Grazing strategy and implementation plan for the Proposed National Nature Reserve (NNR) in North Kent

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Executive Summary

The proposed National Nature Reserve (NNR) covers a range of habitat types with specific grazing requirements. These include wood pasture, ancient woodland, chalk grassland, neutral grassland and vineyards. There are 19 sites, owned by 17 different individuals or organisations – some of whom are 'core' partners of the NNR, and some 'affiliates'.

This report summarises the work done to understand how a suitable grazing strategy could be implemented across the area, offering potential solutions for individual sites. Based on meetings with graziers and landowner representatives, it also looks at some of the common issues and considerations for both parties in delivering meaningful change. It gives particular focus to the financial reality and potential mechanisms by which equitable agreements can be formed. It concludes that the ambitions for a new nature reserve are entirely possible from a grassland and grazing perspective but offers a tiered approach for recommendations depending on available resources. Finally, the importance of building community and fostering collaboration between partners to support coordinated implementation is highlighted as key to long-term success.

Background and heritage

The Kent Downs landscape has a rich history intertwined with livestock grazing. For centuries, drovers moved animals through the area enroute to London and Smithfield, most likely contributing to the development of the diverse grasslands seen today by bringing seeds from afar. Wood pasture, a traditional land-use system, further shaped the landscape, with livestock grazing alongside trees.

The region's history of woodland management and pastoralism stretches back thousands of years. Woodland clearance for farming and subsequent regrowth have left lasting imprints on the landscape, visible in earthworks, ancient trees, and historical pathways.

The Darnley Estate, once a vast and influential landholding in North Kent, created much of the lasting legacy that now lives on through the various properties and landscapes in the area.

Today, the Kent Downs and in particular the areas of the proposed NNR continue to support a diverse range of land uses, including amenity grasslands within schools, golf courses, vineyards, traditional livestock grazing and recreational areas. The decline of coppicing in recent decades has altered the woodland cover and led to more closed canopy, swamping out certain species.

Given the area's heritage the ongoing interplay between human activity and the natural environment cannot be underestimated, most especially in the grasslands and wood pasture.

Project objectives

This project, being one of eight sub-projects looking at different aspects of bringing the NNR into reality, has set out to achieve the following:

1. Identify individual grazing requirements and areas for improvement on each site.
2. Identify potential local graziers to work with NNR partners.
3. Engage with partners to match suitable graziers to individual grazing requirements where required.

4. Produce a grazing strategy and implementation plan to maintain the highest standards of conservation grazing across the NNR and beyond, if required.

Methodology

We are Russ Carrington and Emma Douglas, and we have a strong track record of delivering successful and effective grazing projects, across the UK and Europe.

Russ is a consultant and coach specialising in regenerative grazing practices. He advises and supports farmers and land managers to optimise livestock grazing, whether it's intensive rotational grazing or extensive habitat management. His practical experience includes setting up and managing a 150-hectare organic regenerative farm at the Knepp Estate, where he implemented nature-based solutions and monitored environmental impacts to explore the relationship between rewilding and food production on a landscape scale. Before that, he spent nearly a decade developing Pasture for Life, a nationwide community focused on good grazing practices and certifying meat, milk and fibre from ruminant animals raised wholly on pasture diets.

Emma is a seasoned conservation grazing expert with over 12 years of experience working on various projects in Wales. Her roles at PONT Cymru involved project management, feasibility studies, monitoring, training, and advising landowners. Additionally, she manages her family farm, utilising native breeds to conservation graze specific coastal habitats on the Gower Peninsula. By collaborating with partners like the National Trust, she ensures that grazing practices align with conservation objectives.

We have implemented this project using 5 approaches:

1. **Desk based research** – to understand and determine key parameters of the area, and the surrounding social and economic circumstances
2. **Site surveys** – conducted over two occasions to see sites in different seasons and witness the detail of site requirements and practicalities
3. **Held meetings** – with local farmers and graziers, and separately the landowning partners, to facilitate and find common consensus on some of the most important issues
4. **One to one conversations** – to explore particular challenges and issues with some landowners and farmers, in and around the proposed NNR
5. **Applied learning and experience** – drawing on our networks and pulling on our knowledge from multiple grazing projects outside of the area

Limitations

We have researched, determined and calculated as much as we can within the constraints of time and budget, but acknowledge that there is a limit to how accurately we can estimate costs and gauge commitment from landowners and graziers. At the time of publishing this report there remain a number of uncertainties beyond the scope and remit of this project – not least changing government policy and uncertainty over the implementation of the Lower Thames Crossing.

Furthermore, it is only right that projects such as this which are highly dependent upon working with nature, and which will, in their delivery, lead to many small and large discoveries, evolve and be informed by new findings as they come to light – but guided hopefully by the key principles and objectives we have highlighted in this report.

The necessity of grazing

The native habitats of the UK were established under grazing pressure from large herbivores – they are an essential part of a healthy ecosystem. The ancestors of our native breeds of cattle (aurochs) and ponies (tarpan) roamed these landscapes alongside deer species, European bison, elk, wild boar and their predators. Since many of these species were hunted to extinction or domesticated, we now need to use domesticated livestock in their place, managed by humans in place of predators. We have a long history of livestock husbandry shaping the appearance of the landscape. Livestock agriculture is deeply entwined with our cultural heritage and biodiversity.

An absence of grazing will tend to allow the formation of uniform scrub, culminating eventually in closed-canopy deciduous broadleaf woodland and declining biodiversity. A disturbance factor in the form of grazing herbivores is required to arrest this successional process, maintaining a mosaic of grassland, scrub and trees, with an abundance of interfaces between habitats and vegetation heights optimising opportunities for biodiversity. In grasslands, grasses become rank and dominant if they are not grazed, and they smother the less competitive herb species. Some species require short, grazed swards. Grassland fungi, including waxcaps (*Hygrocybe* spp.) require short, grazed swards through which to send their fruiting bodies, lapwing *(Vanellus vanellus*) and chough (*Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax)*, require short swards for feeding, unimpeded locomotion of chicks and for predator surveillance. Some species require longer swards for cover such as voles, adders (*Vipera berus*) and common lizards (*Zootoca vivipara*).

Livestock produce dung which is used by over 40 species of dung beetle and other dung invertebrates. These invertebrates cycle nutrients by taking dung down into the soil. The invertebrates and their larvae are a food source for birds, bats and mammals. The young of the European protected, greater horseshoe bat feed primarily on *Aphodius rufipes,* a dung beetle found in cattle dung. The rare nail fungus (*Poronia punctata*) grows only on untreated pony dung on uncultivated grasslands. Many birds including chough, curlew (*Numenius arquata)* and woodcock (*Scolopax rusticola*) are reliant on dung invertebrates when feeding on grasslands.

Trampling by livestock around ponds and lakes provides the muddy habitat needed for rare riparian plants such as pillwort (*Pilularia globulifera*), three lobed water crowfoot (*Ranunculus tripartitus*) and pennyroyal (*Mentha pulegium*). Livestock, particularly cattle and ponies, will clear patches in emergent vegetation creating clear areas for newts and dragonflies to display, and preventing ponds from becoming shaded by trees. Their presence in the water is needed for medicinal leech (*Hirudo medicinalis*) to feed and they are used as a dispersal method for the rare fairy shrimp (*Chirocephalus diaphanous)* and the seeds of many plants. Heavier livestock crush rhizomes of bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum)* underfoot, reducing the height and vigour of bracken over time.

Their warm bodies and dung attract flies and therefore the birds and bats that feed on them. Pied flycatcher, particularly require the presence of livestock in a woodland / wood pasture to maintain the open structure and to attract their fly prey. Livestock shed their winter coat in spring, in time with the bird nesting season where it is readily collected by birds and mammals to line their nests.

Browsing the leaves of trees creates a browse line and removes lower branches, shaping trees. These shapes are not created unless browsing pressure is present. Browsing, bark stripping and rubbing can kill or damage trees, creating standing deadwood which is used for nesting by birds such as willow tit (*Poecile montanus*), for insects and fungi amongst many others.

For all the reasons outlined above and more, there is simply no substitute for animals grazing in the landscape. Beyond their essential role in the food system, grazing animals are the most cost-effective

method of habitat management. While machinery like tractor-driven or robotic flails could be used for similar tasks, they would fail to replicate the ecological benefits of grazing or distinguish between different species. In fact, these machines would contribute to a net increase in carbon dioxide emissions, as they rely on fossil fuels for operation and manufacturing. In contrast, ruminants, such as cattle and sheep, play a crucial role in the biogenic carbon cycle. Though they emit methane, this is eventually broken down into carbon dioxide and water, which are absorbed by plants through photosynthesis. When ruminants consume these plants, the carbon is cycled through their bodies and excreted as dung, which feeds the soil biota and contributes to carbon sequestration.

Definitions

As part of this project we have considered the relevance of regenerative agriculture, a relatively new term and practice based on a set of principles, that is becoming increasingly popular.

Due to our varied backgrounds and previous experience, we have brought with us a regenerative agriculture perspective and explored whether it has anything to offer this project, which might have otherwise been more of a conservation style project.

It is therefore important to define and distinguish these two terms as context for our methodologies, findings and subsequent recommendations:

Regenerative grazing and conservation grazing are both agricultural practices that aim to improve soil health and biodiversity. However, they have slightly different approaches and goals.

Regenerative Grazing

- **Goal:** To improve soil health, increase biodiversity, and sequester carbon.
- **Methods:**
    - **Intensive rotational grazing:** Animals are moved frequently between paddocks to mimic natural grazing patterns.
    - **Rest periods:** Grazing is followed by periods of rest to allow plants to recover, build root systems, lock up carbon and increase water holding capacity.
    - **Diverse plant species:** Grazing lands are managed to include a variety of plants, including legumes, grasses, and forbs in order to increase resilience and productivity.

Conservation Grazing

- **Goal:** To protect and maintain natural ecosystems using livestock.
- **Methods:**
    - **Controlled grazing:** Animals are managed to prevent overgrazing and damage to vegetation, although usually allowed to roam freely over designated areas for extended periods of time.
    - **Adaptive management:** Grazing practices are adjusted based on the condition of the land and environmental factors, and animals are sometimes removed during key periods such as when certain grassland flora are flowering and setting seed.
    - **Monitoring and evaluation:** Regular monitoring is used to assess the impact of grazing on the ecosystem and ensure it supports the required biodiversity.

In summary, both regenerative grazing and conservation grazing are sustainable agricultural practices that benefit the environment and promote biodiversity. However, regenerative grazing places a stronger emphasis on improving soil health and carbon sequestration for production resilience, while conservation grazing focuses on protecting and maintaining natural ecosystems by using herbivores.

We feel that both are relevant to this project, and that conservation grazing may actually benefit from applying some of the regenerative grazing principles – as we detail below.

Findings

SWOT Analysis

SWOT analysis for general grazing of the proposed NNR to summarise some of the key factors:

STRENGTHS	**WEAKNESSES**
• Landowners generally willing and engaged • Some existing graziers already in place with knowledge and experience to share • Several more capable graziers are interested in taking on new sites • Some sites are well fenced and equipped with basic livestock infrastructure • Most of the grazing is species rich and diverse, lending itself to supporting animal, and human health • Unique heritage and habitats to be celebrated and utilised • Most local people seem well engaged • Some local infrastructure for processing livestock products is still in existence	• Livestock fencing is in poor condition or non-existent on the majority of sites • Access to drinking water is limited • Busy roads, a railway and other public amenities in close proximity which pose a risk to livestock and vice-versa • The grazing is not highly "productive" in the conventional sense to support meat production • Land ownership and management responsibility is fragmented with very diverse, sometimes conflicting, land use needs • Farmers and graziers are largely disengaged as a result of declining economics and "hassle" with public access.
OPPORTUNITIES	**THREATS**
• New funding from the Lower Thames Crossing to unlock more resources and enable greater delivery • Funding available through Natural England and the ELM scheme to support costs of grazing • Large captive audience to be engaged locally in a variety of ways, including as livestock checkers, supporters and people of influence • Create a good example and showcase of what can be done and achieved via a partnership approach • Increase sales of products from livestock raised and grazed in the proposed NNR	• High footfall of dog walkers, increasing the risk of attacks on livestock • Disease, because of cross-over with the public and their pets, e.g. Neosporosis, or wildlife, e.g. TB or Bluetongue • Withdrawal of funding to provide resources and manage the grassland effectively • Rising costs that make grazing less viable • Increasingly poor economic picture for livestock farming and animal stewardship in general

Areas and grazing status

Following a series of site visits around 500 hectares of the proposed NNR area were deemed as grazeable or in need of some animal intervention. At present some is already being grazed, some managed mechanically (toppers, mowers, etc.) and some is left largely untouched.

