



The future management of Wootton Ridge: 1st stage consultation report

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Wootton Ridge Stage 1 Consultation

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Summary

A public consultation into the future management of the open areas of the Wootton Ridge, near Minehead, has been commissioned by Butterfly Conservation on behalf of the landowners. This report details the first stage of the consultation, in which information about the site was collated and shared with stakeholders, who were then asked about how they use and value the site and how they would like to see it managed in the future.

The consultation area, referred to as Wootton Ridge, is of importance for its landscape, wildlife and archaeological heritage and its local amenity use. It is currently subject to some habitat management, but further, more joined-up intervention is required if the open character of the area is to be maintained.

In accordance with the principles laid out in *A Common Purpose* (Natural England 2012), this first phase of consultation has gathered information and engaged with the landowners, the local community, other site users, local representatives of relevant statutory agencies and other stakeholders to share this information. Stakeholders were invited to share their views on what is important to them about the site and how they feel it should be managed going forward. Consultation techniques included an online written presentation, a questionnaire, two webinars and an on-site drop in, plus talking individually to key stakeholders. The consultation was advertised on the Exmoor National Park website, the local paper, on poster on site entrances and at key location nearby. Letters were delivered to nearby residents and all organisational or other name stakeholders were emailed.

All landowners are keen to work together to manage Wootton Ridge for its landscape, wildlife, and archaeological heritage and to allow people to enjoy it. Stakeholders who were contacted directly raised the importance of taking the archaeological heritage fully into account, the importance of access, the common land status of part of the site including statutory access for horse-riders, issues around choice of livestock and fencing, and the need for a management regime to maintain and enhance the key features of the site.

The questionnaire revealed that:

- Most respondents visit on a regular basis (over half visit weekly) and equally all year round.
- Dog walking was the most commonly recorded activity type, however a range of activities were recorded.
- The majority of respondents arrive on foot, cycle or on horseback rather than by driving, and most live within within 1.8km (75th percentile) of the boundary.
- The most common reason given for visiting Wootton Ridge was for the 'landscape or views'.

- The main concerns about the site were often related to other users (such as meeting cyclists, dog fouling and uncontrolled dogs).
- Attitudes to management practices varied across questionnaire respondents – most considered that balance of open heathland and woodland/scrub was about right and shared a similar view on the current level of flailing.
- Opinions were more divided over swaling and grazing, although these were still largely supported as management practices. There was more uncertainty over the practice of swaling than grazing.
- While grazing was largely supported in principle, there were concerns about the containment of livestock and access for the public, including any potential conflict with the livestock themselves.

Useful specific information and views were also provided in free-text boxes as part of the questionnaire and covered a variety of topics including the importance of views, worries about the efficacy of current management, concerns over erosion and run-off, the potential for multi-user use including events. Many clearly indicated the strength of peoples' love for the site.

The second stage of the consultation will involve more detailed management proposals taking into account the views and preferences of stakeholders expressed so far. These will be shared with stakeholders who will again be invited to contribute via a drop in event and online facilities.

1. Introduction

Background

- 1.1 A public consultation into the future management of the open habitats of Wootton Ridge has been commissioned on behalf of the landowners or the area by Butterfly Conservation in order to inform the joined up, long-term management of the area. It is considered to be in unfavourable condition for the wildlife features for which it is of particular importance, and some changes to the current management will be required to remedy this. The site is also of importance for its heritage features and recreational value, therefore wider consultation with other stakeholders is required to ensure that all interests are taken into account. Part of the site is registered common land, and therefore the consultation follows the guidance set out in A Common Purpose (Natural England, 2012) for consultation on the management of common land. This report presents the results of the first phase of public consultation on the management of the open areas of Wootton Ridge.

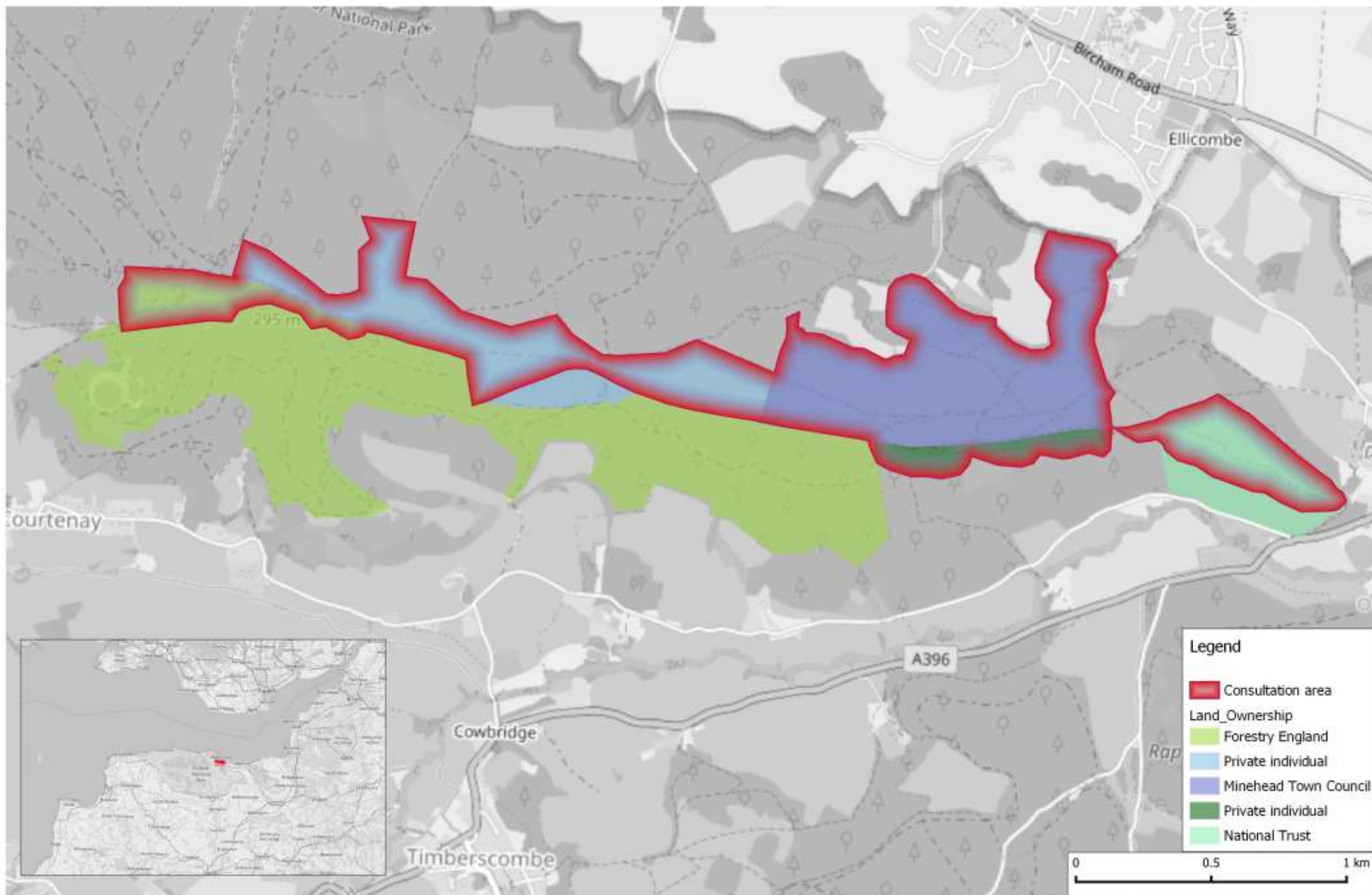
Site description

- 1.2 Wootton Ridge is located within the extreme north-eastern corner of Exmoor National Park just south of Minehead. The consultation area occupies the hilltops and upper, slopes (80m - 290m above sea level) of the Ridge, which runs east-west between Tivington and Dunster. The hilltops mainly support open habitat characterised by heathland, scrub and bracken, while most of the lower slopes have been planted with coniferous woodland. The site provides far-reaching views over the Bristol Channel to Wales.
- 1.3 The area under consultation comprises the hilltops and a small amount of forestry to the south. It is owned by five different landholders, including Forestry England, the National Trust, Minehead Town Council and two private landowners¹ Most of the area falls within the Dunster Park and Heathlands Site of Scientific Interest and Alcombe Common is registered common land, which covers approximately a third of the consultation area.

¹ The landowner of a further component – Ellicombe Common - has also been contacted and this area may be included in the landowners is interested and able to participate in the process.

- 1.4 In this report we use the name Wootton Ridge to refer to the open grassland and heathland habitat falling within Wootton Common, Hopcott Common, Alcombe Common, parts of Grabbist Hill and the Giant's Chair (note that woodland areas are mostly excluded).
- 1.5 The area is important for its ecological, landscape and historical interest. It is also valued by local people and a wide range of user groups. The latter includes walkers (with and without dogs), cyclists and horse riders who are able to access the area via the many Public Rights of Way which cross it.

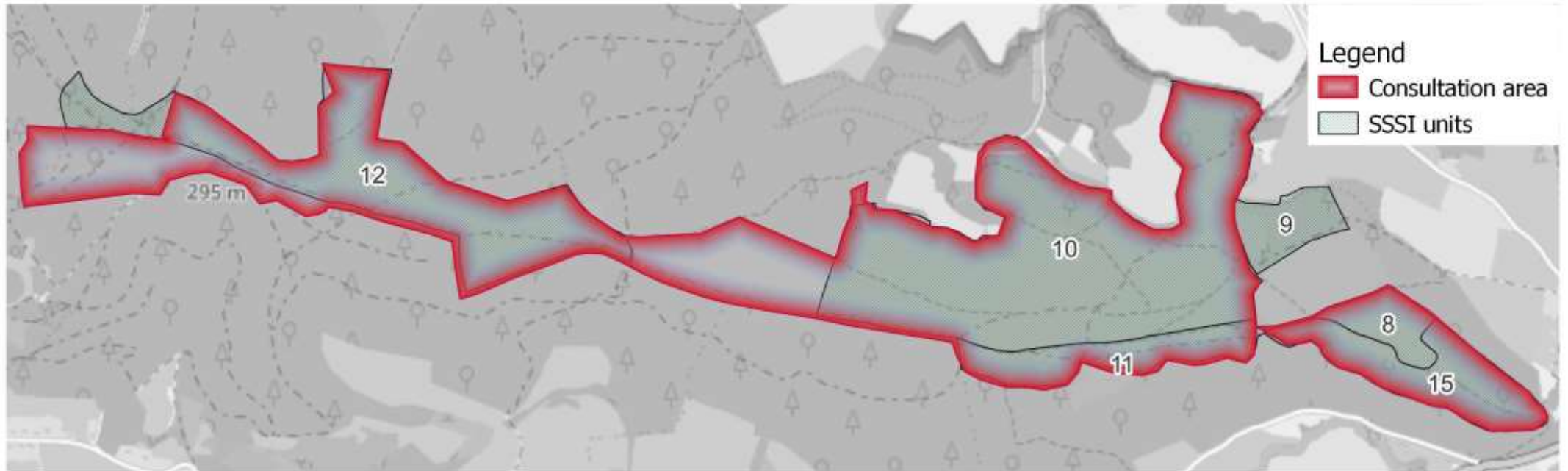
Map 1: Wootton Ridge consultation area.



