



---

# Strategic Environmental Assessment Screening Opinion

---

Coniston Neighbourhood  
Plan

---

March 2015

---



# **Strategic Environmental Assessment Screening Opinion**

## **Introduction**

This screening report is designed to test whether or not the Coniston neighbourhood plan requires a Strategic Environmental Assessment. The exercise tests whether there are likely to be significant environmental effects arising from the policies in the draft neighbourhood plan.

An environmental assessment is a requirement of The Environmental Assessment of plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.

The Authority has undertaken an assessment of the draft policies in the Submission document, which contain the main land-use principles to be included in the final plan. Comments were invited from the consultation bodies, and the assessment was finalised following comments from both Natural England and the Environment Agency.

## **What is the scope of the Plan?**

The Neighbourhood Plan sets the local planning policy framework for Coniston Parish. When the Plan is 'adopted' by the local planning authority, it will become part of the Development Plan for the Lake District National Park and will be used in the decision making process for assessing planning applications within Coniston Parish, where relevant.

## **What are the objectives of the Plan?**

It is hoped that the Neighbourhood Plan will assist in overcoming some of the major issues that the community is facing including:

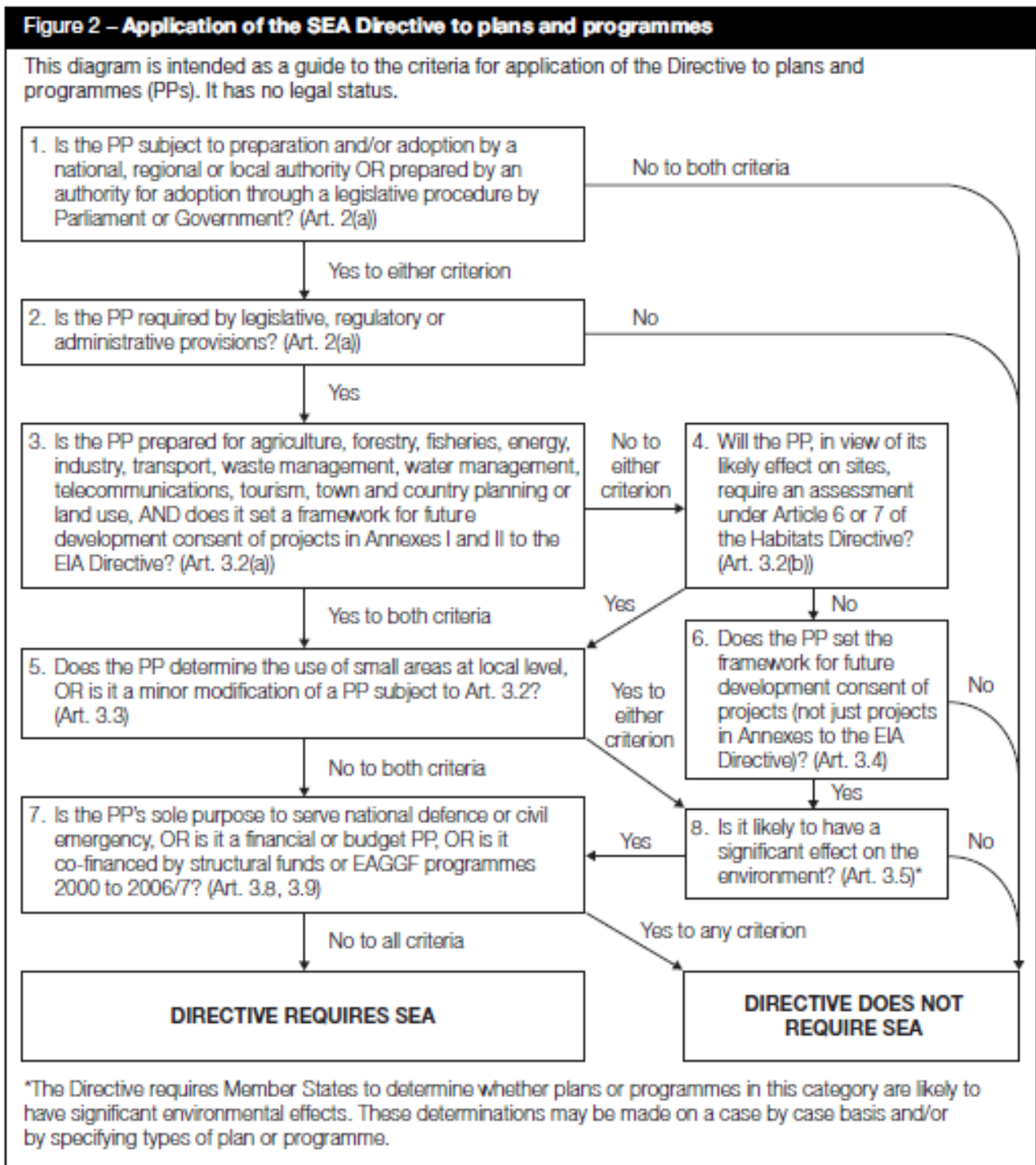
- the loss of village homes,
- the lack of affordable homes to allow village families to remain in their home village,
- the lack of local homes to allow professional families to move to the village
- the effect on the village of the decline in tourism
- the potential for overburdening the community with tourism
- and the potential loss of village facilities.

