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The future management of Wootton Ridge: 2nd stage consultation report

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Summary

This report summarises the 2nd stage of consultation on the future management of open habitat on Wootton Ridge, commissioned by Butterfly Conservation on behalf of five landowners. The consultation followed the guidance set out in A Common Purpose (Natural England, 2012).

The 2nd stage of the consultation centred upon specific management proposals for the open habitat on Wootton Ridge, aimed at achieving the five key objectives/aims set out in a draft 10-year management plan produced following the 1st stage of consultation in 2023. Consultation materials, including copies of the draft plan and the 1st stage of consultation report, were hosted on the Exmoor National Park website throughout the consultation period (running from Wednesday 24th January to Friday 8th March 2024).

During the 2nd stage of the consultation:

- A total of 79 letters/e-mails were sent to a wide range of statutory and non-statutory consultees, including Exmoor National Park Authority, local Parish Councils, and neighbouring properties;
- 12 posters were erected, 10 of which were placed at the main entrances to Wootton Ridge. The posters contained details of consultation events and links to information about the consultation hosted on the Exmoor National Park Authority website;
- An on-site drop-in event was held at Minehead Town Library, in addition to an online evening webinar;
- The consultation was advertised via social media and via email distribution lists;
- Formal written responses were received from 6 stakeholder organisations;
- 13 comments were recorded from members of the public via an online comments form hosted on the Exmoor National Park Authority website, with an additional written comment provided during the drop-in event.

The majority of responses were broadly supportive of the draft management plan. A number of concerns or requests for clarification were made. Some of these were already covered by the management plan. Relevant concerns that could be addressed through amendments to the management plan included:

- A need for greater overall consideration of heritage features;
- Increased clarity over access rights and conditions, particularly with regard to dog walkers;
- Clarification over the potential use of herbicides as part of management;

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- Ensuring the risks of proposed management are adequately addressed, particularly with regard to heritage features, protected species and flooding.
- Considerations with regard to the placement of virtual grazing enclosures and the provision of information relating to grazing locations and periods.

1. Introduction

Background

- 1.1 This report summarises the 2nd stage of consultation on the future management of the areas of open habitat on Wootton Ridge, with Footprint Ecology commissioned by Butterfly Conservation, on behalf of the five Landowners, to facilitate the consultation process. Many of the consultation area's important wildlife features are in an unfavourable condition, despite ongoing (fragmented) habitat management, and would benefit from long-term, joined up, management across the different landholdings.
- 1.2 Following conclusion of the 1st stage of consultation, a draft 10-year Management Plan was produced for the site, with that document comprising the primary focus of the 2nd stage of consultation. The best practice guidance document "A Common Purpose" (Natural England, 2012) was again utilised to ensure that a structured and inclusive consultation approach was adopted.

Summary of the 1st stage of consultation

- 1.3 The 1st stage of consultation ran from Monday 14th August to Saturday 30th September 2023. It engaged and gathered from a wide range of stakeholders, including the landowners, local community, site users, and representatives of relevant statutory agencies. A range of media were used to collate the views of stakeholders concerning what was important to them about the site, and how they felt it should be managed going forwards. The media comprised an online questionnaire, a drop-in event, a webinar, and an online presentation.
- 1.4 The results of the 1st stage of consultation were discussed at length in the initial consultation report (Rush et al., 2024), with a number of recommendations made following analysis of the collated feedback. These were used to determine specific management options for the open areas of Wootton Ridge. The results of the 1st stage of consultation indicated that grazing was largely supported in principle

as a management tool, with a preference shown for the use of “No Fence” (virtual fencing) technology. There were however concerns about the containment of livestock and access for the public, including the potential risk of conflict with the livestock themselves.

