



GUIDELINES FOR HORSE-RELATED DEVELOPMENT

for the

**Mendip Hills
Area of Outstanding
Natural Beauty
(AONB)**

*Supplementary
Planning Guidance*



**Guidelines for Horse-related Development
Mendip Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)
Supplementary Planning Guidance**

Produced by the Mendip Hills AONB Partnership

Published 2004

with financial support from the Countryside Agency



and

**Bath & North East Somerset Council
Somerset County Council
Mendip District Council
North Somerset Council
Sedgemoor District Council**



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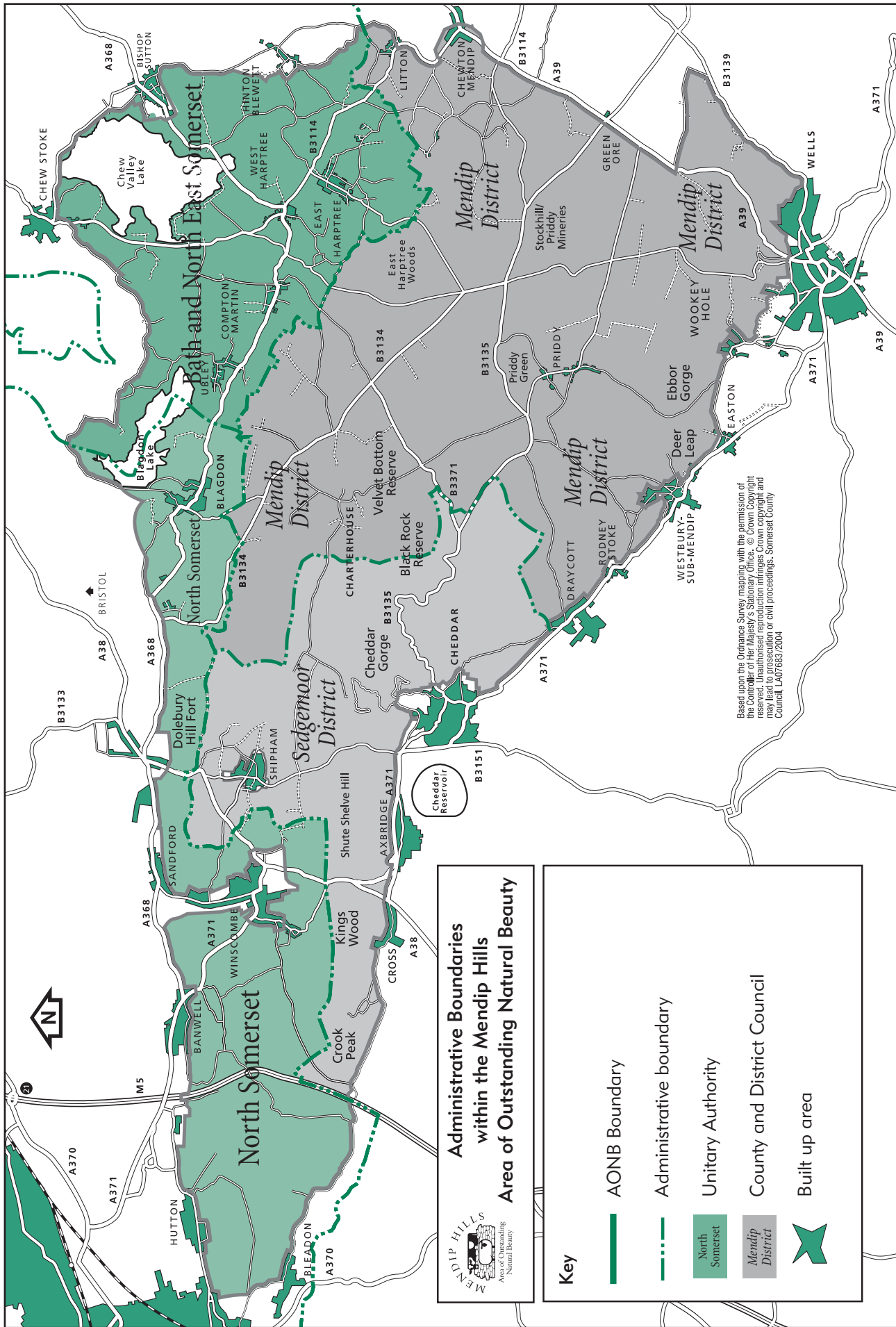
Design/illustrations: Sedgemoor Graphic Design, Sedgemoor District Council

The AONB Partnership would like to thank the owners of the stables featured on the cover for their kind assistance with this publication.