Site No.	Site Name	Total area (ha)	Grazing area	Habitat description
1	Shorne Woods Country Park	124	6	Wood Pasture, acid grassland
2	Cobham Woods	76	64	Wood Pasture
3	Cuxton & Cobham Woodland Project	46	1	Wood Pasture, chalk grassland
4	Ranscombe Farm	265	60	Chalk grassland
5	Ashenbank Wood	29	0.5	Woodland
6	Jeskyns Community Woodland	140	26	Woods and meadows
7	Shorne Common Rough	2	0.1	Wood and grass patch
8	Rochester & Cobham Golf Club	100	8	Grassland
9	Cobham Hall School	62	11	Grassland
10	Silverhand Estate	663	270	Mixed grassland + vines
11	West Park	21	21	Grassland
12	South Ashenbank Wood	7.5	1	Chestnut coppice
13	Great Crabbles Wood	34	0	Chestnut coppice
14	Crabbles Bottom	11.5	2	Orchard, wood pasture
15	Holborough Woodlands	581	25	Chalk grassland
16	Court Wood	38	2.9	Chestnut coppice + pasture
17	Shorne Pasture	3.5	0.25	Woods and chalk grassland
18	Scalers Hill Wood	19	9.5	Woods and horse pasture
19	Camer Park	18	6.5	Wood Pasture, amenity
	TOTAL (Hectares):	**2241**	**515**	

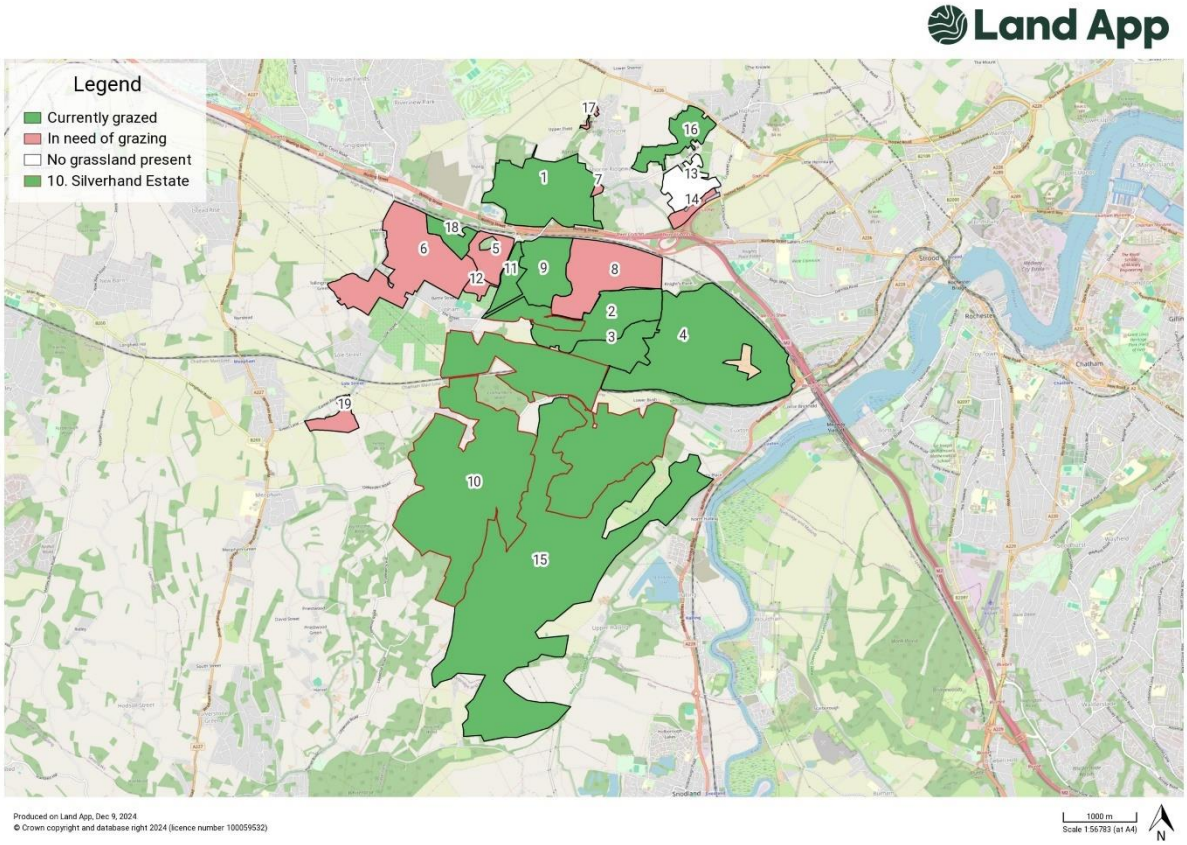
Green areas = already being grazed in some way
Pink areas = in need of grazing – either managed mechanically or not at all at present

The known areas in need of grazing going forwards total 44ha and range from 0.1ha – 26ha across 8 sites, although 2-3 of these sites are unlikely to be viable due to their small size, accessibility for livestock and high levels of public access.

There are a few landowners identified who may have additional land nearby that could be grazed in conjunction with the areas in the nature reserve – perhaps helping to provide grazing during times of the year when grasslands in the nature reserve need rest, and also a base for other grazing enterprise needs – such as buildings and yards for storage of equipment and housing animals at certain times. For example, Jeskyns Community Woodland (owned by the Forestry Commission) has some available barns for potential use by a grazier.

Above: Available barns at Jeskyns Community Woodland

There is also scope for adapting and improving the existing grazing which is taking place on 188ha across 7 other sites, ranging from 1ha to 64ha parcels, plus the Silverhand Estate's 270ha.



(Note the areas highlighted on this map are not indicative of the grazing areas, just the total site areas including woodland and other features)

Grazing needs

In general, and to further improve biodiversity and meet the aims of the proposed new nature reserve, the following are needed:

- **More grazing in general** – being a better option in many ways than doing nothing, and also better than mechanical intervention as a current proxy for grazing in some areas.

- **Right grazing at the right time** – many of the grassland and wood pasture habitats in the area need quite specific grazing at certain times to support their protection, maintenance and enhancement.
- **Rotation of grazing**, with appropriate **rest periods** for grassland recovery – overgrazing can be as detrimental for biodiversity as under-grazing, so increased rest periods would enable wild species to better flourish.
- **Different herbivores for different jobs** – in order to restore or maintain habitats different grazing and browsing techniques are required that have different impacts on vegetation.
- **Bracken and scrub control** to restore grassland habitats and ultimately increase grazing viability.

Together with specific details covered in the site assessments (appendices 1 - 19), a very brief summary of individual grazing requirements and stocking rates for each site are included below:

Site No.	Site Name	Grassland and grazing needs	Estimated current LUs/Ha	Estimated ideal LUs/Ha
1	Shorne Woods Country Park	More rotation of cattle over a short season, plus more bracken control	0.3	0.2
2	Cobham Woods	More rotation of cattle, plus bracken and scrub control - goats to assist?	0.2	0.3
3	Cuxton & Cobham Woodland Project	Pulse graze cattle in late summer, post flowering - ideally August	0.3	0.3
4	Ranscombe Farm	More rotation of cattle and sheep with smaller paddocks, post flowering	0.3	0.3
5	Ashenbank Wood	Pulse graze in summer with cattle, and goats to address scrub in late summer	0	0.2
6	Jeskyns Community Woodland	Rotationally graze cattle and consider integrating with woodland	0	0.5
7	Shorne Common Rough	Too small and unviable to graze, but should be kept open mechanically	0	0
8	Rochester & Cobham Golf Club	Mob graze cattle on rough tall grass areas for a short season	0	0.5
9	Cobham Hall School	More rotation of cattle grazing and rest periods to increase biodiversity	0.5	0.4
10	Silverhand Estate	Increase stock numbers of cattle and sheep, and extend current practice	0.2	0.4
11	West Park	More rotation of cattle grazing and rest periods to increase biodiversity	0.5	0.4
12	South Ashenbank Wood	Some coppice due to be cleared, opening up for some potential grazing	0	0.2
13	Great Crabbles Wood	Dense chestnut coppice unviable to graze amongst	0	0
14	Crabbles Bottom	Periodic pulse graze with sheep (orchard) and cattle (chalk grassland)	0	0.3
15	Holborough Woodlands	More rotation of cattle and sheep with smaller paddocks, plus some goats	0.15	0.3
16	Court Wood	Pulse graze small grassland area with sheep and or goats. Shoot rabbits.	0	0.2
17	Shorne Pasture	Pulse graze with sheep and or goats	0	0.2
18	Scalers Hill Wood	Remove and replace, or rotate horse grazing, to increase rest periods	0	0.3
19	Camer Park	Pulse graze with cattle, either year round or seasonally	0	0.4

N.b. Stocking rates (LUs/Ha) are based on typical bovine weight of 650 kilos, and according to a full calendar year (even though, in reality a much higher stocking rate may be applied, but only for part of the year or short 'pulse' graze). These are also based on current grazeable area, not necessarily for the whole site (where some areas may be woodland and ungrazeable) – for example the Silverhand estate has a fair and reasonable stocking rate on the grassland it is grazing but has many grassland areas currently ungrazed (due to various practical issues).

In each case these actions would be a good starting point and could be further refined following some monitoring, feedback and evaluation of progress.

Site assessments

Alongside surveying grassland potential and grazing needs, each of the sites were also assessed for their suitability to host grazing animals, as summarised below:

- At least 13 of the 19 sites have **water** available on the premises, but only 8 have a minimum provision of pipes and livestock drinking troughs.

- Eight (less than half) of the grazeable sites have a **secure fenced perimeter**, each of which are in various stages of repair and will not last forever without maintenance.
- Only 2 of the sites have any **suitable animal handling facilities** or corrals – at the Ranscombe Reserve and Silverhand Estate, but both of these (along with the other grazed sites) also rely on the livestock managers bringing their own mobile equipment to site.
- Two thirds of the sites have **suitable access for farm vehicles** (with livestock trailers etc.), with at least 2 additional sites in need of improved access points. The remainder are currently unviable for grazing and therefore not needing this provision.
- All of the sites have access to **shelter or dry lying space** for animals during adverse weather – mostly due to the presence of trees or embankments.
- Just over half of the sites currently have **grazing arrangements in place** but only one of these is fully meeting its **grazing objectives** in line with the goals of the proposed NNR.
- The majority (15) of the sites are suitable for **cattle grazing**, 14 for **sheep** and 8 for **goats**.
- All but 2 of the sites have **notable species or habitats** in need of specific management, that is either partly taking place or not at all.
- Half of the sites have a problem with thorn, **scrub or bracken encroachment**, some of which are being addressed (with limited success), but the majority not.
- **Invasive or non-native species** were found on 2 sites, but a more thorough check will be required ahead of livestock deployment.
- **Toxic plants** (such as Ragwort and Yew), other hazards or biosecurity risks were identified on all sites and will therefore need a fuller review on a site-by-site basis.
- **Public access** is taking place on nearly all of the sites but there are 5 in particular where the public access seriously impedes the possibilities of grazing – but none of which are insurmountable with the right infrastructure and support.
- Half of the sites have **SSSI** status bringing some additional obligations.
- Over half of the sites have a vegetation load which could be at **risk of fire**.
- Two thirds of the **landowners engaged** and met with are willing and interested to support grazing taking place on the properties under their management.
- Four of the landowning partners engaged have good **local in-house ecological knowledge** and expertise to support grazing management.

Further detail is provided in the individual site assessment forms (appendices 1 - 19), and in the site assessment summary table in appendix 20.

Meeting summaries

Alongside many individual conversations, two facilitated meetings were held to consult with local farmers and graziers, and the landowning partners within the proposed NNR. These were done as group meetings to help galvanise thinking and nurture some empowerment within the community for taking forward project recommendations. Full notes of each meeting are provided in appendices 21 and 22, with a summary included below:

Graziers' meeting – 25th September 2024

Ten local graziers came to a meeting at Lodge Barn in Cobham to hear about the grazing needs of the proposed NNR and contribute ideas as to the implementation of a new strategy. Several other local graziers were unable to make the meeting but have subsequently been spoken to and consulted.

The meeting considered how grazing would be delivered, and who would be best suited, including existing local graziers, other nearby farming businesses, a new entrant to farming, a new entity set up specifically, or a collective of multiple graziers with a range of livestock and skills. It was agreed that a mixed approach might be good, at least to start with whilst different options are explored.

Key challenges and considerations raised:

- **Infrastructure:** Establishing water sources, fencing, handling facilities, and safe access for livestock is crucial. Provision for GPS collars is also relevant for some sites.
- **Financial Viability:** Traditional grazing models may not be sustainable. Exploring alternative funding mechanisms like government support and payment for ecosystem services and delivery is necessary.
- **Knowledge and Skills:** Building expertise in ecological management, animal husbandry, and public engagement will be vital for both landowners and graziers.
- **Public Engagement:** Effective communication with the public is essential to address concerns and gain support for grazing activities.
- **Market Access:** Identifying suitable markets for livestock products, especially for niche breeds and conservation-grazed animals, is important.

Another common theme in thinking was that the grazier or graziers would need to work with other nearby landowners to create viable enterprises that can carry animals all year round i.e. when the animals are not wanted in the nature reserve areas. Depending on the animals, barns for winter housing may also be needed. These kinds of arrangements would need to be fostered and nurtured over time by the local people involved.

The conclusions were that there is potential interest for grazing within the nature reserve, but that further planning and investment is required. Graziers will need supporting with additional infrastructure, and new knowledge will be necessary to enable effective and safe delivery of grazing objectives. They will also need better routes to market that recognise the provenance of livestock and produce from the proposed NNR. Getting collaborative partnerships between landowners and graziers right will be key to successful development of viable grazing enterprises.

Landowners' meeting – 7th November 2024

Twelve of the landowning partners came together at Lodge Barn in Cobham to hear about the site survey findings and potential models for delivering grazing across the proposed NNR. A selection of grazing projects from elsewhere in the UK were outlined, including the Pembrokeshire Grazing Network, the Anglesey Grazing Animals project, and various private grazing businesses and services.

The goal of enhancing biodiversity through targeted grazing practices was then considered in conjunction with the issues and challenges raised by graziers. Solution topics included:

- **Collaborative Partnerships:** Working together as landowners to share resources, knowledge, and support for mutual benefit.
- **Financial Mechanisms:** Exploring government grants, payment for ecosystem services, and potential partnerships with local farming businesses to make grazing more viable.
- **Knowledge Sharing:** Organising training sessions and workshops to enhance skills and knowledge, alongside designated support from various experts.

- **Public Engagement Strategies:** Utilising social media, community events, and signage to educate the public and address and pre-empt concerns.
- **Market Development:** Exploring niche markets and building relationships with local butchers and retailers, some of whom can service lower income communities.

Many of the considerations for each landowner were similar and there are several areas where a consistent outward message and shared approach would be beneficial for the NNR's reputation and status. Collaborating on creating an opportunity for one or more graziers could be one example worth exploring in more detail, and for which a further meeting would be needed – with supplementary information and insight to be gathered from other relevant sites and professionals.

Summary of findings

To improve their ecological status, the grasslands and wood pastures need:	To enable delivery of grazing, the livestock and graziers need:	Grazing focused solutions for the landowners and the proposed NNR to pursue:
• More grazing in general • Right grazing at right time • Rotation of grazing, with rest periods • Different herbivores for different jobs • Bracken and scrub control	• Infrastructure investment • Financial Viability • Knowledge and Skills • Public Engagement • Market Access	• Collaborative Partnerships • Financial Mechanisms • Knowledge Sharing • Public Engagement Strategies • Market Development

Learning from success

The Pembrokeshire Grazing Network, established in 1999, is a successful model for conservation grazing in Wales. It is facilitated by Pembrokeshire Coast National Park involving three of their staff, their Farm Liaison Officer and two conservation officers with assistance from other staff where necessary.

The network manages 68 sites covering over 2,000 hectares of land (1500ha owned by third parties and 500ha owned/leased by Pembrokeshire Coast National Park), primarily using ponies due to the increased prevalence of Bovine tuberculosis. The network holds a list of land that requires grazing and a list of graziers who have approached the network over the years. Suitable graziers are matched with land belonging to third parties, facilitated by the National Park staff who then go on to work together unaided unless assistance is called for. On other sites that need very specific management a list of three, main, trusted graziers are used to graze several sites according to a grazing plan.

Key aspects of the network's success:

- **Strong partnerships:** At its inception Pembrokeshire National Park, the National Trust, PONT and the Countryside Council for Wales (now Natural Resources Wales) worked in partnership

to get sites into appropriate management. Once suitable grazing was established there was less of a need for partnership working but there are recent moves to re-establish the partnership to share best practice, funding and ensure that sites are appropriately grazed.