Options for consideration during the 2nd stage of consultation

1.5 Following the 1st stage of the consultation, a one-day workshop was held with the landowners in November 2023, during which they identified their aspirations for Wootton Ridge. These informed the 10-year vision for the open areas of the ridge, which was crafted as part of the Draft 10-year Management Plan. Five key objectives were identified in the draft plan with targets, actions, and indicators provided for each. These objectives are outlined below:

- Objective 1: Wildlife;
- Objective 2: Landscape;
- Objective 3: Cultural heritage;
- Objective 4: Public enjoyment, access, and engagement; and,
- Objective 5: Landowner communication.

1.6 Specific options for management were also identified within the Draft 10-year Management Plan, to ensure that the objectives listed above are achieved, with a map created to highlight those areas on the ridge that require management (see Map 1). A range of management actions were therefore incorporated within the draft plan that underpins the 2nd stage of the consultation, namely:





- Birch felling;
- Cutting and mulching at various heights to ensure lower vegetation is not affected;
- Cutting and collecting of Heather and Bracken;
- Spraying of Bracken (where consent has been obtained);
- Swaling of Gorse where appropriate (away from residential areas); and,
- Creation/maintenance of open ride edges or other open space.




- 1.7 After initial vegetation management, undertaken using one or more of the techniques listed above, follow-up rotational grazing with a small number of hardy, docile cattle was recommended as a way of maintaining the open areas. This would prevent the re-encroachment of (e.g.) Silver Birch, with grazing focused within dynamic parcels using “No Fence” technology. Note that this approach/scale would not require consent from the Planning Inspectorate.



Map 1: Wootton Ridge management plan 2024-2034

Legend

Management Type:

-  Birch felling required 2024-2029
-  Bracken cut and collect, or spraying where consent has been obtained.
-  Create/maintain open ride edges /other open space.
-  Cut and collect on a rotational basis to create a heather sward of different age categories.

-  Follow-up cut and mulch of Birch every other year.
-  Cut and mulch within next 3 years and follow-up with cut and mulch of Birch every other year, or as required.
-  Cut and mulch, or swaling to maintain overall Gorse cover below 25% on a rotational basis (of which 50% is mature).

-  Cut and mulch to maintain overall Gorse cover below 25% on a rotational basis (of which 50% is mature).
-  Management Plan Area

Possibility of follow-up rotational grazing across the areas identified for management to prevent regrowth, or otherwise as required.



2. The consultation process

- 2.1 The consultation ran from Wednesday 24th January to Friday 8th March 2024, and involved a similar range of stakeholders and media. The consultation materials (including copies of the 1st stage of consultation report, full draft 10-year management plan, a shorter summary of the management plan, and a comments form) were again hosted on the Exmoor National Park Authority website¹.

Stakeholders

- 2.2 A comprehensive list of stakeholders was identified during the 1st stage of the consultation (see Appendix 1), following the guidance given in “A Common Purpose”. This included the landowners and rights holders, local people, other site users, and representatives of areas of public interest (including nature and landscape conservation, public rights of access, and the protection of archaeological or historic features). All the previously identified stakeholders were again contacted regarding the 2nd stage of consultation.
- 2.3 Invitations to comment on the draft 10-year management plan were sent directly via email to 30 local and national organisations, with a letter drop also made to 39 properties that neighbour Wootton Ridge. The letters/emails included a link to the relevant page of the Exmoor National Park Authority website, as well as information concerning the consultation drop-in event and evening webinar (see below). A reminder email was sent on 22nd February 2024 to all (non-letter drop) stakeholders who had previously been contacted but who had not yet provided a response.

Publicity

- 2.4 In addition to that displayed on the Exmoor National Park Authority website, information concerning the 2nd stage of consultation was

¹ https://www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk/nature-and-landscape/Long-term-management-of-open-habitats-on-Wootton-Ridge/_nocache

displayed on the Minehead Town Council website², Wootton Courtenay Parish Council website³, and in the West Somerset Free Press⁴. Information was also promoted on both the Minehead Town Council and Forestry England Facebook pages (the former on five separate occasions). Wootton Courtenay Parish Council also confirmed that it had sent out information about the consultation, including links to the relevant documents, in an email to 250 villagers. Butterfly Conservation also circulated information about the consultation to their membership via their social media accounts, with e-mail information also sent to West Somerset branch members.

