP area.
2.(c) the transboundary nature of the effects	The NLMP is not expected to result in any significant transboundary environmental effects.
2.(d) the risks to human health or the environment (for example, due to accidents)	There are not anticipated to be any risks to human health as a result of the NLMP.
2.(e) the magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected)	The magnitude and spatial extent of effects outlines in (a) are not thought to extend further than the plan area.

Criteria (from Schedule I of SEA Regulations): (1) The characteristics of plans and programmes and (2) Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected	Response for the Mendip Hills National Landscape Management Plan
2.(f) the value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to: (i) special natural characteristics or cultural heritage (ii) exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values (iii) intensive land-use	Through its objectives, the NLMP seeks to conserve and enhance the quality of the NL. As such, it is not expected that the NLMP will adversely impact the special natural characteristics or cultural heritage in the NL. The NLMP will also not be expected to cause exceedances of environmental standards or lead to intensive land use.
2.(g) the effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, Community or international protection status	Through its objectives, the NLMP seeks to conserve and enhance the quality of the Mendip Hills NL. As a result, it is anticipated that the NLMP will support the management of and improvements to this protected landscape.

2.4 Determination of likely significant effects

2.4.1 A summary of baseline conditions and an assessment of the potential effects of the NLMP against each of the topics set out in Annex I (f) of the SEA Directive (Schedule 2 of the SEA Regulations) is presented in the following sections. The NLMP objectives are set out in **Appendix A**.

2.5 Biodiversity, flora and fauna

2.5.1 The Mendip Hills supports a range of designated and non-designated biodiversity features.

2.5.2 The Mendip Limestone Grasslands Special Area of Conservation (SAC), Mendip Woodlands SAC and North Somerset and Mendip Bats SAC are all located within the south of the NLMP area, with several other small sections of the North Somerset and Mendip Bats SAC located to the north and east of the NLMP area. Chew Valley Lake is the only Special Protection Area (SPA) found within the NL, found in the north east. The Severn Estuary Ramsar site (also designated as a SAC and SPA) is also located circa 2.2km to the west of the NL boundary. **Figure 2.2** shows the European sites within and around the NLMP area. The HRA Screening of the NLMP will provide further details on the characteristics and vulnerabilities of European sites within the vicinity of the NL.

2.5.3 The NL contains 29 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), including Chew Valley Lake SSSI, the largest SSSI in the NLMP area, Blagdon Lake SSSI, Burrington Combe SSSI and Dolebury Warren SSSI to the north of the NLMP area. There are also several smaller SSSIs located to the south and east of the NLMP area, including Line Brimble Pit and Cross Swallet Basins SSSI, The Cheddar Complex SSSI, and Axbridge Hill and Fry's Hill SSSI, among others.

2.5.4 The Mendip National Nature Reserve (NNR) is located within and around the NLMP area, located predominantly to the south and west, there are also six parcels of the NNR located outside of the NLMP area. There are no Local Nature Reserves (LNR) found within the NL, with the nearest being Folly Farm LNR 1.3km to the east and Uphill LNR 1.5km to the west of the NLMP area, as seen in **Figure 2.3**.

-
- 2.5.5 There are numerous stands of ancient woodland found within the NL covering approximately 500ha of the NLMP area. There are also areas of priority habitat, some of which remain intact, such as around the Black Down and Cheddar Gorge, with others more fragmented such as around settlements including Blagdon. Key priority habitats present include deciduous woodland, lowland heathland, good quality semi-improved grassland and lowland calcareous grassland.
- 2.5.6 Overall, the NLMP sets out a framework for the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity, recognising existing and future environmental challenges. The NLMP also does not allocate any development within the NL. The NLMP is expected to further support nature recovery in the NL in line with the Mendip Hills Nature Recovery Plan¹¹. Objectives BG1, BG2, BG3, BG4, BG5 and BG6 of the NLMP seek to promote the protection biodiversity in the NL including the enhancement and conservation of the habitats and species which contribute to the 13 special qualities of the landscape.
- 2.5.7 Objectives under the climate theme, such as LM3 and LM4, are also likely to support biodiversity through the effective management of woodland and quarries to support climate change mitigation and adaptation.
- 2.5.8 Through the above objectives which seek to support the biodiversity of the NL in line with other strategies for the NL, such as the Nature Recovery Plan¹², and as the NLMP does not propose any development, it is likely the NLMP will not result in any significant adverse effects on biodiversity, flora and fauna in the NLMP area.

¹¹ Mendip Hills National Landscape (2023) Nature Recovery Plan. Available at: https://mendiphills-nl.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/MHAONB-Nature-Recovery-Plan_finalv03082023.pdf [Date accessed: 13/02/25]

¹² Ibid.