- **Experienced graziers:** There are three main graziers and an extensive list of potential graziers who are matched with landowners seeking graziers. The three main graziers are experienced and have a geographical split, one grazes the 36 sites in the north of the National Park, another grazes 20 sites in the West and another focusses on the 12 sites to the South.
- **Flexible management:** Graziers are set up with a grazing agreement, a management prescription and have to have third party public liability insurance. The conservation officers and Farm Liaison officer make site assessments and draw up a grazing timetable for the sites for each grazier. This is overseen by the staff and grazing altered as necessary. Trusted graziers are made aware of the outcomes required for the site and will aid in ensuring that they are grazed appropriately. Grazing has to be adaptive to respond to growing conditions etc. The Farm Liaison Officer is the main point of contact for the graziers and landowners, and he will respond to problems as they arise.
- **Financial sustainability:** Pembrokeshire Coast National Park pay for the three members of part-time staff from their core funds. They also use core funds to pay graziers for their time at £75 per site per month. The park will also pay an hourly rate to volunteer livestock checkers, and if the site is provided with a volunteer livestock checker the rate to graziers is £50 per site per month. The payment is considered compensation for the heavily restricted grazing window and expectation that livestock may have to be moved at short notice due to adverse ground conditions. Funding for capital items is found through external funding sought by the National Park or from Welsh Government Capital grants/ agri environment schemes. Some of the grazing facilitated on third party land may be paid for through landowners/ graziers claiming Basic Payment Scheme and agri-environment schemes.

Other successful models, such as the Anglesey Grazing Animals Project and private grazing businesses like Gower Meadow Beef and Grazing Management Ltd, highlight the potential for conservation grazing to work for graziers and landowners alike, whilst also contributing to biodiversity. However, challenges remain, including securing long-term funding, finding suitable graziers, and navigating complex regulations.

Further details on these case studies are included in appendix 23 - nearly all of the learnings are relevant to the proposed NNR in North Kent. However, it is also important to recognise that the contexts of these other areas are in some ways different – for example in Pembrokeshire there is a high demand for grazing for ponies, which are largely people's hobbies.

Implementation of the grazing strategy in North Kent

Based on the site surveys, individual and group discussions, and lessons from afar, there are multiple recommendations for enabling the grazing strategy to be implemented. The extent to which these can be followed through will be reliant on a number of factors, but most crucially on secured finances to support the project. The following recommendations have therefore been organised according to a small, medium or large budget against each of the parameters needing consideration.

Recommendations to enable grazing over most of the NNR	Small budget (similar to existing?)	Medium budget (some additional funding)	Large budget (ample funding for thorough work)
Livestock drinking water	Install sub-meters where possible to provide water on neighbouring sites. Support use of water bowsers also.	Where access to water exists, place suitably positioned pipes and troughs to enable targeted grazing.	Establish new water connections for sites currently without, and install associated pipes and troughs.
Livestock fencing	Maintain existing and accept grazing cannot take place on additional sites without exposure to extra risks.	Install or renew perimeter fencing and associated gates, stiles, etc. on sites where landowners can match fund.	Install perimeter fencing and associated gates, stiles, etc. on all sites in need of or capable of grazing.
Safe vehicular access	Maintain existing and keep in regular use to avoid vegetation building up or fly tipping.	Create a few strategically located access points that can serve several neighbouring and prioritised sites.	Create compliant access points and upgrade existing for all sites in need of grazing across the NNR.
Animal handling and equipment	Rely on graziers bringing their own equipment but recognise this may reduce their motivation to graze.	Purchase suitable mobile equipment that can be shared between landowners and graziers.	Ensure there are corrals for safe handling of animals on each site and funding (and training) for GPS collars.
Coordination, collaboration and governance	Hold periodic voluntary discussions regarding existing grazing and accept no capacity to be proactive in securing new grazing, or changing the existing.	Create a steering group made up of partners and external experts to loosely coordinate and inform existing and new additional grazing.	Create a steering group and funded coordinator position to work on the ground with graziers and public, with additional expertise contracted also.
Grazier engagement	Support and nurture existing grazier relationships to ensure they are kept on board. Keep an open mind for new relationships that may easily occur.	Partners to use existing and new resources to collaborate and create new and attractive grazing opportunities across multiple sites.	Financially incentivise specific and targeted grazing in accordance with needs for each site, making it worthwhile for all concerned.
Knowledge development	Partners work where they can to facilitate joined up thinking and promote grazing and ecological understanding via existing activities.	Provide basic livestock checker courses for selected volunteers who can work with existing and new graziers. Provide ecological training for volunteers also.	Create teams of willing volunteers via bespoke training to support roll out of grazing on all possible sites and engage next generation in the NNR.
Routes to market for livestock and subsequent produce	Use existing supply chains where possible and support those trying to make local food viable, recognising high end and low end markets.	Focus on creating demand for locally produced food and ideally from graziers grazing the NNR. Support initiatives that add value.	Establish dedicated facilities for processing and retailing products. Encourage local demand in deprived areas (e.g. subsidised school meals)
Public and community engagement	Leverage partners existing resources as far as possible to coordinate reactive messaging on ad-hoc basis.	Coordinate pro-active messaging to promote grazing and coherently deal with any negativity arising.	Ensure consistent messaging, signage and media coverage working alongside graziers across the entire NNR.

Some examples to accompany the above are provided below, and individual site reports (appendices 1 - 19) also include reference to actions required to enable grazing:

- **Livestock drinking water** – The Silverhand Estate has some land with no access to water which means delivering appropriate grazing management is difficult. There is a similar situation at Crabbles Bottom. Both ultimately need new mains connections as bowsering water is not necessarily a long-term solution. Also, installing additional water troughs at sites such as Cobham Woods, Holborough Woodlands and Ranscombe would better enable a rotation of focused grazing and rest periods around the sites.

- **Livestock fencing** – few graziers are prepared to risk grazing sites without a secure perimeter fence so some sites need new fences, and others need ongoing maintenance of fences. Public access needs to be carefully thought about in conjunction with fencing, gates, stiles, safety, etc. Partial funding may be available through ELM schemes to enable progress.

- **Safe vehicular access** – if access points are not regularly used they soon invite fly tipping or get used for car parking – so the existing ones need to be kept well maintained. Resources permitting the access to Crabbles Bottom could usefully be improved.

- **Animal handling and equipment** – access to shared equipment in the area would be useful, but ideally graziers will want their own equipment they can rely on and quickly use. Equally GPS collars, corrals and other mobile other equipment will largely be specific to each site or grazier, but their costs could be supported if resources were made available.

- **Coordination, collaboration and governance** The Pembrokeshire Grazing Network shows the real value in having a coordination function for smooth and effective delivery, but there is much else that can also be achieved with a simple governance structure to facilitate joined up thinking and collaboration with existing resources. There are lots of potential collaborations to be encouraged: neighbouring landowning partners working together (e.g. Jeskyns and Ashenbank, Cobham Woods and the golf course). Plus, there are several local landowners outside of the area who are interested to be involved. The interaction between organic and non-organic land parcels could also be explored whereby non-organic animals could graze organic land where there is a surplus of grazing providing it is for less than 120 days (amongst other key requirements and considerations). For example, there is potentially surplus grazing on the Silverhand Estate, such as that on Lodge lane in Cobham, which could be grazed by animals from the neighbouring parcels – but for now this isn't something the Estate are in favour of, and they are anyway working on increasing their own livestock numbers to fully graze all available areas in their ownership.

- **Grazier engagement** – existing grazing arrangements already in place are a priority focus. Some graziers have long-term tenancies and know the land and areas well, meaning they are a real asset to the proposed NNR. Where changes in grazing practices need to be made the graziers should be engaged very positively and supported to gain new knowledge and discover alternative approaches. Whatever the formal arrangements with existing or new graziers (grazing licenses, tenancies, partnership arrangements, etc.) they should be reviewed regularly with open dialogue to ensure habitat management is effectively delivered and equitable for all concerned.

- **Knowledge development –** in support of better grazing management that is integrated into the wider project, the development of new knowledge within the individuals and communities involved will be key to unlocking progress. For example, helping and empowering decision makers to know the difference between over-grazed and under-grazed in different ecological scenarios will enable existing practices to be tweaked. Also, trialling and observing the benefits of more animal rotation within sites will feed motivation for habitat improvement. Regular discussions around knowledge and new ideas will naturally clarify responsibilities to ensure management interventions are well founded and do not get missed or fall through any gaps.

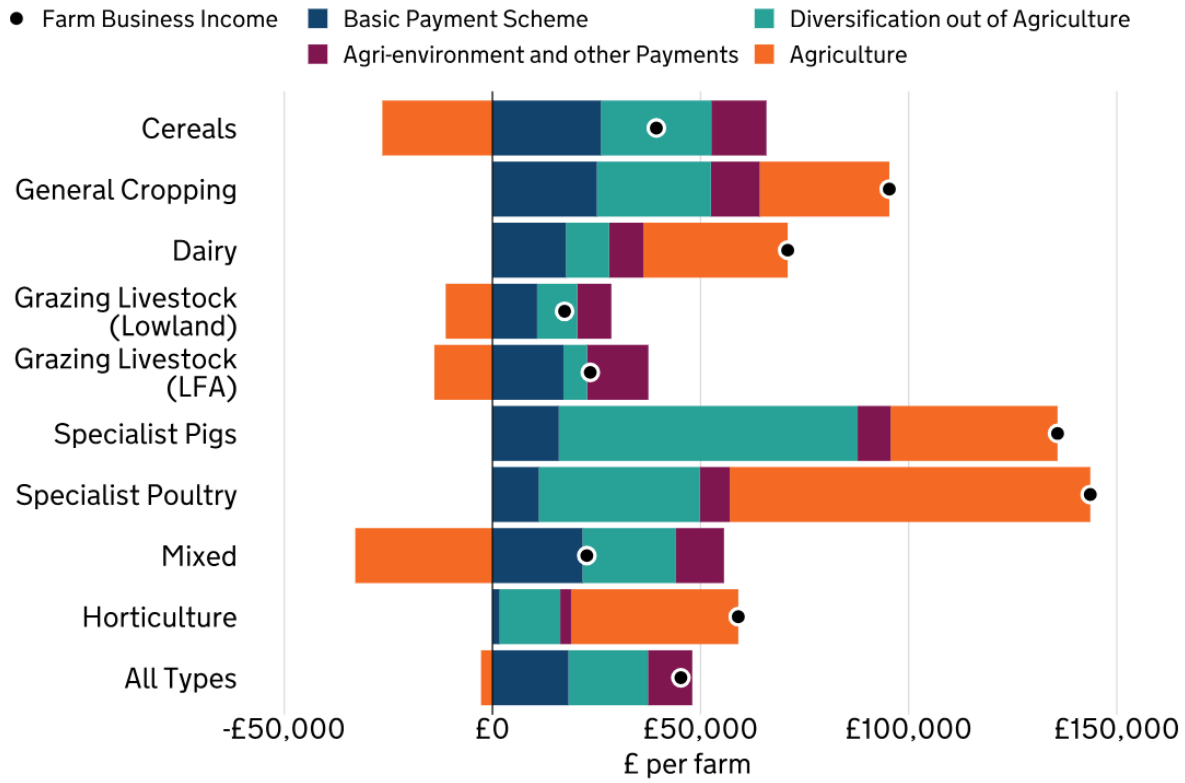
- **Routes to market for livestock and subsequent produce** - successfully marketing produce from the proposed NNR will require several strategies to be employed. Firstly, recognising the unique qualities of conservation-grazed meat, such as its health benefits and environmental impact. This can be achieved through labelling (such as Pasture for Life certification) and marketing campaigns that highlight these attributes. Secondly, by exploring and supporting new markets, such as schools and local businesses, high-end and low-end, demand for these products can be increased. High-end buyers could be encouraged to support low-end buyers through schemes such as "Linking up suppliers and hubs (LUSH)" operating in Gloucestershire: https://realfarming.org/resource/lush-starter-pack/. Additionally, providing business support to farmers can enhance their marketing skills and enable them to develop innovative sales strategies (e.g. selling direct to consumers, working with others, using signage on footpaths, etc.). By implementing these approaches, it will be possible to largely overcome the challenges associated with marketing conservation grazed, non-commercial breeds and create a sustainable local market for livestock products.

- **Public and community engagement** – there are lots of activities already going on between partners and giving these some focused alignment and coordination would begin bringing the local communities on board with new and increased grazing. Volunteer training to help with livestock checking provided by Kent Wildlife Trust or the Rare Breed Survival Trust's Grazing Animals Project (https://www.rbst.org.uk/Pages/Events/Category/training) can help engage people practically. There are other aspects to be pursued too, from access to rejuvenated green spaces and healthier food, to education opportunities for the next generation of ecologists and farmers. Good news stories can be developed collaboratively between partners, for example how the RSPB and partners have been telling the story of grazing Pulborough Brooks in Sussex: https://www.theargus.co.uk/news/24342050.rspb-pulborough-brooks-west-sussex-home-beautiful-cows/

The economics of implementation

Landowners are keen for their grazing land to return some value, if not financially, then by some other means where it brings other benefits or income. On the flip side, to invest in grazing infrastructure, and subsequently manage grazing is going to take time, increase financial commitments and raise exposure to risk – so it needs to be worthwhile as many organisations and landowners are already stretched.

At the same time, farmers and graziers are facing increasingly poor returns, especially those grazing livestock in the lowlands, as shown below by the Defra farm business figures for the year 2023/24:



On lowland grazing livestock farms, average Farm Business Income fell by nearly a quarter to £17,300 driven by lower output from crop and sheep enterprises. And the general picture for this year, and many recent years is that the grazing livestock enterprise loses money – it is only subsidies, environmental payments and non-agricultural diversification income that enable businesses to turn a profit – albeit a very small one.

Without funding this means the appetite for any additional grazing in the proposed NNR, especially with any specific prescriptions for conservation, is going to be low. Farm businesses will need to ensure it is worth their while too.

The ultimate financial arrangement between landowner and grazier will come down to individual circumstances and need to be negotiated as part of any new agreement. It will be heavily influenced by the availability of infrastructure, the practicalities of management delivery, the level of animal husbandry required, and amount of public engagement needed.

Securing funding for delivery of grazing management is therefore going to be essential to enable equitable and effective arrangements to be developed.

Funding

The primary source of funding for farmers and land managers in England is the Environmental Land Management (ELM) scheme. This scheme replaces the previous Basic Payment Scheme and aims to reward farmers for environmentally friendly practices. ELM comprises three main schemes:

1. **Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI):** This scheme rewards farmers for adopting sustainable farming practices, such as improving soil health, reducing pesticide use, and enhancing biodiversity.

2. **Countryside Stewardship (CS):** This scheme provides funding for more ambitious environmental projects, such as creating wildlife habitats, restoring peatlands, and improving water quality.
3. **Landscape Recovery (LR):** This scheme aims to support large-scale land-use change for the long-term with funding from public and private sources, producing environmental and climate outcomes through habitat and ecosystem restoration.