2.5 Furthermore, 12 posters were erected across the local area, with 10 of these strategically placed at or near to access points on/off Wootton Ridge. The remaining posters were displayed at Minehead Library and at the Minehead Town Council offices (with a copy of the poster also posted on the Town Council Facebook page). A copy of the poster is provided in Appendix 2. It incorporated a QR code (and listed the corresponding URL) which directed readers to the relevant page on the Exmoor National Park Authority website. A contact postal address was also provided, alongside details of a daytime drop-in event and evening webinar (see below).

2.6 It should be noted that a small number of individuals subsequently reported experiencing difficulties in accessing the webpage via the QR code on the poster, although this was double-checked and found to work fine for the majority of individuals/phone types. The provision of the URL alongside the QR code on the poster however meant that the individuals affected could still directly access the relevant webpage despite any issues encountered with the QR code.

² <https://mineheadtowncouncil.co.uk/your-council/wootton-ridge-consultation>

³ <https://woottoncourtenayvillage.co.uk/2024/02/18/wootton-ridge-management-plan/>

⁴ <https://www.wsfp.co.uk/news/online-consultation-taking-place-on-wootton-ridge-future-management-options-666999>

Events

Webinar

- 2.7 A webinar was hosted by Footprint Ecology on Thursday 8th February 2024 at 7pm. During the webinar, a Powerpoint presentation was given outlining the process and results of the 1st stage of the consultation, alongside a synopsis of the 10-year vision and the five management objectives detailed in the draft 10-year management plan. The information held on the Exmoor National Park Authority website was also signposted, and extended time was made available for participants to ask questions at the end of the presentation (with a representative from Butterfly Conservation also present to assist with this). The webinar was recorded so that it could subsequently be made available to anyone who was unable to make the date.

Drop-in event

- 2.8 A drop-in event was held at Minehead Library on Monday 19th February 2024, between 10am and 4pm, and was hosted by representatives from Footprint Ecology and Butterfly Conservation. The event incorporated poster boards providing detailed information on the management proposals, as well as information on the outputs of the 1st stage of the consultation. Attendees were invited to leave written comments on the day, with Footprint Ecology representatives also recording the main themes of any conversations had on the day.

3. Consultation responses

3.1 Table 1 summarises the number of consultation events/activities undertaken, and the number of written responses received for each.

Table 1: Summary of consultation events/activities and responses received.

Event/activity	Date	No. deployed/count	No. inds attended	No. responses
Letter drop	29/01/2024	39	-	-
E-mails	24/01/2024	41	-	6
Online comments form	Throughout	-	-	14
Posters	29/01/2024	12	-	-
Webinar	08/02/2024	1	2	-
Drop-in	19/02/2024	1	31	1

Responses by e-mail

3.2 A total of 6 responses were received via e-mail. These were all from stakeholder organisation representatives and are summarised in in Table 2.

Comments form

3.3 A total of 14 comment forms were completed, with the responses provided in Table 3. Note that Natural England’s formal response was submitted via a comments form, but has been included within the “e-mail response” category above. The majority of the comments forms were completed by local people and regular site users, some of whom also attended the drop-in event.

Table 2: Responses to the 2nd stage of consultation on the future management of Wootton Ridge from organisations received via e-mail (arranged alphabetically).