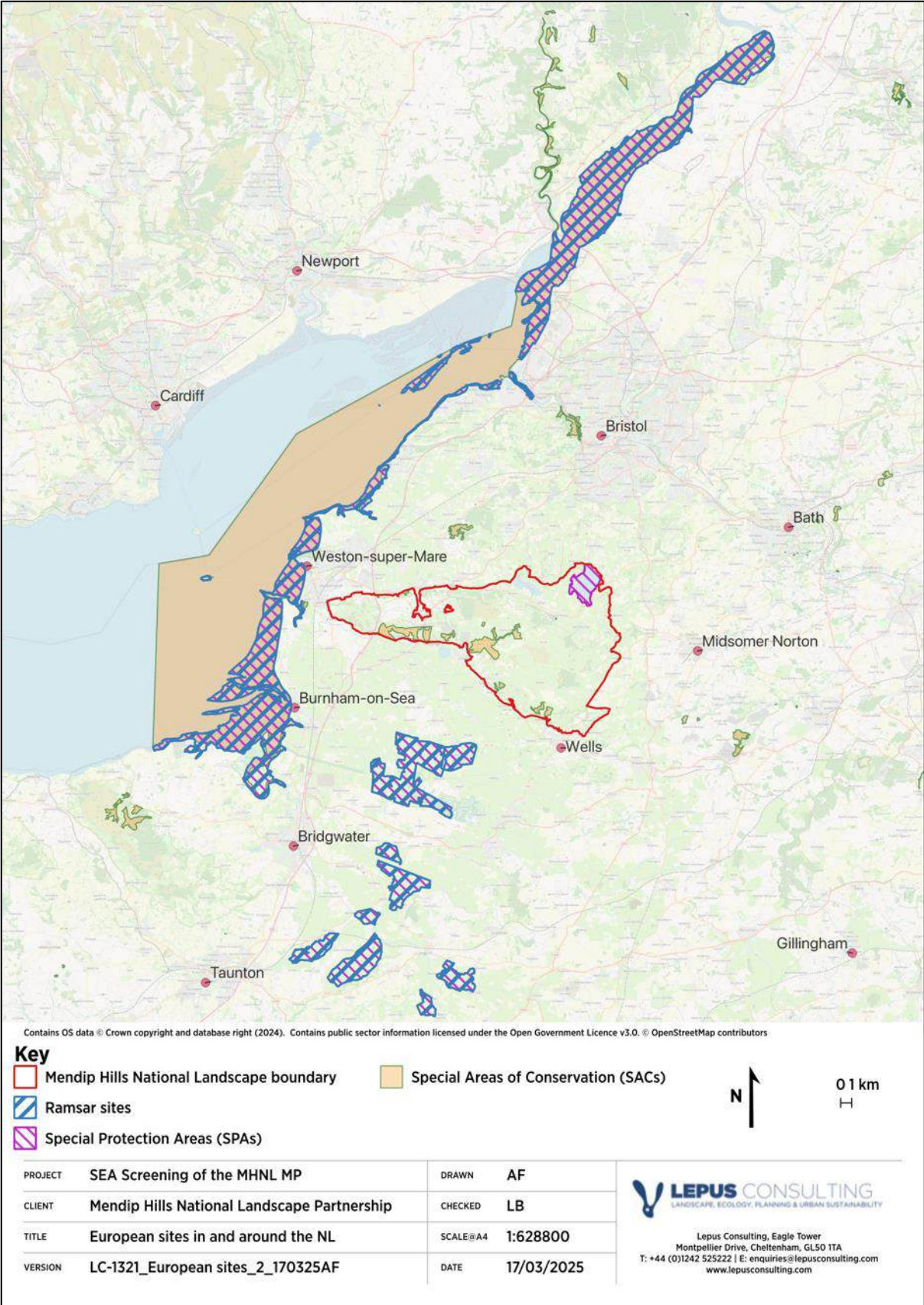


Figure 2.2: European sites in and around the NL (source: Natural England)