Guidelines for Horse-related Development Mendip Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Supplementary Planning Guidance

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1 INTRODUCTION

The AONB designation is recognition that the distinctive character and natural beauty of the area are so outstanding that it is in the nation's interest to safeguard them from inappropriate development. The primary objective of the designation is to enhance and conserve the natural beauty, to consider the local economic and social needs and to promote sustainable development. For planning purposes, AONBs are considered to be of equal importance as National Parks.

The AONB has experienced increasing numbers of applications for stables and maneges and these guidelines have been produced to encourage those seeking such development to carefully consider the impact on the landscape, including nature conservation. The open landscape of the AONB means that new development can be particularly intrusive unless careful attention is paid to siting, layout and design.

Development proposals on the periphery of the AONB can also have an adverse impact and advice in this SPG may be equally applicable in these sensitive areas.

2 PURPOSE AND STATUS OF THE GUIDANCE

This document is published as Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) and has been formally adopted by North Somerset Council, Mendip and Sedgemoor District Councils and Bath and North East Somerset Council. Its purpose is to supplement the policies of the Development Plans and it should be read in conjunction with the appropriate plans for the geographical location. SPG is a material consideration when determining planning applications for horse related development. The aim of this guidance is to emphasise those matters which are particularly pertinent to development in an AONB and to encourage a consistent approach across the designated area.

3 THE NEED FOR DESIGN GUIDELINES

- 3.1 The riding and keeping of horses for both commercial and domestic purposes brings great pleasure to many people and is increasing in popularity. The economic benefit of these activities to the countryside is also acknowledged but it is essential to ensure that the related development does not have an adverse impact on the special landscape qualities of the Mendip Hills AONB.
- 3.2 The potential problems that this guidance seeks to avoid and address through the adoption of best practice include:
 - ❖ visually intrusive stables, field shelters, maneges (outdoor schools), jumps, fencing and paraphernalia,
 - ❖ damage to vegetation and soil structure, weeds and uncontrolled rank grass growth,
 - ❖ breaking up of agricultural land into smaller scale paddocks thereby altering landscape character,
 - ❖ pollution,
 - ❖ conflict with other users on roads and bridleways,
 - ❖ path erosion and change to plant and animal communities adjoining riding routes
 - ❖ adverse impact on the nature conservation resource of the AONB.
- 3.3 The AONB covers a wide geographical area and falls under five administrative bodies at both county and district level comprising Somerset County Council, Mendip and Sedgemoor District Councils, and North Somerset and Bath and North East Somerset Councils. This guidance aims to introduce a consistent approach to the consideration of applications for horse related development across the whole designated area.

4 PLANNING POLICY BACKGROUND

4.1 National planning policy guidance.

4.2 PPG7 (Planning Policy Guidance Note 7 - Countryside - Environmental Quality and Economic and Social Development) gives specific guidance on development involving horses and contains the main guidance on development in AONBs and other designated areas.

4.3 Annex F of the PPG concludes that:

“Within the framework set out in this PPG, the Government wishes to see a positive approach towards planning applications for horse based development which respects the rural environment.”

4.4 However, the annex also advises that

“high standards of design, construction and maintenance of buildings and care of the land are necessary to ensure that equestrian activities do not have an adverse effect on the countryside”

and that applications for

“development involving horses should take particular care to minimise the effect their proposals will have on the appearance of the countryside.”

These last two statements should be given particular attention in the context of the AONB.

4.5 The Government have also published draft PPS 7 (Planning Policy Statement) - “Sustainable Development in the Countryside”, which will in time replace PPG 7.

4.6 Guidance on issues such as impact on archaeology, wildlife, ecology and transport can be found in PPGs 16, 9, and 13 respectively. Planning Policy Guidance Notes are available on the Internet at www.odpm.gov.uk.

5 DEVELOPMENT PLAN/POLICY

5.1 The plans which are the starting point for assessing development proposals are as follows:

- ❖ The adopted Somerset and Exmoor National Park Joint Structure Plan April 2000 (for the part of the AONB within the county of Somerset)
- ❖ The adopted Joint Replacement Structure Plan 2002 (B&NES, Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire)
- ❖ The adopted Mendip District Local Plan 2002
- ❖ The adopted North Somerset Local Plan 2000

5.2 The following local plans are also material considerations:

- ❖ Sedgemoor District Local Plan (Deposit Draft) 2000
- ❖ Bath and North East Somerset Local Plan including minerals and waste policies - Revised Deposit 2003
- ❖ North Somerset Replacement Local Plan deposit draft 2002

- 5.3 Policy 3 of the Joint Somerset and Exmoor Structure Plan is a typical policy dealing with development in AONBs and states that:

“In Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty the conservation of the natural beauty of the landscape should be given priority over other planning considerations. Regard should also be had to fostering the economic or social well being of the locality. Provision should only be made for major or commercial development where it is in the national interest and there is a lack of alternative sites. Particular care should be taken to ensure that any development proposed does not damage the landscape character of the area.”