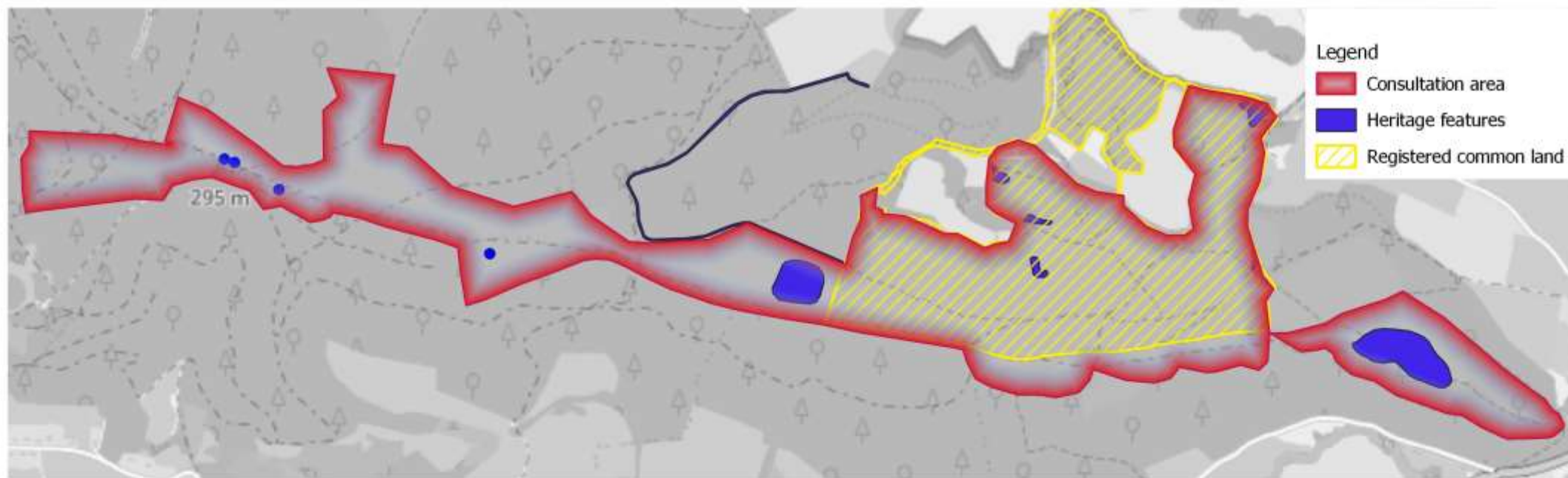
Wildlife

- 1.6 The consultation area incorporates large areas of lowland heathland. This habitat type occurs on low fertility soils which have been subject to historic tree clearance and subsequent grazing and other land uses, preventing the development of woodland. It is characterised by dwarf shrub vegetation that, in the west of the UK, mainly consists of Western Gorse *Ulex gallii* and Bell Heather *Erica cinerea*. However, higher parts of the Wootton Ridge support heathland that is more upland in character, with Bilberry *Vaccinium myrtle* and Purple Moor-grass *Molinia caerulea*. 80% of UK heathlands have been lost over the last two centuries as a result of land-use change, changing agricultural practices and urbanisation (e.g., Lake et al., 2020). Nevertheless, the UK still supports an internationally important area of Europe's remaining heathland habitat.
- 1.7 The Heath Fritillary butterfly is one of the rarest and most threatened species found on Wootton Ridge. Within the UK, it is only found within a few small areas of Kent, Essex, Cornwall, Devon and Exmoor. On Exmoor the caterpillars require patches of young Bilberry within which to find their favoured foodplant – Common Cow-wheat *Melampyrum pratense*, which is partially parasitic on Bilberry. In addition, the butterfly prefers to breed within sunny, warm, and sheltered locations. Due to these very specific habitat requirements and changes in the structure of vegetation on site that have made much of the area unsuitable for them, the Heath Fritillary population within the consultation area has experienced extreme historic declines. However, recent work to create glades and broaden path edges combined with favourable weather has resulted in an increase in the population size and recolonisation of areas of the ridge where the butterfly has not been seen for 10 years (J. Plackett, pers. comm.).

Map 2: SSSI units and heathland within Wootton Ridge consultation area



Map 3: Heritage features, common land, open access land and public rights of way.



Dunster Park and Heathlands SSSI

- 1.8 Much of the heathland on Wootton Ridge is incorporated within the Dunster Park and Heathlands Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)², which also includes 4 other discrete sites nearby. However, a small area in the centre just south of Staunton Plantation is not included within the SSSI. In addition to its heathland, the SSSI is designated for lowland dry acid grassland and ancient oak woods (including wood pasture with ancient trees) together with the wide range of rare and specialised species that use these habitats. Species include specialist heathland breeding birds, such as the Dartford Warbler *Curruca undata* and Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*, the nationally rare and range-restricted Heath Fritillary butterfly *Mellicta athalia*, and the localised Pink Meadowcap *Porpolomopsis calyptriformis* toadstool, plus a nationally important assemblage of beetles associated with veteran trees. However, it should be noted that areas supporting oak woods and wood pasture are largely outside of the consultation area.
- 1.9 Encroachment by Birch *Betula* sp. saplings and other tree species is resulting in the conversion of areas of open heathland to young secondary woodland, with the resultant loss of the heathland and grassland. Much of the remaining heathland has reached a stage in its development where dense, mature Heather and Western Gorse is dominant. This has led to a decline in structural variation within the sward, including the loss of bare and open areas that are favoured by many specialist heathland species. In addition, stands of Bracken have become extremely extensive in places, shading out the Billberry/Common Cow Wheat ground flora favoured by the Heath Fritillary.
- 1.10 Five SSSI units are included within the consultation area (see Table 1). Three of these (10-12) are monitored by Natural England for the condition of the heathland and, at the last assessment in 2011, all were considered to be *unfavourable - recovering*. In brief, they exceeded the maximum targets set for the cover of scrub and were ungrazed but other management (burning and vegetation cutting) was being implemented. A fourth unit (8) monitored for heathland was assessed in 2021 as *unfavourable - no change*, due to prevalence of scrub and lack of remedial action. The last unit (15) was

2

<https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/SiteDetail.aspx?SiteCode=S2000415&SiteName=dunster&countyCode=&responsiblePerson=&SeaArea=&IFCAAra=>

assessed in 2021 for woodland targets and was considered *unfavourable - recovering* (the failed targets are not listed but were considered to be being addressed through an agri-environment agreement).

Table 1: Summary of the condition of the SSSI units that fall within the Wootton Ridge consultation area.

Unit	Condition	Comment
8	Unfavourable no change	Site appears to not have improved over the last 10 years since the previous assessment, fails on most of the targets. Lack of corrective works and inappropriate scrub control.
10	Unfavourable - recovering	Excessive European gorse and bracken with some Rhododendron. Ungrazed but a plan of burning and scrub control is being implemented. Some good areas of Dwarf Shrub species.
11	Unfavourable - recovering	Scrub work is now underway on birch and the burning and other scrub clearance have been more successful.
12	Unfavourable - recovering	Prevalent sapling birch and conifer, managed through annual burning and scrub control. Structural diversity within Heather and Bilberry sward.
15	Unfavourable - recovering	Unfavourable recovering, the unit is in an existing HT woodland only agreement to address the issue.

Archaeological/historic heritage

1.11 Wootton Ridge has a number of heritage features (see Map 3), the most notable of which is the hillfort on Grabbist Hill, which is considered to date from the Iron Age. The steep flank of the hillfort forms one of the boundaries of Grabbist Hill itself, and its western end also incorporates the remains of a medieval to post-Medieval ridge and furrow systems. The hillfort is a Scheduled Ancient Monument, scheduled as a nationally important archaeological site under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act of 1979.

1.12 Other features of interest include three Bronze Age barrows (two on Periton Hill, one on Wootton Common), several medieval and post-medieval quarries and pits on Alcombe Common and Arms Hill, an undated subcircular enclosure on Knowle Hill, a 16th-19th-century horse pond on Ellicombe Common and an undated standing stone on Hopcott Common. A 19th-century to modern day wood bank with boundary ditch follows the consultation boundary around Staunton Plantation.

Common land

- 1.13 The names shown on historic maps (see Figure 1) indicate that there was once a string of commons along the top of the Wootton Ridge, including Wootton Common, Hopcott Common, Staunton Common, Alcombe Common and Ellicombe Common. Although some parts of these old commons remain as unenclosed land supporting semi-natural habitats and with open access under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000), only Alcombe Common was registered as common land (as Alcombe Hill Common) under the Commons Registration Act (1965). There are no commons rights registered for the common.
- 1.14 Alcombe Common falls within an urban area³ (see implications under Access below) and there is a Scheme of Regulation for the land under the 1899 Commons Act. This makes provision for Minehead Council to manage and improve the condition of the common in the public interest and to make, revoke and alter byelaws for listed purposes. There are 18 byelaws dating from 1926, which mainly address anti-social behaviour or unlawful grazing or removal of timber etc.
- 1.15 On registered common land, there are restrictions on the kind of works that can be carried out, for example it is not permitted to erect fencing or to resurface the commons (for more information, see Natural England's Works and consents commons information sheet⁴). However, it is generally permissible to install temporary fencing to enclose up to 10 hectares, or 10% of the site, whichever is the lesser, for up to 6 months for the purpose of containing livestock. For more permanent or extensive fencing, permission must be obtained from the Planning Inspectorate.

³ See Section 15 land on <https://magic.defra.gov.uk/MagicMap>

⁴ <https://www.footprint-ecology.co.uk/reports/Footprint%20Ecology%20-%202010%20-%20Works%20and%20Consents%20Commons%20Factsheet%20No.%2013.pdf>

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Figure 1: An excerpt from two historic OS maps: Dulverton (Outline), Sheet 294, Revised: 1896, Published: 1898 and Minehead (Outline), Sheet 278, revised: 1897, Published: 1898 (from Historic Scotland's side-by-side maps website).

Access

- 1.16 Under the CROW Act, members of the public have right of access to the common and the other Open Access areas for walking, running, watching wildlife and climbing. There are also numerous public rights of way crossing the consultation areas (see Map 3). In 2019, the network was improved by Minehead Town Council dedicating an existing track across Alcombe Common as a public bridleway under Section 25 of the Highways Act (1980)⁵. On Open Access land, dogs must be on a short lead (fixed length and not more than 2 metres) between 1 March and 31st July, and at any time of year in the vicinity of livestock.
- 1.17 The Law of Property Act 1925, Section 193 grants statutory rights of access to local people for “air and exercise” on foot and on horseback to commons in urban/metropolitan commons (i.e. Alcombe Common). In addition, the Scheme of Regulation for Alcombe Common allows “free access for the inhabitants of the district and neighbourhood and a privilege of playing games and of enjoying other species of recreation thereon, subject to any byelaws”. These pre-existing rights are retained through Section 15 of the CROW Act. Note that on commons subject to a management scheme, the CROW Act extends the rights of local people to the public in general.

Current management

- 1.18 In the recent past, variety of management activities have been carried out on Wootton Ridge. Within the heathland and scrub, extensive Bracken and Bramble stands have been cut and removed and invading Gorse has been cut back. Prescribed burns (often known as “swaling”) have also been used to allow Heather and Gorse to regenerate and to promote Bilberry growth. Areas of encroaching Birch have been cut back and expansive areas of Bracken have been cut or “bruised” to facilitate Bilberry growth.
- 1.19 Currently, management varies across the site but includes scrub control on heathland, Bracken control (including some chemical control, mainly in areas where mechanical control is very difficult) and targeted habitat management for the Heath Fritillary, including the creation of glades and cutting along

⁵ https://www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0031/345766/199_Signed-Creation-Agreement-WL31-59-Minehead-28.10.2019.pdf

track edge. Some areas (such as Grabbist Hill) are mown on a rotational basis.

- 1.20 Forestry England manage their holdings according to the Exmoor Forest Plan 2020-2030⁶. Large-scale felling operations therefore take place at intervals. The plan also seeks to create areas of wooded heath in close proximity to the SSSI to improve the condition of neighbouring SSSI units which have deteriorated due to the effects of under-grazing and scrub encroachment.

The consultation process

- 1.21 This report details the actions taken and the results of the first stage of the two-part consultation. The second stage of consultation will involve a similar consultation on more detailed options that will be developed with the input of key stakeholders.

⁶ <https://www.forestryengland.uk/forest-planning/exmoor-forest-plan>

2. The consultation

- 2.1 The consultation about the future management of Wootton Ridge ran from Monday 14th August 2023 to Saturday 30th September 2023. The consultation aimed to provide accessible information about the site, its features of interest and the challenges of managing it. Different types of opportunities were provided for stakeholders to feed back about what is important to them about the site and the type of management they would like to see. The consultation included the components listed in Table 2.

