

## WEST ENGLAND FOREST DISTRICT

Scheduled Monument

Management Plan for

Castle Neroche SM

Plan Period May 2016 - 2026

# SM Management Plan

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2. Introduction
3. Management Objectives
4. Description and List Entry

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### 1. Agreement & Consent

**District** West England Forest District

**Name of SM** Castle Neroche

**Period of Plan** 2016-2026

Peter Kelsall  
pp. Kevin Stannard  
Forest Management Director  
Forestry Commission England  
Date

  
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03/10/2016  
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Historic England **HARPO.**  
Date

  
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18/10/2016.  
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## 2. Introduction

Castle Neroche is one of the most visited recreational sites in the northern Blackdown Hills area. It comprises a Norman motte and bailey castle on the site of an earlier Iron Age hillfort. Much of the earthworks are still clearly visible.

## 3. Management Objectives

The major management issues on the site are as follows:

- Public access causes localised erosion of the historic features (ramparts)
- Management needs to ensure the safety of public when they access the site
- Vegetation obscures the impressive views and the roots cause disturbance underground, this includes plantation forestry on part of the monument and naturally regenerating material across much of the site
- Invasive species are present which are detrimental to wider objectives
- Mature trees are present which are an attractive important feature in their own right but these can cause disturbance to the monument and need to be carefully managed
- Provision of appropriate interpretation of the historical interest of the site

To achieve the protection of the monument and balance with the enjoyment, understanding and recreational needs of the public the following objectives are proposed

<b>Objective 1</b>	To reduce vegetation-induced threats to site stability and enhance appreciation and visibility and viewpoints
<b>Objective 2</b>	To monitor and maintain physical access to the SM for all audiences to prevent damage to the monument and allow for good, safe appreciation of the site, linked to wider local access routes
<b>Objective 3</b>	Ensure forestry works are sympathetic to the SM, avoiding damage and making improvements where possible.

## 4. Description and List Entry

The earthworks comprise three concentric rings (ramparts) with a small motte mound (which may once have had a stone keep) and a bailey set into the corner of an earlier enclosure. The structure of the site reflects three distinct periods of occupation, plus later nineteenth century additions.

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## **Iron Age period (700-43BC)**

The Castle was built around 500BC, with a strongly defended enclosure with three lines of defence enclosing an area of some 3.7ha, positioned to take full advantage of the natural defences provided by the northern escarpment.

## **Norman Conquest 1066**

The motte and bailey at Castle Neroche was sited to make the best use of earthworks surviving from the earlier period. It is believed to have been constructed immediately after the Conquest by Robert Count of Mortain, half-brother of William the Conqueror, as part of his campaign to suppress the South West. Built in 1067 Castle Neroche was abandoned in 1087 by the Count in preference for his other castle at Montacute.

These timescales were confirmed during excavations in the early 1960s. Finds recovered included large quantities of locally-made early medieval pottery in a Northern French style, suggesting that for a short time a foreign potter was based within the castle itself. These investigations also confirmed that the motte, which was constructed using alternate layers of sand and gravel, was a fairly late addition, being built over part of an earlier 'ringwork'.

## **Mid 12th Century changes**

A further phase of construction occurred in a period called the 'Anarchy' (1139-1153) during the reign of King Stephen when an unknown owner (possibly the Lord of the Manor of Staple Fitzpaine), briefly refortified the Castle. The main refortifications at Castle Neroche, which are believed to date from this period, include the construction of an upper mound on the motte and the creation of the great motte ditch. The wooden tower was replaced with a small stone keep, which is believed to have been set within a circular stonewall.

## **The Rabbit Warrens**

During the 13th Century, documentary evidence has shown that the Lord of the Manor of Staple had a warren, inside Castle Neroche on the edge of his manor. There are at least five pillow mounds (warrens) at Castle Neroche: one is easily seen, a low mound in the outer enclosure adjacent to the former car park and others lie hidden in dense woodland in a series of enclosures to the north of the castle mound.

## **Nineteenth Century**

Castle Farm was built on the site of a property recorded in 1829 as Warren House. The present earthworks have been damaged by sand and gravel extraction pits possibly for use in the building of the Chard Turnpike Trust roads into Wellington and Taunton in 1777.

