

5.1 To establish a grazing and mowing regime to effectively manage the Common for the benefit of wildlife and public amenity.

Under the Countryside Stewardship Scheme administered by Defra, it is a requirement that due consideration is given to re-establishing grazing on the Common, with the ideal long term vision being free-range grazing.

Low intensity grazing is the recognised primary management method for maintaining important grass and heath communities. (Refer to Appendix 15 for further details.) Grazing also provides important historical and cultural inputs to the management of traditional Commons.

Grazing was the primary traditional management of Stelling Minnis Common and all indications are that the maintenance of this historic landscape and its biodiversity value will be enhanced by the reintroduction of grazing.

As grazing is of such high importance in grassland biodiversity maintenance, Defra gives it a high priority as the ideal key method of achieving their objectives of supporting long-term sustainability of the ecological interest of the Common.

Without some grazing, the Common may become increasingly impoverished ecologically to the point where it no longer fulfils Countryside Stewardship requirements. This could lead to a withdrawal of funding which would generate major problems for the continued management of the site.

The re-establishment of grazing needs support especially from the local community if it is to succeed. It needs to take into account the interests of the local community and requires a method of implementation that encourages their support and participation.

This management plan explores the options for establishing grazing on the Common in a phased fashion, with several years between each new phase being introduced. This phased introduction gives everyone involved the opportunity to adapt to the new situation and provides the opportunities to identify and solve any difficulties that may be encountered. If these difficulties become insurmountable, then alternative long-term management options might need to be considered. However, the ideal outcome is that the local community come to consider the grazing as enhancing and enriching their experience of residing in close proximity to the Common.

The options presented below are outline options and are open for discussion and debate by the Owners, Managers and local residents during the public consultation. It should be noted that all of these options will involve installation of some temporary internal compartment fencing as well as the installation of a number of cattle grids.

Grazier Options

Option	Advantages	Disadvantages
Local Farmer/Grazier	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ No effort ➤ Low cost ➤ No responsibility ➤ In theory could maintain fences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Little choice of stock ➤ Competes against general decline in grazing ➤ Depends on market forces ➤ In-experienced animals ➤ No direct interest in wider outcomes ➤ Reduced control ➤ Profit motivated ➤ Likely to require supervision
Managers of Stelling Minnis Common	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Control of livestock types ➤ Control of livestock numbers ➤ Control of animal welfare ➤ Could train and manage volunteer livestock managers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Management ➤ Maintenance ➤ Likely to require at least part-time staff
Commoners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ No effort ➤ Low cost ➤ No responsibility ➤ On site ➤ Local ➤ Homed stock ➤ Keen to keep system going 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Few if any prepared to exercise rights ➤ Competes against general decline in grazing ➤ Little control of types of livestock and numbers ➤ Likely to still need management ➤ Managers need to maintain fences

<p>Selected Commoners</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ No effort ➤ Low cost ➤ No responsibility ➤ On site ➤ Local ➤ Homed stock ➤ Keen to keep system going ➤ Could be supported possibly through agri-environmentally schemes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Initial investment in time and effort to establish ➤ Might require 2-3 year project officer part time ➤ Little control of types of livestock and numbers ➤ Competes against general decline in grazing ➤ Likely to still need management ➤ Need to clearly sign up to management vision ➤ Managers need to maintain fences
<p>Commoners Association</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ No effort ➤ Low cost ➤ No responsibility ➤ On site ➤ Local ➤ Homed stock ➤ Keen to keep system going ➤ Could be supported possibly through agri-environmentally schemes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Little control of types of livestock and numbers ➤ Competes against general decline in grazing ➤ Likely to still need management ➤ Need to clearly sign up to management vision ➤ Managers need to maintain fences
<p>Kent Wildlife Trust</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Experienced in conservation grazing ➤ Likely to use rare/hardy breeds ➤ Good animal welfare ➤ No effort ➤ Low cost ➤ No responsibility ➤ Keen to keep system going ➤ Could be supported possibly through agri-environmentally schemes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Needs to be cost effective for KWT ➤ Managers need to maintain fences
<p>Eat the View</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Local ➤ On site ➤ Control of livestock type ➤ Control of livestock numbers ➤ Control of animal welfare ➤ Homed stock ➤ Could use rare/hardy breeds ➤ Organic ➤ Funding is a strong possibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Needs Management ➤ Requires Community shepherd

Grazing Animals Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Could use any or all of the above ➤ Could outreach into local areas and provide a focus of grazing opportunities ➤ Could be supported with Kent Wildlife Trust infrastructure ➤ Could be independently supported e.g Rural Development Initiative/ Heritage Lottery Fund 	
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Factors that will determine the success of grazing for Stelling Minnis Common

Factor	Comments
Physical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Relatively flat land ➤ Low productivity acidic soils
Climate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Typical of eastern lowland England ➤ Drought. Due to shallow soils and the overall lack of standing water climatic change and periods of dryness could pose problems with insufficient forage and water being available for livestock
Water Supply	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Ponds and probably mains water available
Boundaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The Common is bounded by extensive numbers of dwellings many of which has rights/needs for access across the common ➤ The common is bisected by a number of public highways ➤ There are an extensive number of easements in effect over the common
Accessibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Generally very good
Problem Plants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Bracken management currently effective ➤ Ragwort is not significant
Vegetation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Acid grassland not floristically species rich ➤ Neutral grassland currently enriched not species rich due to current management ➤ Heath land declining in terms of area, currently under managed
Productivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Likely to be low
Non-livestock grazing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Some rabbit grazing ➤ Deer grazing not quantified

Local agricultural systems	➤ Some local grazing attached to dwellings
Management history	➤ Grazing over many centuries, now declined
Livestock requirements for habitat management (Constant)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Light annual grazing for diversity ➤ Fairly high intensity late summer/autumn grazing to remove seasons vegetation
Livestock requirements for habitat management (Variable)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Occasional high intensity early spring grazing to remove grass ➤ Occasional browsing of heath land to promote new shoots and age diversity ➤ Annual to occasional browsing to reduce scrub
Livestock suitability for habitat management.	<p><u>Sheep.</u> Are least likely to be effective. Although they may maintain a close sward they are likely to be of little benefit to managing the scrub and heath land components and could be detrimental to establishing heath land. Their main use is likely to be episodic to reduce overall biomass from grassland units. Current estimates which needs revising in summer suggest that lowland breeds would only do well if used for limited periods. Hill/rare breeds might be suitable for free ranging but might be very difficult to manage in a scrub environment. Lowland sheep are unlikely to find sufficient feed throughout the year. Fairly high levels of maintenance required.</p> <p><u>Cattle.</u> Are likely to have some effect on the grassland sward but might not find sufficient feed throughout the year. They may have some effect on scrub vegetation by browsing and are traditional on wood-pasture. They may help manage some scrub by creating glades and paths. They could create some ground poaching which if subsequently managed could be used for heath land establishment, providing it is suitability fenced. Reasonable levels of maintenance required</p> <p><u>Ponies.</u> Hardy breeds such as Exmoor's are likely to have a generally positive effect, as they are adapted to grazing these types of habitat. Latrines might be a problem. Their inherent wildness makes them suitable for the area and they may browse some scrub vegetation. Good for areas with high levels of dog walking. Can be a conflict with horse riders. Medium to low maintenance</p> <p><u>Goats.</u> Would have a significant impact on scrub especially when grass levels are low. Not easily controllable/managed. Medium-to-low maintenance</p>

Figure 2 includes a first draft of how the phased introduction of grazing might be carried out.

Insert Figure 2 here Grazing map.
A3 – landscape. Colour