Stakeholders

- 2.2 A comprehensive list of stakeholders (see Appendix 1) was identified following the guidance given in A Common Purpose (Natural England, 2012). This includes owners and rights holders, the people of the neighbourhood, other site users and representatives of areas of public interest (including nature conservation, the conservation of the landscape, public rights of access and the protection of archaeological or historic features).

Publicity

- 2.3 The consultation materials were hosted on the Exmoor National Park website ⁷(with hard copies available via the Footprint Ecology office). Posters advertising the consultation were put out at 10 access points to Wootton Ridge (17th-18th July), plus the Dunster National Park Centre and the Minehead Town Council Office. Timberscombe Parish Council kindly agreed to post relevant information on their website, and material was also sent to Wootton Courteney Parish Council. The consultation was also publicised through an article⁸ in the West Somerset Free Press on 10th August.
- 2.4 Letters, together with posters advertising the consultation, were hand delivered to 39 neighbouring properties, and posted to a further two. 44 stakeholders were written directly by email. Butterfly Conservation sent information on the consultation via an email bulletin to members of the Somerset and Bristol branch.

⁷ <https://www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk/living-and-working/management-of-wootton-ridge>

⁸ <https://www.wsfpc.co.uk/news/future-management-options-for-wootton-ridge-on-exmoor-are-subject-to-consultation-631861>

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Table 2: Components of the 2023 consultation on the future management of Wootton Ridge.

Component	Description	Metrics
(1) Landowner meetings	An online meeting and a site visit were arranged with landowners.	1 online meeting with 4 landowners or their representatives, face-face meeting with 1 landowner, site visit with 3 landowners or their representatives.
(2) Letters to stakeholders	All stakeholders identified in the mapping exercise were written to via email. In addition, letters were hand delivered to nearby properties.	44 stakeholders emailed, 39 letters dropped, 2 neighbours written to.
(3) Questionnaire (see Appendix 2)	Hosted on the Exmoor National Park website, this was designed to gather respondents' views on Wootton Ridge, including why they visit the site, the activities they undertake, what they value and what changes, if any, that they would like to see. The questionnaire was available online and as a pdf for the period of consultation.	93 questionnaires completed.
(4) Webinar	Webinars involved a 40 minute presentation about the site, its features of interest and management options (given by Footprint Ecology staff). At the end of the presentation, participants were invited to ask questions or share comments by video, audio, or in the chat.	Two webinars held (07/09/2023 and 13/09/2023) 6 participants overall.
(5) On-site drop-ins	A face-to-face event designed to raise the profile of the consultation and provide an opportunity for site users to chat informally were based at Minehead Library.	One event held on 11/09/2023 between 10:00-17:00. 21 participants engaged with directly.

3. Questionnaire results

Overview

3.1 A total of 93 respondents completed the questionnaire with the vast majority doing so online. A copy of the questionnaire is provided in Appendix 2.

Main activity of respondents (Q1)

3.2 All respondents were able to identify a main activity that they carry out at Wootton Ridge (see Figure 2). Dog walking was identified as a main activity by a third (33%) of all respondents. The second most commonly identified activity was walking (24%), followed by cycling or mountain biking (17%). Wildlife / bird watching is undertaken by 10% of survey respondents as a main activity and running or jogging by a further 9%. The two respondents identifying 'other' activities on site either lived there or visited Wootton Ridge for multiple activities (meeting friends, walking and wildlife watching) and couldn't identify a main reason to visit.

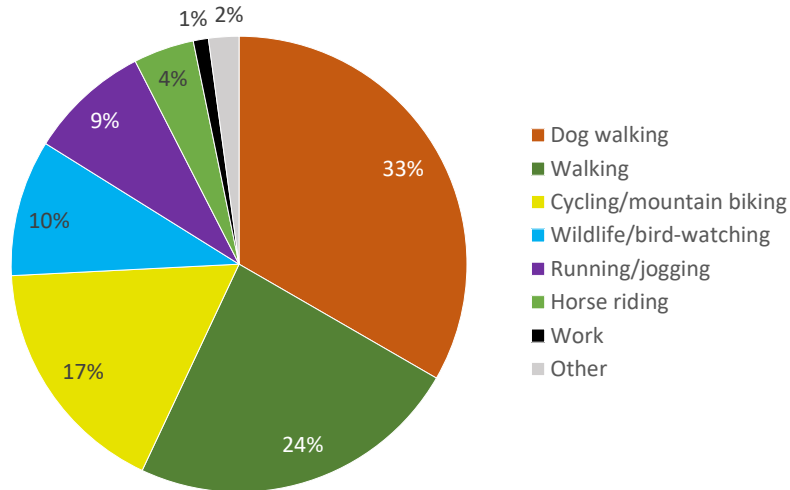


Figure 2: Main activity carried on Wootton Ridge identified by questionnaire respondents (Q1).

Frequency of visit (Q2)

3.3 Overall, over half of all respondents (57%) stated that they visit Wootton Ridge at least on a weekly basis. Approximately a quarter (26%) of respondents stated that they visit more than once a week and a further 14% stated that they visit on a daily basis (see Figure 3).

3.4 These patterns are consistent across activity types, with the exception of walkers, who visit less frequently: 27% visit monthly and 23% visit less than once a month. In contrast, half of the questionnaire respondents who visit for jogging/running do so on a daily basis. The frequency of visits for respondents who are visiting for wildlife / bird watching varies.

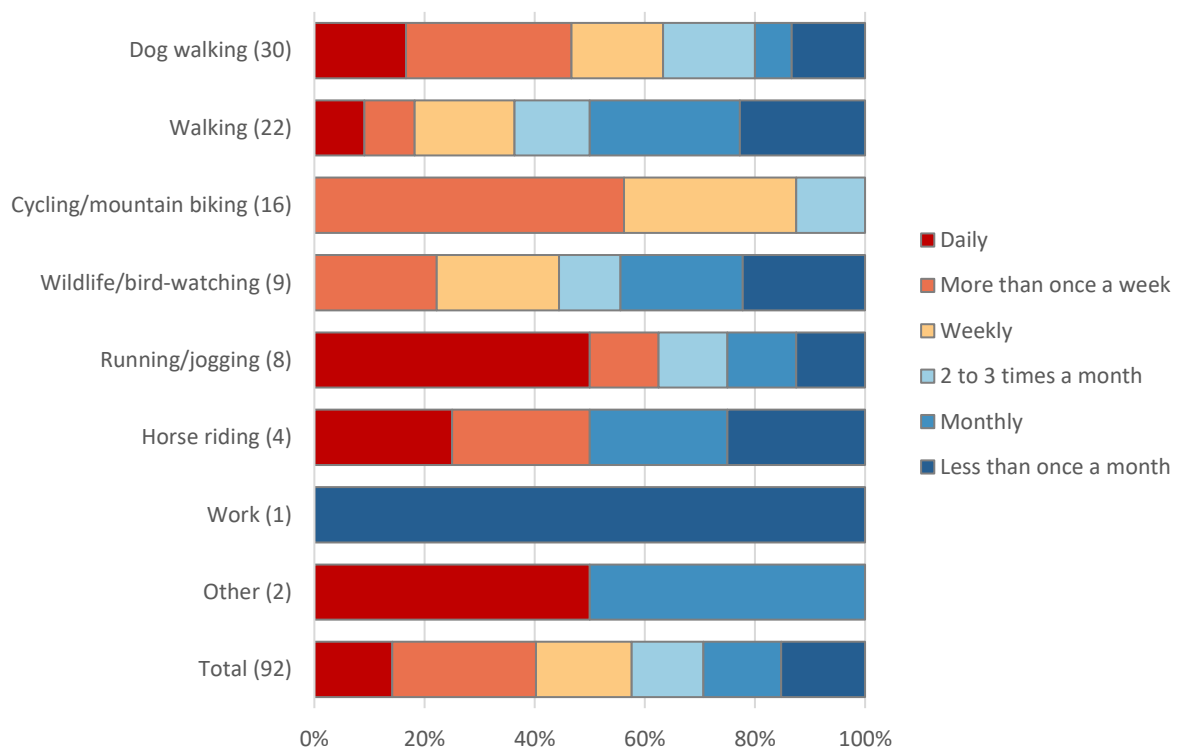


Figure 3: Visitation frequency at Wootton Ridge of questionnaire respondents (Q2), arranged by main activity (number of respondents per activity type in parentheses). Note that a single respondent did not answer this question.

Time of year (Q3)

3.5 Questionnaire respondents could provide multiple responses to this question. The majority of responses (67%) indicated that they tend to visit equally all year round, A further 10% of responses stated that they were

more likely to visit in the autumn. Only a few respondents (5%) indicated a preference for visiting during the winter months (see Table 3).

3.6 This pattern generally held true across all main activity types, in particular with the cyclists / mountain biking respondents where all 16 individuals stated that they visit equally all year.

Table 3: Preferred time of year for visit to Wootton Ridge by questionnaire respondents (Q3), arranged by main activity (with row percentages). The largest value in each row is highlighted in dark grey, and the second largest in light grey. Note that individual questionnaire respondents could provide multiple answers to this question.

Activity	Equally all year	Spring (Mar-May)	Summer (Jun-Aug)	Autumn (Sept-Nov)	Winter (Dec-Feb)	Total
Dog walking	25 (56)	5 (11)	4 (9)	6 (13)	4 (9)	45 (100)
Walking	18 (69)	2 (8)	2 (8)	2 (8)	1 (4)	26 (100)
Cycling/ mountain biking	16 (100)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	16 (100)
Wildlife/ birdwatching	7 (64)	1 (9)	2 (18)	1 (9)	0 (0)	11 (100)
Running/ jogging	6 (60)	1 (10)	0 (0)	2 (20)	1 (10)	10 (100)
Horse riding	3 (75)	0 (0)	1 (25)	0 (0)	0 (0)	4 (100)
Other	2 (100)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	2 (100)
Work	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (100)
Total	77 (67)	9 (8)	9 (8)	11 (10)	6 (5)	115 (100)

Mode of transport (Q4)

3.7 The majority of respondents (58%) travel to Wootton Ridge on foot, and a further 24% are accessing the site via car/van (see Table 4). This pattern is consistent across activity types; however, unsurprisingly, the most common mode of transport for cyclists / mountain bikers is cycling (81%) and travelling on horseback for those stating that their main activity at Wootton Ridge is horse riding (67%).

Table 4: Mode of transport used by questionnaire respondents to access Wootton Ridge (Q4), arranged by main activity (with row percentages). The largest value in each row is highlighted in dark grey, and the second largest in light grey. Note that a single respondent did not answer this question.

Activity	Mode of transport				Total
	On foot	Car/van	Cycle	Horseback	
Dog walking	23 (74)	8 (26)	0 (0)	0 (0)	31 (100)
Walking	15 (68)	6 (27)	1 (5)	0 (0)	22 (100)
Cycling/mountain biking	0 (0)	3 (19)	13 (81)	0 (0)	16 (100)
Wildlife/birdwatching	4 (44)	4 (44)	0 (0)	1 (11)	9 (100)
Running/jogging	8 (100)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	8 (100)
Horse riding	1 (33)	0 (0)	0 (0)	2 (67)	3 (100)
Other	2 (100)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	2 (100)
Work	0 (0)	1 (100)	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (100)
Total	53 (58)	22 (24)	14 (15)	3 (3)	92 (100)

Reasons for visiting (Q5)

3.8 Questionnaire respondents could provide multiple answers to this question about why they visit Wootton Ridge (see Figure 4). When asked to consider the main reasons for visiting Wootton Ridge, the most commonly given answers were the landscape or views (18%), the peace and quiet (16%) and for wildlife (14%). A further 12% indicated the suitability of the area for walks and 10% choose to visit for the easy access on foot and state that the area is good for dogs (also 10%).