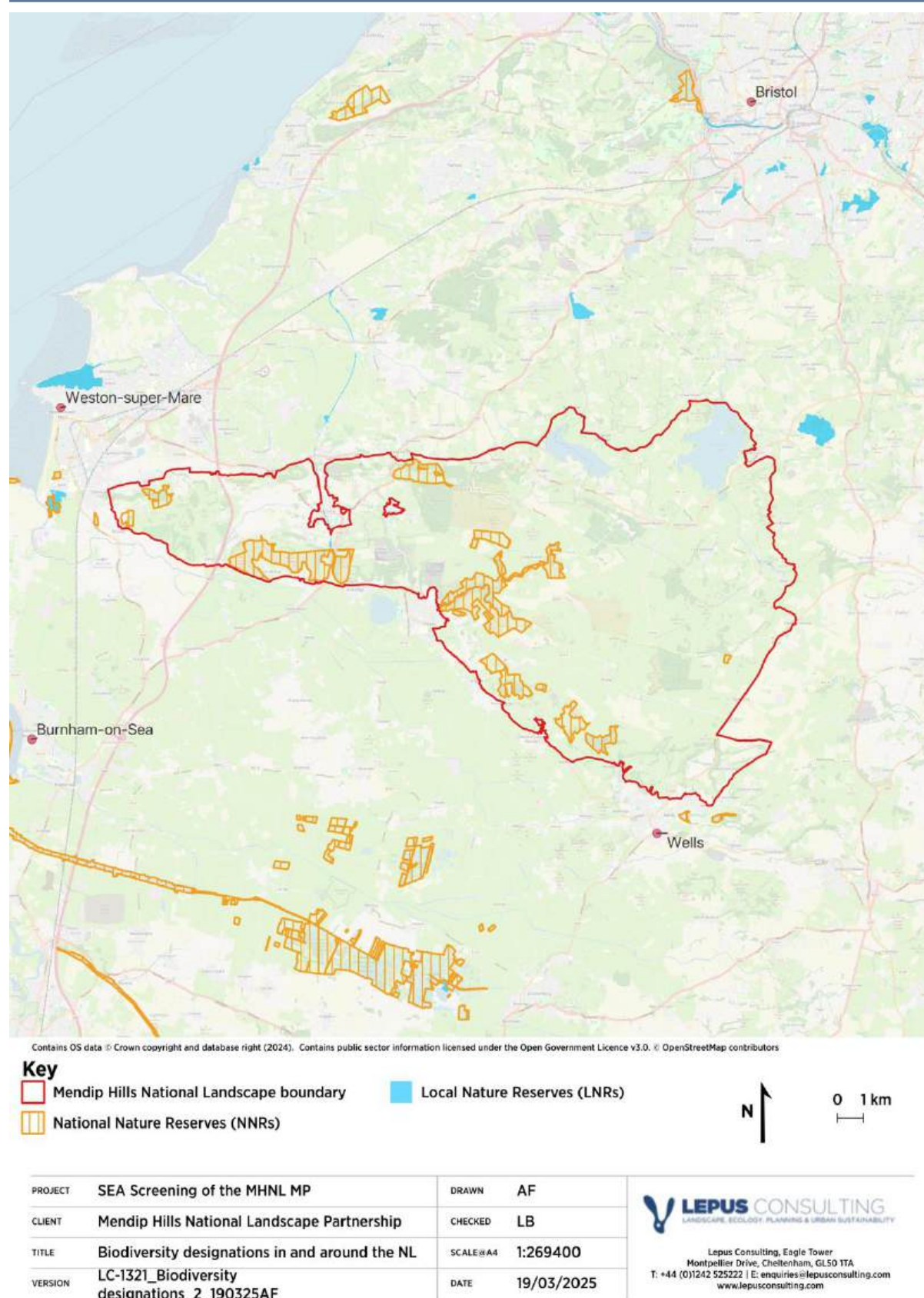


Figure 2.3: Biodiversity designations in and around the NL (source: Natural England)

2.6 Population and human health

- 2.6.1 Between 2011 and 2021 each of the four local authorities found within the NL experienced a population increase. North Somerset increased by 7%, Bath and North East Somerset increased by 9.9%, Mendip increased by 6.2% and Sedgemoor increased by 9.2%¹³. The number of people of working age within the NL is steadily declining¹⁴.
- 2.6.2 The NLMP details issues concerning education and understanding around the NL, ensuring those in hard-to-reach communities are supported through involvement with the management and governance of the NL. The NLMP will be expected to support equal access and inclusivity for those in the NL area.
- 2.6.3 There are numerous Public Rights of Way (PRoW) running through the NL, as well as several National Cycle Network trails, which will be expected to support easy access for residents and visitors to the landscape and amenities. The NL provides opportunities for good access to the outdoors which will support the physical and mental wellbeing of local residents and visitors. NLMP Objectives R1 and R2 seek to ensure that the landscape is promoted for public access to ensure use for all, where this accords with the purpose of the NL designation, and promoting local tourism which will boost the local economy as conserving and enhancing the landscape through greater understanding.
- 2.6.4 The rural nature of the NL also means that private car use to access the NL is high. NLMP Objective R3 seeks to promote green infrastructure routes which will encourage sustainable methods of travel, as well as encouraging and providing residents and users with safe and sustainable access to green infrastructure, expected to foster positive physical and mental health practices.
- 2.6.5 NLMP Objectives R4, P1, P2, P3 and P4 seek to support healthy lifestyles through encouraging the use of the NL for outdoor activities, as well as providing inclusive and equal opportunities for local people to become more involved with the NL through management and governance, participation and education. This will be expected to support more active lifestyles encouraging people to value the environment in which they live and work.
- 2.6.6 Since the NLMP does not propose new development and the objectives aim to protect and enhance the landscape, improving understanding and enjoyment of the NL, it is likely that the NLMP will not result in any significant adverse effects on population and human health.

¹³ ONS (2021) How the population changed where you live: Census 2021. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/articles/howthepopulationchangedwhereyoulivecensus2021/2022-06-28> [Date accessed: 04/02/25]

¹⁴ Mendip Hills AONB (2022) State of AONB Report. Available at: <https://mendiphills-nl.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/State-of-the-AONB-2022-Report-Final-6June23.pdf> [Date accessed: 04/02/25]

2.7 Soil, water and air

- 2.7.1 Soil resources provide invaluable ecosystem services, such as nutrient cycling and carbon storage and having good quality soil is essential in maintaining these multifunctional benefits for agriculture, for example. The majority of the NLMP area is located on Grade 3 Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) land (see **Figure 2.4**). There are small portions of Grade 1 and 2 ALC land predominantly located to the west of the NLMP area. Land of Grades 1, 2 and 3a is considered to be the best and most versatile (BMV) land thus supporting agriculture and food production¹⁵. There are also large areas of lower quality Grade 4 land throughout the NL, and small portions of Grade 5 ALC land to the east and south, as well as areas of non-agricultural land to the north and south east of the NLMP area.
- 2.7.2 There are two watercourses which flow through the NL. The Lox Yeo, a tributary of the River Axe, runs through the west of the NLMP area. The River Chew runs near to the eastern border of the NLMP area. The source of the River Axe is located just into the NLMP area at Wookey Hole, with the River Yeo, Cam Brook and the River Banwell located in close proximity to the NL boundary. There are areas located in Flood Zone 3 to the north east of the NLMP area, with a small area in Flood Zone 2 found in the west. There are small areas of surface water flood risk (SWFR) scattered across the NLMP area, with high concentrations in and around Winscombe and along the Lox Yeo River.
- 2.7.3 There are concerns relating to traffic and congestion within the NL area particularly around Cheddar Gorge, which the NLMP seeks to better manage. The main roads which pass through the district include the M5, A39, A371, A38 and A368 which are likely to contribute to increased flows of traffic and reduced air quality, although there are no AQMAs designated within the NL boundary, with the nearest being the Farrington Gurney AQMA approximately 3km east of the NL boundary. Bristol Airport is located approximately 3.7km to the north of the NLMP area and is expected to undergo an expansion which may have the potential to affect the air quality within the NL.
- 2.7.4 NLMP Objective NR1 seeks to promote the value of the NL for its multifunctional ecosystem service functions, such as carbon sequestration and filtering air and water. This will support the maintenance of healthy soils and reduce soil erosion. Objectives LM1 and LM2 aim to support farming and land management to have positive impacts with regard to the preservation of high quality soil resources.
- 2.7.5 Through Objective NR2, the NLMP aims to promote the conservation and enhancement of water and air quality. This will be expected to reduce polluting activities which may be associated with construction and development.
- 2.7.6 NLMP Objectives D2 and D5 will also be anticipated to support improvements to air quality through ensuring that transport and associated infrastructure do not impede the NL, appropriate mitigation measures are put in place where development is supported and that the special qualities of the NL are conserved. This will be particularly relevant where the M5, A39, A371, A38 and A368 pass through the NL to the west and has the potential to expose residents and visitors to air and noise pollution.