Several landowners in the NNR are already engaged with ELM schemes, or its predecessors, but a number are not and could secure new agreements that would help fund grazing management and some of the costs of infrastructure:

Sustainable Farming Incentive

Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) land management options to consider could be:

Code	SFI actions for farmland wildlife and habitats on grassland	Annual payment (per hectare)	Action's duration
CIGL1	Take grassland field corners or blocks out of management	£333	3 years
CIGL2	Winter bird food on improved grassland	£515	3 years
CLIG3	Manage grassland with very low nutrient inputs	£151	3 years
GRH1	Manage rough grazing for birds	£121	3 years
GRH6	Manage priority habitat species-rich grassland (endorsed)	£646	5 years
GRH7	Supplement: Haymaking	£157	3 years
GRH8	Supplement: Haymaking (late cut)	£187	3 years
GRH10	Supplement: Lenient grazing	£28	3 years
GRH11	Supplement: Cattle grazing (non-moorland)	£59	5 years
SCR1	Create scrub and open habitat mosaics	£588	5 years
SCR2	Manage scrub and open habitat mosaics	£350	3 years

Source: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sustainable-farming-incentive-scheme-expanded-offer-for-2024/sfi-scheme-information-expanded-offer-for-2024

There is a further option supplement (SPM2) that will pay £92/ha for grazing with native breeds which may be relevant for some graziers, and generally worthwhile over more commercial breeds.

Grants for infrastructure could also be possible in association with these land management options, such as FG1 & FG2 for livestock fencing. However, at the time of writing there are now some limitations on the amount of capital grants available due to their being over-subscribed.

To establish new agreements landowners and or the land managers / graziers could do this themselves or employ the services of a land agent or consultant. Another possibility for collaboration in the proposed NNR is to do this work together to share learning and understanding. Whichever options are pursued those responsible must make sure they are able to deliver the scheme requirements. The agreement holder could be the landowner or grazier depending on the arrangement they have between one another.

Countryside Stewardship

The Countryside Stewardship level of ELMs is, at the time of writing, still under review as part of the agricultural transition process. The aim is for it to focus on the most environmentally important land, such as sites of special scientific interest, commons and woodlands.

When the new scheme opens, it will offer a range of actions to carry out more ambitious environmental activities than are included in SFI, and also opportunities to apply for capital items to help do the actions. Specialist advice from Natural England or the Forestry Commission will be needed to apply.

Defra pledged to publish details in 2024 on who will be eligible, what the management options and payment rates will be, and how to go about applying – but at the time of writing nothing has been announced.

It seems likely that much of the land in the proposed NNR will be both eligible and suitable for delivering against the new countryside stewardship options, so there is perhaps merit in seeing what gets announced ahead of rushing into SFI agreements.

Landscape Recovery

Landscape scale projects using public and private funding is a new approach and so the Landscape Recovery scheme is still in development with a number of pilot projects around the country. At present there is not a pilot project covering the proposed NNR.

Landscape Recovery may become relevant in the area in the future, but it does not prevent land managers from pursuing SFI or CS as Defra state that it is possible to be involved with both and that they will assist with any future transition to avoid double funding.

In the absence of other sources of funding materialising it may be a good avenue to pursue.

Other sources of funding

There may be other relevant sources of funding besides from government, such as Green Finance or private investment via Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG). Many such opportunities are still emerging but through collaboration across the NNR options may become worthwhile and plug forecast funding gaps. Such funding could not only support physical infrastructure and management improvements, but also skills and knowledge development.

For example, Growing Kent and Medway, possibly into its “2.0” iteration by summer 2025, could possibly be a means for helping businesses adapt to changes and introduce new skills by leveraging student research or consultancy.

Targeted seed funding could also be an essential catalyst for start-up grazing enterprises, that aren’t supported by any other means.

Possibly there will also be a new iteration of FiPl (Funding in Protected Landscapes) which could be relevant to work in the area.

Costs for implementation

Investments in capital items will need to be made upfront to initiate grazing, and then further payments to manage, deliver and coordinate the grazing thereafter:

Capital items (approximate costs for which are included in the site assessments)

- **Fencing** – a typical stock fence, installed by a contractor, will today, with current costs of materials and labour, be in the region of £10-15/m – especially if the quantities are small and fiddly. Fence posts could be sourced locally from chestnut coppice, but this is unlikely to make a huge difference to costs. Existing fencing also needs maintaining and depending on age and condition, a small maintenance budget should be allowed for, perhaps starting at 50p/m per year.

- **Water** – costs for installing water on each site will largely depend on how far away the water connections will be. Typically, it could be £1/m to mole plough in a pipe including the pipe, pipe fittings, machinery and labour. A water trough installed with floating ball valve shut-off and solid base would be in the region of £250 per unit. More specialist troughs may be needed if they are required to cope with cold weather. For a decent road-worthy bowser, a minimum budget of £2000 should be allocated. If a water connection needs to be established on the mains supply, then at least £5000 should be allocated. If traffic management is needed to allow a connection to be made, then this will easily double.


Above: Example of mobile water bowser with inbuilt drinking trough, and fixed in-field trough

- **Animal Handling** – a fully mobile animal handling system will, depending on quality and brand, cost at least £18,000 for cattle, and £9000 for sheep. Additional hurdles may also be required. Building a permanent corral system or pens, perhaps made from local materials and or motorway crash barriers, would cost around three thousand pounds.


Above: Mobile handling systems for sheep (left) and cattle (right)

Above: Example of inexpensive corral with calving gate and head yoke

- **GPS collars** – these are approximately £250 per unit for the Norwegian NoFence brand, with £50 per year fees, plus spare batteries. For a site such as Cobham Woods with around 10 cattle, this would mean a required investment of around £2,500, plus running costs or around £500 per year. Exact costs may vary, and a deal could potentially be done for greater numbers. Other brands of collar are also now entering the UK market. Collars could also help negate the need (and therefore cost) for robust fencing on some sites, especially where internal fences are needed. Whether collars would be purchased and owned by the graziers or landowners would be up for negotiation as part of a grazing arrangement.

Above: Longhorn Cow at Epping Forest wearing a 'NoFence' GPS collar

Management costs

Costs for implementing the grazing will vary from site to site. For some sites where the grazier can do as they please and have full control of the land, they may be prepared to do so for free or even pay a small amount. Generally, however, and to have some control over the grazing delivered, most of the sites in the proposed NNR will need to pay for specific grazing prescriptions. Such payments will most likely be based on the following:

- Numbers and type of animals required
- Length of time the animals are required
- How often the animals will need moving
- How often the animals will need checking by the grazier vs volunteer livestock checkers
- Whether or not there is good infrastructure, e.g. fencing, water troughs, access, etc.
- The level of public engagement required of the grazier
- The amount of admin needed to coordinate and complete mandatory paperwork

Some graziers have set prices for each of these aspects and have a framework for pricing the grazing requirements of a site. To determine an exact price, it would be best for landowners to agree what they want, individually or collectively, and invite some graziers to quote.

Coordination costs

To ensure grazing across the reserve is both effective and consistent for landowners, land managers, graziers/farmers, the public, the nature reserve and animals themselves, an element of coordination and public engagement will be required. This would be best served via a dedicated role, most likely part-time, providing an interface predominantly between graziers and landowners, but also anyone else with a vested interest in the area such as volunteers and footpath users in the community. They could also help provide essential assistance to graziers when moving animals between sites or assessing animal impact in line with ecological objectives. Importantly they will be able to join dots across the whole area and see solutions that individual partners cannot. Much like the coordination conducted for the Pembrokeshire Grazing Network and others (detailed in appendix 23), this function will enable grazing improvements and therefore improvement of the whole area. Ideally this role would be supported by a steering group of partners and experts from the area. Furthermore, this kind of role is already being successfully demonstrated at the Ranscombe reserve where Ben Sweeney is helping to ensure everything runs smoothly between grazing and the desired ecological outcomes, and with visitors to the site – including volunteers.

A budget of around £50k per year should be allocated for such a role, including a vehicle (4x4) and expenses. However, if the role could form part of another wider function within the nature reserve or with one of the partners, this cost [allocated specifically to grazing] could perhaps be halved.

Conclusions

Grazing animals are integral to the maintenance of rural heritage, landscapes, and open spaces. They support the culture and traditions of rural communities while also promoting physical and mental well-being for the broader population. Their role in sustaining healthy ecosystems, promoting biodiversity, ensuring the continued vitality of rural areas and their surrounding environments, and fostering a sense of connection to nature cannot be overstated.

The grazing requirements of the proposed national nature reserve in North Kent are complex and varied, but can be met with time, patience, appropriate knowledge and skills, proactive community engagement and equitable financial mechanisms. The grasslands generally need more grazing at the right time, with the right animals and suitable rest periods between grazing, and there are a range of options for delivering these depending on available resources. A blend of regenerative and conservation grazing practices will be ideal. Additionally, there are possible funding opportunities to explore which may cover some or all of the costs of management and capital investments.

Whilst there are practical recommendations to be implemented, the key to success will also be reliant on the people involved and their relationships with one another. It is therefore important to focus on building community momentum in order to deliver something meaningful and long lasting in the area. Essential to all of this will be a coordinator role that can help manage relationships with everyone involved, or with a vested interest, and be proactive in ensuring the best possible grazing management takes place for the benefit of nature across the entire reserve.

Suggested next steps

To keep the ball rolling and some momentum with ongoing conversations, the following next steps are suggested:

- Present this full report to relevant audiences
- Organise a combined gathering with landowners and graziers and other key people in the community and with connection to the project to further explore the grazing opportunities and practicalities. This could involve a number of guest speakers to bring in knowledge about different grazing models and practical applications, some information on training for volunteer livestock checkers, plus some brainstorming workshops to further build impetus and connection for local solutions. Also sharing information on the funding landscape and options available to land managers and graziers alike. A full day would be needed.
- Arrange a visit to Epping Forest for landowners and interested graziers to see where and how grazing cattle are managed using GPS collar technology in an area with very high visitor numbers.
- Arrange a visit to Pembrokeshire National Park for a selection of landowners, graziers and other key people who may be involved in the grazing of the proposed NNR to see how their coordination works in practice, and how the relationships with graziers, landowners and the public are managed so that lessons may be learned.
- Support landowners to individually explore securing government support through the ELM scheme to help finance grazing management.
- Support landowners to approach potential graziers and explore opportunities for working together and defining exact pricing and needs for making an arrangement worthwhile.

END MAIN REPORT

APPENDICES 1 – 19: SITE ASSESSMENT REPORTS

Site assessment			
Site name & Location	1. Shorne Woods Country Park – "The Knoll"	**Total Site Size (ha)**	124
Date visited	29/7/24	**Grazing area (ha)**	6
Landowner/ Land manager	KCC – Tim Bell		
Soil type / Habitat/s	Wood pasture. Acid grassland. Part of SSSI		
Past management/ history	Kent Wildlife Trust are contracted to graze, approximately May to July. Nine Longhorns grazed for 2 months in 2023, and fifteen Sussex for 2 months in 2024.		
Species of management priority	Veteran trees. Grassland grazed too tight to see any specific grassland species.		
Notable species encountered on visit	Bracken – this is dominating in many areas, although some topping has been done to try and control.		
Desired outcome for site	Reduction of bracken and control of other species (e.g. birch) if get dominant. Increase acid grassland species diversity and abundance. Adjacent woodland would benefit from livestock interaction (if done sensitively), but currently not allowable under SSSI constraints.		
Grazing period, number and species current/ suggested	Suggest grazing cattle later in July/August to give grassland species more chance. This may clash with busy summer holiday period, so Sept/October or winter grazing could also be trialled. A basic rotation of livestock grazing using GPS collars (and additional watering points) could also increase animal impact on the bracken. Stocking rate of 0.2 LUs/ha is probably sufficient, equating to around 8 adult dexter cattle for maximum of 3 months.		
Ground/ water contamination	None seen		
Drinking water availability	1 x water trough with mains supply		
Toxic plants	Yew – which has been heavily browsed, indicating the cattle have been pushed too hard. Ragwort – present but not dominating.		
Hazards	Undulating slopes and dead wood – but unlikely to be an issue for cattle		

Public access	Yes, with multiple paths crossing the area and likely free roaming across the whole area. High numbers of visitors to the park in general. The site managers are actively engaging with visitors about the presence of livestock and the need to control dogs, etc. or use alternative paths if they wish.
Condition of fencing and type	Good. A few minor repairs needed in a few places.
Animal handling present/ suggested	None seen – presume mobile handling system has been used in the past.
Evidence of illegal off road driving	None
Access for vehicles and livestock (including ground conditions and turning)	Yes. Access route from main car park and entrance and sufficient hard standing for turning.
Risk of feeding from public/ garden waste	Unlikely
Fly tipping	None seen
Biosecurity (water, nose to nose contact, wildlife)	No adjacent livestock and no evidence of deer, but dogs and foxes will likely pose a Neosporin risk to any breeding females placed on the site.
Shelter and dry lying	Yes
Fire Risk (fuel load, history)	Yes, some, especially hot dry summers – one reason to graze sooner
Invasive non-native species	Caper Spurge
Previous issues	Over grazing leading to cattle stripping bark.
Approximate costs for infrastructure improvement	Minor fencing repair and maintenance annually - £500 Enhanced water infrastructure - £1000 Permanent corral with head yoke (optional) - £3000 (Assume grazier can bring own GPS collars) Volunteers could potentially be engaged, and own materials used to reduce costs.
Notes	Grazing pressure from rabbits also noted. Allowing grass to get longer may help to deter them. Bracken rolling, twice annually would be beneficial alongside grazing management and some topping.

Site assessment			
Site name & Location	2. Cobham Woods	**Total Site Size (ha)**	76
Date visited	30/7/24	**Grazing area (ha)**	64
Landowner/ Land manager	National Trust – Jonathan Ireland		
Soil type / Habitat/s	Clay over limestone. Wood pasture. Part of SSSI.		
Past management/ history	Highland cattle grazing at low stocking rates year-round. Some wood pasture restoration work under way.		
Species of management priority	Veteran trees including Oak and Sweet Chestnut.		
Notable species encountered on visit	Bracken – this is dominating and continuing to encroach in many areas.		
Desired outcome for site	Reduction of bracken and increase areas of functioning grassland, to the benefit of the trees. More rotation of cattle to diversify the habitat and improve impact on scrub and bracken. Pigs could be sensitively used on the bracken, but this is likely out of the question in terms of practicalities, SSSI and public access. Goats could also play a part in controlling some of the scrub, but again could be practically challenging and beyond those willing to engage with the management.		
Grazing period, number and species current/ suggested	0.5 LUs/ha should be achievable following reduction of bracken and better impact on scrub. Probably around 0.2 LUs/ha currently. The year-round grazing appears to be doing okay (and with it brings various benefits for biodiversity) but rotating cattle would allow grassland species to thrive better and compete with bracken (which could be trampled simultaneously with appropriate grazing intensity).		
Ground/ water contamination	None seen / unlikely		
Drinking water availability	1 x water trough with mains supply		
Toxic plants	Ragwort – present but not dominating.		
Hazards	Fallen trees and standing dead wood. Also potential for dog attacks.		
Public access	Yes, on public footpaths and multiple other desire lines.		
Condition of fencing and type	Good although a full survey may be advisable if changes are made that may increase pressure on the fencing.		