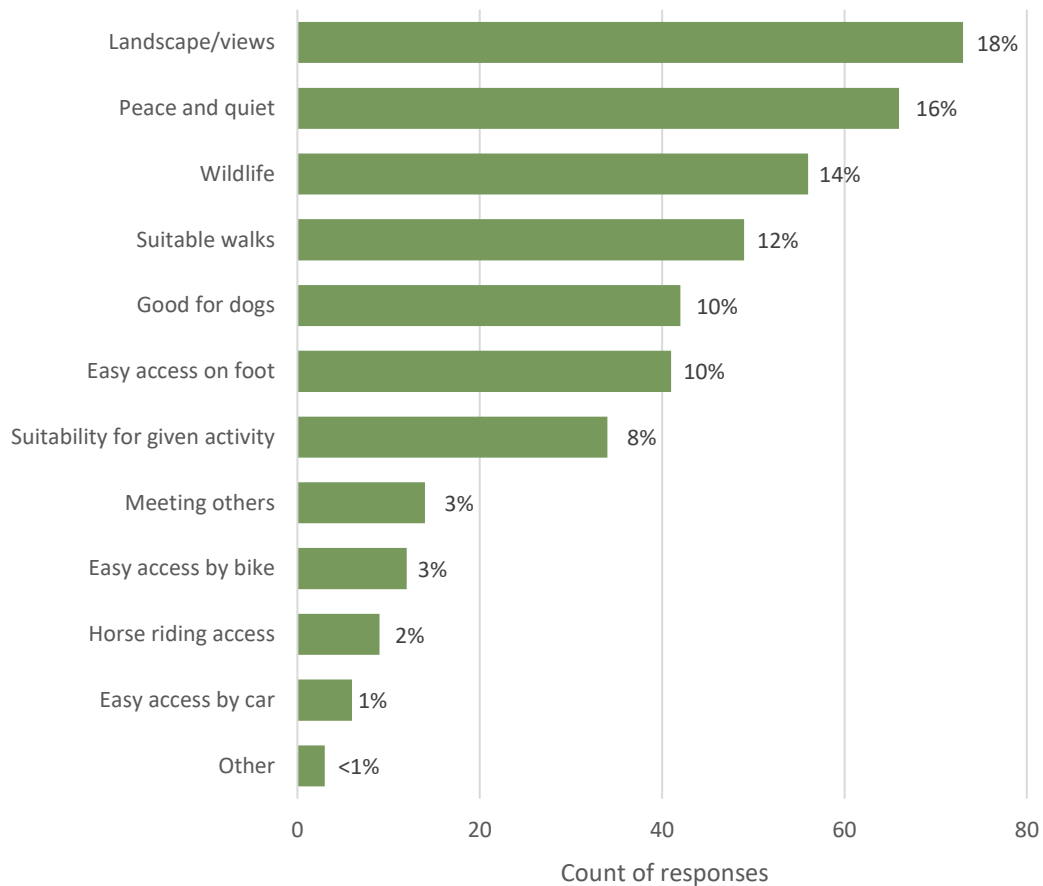


Figure 4: Reasons for visiting Wootton Ridge given by questionnaire respondents (Q5). Note that individual questionnaire respondents could provide multiple answers to this question.

Location of questionnaire respondents (Q16)

3.9 88 of the 93 questionnaire respondents provided identifiable home postcodes. Map 4 shows their locations in relation to the Wootton Ridge consultation site boundary. Within the local area, clusters of respondents can be identified around Minehead, Alcombe and Dunster, all to the north and east of the consultation area. The entire spread of respondents stretches west to east from Porlock to Williton, and as far south as near Crewkerne in Somerset.

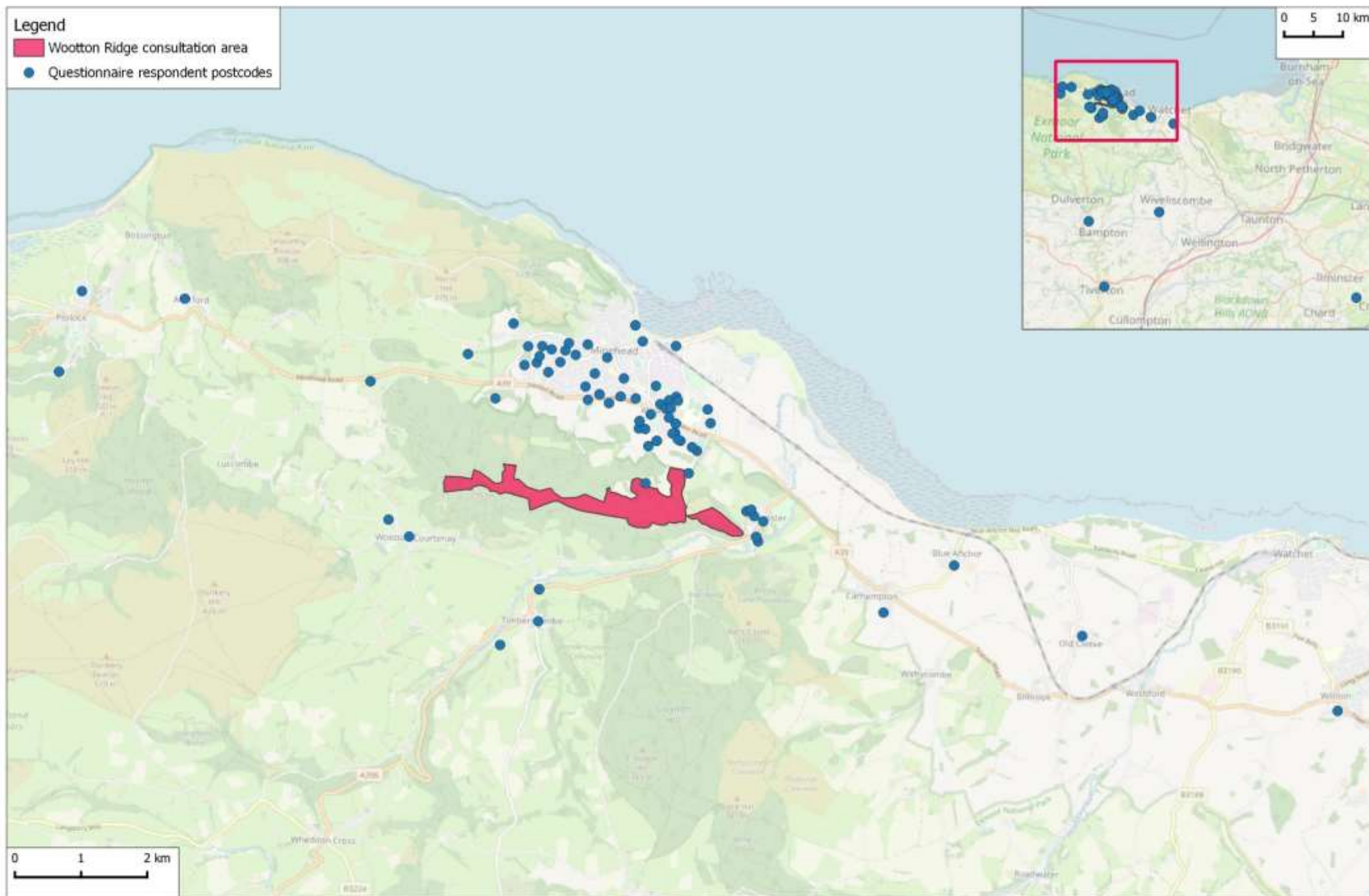
3.10 Map 5 and Table 5 depict the respondent postcode locations by main activity type and provide summary distance statistics for each, respectively. Across all respondents, most live within 1.8 km (75th percentile) of the site boundary. The main activity of respondents who live closest are running/jogging, walking or horse riding on site (mean distances of 0.8km, 1.4km and 1.4km respectively). Respondents who visit for wildlife or

birdwatching tend to live further away (mean distance of 5km from site boundary), a trend also seen in cyclists (mean distance of 3.7km). An individual respondent who travelled for work purposes had visited from the greatest distance of 51.5km.

Table 5: Questionnaire respondents' main activity at Wotton Ridge and summary statistics describing the straight-line distance in km that respondents live from the consultation area boundary (Q16). N is the sample size (number of valid postcodes) and Q3 is the 75th percentile.

Activity	N	Mean (+ 1SE)	Min	Median	Q3	Max
Dog walking	28	1.7 (+ 0.7)	0.0	0.9	1.2	19.8
Walking	22	1.4 (+ 0.2)	0.3	1.4	1.8	4.8
Cycling	16	3.7 (+ 1.8)	0.2	1.9	2.2	30.5
Running / jogging	8	0.8 (+ 0.2)	0.2	0.5	1.4	1.8
Wildlife or bird watching	8	5 (+ 2.2)	0.5	1.9	8.4	18.9
Horse riding	4	1.4 (+ 0.3)	0.7	1.3	2	2.1
Unidentified	1	0.5	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Work	1	51.5	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Total	88	2.7 (+0.7)	0.0	1.2	1.8	51.5

Map 4 : Location of identifiable home postcodes from questionnaire respondents (n=88). Note that the inset map shows all postcodes, whilst the larger map excludes 4.

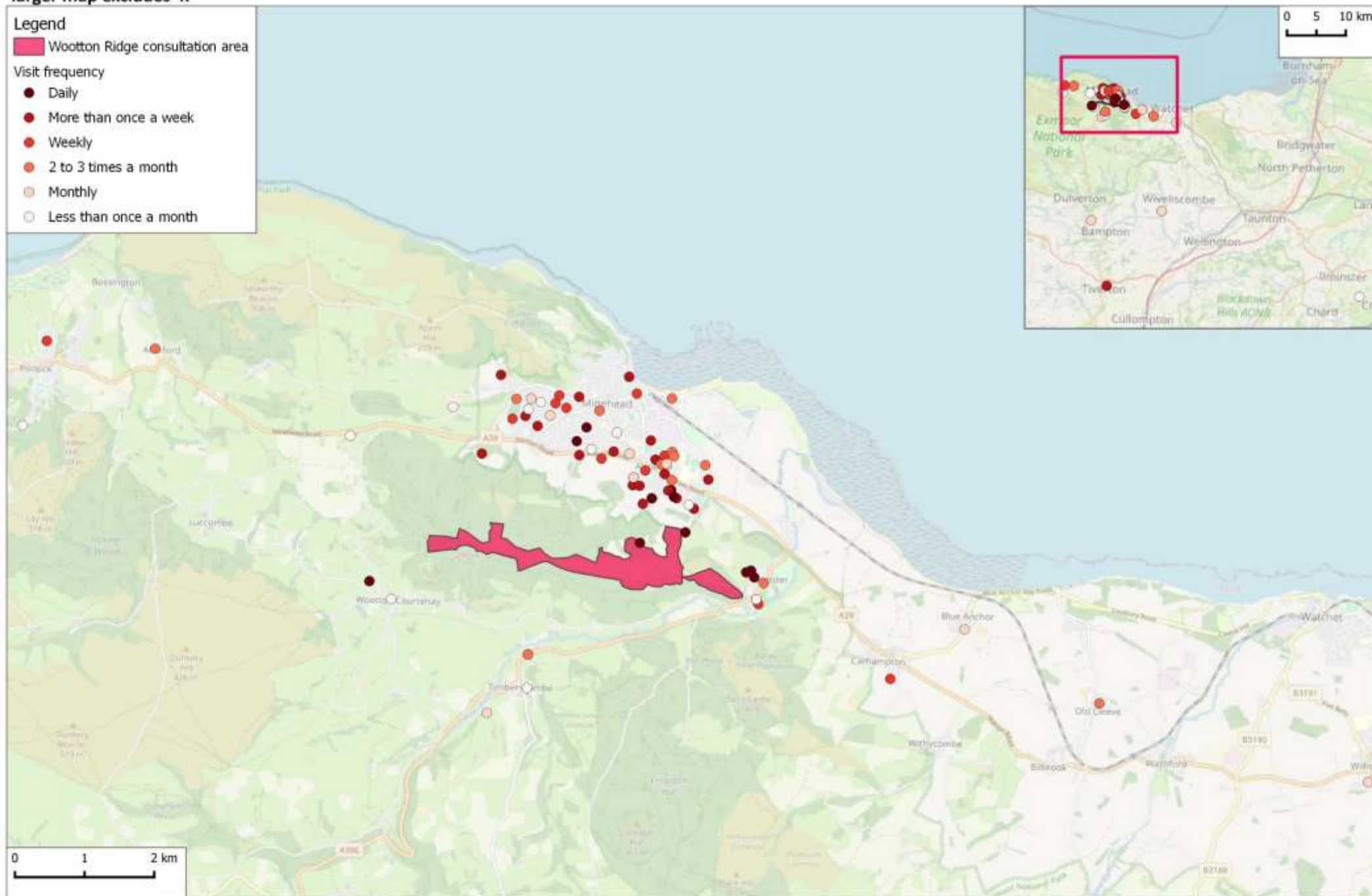


3.11 Map 6 and Table 6 depict the respondent postcode locations by frequency of visit to Wootton Ridge and provide summary statistics for each category, respectively. Unsurprisingly, daily visitors appear to live close to the site boundary, with a mean distance of 0.6km among respondents, whilst visitors who visit less than once a month tend to live further away (mean distance of 5.9km). Overall, visit frequency decreases as mean distance from the site boundary increases. Respondents who visit more than once a week are the exception to this, with a mean distance from site of 2.4km.