## **What is the outcome of Screening?**

Having regard to the location, nature and scale of the Coniston Neighbourhood Plan, it is considered that the policies in the Plan are unlikely to adversely affect the integrity of the Special Qualities or the environmental characteristics of the area. Therefore a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is not considered necessary in this instance.

The overall conclusion that no significant effects on the environment are likely was determined following a methodological assessment carried out having regard to the SEA Directive and Schedule 1 and 2 of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.

The diagram below - extracted from the 'A Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive (2005)' - illustrates the process for screening a planning document to ascertain whether a full SEA is required



**Does the Coniston Neighbourhood Plan require a full Strategic Environmental Assessment? The list of questions below follows the screening process set out in Figure 2 above.**

- 1. Is the plan or programme (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 draft Coniston Neighbourhood Plan is prepared by a qualifying body – namely Coniston Neighbourhood Plan working group with support and advice from the local planning authority. The legislative procedure is set out in ‘The Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012.

- 2. Is the PP required by legislative, regulatory or administrative provisions? (Art. 2(a))**

Yes? Communities are encouraged rather than required to develop a Neighbourhood Plan. If a community chooses to develop a neighbourhood plan, there are ‘provisions’ in place that require the neighbourhood plan to be prepared in a formal way.

- 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 consent of projects in Annexes I and II to the EIA Directive? (Art 3.2 (a))**

The PP is prepared for town and country planning or land use, but it does NOT set a framework for future development consent of projects in Annexes I and II of the EIA Directive.

- 4. Will the PP, in view of its likely effects on sites, require an assessment under Article 6 or 7 of the Habitats Directive? (Art. 3.2(b))**

No.

- 6. 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 Neighbourhood Plan sets out land use planning policies, and specifically policies which support small scale housing schemes and new businesses.

- 8. Is it likely to have a significant effect on the environment? (Art. 3.5)**

No.

### **Conclusion**

The draft Coniston Neighbourhood Plan does not require a full SEA to be undertaken.

## **Criteria for determining the likely significance of effects on the environment**

(Schedule 1: The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004)

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;**

Neighbourhood planning gives communities direct power to develop a shared vision for their neighbourhood and shape the development and growth of their local area through locally distinct planning policies. The Coniston Neighbourhood Plan provides additional guidance on location, nature and size of development in relation to the following themes:

- a. Businesses
- b. Housing
- c. Buildings, Structures and Sites of Historic Importance
- d. Village Services
- e. Tourism
- f. Transport and Traffic Management
- g. Environmental Sustainability

- **The degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy**

A neighbourhood plan attains the same legal status as the Local Plan once it has been agreed at a referendum and is made (brought into legal force) by the local planning authority. At this point it becomes part of the statutory development plan. Applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

- **The relevance of the plan and programme for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development**

The Coniston Neighbourhood Plan is in general conformity with the strategic policies of the Core Strategy (Local Plan Part One), which aims to achieve sustainable development which conserve and enhance the special qualities of the Lake District. The draft policies in the neighbourhood plan complement this aim, and specifically, by promoting sustainable development that retains the unique character of Coniston and that of the spectacular surrounding landscape.

- **Environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme**

The neighbourhood plan area falls entirely within the Lake District National Park. This is a nationally important landscape and is considered as part of the neighbourhood plan. Coniston is the fifth largest settlement in the Lake District National Park and is a popular tourist destination particularly for outdoor pursuits. The neighbourhood plan identifies a range of special qualities within Coniston, and specifically, the picturesque landscape and important flora and fauna. It also names the iconic housing design as being a feature and acknowledges the pressure associated with tourism related development and the potential this has to overburden the community. Policies within the draft plan seek to retain the unique character of the settlement and that of the spectacular surrounding landscape, as well as identifying specific environmental features which it aims to protect and enhance. However there are other internationally, nationally and locally designated sites that are found within the boundary of the neighbourhood plan that have not been referenced, see Table 1. An impact risk on these designated sites has not been identified by Natural England.