Animal handling present/ suggested	Evidence of an old corral now in disrepair – presume mobile handling system has been used more recently. An alternative design with funnel system may be worth considering if reconstructed in conjunction with altered grazing regime.
Evidence of illegal off road driving	None
Access for vehicles and livestock (including ground conditions and turning)	Yes – good hard track from Cobham.
Risk of feeding from public/ garden waste	Unlikely
Fly tipping	None seen
Biosecurity (water, nose to nose contact, wildlife)	None, but possible contact with other animals should grazing take place on the golf course or leisure plots – unless it was done by same grazier. Dogs and foxes will likely pose a Neosporin risk to any breeding females placed on the site.
Shelter and dry lying	Yes plenty of trees and elevated areas of dry ground throughout
Fire Risk (fuel load, history)	Minimal
Invasive non-native species	None seen
Previous issues	Some bark stripping seen – possible over stocking and winter hunger.
Approximate costs for infrastructure improvement	Minor fencing repair and maintenance annually - £500 Enhanced water infrastructure - £1500 Permanent corral with head yoke (optional) - £3000 (Assume grazier can bring own GPS collars) Volunteers could potentially be engaged, and own materials used to reduce costs.
Notes	Best approach may be to divide area into 3 or 4 blocks to rotate between initially and see how this goes and monitor positive and negative impacts. GPS collars could be used instead of permanent fenced divisions. Bracken rolling, twice annually would be beneficial alongside grazing management and some topping in denser areas. Some evidence of deer, but unlikely to be an issue to grazing, especially if using virtual fencing.

Site assessment			
Site name & Location	3. Cuxton and Cobham Woodland Project	**Total Site Size (ha)**	46
Date visited	31/7/24	**Grazing area (ha)**	1
Landowner/ Land manager	West Kent Downs Countryside Trust – Mike Adams		
Soil type / Habitat/s	Chalk grassland, wood pasture and closed canopy mixed woodland		
Past management/ history	Various! Mostly chestnut coppice and small orchard area opened up for grazing once per year – which is scheduled to be expanded.		
Species of management priority	Chalk grassland species		
Notable species encountered on visit	Sweet chestnut dominating		
Desired outcome for site	Maintain existing grazing and expand into nearby wood pasture areas. Goats could be used to control hawthorn and other scrub, but given the small area and practicalities this may be too difficult – so mechanical intervention is likely best.		
Grazing period, number and species current/ suggested	Usually “pulse” grazed in September, and this appears suitable for all concerned. The number of days grazing is typically based on the number of animals available for grazing that can be loaned by Andrew Lingham who grazes adjacent. Importantly it is not, and should not, be grazed in the flowering period.		
Ground/ water contamination	Potential due to previous dumping in the area		
Drinking water availability	Due to be connected to Ranscombe water supply via sub-meter.		
Toxic plants	Ragwort – present but not dominating.		
Hazards	Steep slopes, fallen trees and standing dead wood. Also potential for dog attacks.		
Public access	Yes, on public footpath which passes through orchard.		
Condition of fencing and type	Good and more new fencing planned. Kissing gates also in good order.		
Animal handling present/ suggested	Corral at Ranscombe is used.		

Evidence of illegal off road driving	None
Access for vehicles and livestock (including ground conditions and turning)	There is a track but it is in poor condition and wouldn't be easy for animal extraction – better to access via Ranscombe reserve.
Risk of feeding from public/ garden waste	Unlikely
Fly tipping	Some in past
Biosecurity (water, nose to nose contact, wildlife)	Potential contact with animals at Cobham Woods, or if Ranscombe grazier changed. Would need fully assessing if grazing areas substantially increased. Dogs and foxes will likely pose a Neosporin risk to any breeding females placed on the site.
Shelter and dry lying	Yes - trees
Fire Risk (fuel load, history)	Minimal
Invasive non-native species	None seen
Previous issues	Dumping
Approximate costs for infrastructure improvement	Additional fencing to expand grazing area slightly - £2500 Track improvements for better access - £5000 Volunteers could potentially be engaged, and own materials used to reduce costs.
Notes	Small team of volunteers doing bulk of maintenance with occasional grant support. They are being proactive in wanting to work with graziers. Woodland management plan sounds restrictive towards any potential woodland grazing. Cattle dung previously collected, allegedly on ecologists' advice, but suggest this is not necessary as it could support more biodiversity and populate grassland from seed bank at Ranscombe.

Site assessment			
Site name & Location	4. Ranscombe Farm	**Total Site Size (ha)**	265
Date visited	30/7/24	**Grazing area (ha)**	60
Landowner/ Land manager	Plantlife (25%) + Medway Council (75%). Ben Sweeney		
Soil type / Habitat/s	Restored chalk grassland, conservation arable and woodland glades		
Past management/ history	Plantlife have been joint owners for 19 years (Ben in post for 16 years). Andrew Lingham has been the tenant throughout, now under a 5 year rolling FBT.		
Species of management priority	Corn cockle, clustered bellflower, broad leafed cudweed, stinking camomile, man orchids.		
Notable species encountered on visit	High invertebrate numbers. Spurge Laurel. Meadow Clary.		
Desired outcome for site	More cattle and or sheep grazing and more grazing management. Higher density grazing to help the meadow clary, and better utilisation of pasture by animals, and trample ligneous material. Cattle are best suited for what's needed. Changing time of year of grazing in some areas would also help diversify the habitats – i.e. not sticking to the same rotation or period every year.		
Grazing period, number and species current/ suggested	Ideally July onwards (and off by Spring). Either needs more animals for shorter period, or same numbers for same period but rotated around more intently to create required impact.		
Ground/ water contamination	None evident		
Drinking water availability	Yes, all fields.		
Toxic plants	Yew (in woodland) and Spurge Laurel (poisonous to livestock). Occasional ragwort.		
Hazards	Potential for dog attacks.		
Public access	Medium numbers of footpath users, although given the type and distance from conurbations, walkers appear respectful and stick to the [often fenced] paths.		
Condition of fencing and type	Very good throughout – actively maintained.		

Animal handling present/ suggested	3 corrals on site – purpose built from own chestnut materials
Evidence of illegal off road driving	None
Access for vehicles and livestock (including ground conditions and turning)	Good throughout
Risk of feeding from public/ garden waste	Unlikely
Fly tipping	Some in past, now better managed / deterred
Biosecurity (water, nose to nose contact, wildlife)	There would need to be some double fencing if a second grazier took over the other fields (“Brockles”) to the south (not in Andrew Lingham’s main tenancy). Dogs and foxes will likely pose a Neosporin risk to any breeding females placed on the site.
Shelter and dry lying	Sufficient
Fire Risk (fuel load, history)	Minimal
Invasive non-native species	None seen
Previous issues	
Approximate costs for infrastructure improvement	Additional fencing to expand grazing areas - £2500 (already in hand) Additional water infrastructure and mobile equipment to allow more focused grazing - £1500 Volunteers could potentially be engaged, and own materials used to reduce costs.
Notes	Scope for more grassland (via arable reversion) if tenant willing and can deliver required management. Also a number of woodland glades would benefit from grazing and occasional livestock interaction.

Site assessment			
Site name & Location	5. Ashenbank Wood	**Total Site Size (ha)**	29
Date visited	30/7/24	**Grazing area (ha)**	1-2
Landowner/ Land manager	Woodland Trust / Andrew Goodwin and Clive Steward		
Soil type / Habitat/s	SSSI Ancient woodland with some grassy glades		
Past management/ history	Cattle grazing with Highlands from 2012, but grazier moved on to Cobham woods. Sussex cattle then introduced until 2018 when grazier stopped, allegedly after challenges with public engagement, and momentum subsequently lost.		
Species of management priority	Veteran trees		
Notable species encountered on visit	Mature chestnuts and Oaks		
Desired outcome for site	Reintroduce cattle periodically to graze down grassy glades and other browse. Goats would also be able to help reduce the bramble load and open up the understory for more grassland. Possible thinning of undesirable tree species would assist habitat improvement.		
Grazing period, number and species current/ suggested	Times of the year to graze can be flexible. Use GPS collars on all animals to control and focus grazing, and assist public engagement. Half a dozen adult cattle could spend a month per year on the site as a starting point, and either the number of animals or grazing period could be increased over time as habitat is restored. Given the public access (including dogs being walked), small numbers of goats would be best rotated around the site to target specific areas for restoration.		
Ground/ water contamination	None seen		
Drinking water availability	Water trough bisecting the internal fence about 50m in from the car park with its own connection to the mains supply, also on the bund by the car park entrance next to the road.		
Toxic plants	Yew		
Hazards	Potential for dog attacks. Some steep slopes, plus fallen and standing deadwood. Old wire fencing collapsed onto the floor and getting taken over by undergrowth.		

Public access	A very popular spot with most people parking at the car park and doing a loop
Condition of fencing and type	Stock netting okay in places, but many lengths in poor repair and hardly stock proof. Some fencing lying on the ground. Several kissing gates broken.
Animal handling present/ suggested	None seen – a grazier could use mobile handling equipment (subject to access)
Evidence of illegal off road driving	None
Access for vehicles and livestock (including ground conditions and turning)	Limited. Car park appears the best location, although it is busy and parked cars may block access for farm vehicles. There is also a height barrier. Access via a track on the western boundary and the track to 'The Mount' may also be possible with some improvements.
Risk of feeding from public/ garden waste	Unlikely
Fly tipping	None seen
Biosecurity (water, nose to nose contact, wildlife)	Possible nose to nose if other livestock present at Jeskyns or Scalers Hill. Dogs and foxes will likely pose a Neosporin risk to any breeding females placed on the site.
Shelter and dry lying	Yes
Fire Risk (fuel load, history)	Yes
Invasive non-native species	None seen
Previous issues	Public engagement with graziers and or livestock
Approximate costs for infrastructure improvement	Repair / replacement of ring fence (inc. disposal of old) - £25,000 Gate repairs and improvements - £1000 Access improvements (2 people, plus mini-digger, 2 days) - £2000 Installation of basic corral (optional) - £3000 Update signage for livestock (inc. flip signs for gates) - £1500 Volunteers could potentially be engaged, and own materials used to reduce costs.
Notes	Cattle signage still in place and should be updated or taken down so that the public don't become complacent about the potential for livestock interaction. Obvious solution is to have grazing animals rotating between here and Jeskyns, and maybe South Ashenbank wood but Forestry Commission seem reluctant.

Site assessment			
Site name & Location	6. Jeskyns Community Woodland	**Total Site Size (ha)**	140
Date visited	31/7/24	**Grazing area (ha)**	26+
Landowner/ Land manager	Forestry Commission – Oliver Wilton		
Soil type / Habitat/s	Loam. Grassland without significant flora species and young native woodland		
Past management/ history	Arable farm purchased by FC and converted to woodland and grassland in 2004. Fields formerly grazed by a tenant and Jeskyns Young Farmers, but now ungrazed since 2023. Fields were last topped 2023. Some cut and collect on grassland areas outside of the fenced field boundaries.		
Species of management priority	Calcareous grassland in need of development support, new trees still vulnerable, orchard trees, emerging scrub.		
Notable species encountered on visit	Skylark, green woodpecker, kestrel, yellowhammer		
Desired outcome for site	The FC's longer-term aim (based on previous consultation) is to create a mixed parkland with open calcareous grassland interspersed with native woodland and orchards – representative of a Kentish landscape. Maintaining habitat for skylarks, lapwings and yellowhammers would also be beneficial.		
Grazing period, number and species current/ suggested	Stocking rate of 0.5 LUs/ha would enable a low input extensive system that would support habitat development. Timing of grazing can be flexible so could be usefully grazed when other areas in the NNR have restricted grazing due to flowering periods. Additional areas of young woodland and emerging scrub are also crying out for being grazed, and this would help with their long-term development if done sensitively. Could be managed like Epping Forest.		
Ground/ water contamination	None seen		
Drinking water availability	Borehole available, allegedly supplying water across the site but water troughs absent from most fields and knowledge of pipe locations lost. Water diviner needed to ascertain where to start looking.		
Toxic plants	Ragwort – present but not dominating.		
Hazards	Potential for dog attacks		
Public access	350,000 visitors per year (60% of whom are walking dogs), mainly using marked tracks and kept out of grazing fields. However, a number of other desire lines are developing. The site managers have previously engaged visitors about the presence of livestock but they have now been absent for some time and people/dog walkers/dogs have got used to their not being there.		

Condition of fencing and type	Poor condition and most in need of replacement. Depending on extent to which grazing is conducted a greater ring fence could be installed and old fences removed. Grazing animals could then be grazed within temporary or virtual boundaries.
Animal handling present/ suggested	None present but there's a yard available (and barns) with adjacent small paddock that could usefully be a location for animal handling.
Evidence of illegal off road driving	None
Access for vehicles and livestock (including ground conditions and turning)	Good tracks throughout.
Risk of feeding from public/ garden waste	High chance given number of visitors, many with picnics!
Fly tipping	None seen
Biosecurity (water, nose to nose contact, wildlife)	No adjacent livestock and no evidence of deer, but dogs and foxes will likely pose a Neosporin risk to any breeding females placed on the site.
Shelter and dry lying	Limited shelter in fields, but woodland areas have ideal shelter.
Fire Risk (fuel load, history)	High if fields continue to be left ungrazed in a droughty year. Visitor BBQs should be carefully avoided.
Invasive non-native species	None seen
Previous issues	Jeskyns YFC allegedly grazed unsympathetically to nature using sheep. Water availability was also an issue and a lack of funding for infrastructure improvements led to a strained relationship and eventual cessation of the grazing agreement – resulting in some bad press and nervousness within the local FC.
Approximate costs for infrastructure improvement	Water diviner to ascertain likely water locations - £2000 Reinstated watering points, unknown but allow £5000 Replace fencing around current fields (and dispose old) - £50,000 Mobile water infrastructure - £1500 Permanent corral with head yoke (optional) - £3000 (Assume grazier can bring own GPS collars or fencing equipment) Volunteers could potentially be engaged, and own materials used to reduce costs.
Notes	The FC are interested to make improvements, and have commissioned Kent Wildlife Trust to develop a plan. They would also be interested in grant support through Countryside Stewardship or SFI. This location would make an excellent base for other grazing operations in the area and perhaps a good starting point for a new entrant.

