

BLACK DOWN AND **BURRINGTON HAM** **PROJECT CONSULTATION**

ESTABLISHING THE NEED & PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

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Rural Environment Practice

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1.INTRODUCTION

There are a number of issues affecting Black Down and Burrington Ham that are beginning to have a detrimental impact upon the landscape, heritage and wildlife values of the area. These are the values that draw recreational users (walkers, cyclists and horse riders) to the area. In order to clearly identify the issues that affect the area and consider possible solutions it was important to consult with a wide variety of interested groups; these included land managers, central and local government bodies, voluntary organisations, local communities and user groups.

An initial round of consultation was therefore undertaken and the results and feedback will be used to scope a project that will tackle the various issues. The consultation took place during February and March 2010 and involved meetings with twenty key stakeholders and the distribution of a questionnaire.

The consultation revealed an overwhelming concern that increasing visitor numbers were having a detrimental impact upon the landscape and heritage values of the area. Strong support was expressed for works to repair and restore eroded paths and involve user groups in initiatives that will secure more sustainable access to the area, balancing the needs of the various users with the carrying capacity and natural qualities of the land.

2. PURPOSE OF THE CONSULTATION

The purpose of the consultation was to clearly identify the issues affecting the area, consider potential solutions and establish the need and scope for a sustainable access project. The consultation considered the following: -

- What are the main issues currently affecting the area in respect of access and interpretation?
- Is there support for measures to address erosion, even if this resulted in temporary closure of paths?
- What do people think about current signing and interpretation provision, and how this can be improved? How can we provide better information about the history and natural importance of the site?
- How can we provide sustainable access to the area for walkers, off-road cyclists and horse riders in ways that do not damage its wildlife and archaeological interest?
- How can we involve the local community and user groups in decisions about the area?
- What is the role and involvement of key partners, and possible working arrangements?

3. CONSULTATION METHOD

3.1 Identifying Key Contacts

Before consulting key stakeholders, internal discussions were held with officers from the Mendip Hills AONB Partnership. The discussions considered the variety of organisations and individuals who should be consulted and a list of key contacts was drawn up to include parish councils, user groups, land managers, local and central government, voluntary organisations and other interested parties.

A list of the key organisations and individuals consulted is set out below: -

Black Down Advisory Group,	Somerset County Council
Forestry Commission	English Heritage
Woodspring Ramblers	Natural England
The Trails Trust (local groups)	North Somerset Council
BAD ASS Bikes	(Archaeologist)
Mendips District Council (Heritage and PROW Officers)	Active Mendip
Sir David Wills (landowner),	The Woodland Trust
Burrington Conservators	The National Trust
Burrington Parish Council	British Horse Society
Priddy Parish Council	Black Down Riding Club
	CRPE

3.2 Consultation questionnaire

The views of visitors and recreational users of the area were an important consideration of the consultation. A consultation questionnaire (see Appendix 2) was prepared and distributed by the following means:

- Questionnaires and a response box were made available at the Burrington Inn.
- Questionnaires were made available at the Bad Ass Bike shop.
- A press release was issued to publicise the consultation and articles appeared in the Cheddar Valley Gazette and Mendip Times . Downloadable questionnaires were made available on the Mendip Hills AONB web site and the Active Mendip Website
- Copies of questionnaires were made available at various events by Mendip Hills AONB Unit.

Questionnaires were available throughout February and March 2010.

4. CONSULTATION FEEDBACK & RESULTS

4.1 Meetings and Discussions with Key Contacts

Notes were taken of all meetings and discussions with key contacts.

4.2 Feedback from the Questionnaires

A total of 61 questionnaires were returned. An analysis of the feedback from the questionnaires is included in Appendix 1.

4.1 Analysis of Feedback

People who took part in the consultation recognised the growing pressures on Black Down and Burrington Ham as a result of increased visitor numbers. There was a high degree of support for projects that will repair and reduce erosion, promote sustainable access, improve public knowledge and understanding and involve user groups in the care and sympathetic management of the area. Analysis of the feedback from the meetings with key contacts and questionnaires revealed a number of overarching concerns and issues that should be built into a future project for the area, along with more detailed comments and project ideas: -

4.1.1 Heritage Conservation

People recognised that Black Down and Burrington Ham is a heritage landscape of considerable geological, archaeological, ecological, aesthetic and cultural importance and it is suffering from the demands placed on it by the growing number of recreational users. Project proposals for the area need to recognise that: -

