



Guidelines for Horse-related Development for the Mendip Hills AONB

Supplementary Planning Guidance

Produced by the Mendip Hills AONB Partnership

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

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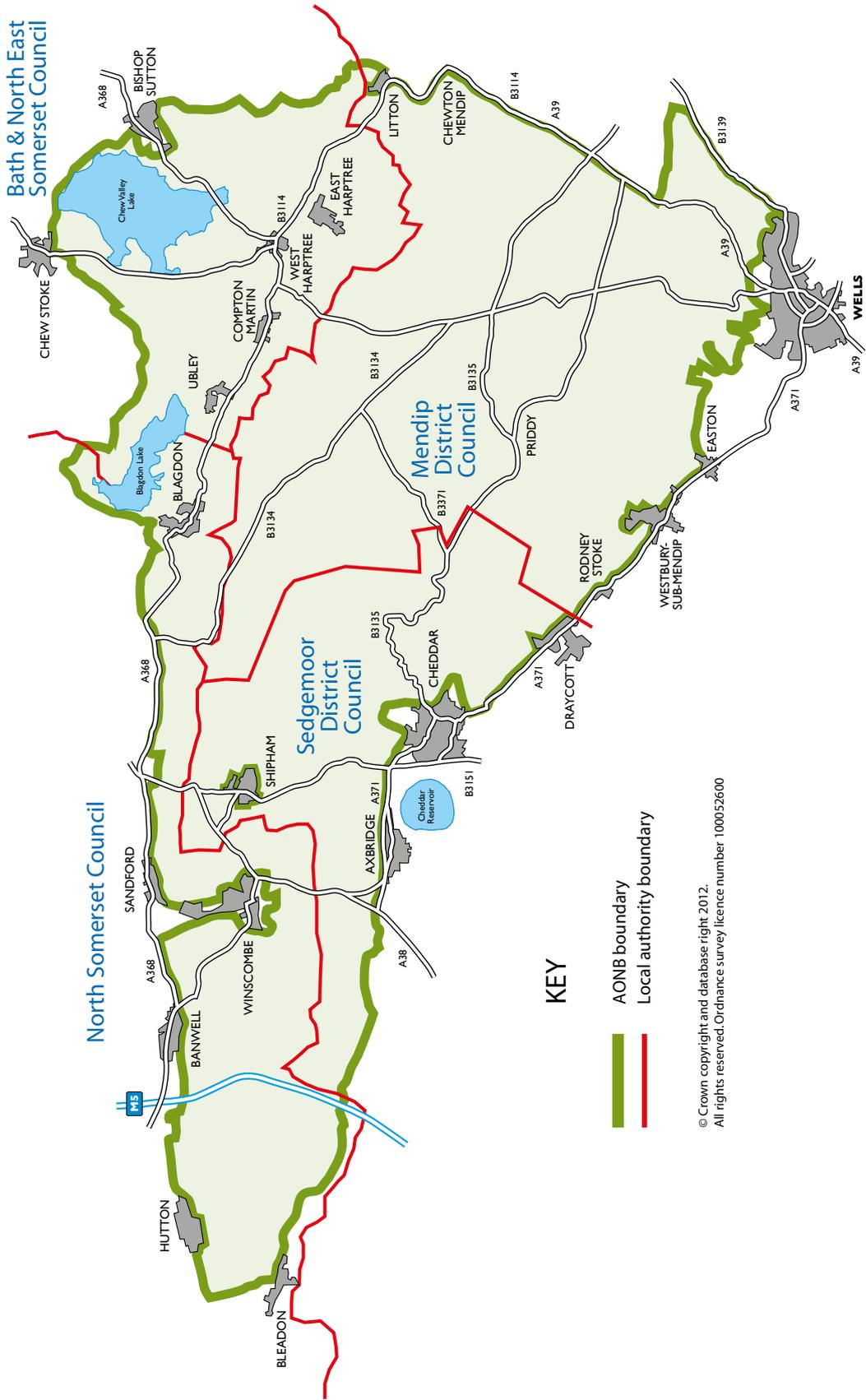
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Bath & North East Somerset Council

North Somerset Council

Sedgemoor District Council

Mendip District Council



KEY

- AONB boundary
- Local authority boundary

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AONB and local authority boundaries

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 significant numbers of planning applications for stables, all weather exercise areas and other associated buildings and structures. In response, 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 Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) may be equally applicable in these sensitive areas.