Organisation	Points made	Our response
CPRE	CPRE are pleased to see positive plans being pulled together with both nature and the community in mind. Due to their small size and lack of in-house expertise they are unable to comment in any detail on the ecological nuances of the proposal.	No changes were made to the draft management plan.
Exmoor National Park Authority: Historic Environment	The representative of the Historic Environment team described the management plan as a useful document. They were pleased to see that the protection/promotion of cultural heritage on Wootton Ridge was an objective of the draft plan but raised concerns about the lack of a historic-desk-based assessment and field survey in the draft plan's development. They suggested an overarching plan could cover most of the key heritage sites, except for the Scheduled Ancient Monument of the Hillfort on Grabbist Hill, which requires a specialist plan. The inclusion of historic maps would highlight how the landscape has dramatically changed in the area over the last 200 years. Blindman's Well may be within the consultation boundary and if so should be added.	The undertaking of a desk-based historic assessment and field survey was unfortunately outside of the remit of the draft management plan but the preparation of heritage management plans is included as an action. We recognise that including a historic map could have been useful in the consultation process. Blindman's well is just outside but has been added as it is almost on the boundary.
Historic England	A representative from Historic England felt that the document is generally useful and was pleased that Cultural Heritage is considered as an objective. They suggested a number of further amendments needed to ensure that the historic environment and landscape is given commensurate consideration within the plan. They felt that the draft plan lacked breadth of consideration of the Historic Environment and suggested that the vision should include a statement that reflects the significance of the historic and archaeological sites. They also added that there needs to be acknowledgement that the area is rich in archaeological remains, which are a rare and finite resource, and so must be conserved	Various amendments made as suggested to highlight the significance of the cultural heritage of the site, including the addition of an overarching objective. Further detail added about the importance of appropriate habitat management to safeguard features.

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Organisation	Points made	Our response
	<p>for future generations. They explained that, on Exmoor, such remains are threatened in places by damage from Bracken rhizomes, visitor and stock erosion, and from root damage caused by unmanaged tree and scrubby plant growth. They stated that the current condition and known risks to the locally important and nationally significant historic environment should be better understood and managed. They added that the draft plan needs to ensure the potential for any as yet unknown remains is investigated and understood prior to instigating any change in management that might affect earthworks or buried remains. They asked that the required levels of mitigation and management should be detailed in all management plans and integrated into any work plans and operations and that objectives should acknowledge and integrate management of the historic environment (e.g. under Objective 4 - damage by unauthorised vehicles should be noted as being of concern to historic assets). They indicated that whilst separate management plans are welcome, these need to be integrated into the overall document and ought to have formed part of the initial data gathering, with any areas of potential conflict identified and mitigation suggested. Historic England could advise upon a management plan for the SM 1021060 Hillfort on Grabbist Hill.</p>	<p>A map is included within the plan and the need to take heritage features into account when planning surface habitat management is recognised.</p> <p>No activities that would affect buried features are included within the plan.</p>
Kennel Club	<p>The representative highlighted that dog walkers seek areas to let their dogs off lead, and that this should be away from sensitive areas, where dog walking has traditionally occurred less frequently. They were pleased to see that any changes in management would be notified in advance but commented that it would also be crucial to communicate alternative routes and areas to avoid (such as potential grazing areas) at the same time. There was a suggestion that the use of social media platforms (e.g. those of local dog groups) could help people make informed decisions</p>	<p>Section 2.3 amended to clarify conditions on the use of access rights under CROW that do not apply to other rights.</p> <p>Section 2.49 amended to suggest that Kennel Club recommendations on signage are considered.</p>