Table 6: Questionnaire respondents frequency of visit to Wotton Ridge and summary statistics describing the straight-line distance in km that respondents live from the consultation area boundary (Q16). N is the sample size (number of valid postcodes) and Q3 is the 75th percentile.

Visit frequency	N	Mean (+ 1SE)	Min	Median	Q3	Max
Daily	13	0.6 (+ 0.1)	0.0	0.5	0.7	1.7
More than once a week	23	2.4 (+ 1.3)	0.2	1.0	1.6	30.5
Weekly	16	1.5 (+ 0.4)	0.3	1.2	1.9	6.2
2 to 3 times a month	12	1.8 (+ 0.5)	0.3	1.1	1.9	5.4
Monthly	12	5.2 (+ 2.0)	0.7	1.8	7.8	19.8
Less than once a month	12	5.9 (+ 4.2)	0.2	1.7	1.8	51.5
Total	88	2.7 (+0.7)	0.0	1.2	1.8	51.5

Map 6: Location of identifiable home postcodes from questionnaire respondents organised visit frequency (n=88). Note that the inset map shows all postcodes, whilst the larger map excludes 4.



3.12 Table 7 provides summary statistics for postcode distance categorised by the mode of transport used by the respondent to visit Wootton Ridge. People accessing the site on foot and horse riders tend to live closest (mean distances of 0.9km and 1.3km respectively), whilst those doing so by car/van tend to live further away (mean of 8.4km).

Table 7: Questionnaire respondents mode of transport used to get to Wootton Ridge and summary statistics describing the straight-line distance in km that respondents live from the site boundary (Q16). N is the sample size (number of valid postcodes) and Q3 is the 75th percentile. Note that a single respondent did not answer this question.

Mode of transport	N	Mean (+ 1SE)	Min	Median	Q3	Max
On foot	50	0.9 (0.1)	0	0.8	2	6.2
Car or van	20	8.4 (2.9)	0.9	2.2	0	1.7
Cycle	14	1.7 (0.4)	0.2	1.4	8.5	51.5
Horseback	3	1.3 (0.4)	0.7	1	1.3	2.1

Visitor concerns (Q6)

3.13 Questionnaire respondents could provide multiple answers this question as to whether they have any concerns when visiting Wootton Ridge. The most common concerns were encountering cyclists (18%) and dog fouling (14%) and 11% respectively were concerned about litter, uncontrolled dogs and disturbance or damage to wildlife (See Figure 5). 10% of respondents in contrast stated that 'Nothing concerns me'.

3.14 5% of respondents identified "other" reasons for concern, which included off-road motorcycles, restricted access to a bridleway, access to parking, lack of maintenance or the path network and risk of wildfires.

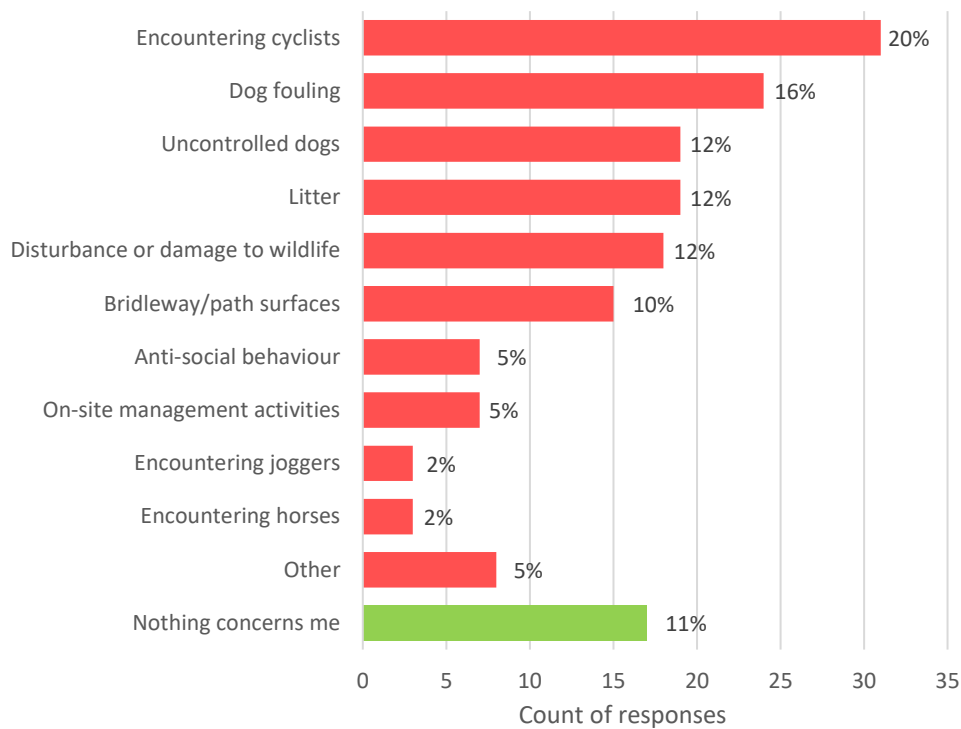


Figure 5: Concerns when visiting Wootton Ridge identified by questionnaire respondents (Q6). Note that individual questionnaire respondents could provide multiple answers to this question.

Changes visitors would like to see (Q7)

- 3.15 Questionnaire respondents could provide multiple answers to this question. The largest proportion of respondents (41%) indicated that they would like to see no changes to Wootton Ridge. 15% of responses stated they would like to see better footpaths or bridleways, 13% would like more seating provision and 11% of responses would like more on-site information (see Figure 6).
- 3.16 In addition, 11% of responses indicated there were 'other' changes they would like to see at Wootton Ridge. These included better mountain bike trails/infrastructure (4 respondents) and a request that there is no increase to the number of biking or motoring events (2 respondents). From single respondents, other changes included the introduction of grazing livestock, continued management of scrub, better road access (fewer potholes), provision of dog bins in the area and better signage.

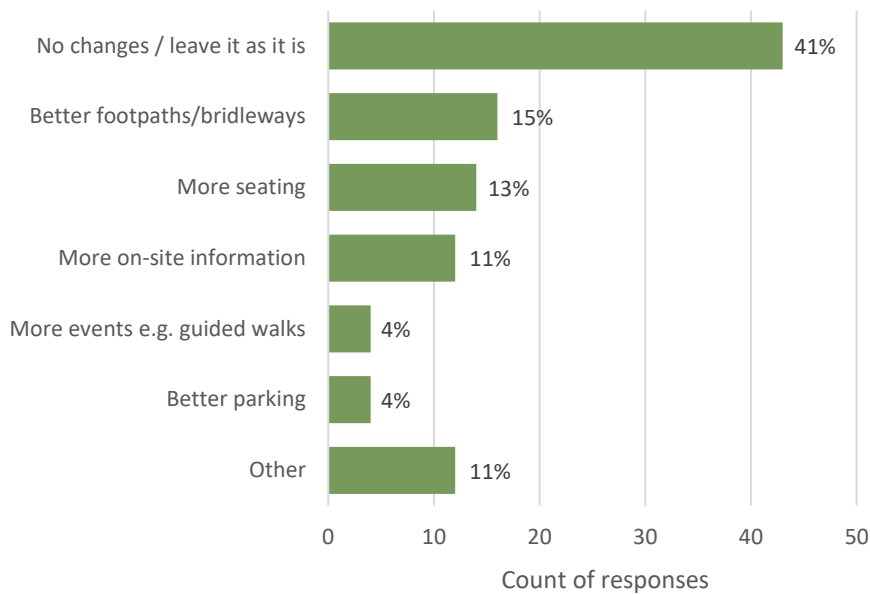


Figure 6: Changes that questionnaire respondents would like to see at Wootton Ridge (Q7). Note that individual questionnaire respondents could provide multiple answers to this question.

Habitat management at Wootton Ridge (Q8-13)

- 3.17 Almost all questionnaire respondents answered Q8 (n=91), Q9 (n=92) and Q12 (n=90) and all respondents answered Q10 and Q11 (n=93).
- 3.18 Almost two-thirds (62%) think that the balance of open heathland and woodland/scrub at Wootton Ridge is 'about right' (see Figure 7). However, 21% responded that there is not enough open heathland and 11% stated that there is not enough woodland/scrub. This pattern was generally true across all activity types, however proportionally more dog walkers and wildlife/birdwatchers were inclined to say that there wasn't enough open heathland.

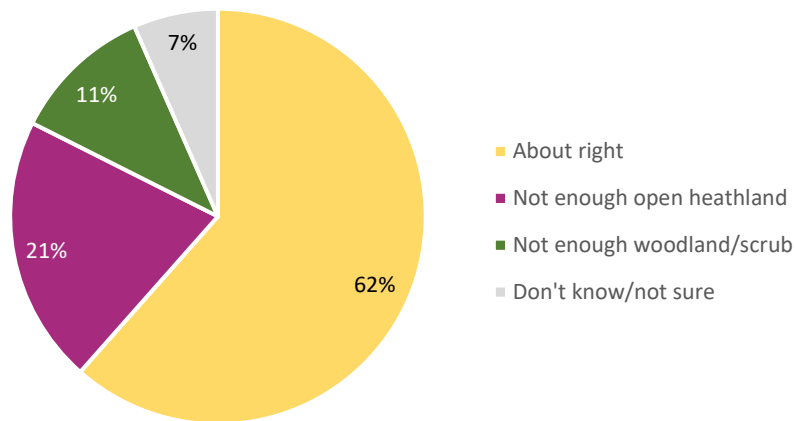


Figure 7: Respondents opinion on the current balance of open heathland and woodland/scrub on Wootton Ridge (Q8). Note that 2 respondents did not answer this question.

3.19 Flailing (similar to mowing) is used at Wootton Ridge to prevent scrub encroachment and maintain the area of open heathland. The area currently flailed is thought to be about right by 62% of respondents (see Figure 8), while 13% state that there is not enough flailing. A greater proportion of respondents stated that they didn't know or weren't sure (18%). This was consistent across all activity types.

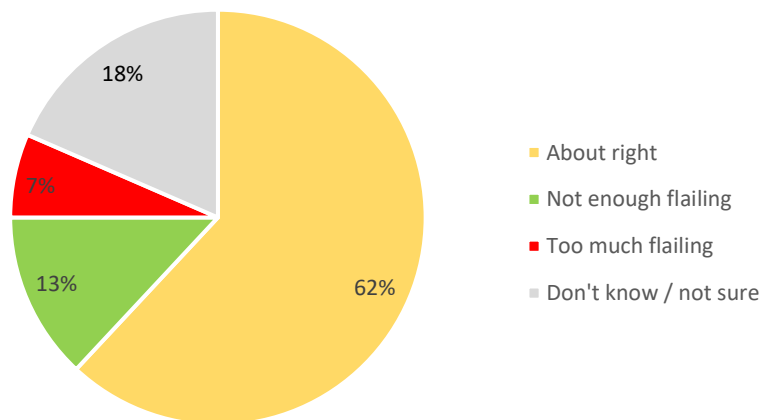


Figure 8: Respondents opinion on the use of flailing across Wootton Ridge (Q9). Note that 1 respondent declined to answer this question.