- Archaeological / natural features are being damaged as recreational user numbers continue to increase.
- Erosion has damaged the archaeological interest of Black Down to the extent that English Heritage has placed it on the 'Heritage at Risk' Register.
- Works are needed to conserve the archaeological and natural interest

4.1.2 Access and Management

There was great anxiety regarding the impact of increasing numbers of recreational users on this sensitive landscape. The increased popularity of off-road cycling in the area, combined with the impact of walkers and horse riders is leading to erosion scars, deteriorating bridleways and path surfaces, damage to archaeology and flora, and conflicts between different users. Damage by illegal 4 x 4 vehicles has been considerable and should be

tackled as a priority. There is a need for a co-ordinated and sustainable solution to the access and management issues affecting the area. Project proposals for the area need to recognise that: -

- Beacon Batch is the highest point in the Mendip Hills. People will always want to access this point; it will always be a key focal point for most visitors.
- Access to the area is unsustainable and there is no co-ordination or active involvement amongst different user groups in the long term care and management of the heritage.
- The combination of visitor pressure, thin soils and exposure to bad weather has led to increased erosion of paths over the last 30 years; however the problem has accelerated more recently. Some paths have become very eroded and muddy, others are widening significantly and vegetation cover is being lost
- Better drainage is required in some areas to reduce water damage to eroding paths.
- A number of bridle paths, desire lines and sensitive areas have become badly damaged following illegal 4x4 use
- The rapid growth in the popularity of off-road cycling has contributed significantly to the increase in erosion, together with more walkers. Horse riding does not seem to have increased in recent years, and may have declined slightly.
- Sponsored events and commercial groups have added to the erosion damage and large scale events are not compatible with the sustainable use of the area.
- Links to the surrounding network of bridleways and footpaths need to be developed; this could help reduce pressures on Black Down and Burrington Ham by allowing users to disperse along safe routes.
- There is significant support for repairs to paths and bridleways even if this results in temporary closures and requests to use alternative routes whilst paths are restored and/or improved.
- There is significant support for the closure of 'desire line' paths (these are routes that are not public rights of way) to protect wildlife habitats and archaeological features, so long as there is a suitable alternative route.
- Path restoration and repairs should use materials sympathetic to the area.
- There is a need for clear information on the reasons for closing paths along with an indication of timescale for any closure/diversion to ensure co-operation of users.
- There is a need for wider access to Rowberrow Warren for cyclists and horse riders to relieve the pressure on Black Down. Forest tracks within the woodland mean that it is a more resilient landscape that can sustain greater numbers of recreational users.

4.1.3 Information and Understanding

There is currently little provision of interpretation and information. Signing and way-marking is poor and confusing in places. The lack of coherent signing and information for visitors has amplified instances of inappropriate site use and contributed to subsequent path erosion. There is a need for a co-ordinated vision for the area, with clear information on how different users can access the area and their respective responsibilities. Project proposals for the area need to recognise that: -

- Signage and information is widely perceived as being poor. There is a lack of coherent signing and information to make people aware of where they are entitled to go and their responsibilities.
- There is a need for improved way-marking and provision of information, including Instructions that are firm and friendly with clear instruction what users can / cannot do. There is a need for information that sets out clearly the respective access rights of different recreational users.
- Signage and information provision should be sensitive to the character of the area. Avoid clutter in the countryside.
- There is significant support for interpretation to include a map of the area showing bridleways and footpaths, located at the main access points.
- Visitors from a wider area are less inclined to know of the history / archaeology / importance of the area.
- Most people would you be interested in finding out any more information about the area, including wildlife, history, geology and archaeology through appropriate provision of signing / interpretation / printed materials / web provision / guided walks and events.

4.1.4 Safe and Accessible

The increasing number of visitors and users of the area has amplified concerns regarding safe access from the B3134. Growing demand for parking has become problematic at busy times with associated safety concerns for walkers and riders crossing the road. There is no controlled crossing point over the B3134. Potential conflict between users) is a growing concern expressed by many. Project proposals for the area need to recognise that: -

- Safe access from car parks to Black Down and Burrington Ham is required. Growing visitor numbers, increased parking and traffic levels, and rising vehicle speeds combine to make the area unsafe at busy times.
- Police should be a key partner in helping address illegal use by 4x4s and motorcycles through the Pathwatch scheme.
- All 4x4 vehicles / motor bikes should be excluded from the site as they are using the site illegally.
- A code of conduct for site users (horse riders / cyclists / walkers) should be developed to ensure co-ordinated future site management.
- There is a need to improve safe access to the site, specifically with regard to the safe crossing of the B3134.