- **The relevance of the plan or programme for the implementation of Community legislation on the environment (such as, plans and programmes linked to waste management or water protection)**

The Neighbourhood Plan is prepared for town and country planning and land use. It does not introduce additional environmental criteria not already covered by the NPPF and associated technical guidance.

**Table 1: Designated sites in Coniston Parish**

<b>Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)</b>
Little Langdale tarn
Birk Fell Hawse Mine
Tilberthwaite Gill
Tarn Hows
High Cross Plantation
Yewdale Beck
<b>Coniston Mines and Quarries</b>
Ashgill Quarry
County Wildlife Sites
Widdy Gill
Wetherlam Juniper Scrub
Tilberthwaite Woods
Atkinson Coppice
Bakestone Barrow Wood
Low Coppice
Yewdale Fells
Holme Fell
Calf Crag Wood
Yewtree Tarn
Tarn Hows Wood
Lags Coppice
Yewdale Fell Woods
Benson Coppice
Lags Wood
Wharton Tarn
Black Dyke Moss
Storth Gutter
Coniston water
Crag Heads Woods
Brantwood Meadows
Park Coppice
Great Briery Coppice
Beck Leven Coppice
Bleathwaite Coppice
Calf Close Coppice

**Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to:**

**a. The probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects;**

Coniston Parish is within the Lake District National Park – a protected landscape. National Parks are characterised by special qualities which distinguish them from each other and from other parts of the country. It is essential that they are given the highest level of protection so as not to compromise their integrity and value.

The strategic approach to the conservation and enhancement of the special qualities of the Lake District National Park is articulated in Core Strategy Policy CS01: National significance and distinctive nature of the National Park. These special qualities are prevalent in Coniston Parish, and the draft neighbourhood plan acknowledges these special qualities and those particular to Coniston Parish. CNP1 (Our Community) supports new development that retains the unique character of Coniston and that of the spectacular surrounding landscape.

**b. The cumulative nature of the effects;**

The neighbourhood plan seeks to facilitate small scale housing, businesses and local service development which will not have significant detrimental effects on the unique character of Coniston or the spectacular surrounding landscape. There will be no negative cumulative effects on the environment as a consequence of the draft policies.

**c. The trans-boundary nature of the effects;**

The neighbourhood plan establishes locally distinct development policies for Coniston Parish. Trans-boundary effects will be minimal.

**d. The risks to human health or the environment (such as due to accidents)**

The draft policies do not provide unacceptable risks to human health or the environment. The vision of the plan is to retain a sustainable community within a protected and valuable landscape. The draft policies seek to create the conditions to improve health by providing opportunities for small scale housing development for local people alongside employment opportunities neither of which have a detrimental effect on the landscape.

**e. The magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected);**

Coniston Parish covers an area of 4,231ha and has a resident population of 928 (Census 2011).

**f. The value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to**

**a. Special natural characteristics or cultural heritage;**

**b. Exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values; or**

**c. Intensive land-use;**

The draft policies will not create conditions for intensive land-use, or exceed environmental quality standards or cultural heritage. Although some development is recognised as being necessary to prevent the decline of the resident population, it will be small to moderate in scale, and serve to meet the needs of the community. And development proposals for building structures and sites of historic importance will need to conserve and enhance the character, integrity and setting.

**g. The effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, Community or international protection status**

The Designated Area is entirely within the Lake District National Park, where great weight is given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty.

