

Dynamic Dunescapes Dune Engagement Case Study

Braunton Burrows Outdoor Cinema

Sand dune system	Braunton Burrows, Devon
Case Study Subject	Outdoor cinema event to boost engagement with the dunes
The Engagement Intervention	

Site background information

Braunton Burrows is home to the second largest sand dune system in the UK and, as it's an internationally important site for wildlife and sand dune habitats, the area is a designated Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and part of the North Devon UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. Since the 1950s, the landscape here has become increasingly vegetated. Fast and widespread growth of shrubs and plants which stabilise the sand mean that lots of early successional dune have been lost. As a result, many of the threatened species that live in these dunes have been rapidly declining – some have even become extinct from the area.

What was the issue/change you hoped to make?

Many people were unaware of the dunes, their importance and the wildlife found there as they were often used as a 'route to the beach'. By putting on a free cinema showing for local people, we hoped to encourage new audiences to the dunes and expand the current audience's idea of what the dunes could mean for them.

We also hoped to build on the relationship between landowners and visitors to encourage a more collaborative use of the dunes.

What did you do and how?

We commissioned a [short film](#) about Braunton Burrows, showcasing the wildlife and highlighting the area's importance. We premiered this film at the start of the event and used it as an introduction to the site.

We organised a showing of Star Wars: A New Hope on an inflatable screen in a 'natural amphitheatre' - a sand bowl type area found in the Braunton dunes. We had catering trucks and a pop-up bar, porta-loos, and atmospheric lighting to guide the audience to their seats. We premiered our short film and had a series of images from a local photographer playing on a loop before the film began and then at sunset, began the main showing.

The tickets for the event were free but catering was at cost to the audience. They were also allowed to bring their own food and drinks to ensure the event was as accessible as possible.

What consents and permissions were needed prior to doing the works?

As Braunton Burrows is privately owned and contains a SSSI, we required several consents:

- Events license from District Council
- Landowner's permission
- Natural England SSSI activity consent
- Film license from film owners (Lucas Films)
- Permission from carpark lease holder
- Agreement from MOD (Braunton is an MOD training area)
- Risk assessment

As part of the SSSI consent and risk assessment, mitigation measures were also in place. We had all equipment on bare sand and spill kits available for every vehicle and the generator. The generator was also left on a trailer to reduce the risk to the habitat. We had to plan out the event area and ensure the audience would only be walking and sitting on areas of bare sand, in order to protect the plants found in the habitat.

Who did you work with? / How did you engage with different groups?

We worked with a range of people for this event:

- [Plantlife](#), the lead partner for Dynamic DunesCAPES at Braunton Burrows, were the driver of the event.
- [Blackbeam Cinematic](#) were the cinema organisers. They acquired the event and film licenses on our behalf.
- [Emma Brisdion](#) and [Mark Skinner](#) were commissioned to create the short film
- Natural England Area Team for North Devon
- Dynamic DunesCAPES National Team provided support to logistics and communications

Blackbeam Cinematic organised most of the promotional materials, alongside Plantlife. The advertising was kept small and local to ensure this event was targeted towards local people. The event was capped at 300 attendees to prevent stress to the site.

Social media and a mailing list were the main routes for ticket registrations.

How was the site / intervention monitored?

Two types of monitoring were involved for this event:

The site was monitored to prevent damage before, during and after.

The audience were encouraged to answer a feedback questionnaire to monitor any changes in attitude towards the dunes. Comments on social media posts were also reviewed to gather any additional feedback. Overall, the feedback was positive and encouraging of future similar events.

What modifications, if any, did you make to your initial plan and why?

As an outdoor event, the weather played a key role. The date was changed twice due to poor conditions impacting the equipment and overall safety. We successfully held the event on our third attempt and the key to this was the engaged mailing list and event communications.

Highlight any issues/obstacles & how you overcame them?