2 Purpose and status of guidance

This document is published as SPG and has been formally adopted by Somerset County Council, 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 documents for the geographical location. SPG is a material consideration when determining planning applications for horse related development. The AONB covers a wide geographical area and falls under five administrative bodies at county, unitary and district level comprising Somerset County Council, Mendip and Sedgemoor District Councils, and North Somerset and Bath and North East Somerset Councils. The aim of this guidance is to emphasise those matters which are particularly pertinent to development in the Mendip Hills 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 For further advice and information particularly aimed at owners of horses please refer to '**Horses, the landscape and You**' produced in 2010 on behalf of Protected Landscape organisations in the South West Region, The British Horse Society and Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group.

4 Planning policy

4.1 National policy.

- 4.2 The Coalition Government has reviewed National planning policy guidance to consolidate it within a single planning policy framework. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) replaces all existing planning policy statements and guidance.
- 4.3 The NPPF indicates that local authorities should give great weight to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in AONBs 'which have the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty'. The NPPF also indicates that 'conservation of wildlife and cultural heritage are important considerations'. Policies are also included relating to impacts on, for example, biodiversity, heritage assets, geology and transport.
- 4.4 Core planning principles in the NPPF which should underpin both plan-making and decision-taking (paragraph 17) include:

'always seek to secure high quality design'

'take account of the different roles and character of different areas, ...recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and supporting thriving rural communities within it;'

4.5 Local Policy - Development Plans

- 4.6 The NPPF emphasises that planning decisions ‘must be taken in accordance with local development plans unless material considerations indicate otherwise.’ The plans which are the starting point for assessing development proposals are shown in Appendix 1.
- 4.7 Policy D14 of the Sedgemoor Core Strategy is a typical policy dealing with development in AONBs and reflects the duty placed on public bodies as set out in the Countryside & Rights of Way Act 2000 (CRoW).

“Development proposals within the Mendip Hills AONB or the Quantock Hills AONB will only be supported where they enhance or conserve the natural beauty, or the exceptional character or quality of the landscape in these areas.”

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

5 Planning controls

5.1 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.

5.2 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.

5.3 Stabling, Field Shelters and Ancillary Buildings

Most stables and other buildings related to the keeping of horses that are simply grazing the land, rather than working in farming, require planning permission. There may be some exceptions for stables/loose boxes erected within 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" which may enjoy permitted development rights under Part 1 of the General Planning Development Order subject to certain size criteria relevant in AONBs. Stables for horses used in agriculture on holdings of over 5 hectares may also qualify as agricultural permitted development.

5.4 Three sided, open fronted field shelters require planning permission if they are fixed in a permanent position and have solid floors. Mobile field shelters may not require permission. However, in all cases where horse related development is being considered it is advisable to consult your local planning authority to determine whether or not a planning application is required.

6 Provision of stables or shelters

6.1 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 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), 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.

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

- 6.3 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.



- Stables located near existing dwellings and located in the folds of the landscape*

- 6.4 Because of the landscape variety across the AONB, reference should be made to Natural England's and local authority 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.

6.5 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.

- 6.6 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.

6.7 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.

6.8 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.

6.9 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.

6.10 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

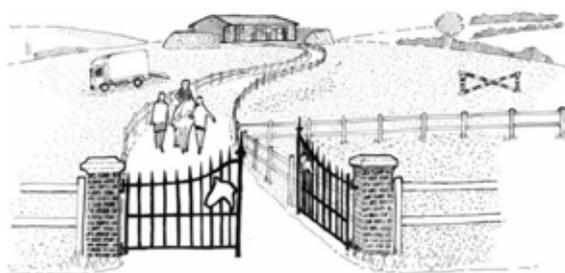
- Where possible existing buildings should be utilised or new development should be sited in close proximity to existing groups of buildings.
- Where a new site is to be developed, the impact on the landscape should be the primary consideration. New buildings should be sited to take advantage of the 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.