- 5.4 This policy is reflected in the AONB policies in all development plans covering the area and is the starting point for assessing all development proposals in the AONB, including those for horse-related development. Some of the local plans contain policies relating to equestrian development and references are appended to this document. Advice should be sought from the relevant local planning authority, preferably including a pre-application meeting.

6 PLANNING CONTROLS

- 6.1 The scale of horse related development varies widely from keeping one family pony in a small paddock with a field shelter to a large commercial development such as a riding school, stud, livery yard or racing stables which will include stables, maneges, haybarns and other associated buildings such as feed storage and tack rooms. The type of development will determine whether or not a planning application should be made.

6.2 Grazing

The use of land for grazing horses or ponies does not require planning permission providing that the majority of the animal's food is obtained from the land. The land can be considered to be used for “grazing” if horses are turned onto it with a view to feeding them from it. The use of land for grazing horses is an agricultural use. However if the grazing is part of a commercial activity, such as livery, or if other activities take place on the land, this will normally require planning permission. If horses are turned out on the land for exercise, grazing is incidental so keeping horses on land, as opposed to grazing them is not considered to be an agricultural use. Also if the land is subdivided into paddocks and shelters provided, there may be a material change from agricultural to recreational use, therefore requiring planning permission.

6.3 Stabling, Field Shelters and Ancillary Buildings

Buildings related to the keeping of horses that are simply grazing the land, rather than working in farming, require planning permission. The exception to this is that stables/loose boxes erected in the curtilage of dwelling houses for horses “kept as pet animals for the domestic needs or personal enjoyment of the occupants of the dwelling house” enjoy permitted development rights under Part 1 of the GPDO. However, Schedule 2, Part 1, Class E indicates that within an AONB or land within the curtilage of a listed building, buildings having a cubic capacity greater than 10 cubic metres are not permitted development. Thus most stables will need consent and it is advised that consultation should be carried out with the local planning authority. Stables for horses used in agriculture on holdings of over 5 hectares qualify as agricultural permitted development and benefit from permitted development rights in Part 6 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 (GPDO). Permission will be required if the stables are within 400m of the curtilage of a protected building (e.g other dwelling, school etc.)

- 6.4 Three sided, open fronted field shelters require planning permission if they are fixed in a permanent position and have solid floors. It is advisable to consult your local planning authority on the matter of mobile field shelters.

7 PROVISION OF STABLES OR SHELTERS

7.1 Siting

In an area such as the AONB it is essential that new development is strictly controlled and sensitively sited. Important wildlife sites, such as SSSIs (Sites of Special Scientific Interest), are indicated on development plan proposals maps and should generally be avoided. Wherever possible attempts should be made to avoid the need for new development through the reuse or conversion of existing buildings. In these cases, wildlife surveys of the building will be requested. When new horse-related development is necessary, it should preferably relate to an existing group of buildings or be sited as inconspicuously as possible.

7.2 When considering a new site, critical viewpoints in the surrounding landscape should be identified to assess the visual impact of any development. Generally new buildings should be related to existing features and respect the lie of the land. Elevated or skyline sites should be avoided. The use of earth mounding and cutting into the ground should also be avoided unless it merges with the landscape. Planting can usually reduce the adverse effects of development but again this should complement existing tree and hedge cover rather than producing unnatural features in the landscape. All new planting should consist of native trees and shrubs appropriate to the Mendip Hills; a list of which is provided below

| Trees | Shrubs |
|-----------------------|----------------|
| Ash | Holly |
| Sessile Oak | Hawthorn |
| Common Alder | Blackthorn |
| Common Oak | Hazel |
| Beech | Dogrose |
| Field Maple | Common Privet |
| Silver or Downy Birch | Field Rose |
| Whitebeam | Guelder Rose |
| Small Leaved Lime | Wayfaring Tree |
| Willow | Spindle |
| | Goat Willow |
| | Grey Willow |

Shelters and stables can be sited to benefit from the natural folds in the land and existing surrounding tree belts to both minimise their impact and maximise the protection offered.