¹⁵ Natural England (2021) Guide to assessing development proposals on agricultural land. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/agricultural-land-assess-proposals-for-development/guide-to-assessing-development-proposals-on-agricultural-land> [Date accessed: 14/02/25]

2.7.7 As no development is proposed within the NLMP, it is likely that the NLMP will not result in significant adverse effects on the soil resource, water or air resource.

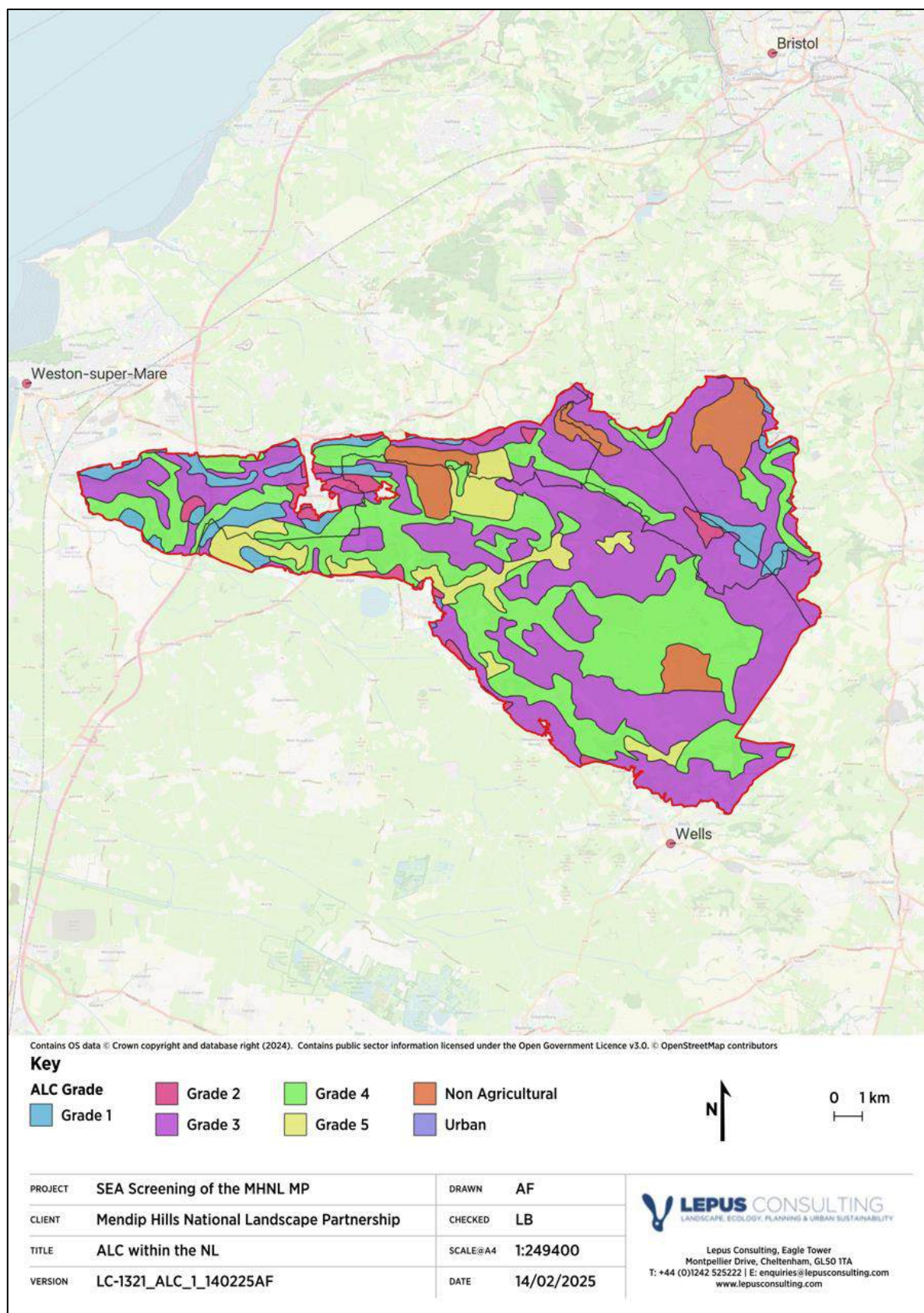


Figure 2.4: Agricultural Land Classification in the NL (source: Natural England)