- It is important to ensure that the area can be accessed by emergency vehicles at all times.
- The toilets are in very poor condition and there is a need for new facilities with disabled access and wash down facilities. Charging for use of improved facilities may be a sustainable option in a climate of budgetary constraint.

4.1.5 Sustainable and Inclusive

Any vision must address the long term sustainable management of the area, and be inclusive of local communities, user groups and wider visitors to the area.

- Over promotion of the area is becoming a concern, drawing increasing numbers into the area, resulting in greater pressures. The area is within ½ hour / 15 miles of the City of Bristol which has a population of over 420,000.
- Un-co-ordinated promotion of the area on the internet, particularly for off-road cycling is a concern. Leaflets and routes are freely available that promote cycling on routes where there is no legal entitlement for access.
- The area is a 'honey pot' site for outdoor activities (walking, cycling, horse riding, caving and abseiling). It is necessary to engage all user groups with initiatives to achieve sustainable access, and to 'put something back'.
- There is a need for a clear vision for the sustainable use and management of the area. This should include partnership working with the Forestry Commission, National Trust and Woodland Trust who manage adjacent land.
- Sustainable recreation has wider benefits for health and fitness of people which should be taken into consideration.
- Visitor payback schemes should be investigated as a vehicle for linking tourism / site users with conservation of the landscape and heritage.
- A user group made of local people / site activity user group representatives should be established as part of proposals for managing and restoring footpaths.

5. SUMMARY

The consultation managed to reach a representative range of user groups, local communities, voluntary organisations, site managers and professionals within local and central government. The consensus view is that landscape, heritage and wildlife values have been damaged by increasing visitor numbers and that positive action is urgently required to restore eroded paths, improve signage and information and bring together user groups and site managers in a spirit of positive co-operation to develop a clear vision for the sustainable management of the area. The Mendip Hills AONB unit is the best position to achieve this; however it will need to obtain significant resources to implement a carefully thought out project with the support of all involved.

APPENDIX 1: ANALYSIS OF QUESTIONNAIRE

ANALYSIS OF QUESTIONNAIRE

INTRODUCTION

A questionnaire was devised to ascertain the initial views of the general public about the issues that affect the area and how best to tackle them. A blank copy of the questionnaire can be found at Appendix 3 below.

The questionnaire asked people: -

- Why people visited the area.
- Their views on the condition of paths and whether they support temporary closure of paths to allow repair and restoration.
- Their views on signing and interpretation.

The intention of the questionnaire is to obtain a 'snapshot' of people's views to help with project scoping work. It was not intended to be a comprehensive survey and was not conducted using stratified random sampling techniques. It should also be understood that questionnaires were distributed in February and March 2010 that generally is not the busiest time of year for visitors. The results should therefore be regarded as indicative only, however they do represent a good cross section of user opinion. It was made clear during the consultation period that further, more detailed surveys may follow to support project development and funding bids.

Questionnaires were distributed as follows: -

- Questionnaires and a response box left at the Burrington Inn.
- Questionnaires left at the Bad Ass Bike shop for users/visitors.
- Electronic copies available to download and return through the Mendip Hills AONB web site. (This was publicised via a press release so that members of the public had the opportunity to comment)
- Copies circulated by Mendip Hills AONB volunteer wardens at events.

A total of 61 questionnaires were returned. All returned questionnaires were analysed.

A summary of responses is presented below.

We asked people for what reason do they visit the Black Down, Burrington Combe and Burrington Ham Area and received the following feedback:

Category of User	Number of users within each category (can tick more than one category)
Walking	46
Cycling	17
Horse riding	5
Pub/café	14
Dog walking	25
Caving	12
Rock Climbing	4
Other	8

Walking (including dog walking) was the most popular activity, followed by cycling. Activities confined within Burrington Combe were visits to the cafe/pub and caving / rock climbing.

ACCESS

We asked people if they had walked, cycled or ridden a horse on Black Down and Burrington Ham, what was their view about the condition of the paths and bridleways, and if the problem has got worse in recent years?