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## 5.i. Management Prescriptions - Timing

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Cut vegetation on flatter areas twice annually. Actively target any bracken	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆
Review of viewpoints. Fell trees and shrubs to ensure views retained	◆			◆			◆			
Undertake tree stability survey	◆		◆		◆		◆		◆	
Undertake programme of rhododendron control	◆	◆								
Survey for invasive non-native plants with control as needed.			◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆
Resurface car park		◆					◆			
Formal survey of visitor infrastructure, undertake maintenance as required	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆
Survey of SM looking for any new threats; taking action as required	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆
Survey site for woody vegetation on steeper slopes where grass is not regularly cut			◆			◆			◆	

Note: A timber harvesting operation is planned in the early years of the plan but is difficult to attach to a specific year.

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## 5.ii. Management Prescriptions - Detail

<b>Work programme</b>			
<b>Objective 1</b>			
<b>Operations</b>	<b>Prescriptions</b>	<b>Timescale</b>	<b>SMC Req?</b>
Periodic clearance of ground vegetation	Mechanical cutting of ground vegetation on flatter areas around top of Motte and other grassed banks and areas surrounding old car park.	Twice per year (May & August)	No
Actively target bracken	Survey whole site for bracken and action the cutting anywhere on site unless it is on the inaccessible slopes. A follow-up cut 6 weeks later will be needed. This is likely to need repeating for several years until eradicated	Survey in late May, cutting throughout summer	No
Widening of viewpoints from top of motte, old car park, and promontory	Thin/remove trees and branches obscuring viewpoints as required during period of plan to maintain open views	Felling after each survey timed outside of bird nesting season	No
Manage unstable trees	Monitor all trees within SM boundary and reduce danger of wind throw through felling or crown reduction as necessary  Cut windblown trees and return root plates to original location as far as possible	Annual inspection and subsequent tree works	No
Eradicate invasive non-native plants from site	Survey for invasive non-native species. Control Himalayan Balsam by hand pulling during growing season if found  Undertake chemical control of rhododendron during first years of the plan period	Hand pull new growth monthly Jun/Jul/Aug. Stem injection of mature rhododendron during late winter.	No

<b>Objective 2</b>			
<b>Operations</b>	<b>Prescriptions</b>	<b>Timescale</b>	<b>SMC Req?</b>
SCC RoW team upgraded a dangerous section of the footpath that previously served as the waymarked Red Route (March 2016)	Consider reinstating red route signage	By end of 2017	Yes (if signs within SM boundary)
Provide adequate car parking outside of SAM boundary.	Resurface car park entrance (outside SAM boundary) as required during plan period to provide safe vehicle	Anticipated during 2017	No

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	access		
Manage potentially damaging activities, notably mountain biking to reduce erosion of banks and earthworks.	Monitor condition of main and subsidiary paths used by visitors to the site, and if significant erosion is noted at pinch points and heavily used sections, instigate informal temporary diversions using advisory signage and physical barriers, for a long enough period to allow vegetation cover to re-establish	As necessary, based on inspections	Possibly
Ensure safe access for the public	Monitor surface condition and overhead tree safety and address any hazards found. Footpath surfaces are the responsibility of SCC RoW team, elsewhere the FC maintain the paths. FC to liaise with SCC regarding access.	As necessary, based on biannual inspection	No
Access infrastructure	Steps on the steeper slopes will be inspected and maintained on a like-for-like basis	Annual inspection and work as required	Yes
<b>Objective 3</b>			
<b>Operations</b>	<b>Prescriptions</b>	<b>Timescale</b>	<b>SMC Req?</b>
Liaison with HE in planning of forestry operations	To ensure timber harvesting maximises benefit to the SM; liaison between FC and HE will be conducted	One harvesting operation planned during life of plan	Yes
Remove all young conifers from the lower northern slopes	When timber harvesting the FC plan to harvest the young planted larch stand that is on the footprint of the monument; this includes the regenerated Western Hemlock. A detailed harvesting proposal will be consulted with HE at the time of the operation	One harvesting operation planned during life of plan	Yes
Remove regenerating tree cover	FC will act to remove all small trees (under 10cm diameter) to prevent future tree canopy being created. Where a suitably located tree is of good form it can be selectively marked for retention but the presumption will be to remove all small trees by the end of the plan period	Once operation during the plan	Yes
Establish suitable ground cover	Once tree cover is removed during the harvesting operation an assessment of suitable methodology to establish a desirable low maintenance ground cover will be considered. This may include seeding or planting.	Post-timber harvesting	Yes