2.8 Climatic factors

- 2.8.1 Increasing temperatures, more frequent storm events with increased rainfall and more frequent drought as a result of climate change are all likely to have an impact on the NL. The NLMP has detailed a Climate Vulnerability Assessment which seeks to gauge the likely impacts on the NL's special qualities as a result of increased rainfall, increased temperatures and extreme events. Many of the special qualities, such as the south facing slopes and ancient wooded combs of the NL are anticipated to be vulnerable to these threats associated with climate change. Through conserving and enhancing the quality of the landscape it is likely that the NLMP support multifunctional ecosystem services which can support the NL's adaptation to and mitigation of climate change.
- 2.8.2 The NL contains features providing numerous multi-functional ecosystem services which the NLMP seeks to protect, such as under Objective NR1. This will be expected to support the conservation and enhancement of key landscape and biodiversity features facilitating carbon sequestration, air and water filtration and flood alleviation among others, supporting adaptation and mitigation to climate change.
- 2.8.3 As detailed in **section 2.6**, NLMP Objective R3 seeks to deliver a connected network of green infrastructure routes. This will be expected to support sustainable and active mode of travel within the NL and will be expected to help reduce the reliance on private vehicles in this predominantly rural area, contributing to a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.
- 2.8.4 NLMP Objective D1 seeks to ensure that any development in the NL will be designed appropriately to ensure it is resilient to climate change and meeting net zero targets. This will be expected to ensure the NL and development within it is resilient to climate change.
- 2.8.5 The NLMP does not propose any development. Together with the above policy provisions, it is likely that the NLMP will not result in significant adverse effects on climate change.

2.9 Material assets

- 2.9.1 The material assets topic considers social, physical and environmental infrastructure. This sub-section should be read alongside 'Population and human health', which details health and social infrastructure implications of the NLMP; 'Climatic factors', which considers transport infrastructure and the provision of sustainable transport; 'Soil, water and air', which considers air and water quality and agricultural land classification; and the 'Biodiversity, flora and fauna' sub-section, which considers environmental infrastructure.
- 2.9.2 The NL is an area rich in natural capital. As detailed in previous sections including 'biodiversity, flora and fauna' (**section 2.5**) and 'soil, water and air' (**section 2.7**), assets such as BMV land, and the variety of habitats present contribute to the NL's multifunctional ecosystem services, such as carbon sequestration and storage, air and water filtration, and nutrient cycling. The NLMP seeks to conserve and enhance the quality of the NL landscape and as such will in turn support the functioning of these systems.
- 2.9.3 NLMP Objective L4 will be likely to have a positive impact on the local economy and the provision of amenities through supporting local products and services which help conserve and enhance the landscape.

- 2.9.4 As detailed in **section 2.6** (population and human health), NLMP Objective R2 will also be expected to support the local economy through tourism which aims to conserve and enhance the landscape, as well as seeking to improve understanding and importance of the NL.
- 2.9.5 Owing to the provisions of the NLMP objectives discussed above, and as the NLMP does not propose any development, it is likely that the NLMP will not result in any significant adverse effects on the NL's material assets.

2.10 Cultural heritage

- 2.10.1 The NL is an area rich in heritage with prehistoric settlement activity and World War 2 archaeology. The NLMP area contains pre-historic henges, including Gorsey Bigbury and Priddy Circles as well as large Iron Age hillforts, such as Dolebury which all form an important part of the NL.
- 2.10.2 **Figure 2.5** shows the designated heritage assets that lie within the NL. There are 208 Listed Buildings (LBs) located within the NLMP area, with 11 Grade I LBs, 179 Grade II LBs and 18 Grade II* LBs the majority of which are concentrated in the west and north of the NL. There are 173 Scheduled Monuments (SMs) located within the NLMP area, the largest of which is 'World War II bombing decoy complex, anti-aircraft obstructions and Beacon Batch round barrow cemetery on Black Down' located centrally in the north of the NLMP area.
- 2.10.3 There is one Registered Park and Garden (RPG), 'Milton Lodge and the Combe', located in the south west of the NLMP area, bordering the city of Wells. There are also 15 Conservation Areas (CAs) in the NLMP area including the Christon CA, Blagdon CA and Compton Martin CA, among others.
- 2.10.4 NLMP Objective H1 seeks to ensure the distinct sense of place is maintained through supporting improvements to the recording, interpretation and understanding of the NL's historic environment. This will be expected to further the understanding of what heritage features are present within the area, as well as consolidating their importance to the NL's unique historic character. This will be furthered under NLMP Objective H2 which seeks to increase awareness and communication of the significance of a high-quality historic environment.
- 2.10.5 Under Objective H3, the NLMP aims to ensure there is no further loss of heritage assets through appropriate managements of assets designated for varying levels of historic value. This will be expected to help preserve the historic character of the NL for current and future generations.
- 2.10.6 Due to the objectives outlined above and as the NLMP does not propose any development, it is likely that the NLMP will not result in any significant adverse effects on cultural heritage assets within the NLMP area.

