

MENDIP HILLS AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY

SUSTAINING BLACK DOWN CONSERVATION PLAN

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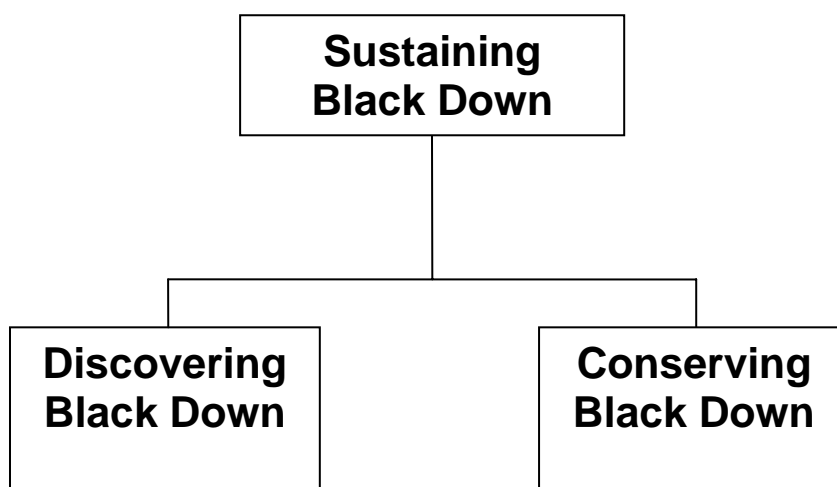
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Sustaining Black Down Conservation Plan

1. Introduction

In December 2010 the Mendip Hills AONB Unit submitted a Heritage Grant application to Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for a project entitled Conserving Black Down. The application was not successful because of land ownership issues and concerns that the capital work elements would be undertaken on private land. As a result HLF has advised that they would welcome re-submission of a revised application that focuses on learning and participation elements, with capital elements related to the restoration and conservation of footpaths, landscapes, habitats and archaeology taken out.

To make the most of funding opportunities and separate out learning and participation projects from capital works a new project has been developed called Sustaining Black Down. This consists of two complementary projects that will run concurrently, as shown in the flow diagram below.



1.2 Overall Aim of Sustaining Black Down

Sustaining Black Down is a long-term project that will help conserve the heritage landscapes, biodiversity and archaeological features of the Burrington Commons, working with local communities and recreational users to achieve well managed and sustainable access and discover the areas rich natural and cultural heritage.

There are two main project elements of the Sustaining Black Down project entitled 'Discovering Black Down' and 'Conserving Black Down'. To maximise

learning, participation and skills development opportunities the two projects will run concurrently, however they will be funded and supported separately. The two projects are closely linked because the conservation works will only be successful if the public and recreational users understand the issues and act positively to reduce future erosion and damage, by taking part in the learning and participation projects.

1.3 Discovering Black Down

The aim of this project is to work with local communities and user groups to achieve well managed and sustainable access to the Burrington Commons, and discover the areas rich heritage. It will do this by encouraging greater understanding of the heritage values of the area by engaging local communities, user groups and target audiences in a range of learning, interpretation, participation and volunteering programmes. It will effectively communicate information on current and future management activities and ensure that the area is promoted to various groups in a responsible and sustainable way, with coherent and co-ordinated information regarding walking, off-road cycling, and horse riding through events and activities, leaflets, web information and signing. The legacy will be to leave a sustainable structure so that local community and user group volunteers can take an active role in the care and conservation of the areas heritage for future generations to enjoy.

A Heritage Grant application is being submitted to the Heritage Lottery Fund to support the Discovering Black Down project and full details are included in the grant application.

1.4 Conserving Black Down

The aim of this project is to conserve the landscape, biodiversity and archaeological features of Black Down and Burrington Ham. It will do this by repairing and restoring heavily eroded paths, landscape scars and habitats resulting from increased numbers using the area for walking, cycling and horse riding. It will also seek halt the decline in condition of the archaeological features of the area by implementing the recommendations of a recently developed Archaeological Management Plan.

The work will be supported by £40,000 funding from the Mendip Hills AONB Unit over a period of three years, to run concurrently with the Discovering Black Down project. Further funding opportunities will also be explored to implement capital works and there will be a supported programme of volunteering through the Mendip Hills AONB Unit, including Young Rangers, volunteer task group rangers and CLIC24 volunteers.

2. Consultation & Background Reports

The Mendip Hills AONB Unit has undertaken a number of consultations and commissioned three reports which form the basis of this Conservation Plan. These reports highlight the problems and issues affecting the Burrington Commons and demonstrate the need for the Sustaining Black Down Project. The reports are as follows: -

Proposals for a Black Down and Burrington Ham Access Management and Interpretation Project. REP. April 2010.