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Organisation	Points made	Our response
	<p>about where to start their walks, and where to drive to before they leave home. They raised concerns over possible generalised dogs on lead messaging as this should only relate to areas in the vicinity of livestock and suggested that any information about lead use should include the message to “release your dog if threatened by cattle or horses”, as included in the Countryside Code. They also highlighted their concern over how restrictions relating to dogs off lead between 1st March and 31st July, or in the vicinity of livestock are stated in the management plan, as there may be misinterpretation in terms of when and where this restriction applies (the CROW Act provided new rights of access and conditions attached to their usage alone but did not alter other forms of public access rights, permissions or traditions). Any such misinterpretation may lead to conflict and it is important to get signage correct in the first instance and to clarify this information in the draft management plan. Their support is limited to proportionate and zoned lead use in areas where it is evidence-based. They stress the importance of a mutually respectful and supportive relationship between dog walkers and site managers. They are supportive of any spatial, seasonal, or temporary restriction signage, but add that it should be removed when not in use. The signage should also state the period during which it applies, explain why it is needed, and provide contact details for any queries. They indicate that the start and finish of any on-lead or other zones should be made equally clear. Overall, they suggest the management plan is thoughtful and feasible approach in principle and can benefit both people and wildlife. However, they have concerns is in regard to their overall effectiveness and acceptance (and compliance) by the local community, which depends on how such principles are implemented.</p>	<p>Plan is specific that grazed areas should be clearly publicised and designed in such a way that visitors wishing to avoid livestock can do so easily.</p>

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Organisation	Points made	Our response
Natural England ⁵	They complimented the draft management plan with respect to the goal of moving the SSSI towards a more favourable condition. They also highlighted that the undertaking of Bracken control via chemical means, and the use of Round Up to do this, would need consent from Natural England, and that this would only be provided in exceptional circumstances. They also suggested that if using chainsaws to cut larger material during stump removal. it would be beneficial to treat the stumps with chemicals (such as Roundup) prior to removal. They also indicated that eradicating Rhododendron should be included in Target 1, as it is important feature in the SSSI monitoring specification.	Amendments were made to the wording contained within the draft management plan regarding use of herbicides for Bracken and cut stumps and a specific target for Rhododendron eradication.
Open Spaces Society	The response was both on behalf of the Open Space Society and as a member of the Exmoor National Park Local Access Forum. In relation to Alcombe Common, they were pleased to see that the rights of horse riders under Sec 193 of the LPA 1925 were recognised. They pointed out that para 1.17 of the report states that the rights granted under Sec 193 are for the benefit of “local people”, but that the rights granted under Sec 193 are for the benefit of the public at large. The commented that the dedication of an existing track as a bridleway may have been welcome by cyclists but possibly not by walkers and horse-riders who previously have had exclusive use of the track.	The wording in the draft management plan was amended with regard to S193 and the scheme of regulation and implications of CROW.

⁵ The response from Natural England was submitted by a Natural England representative via an online comment form.

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Table 3: Responses to the 2nd stage of consultation on the future management of Wootton Ridge from individuals who completed a comments form online or on paper (private individuals have been numbered for data protection purposes).

Individual	Points made	Comment
1	<p>Individual is a dog walker and horse rider and uses Wootton Ridge daily. They raised concerns over the introduction of domestic livestock, and specifically asked how many animals would be used and who would be responsible for them and highlighted the lack of water for grazing animals on Wootton Ridge. They highlighted their concerns over erected signage and ensuring that the signage is removed once the herd have been moved. Additionally, they questioned whether grazing animals would block bridleways or footpaths. Finally, they pointed out that the posters for the consultation were not erected at a height that is suitable for horse riders to read.</p>	<p>This individual consequently attended the drop-in event and discussed concerns with a Footprint Ecology representative. They felt reassured that their concerns had been communicated and would be addressed moving forwards. Specific practicalities regarding grazing would be addressed in the grazing plan, animal health plan and livestock risk assessment.</p> <p>The management plan provides information about signage, water and the placement of grazing areas.</p>
2	<p>Supported the proposed draft management plan and felt it was a sensible and balanced management strategy. Individual is a regular site user and offered help with photography, if required.</p>	
3	<p>Individual commented on the usefulness of the landscape and habitat objectives in creating CHEG (i.e. waxcap) grassland and suggests monitoring will be required to measure progress. Butterfly transects, pitfall trapping of beetles, and macrofungal surveys were suggested as ways to monitor biodiversity. They also highlighted their concern over nitrogen deposition on site and suggested monitoring using Nitrogen Critical Exceedance (NCLE) data.</p>	<p>Monitoring of indicators of success is highlighted in the management plan. The site-based management is designed to help mitigate the impacts of N-deposition, but cannot directly influence it.</p>
4	<p>Was in support of the proposals, stating that the draft plan is exciting and well thought through.</p>	
5	<p>Supportive of the plans to create new and diverse habitats, highlighting that there is a lack of wildlife on Wootton Ridge, particularly birds.</p>	