This is an open question, and the following comments were made by members of the public in answer to this question:

- Mountain bikes cause the most erosion problems. They should be restricted to designated areas on tracks properly marked and provisioned.
- Paths have become eroded and stony, very difficult to ride.
- Paths much worse over last 5 years, lot of standing water and increased use. Big increase in cyclist numbers.
- Paths have deteriorated. Erosion a lot worse. Very poor condition where bikes and horses have used them.
- Some paths in shocking condition, much worse in last 4/5 years. Some paths now very difficult to walk on.
- Very muddy and eroded in places, much wider, bad up to Beacon Batch and towards Tynings Farm due to 4x4s..
- Burrington Ham not changed much, Black Down suffering from bike tyres in last 10 years, many tumps now cut up by bikes.
- Cyclists, bikes and 4x4 causing most damage. Bike users take tools to cut tracks and make jumps. Cyclists should be guided to set routes.
- Paths on west side by wood have become a mess following 4x4 use though not sure what vehicle causing this?
- Paths are poor and getting worse. Wet and muddy, difficult to walk over.

- Heavy vehicles have wrecked paths making them unusable deep trenches of mud, making them slippery and dangerous. Result is riders are forced to use different routes/access points.
- Paths/bridle paths not affected by vehicles are suitable and excellent riding, although could be more level and ruts filled.
- Gate on main road at Ellick House almost impossible to open on horseback, being next to road/cattle grid it is dangerous and hard to open.
- Bridle way from edge of Ham down the hill of Rickford coming out by Plume of Feathers is badly way marked / has barded wire which makes it difficult to get a horse through.
- Access to Ham on horse from top car park is difficult because of overgrown trees and shrubs.
- Have not found the paths a problem though we always wear correct footwear.
- Paths are OK / fine. Can get bad / wet / muddy in wet conditions.
- Increase in bikes/walkers/horses has eroded paths in both width and depth.
- Paths do not match with routes shown on OS maps.
- Thin soils and weather has lead to erosion of paths over last 30 years, however problem now worse.
- Paths aren't too bad, problem is removal of trees and bushes turning area into grassy field and not how it used to be.
- Problem has become worse, footpaths badly eroded by vehicle and horse traffic. Signage would help.
- Tracks have got much worse in last 5 years mainly due to vehicles and poor drainage on part of hill.
- Paths are deteriorating, get worse in winter.
- Erosion increased alarmingly in last 4/5 years due to, in part, sponsored events and commercial groups and illegal motorised traffic.
- V.muddy up to Beacon Batch.
- Paths have got worse, sometimes difficult to walk along without falling.
- Paths worse on Black Down.
- Local damage to archaeological features.
- Erosion has got worse since 1990s, then most were short grass. Many riders will now not use due to deep gullies and tracks.
- Access to area should be limited to stop erosion.
- Separate routes for horses and bikes away from walkers.
- Mend old walls, clear litter.
- Mend/fill wheel ruts on Rowberrow Warren side of Black Down.
- Ponies grazing area has made tracks worse.
- Need to improve drainage.
- I have been riding mountain bikes for 25 yrs, not much change, biggest problem with 4x4s, and attitudes between user groups.
- Most trails are wet though dry out in summer, wet spots could be improved, last 3 years have seen trails degrade significantly.
- Make paths wider so cyclists and walkers can pass safely.
- Paths are reasonable at best.

We asked people what improvements they would you like to see made to the paths and bridleways in the area?

This is an open question, and the following comments were made by members of the public in answer to this question:

- Better way marking.
- Stop vehicle access, block access points, information to inform users, encourage better interpretation/management of area.
- Instructions that are firm and friendly with clear instruction what can / can not do.
- New surfaces would be wonderful.
- Target drainage works in wet areas to mitigate surface water run-off. Consider all best practice to address path surface issues.
- Use local materials if repairing paths.
- Temporary closures where required, widen ROW opportunities for walkers.
- Not tarmac. Needs to be to be firm under foot to cope with present use.
- Infill worst sections on paths.
- Hard core in places/worst patches to stop getting wider to stop people going around and making paths wider.
- Restrict abuse of bridle paths and footpaths
- Bridle paths / footpaths should be returned to prior use of forestry vehicles
- Maintain trees so not over paths and prevent use by riders.
- Better gates that can be opened while mounted on horse back.
- Better fencing around cattle grids to prevent horses straying onto grids when trying to open/close gates.
- Back fill trenches that were once paths.
- No improvements, just some information signs and information.
- Ban vehicular access.
- Special surfaced tracks for horses would reduce pressure on footpaths. Horse riding causes damage. Grazing ponies not a problem.
- Fill in depressions and improve drainage.
- Distinguish between footpaths and bridle paths, better signage.
- Better drainage that is sustainable. Resurface in places?
- Keep cyclists away from horse riders and walkers.
- Use stone chippings/drainage to improve surface on most popular 'honey-pot' routes – up to Trig Point on Beacon Batch.
- Use of local stone and board walks can help.
- Formalise some downhill 'bandit' routes which should be properly maintained and graded.
- Better surface without tripping.
- Safer crossing at Ellick House required. Road is very dangerous.
- Create new bridle path links on Luvers Lane, Lease Lane and Green Lane. Wider connections to Cheddar Gorge. Need for crossing over A38 at Churchill.
- Restore paths to normal, sensitive natural look.
- Repairs needed. Eliminate bikes. Keep wheel tracks to minimum, ban vehicles.