In the spring of 2010 consultants REP undertook a scoping and consultation exercise and provided a series of recommendations. These are contained in the report *Proposals for a Black Down and Burrington Ham Access Management and Interpretation Project*, April 2010. The report involved comprehensive consultation with parish councils, user groups, land managers, local and central government, voluntary organisations, the local community and other interested parties. The people and organisations who took part in the consultation exercise recognised the growing pressures on Black Down and Burrington Ham as a result of increased visitor numbers and demonstrated 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.

Archaeological Management Plan for Black Down, Burrington Combe and Burrington Ham, in the Mendip Hills AONB. Living Landscapes Consultancy and ULAS . September 2010

This document was prepared by Living Landscapes Consultancy and University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS). The report was commissioned by Sir David Wills, with the support of the Mendip Hills AONB, Natural England and English Nature.

The Archaeological Management Plan provides the following information: -

- Information on the archaeology of the area.
- The current management issues with regard to the extant archaeology, and a prioritised programme of action to maintain and improve its condition.
- A sustainable and long-term approach to the future management of the various heritage assets.

The Archaeological Management Plan concluded that in order to halt the decline in condition of the archaeological features, it is necessary to put in place a system of sustainable management which will protect and preserve the archaeological features in the long term. It sets out the general principles governing the long-term management of the archaeology within the project

area providing an acceptable compromise between preservation of the archaeology and public enjoyment of the area. It also presents a series of management solutions which will help to realise these long-term goals, including the identification of key areas in need of restoration/ management change and a prioritised programme of action to achieve these changes.

Consultation on the findings of the report was undertaken with the Black Down advisory Group, including English Heritage, Natural England, Mendip Hills AONB Unit and Sir David Wills.

Study of Repair and Restoration of Paths on Black Down and Burrington Ham. REP. September 2010.

The aim of this study was to assess priorities, agree appropriate techniques and develop a fully costed programme for the repair and restoration of paths on Black Down and Burrington Ham. The report involved a structured survey of all paths which were then assigned to the following categories: -

Green – representing good sustainable routes with few problems

Amber – Routes requiring moderate intervention

Red – Routes with serious erosion problems

A draft work schedule and estimate of costing was prepared, along with recommendations for future more detailed development and consultation work.

Consultation on the findings of the report was undertaken with English Heritage, Natural England and Local Authority Public Rights of Way Staff.

3. Sustaining Black Down Conservation Plan

This Conservation Plan is based on recommendations contained in the three reports detailed in section 2. The reports form the backbone of the Conservation Plan and they should be consulted for further detail. The recommendations from the reports have been developed into an overarching Conservation Plan in the table below. This sets out a structured programme of actions for achieving the conservation aims of the Sustaining Black Down project.

The purpose of this conservation plan is to set out the priorities for the restoration and conservation of footpaths, landscapes, habitats and archaeology in the Sustaining Black Down project, and how these will be achieved.

Please note that some of the actions in the Conservation Plan have already been achieved.

SUSTAINING BLACK DOWN CONSERVATION PLAN

Repair and Restoration of Paths on Black Down and Burrington Ham.

Action	How will it be achieved?	Funding?	Timetable
<p>Confirm the line of paths identified and address any inaccuracies - . This will involve confirming the line of paths identified in 1999 and 2006 path surveys. There are some inaccuracies with the mapped routes of paths on Burrington Ham, including paths that have not been mapped at all. On Black Down the line of paths 46 and 47 should be re-surveyed.</p>	<p>Volunteers</p>	<p>Maps and survey materials to be supplied by AONB Unit</p>	
<p>Agree Restoration Techniques - Agree appropriate techniques for restoring paths and improving drainage and consult with English Heritage, Natural England, Sir David Wills, Burrington Conservators and recreational user groups.</p>	<p>Appoint consultants</p>	<p>Mendip Hills AONB Unit. Estimated cost £7047</p>	
<p>Draft Schedule of Path Works - For all priority red and amber paths work up a draft schedule of works for repair and restoration.</p>			
<p>Permanent and Temporary Path Closures - Agree a phased programme of permanent and temporary path closures and consult with LA PROW officers, Sir David Wills, Burrington Conservators and recreational user groups.</p> <p>This programme will include the recommended closures of un-official paths as detailed in the Archaeological Management Plan.</p>			
<p>Programme for Repair and Restoration of Paths - Develop a fully costed programme for the repair and restoration of paths, with recommendations for appropriate surface treatments and restoration techniques, capital works and permanent and temporary path closures.</p>			