	Policy	Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected						
		a	b	c	d	e	f	g
1	<p><b>Policy CNP 1 – Our Community</b> Development of an appropriate scale that meets the needs of the community will be supported; particularly development which enhances the role of Coniston as a rural service centre and that retains its unique character and that of the spectacular surrounding landscape.</p> <p>The Neighbourhood Plan will support the optimisation of community benefits arising from future appropriate enterprise and development. This will be done by ensuring that Coniston Parish Council and other appropriate bodies are involved at all stages of future developments.</p>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
2	<p><b>Policy CNP 2 – Business</b> Development proposals will be supported that will enable the expansion and retention of existing local businesses including those listed above and the establishment of new businesses that diversify and strengthen the local economy.</p> <p>The upgrading of broadband will be encouraged, including the introduction of ultra-high speed broadband at 50Mbps, to assist local businesses and the community as a whole.</p>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
3	<p><b>Policy CNP 3 – Housing</b> The Neighbourhood Plan will support housing schemes that meet local need and local affordable housing needs that satisfy policy CNP1 of this plan.</p> <p>The Neighbourhood Plan will support small scale self-build where this is for permanent occupancy on appropriate sites and which conforms to Local need criteria</p> <p>The Neighbourhood Plan will identify empty homes suitable for return to occupancy within the parish and will attempt to return the homes to the affordable housing stock</p>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
4	<p><b>Policy CNP 4 – Buildings Structure &amp; Sites of Historic Importance</b> The determination of planning applications will take account of the need to conserve and enhance the character, integrity and setting of locally important historic sites, shown on the list in Annex 9.</p> <p>In the event that a place of worship or the St Andrew’s Youth Centre is no longer used for the existing purpose the Neighbourhood Plan will support its reuse in accordance with the policies in this Plan.</p>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
5	<p><b>Policy CNP 5 – Village Services</b> The Neighbourhood Plan will support appropriate development proposals that will enable the retention of key local services.</p>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x

	<p>Coniston Parish Council in conjunction with Coniston and Torver Community Land Trust will oppose development proposals that would result in the loss of a key local service unless it can be demonstrated that there is no longer a community need for the facility or that community use of the property is no longer suitable or viable</p> <p>Coniston Parish Council will strive to maintain the primary and secondary schools on separate sites. Should it prove to be necessary to merge the two schools on one site, development of any vacant site will be supported provided the development complies with the relevant policies in this plan.</p>							
6	<p><b>Policy CNP6 – Tourism</b></p> <p>The Neighbourhood Plan will support the development of new tourist attractions that have no significant adverse impact on the local community and are of an appropriate scale and in accordance with the policies of this plan.</p> <p>The Neighbourhood Plan will also support development proposals that constitute an appropriate extension and / or improvement of existing tourist attractions and services, in particular:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Steam Yacht Gondola</li> <li>• Coniston Launch</li> <li>• Ruskin Museum</li> <li>• Brantwood</li> <li>• Coniston Boating Centre</li> </ul> <p>will be supported in accordance with the policies of this plan.</p> <p>Coniston Parish Council will encourage and assist tourism providers to build on the present accolade that Coniston is one of the leading centres for mountain walking in the North of England.</p> <p>Coniston Parish Council will monitor the effect on Coniston of the present decline in tourism in the National Park and help, discuss and advise both those serving the tourist industry and also the wider community on action that could be taken to counteract this decline, in accordance with the policies of the Plan.</p>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
7	<p><b>Policy CNP 7 – Transport / Traffic Management / Parking</b></p> <p>The Neighbourhood Plan will support improvements to the infrastructure that enable road users to remain safer, for example, off-road cycleways to remove bicycles from main roads used by vehicles, and footpaths to remove pedestrians from main roads.</p> <p>We will support development that improves the management of traffic in the parish.</p> <p>We will work to ensure that existing parking areas in the village are maintained for use by both local people and visitors. We will support development of additional parking facilities of limited size where there</p>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

	is a proven need for such facilities.							
8	<p><b>Policy CNP 8 – Environmental Sustainability</b></p> <p>When determining planning applications affecting the following environmental attributes of the Coniston Parish, due account will be given to protecting and enhancing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Coniston and Crake Catchment area to ensure the long-term protection of water quality within the area.</li> <li>• Yewdale Wood to protect it as a green corridor</li> <li>• Renewable energy schemes including hydro schemes</li> <li>• The quieter areas at the head of Coniston Lake in the Monk Coniston area</li> <li>• The Tilberthwaite Valley</li> <li>• The Commons Lands to the south of the Village</li> </ul> <p>Coniston Parish Council in conjunction with the Coniston Flood Forum team, the Environment Agency and Cumbria County Council will establish future programmes, with time-scales, which are designed to prevent flooding of village properties using information accrued from previous flooding incidents and from the Environment Agency's surveys.</p> <p>Coniston Parish Council in conjunction with the Coniston and Torver Community land Trust will ensure that all new housing developments in the parish conform to the Code for sustainable Homes, Schedule 2, or greater.</p> <p>Coniston Parish Council will encourage and be supportive of education schemes to encourage reducing wastage (for example water, energy) and to promote the development of environmentally friendly renewable energy schemes.</p>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x