Site assessment			
Site name & Location	7. Shorne Common Rough	**Total Site Size (ha)**	2
Date visited	29/7/24	**Grazing area (ha)**	0.1
Landowner/ Land manager	Shorne Parish Council?		
Soil type / Habitat/s	Mostly dense woodland with small area of amenity grass plus football field		
Past management/ history	Woodland appears relatively untouched. Grass area is mown, and scrub cleared		
Species of management priority	None seen		
Notable species encountered on visit	None		
Desired outcome for site	Grassland maintained and prevention of scrub encroachment. No contact with owners / those responsible but most likely needs to remain as an amenity space.		
Grazing period, number and species current/ suggested	Grazing here, with the tiny area and proximity to the road is not viable.		
Ground/ water contamination	None seen		
Drinking water availability	None		
Toxic plants	None seen		
Hazards	Adjacent road		
Public access	Footpaths well used, and regular use of football field		
Condition of fencing and type	Non-existent		
Animal handling present/ suggested	None		
Evidence of illegal off road driving	None		

Access for vehicles and livestock (including ground conditions and turning)	Limited to small amenity vehicles
Risk of feeding from public/ garden waste	N/A
Fly tipping	None seen
Biosecurity (water, nose to nose contact, wildlife)	N/A
Shelter and dry lying	N/A
Fire Risk (fuel load, history)	Yes
Invasive non-native species	None seen
Previous issues	Unknown
Approximate costs for infrastructure improvement	Nothing proposed
Notes	

Site assessment			
Site name & Location	8. Rochester & Cobham Golf Club	**Total Site Size (ha)**	100
Date visited	30/7/24	**Grazing area (ha)**	8+
Landowner/ Land manager	Golf Club – no contact made		
Soil type / Habitat/s	Grasslands nutrient enriched. Spread of native trees.		
Past management/ history	Fairways are regularly mown. 'Rough' areas are likely mown or topped once per year / end of season.		
Species of management priority	Abundant birds of prey hunting the long grass		
Notable species encountered on visit	Reasonable diversity for a golf course – perhaps result of previous management.		
Desired outcome for site	Grazing the rough areas unused by golfers would greatly enhance biodiversity. This would be practically tricky, but GPS collars could be used to assist. At the very least removal of vegetation once a year would help grassland diversity.		
Grazing period, number and species current/ suggested	Autumn/winter grazing best, at stocking rate of 0.5 LUs/ha on roughs. Suggest hay is made on the roughs to support livestock elsewhere. Grazing would also be beneficial in the wooded areas – although goats would likely be needed to control brambles initially.		
Ground/ water contamination	None seen		
Drinking water availability	Site appears to be fully irrigated so presumably sufficient capacity to support grazing livestock if it were viable.		
Toxic plants	Some ragwort and yew		
Hazards	Flying golf balls. Risk of choking on golf balls? (Unlikely)		
Public access	Footpaths used but also high numbers of golfers		
Condition of fencing and type	Around 50% of perimeter assessed has adequate livestock-proof fencing. Rest is lying on the floor or lost in the undergrowth.		
Animal handling present/ suggested	South west corner could be a suitable location for setting up a corral		

Evidence of illegal off road driving	None. High level of security for golf club, and anti-vehicle ditches along road way
Access for vehicles and livestock (including ground conditions and turning)	Yes, using golf course tracks although care would need to be taken to avoid damage to fairways
Risk of feeding from public/ garden waste	Minimal
Fly tipping	None seen
Biosecurity (water, nose to nose contact, wildlife)	Nose to nose contact possible with animals at Cobham Woods.
Shelter and dry lying	Yes – clumps of trees
Fire Risk (fuel load, history)	Yes – left uncut the rough areas could become a tinder box
Invasive non-native species	None seen
Previous issues	Unknown
Approximate costs for infrastructure improvement	Restoration of a fenced perimeter where needed - £15,000 Mobile water infrastructure to assist grazing - £1500 Access improvements to aid ease of bringing livestock on site (2 people, plus mini-digger, for 2 days) - £2,000
Notes	Do the owners have an appetite for grazing and working this around the golfing?

Site assessment			
Site name & Location	9. Cobham Hall School	**Total Site Size (ha)**	62
Date visited	30/7/24	**Grazing area (ha)**	11+
Landowner/ Land manager	Cobham Hall School – no contact made (closed for summer)		
Soil type / Habitat/s	Neutral and calcareous grassland. Bracken and scrub amongst mature parkland trees		
Past management/ history	Old deer park style, now grounds of the school. Now let grazing (20 x Dairy cross yearlings). Remnants of a Roman Villa. Deer and many rabbits also present.		
Species of management priority	Mature open grown parkland trees, deadwood (invertebrate habitat)		
Notable species encountered on visit	Mature Oaks		
Desired outcome for site	Improvement of species richness by adjusted grazing management that will enable flowers and herbs to better thrive. Retain and increase parkland trees, and deadwood. Graze rather than mow some of school grounds?!		
Grazing period, number and species current/ suggested	Suggest rest from March until late summer, then graze with low numbers of cattle for extended period, or shorter period with more animals. Aim for 0.5 LUs/ha. Rabbit control until grasslands better recovered.		
Ground/ water contamination	None seen		
Drinking water availability	Water supplied via a trough – presumably mains connection		
Toxic plants	Some ragwort		
Hazards	Road, trainline and fishing lakes are immediately adjacent, but all are well fenced		
Public access	Well used public footpath and school also has access (term time)		
Condition of fencing and type	Good – Estate park fencing		
Animal handling present/ suggested	Hurdles present suggesting temporary corral usually set up when needed		

Evidence of illegal off road driving	None.
Access for vehicles and livestock (including ground conditions and turning)	Yes – via track from Cobham Hall and over cattle grid and across grazing area to fishing lakes
Risk of feeding from public/ garden waste	Low – no housing backing onto the site, but pupils might be tempted?
Fly tipping	None seen, low risk
Biosecurity (water, nose to nose contact, wildlife)	No adjacent livestock for nose to nose contact – next fields (West Park) are across the track. Badger latrines noted near kissing gate on footpath.
Shelter and dry lying	Yes – abundant in-field trees
Fire Risk (fuel load, history)	Low
Invasive non-native species	None seen
Previous issues	Unknown
Approximate costs for infrastructure improvement	Mobile water infrastructure to assist with focused grazing - £1500 GPS collars could be used to rotate animal impact where needed – but could assume grazier may bring these as part of grazing arrangement.
Notes	Grassland herbs are being outcompeted so a change in management would benefit biodiversity.

Site assessment			
Site name & Location	10. Silverhand Estate	**Total Site Size (ha)**	663
Date visited	1/11/24	**Grazing area (ha)**	270
Landowner/ Land manager	MDCV UK (Mark Dixon) / Tim Steele		
Soil type / Habitat/s	Chalk grassland, vineyards, improved grassland and woodland		
Past management/ history	Former organic farm amalgamated with other holdings to host organic vines and complementary grazing.		
Species of management priority	Various chalk grassland species in areas with restoration focus		
Notable species encountered on visit	Orchids. Browsed scrub generating ideal bird nesting habitat.		
Desired outcome for site	More cattle and or sheep grazing and more grazing management to deliver improved biodiversity and further grassland restoration.		
Grazing period, number and species current/ suggested	There is sufficient land area and soil conditions to graze cattle and sheep year-round. The rotational system should be continued to allow rest periods, especially during the flowering period and for the sheep, fitting around grazing the vines also. An overall stocking rate of 0.5 LUs/ha will be a good initial target.		
Ground/ water contamination	None evident		
Drinking water availability	In some fields, but not all, and this currently prevents grazing in some areas with cattle. An initial quote for new water connection came in at £13k.		
Toxic plants	Occasional ragwort.		
Hazards	Potential for dog attacks near footpaths.		
Public access	Some footpaths but not heavily used		
Condition of fencing and type	Good in fields designated for grazing. Temporary electric fencing also used by the shepherdess where needed. Further fencing would be helpful.		
Animal handling present/ suggested	Mobile animal handling equipment used		

Evidence of illegal off road driving	None
Access for vehicles and livestock (including ground conditions and turning)	Good throughout
Risk of feeding from public/ garden waste	Unlikely
Fly tipping	None seen. Security fairly good and the sites are busy.
Biosecurity (water, nose to nose contact, wildlife)	No immediate issues.
Shelter and dry lying	Sufficient
Fire Risk (fuel load, history)	Minimal
Invasive non-native species	None seen
Previous issues	
Approximate costs for infrastructure improvement	Unquantifiable at this stage without more in-depth investigation. Nonetheless new water supplies (and associated equipment) will be key – quote for one connection was £13k.
Notes	Lots of scope for doing more grazing and improving the grasslands in multiple ways. Silverhand's livestock are registered organic – so they are unable to graze other areas. And if other [non-organic] livestock were brought onto the site, they would only be permitted for a limited period (120 days).

Site assessment			
Site name & Location	11. West Park	**Total Site Size (ha)**	21
Date visited	30/7/24	**Grazing area (ha)**	21
Landowner/ Land manager	Gravesham Borough Council – James Young		
Soil type / Habitat/s	Neutral and calcareous grassland surrounding mature parkland trees and small copses		
Past management/ history	Historically part of the Cobham Hall parkland. Sheep now grazing on a regular basis. Signs of some deer also.		
Species of management priority	Mature open grown parkland trees, deadwood (invertebrate habitat)		
Notable species encountered on visit	Mature Oaks, Green woodpecker (ant hills)		
Desired outcome for site	Improvement of species richness by adjusted grazing management that will enable flowers and herbs to better thrive. Retain and increase parkland trees and copses, and deadwood.		
Grazing period, number and species current/ suggested	Cattle or sheep grazing to be delayed until after flowering period, but ensure vegetation is grazed down by March ahead of new season. Aim for 0.5 LUs/ha.		
Ground/ water contamination	None seen		
Drinking water availability	Water supplied via a trough – presumably mains connection. Also pond access.		
Toxic plants	None seen		
Hazards	Pond – risk of drowning for young livestock		
Public access	Two heavily used footpaths cross the area		
Condition of fencing and type	Parkland fencing along NE boundary in good order. Remainder is stock proof but may need some investment in next few years		
Animal handling present/ suggested	Small barn with handling system present		

Evidence of illegal off road driving	None.
Access for vehicles and livestock (including ground conditions and turning)	Yes – via track from Cobham Hall and the Avenue. Good ground conditions.
Risk of feeding from public/ garden waste	Minimal, but possible from roadside (halfpence lane) or school
Fly tipping	None but a pile of garden waste, presumably from school grounds, tipped midway along the eastern edge
Biosecurity (water, nose to nose contact, wildlife)	No adjacent livestock for nose-to-nose contact. Badger latrines noted nearby. Dogs may pose a Neosporin risk to any breeding females placed on the site.
Shelter and dry lying	Yes – abundant in-field trees and an open barn
Fire Risk (fuel load, history)	Low
Invasive non-native species	None seen
Previous issues	Unknown
Approximate costs for infrastructure improvement	Mobile water infrastructure to assist with focused grazing - £1500 Fencing repairs over the next few years - £5000 GPS collars could be used to rotate animal impact where needed – but could assume grazier may bring these as part of grazing arrangement.
Notes	Unclear whose responsibility fencing maintenance is – tenant or landlord. Good that it is grazed and well maintained – just needs tweaking a little for biodiversity benefit.

Site assessment			
Site name & Location	12. South Ashenbank Wood	**Total Site Size (ha)**	7.5
Date visited	30/7/24	**Grazing area (ha)**	<1
Landowner/ Land manager	Privately owned – James Weymes and Malcolm Sherrington		
Soil type / Habitat/s	Predominantly chestnut coppice, some mature trees, small grass clearings		
Past management/ history	Purchased by current owners around 10 years ago. Plans to clear some coppice to open up more grassy glades and areas.		
Species of management priority	Some mature trees swamped by sweet chestnut		
Notable species encountered on visit	Mature trees, dense undergrowth (in places)		
Desired outcome for site	More open habitat, control of undergrowth and haloing mature oak trees		
Grazing period, number and species current/ suggested	Grazing with goats could be targeted at undergrowth and to enlarge the clearings. Pigs could also play a similar role, and help rejuvenate the woodland floor. Cattle could be grazed very occasionally, ideally brought through from Ashenbank Wood, or Jeskyns, when cattle are present there.		
Ground/ water contamination	None noted		
Drinking water availability	None – a temporary bowser would be needed for any grazing period.		
Toxic plants	None noted		
Hazards	Some very dense undergrowth and fallen deadwood.		
Public access	None – with a stockproof fence running the boundary with Ashenbank Wood (which does have high levels of public access)		
Condition of fencing and type	Fence on boundary with Ashenbank Wood is just about stock proof. Other boundaries are lost in undergrowth and hard to assess.		
Animal handling present/ suggested	None present. Temporary hurdles could be used.		

Evidence of illegal off road driving	None.
Access for vehicles and livestock (including ground conditions and turning)	Yes – via track from Halfpence lane, with small turning area at the top
Risk of feeding from public/ garden waste	Low to no risk
Fly tipping	Some evidence of previous issues at end of track on halfpence lane
Biosecurity (water, nose to nose contact, wildlife)	Nose-to-nose contact not really possible, and if it could be grazed by same animals as neighbouring properties this would avoid any risks.
Shelter and dry lying	Yes
Fire Risk (fuel load, history)	Low
Invasive non-native species	None seen
Previous issues	Trespassing, including someone illegally camping in the wood.
Approximate costs for infrastructure improvement	Mobile water infrastructure to assist with focused grazing - £1500 Temporary fencing systems to enable focused grazing by pigs or goats - £1500 New fence around perimeter (optional) - £15000 GPS collars could be used to rotate animal impact where needed – but could assume grazier may bring these as part of grazing arrangement.
Notes	This site is not a top priority for arranging grazing (it doesn't have particularly special grassland habitat, and is small and awkward) but would be more viable if adjacent sites were being grazed and animals could 'pop' across. A long-term view could look to greatly reduce the chestnut and work towards a wood pasture.

Site assessment			
Site name & Location	13. Great Crabbles Wood	**Total Site Size (ha)**	34
Date visited	29/7/24	**Grazing area (ha)**	0
Landowner/ Land manager	Unknown – not introduced, but accessed via footpaths		
Soil type / Habitat/s	Predominantly dense chestnut coppice, some mature trees		
Past management/ history	Unknown		
Species of management priority	Some mature trees swamped by sweet chestnut		
Notable species encountered on visit	Mature trees, dense undergrowth (in places) and dense chestnut plantation		
Desired outcome for site	Unknown but would benefit from more open habitat, control of undergrowth and haloing mature oak trees to lead to wood pasture and some grazing		
Grazing period, number and species current/ suggested	Grazing with goats could be targeted at undergrowth and to enlarge any clearings. Pigs could also play a similar role and help rejuvenate the woodland floor once Chestnut thinned / removed.		
Ground/ water contamination	None noted		
Drinking water availability	None seen		
Toxic plants	None noted		
Hazards	Some very dense undergrowth and fallen deadwood.		
Public access	One infrequently used path passing through		
Condition of fencing and type	Nothing of note although some neighbouring properties are fenced		
Animal handling present/ suggested	None seen.		
Evidence of illegal off road driving	None.		