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## Appendix

### 5. Location Maps

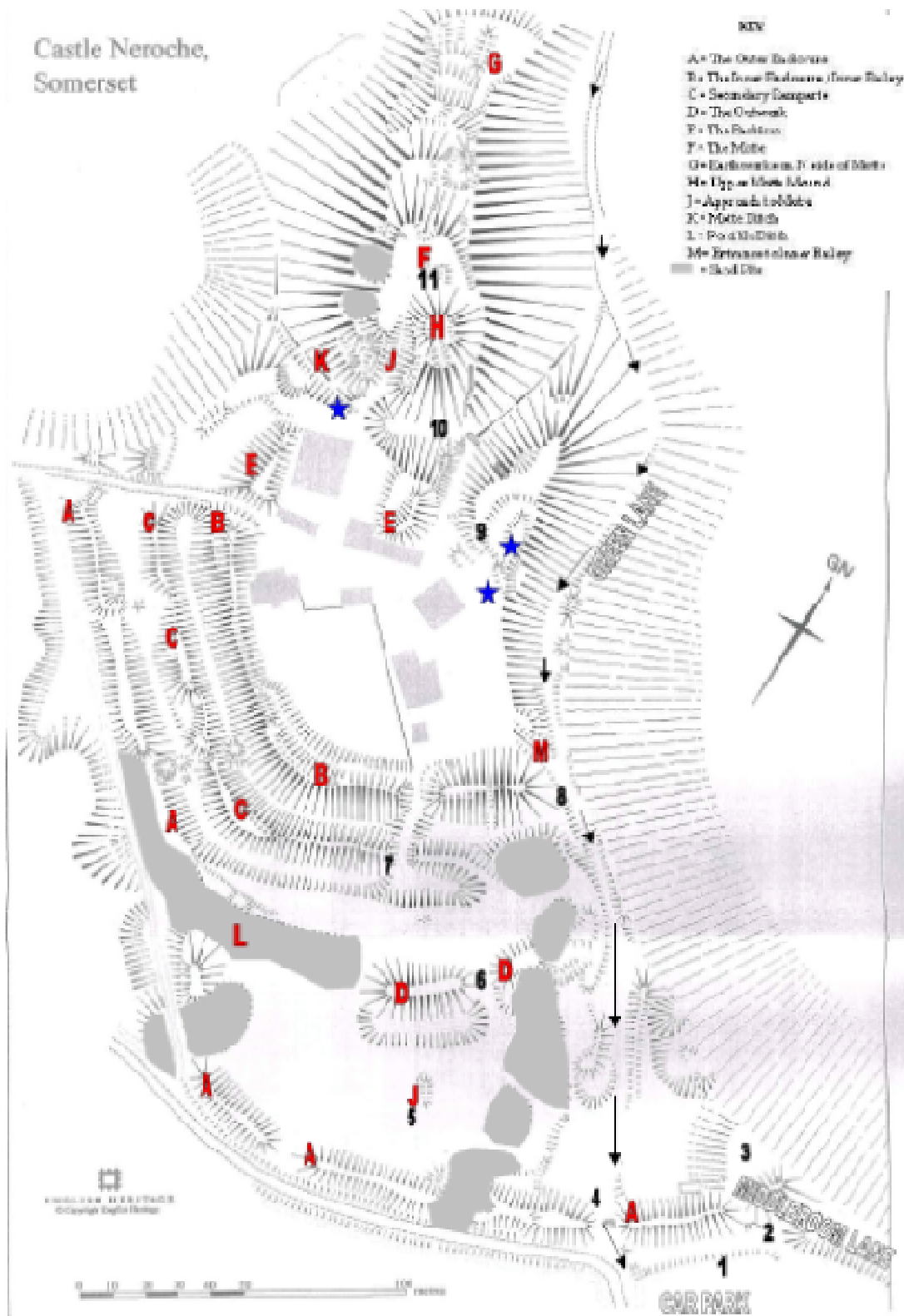
#### Map 1: Site plan showing Scheduled Ancient Monument boundary