- Barriers to stop vehicles accessing area.
- Leave alone as natural, paths recover, do not formalise paths. Challenge riders. Keep 4x4s off the area – must be stopped.
- Board walks for wettest areas in worst locations.
- Close areas to allow ground to recover.
- Not improvements, just repairs and drainage in worst areas only.

We asked if people support repairs to paths and bridleways even if this resulted in temporary closures and requests to use alternative routes whilst paths are restored and/or improved?

Yes 55 No 3

The following additional comments were made by members of the public in answer to this question:

- Has always been horse riding use on Black Down and paths cut up in wet weather. Much worse since mountain bikes have used the area, creating ruts which are more damaging than horses hooves.
- All off road motorbikes should not be allowed.
- Only if short closures. Must not become permanent.
- Provided path surface is returned to a suitable state to reduce trips/slips.
- Paths are not the problem, it is destruction of surrounding area in the name of maintenance and preservation.
- Works to stop erosion is needed.
- As long as correct repairs work and do not make paths worse.
- Need indication of timescale for any closure/diversion to ensure co-operation of users.
- Needs to be done for fear of losing paths to erosion completely.
- No man made structures such as board walks or bridges.
- Paths should stay open during May – Sept as best months to visit.
- Clear signing and instruction required.

We asked people if they would support the closure of ‘desire line’ paths (these are routes that are not public rights of way) to protect wildlife habitats and archaeological features, so long as there is a suitable alternative route?

Yes 55 No 6

The following additional comments were made by members of the public in answer to this question:

- People should be able to roam freely where possible.
- There are more bikes than horses on site.
- Wildlife adapts to the presence of noise and people as long as people keep to paths there is not a problem.

- Mountain bikes are now cutting paths through trees off tracks which is a problem and are also using footpaths.
- Only if in open access area.
- If people are prevented access closure will not make difference anyway?
- Only if protecting sensitive areas.
- Is this possible as routes have been used for a long time?
- A lot of paths on Black Down are already desire lines.
- People will always gravitate to highest point for best views. Many people come to Mendips for 'right to roam' so should not over regulate where people can walk.
- Too many paths are undesirable.
- Area will become abused and no food/habitat for wildlife.
- Emphasise / information required for alternative routes.
- Need to be clear about PROW legislation and what is/is not permitted in area.
- Temporary closures where justified, with agreement of public, with plenty of planned notice for users. Use all forms of media to inform public.
- Pointless closing routes, need to re-align PROW to correct route on ground. Fence off archaeology sites to protect.

SIGNAGE

We asked people what they thought about the existing signage of public footpaths and bridleways at Black Down and Burrington Ham and received the following responses:

Very Poor	7
Poor	21
Average	19
Good	7
Very Good	2

The following additional comments were made by members of the public in answer to this question:

- No instruction on site telling cyclists/walkers/riders where they are permitted to go.
- No official / over bearing signs with 'you must not' written everywhere.
- Ok if used to using OS Maps. Those without maps may struggle.
- The AONB needs to take a lead from Natural England.
- Lots overgrown / not clear, hard to see from horse back.
- No signage at Burrington Ham.
- Danger not too much signage clutter in countryside.
- There is confusion with signage in many areas – different way markers for different routes.
- Current interpretation panels are faded so cannot read.
- Not aware of any signage in the area!

- More signage required to tell people where they can ride.
- Information board at Burrington Inn required.
- Keep landscape free of artificial navigation aids.
- Should come with map and be prepared to navigate, Mendips is not a private estate. Specific paths for user could ruin area.
- Needs bigger signs and maps.
- Not maps, more info on species/archaeology, and code of conduct.