Access for vehicles and livestock (including ground conditions and turning)	Partial access at eastern most point
Risk of feeding from public/ garden waste	Low to no risk
Fly tipping	None seen
Biosecurity (water, nose to nose contact, wildlife)	Possible contact with any animals at Crabbles Bottom
Shelter and dry lying	Yes
Fire Risk (fuel load, history)	Low
Invasive non-native species	None seen
Previous issues	Unknown
Approximate costs for infrastructure improvement	Unviable until chestnut thinned / removed
Notes	

Site assessment			
Site name & Location	14. Crabbles Bottom	**Total Site Size (ha)**	11.5
Date visited	29/7/24	**Grazing area (ha)**	2
Landowner/ Land manager	Shorne Parish Council – Pauline Clifton		
Soil type / Habitat/s	Chalk grassland, old orchard with clay over chalk, and young woodland		
Past management/ history	Site was possibly influenced by the building of the adjacent bypass. Previously managed by Tim Bell (if additional intel needed). Orchard and chalk grassland has been previously topped to keep scrub at bay.		
Species of management priority	Veteran apple trees, meadow wildflowers and pyramidal orchids		
Notable species encountered on visit	Many wildflowers in chalk grassland, including nettle-leafed bell flower		
Desired outcome for site	Maintain the two special habitats and prevent scrub encroachment. Some tree management would also be beneficial.		
Grazing period, number and species current/ suggested	Grazing with sheep would be ideal given limited water availability and need to protect trees (which cattle would rub on). Ideally grazing would take place on chalk grasslands after August and before March. Orchard grazing less critical, but ideally after grassland species are flowering and before orchard fruit is ready. One-off grazing with goats could be used against scrub encroachment.		
Ground/ water contamination	None noted		
Drinking water availability	None seen – although a water treatment plant next door		
Toxic plants	Yew saplings (planted)		
Hazards	Busy highway nearby, but 2 fences between it and grazing areas.		
Public access	One infrequently used path passing through. Official path adjacent.		
Condition of fencing and type	Mostly good but several areas needing repair, and sub-divisions may be useful. Kissing gates also need repair and renewed signage.		
Animal handling present/ suggested	None seen, but something temporary could be arranged near entrance gate.		

Evidence of illegal off road driving	None.
Access for vehicles and livestock (including ground conditions and turning)	Access point at Eastern end, but this is in need of some improvement. Access point at Western end is quite overgrown and also needs improving.
Risk of feeding from public/ garden waste	Low to no risk
Fly tipping	None seen
Biosecurity (water, nose to nose contact, wildlife)	Unlikely to be any issues apart from possible Neosporin from dogs if female breeding cattle are grazing
Shelter and dry lying	Yes
Fire Risk (fuel load, history)	Low – lots of deadwood
Invasive non-native species	None seen
Previous issues	Unknown
Approximate costs for infrastructure improvement	Access improvements (east and west) - £4000 Water bowser for use on site - £2000 Fence and gate repairs - £3000 Simple corral for sheep (optional) - £1500 New ring fence (optional) - £20,000
Notes	There are other orchard areas that could be restored and incorporated into the site. If a stock proof ring fence was established the whole site could be better managed with different grazing animals fulfilling different jobs and restoring habitat.

Site assessment			
Site name & Location	15. Holborough Woods (Ladds Farm)	**Total Site Size (ha)**	581
Date visited	25/9/24	**Grazing area (ha)**	25
Landowner/ Land manager	Tarmac / Micheal Charlton		
Soil type / Habitat/s	Chalk grassland and woodland		
Past management/ history	Funding used to create meadows and do fencing around 15 years ago. Tarmac had grazed Hebridean sheep in a rotation since with Andrew Lingham's help. The grazing arrangement now changed and Andrew has bought the sheep off them and acting more as a grazier. Steve Weekes from Kent WT advising. Numbers of sheep have been slowly reducing in recent years. Also a shoot is hosted on part of the estate with extensive pheasant rearing.		
Species of management priority	Chalk grassland, transitioning to scrub		
Notable species encountered on visit	Many species not seen elsewhere. Silver birch taking hold in several places.		
Desired outcome for site	Improvement of chalk grassland and reduction of scrub encroachment.		
Grazing period, number and species current/ suggested	Hebridean sheep are the ideal solution but more are needed to keep pace with the vegetation, and scrub in particular. It would be beneficial for them to rotate around the site more too, perhaps grazing each area twice per year. Cattle could also be used (and goats) to break up scrub and thicker undergrowth in some places, but not a necessity whilst Hebs are present.		
Ground/ water contamination	None evident		
Drinking water availability	Yes, some fields. Others have IBCs present from previous use.		
Toxic plants	Yew		
Hazards	Lots of used shot gun cartridges lying around – risk of ingestion by cattle?		
Public access	Some paths, but not well used		
Condition of fencing and type	Sufficient for sheep but needs attention and maintenance in places		

Animal handling present/ suggested	None seen
Evidence of illegal off road driving	None
Access for vehicles and livestock (including ground conditions and turning)	Tricky – quite steep ground in places – but not impossible with 4x4 and making use of moving animals on foot where possible.
Risk of feeding from public/ garden waste	Unlikely
Fly tipping	Some near road entrances
Biosecurity (water, nose to nose contact, wildlife)	Neighbouring fields to South and West are grazed by other graziers so a risk of nose to nose contact.
Shelter and dry lying	Sufficient (scrub and trees)
Fire Risk (fuel load, history)	Ungrazed the areas could become tinder dry
Invasive non-native species	None seen
Previous issues	Under-grazing. Conflict with shoot for land use and timing of grazing.
Approximate costs for infrastructure improvement	Some human days spent tidying up fencing, gates and fallen trees - £6000 Additional water infrastructure and mobile equipment to allow more focused grazing - £1500 Volunteers could potentially be engaged, and own materials used to reduce costs.
Notes	Some 24k pheasants and partridges reared on the site. Gamekeepers say the sheep generally keep out of the way on shoot days so grazing plans need not be influenced by them – nonetheless some better communication would be helpful. If Andrew Lingham doesn't want to or can't improve the grazing management then there may be other neighbours willing to explore the opportunity.

Site assessment			
Site name & Location	16. Court Wood	**Total Site Size (ha)**	38
Date visited	29/7/24	**Grazing area (ha)**	3
Landowner/ Land manager	Unknown – not introduced, but accessed along edges via footpaths		
Soil type / Habitat/s	Predominantly dense chestnut coppice, some mature trees and small grassland areas. More sandy loam in places.		
Past management/ history	Unknown. Grazing looked to be more proactively managed in the past.		
Species of management priority	None of note		
Notable species encountered on visit	Nothing noted, but previous management may have prevented from being obvious		
Desired outcome for site	Rabbit and scrub control needed in first instance, followed by proactive rotational grazing and interaction with woodland where suited.		
Grazing period, number and species current/ suggested	Grazing with goats could be used to reduce scrub encroachment. In time cattle or sheep could be introduced to help grassland diversity develop.		
Ground/ water contamination	None noted		
Drinking water availability	None seen		
Toxic plants	Ragwort		
Hazards	Some very dense undergrowth with fallen stock fencing within.		
Public access	Some unofficial use		
Condition of fencing and type	Poor. GPS collars could be a partial solution.		
Animal handling present/ suggested	None seen. Sufficient and corners could host temporary corrals.		
Evidence of illegal off road driving	None.		

Access for vehicles and livestock (including ground conditions and turning)	Possible access points currently blocked off, but could be via field margins in neighbouring arable fields, or via properties on southern boundary.
Risk of feeding from public/ garden waste	Low to no risk
Fly tipping	None seen
Biosecurity (water, nose to nose contact, wildlife)	Possible contact with animals to south on neighbouring farm
Shelter and dry lying	Yes – ample trees and hedgerows
Fire Risk (fuel load, history)	Low
Invasive non-native species	None seen
Previous issues	Unknown
Approximate costs for infrastructure improvement	New fencing for just grassland areas – £20,000 Access improvements - £3000
Notes	Could be difficult and take time to get this grassland to species rich status. Neighbouring small holding to the south may be suitable collaborators.

Site assessment			
Site name & Location	17. Shorne Pasture	**Total Site Size (ha)**	3.5
Date visited	29/7/24	**Grazing area (ha)**	0.25
Landowner/ Land manager	Shorne Parish Council?		
Soil type / Habitat/s	Sandy loam hillocks with pebbles. Made ground or drumlin? Mixture of native woodland, scrub and pockets of calcareous grassland.		
Past management/ history	Appears to have been relatively untouched / abandoned (grassland and woodland). Lower grassland area with playground / picnic benches is mown.		
Species of management priority	Grassland – slowly being swamped by encroaching scrub		
Notable species encountered on visit	Ladies bedstraw, tall sow thistles, dragonflies		
Desired outcome for site	Grassland (which is quite unique to the area) maintained and reduction of scrub encroachment. No contact with owners / those responsible but most likely needs to remain as an amenity space in the lower part.		
Grazing period, number and species current/ suggested	Grazing here, with the tiny area and tricky access is barely practical but could be worthwhile if neighbouring landowners were engaged to increase grazing area. Goats would be the ideal application for knocking back scrub and bramble, and to open up the space, to be followed by periodic sheep grazing to maintain the grassland. Winter grazing probably best. Control of rabbits would help too.		
Ground/ water contamination	None seen		
Drinking water availability	None, but presumably a mains water supply nearby for adjacent houses. It would be tricky bringing a bowser to the grazing areas, therefore supporting the notion that sheep/goats would be best (i.e. not requiring much water, especially during winter).		
Toxic plants	Ragwort		
Hazards	Steep slopes, fallen deadwood		
Public access	Footpaths well used, and many desire lines criss-crossing the site		
Condition of fencing and type	Non-existent, and would be hard to install anything. GPS collars or electric fencing would be best alternative.		

Animal handling present/ suggested	None
Evidence of illegal off road driving	None
Access for vehicles and livestock (including ground conditions and turning)	Limited tight access via the car park. Potentially another route via private landowners to the north or north-east.
Risk of feeding from public/ garden waste	Unlikely
Fly tipping	None seen
Biosecurity (water, nose to nose contact, wildlife)	N/A
Shelter and dry lying	Yes
Fire Risk (fuel load, history)	Could be an issue, especially with dry grassland
Invasive non-native species	None seen
Previous issues	Unknown
Approximate costs for infrastructure improvement	Nothing proposed as it will most likely rely on mobile infrastructure that a grazier may be able to bring with them.
Notes	Exact boundaries unclear. Potential for collaboration with neighbouring orchard (similar grassland type) and arable field – seemingly planted with wildflowers (countryside stewardship?)

Site assessment			
Site name & Location	18. Scalers Hill Wood	**Total Site Size (ha)**	19
Date visited	30/7/24	**Grazing area (ha)**	9.5
Landowner/ Land manager	Unknown – not introduced, but accessed along edges via footpaths		
Soil type / Habitat/s	Predominantly native woodland and horse pasture (with some in-field trees)		
Past management/ history	Unknown. Currently very tightly grazed by horses (from what seen).		
Species of management priority	Nothing seen		
Notable species encountered on visit	Nothing seen		
Desired outcome for site	No contact with owners but opportunity to improve grassland biodiversity. The woodland areas are unlikely viable to incorporate grazing livestock, but could be something to consider alongside similar developments at Jeskyns and Ashenbank		
Grazing period, number and species current/ suggested	If horses remain then building in some rest periods to the grazing would be a first step, particularly during the spring/early summer.		
Ground/ water contamination	None noted		
Drinking water availability	None seen – but presumably available for horses		
Toxic plants	Ragwort		
Hazards	Dense undergrowth and fallen/standing deadwood		
Public access	One public footpath crossing the south east corner		
Condition of fencing and type	Horse pastures look to be stock proof fenced		
Animal handling present/ suggested	None seen.		
Evidence of illegal off road driving	None.		

Access for vehicles and livestock (including ground conditions and turning)	Possible access points via private property. If animals grazing from Jeskyns or Ashenbank they could walk along the tracks to access
Risk of feeding from public/ garden waste	Low to no risk
Fly tipping	None seen
Biosecurity (water, nose to nose contact, wildlife)	Possible contact with animals on neighbouring sites
Shelter and dry lying	Yes – ample trees and hedgerows
Fire Risk (fuel load, history)	Low
Invasive non-native species	None seen
Previous issues	Unknown
Approximate costs for infrastructure improvement	Nothing proposed in the absence of a more thorough investigation and establishment of the owners motives to be involved in the NNR.
Notes	

Site assessment			
Site name & Location	19. Camer Park	**Total Site Size (ha)**	18
Date visited	30/7/24	**Grazing area (ha)**	6.5
Landowner/ Land manager	Gravesham Borough Council – James Young		
Soil type / Habitat/s	Loam. Arboretum / Wood pasture with mosaic of mixed height swards		
Past management/ history	Former private parkland now under council management. Some areas mown (with tractor pulled cylinder mower) and other areas left to scrub up (including some areas fenced off – presumably as wildlife refuges)		
Species of management priority	Some significant trees, and mixture of grassland species		
Notable species encountered on visit	Wild carrot. Ornamental trees		
Desired outcome for site	The site would greatly benefit from some grazing intervention to help increase biodiversity and manage vegetation. Cut and collect would also be worth implementing to reduce latent nutrients and improve floral diversity. Winter grazing some areas would work and reduce interaction with public during peak visitor seasons.		
Grazing period, number and species current/ suggested	Non-breeding cattle would be ideal (avoiding issues of Neosporin exposure) and not sheep (due to high numbers of dogs off their leads and therefore attack risk). Stocking rate of 0.5 LUs/ha would enable a low input extensive system that would support habitat development. Timing of grazing can be flexible so could be usefully grazed when other areas in the NNR have restricted grazing due to flowering periods. It would also be helpful to change the timings each year.		
Ground/ water contamination	None seen		
Drinking water availability	There is water on site for the café and toilets, so in theory this could be piped (mole plough) down to the necessary areas. Otherwise a new connection needed.		
Toxic plants	Pre-grazing, a comprehensive survey of all trees to check for toxicity as there are several exotic species present.		
Hazards	Potential for dog attacks		
Public access	High numbers, especially dog walkers – all of whom won't be used to having livestock in the area – so much preparation would be required.		

Condition of fencing and type	Approximately 50% of the perimeter has some fencing (mixture of post and rail, and stocknet), most of which would be stock proof. Remainder is non-existent. Could be risky to rely solely on GPS collars.
Animal handling present/ suggested	None present. There a few natural corners where a temporary system could be sited, within reach of the access point to the north.
Evidence of illegal off road driving	None
Access for vehicles and livestock (including ground conditions and turning)	Suitable gated access at the most northern point. Also access would be possible via the car park to the west, but this will generally be busier with the public. Good track running through the centre.
Risk of feeding from public/ garden waste	High chance given number of visitors, many with picnics!
Fly tipping	None seen
Biosecurity (water, nose to nose contact, wildlife)	No adjacent livestock and no evidence of deer, but dogs and foxes will likely pose a Neosporin risk to any breeding females placed on the site.
Shelter and dry lying	Trees and woodland areas have ideal shelter.
Fire Risk (fuel load, history)	Possible with the build up of vegetation and fallen deadwood, and likelihood of BBQs in the summer.
Invasive non-native species	None seen
Previous issues	None made aware of
Approximate costs for infrastructure improvement	Water infrastructure improvements (assume can use existing supply) - £4000 Reinstate a stock proof ring fence - £15,000 – 20,000 Mobile water infrastructure - £1500 Permanent corral with head yoke (optional) - £3000 (Assume grazier can bring own GPS collars) Volunteers could potentially be engaged, and own materials used to reduce costs.
Notes	The concept of grazing would have to be introduced very carefully as the site is very popular, especially with dog walkers.