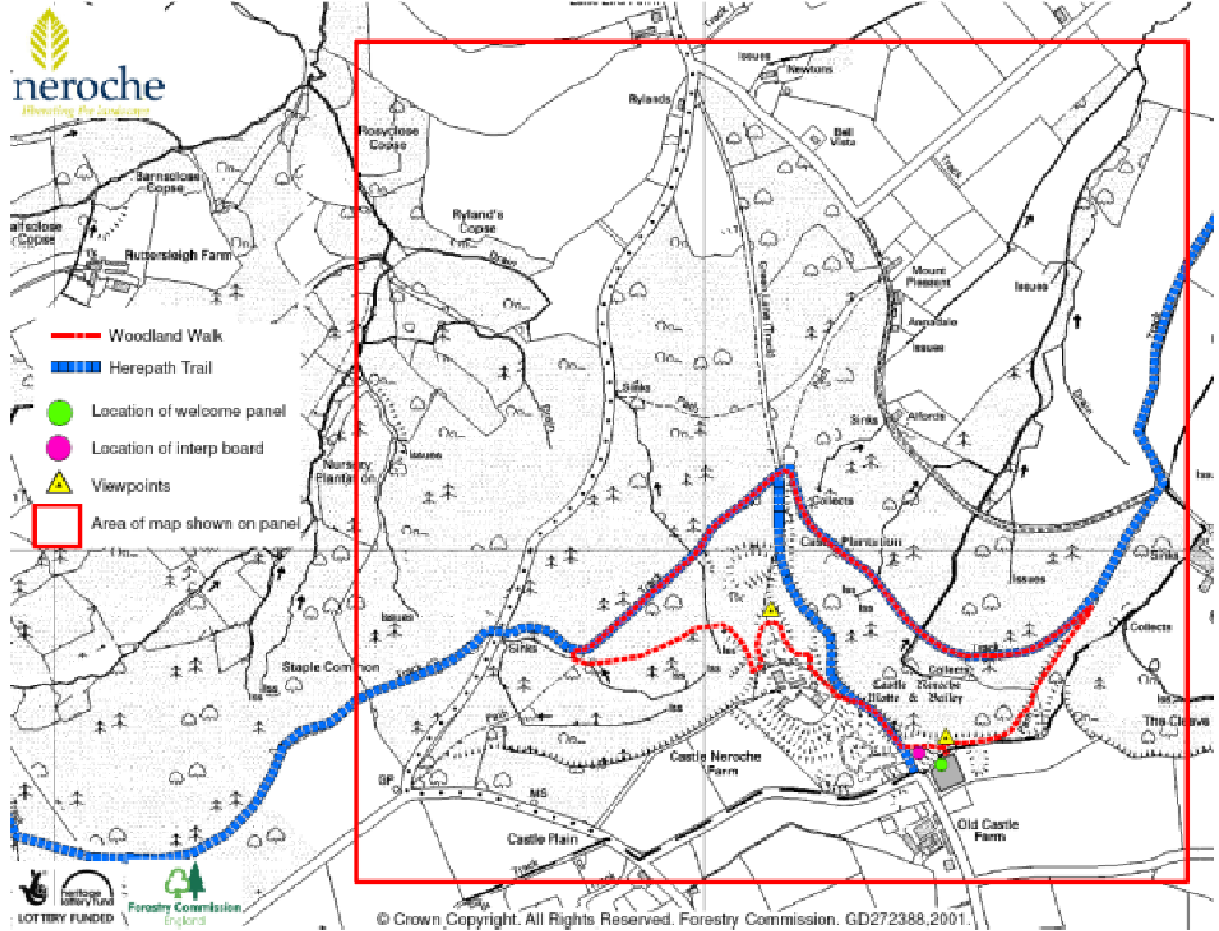
# SM Management Plan

Map 2: Relief map showing structure of site and main features



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Map 3: Trails map



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## 6. Photographic record

Image 1. Showing grassy banks of earthworks with mature trees



Image 2. Shows some tree saplings growing on banks of earthworks



Image 3. Viewpoint is open but being encroached by trees



### 7. Historic England Listing details

## Castle Neroche: a motte and bailey castle and earlier defences above Castle Plantation

### List Entry Summary

This monument is scheduled under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979 as amended as it appears to the Secretary of State to be of national importance. This entry is a copy, the original is held by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

Name: Castle Neroche: a motte and bailey castle and earlier defences above Castle Plantation

List entry Number: 1008252

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## Location

The monument may lie within the boundary of more than one authority.