7.3 Because of the landscape variety across the AONB, reference should be made to the Countryside Agency and Councils' landscape character assessment documents. These analyse the prevalent features in the different landscape areas across the AONB which it is necessary to protect, maintain and enhance. Prominent developments on the Mendip Plateau will be resisted. Advice in the AONB publication "Agricultural Building Design Guidelines for the Mendip Hills AONB" on the integration of buildings in the landscape is equally applicable to horse-related development.



7.4 **Materials and design**

The design of ready made stables is fairly standard and in less sensitive areas is likely to be acceptable if appropriately sited and constructed of timber, preferably treated with a dark stained preservative/finish. In view of their often temporary nature and the small size of most stables, a dark coloured felt is often the least intrusive roof covering.

The use of more permanent materials such as rendered concrete block and tiles should be resisted as they are more visually intrusive, often do not weather well and can give rise to problems of after use when the original use is no longer required. However in more sensitive areas the use of traditional materials i.e. natural stone and tile/slate will be encouraged.

7.5 National and local policies strictly control new residential development in the open countryside outside the development limits of recognised settlements. In the light of this firm policy of restraint it is highly unlikely that planning permission will be granted in the countryside for a new dwelling for occupation in conjunction with stabling.

7.6 **Access and services**

Wherever possible existing field gates should be utilised to gain access to stables and paddocks to avoid hedgerow or wall removal. The width and length of any new access formed should be kept to the minimum necessary for safety.

7.7 Services such as water and electricity are often required on site and care should be taken that unsightly overhead wires are not allowed unless no other alternative is available. Where undergrounding of cabling is considered, advice should be sought from the relevant Local Authority tree officer on the impact on any existing trees. The provision of lighting, as with maneges, should be strictly controlled and general policies with regard to light pollution taken into account.

7.8 Storage of dung on site should be carried out in such a manner as not to endanger or pollute the water environment through seepage into water courses. Much of the AONB is a groundwater protection zone and advice should be taken from the Environment Agency.

KEY POINTS

- ❖ **Where possible existing buildings should be utilised or new development should be sited in close proximity to existing groups of buildings.**
- ❖ **Where a new site is to be developed, the impact on the landscape should be the primary consideration. New buildings should be sited to take advantage of the natural form of the land. Prominent skyline sites should be avoided.**
- ❖ **Landscape planting should complement existing tree/hedge cover. Use of bunding and non indigenous trees should be avoided.**
- ❖ **Use existing accesses where possible but where new accesses are created keep the width and length to the minimum required and use traditional timber gates.**
- ❖ **Lighting should be minimal to avoid light pollution**
- ❖ **Advice should be taken from the Environment Agency to ensure no ground water pollution is caused.**