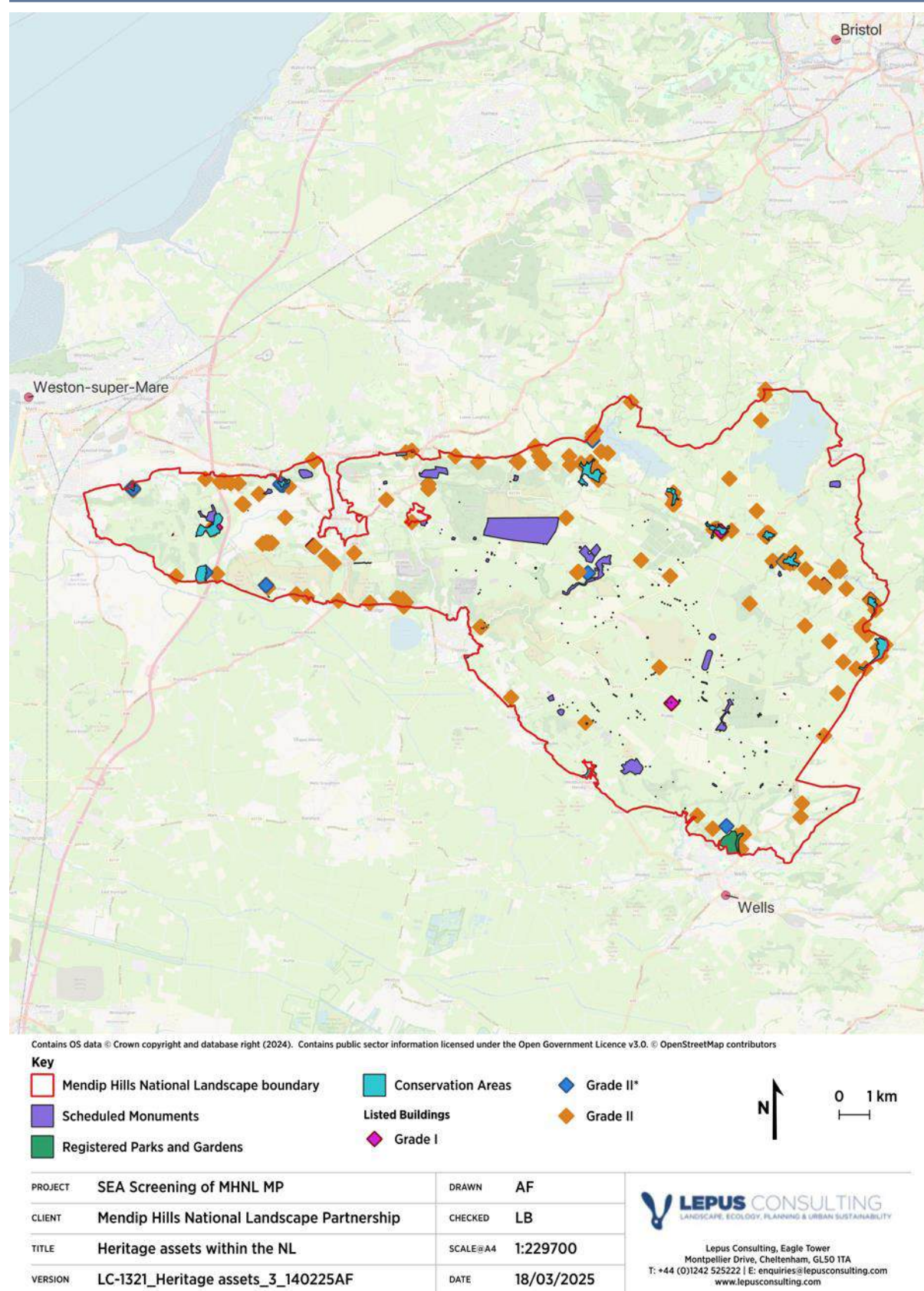


Figure 2.5: Heritage assets in and around the NL (Source: Historic England)

2.11 Landscape

- 2.11.1 The Mendip Hills is a designated AONB valued for its limestone hills providing wide views across the NL and the Severn Estuary¹⁶, natural surface water, such as the lakes in the Chew Valley, a combination of large and irregular fields enclosed by hedgerows and dry stone walls, caves, woodland and a series of roman roads crossing the limestone hills, as detailed in the Mendip Hills National Character Area¹⁷.
- 2.11.2 The NL is a predominantly rural area with other key features, including Cheddar Gorge to the south west of the NLMP area. As detailed in **section 2.6**, there are numerous PRow running throughout the NL allowing residents and visitors to access and enjoy the amenities of the landscape.
- 2.11.3 Bath and Bristol have areas of Green Belt surrounding the city which have been identified to prevent the effects of urban sprawl and coalescence. A small section of this Green Belt falls within the NL to the north.
- 2.11.4 NLMP Objectives L1 and L2 both seek to ensure the distinctive landscape of the NL is maintained through appropriate management and necessary skills required. As a result, it is expected that the distinctive features of the landscape will be conserved and enhanced.
- 2.11.5 Increasing the awareness of why the Mendip Hills were designated as NL will encourage residents and visitors to appreciate the special qualities present in the landscape and take greater care in their approach to the environment.
- 2.11.6 As set out in **section 2.5**, through increasing awareness of the special qualities of the NL, as well as working to maintain and improve them, as detailed in Objectives BG1, BG2, BG3, BG4, and BG5, the NLMP will enhance the quality of the landscape through conserving and enhancing the distinctive biodiversity features, of the NL, such as ancient wooded combs. This will be further supported under Objective LM3, whereby supporting the woodland economy will be anticipated to enhance these habitats across the NL and facilitate improved woodland management.
- 2.11.7 The NLMP does not propose any development. The objectives within the NLMP will be expected to conserve and enhance the distinctive landscape features and special qualities of the NL. Therefore, it is likely that the NLMP will not result in significant adverse effects on the landscape.