3.20 When cross-referenced with the postcode dataset (see Table 8), there is a suggestion that respondents who live further away from the site boundary are more likely to state that there is not enough open heathland at Wootton Ridge (mean distance of 6.1km).

Table 8: Questionnaire respondents views on the current extent of woodland and scrub at Wootton Ridge and summary statistics describing the straight-line distance that respondents live from the consultation area boundary (Q16). N is the sample size (number of valid postcodes) and Q3 is the 75th percentile. Note that a single respondent did not answer this question.

View on habitat balance	N	Mean (+ 1SE)	Min	Median	Q3	Max
About right	54	1.7 (+ 0.4)	0.0	1.1	1.9	19.8
Not enough open heathland	17	6.1 (+ 3.1)	0.3	1.2	5.4	51.5
Not enough woodland	10	1.0 (+ 0.2)	0.0	0.9	1.7	2.0
Don't know or not sure	6	1.1 (+ 0.3)	0.2	1.4	1.6	1.8

3.21 When comparing the postcode dataset to responses about the current level of flailing (see Table 9), respondents that answered 'Don't know or not sure' tend to live further away from the site boundary (mean distance of 4.5km). Respondents who think there is currently too much flailing at Wootton Ridge tend to live the closest with a mean distance of 1.2km.

Table 9: Questionnaire respondents views on the current level of flailing at Wootton Ridge and summary statistics describing the straight-line distance that respondents live from the consultation area boundary (Q16). N is the sample size (number of valid postcodes) and Q3 is the 75th percentile. Note that a single respondent did not answer this question.

View on flailing	N	Mean (+ 1SE)	Min	Median	Q3	Max
About right	54	2.6 (+ 0.7)	0.0	1.3	1.9	30.5
Not enough	11	1.9 (+ 0.9)	0.3	0.8	1.2	9.4
Too much	6	1.2 (+ 0.3)	0.0	1.7	1.8	2.0
Don't know or not sure	16	4.5 (+ 3.2)	0.2	1.1	1.8	51.5

3.22 Swaling (small-scale controlled burning) and livestock grazing are potential management options for maintaining the open heathland areas and diversity of heathland at Wootton Ridge. Responses about these were generally positive (see Figure 9), although a greater proportion of respondents stated 'yes' to livestock grazing (73%) compared to swaling (52%). Respondents unable to choose definitively and instead stating that they didn't know/not sure was higher for swaling (24%) than grazing (6%).

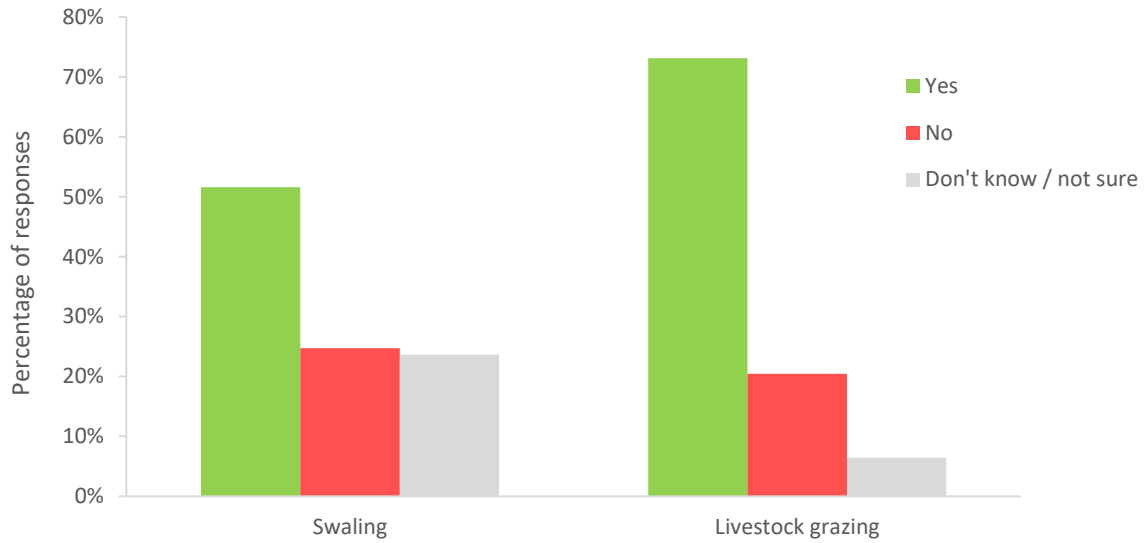


Figure 9: Methods that questionnaire respondents would be happy to see used at Wootton Ridge to maintain the open heathland areas and diversity of the heathland (Q10 & Q11).

3.2.3 If grazing were to be carried out, respondents were asked to consider which livestock they would like to see on site. Of those respondents that were in favour of grazing being introduced, 72% wished to see mixed grazing (i.e. the use of two or more livestock types) carried out, whilst 28% preferred the use of a single species (see Figure 10).

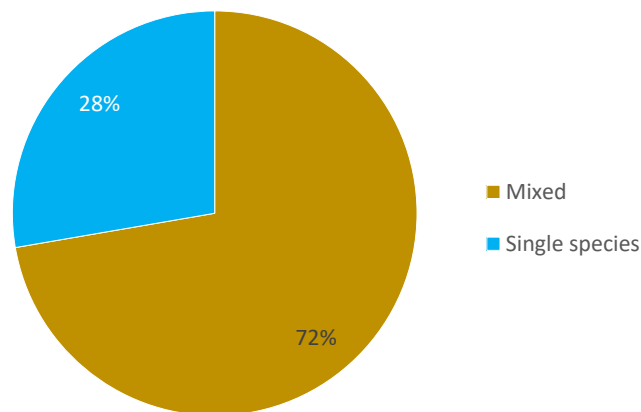


Figure 10: Questionnaire respondents' preference for either mixed or single-species grazing, if grazing were to be used as a management tool on the Wootton Ridge (Q13). Note that respondents who did not wish to see any grazing on the ridge are excluded from the figure.

3.24 The preferences in livestock type identified by respondents are provided in Figure 11. Note that the data depicts the frequency with which each livestock type was individually mentioned, irrespective of whether the response ultimately proposed either mixed or single-species grazing. The majority of responses (45%) related to ponies; 27% related to cattle; and 22% related to sheep. A small number of responses suggested using pigs or goats, and a minority (4%) stated none of the above. 59% of individual respondents would like to see a combination of livestock types grazing the site.

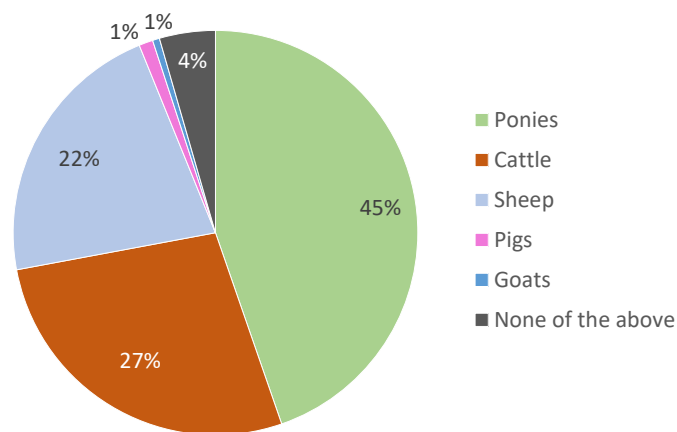


Figure 11: Questionnaire respondents' preference of livestock type if grazing were to be used as a management tool on the Wootton Ridge (Q13). Note that respondents could provide multiple answers to this question.

3.25 The largest proportion of respondents (37%) identified the use of virtual fencing as a preferred option to contain animals if grazing were to be carried out on site. The second most preferred option was boundary fencing (32%), whilst 18% were unable to identify a preference (see Figure 12). It should however be noted that five respondents who identified ponies as their sole preferred grazing livestock of choice (comprising 26% of respondents within that category) identified a preference for virtual fencing. This suggests that they did not necessarily fully engage with the background paper, which explained that GPS collars were unsuitable for use with ponies.

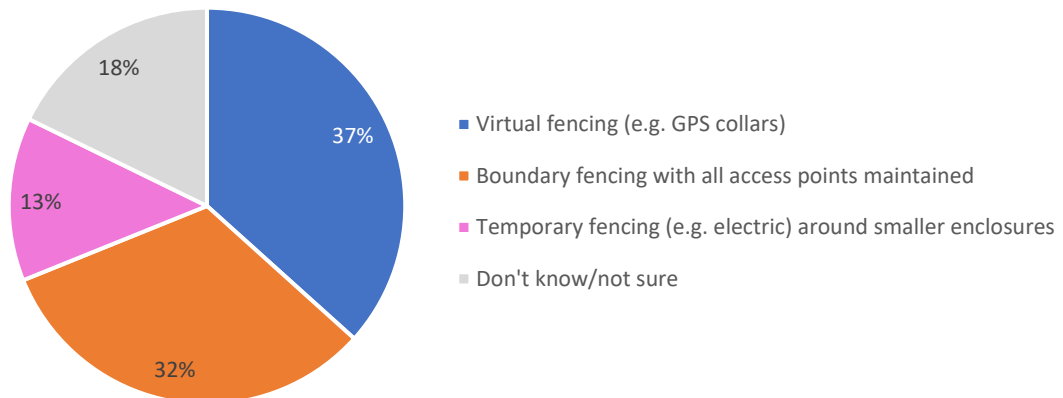


Figure 12: Questionnaire respondents' preference of fencing type if livestock were to be grazed at Wootton Ridge (Q12).

3.26 In addition to the summarised responses above, the questionnaire gave respondents the option to provide further information or comments with respect to their answers to Q8-11. These are repeated verbatim in Appendices 3 to 6 at the end of this report.

General comments on grazing, site management and, interest in other activities (Q14-15)

3.27 The last parts of the questionnaire included free text boxes for respondents to provide further information about their views regarding Wootton Ridge (Q14) as well as gauging interest in other activities on site (Q15). All comments received for Q14 are provided verbatim in Appendix 7 and are summarised in Figure 13, overleaf.

3.28 The comments received for Q14 were largely positive about the area around Wootton Ridge, expressing enjoyment of the peaceful and 'fantastic' open access to nature. Some comments expressed conflict with other users, notably cyclists using trails too quickly and motorcyclists/off-road vehicles joy riding in the area. A few respondents mentioned current management, with concerns of unsuccessful livestock management, and tree felling in the forestry areas during the bird nesting season. However overall, comments were complimentary of the site and most respondents would like it to be left as it is.

3.29 Respondents could provide multiple answers to Q15 (interest in other activities on site), and 66 responses were received (see Figure 14). Most interest was shown in volunteer work parties (47% of responses), with some interest also in an establishment of a “friends group” (23% of responses) and attendance of guided walks (17% of responses). 9 “other” responses were received, comprising of requests for bird ringing, mountain bike guiding or trail building, wildlife/grazing monitoring and litter collection.

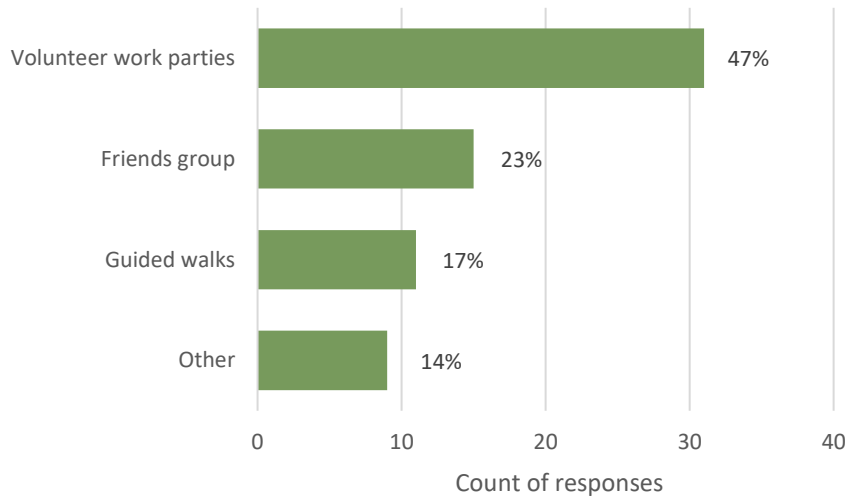


Figure 14: Interest of questionnaire respondents in taking part in other activities at Wootton Ridge (Q15). Note that respondents could provide multiple answers to this question.