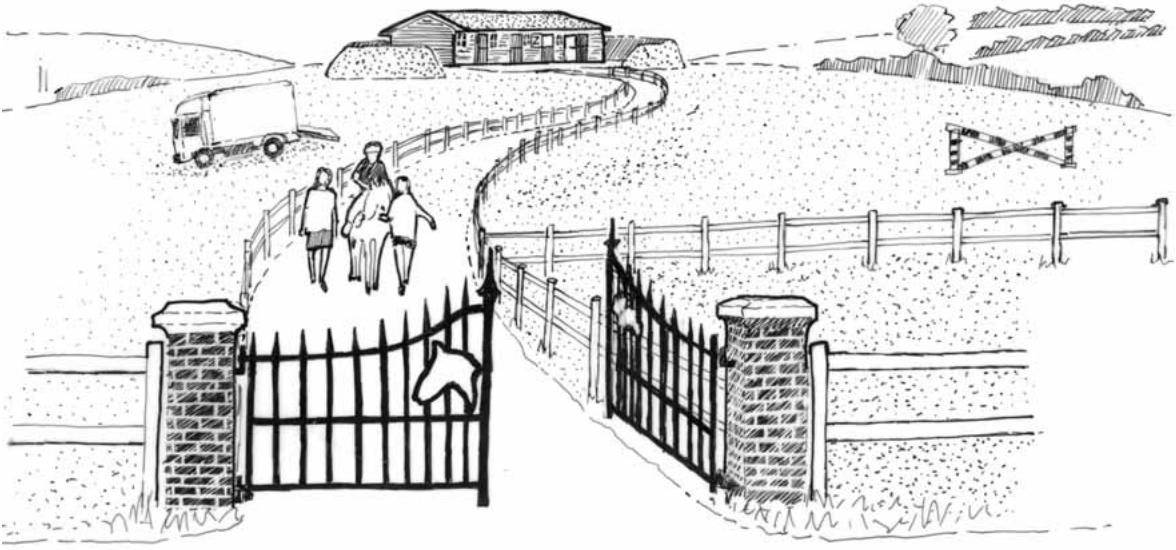
8 GRAZING, EXERCISING AND ENCLOSURE OF LAND

8.1 Providing and Managing Land for Horses

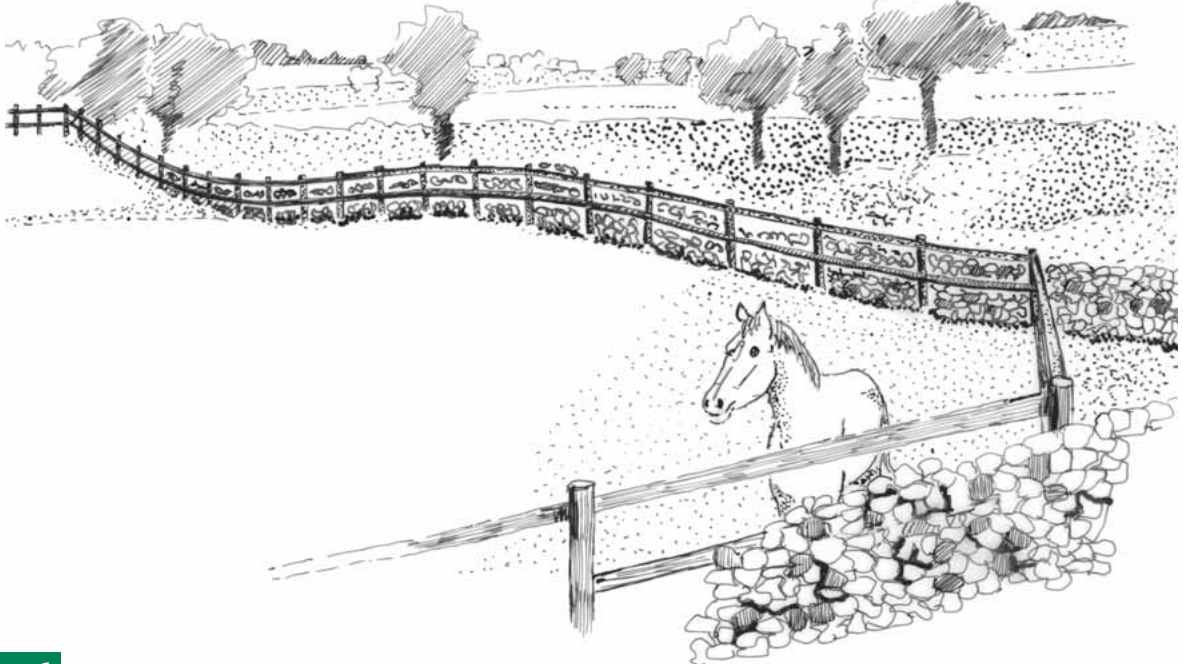
Although it is not possible to control the use of a paddock for the grazing of a horse, the proliferation of paddocks, poor pasture management and the introduction of ancillary structures can have a significant impact on the landscape quality of the Mendip Hills AONB. A free leaflet “Horses in the Countryside” is available from the Countryside Agency and contains advice on pasture management.

The proliferation of ragwort has become a particular problem and DEFRA have produced information giving guidance to farmers and landowners. The British Horse Society (BHS) is another source of information including “Horses, grasslands and nature conservation” which has been produced jointly with English Nature.

- 8.2 The enclosure of paddocks is of particular concern because they tend to be much smaller than the traditional fields of the Mendips thereby eroding the landscape pattern of the locality. The use of unsuitable materials to form both boundary and internal enclosures should be avoided where it is not possible to use or reinforce existing stone walls or hedges. However, owners of straying livestock are liable for any damage caused and most owners will require robust and adequate barriers to contain their animals. The most common form of enclosure used is post and rail fencing which will often not reflect local boundary types but the impact can be considerably softened by the use of suitable accompanying planting of indigenous species prevalent in the locality. Post and rail fencing should not be painted white, or any other bright colour. Gates should be traditional wooden farm gates and the introduction of more suburban forms of gates and gate piers should be avoided.