¹⁶ Wardell Armstrong (2018) Landscape Character Assessment: Supplementary Planning Guidance. Available at: <https://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2022-06/B2%20-%20landscape%20character%20assessment%20SPD.pdf> [Date accessed: 14/02/25]

¹⁷ Natural England. National Character Area 141: Mendip Hills- Key Characteristics. Available at: <https://nationalcharacterareas.co.uk/mendip-hills/key-characteristics/> [Date accessed: 14/02/25]

3 Conclusions

3.1 SEA screening outcome

- 3.1.1 This report has explored the potential significant environmental effects of the proposed Mendip Hills National Landscape Management Plan with a view to determining whether an environmental assessment is required under the SEA Directive.
- 3.1.2 Evaluation of the topics cited in Schedule 2 of the SEA Regulations (Annex 1(f) of the SEA Directive), has revealed that there are no likely significant effects associated with any part of the NLMP.
- 3.1.3 It is recommended that the Mendip Hills National Landscape Management Plan should **not** be screened into the SEA process.

3.2 Consultation

- 3.2.1 This Screening Report has been subject to consultation with the statutory bodies: Natural England, the Environment Agency and Historic England. The comments received during the consultation are presented in **Appendix B**.

4 Next steps

4.1 Final determination

- 4.1.1 Following consultation, and taking on board the opinions of the statutory bodies, the MHNLMP as relevant authority, will make a final determination and share the findings with the statutory bodies not later than 28 days of having made the determination.

Appendix A: Mendip Hills National Landscape Objectives

Objective theme	Objective reference	Objective
Place	L1	Promote appropriate management to ensure that the distinctive Mendip Hills NL landscape is conserved and enhanced.
Place	L2	Provide opportunities to acquire and develop skills required to care for and promote the landscape and its special qualities.
Place	L3	Increase awareness and appreciation of the purposes of designation and the special qualities of the NL.
Place	L4	Increase awareness of the benefits of supporting local products and services that help conserve and enhance the landscape.
Place	H1	Improve the recording, interpretation and understanding of all aspects of the NLs historic environment to ensure local communities and visitors enjoy a rich experience of the sense of place.
Place	H2	Increase awareness and communicate the significance of the high quality historic environment of the Mendip Hills NL.
Place	H3	Promote appropriate management of sites, structures and landscapes designated for their international, national, regional or local importance in the historic environment to ensure no further loss of heritage assets.
Nature	BG1	Increase the characteristic habitats and species of the Mendip Hills.
Nature	BG2	Promote a landscape scale approach to the conservation and enhancement of ecological networks within and adjoining the NL.
Nature	BG3	Increase monitoring and awareness of the biodiversity resource of the Mendip Hills NL so that it is sufficiently understood to continue to guide the successful conservation of the characteristic habitats and species.
Nature	BG4	Promote a partnership approach to implementing NL Management Plan objectives, Protected Landscapes Targets & Outcomes Framework and National Character Area Statements of Opportunity.
Nature	BG5	Recognise and celebrate geological sites and features of the Mendip Hills NL to ensure the successful conservation both of the geology and wildlife habitat they provide.
Nature	BG6	Increase awareness of the Mendip Hills geology, particularly cave systems in relation to the importance they play in water management and water supply.
Nature	NR1	Recognise and promote the benefits and relevance of the NL as a valuable source of ecosystem services, economic and health benefits.
Nature	NR2	Promote conservation of water resources, reduce pollution and enhance their quality, by appropriate management and use.
Nature	NR3	Promote sustainable management of soils in accordance with best practice to minimise erosion and water pollution and maximise resilience to drought.
Climate	LM1	Support and promote farming to have a positive impact on the Mendip Hills NL, contributing to climate adaptation and mitigation and to the furthering of the special qualities of the National Landscape, while remaining the principle land use.
Climate	LM2	Support and promote rural land management that conserves and enhances natural resources, including biodiversity special to the Mendip Hills, landscape character, the historic environment and aids public awareness and enjoyment of the Mendip Hills NL.
Climate	LM3	Support and promote a sustainable woodland economy that enhances the Mendip Hills NL woodlands and wider landscape with targeted woodland management of

Objective theme	Objective reference	Objective
		diverse species resilient to climate adaptation and mitigation, and creation in appropriate locations supporting wood fuel and local community opportunities.
Climate	LM4	Influence the use, restoration and after use of all quarries to minimise the impact on the landscape, contribute to climate adaptation and mitigation and to be compatible with the purposes of designation.
Climate	D1	Working with the local planning authorities, ensure that development in the NL and its setting is of a nature, scale, location and design that meets community need, resilience to climate change and net zero targets, without compromising the special qualities of the Mendip Hills NL.
Climate	D2	Working with the local highways authorities, ensure that the special qualities of the NL are fully respected in the planning, design, provision and management of all types of transport and associated infrastructure.
Climate	D3	Reduce carbon emissions within the NL through reducing energy consumption, applying energy conservation measures, encouraging more sustainable patterns of development, and utilising renewable energy generation technologies that are of an appropriate type and scale for their siting.
Climate	D4	Ensure issues of importance for the management of the NL landscape are fully reflected in strategies and plans produced by other agencies and local communities.
Climate	D5	The impact of development on the protected landscape and the special qualities of the Mendip Hills NL would need to be carefully considered, and where supported would require appropriate and acceptable mitigation measures.
People	R1	Maintain, improve and promote public access and quiet recreational activities, addressing anti-social activities and avoiding sensitive habitats, with measures to ensure access for all in accordance with the purposes of the National Landscape designation.
People	R2	Support the development of tourism that benefits the local economy, conserves and enhances the landscape including sensitive habitats, and improves understanding of the Mendip Hills.
People	R3	Develop and deliver a safe, accessible, connected strategic network of green infrastructure routes and space that works for people and nature, avoiding particularly sensitive habitats, and promote more sustainable methods of travel to the NL for enjoyment and recreation.
People	R4	Support healthy lifestyles by encouraging more people to use the Mendip Hills for sustainable outdoor activities, while ensuring they avoid sensitive habitats.
People	P1	Increase the opportunities for volunteering and the range of people participating, to benefit the environment, people's health and wellbeing and local communities in and around the NL.
People	P2	Encourage the involvement of local people and the wider community in the management of the NL.
People	P3	Promote the Mendip Hills as an educational resource for all ages and encourage sharing of research and learning tools.
People	P4	Improve equality, diversity and inclusivity in the management and governance of the Mendip Hills National Landscape.