4. Individual consultation responses

- 4.1 Written responses from organisations and individuals are summarised below in Table 10 and Table 11 respectively. Responses are generally in support of a management scheme for Wootton Ridge, stating the importance of the habitat in supporting the Heath Fritillary. However, there were some concerns about physical fencing for grazing livestock, limiting public access on common land and about the role in which management measures may have in the climate crisis (e.g., swaling). A management scheme is also thought to be positive for the historical environment although largely dependent on which habitat management methods are used and the level of research prior to implementation of a scheme.

Table 10: Responses from stakeholder organisations

Organisation/representative	Response
Buglife	Identified that the site appears to lie within their North Devon and Exmoor Important Invertebrate Area (i.e. nationally important for invertebrates), although it has yet to be mapped in detail. They hope for it to be mapped later in 2023 or early 2024, using Natural England funding to progress the English IIA network.
Exmoor National Park Authority – Historic Environment team	<p>Comments that a site management plan is likely to be positive for the historic environment because generally management of open spaces is compatible with the conservation of historic features. As well as providing a detailed list (and map) of the historic features found within the consultation area, they recommend that a desk-based study and field assessment might be required to fully understand the historic landscape.</p> <p>Suggests that there should be some care in choosing the management strategies deployed, citing concerns about mechanical mowing around standing stones, ground disturbance, placing of paths and recreation features on Bronze Age barrows and scrub encroachment. The latter has already been identified during the consultation process, but the representative would like to see a holistic regime to address this across the ridge. Finally, states that by cutting scrub/saplings rather than pulling or grubbing out there is a lower risk to the ground and archaeological remains, of which some may be undiscovered.</p>
Exmoor National Park Authority – Public Rights of Way / access team	<p>This organisation is the Access Authority for the whole consultation area and notes that the common land included, Alcombe Common, is an Urban Common granted for ‘air and exercise’ and additionally allows horse riders to ride all over the common and are not restricted to Public Rights of Way.</p> <p>Following on from the webinar, comments that they welcome the commitment to ‘maintain all rights of access’. The access at Wootton Ridge is heavily influenced by the management of surrounding land, and notes that the most significant impact to public access would be if grazing were introduced. Physical fencing for example, would require gates on all public rights of way and would need to maintain access for walkers and horse riders. Additionally, they highlight the need for careful choice of livestock, as the area is heavily used for recreation and so would need to mix safely with members of the public.</p>

Organisation/representative	Response
<p>Exmoor National Park Authority – Conservation team</p>	<p>Would be in support of a management programme across Wootton Ridge, to support the population of Heath Fritillary and is in line with the Exmoor Nature Recovery Vision 2030.</p> <p>Restoring areas of lowland heath would be encouraged, however it may have gone too in the direction of secondary woodland. Flailed areas in the past have resulted in woody mulch which may stop favourable plants establishing and, in some cases, mature scrub has been flailed which needs questioning. They suggest focussing on areas with recently developed young scrub, bracken and mature heathy areas. Ensure that in cut areas, cut material is removed. An alternative and traditionally effective method, swaling, is being ‘moved away from’ by the National Park Authority, due to the climate crisis.</p> <p>Grazing would be supported as it is likely to benefit both the heath fritillary and the lowland heath management, and geofencing would likely be more effective than physical fencing (citing a number of reasons, particularly local opposition).</p>
<p>Exmoor Local Access Forum and Commons</p>	<p>States the relevant sections of The Wildlife and Countryside Act, The Countryside and Rights of Way Act and states that Alcombe Common is an Urban Common where different access rights apply. They are concerned that physical fencing, even temporary fencing through which gates at key access points could be provided, would impact the rights of horse riders on Alcombe Common where they can access all of the common and are not restricted to Public Rights of Way. Regulations allow for temporary fencing on a common for up to 6 months, over an area of 10% of the total land or 10 hectares (whichever is smallest).</p>
<p>Historic England</p>	<p>States that the historic environment in this area is extensive, significant and vulnerable and that changes to the landscape must be mindful of this, to enhance or protect it. Management would be supported:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reducing scrub/gorse/bracken and woodland would limit damage to historic sites by making them more visible; - Repair of erosion would be desirable; - Controlled grazing would be welcomed. <p>In contrast, planting or regeneration near historic sites would not be welcomed and habitat creation should be considerate of nationally important sites. Historic England would recommend that the project includes a heritage impact assessment and management plan for each heritage asset, and states that access and interpretation of any heritage sites must inform any wider changes for the area.</p>

Organisation/representative	Response
Kennel Club	<p>States that current access appears to be in defined routes, thus preserving the access for both people and nature. The concern for visitors with dogs would be grazing livestock and ground nesting birds and therefore notes the importance of communication with the target audience, to ensure compliance with whatever restrictions might be encouraged.</p> <p>If grazing livestock were introduced, visitors should be able to make informed decisions about which area they visit, suggesting zoning, so that circular routes which are livestock free can still be accessed. Most dog walkers will seek to have dogs off lead, so encouraging people to keep dogs on the lead across all of the common is likely to be ineffective.</p> <p>On the issue of ground nesting birds, a zoned approach may also be effective in ensuring compliance at sensitive times / areas with the ability of users to be clear of where dogs off lead exercise can be taken.</p>

Table 11: Responses from individuals

Individual	Response
Individual 1	Respondent doesn't want to be involved in the consultation, however expresses the view that global warming is likely to continue and these smaller projects (such as this, new SSSI status or rewilding) are unlikely to have a significant effect.
Individual 2	States that for butterflies to thrive, birds would have to be controlled.
Individual 3	Suggests that the gorse should be kept down where areas had previously been covered by grassland and that birch trees are spoiling a good view. If these are kept in check then the area is really special. Forestry should continue to happen as need however requests that swaling should stop by the end of February.
Individual 4	Suggests that wildlife regeneration should be given priority and that there should be no chemical control on the common (of bracken or anything else). People need access, but that this access should be reasonable i.e. not motor bikes, racing cars or mountain bike racing through the woods.

Wootton Ridge Stage 1 Consultation

Individual	Response
Individual 5	<p>This individual had written previously about the vegetation clearance on Alcombe Common, stating that they were concerned about the level of clearance given that we are in a climate emergency. Tree planting is positive for storing carbon, and therefore removing trees seemed counterproductive. Additionally, risk of flooding seems to be increased due to climate change, experienced during the winter at the time of letter writing in the village of Alcombe. The removal of vegetation at Grabbist is likely to have exacerbated this.</p> <p>The individual's views at the time of the consultation state that vegetation growth should be kept down on the ridge to preserve the views and provide suitable habitat for butterflies. Rhododendron is also growing on the ridge and should be kept under control before the shrubs become too large and suggests that volunteers could clear this under supervision using hand tools to avoid use of fossil fuels.</p>

5. Consultation effectiveness

- 5.1 Overall, we consider that the consultation was effective in reaching out to stakeholders, including local residents, visitors and a variety of user groups and organisations representing different interests. Responses from a larger number of organisational stakeholders would be useful, and these will be contacted again for the second stage. Attendance at the online seminars was limited, but it did allow people to participate who were not able to attend the drop in.

6. Next steps

- 6.1 The next step will be to formulate a shortlist of more detailed options. These should include mapped information, such as the possible locations of any new features or potential changes. A second phase of the consultation will then be carried out to re-engage all relevant stakeholders on the these more detailed options including drop-in days, webinars, guided walks (depending on circumstances at the time) and direct correspondence and meetings as required. Based on consultation with stakeholders, preferred options (including any amendments agreed on) will be identified. A second written report will be created and made available to stakeholders and an implementation programme developed.

References

- Lake, S., Liley, D., Still, R., Swash, A.R.H., 2020. Britain's Habitats; a Guide to the Wildlife Habitats of Britain and Ireland, 2nd ed. WildGuides/Princeton University Press.
- Natural England, 2012. A Common Purpose-A guide to community engagement for those contemplating management on common land-Revised edition. Natural England, Peterborough.

Appendix 1: Stakeholders

The table below lists those stakeholder organisations contacted for their views on the future management of Wootton Ridge. Neighbouring properties were also contacted via a direct letter.

Contacted stakeholders in alphabetical order
British Horse Society
Buglife
Butterfly Conservation
CLA
CPRE
County Ecologist (Taunton Deane and Somerset West)
Dog's Trust
Exmoor Local Access Forum
Exmoor National Park
Exmoor Natural History Society
Fairfield Estate
Forestry England
Historic England
Kennel Club
Local Ornithological Society
Minehead Cycling Club
Minehead Town Council
MP – Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgewater and West Somerset)
National Trust
Natural England
National Farmers Union
Open Spaces Society
Plantlife
Public Rights of Way
RSPB
Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society
Somerset County Council Rights of Way Officer
Somerset County Ecologist
Somerset Highways
West Somerset Ramblers

Appendix 2: Questionnaire



Wootton Ridge Questionnaire

We are carrying out a consultation on the future management of Wootton Ridge (including parts of Wootton Courtenay, Hopcott Common, Alcombe Common, and Grabbist Hill). We would therefore like to hear about your long-term aspirations for the common and the wider landscape, and any changes you would like to see.

This survey is being carried out by Footprint Ecology on behalf of the landowners and Butterfly Conservation. Please see the Exmoor National Park website for further information.

All the data we collect will be anonymous.

Q1 What activity do you most often visit Wootton Ridge for? Please tick one.

- Walking
- Dog walking
- Cycling/mountain biking
- Horse riding
- Running/jogging
- Wildlife/bird-watching
- Picnics/family outings
- Meeting friends
- Work
- Other

If other, please give details:

Q2 How often have you visited Wootton Ridge over the past year? Please tick one.

- Daily
- More than once a week
- Weekly
- 2 to 3 times a month
- Monthly
- Less than once a month

Q3 Do you tend to visit more at a particular time of year? Please tick all that apply.

- Spring (Mar-May)
- Summer (Jun-Aug)
- Autumn (Sep-Nov)
- Winter (Dec-Feb)
- Equally all year
- Don't know

Q4 How do you usually travel to Wootton Ridge? Please tick one.

- Car/van
- On foot
- Cycle
- Public transport
- Horse-box/lorry
- On horseback
- Other

If other, please give details:

Q5 Why do you visit Wootton Ridge? Please tick all that apply.

- Landscape/views
- Peace and quiet
- Wildlife
- Suitability for given activity
- Suitable walks
- Good for dogs
- Meeting others
- Easy access on foot
- Easy access by car
- Easy access by bike
- Horse riding access
- Other

If other, please give details:

Q6 When visiting Wootton Ridge do any of the following concern you? Please tick all that apply.

- Bridleway/path surfaces
- Dog fouling
- Litter
- Uncontrolled dogs
- Encountering horses
- Encountering joggers
- Encountering cyclists
- Onsite management activities
- Anti-social behaviour
- Disturbance or damage to wildlife
- Nothing concerns me
- Other

If other, please give details:

Q7 What changes would you like to see, if any, to how Wootton Ridge is managed for visitors? Please tick all that apply.

- No changes / leave it as it is
- Better parking
- Better footpaths/bridleways
- More on-site information
- More seating
- More events e.g. guided walks
- Other

If other, please give details:

Q8 Do you think the current balance of open heathland and woodland/scrub at Wootton Ridge is: Please tick one.

- About right
- Not enough open heathland
- Not enough woodland/scrub
- Don't know/not sure

Further details:

Q9 Some flailing (similar to mowing) is carried out to help prevent scrub encroachment and maintain the area of open heathland. Do you think the area currently flailed at Wootton Ridge is: Please tick one.

- About right
- Too much
- Not enough
- Don't know / not sure

Further details:

Q10 Swaling (small scale controlled burning) may be an option to maintain the open heathland areas and diversity of heathland. Would you be happy to see swaling carried out at Wootton Ridge? Please tick one.