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Individual	Points made	Comment
6	Individual is a mountain biker and site user and commented on the benefit of cyclists keeping to the designated routes, rather than creating new tracks. They were supportive of introducing management to limit the growth of Birch saplings to maintain the heathland habitat. They were also in support of cattle grazing using virtual fencing, as long as docile breeds were used (Belted Galloways were suggested). They were also happy to see that heritage features will be made more visible.	This individual also attended the drop-in session and discussed the draft plan in more detail.
7	Individual suggested that the area should be passed over to the National Trust.	
8	Individual was unable to access the web page on the Exmoor National Park website and asked for the relevant documents to be e-mailed to them.	All documents on the web page were subsequently emailed to the individual.

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Individual	Points made	Comment
9	<p>The Individual, a local person site user, expressed their disappointment in the first stage of the consultation, saying that responses were ignored. They were happy to see recognition of the heritage features and would like to see information boards put up. They suggest that the draft management plan should reflect the different ecosystems present on the ridge, compared to the lower coombes. They'd like to see a wildlife study across the whole, to include two species of deer, Adder, Dormice, Stonechat, and Cuckoo. They stated that mulching and swaling should be done outside of the bird nesting season, and that fixed fencing is a better option. The individual also asked how volunteer groups could be (re)established. In areas identified for Birch felling, they commented that other species of tree are also present and that small Holly bushes block out light. They stated that Silver Birch is a problem when coppiced using machinery and suggested it should be managed by hand (similar to at North Hill). They also suggested the area for Gorse management near Ellicombe has Dormice nearby. The individual stated that cutting, burning, and swaling of Bracken is outdated and in other parts of Exmoor (North Hill) is beaten down and trodden using Exmoor ponies. They explained that heavy machinery causes further problems with climate change and that mixed grazing and manual work are the traditional methods of maintaining commons. They expressed their concern for soil erosion in the winter and summer, suggesting that water comes off the Ridge and floods Ellicombe. The individual also requested that no spraying was used, as it affects bees and other insects. Finally, they stated that other individuals have not responded to the consultation as they think they will not be listened to. They also asked for respondents to be notified of the next stages.</p>	<p>The individual attended the drop-in event and raised some of the issues stated. During the drop-in event, it was reiterated that (as stated in the draft plan) any management would comply with the bird nesting season restrictions. The possible presence of Dormice has also been noted in the plan and the need for any management to comply with relevant protected species legislation highlighted. Any increased flood risk as a result of habitat management has been addressed in the draft plan through recommending that cutting runs across, rather than down, the slope and that wavy edges are created. All comments received during both stages of the consultation were recorded and considered during the drafting and finalisation of the management plan. The final management plan will be made available on the Minehead Town Council website and the consultation response on the project page on the Exmoor National Park website.</p>