Action	How will it be achieved?	Funding?	Timetable
Scheduled Ancient Monument Consent - Submit an application for Scheduled Monument Consent for the proposed works, including all necessary consultation with English Heritage prior to submission.	Mendip Hills AONB Unit to lead.	Mendip Hills AONB	
Path Diversions and Realignments - Consider the need for formal path diversions and path re-alignments and consult with Local Authority Rights of Way officers.	Mendip Hills AONB Unit to lead.	Approximately £2,000 per path diversion or re-alignment. Discussions to be held with Local Authorities over funding once priorities have been agreed.	
Path Restoration by Contractors. - Appoint contractors to undertake path improvement works.	Mendip Hills AONB Unit to prepare work specifications and oversee work	Mendip Hills AONB Budgets. £35,000. Further funding applications to be made to support this element as opportunities arise.	
Path Restoration by Volunteers - Implement a programme of path restoration works to be undertaken by volunteer rangers, Young Rangers, CLIC24 volunteers and recreational user group volunteers.	Mendip Hills AONB Unit to develop and support volunteering programme.	Mendip Hills AONB Budgets. £5,000 for materials CLIC24 to contribute £1,000 per annum. Further funding applications to be made to support this element as opportunities arise.	

Action	How will it be achieved?	Funding?	Timetable
Restoration of Degraded Habitats Next to Paths			
Biodiversity Restorations Work - Undertake a programme of biodiversity restoration work to restore degraded heathland habitats close to restored paths. Re-vegetation projects to involve seed gathering and/ or heather cutting and heather regeneration work.	Mendip Hills AONB Unit to develop and support volunteering programme	£6,000 Funding applications to be made to support this element as opportunities arise.	
Erosion Monitoring			
Erosion Monitoring on Paths - Use AONB volunteer rangers, Young Rangers and students from Cannington College to set up a robust system for monitoring the future use and erosion of paths.	Proposals will be included in the 'Discovering Black Down' Project as this is a participation and learning project.	HLF	
<p>Monitoring of Archaeological Interest - It is important that the condition of archaeological features is monitored and recorded regularly to assess whether or not management practices are succeeding in controlling erosion. If they are found to be failing, alternative management practises must be put in place quickly to minimise any further damage.</p> <p>Train volunteers / AONB wardens to work with archaeologists to set up a process for monitoring archaeology on Black Down in line with recommendations detailed within the Archaeological Management Plan. The following to be monitored: -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beacon Batch Barrow Cemetery • Outlying Barrow clusters to west and north of Beacon Batch Barrow • World-War 2 structures and tumps • Burrington Ham Prehistoric Hillfort - once vegetation clearance has taken place. • Bronze-Age Cremation Cemetery (in the North-west of Black Down) 	Proposals will be included in the 'Discovering Black Down' Project as this is a participation and learning project.	HLF	

Action	How will it be achieved?	Funding?	Timetable
Conservation of Archaeology			
Stone Pitching of Beacon Batch Barrow Cemetery - This area has suffered considerably from erosion by walkers, cyclists, horse-riders, grazing animals and water. Re-surface with stone pitching to protect barrow.	This project was completed in 2010.	Mendip Hills AONB Funding.	
Clear Bracken and Encroaching Scrub from Burrington Ham Prehistoric Hillfort - The area is currently covered by bracken and surrounded by woodland/ scrub. It is very important that scrub is not allowed to invade the fort, as it will be damaged by tree roots. Bracken can also damage archaeology through the physical and chemical impacts of its underground rhizomes.	Landowner to apply for funding under HLS.	Cost £692 per hectare, funding under HLS Special Projects or Historic Special Projects codes.	
Introduction of Interpretation and Education Programme - An effective interpretation strategy which enables the public to understand and appreciate the archaeology is an essential tool in educating the public on how not to damage the archaeological features. It can be incorporated into the whole-site interpretation programme being developed under the current HLF bid.	Proposals will be included in the 'Discover Black Down' Project as this is a participation and learning project.	HLF	
Retain Recently-Constructed 4x4 Barriers and Gates - The recently-installed stone blocks and metal gates appear to have addressed the problem of illegal 4x4 vehicles damaging the northern part of Black Down. These barriers should therefore be retained.	Project completed in 2010.	Monitoring and on-going maintenance by Mendip Hills AONB.	
Continue current access restrictions into archaeologically-sensitive caves.	Ensure gates and caves are monitored.		

4. Conclusion

This Conservation Plan sets out a clear and structured programme for the 'Conserving Black Down' elements of the Sustaining Black Down project, along with an indication of how the recommendations will be funded, who will implement them and a timetable. The Mendip Hills AONB Unit is committing £40,000 over three years to help implement the Conservation Plan; however it will be necessary to obtain further external funding to support the work. Many of the recommendations can be achieved by supporting volunteers to undertake practical work and develop skills, and this will be an important component of the work. The conservation works and volunteer support will run in tandem with the learning and participation elements of the 'Discovering Black Down' project. This is because the two projects are complementary and will add value to each other in terms of the interest and levels of amongst the local community and recreational user groups.