Stables on skyline, inappropriate gates, fencing and jumps



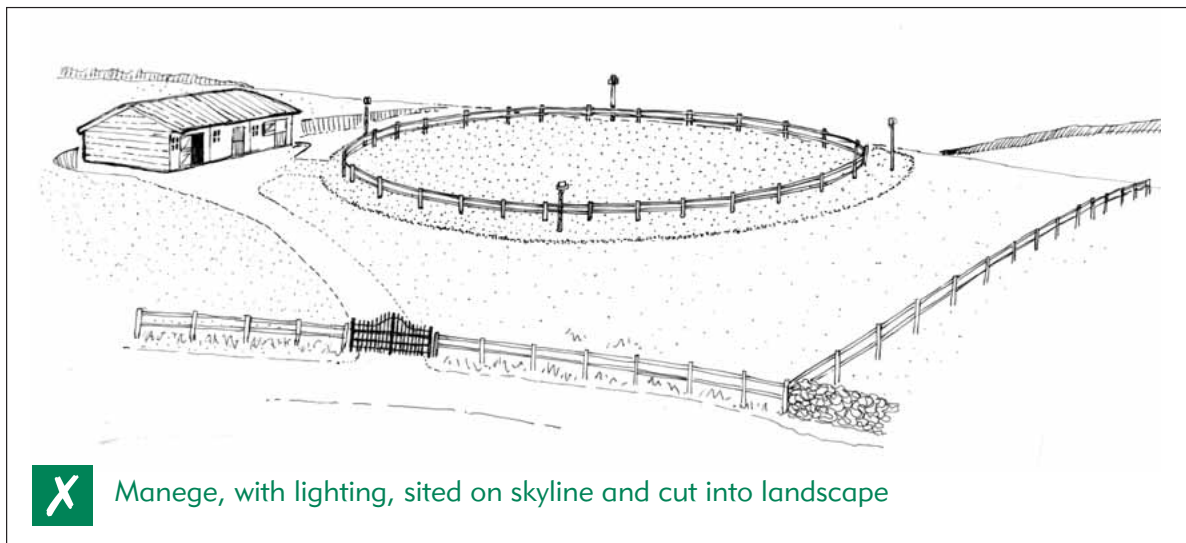
Wooden fencing reinforcing dry stone walls

8.3 Land for exercise

The preferred option is to provide enough space to keep and provide some exercise for horses on the same site to minimise conflict with other road users, but exercising horses in the fields where they are grazed can damage the sward and reduce the nutritional content of the pasture.

8.4 Brightly coloured jumps left in position after use can be very visually intrusive in an open countryside landscape. Conditions may be imposed that jumps should be removed after use and stored on site. Jumps that are fixed to the ground require planning permission and should preferably be constructed of unpainted natural materials e.g. for hunter trials, cross country events.

8.5 The provision of hard surfaced, all weather areas for exercise, known as maneges, also need specific consideration. The choice of surface is important but a number do exist which can be sympathetic to the landscape, such as rubber or bark. As a flat surface is needed for a manege it is essential to choose a location where the re-grading of the land surface is not necessary. Maneges are frequently enclosed by fencing which further subdivides the landscape and if at all possible such enclosures should be dispensed with. However it should be noted that Health and Safety guidelines for commercial riding establishments, livery stables and competition/training centres state that the arena should be securely fenced and gated, ideally using post and rail fencing. Requests for lighting for maneges should be resisted as this represents unacceptable light pollution in a designated landscape area.



8.6 Off site exercise

With the problem of providing adequate exercise areas in paddocks, the use of roads and bridleways is often essential. The provision of off road routes in the AONB is patchy and it is often only possible to ride on roads.