County: Somerset

District: South Somerset

District Type: District Authority

Parish: Buckland St. Mary

County: Somerset

District: Taunton Deane

District Type: District Authority

Parish: Curland

National Park: Not applicable to this List entry.

Grade: Not applicable to this List entry.

Date first scheduled: 12-Feb-1925

Date of most recent amendment: 20-Apr-1994

## Legacy System Information

The contents of this record have been generated from a legacy data system.

Legacy System: RSM

UID: 24006

## List entry Description

### Summary of Monument

Legacy Record - This information may be included in the List Entry Details.



## Reasons for Designation

Motte and bailey castles are medieval fortifications introduced into Britain by the Normans. They comprised a large conical mound of earth or rubble, the motte, surmounted by a palisade and a stone or timber tower. In a majority of examples an embanked enclosure containing additional buildings, the bailey, adjoined the motte. Motte castles and motte-and-bailey castles acted as garrison forts during offensive military operations, as strongholds, and, in many cases, as aristocratic residences and as centres of local or royal administration. Built in towns, villages and open countryside, motte and bailey castles generally occupied strategic positions dominating their immediate locality and, as a result, are the most visually impressive monuments of the early post-Conquest period surviving in the modern landscape. Over 600 motte castles or motte-and-bailey castles are recorded nationally, with examples known from most regions. As one of a restricted range of recognised early post-Conquest monuments, they are particularly important for the study of Norman Britain and the development of the feudal system. Although many were occupied for only a short period of time, motte castles continued to be built and occupied from the 11th to the 13th centuries, after which they were superseded by other types of castle.

Castle Neroche survives as a fine example of its class and is of interest as excavations have shown its development from an earlier Norman ringwork and perhaps originally from an Iron Age or Saxon fortification.

## History

Legacy Record - This information may be included in the List Entry Details.

## Details

The monument includes a motte and bailey castle associated with multi-phase defensive enclosures on a spur of land protruding from the Blackdown escarpment. The site commands extensive views northwards over the Vale of Taunton Deane. Partial excavation has identified four phases of construction. The outer defence consisting of a rampart 1.6m high and a ditch c.0.5m deep is undated but considered to be earliest, part of either an Iron Age hillfort or perhaps an Anglo-Saxon work. The second phase was the construction of a ringwork, probably early Norman, within this enclosure. The ramparts of this have been heightened by later works. An unfinished outer work associated with it, consisting of a rampart 1m high and a ditch 0.7m deep, was seen by the excavator as an attempt to reduce the area of the old enclosure. The next phase saw the construction of a motte and ditch over the north edge of the ringwork, the remainder of which was heightened to form a bank 3m-4m high and became a sub-rectangular bailey. At some stage a second line of ramparts

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1.3m high with ditches 1.7m deep was added around this, creating three lines of ramparts. One corner of the bailey was subdivided to form a barbican. Down the north tip of the spur in an area not investigated by excavation, below the motte, are two lines of scarps, with a lobed or sub-rectangular bailey at the foot. This bailey encloses 0.18 ha., with an internal bank dividing it into two, and is defended by a steeply scarped face up to 2m high with a bank 0.5m high on top, a ditch 0.5m deep at the bottom, and a counterscarp bank 0.5m high outside the ditch. In the final phase a stone shell keep and curtain wall were added to the top of the motte, and the ruins of these were noted in 1854. There is a pillow mound - a low linear mound for keeping rabbits - within the outer defences. The construction of the ringwork took place soon after the Norman Conquest and it may have been used in the suppression of local disturbances in 1067-9. The later building of the motte and bailey castle is likely to have taken place under Robert de Mortain, a major landowner in the west country from the Conquest to 1103. The castle seems to have passed out of use by the early C12 but was refurbished for a time, probably during the Anarchy of King Stephen's reign, by the construction of the curtain wall and keep on the motte.