People were asked if a map of the area showing bridleways and footpaths, located at the main access points be useful?

Yes 54 No 7

INTERPRETATION

We asked people if they knew anything about the special features or history of the area?

This is an open question, and the following comments were made by members of the public in answer to this question:

- Scheduled Ancient Monument
- Limestone geology
- Bronze Age and Roman monuments.
- Decoy area in WWII, roman mining activities
- Lead processing at Charterhouse
- Rabbit warrens
- Rock of Ages
- Geology of area / formation of the Combe
- Archaeology of the area / burial barrows
- Goat Church Caverns / caves
- CHERT has good record of historical information.
- Wildlife/natural history
- Special SSSI grassland / geology / limestone grassland.
- Highest point in the Mendips
- Families picked bracken for winter bedding up to 1920s, selling for money to buy shoes for winter.
- Aware of information at Burrington Inn.

We asked people if they would you be interested in finding out any more information about the area, including wildlife, history, geology and/or archaeology?

Yes 53 No 5

We asked people which of the following methods of interpretation would you like to see:

Type of interpretation	Yes	No
More sign boards / interpretation panels	37	10
Leaflet about history / geology / wildlife / outdoor activities.	39	3
Website about the area	33	5
Guided Walks / events / community activities	28	7

FACILITIES

People were asked how important the toilet facilities were to their visit, and would they like to see them improved, and if so in what way (eg. disabled access, wash down facilities for bikes / cavers, baby changing facility etc)?

This is an open question, and the following comments were made by members of the public in answer to this question:

- Current facilities very poor. Could be improved. At least clean and functional!
- Managed facility in need. Could provide focus for educational materials.
- No!
- Toilets required at more parking access points to the Mendips – eg. Charterhouse, Tynings, Ham, and at top car park.
- Facilities currently let area down, scope to improve and make more user friendly. Any replacement must be cost effective.
- Special annual program of walks – owls/badger watches to develop interest in area and attract more people.
- Refurbish toilets at Burrington, provide toilets at Charterhouse and Tynings.
- Wash down facilities would be great.
- More bins for rubbish/litter and dog bins.
- Improved facilities but do not over commercialise area.
- Public toilet is disgusting.
- Toilets only, no other developments, it is a wild area.
- Toilets are important for all visitor groups. Not convinced a specialist washing facility is needed though seating would be welcome.
- Concerned to find toilets closed on weekend.
- Need to be careful as better facilities = more visitors. Do not ruin area with more visitor facilities and attractions.
- More toilets and a wash down facility are required.
- Build new facilities below Burrington inn where old garden centre used to be.

Finally, people were asked if they wish to make any further comment. The following comments were made by members of the public in answer to the questionnaire:

- Last wilderness in the area. Need to see more environmentally sensitive use of the area.
- Sustainable recreation has wider benefits for health and fitness which offsets cost of management of area.
- The area is not extensive and too many are now visiting the area which is the problem. People need to clear up after dogs/litter.
- Any path restoration/signage must not impact on the natural heritage of the area.
- Keep the unspoilt natural Mendips we all know.
- Re-instate damage from heavy vehicle/machinery use.
- Continually advertising and talking about the AONB attracts more tourists, therefore having detrimental affect in the erosion and wear and tear of area.
- Ban off-road motorbikes/4x4s, horses and mountain bikes from area. Clear bracken, heather and gorse. Re-instate grassland and graze with sheep/goats.
- Need good contact number for help/assistance.
- Police response needs to be improved. Often takes too long to action/respond.
- Signage at entry points only.
- Area is open/unique because there was no enclosure act for Black Down and the Ham, only the number of cattle that can be grazed by commoners.
- Ensure gates/barriers can be accessed by emergency vehicles for saving life/fires etc.
- Less visitors the better. Bring back character to area and allow meandering paths to re-develop. Clearance cannot be good for wildlife habitat.
- Keep area as natural as possible without signs and buildings.
- Walkers have problem with cyclists approaching who have no bell / make no warning. All cyclists should have bells.
- Signage only at main entry points.
- Good management of roadside approaches to Burrington Combe has improved area.
- Commercial exploitation of area for events and outdoor activities needs evaluation to see whether damage is justifiable – ie. Active Mendip.
- Manage trails, keep wild feel, look at opportunities for wheel chair access to open countryside.
- Great area – do not over commercialise.
- Bins in car parks. More dog waste bins required.
- Area has suffered over recent year through lack of maintenance coupled with heavy promotion for mountain biking.
- Grazing good for vegetation control – traditional management. Welcome opening up paths and clearance of scrub – well done!
- Hurry up and mend main E-W path over Black Down – very bad!