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Individual	Points made	Comment
10	<p>The individual raised concerns over the damage caused by logging and would like to see native species planted along the logging trails. They suggested that recreation use needed to be carefully monitored and biking trails created to prevent conflict with footpath and bridleway users. They added that they'd like to see Giant's Chair used as a venue for plays/music events.</p>	
11	<p>Regular site users who understood the requirement to conserve and maintain the wilderness of the area. They however were concerned by grazing and particularly the type of livestock used. They requested specifics as to where the livestock would be and whether grazing units would encompass footpaths. They highlighted that the introduction of livestock would lessen their enjoyment and relaxation in an area they value.</p>	<p>Management plan amended to highlight importance of careful placement of temporary virtual fencing enclosures to avoid footpaths and necessity for appropriate signage.</p>
12	<p>The individual extended their congratulations on the draft plan itself, but still held concerns over flooding on Alcombe Common. They stated that scrub was cleared a few years previously (in March) and resulted in water running off into the combe. They added that cutting across the slope would ease the issues. The individual also expressed their concern over climate change and the use of fossil fuel powered vehicles, and asked if horse-drawn logging would be economic. They stated that there should not be any use of glyphosate due to the risk to butterflies, birds, insects, and watercourses. They suggested that several official tracks could be created by working with the local cyclists and ensuring that all other tracks are closed off. They also suggested that a website could be used to host comments/problems encountered by people on site. Finally, they asked who will oversee the management and ensure that it is adhered to?</p>	<p>The individual attended the drop-in event and raised concerns over flooding on Alcombe Common. The draft management plan was amended to specific that vegetation cutting should take place across the slope to address this issue.</p>

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Individual	Points made	Comment
13	<p>A local site user who was happy to have the opportunity to comment. They were upset over the recent forestry operations and the impact it has had on wildlife and stated that Hopcott Lane is inaccessible to pedestrians due to the impact of vehicles. They are also sad to see the loss of bats in the area.</p>	<p>The forestry operations area falls outside of the consultation area and does not fall within the remit of the draft management plan. The concerns raised over the impacts of forestry operations have been passed onto the landowners.</p>
14	<p>The individual commented that they were a regular site user and wanted more information on how the information in the 1st stage of the consultation was collected, including how many people were engaged with. They also questioned who will be supervising and checking the work that has been done. They also asked whether any ecological surveys had been undertaken, stressing that there are different species of deer, newts, and woodpeckers on the Wootton Ridge. The individual also raised concerns about the forestry works that have taken place, commenting that the overall management plan should also include the forestry operations area.</p>	<p>The individual was engaged with on two separate occasions during the drop-in event and questions answered. This included the delineation of the consultation area boundary and the externality of forestry operations with respect to management of the open areas of the Wootton Ridge.</p>

Webinar

- 3.4 In total, five individuals registered via e-mail to attend the webinar. However, only two individuals ultimately attended the event. No requests were subsequently received for access to the recording made of the event.

Drop-in event

- 3.5 31 individuals attended the drop-in event at Minehead Library. Most individuals were local people, some of whom had attended the previous drop-in event during the 1st stage of the consultation. A representative from Minehead Town Council also attended the event.
- 3.6 Attendees generally wanted to find out more information about the proposed management and to ask specific questions. We were pleased to find that a number of people who attended the drop-in event were happy that their comments on the initial stage of the consultation had effectively been reflected in the 1st stage consultation report and the draft management plan.
- 3.7 One individual highlighted their concern regarding potential conflicts between site users and grazing cattle but felt reassured when it was explained that very low numbers of animals (e.g. 4-6) would be used, and that all grazing would be well signposted. Multiple individuals were also concerned about ongoing forestry operations external to the consultation area, but were positive about the proposals once it was highlighted that only Silver Birch at the western end of Wootton Ridge would be felled under the draft plan.
- 3.8 Another individual expressed interest in volunteering on site, with the potential to undertake regular butterfly transects throughout the summer.
- 3.9 There was general concern over the potential for a new housing development near Manor Road, and the damage that this could cause to Wootton Ridge and the surrounding area.

4. Conclusions

- 4.1 The 2nd stage of consultation received the same level of publicity as the previous stage, and again incorporated a range of interactive consultation events (including an evening webinar and day-time drop-in session in addition to online materials). A smaller number of responses were received during the 2nd stage of consultation. This may indicate an absence of strong feelings amongst the local population about the specifics of the draft management plan. The positive responses received from those individuals who have engaged with both stages of the consultation (with respect to their comments being taken on board) is encouraging.
- 4.2 A range of concerns were raised during the consultation. Several of these (e.g. forestry operations and proposed housing developments on neighbouring land) fell outside the remit of the consultation. Amendments have been made to the draft management plan to ensure that relevant concerns (e.g. adequate consideration of heritage features, specifics around access rights, how grazing is implemented, any potential for increased flood risk downslope and impacts upon other protected species) have been considered and addressed.