Appendix B: Consultation Responses

Consultee	Consultation response
Natural England (response received 01/05/25)	It is Natural England's advice, on the basis of the material supplied with the consultation, that: - significant effects on statutorily designated nature conservation sites or landscapes are unlikely; and, - significant effects on Habitats sites, either alone or in combination, are unlikely. Natural England can confirm, at this stage, further screening of the SEA is not required. Natural England does not hold information on the location of significant populations of protected species, so is unable to advise whether this plan is likely to affect protected species to such an extent as to require an SEA. Further information is included in Natural England's <u>standing advice</u> on protected species. Furthermore, Natural England does not routinely maintain locally specific data on all environmental assets. The plan may have environmental impacts on priority species and/or habitats, local wildlife sites, soils and best and most versatile agricultural land, or on local landscape character that may be sufficient to warrant an SEA. Information on ancient woodland, ancient and veteran trees is set out in Natural England/Forestry Commission <u>standing advice</u>. Natural England reserves the right to provide further advice on the environmental assessment of the plan. This includes any third party appeal against any screening decision you may make. If a SEA is required, Natural England must be consulted at the scoping and environmental report stages.
Historic England (response received 01/05/25)	"We have no reason to challenge your conclusion that an SEA is not required."
Environment Agency	No response provided during consultation window.

Ecological Services

Green Infrastructure

Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment

Landscape Character Assessment

Habitats Regulations Assessment

Strategic Environmental Assessment

Sustainability Appraisal



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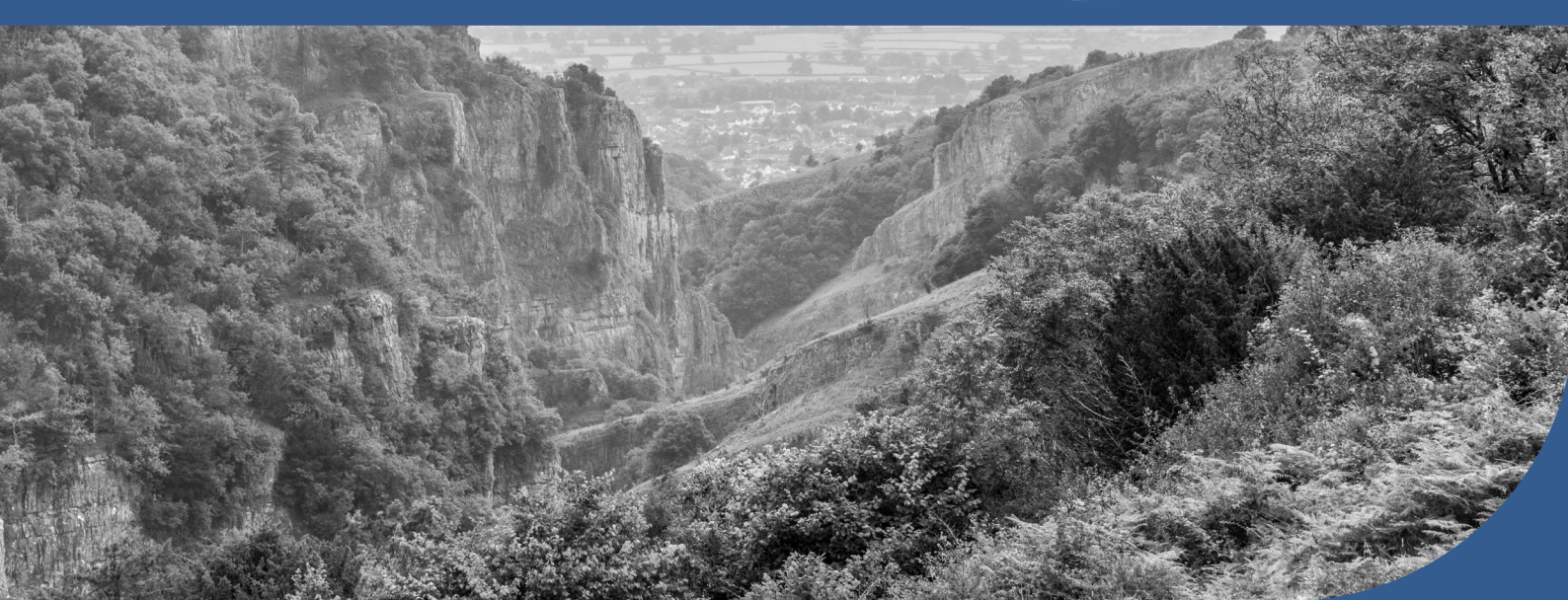
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