The event was logistically challenging. The equipment had to be transported across soft sand and specialist offroad vehicles required. The carpark had to have a trailer to load equipment from the vans before transport.

Vendors also needed plenty of support in order to set up. This required event staff time that had not been previously accounted for.

Potentially due to the changing event date or standard drop off for free events, but 50% of ticket holders failed to turn up. This could be overcome by charging a small fee to encourage attendance (Dynamic Dunescapes are unable to charge for event ticketing).

How much did the intervention cost?

£3,000 with charity concessions and local support.

Did the intervention work?

Please describe how. What has changed?

Yes, the event was a success. The audience made several comments throughout the evening about things they had learned or wanted to visit next time. Public feedback was positive, and the short film was met with a round of applause.

External feedback

Organizers' summary:

Challenges

- Some technical issues but all overcome on the day
- Would have been good to have something to give people on the day e.g. a leaflet on Plantlife/Dunescapes. It was hard to explain who Plantlife/Dunescapes/Christie Estate and the relationship to the event was – felt complex and clunky.
- 50% of people who booked didn't turn up so around 150 people out of 300 despite reminders about releasing tickets.

Successes

- All parties (Plantlife, Blackbeam and Christie Estate) enjoyed working together and felt it was a successful collaboration
- Mixture of ages present at the event went beyond the demographic you would expect at a conservation event
- Braunton video was impactful, eliciting a spontaneous round of applause and sparking a lot of conversation which the team overheard e.g. 'isn't that interesting?..' 'I didn't know that about Braunton'... The team felt this element rooted the event in the landscape and

community and reached new audiences with conservation messages, “We were not preaching to the converted” Alastair, Blackbeam

- Locally there has been a big impact with people talking about it in the local pubs, and online. Blackbeam have received a volume of calls and emails from people who went, wanting to say how much they enjoyed it and if there will be more. This is unprecedented following an outdoor cinema event.

What could be done differently next time?

Organizers’ thoughts:

- Consider other types of events to engage people beyond the usual demographic e.g., Blackbeam Cinematic do ‘Gorilla projection’ where they project images onto buildings, landscapes etc. and make sure that it gets on social media. They have had success with this before for national campaigns.
- Choice of film was important especially for this other-worldly landscape. The team felt that something futuristic and fantasy was the right choice in terms of appeal to the audience and the place it was being shown.
- Consider charging a nominal fee for tickets to encourage people to attend once they’ve booked. This could be £5 a head.

Media & Reports

Images of the intervention

The audience were encouraged to dress up as Star Wars characters – they didn’t disappoint!



The cinema audience and set-up



The Braunton Burrows Facebook account post and comments:

Braunton Burrows Public Information
11 September · 🌐

The Burrows was alive with the sound of light sabres over the weekend! Flagpole Dune hosted a community event - an outdoor cinema showing of Star Wars. North Devon's BlackbeamCinematic provided the screen (and the popcorn!).

With the support of the Christie Estate, the event was sponsored by [Dynamic Dunescapes](#). The project, overseen by [Plantlife: saving wild plants](#), has been carrying out sand dune restoration works on the Burrows for the past 2 years.

The Dynamic Dunescap... See more



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Dynamic Dunescapes
If you attended this event, we'd love to hear your feedback! You can fill out our quick questionnaire here <https://forms.gle/KQcMrDrhHC485rvw7>

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- It was a brilliant event - the location was so very atmospheric and perfect for the film. Thank you for putting it on!

13 w · Like · Reply
- Fantastic event

13 w · Like · Reply
- And it was amazing!!!! Wood!!!!

13 w · Like · Reply
- Great Event! Thank you kindly! Loved the characters too! Imagine coordinating the characters in the dunes behind the screen as the film played! Now there's an idea!!!! 🤔

13 w · Like · Reply
- It was a great event! Thank you

13 w · Like · Reply
- This was fantastic. Really enjoyed it

13 w · Like · Reply