5. References

- Natural England. (2012). *A Common Purpose-A guide to community engagement for those contemplating management on common land-Revised edition*. Natural England.
- Rush, E., Lake, S., & Saunders, P. (2024). *The future management of Wootton Ridge: 1st stage consultation report* [Report by Footprint Ecology].

Appendix 1: Stakeholders

The table below lists those stakeholder organisations/representatives contacted for their views on the draft management plan during the 2nd stage of consultation.

Name of organisation
British Horse Society
Buglife
Butterfly Conservation
Campaign to Protect Rural England
Country Land and Business Association
County Ecologist (Taunton Deane and Somerset West)
Dog's Trust
Dunster Parish Council
Exmoor Local Access Forum
Exmoor National Park Authority - Conservation Manager
Exmoor National Park Authority - Public Rights of Way Officer
Exmoor Natural History Society
Fairfield Estate
Forestry England
Historic England - Conservation Officer
Historic England - Heritage at Risk Projects Officer
Kennel Club
Minehead Cycling Club
Minehead Town Council
Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger (MP for Bridgwater and West Somerset)
National Farmers Union
National Trust
Natural England
Open Spaces Society
Plantlife
RSPB
Selworthy and Minehead Without Parish Council
Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society
Somerset County Council - Rights of Way Officer
Somerset County Ecologist
Somerset Highways
Somerset Ornithological Society

W o o t t o n R i d g e S t a g e 2 C o n s u l t a t i o n

Name of organisation
Timberscombe Parish Council
West Somerset Ramblers
Wootton Courtenay Parish Council

Appendix 2: Example poster and poster locations

Photograph copyright: Jenny Plackett/Butterfly Conservation

The future of Wootton Ridge


We are undertaking the 2nd stage of a consultation on the future management of Wootton Common to Grabbist Hill, including a draft management plan and associated comments form, which can be found via the link and QR code at the bottom of this poster.

A public drop-in event will also be held at Minehead Library between 10am & 4pm on Monday 19th February 2024.

Alternatively, join in a webinar (with the facility to post questions) on 8th February 2024 at 7pm. Please register to attend by emailing: commons@footprint-ecology.co.uk

To get involved please scan the QR code or visit: https://www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk/nature-and-landscape/Long-term-management-of-open-habitats-on-Wootton-Ridge/_nocache to view the management plan and access the comments form.

Alternatively, if you would prefer to send any comments you may have via post, please do so to the following address: Fenella Lewin, Footprint Ecology, Forest Office, Cold Harbour, Wareham, BH20 7PA, or e-mail commons@footprint-ecology.co.uk.



We are keen to hear from everyone who visits and values this site. *Thank you!*

W o o t t o n R i d g e S t a g e 2 C o n s u l t a t i o n

Location	Date	What3Words
Wootton Ridge	29/01/2024	Enjoys.Puppets.Inner
Wootton Ridge	29/01/2024	Whizzing.Fallback.Income
Wootton Ridge	29/01/2024	Mondays.Winter.Yesterday
Wootton Ridge	29/01/2024	Garden.Arose.Begins
Wootton Ridge	29/01/2024	Strategy.Partners.Trapdoor
Wootton Ridge	29/01/2024	Shirts.Yourself.Gilding
Wootton Ridge	29/01/2024	Sampled.Trusts.Sweetened
Wootton Ridge	29/01/2024	Owls.Bathtubs.Seducing
Wootton Ridge	29/01/2024	Delved.Sundial.Thin
Wootton Ridge	29/01/2024	Votes.Raven.Successes
Minehead Town Council offices	25/01/2024	N/A
Minehead Library	09/02/2024	N/A