- Control parking – verges being eroded during times of heavy use.
- Need to establish user group so all user groups can express their views. Careful planning required, more access opportunities required.
- Most erosion caused by weather. Not users. Wet conditions make area challenging and attract cyclists/walkers.
- Support 4x4 barriers at long last! Illegal 4x4 use must be stopped, accident waiting to happen.
- Resolve conflict between walkers and cyclists, area is for all. Horses do a lot of damage.
- Need for users/public to be included in access decision making on Black Down, need to improve information flow and include all stakeholders in planned works.
- Action has been required to address trail damage for a long time. Include local people in planning repairs, and use local labour/business.

APPENDIX 2: EXAMPLE QUESTIONNAIRE



BLACK DOWN AND BURREINGTON HAM **CONSULTATION QUESTIONNAIRE**

Black Down and Burrington Ham is the largest area of open access land in the Mendip Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). In recent years these areas have become increasingly popular with walkers, horse riders and off-road cyclists. As a result the area is suffering from severe erosion along public rights of way and other paths with damage to important landscapes, wildlife habitats and archaeological features. The erosion problem has been made worse by illegal off-road vehicles using the area.

Over the next few months the Mendip Hills AONB Team is developing a project to help address some of the problems that affect Black Down and Burrington Ham. This project will need to obtain significant outside funding if it is to be successful.

The project will seek to achieve the following: -

- Provide sustainable access to the area for walkers, off-road cyclists and horse riders in ways that do not damage its wildlife and archaeological interest.
- Repair and restore badly eroded areas.
- Provide better information about the history and natural importance of the site.
- Involve the local community and site users in decisions about the area.

To help develop the project we would like your initial views about the issues that affect the area and how we can tackle them. Please could you complete the following short questionnaire. The feedback from the questionnaire will be analysed to help us develop the project.

1. Why do you visit the Black Down, Burrington Combe and Burrington Ham Area? (please mark all that apply)

Walking Cycling Horse riding Pub/cafe

Dog Walking Caving Rock climbing Other

If other, please state

ACCESS

2. If you have walked, cycled or ridden a horse on Black Down and Burrington Ham what is your view about the condition of the paths and bridleways? If you are a regular visitor do you feel that the problem has got worse in recent years?

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3. What improvements would you like to see made to the paths and bridleways in the area?

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4. Do you support repairs to paths and bridleways even if this resulted in temporary closures and requests to use alternative routes whilst paths are restored and/or improved?

Yes No

Comments?.....
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5. Do you support the closure of 'desire line' paths (these are routes that are not public rights of way) to protect wildlife habitats and archaeological features, so long as there is a suitable alternative route?

Yes No

Comments?.....
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SIGNAGE

6. What do you think about the existing signage of public footpaths and
bridleways at Black Down and Burrington Ham?

Very Poor	
Poor	
Average	
Good	
Very Good	

Comments?.....
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.....

7. Would a map of the area showing bridleways and footpaths, located at the main
access points be useful?

Yes No

INTERPRETATION

8. Do you know anything about the special features or history of the area?

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9. Would you be interested in finding out any more information about
the area, including wildlife, history, geology and/or archaeology?

Yes No

10. Which of the following methods of interpretation would you like to see

Type of interpretation	Yes	No
More sign boards / interpretation panels		
Leaflet about history / geology / wildlife / outdoor activities		
Website about the area		
Guided Walks / events / community activities		

FACILITIES

11. How important are toilet facilities to your visit? Would you like to see them improved, and if so in what way (eg. disabled access, wash down facilities for bikes / cavers, baby changing facility etc)?

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12. Do you have any other comments that you would like to make?

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Thank you for completing this questionnaire. If you want to be kept informed of progress with the development of project proposals for Black Down and Burrington Ham, please leave your contact details below:

Contact / Telephone details:
.....
.....
.....

Please return this questionnaire via the following methods:-



By email to: mendiphills@somerset.gov.uk,

By post: Mendip Hills AONB Unit, Charterhouse Centre, Blagdon, Bristol BS40 7XR

Thank You.