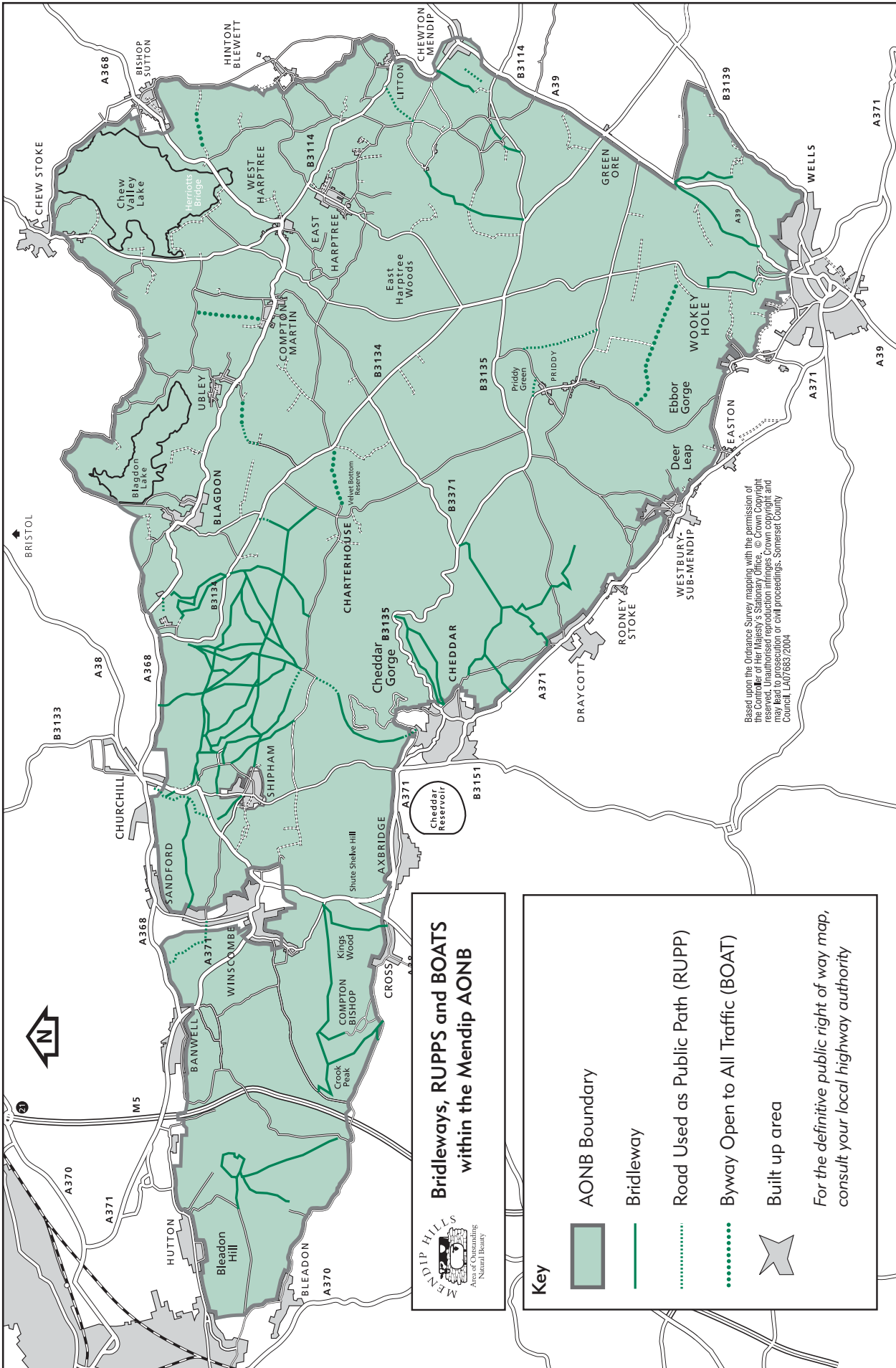
Most local plans covering the AONB seek readily available access to off road riding, particularly for commercial development.

KEY POINTS

- ❖ **Avoid the enclosure of small paddocks and maneges**
- ❖ **Use and reinforce traditional walling and hedges where possible**
- ❖ **Post and rail fencing is acceptable but should not be painted white**
- ❖ **Maneges should be sited on flat sites rather than regrading the land surface**
- ❖ **Brightly coloured jumps should not be left in situ**
- ❖ **Off road riding should be available, particularly for commercial development**

Advice for applicants.

As stated at the beginning of this document, this guidance is intended to supplement national and local planning policy on the issue of the provision of stables, shelters and associated development in the Mendip Hills AONB. With careful planning the Mendip Hills can accommodate further development but it is strongly recommended that early consultation and pre-application discussions are held with your local planning authority to ensure that you are aware of all relevant planning policy to any development you are proposing. This is particularly pertinent in Bath and North East Somerset where the AONB overlaps with the Bath/Bristol Green Belt. Advice on the management of land for keeping horses is available from the Somerset and Avon Wildlife Trusts and The British Horse Society.



APPENDIX 1 - RELEVANT STRUCTURE/LOCAL PLAN POLICY

All plans comprising the development plans for the AONB should be read as a whole; that is all policies relevant to an application will be taken into account when considering a planning application. However, this supplementary planning guidance is intended to specifically supplement the planning policies listed below.