- Yes
- No
- Don't know / not sure

Further details:

Q11 Livestock grazing may be an option to maintain the open heathland areas and diversity of heathland. Would you be happy to see grazing carried out at Wootton Ridge? Please tick one.

- Yes
- No
- Don't know / not sure

Further details:

Q12 If grazing were to be carried out, it would be necessary to ensure the animals do not stray off site. Which of the following fencing methods would you prefer to see at Wootton Ridge (given that full public access would be maintained at all times)? Please tick one.

- Boundary fencing with all access points maintained
- Temporary fencing (e.g. electric) around smaller enclosures
- Virtual fencing (e.g. GPS collars)
- Don't know/not sure

Further details:

Q13 Were grazing to be carried out on site, which of the following livestock would you prefer to see used? Please tick all that apply.

- Cattle
- Sheep
- Ponies
- None of the above
- Other

If other, please give details:

Q14 Do you have any other comments regarding Wootton Ridge?

Q15 Would you be interested in taking part in other activities at Wootton Ridge? Please tick all that apply.

Volunteer work parties

Friends group

Guided walks

Other (please give details):

Q16 What is your home postcode? Please note that your postcode will only be used to calculate the distance you traveled from home to the site and will not be used for any other purpose.

Appendix 3: Additional questionnaire responses to Q8

The table below provides the verbatim responses (in alphabetical order) to Q8 (concerning the balance of open heathland and woodland/scrub at Wootton Ridge).

Responses
A mosaic of all the above including some bramble would enhance biodiversity. This can develop with large herbivore grazing.
But the Birch encroachment is a worry. This will block the views towards Minehead and the Bristol channel.
I'm not an expert.
Many species require some scrub for shelter. The areas left are usually too small or too isolated.
Mixed forests. We know monoculture is killing the forests!!
Need to keep large open areas for flowers and grasses. And open views of sea and Exmoor.
Needs a better understory in places.
Needs better management to allow wildlife to thrive as a recorder of reptiles and amphibians for Exmoor Natural History Society I am seeing a decrease in the numbers of reptiles in particular in the area.
Open heathland should be on top of ridge with NATIVE tree species & scrub on lower slopes.
The new paths on the top which has meant more Heather and gorse flowers is much better.
Trees are currently taking over.
Without ongoing management, scrub and secondary woodland will encroach to the detriment of the open heath but scrub is an important element to the open heath.
Would like to see preservation of the views to either side of the ridge.

Appendix 4: Additional questionnaire responses to Q9

The table below provides the verbatim responses (in alphabetical order) to Q9 (concerning the extent of the area currently subject to flailing at Wootton Ridge).

Responses
All the management seems to involve large areas, whereas most species benefit from a more mosaic habitat, e.g. Dartford Warblers need taller gorse in which to nest and all the butterflies need taller vegetation to shelter from the wind and it's often windy up on the ridge! Management in roughly 10x10 metre blocks with wobbly edges so that it doesn't look like a chess board would be better.
As long as it is done in small parcels so wildlife has shelter in adjoining areas.
Because I don't understand it's purpose well enough.
It is a total waste of time and destroys the rare orchids and habitat for rare butterflies and young oaks which are slowly replacing the ancient oaks which the NT cut down about 25 years ago which was criminal.
It's done at odd times of the year. Some was done in April this year and it was so low nothing grew resulting in no wildlife no bird nesting sites (this is the start of the nesting season) in that area. Also some parts still haven't recovered from a couple of years ago. Other areas silver birch and other plants have doubled in size resulting in it having to be cut again. When the soil is left exposed there is nothing to help retain the rain and water flow down the combe is getting faster and more common. Just look at where the water is cutting into the ground.
More flailing not just to improve habitats but also as vital firebreaks.
Needs to be carried out in smaller areas at a time to allow wildlife time to move out of harms way. When a large area is cut by large machinery smaller animals cannot make their escape and get taken by buzzards, crows etc. It would also be good if pools, dew ponds etc could be created to allow more diversity. Cutting or swalling should preferably be carried out in the autumn after nesting and before hibernation to preserve wildlife of all kinds . Domestic animal grazing should help this process. using old fashioned techniques such as horse drawn cutting mowers could help and maybe a feature could be made whereby people paid to come and learn and watch this activity.
Not been to the site recently to comment on this.
Removal of cut or material will have better results for heath restoration. Bruisibg braken often most effective in reducing vigour.
The view is now lost at the top of the hill due to higher shrubs.
Though I'm unaware of the risk to wildlife/habitats, whether beneficial or detrimental.

Appendix 5: Additional questionnaire responses to Q10

The table below provides the verbatim responses (in alphabetical order) to Q10 (concerning the use of swaling to maintain the open heathland areas on Wootton Ridge).

Responses
Again whatever supports the wildlife and resilience to Climate Change.
Any burning creates a fire hazard which could get out of control, causes pollution and encourages other people to light bonfires. Any smoke seen on the ridge should be reported immediately to prevent the spread of fire if people think swaling is being used the incident might not be reported in time before the fire takes hold. When its not actually controlled burning.
As long as it is properly controlled.
But again not in critical areas where orchids in particular grow. The last swaling destroyed an important area of orchid growth. Left and right hand disparity syndrome I fear.
But if it has to be it should be on a very small scale. by hand not large machinery where it's indiscriminate.
But in the right areas and the right habitat.
Depends on the amount of smoke pollution. Although burning is not compatible with a zero carbon emissions national objective.
Don't know enough about it, but in facour of whatever best encourages a balance in wildlife.
If it needs it to maintain the area.
Ifvrequire and properly controlled and we are well informed about it.
I'm not convinced that swaling is worthwhile - I suspect that it may cause more harm than good.
It clears far too large an area and increases global warming.
More, but controlled swaling to improve habitats, control tics & parasites & provide vital firebreaks.
Need to work with climate and nature and not micro manage for single species.
Swaling is deadly for small animals who can't escape and die horribly in the fires. It is also dangerous and difficult to control in hot, dry weather - which is becoming increasingly common.
Under controlled conditions.
Unsure about the environmental impact of swaling in terms of climate change.
Very smoky for Alcombe residents.
With summer temperatures rising each year surely there will be enough fires in future.
Yes IF finished earlier than in the past to allow for nesting birds.

Appendix 6: Additional questionnaire responses to Q11

The table below provides the verbatim responses (in alphabetical order) to Q11 (concerning the use of grazing to maintain the open heathland areas on Wootton Ridge).

Responses
A variety of grazing types to encourage diversity of vegetative species within the grass/heathland.
Again whatever supports the wildlife and resilience to Climate Change
And Tamworth pigs 😊
But not restricting public access.
Dogs may not be allowed to run free which is why we come here.
Grazing creates the un even age structure that makes a heathland more diverse but requires the correct grazing animal (cattle and/or ponies) at the right time of the year.
Grazing must be the best option that is how heathland was created in the first hand. Without livestock it would be better to let it revert to a natural state.
Grazing reduces ability to exercise well controlled dogs off of leads, graze animals on farmland or leave wild like other places eg Haddon Hill.
If this were to occur it would have to be very carefully managed. Absolutely no sheep or goats - they would make the area unusable for dog walkers. Exmoor ponies might work well. But keeping them in is an issue - it would be a pity to put up fences up in this comparatively wild area.
Just manage cattle vs walkers.
No cows or bullocks etc.
Please no cows! The goats were problematic for some horses, a few years ago!
Providing full access is permitted on horses, bikes and on foot.
Several incidents where "docile" cattle have not been so docile. Dog walkers often don't care about livestock and I worry about attacks (see North Hill) posters of attacks.
Too many access points and hazzards for animals. Old quarries etc.
Unless in fenced areas.

Appendix 7: Additional questionnaire responses about the general management at Wootton Ridge (Q14)

The table below provides the verbatim responses (in alphabetical order) to Q14 (concerning any other comments the respondents had regarding Wootton Ridge).

Responses
As I work with a number of mtb events, i would be interested in assisting in maintaining a legal series of trails.
Consider establishment of open grown oaks, rowan, hawthorn across the whole site.
Cyclists can be a real menace, they cycle off paths causing damage, cycle on narrow footpaths or cycle extremely fast downhill which is alarming and dangerous for walkers on footpath corners. Fouling by dogs is a perennial issue but the absolute worst, by a large margin, is the plastic SH!T bags that a significant minority of irresponsible dog owners leave around.
Embrace all activities moving forward, especially running and cycling. They barely dent ecosystems but being so many people to the area. Times are changing and with older less welcoming generations starting to disappear there's room for much more diverse use of the space.
Fantastic resource for the local community. With, in my experience, almost no conflict between different users. This is a rare balance that should be maintained as a priority.
I go here regularly when I am visiting my family who live locally.
I have seen other areas , such as Bodmin Moor where the livestock ' management ' has not been a success resulting in (after a number of years late) flaying then having to take place. I also wish that other areas, eg The Peak National Park had the nerve to flay areas (obvs a lack of knowledge/ understanding by visitors can and does result in a huge backlash) thus allowing the more invasive species to completely dominate the area.
I love this area and hope to continue using it, we are so lucky to have access to it on our doorstep. Many of the roads are too busy now for horse riding and many car drivers are inconsiderate/ do not know how to drive around horses. grabbist is our sanctuary!
I'd love for there to be group walking / foraging events. I have friends with both qualifications & my job is events. I'd be happy to help. [email address provided]
important to maintain this open heathland but grazing low density preferred over burns. Accept that some woodland will encroach, NE need to understand this too.
It feels like common heathland open to all & I would like it to remain like that.
It is a fantastic facility to a large local population. Really appreciate all the things you have planned to include the public in this Consultation. Make sure you do an interview and get big spread in West Somerset Free Press and Gazette.
It is an important area and I was delighted to learn more at the library on 11/9.
It's nice and peaceful as it is!

Responses

Joy riding motor cyclists and off-road vehicles other than official workers should be kept out. Any fencing and gates used must be able to allow safe opening and closing from horseback . Fire is a risk to our home and property historically it has come frighteningly close. Wootton Ridge is a special and delightful area I value the peace, tranquility and wildlife. Fire is a risk to our home and property I understand that historically fire has come very close in the past.

Just that it is the most fantastic resource for the people of Minehead and surrounding villages and especially young people. We have been seeing more and more of them venturing out.

Like it left as it is.

Planning for more available water for wildlife in dry spells.

Please keep it as it is.

Priority should be given to supporting the natural habitat and wildlife. Yes, humans want access to this beautiful place, but not at the expense of the wildlife. A balance is needed, with the weight of the balance given to respecting the wildlife. Humans should keep to the tracks, leaving the off-track areas to the animals. I understand that children and young people need to be encouraged to enjoy nature - but they also need to learn to respect it and value it for what it is and not just see it as a playground for people. Racing cars, riding motor bikes, and biking off-track through the wild areas on Grabbist Hill are destructive and disrespectful activities.

The access road needs repair. Also I believe the area needs to be kept as woodland with correct forestry management (i.e. fell & replant) rather than open moorland. In a world where we are losing so many trees daily, which are ultimately the lungs of the earth, we need to do more to protect and replant.

The appeal of the area is that most people using it , do so because of the unspoilt beauty and that nature is allowed to thrive in its own way and not man made with animals put there. Local areas are already being fenced off for the purpose of grazing animals - Timberscombe Farm will now not as accessible for walking dogs or riding due to all fencing going up and grazing animals being introduced. and this will just be another area that will be potentially lots of gates and fences.

There needs to be a joined-up action plan that is available to the public so everyone knows what's happening. At the moment work seems to be carried out (sometimes without permissions being granted) with no apparent reason. Over the last few years there has been forestry work carried out. Always started at the start of the bird nesting season. It's all very well to say we know where nests are but for these birds it must be like being on a building site. Would you live there? I have only lived here for the last 7 years and in that time I have seen a decline in wildlife. Maybe it's climate change or the management of the area. Fewer cuckoos and nightjars are heard as their nesting sites are disturbed at the start of the nesting season. Cover has also been removed making deer more exposed and therefore you see fewer on the ridge. Butterflies and dragonflies seen to be on the lower slopes more around Ellicombe and Alcombe where the land isn't actually managed.