7 Grazing, exercising and enclosure of land

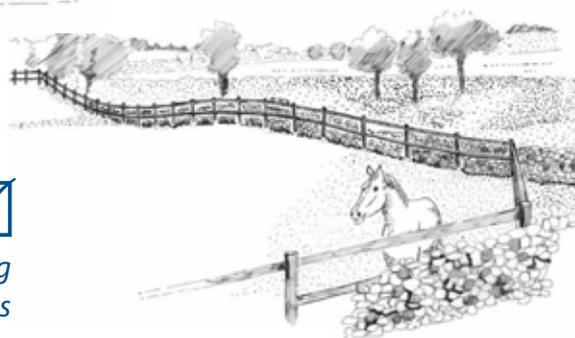
7.1 Providing and Managing Land for Horses

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. As mentioned previously in paragraph 3.3 the publication **'Horses, the landscape and You'** produced in 2010 on behalf of protected landscape organisations in the South West Region, The British Horse Society (BHS) and Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group contains advice on pasture management. Further information is available on the BHS website www.bhs.org.uk

7.2 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



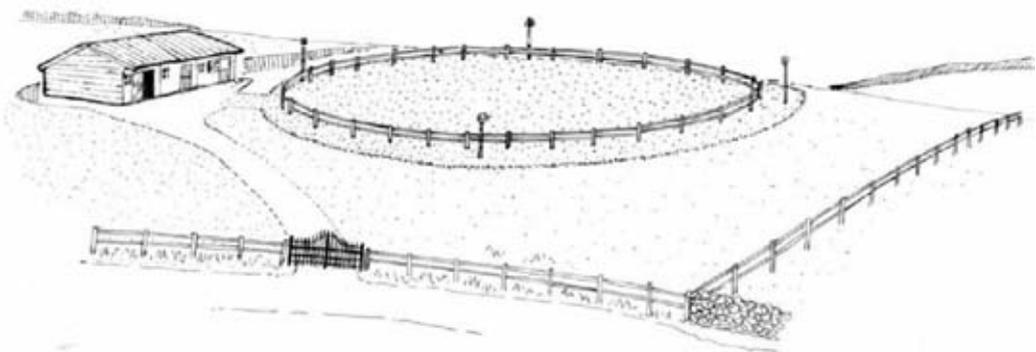
Wooden fencing reinforcing dry stone walls

7.3 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.

7.4 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.

7.5 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.



 *Manege, with lighting, sited on skyline and cut into landscape*

7.6 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 evidence of readily available access to off road riding for new development, particularly those for commercial use.