Excavations within the castle have produced evidence of cobbled building footings, post-holes and local pottery of northern French style. In the 19th century, a farm was constructed within the inner bailey, and this continues in use today. Sand diggings have left deep hollows in the outer areas of the site, which on the surface can be confused with the castle ditches. The extent of the area of the scheduling is indicated on the mapped depiction, and includes a 10m wide strip in the field on the south-west. Excluded from the scheduling are all modern buildings, structures, fences and posts, though the ground beneath is included.

### Selected Sources

#### Books and journals

Davison, B K, 'Proceedings of the Somerset Archaeological and Nat.Hist. Society' in *Castle Neroche*, , Vol. 116, (1972), 16-58

Davison, B K, 'Proceedings of the Somerset Archaeological and Nat.Hist. Society' in *Castle Neroche*, , Vol. 116, (1972), 16-58

Davison, B K, 'Proceedings of the Somerset Archaeological and Nat.Hist. Society' in *Castle Neroche*, , Vol. 116, (1972), 16-58

#### Other

Castle Neroche 43844,

National Grid Reference: ST 27202 15708

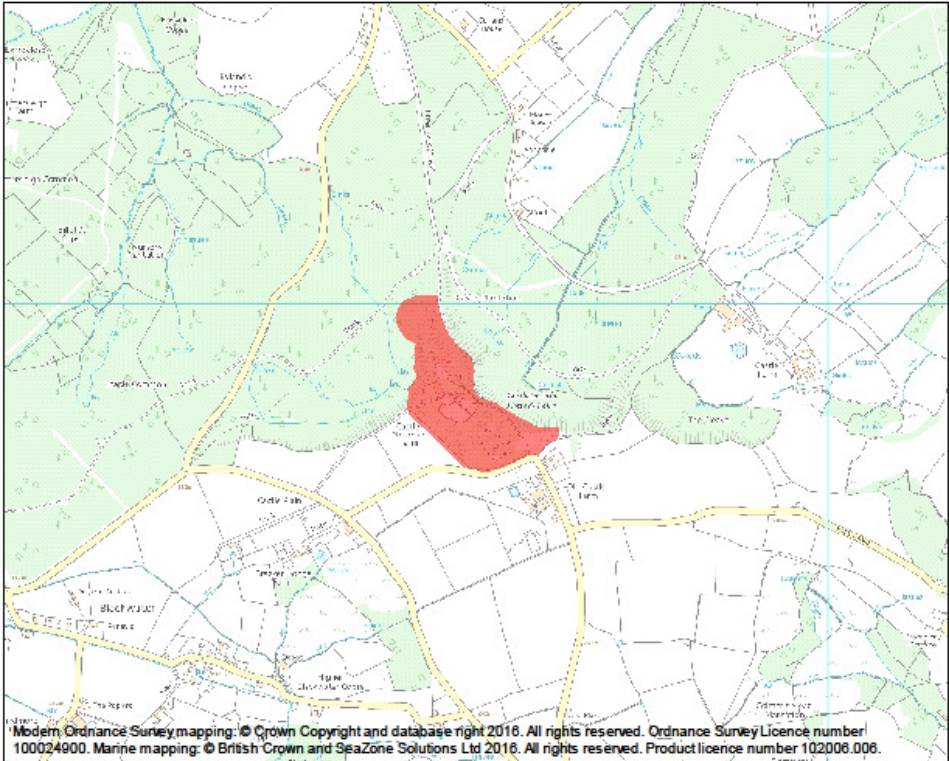


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## Map

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**Heritage Category:** Scheduling

**List Entry No :** 1008252

**County:** Somerset

**District:** Taunton Deane, South Somerset

**Parish:** Curland, Buckland St. Mary

Each official record of a scheduled monument contains a map. New entries on the schedule from 1988 onwards include a digitally created map which forms part of the official record. For entries created in the years up to and including 1987 a hand-drawn map forms part of the official record. The map here has been translated from the official map and that process may have introduced inaccuracies. Copies of maps that form part of the official record can be obtained from Historic England.

This map was delivered electronically and when printed may not be to scale and may be subject to distortions. All maps and grid references are for identification purposes only and must be read in conjunction with other information in the record.

**List Entry NGR:** ST 27202 15708

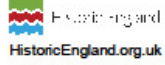
**Map Scale:** 1:10000

**Print Date:** 12 July 2016

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**Name:** Castle Neroche: a motte and bailey castle and earlier defences above Castle Plantation



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