Protection of AONBs

| | |
|--|---------------|
| Somerset & Exmoor National Park Joint Structure Plan Review | Policy 3 |
| Joint Replacement Structure Plan – Bath & North East Somerset, Bristol, North Somerset & South Gloucestershire | Policy 17 |
| Mendip District Local Plan | Policy EN6 |
| Sedgemoor District Local Plan – Deposit Draft | Policy CNE1 |
| North Somerset Local Plan | Policy AONB/1 |
| Bath & North East Somerset Local Plan – deposit draft | Policy NE.2 |

Horse related/equestrian development

| | |
|---|--------------|
| Sedgemoor District Local Plan – Deposit Draft | Policy CNE6 |
| North Somerset Local Plan | Policy R/11 |
| Bath & North East Somerset Local Plan – deposit draft | Policy SR.12 |
| Mendip District Local Plan | Policy SN15 |

APPENDIX 2 - USEFUL CONTACTS

Local authorities

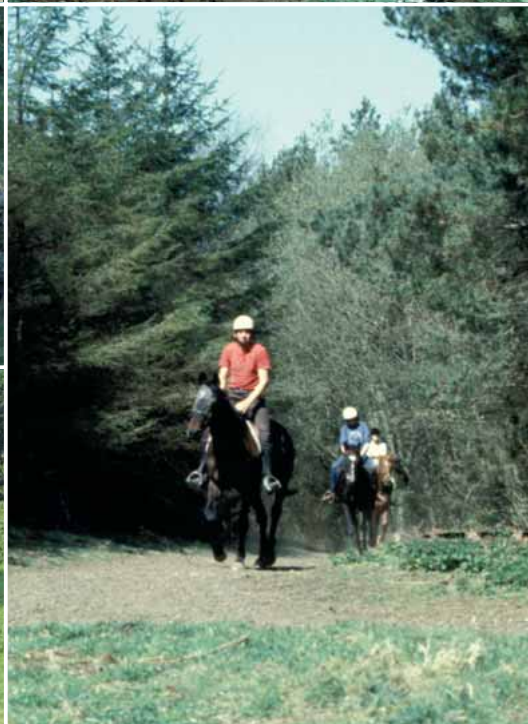
| | |
|---|-------------------|
| Bath and North East Somerset Council Trimbridge House, Trim Street, Bath BA1 2DP | Tel: 01225 477000 |
| Mendip District Council Cannards Grave Road, Shepton Mallet, Somerset BA4 5BT | Tel: 01749 343399 |
| North Somerset Council PO Box 141 Somerset House, Oxford Street, Weston-super-Mare BS23 1TG | Tel: 01934 888888 |
| Sedgemoor District Council Bridgwater House, King Square, Bridgwater TA6 3AR | Tel: 01278 435435 |
| Somerset County Council County Hall, Taunton TA1 4DY | Tel: 01823 355455 |

Other useful addresses

| | |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| Avon Wildlife Trust Bristol Wildlife Centre, 32 Jacobs Wells Road, Bristol BS8 1DR | Tel: 0117 9268018 |
| British Horse Society Stoneleigh Deer Park, Kenilworth, Warwickshire CV8 2XZ | Tel: 01926 707700 |
| Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) Government Office South West, 2 Rivergate, Temple Quay, Bristol, BS1 2PB | Tel: 0117 900 1867 |
| English Heritage 29 Queens Square, Bristol BS1 4ND | Tel: 0117 9750700 |
| English Nature Roughmoor, Bishops Hull, Taunton TA1 5AA | Tel: 01823 283211 |
| Environment Agency Rivers House East Quay, Bridgwater, TA6 4YS | Tel: 08459 333111 |
| Hawk and Owl Trust 32 Hollis Avenue, North Weston, Portishead, BS20 8NB | Tel: 01275 849287 |
| The Landscape Institute 6-8 Barnard Mews, London SW11 1QU | Tel: 020 7350 5200 |
| Royal Institute of British Architects Wessex Region 12c Church Farm Business Park, Corston, Bath BA2 9AP | Tel: 01225 874700 |
| Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) Surveyors Court, Westwood Way, Coventry CV4 8JE | Tel: 0207 2227000 or 02476 694757 |
| Somerset Wildlife Trust Fyne Court, Broomfield, Bridgwater Somerset TA5 2EQ | Tel: 01823 451587 |

Publications

| | |
|---|--------------------|
| Countryside Agency Publications PO Box 125, Wetherby, West Yorkshire LS23 7EP | Tel: 0870 120 6466 |
| DEFRA Publications PO Box 9B, Thames Ditton, Surrey, KT8 0BN | Tel: 08459 556000 |



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