7.7 A map showing bridleways, restricted byways and BOATS, is shown on page 16

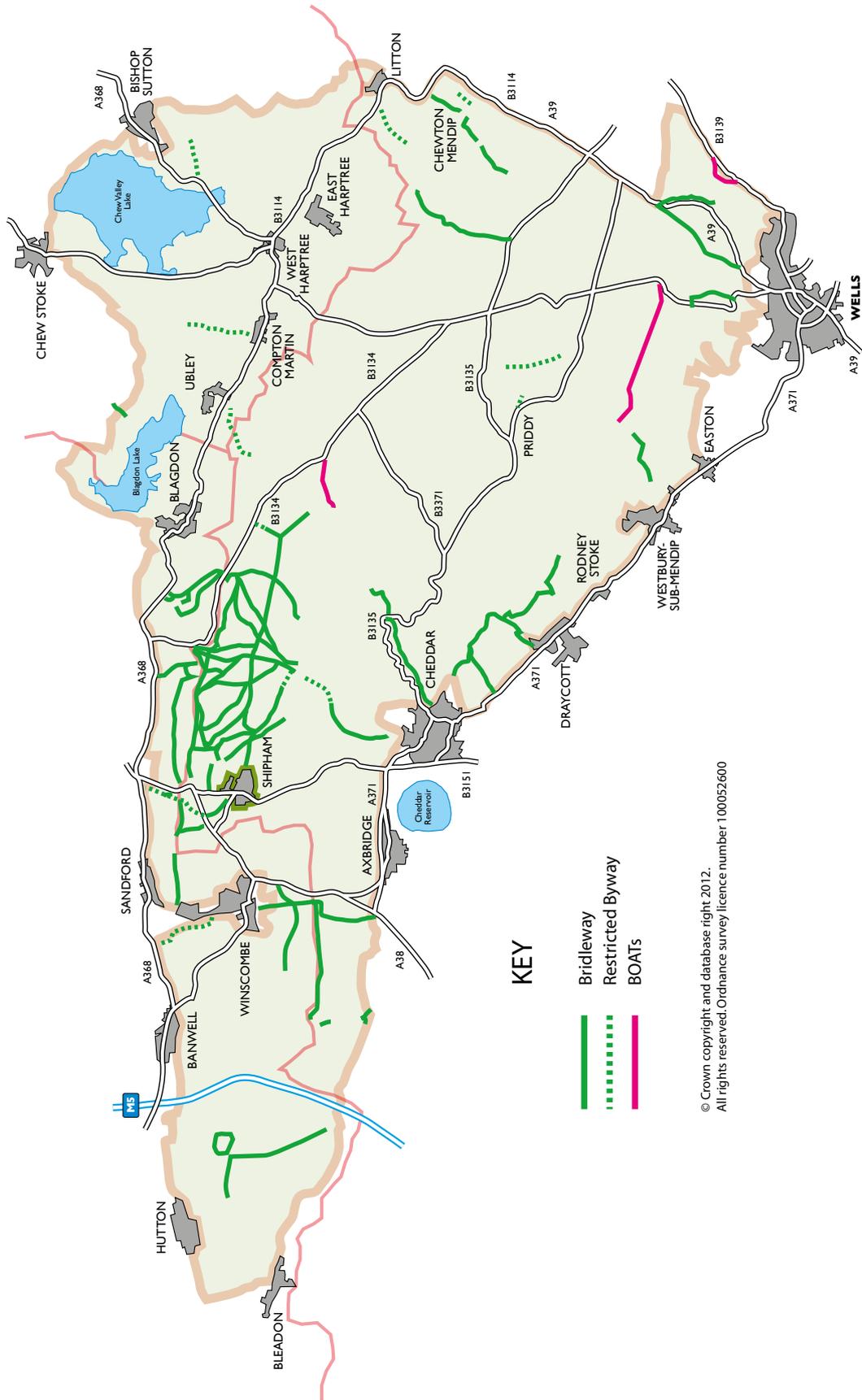
KEY POINTS

- 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 your are proposing. This is particularly pertinent in Bath and North East Somerset where the AONB overlaps with the Bath/Bristol Green Belt. As well as the guidance referred to above, further advice on the management of land for keeping horses is available from the Somerset and Avon Wildlife Trusts, The British Horse Society and Somerset Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group.

Map showing Bridleways, Restricted Byways and BOATs (Byways Open to All Traffic) within the AONB



Appendix 1 - Relevant development plan policies

All documents comprising the development plans for the AONB should be read as a whole; i.e. 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

Bath & North East Somerset Local Plan <i>*Core Strategy</i>	<i>Policy NE.2</i> <i>Policy CP6</i>
<i>*Mendip Core Strategy</i>	<i>Development Policy 1</i>
North Somerset Core Strategy North Somerset Replacement Local Plan	<i>Policy CS5</i> <i>Policy ECH/8</i>
Sedgemoor Core Strategy	<i>Policy D14</i>

Horse related/equestrian development

Bath & North East Somerset Local Plan	<i>Policy SR.12</i>
Mendip District Local Plan <i>*Core Strategy</i>	<i>Policy SN15</i> <i>Development Policy 17</i>
North Somerset Replacement Local Plan	<i>Policy CF/3</i>
Sedgemoor Core Strategy	<i>Policies S1, S3, D11, P6</i>

Note: Local Plan policies indicated above are currently 'saved policies' via a direction given by the Secretary of State under paragraph 1(3) of Schedule 8 to the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (directions preserving development plan policies) pending adoption by local planning authorities of Local Development Framework documents which will contain new policies.

**These are currently draft LDF documents pending formal adoption.*

At the strategic level, Structure Plans were to have been replaced by Regional Spatial Strategies, but future arrangements are being implemented under the 'Localism Act'.

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