APPENDIX 20 - SITE ASSESSMENT SUMMARY TABLE

Symbols: ✓ **= confirmed** **X = not seen, available or relevant** **? = unable to ascertain**	**Shorne Woods Country Park**	**Cobham Woods**	**Cuxton & Cobham Woodland**	**Ranscombe Farm**	**Ashenbank Wood**	**Jeskyns Community Woodland**	**Shorne Common Rough**	**Rochester & Cobham Golf Club**	**Cobham Hall School**	**Silverhand Estate**	**West Park**	**South Ashenbank Wood**	**Great Crabbles Wood**	**Crabbles Bottom**	**Holborough Woodlands**	**Court Wood**	**Shorne Pasture**	**Scalers Hill Wood**	**Camer Park**
Parameters	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**	**11**	**12**	**13**	**14**	**15**	**16**	**17**	**18**	**19**
Drinking water access?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	?	X	✓	?	X	✓	✓
Water infrastructure (pipes and troughs)?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	X	X	✓	✓	✓	X	X	X	X	X	X	?	X
Secure fenced perimeter?	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	X	X	X	✓	✓	✓	X	X	X	✓	X	X	?	X
Animal handling facilities / corrals	X	X	X	✓	X	X	X	X	X	✓	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	?	X
Safe access for farm vehicles?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	X	✓	X	X	?	✓
Shelter or dry lying space for animals?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Grazing arrangement currently in place?	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	X	X	X	✓	✓	✓	X	X	X	✓	X	X	✓	X
Grazing objectives being met?	X	X	✓	X	X	X	X	X	?	X	X	X	?	X	X	?	X	?	X
Relevant for cattle?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	?	✓	✓	?	X	?	✓
Relevant for sheep?	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	X	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	X
Relevant for goats?	✓	✓	X	X	✓	X	✓	X	X	X	X	✓	?	✓	✓	?	✓	?	X
Notable species needing specific management?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	?	✓	✓	✓
Scrub / thorn / bracken encroachment?	✓	✓	X	X	✓	X	✓	X	X	X	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	?	X
Invasive or non-native species?	✓	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	?	✓
Toxic plants, hazards or biosecurity risks?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Public access impeding grazing?	X	X	X	X	✓	X	✓	✓	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	✓	X	✓
SSSI status?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	X	X	X	X	X	✓	✓	X	✓	X	X	✓	X
Fire risk from vegetation load?	X	X	X	X	✓	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	✓
Willing and engaged landowner?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	X	?	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	X	?	X	✓
In-house and local ecological expertise?	✓	✓	X	✓	X	X	X	X	X	✓	X	X	X	X	X	X	?	X	X

APPENDIX 21 – NOTES ON MEETING WITH GRAZIERS – 25/9/24 – LODGE BARN, COBHAM, KENT

Purpose of the meeting

- Understand local interest in delivering grazing in the NNR
- Gather ideas on what to do to make grazing in the NNR more viable/feasible
- Understand what new knowledge or training may be required in the area
- Make connections with local farmers and graziers to spread the word about upcoming developments

Background

Russ Carrington explained the background to the proposed new nature reserve, which would cover over 2000ha in the North Kent Downs. Around 500 hectares of this area have been deemed as grazeable or would benefit from animal intervention. At present some is already being grazed, some managed mechanically (toppers, mowers, etc.) and some not at all.

Site No.	Site Name	Total Area (ha)	Grazing area	Habitat description
1	Shorne Woods Country Park	124	6	Wood Pasture
2	Cobham Woods	76	64	Wood Pasture
3	Cuxton & Cobham Woodland Project	46	1	Wood Pasture
4	Ranscombe Farm	265	60	Chalk grassland
5	Ashenbank Wood	29	0.5	Woodland
6	Jeskyns Community Woodland	140	26	Wood and meadows
7	Shorne Common Rough	2	0.1	Wood and grass patch
8	Rochester & Cobham Golf Club	100	8	Grassland
9	Cobham Hall School	62	11	Grassland
10	Silverhand Estate	663	270	Mixed grassland + vines
11	West Park	21	21	Grassland
12	South Ashenbank Wood	7.5	?	Chestnut coppice
13	Great Crabbles Wood	34	?	Chestnut coppice
14	Crabbles Bottom	11.5	2	Orchard, wood pasture
15	Holborough Woodlands	581	25	Chalk grassland
16	Court Wood	38	?	Chestnut coppice
17	Shorne Pasture	3.5	0.25	Woods and chalk grassland
18	Scalers Hill Wood	19	?	Woods and horse pasture
19	Camer Park	18	6.5	Wood Pasture
		2241	**501**	

Green areas = already being grazed in some way
Pink areas = in need of grazing – either managed mechanically or not at all at present
? = unquantified at this stage but unlikely to need grazing

The known areas in need of grazing going forwards total 43ha, and range from 0.1ha – 26ha across 7 sites, although 2-3 of these sites are unlikely to be viable due to their small size, access practicalities and high levels of public access. There have also been a few landowners identified who may have additional land nearby that could be grazed in conjunction with the areas in the nature reserve – perhaps helping to provide grazing during times of the year when chalk grasslands in the nature reserve need rest, and also a base for other grazing enterprise needs – such as buildings and yards for storage of equipment.

There is also scope for adapting and improving the existing grazing which is taking place on 188ha across 7 other sites, ranging from 1ha to 64ha parcels, plus the Silverhand Estate's 270ha.

In general, and to further improve biodiversity and meet the aims of the proposed new nature reserve, the following are needed:

- **More grazing in general** – being a better option in many ways than doing nothing, and also better than mechanical intervention as a current proxy for grazing in some areas.
- **Right grazing at the right time** – many of the grassland and wood pasture habitats in the area need quite specific grazing at certain times to support their protection, maintenance and enhancement.
- **Rotation of grazing**, with appropriate **rest periods** for grassland recovery – overgrazing can be as detrimental for biodiversity as under-grazing, so increased rest periods would enable wild species to better flourish.
- **Different herbivores for different jobs** – in order to restore or maintain habitats different grazing and browsing techniques are required that have different impacts on vegetation.
- **Bracken and scrub control** to restore grassland habitats and ultimately increase grazing viability.

Delivery of grazing in the NNR

The meeting then explored how local farmers and graziers might make these grazing requirements happen and what they would need to facilitate delivery. The discussions were wide ranging and are summarised below under different headings:

Marketplace

Animals reared and fattened on the chalk grassland have a great story and are likely to have provable health benefits for consumers if fully pasture-fed – something which should be worth a premium. Pasture for Life have multiple resources on this and are a good example of what can be achieved. Also the Herdwick sheep promotion scheme in the Lake District / Cumbria: https://www.herdy.co.uk/ and the Lakeland PDO: https://www.herdwick-sheep.com/lakeland-herdwick-pdo/

Will anyone locally be willing to pay a premium? Some, and London markets are also nearby (which one grazier is occasionally accessing already), but generally it was thought that the local population were not interested in / cannot afford premium products. We agreed this was a shame and that maybe there would be a way to help address this with the new nature reserve – one example being the LUSH scheme in Stroud in the Cotswolds where customers who can afford premium products offer small donations to subsidise those products for members of their community who cannot afford them. Short video here about it: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gexOhZr_sXc

If more people come to the area because of the nature reserve status, can they be marketed to? Using signage on footpaths is easy and cheap advertisement for meat boxes (as well as helping to explain grazing activities and any necessary precautions).

What about opportunities to supply local restaurants that receive visitors to the area? Silverhand are looking to supply their own meat to their eatery, but there might be opportunities for others to help with this supply – as "guest" meat suppliers like guest ales in due course.

How will venison from the nature reserve be marketed? Could there be resources and facilities shared with beef and lamb? Russ will find out.

Supply chain

Abattoirs are under a lot of pressure and there is a shortage of good butchers – both of which make getting local meat back to local people a real challenge. Supply chain infrastructure needs investment and support if it is to keep going and process animals from the nature reserve.

If the UK's mobile abattoir initiative gets off the ground, this could also be helpful.

Infrastructure and equipment

Some essential elements were identified for any site to attract graziers:

- **Perimeter fencing** is a must, especially given the proximity to busy highways. At present much of the fencing in the area is tired and needs investment in the coming years. Good fencing is essential for attracting graziers to even consider delivering a service.
- **Collecting yards and handling facilities** are also a considerable advantage. For example there are several corrals at Ranscombe which are very helpful for the grazier there. Mobile handling facilities can be brought to site, but these equate to more time and cost, and rely on the grazier having such equipment – unless certain items could be shared across the nature reserve and be used by multiple graziers?
- **A source of water.** Mains water is ideal, with troughs and or standpipes in each area. Fewer drinking points can limit delivery of even grazing across an area (animals become concentrated around water sources, especially in dry or hot weather. Bowsers are okay if mains connectivity is not possible but these can be hard work to keep filled in hot weather and can therefore mean grazing is limited in such areas.
- **Safe access and tracks**. Points of access to sites ideally need a 20m pull in at least, enough for a pick-up or tractor with a livestock trailer. The vehicle also needs to be able to turn around before re-entering the highway. Once on-site, animals can be walked or led to the furthest reaches of the site, but an option to extract a dead or injured animal is also required – so good tracks are beneficial, especially for winter grazing.

Other equipment that could be useful:

- **GPS Collars**, such as NoFence, could be used to track animals, especially within some of the larger sites, and in some cases control where animals can graze and spend their time. This could help with livestock checking and also delivering the required grazing impact in the right areas. However, some graziers present had found, or had heard of, problems with them breaking and having reduced reliability in heavily wooded areas (where tree foliage blocks satellite access). The other limitation is their cost, particularly if they are to be used on every animal (in the controlled grazing scenario). Perhaps this is something land owning partners in the nature reserve project could help resource (and further attract the right graziers)?
- **Bracken bruisers/rollers**. Given some grassland areas are being swamped by bracken, lightweight rollers could be used to knock it back (ideally twice per year) and provide better conditions for the grassland, and therefore grazing animals, to thrive. This sort of equipment, which would only be used infrequently, could perhaps be shared amongst land owning partners? Alternatively maybe there is scope for a local contractor to offer a bracken rolling service (along with topping, scrub control, fencing, etc.)?

There was talk that the new nature reserve status may bring an increased availability of funding, perhaps in a similar way to FiPL and National Landscapes but this is yet to be confirmed and may be dependent upon whether the Lower Thames Crossing goes ahead.

Financial arrangements

There was universal agreement that for such small areas there is no real value attainable from grazing such areas purely for production. It is therefore necessary to look at different economic models for delivering a grazing service – this in the context of declining returns from beef and sheep farming, and the ever-greater need for economies of scale.

How should graziers therefore be remunerated for the service they are delivering?

- Is it linked to the time it takes (checking, moving animals on and off site)?
- Or recognition for the difference in daily live weight gain compared to an improved grass clover ley – and financial recompense for any comparative losses (otherwise why do it?!)?
- If Countryside Stewardship or SFI agreements are attainable for a land area, who would take responsibility for this and receive the payments? This has to be part of the agreed financial framework if available.
- Or a combination of factors that also take into account provisions on the site, such as fencing, support with livestock checking, water, etc.?

Sourcing stock to graze areas can equate to a significant capital outlay for livestock keepers and can prevent the right grazier from being able to stock the land appropriately. This is particularly relevant for new entrants who may not have the cash reserves. Could finance arrangements be put in place together with landowners to help buy the livestock?

Coordination

Given the level of complexity across multiple sites, and the need for specific grazing at specific times by different animals, how can the nature reserve collective ensure the right delivery?

It was felt that someone would need to help coordinate the graziers and help advise on timing of grazing, bringing in specific ecological understanding to ensure effective delivery.

Perhaps this coordination entity could facilitate a “Dial up for grazing” service to provide landowners with a suite of graziers offering different specialisms or different animals for different jobs?

Perhaps the entity could also provide hands on support for graziers when animals need to be gathered or moved, or help deal with public engagement, footpaths, etc.? The ranger type role at Ranscombe was referenced as a good and effective model.

Skills and knowledge

The need for new skills and knowledge was identified for several groups:

- **For graziers** to upskill and learn how best to deliver conservation and or regenerative grazing, and how to manage animals in areas with high levels of public access.

- **For livestock checker volunteers** who could be an essential asset for making sure animals are well, watered and where they should be. Kent Wildlife Trust already provide training for livestock checkers.
- **For butchers and retailers** who may be involved in processing some of the animals reared and fattened in the nature reserve – in particular understanding their unique selling points and butchery requirements as distinct from meat from mass produced grain-fed production systems.
- **For the next generation**, school children and in particular anyone under the age of 11 ¾ - apparently being the age at which children decide their life paths! To provide real longevity for the nature reserve young people will need to engage with and be a part of delivering habitat management.

Public access and engagement

With high levels of public access in the area, including many dog walkers, the interface with livestock needs managing carefully – and prospective graziers are acutely aware of that – whilst also supporting and respecting people's rights and needs to have access to green spaces.

Desire lines and any violence / damage / littering will need to be kept on top of. Where appropriate, desire lines should be prevented, or alternatives provided. Landowners and graziers should be vigilant towards any damage to fences, gates or stiles and have a system in place to quickly carry out any repairs. Provision of waste bins, and in particular bins for dog waste.

There will need to be a programme of education and engagement with the public, in particular if grazing animals are to be placed in areas that have not seen animals for many years. How to safely handle dogs around livestock will also need educating on, and animals will need to be selected (especially cattle) for temperament around people and dogs. A consider effort will need to be made to campaign for people to clear up their dog mess as leaving it can have consequences for animal health – most notably neospora in cattle.

The local media and careful use of social media could be used to help inform local people, together with events whereby people can meet the graziers, be introduced to the livestock and have the opportunity to ask questions or raise concerns. Clear communications and endorsements from key organisations and people (e.g. local Instagram influencers like Zoe Colville @thechiefshepherdess) will help foster support for the grazing management regimes. Good signage can also be a great tool for communicating grazing practices and any precautions that the public may need to take. There are already some great examples in use across the area.

Grazier arrangements

Do the landowners forge specific deals with individual graziers or form a collective to work with one (or a few) grazier(s), who can deliver the grazing across the whole reserve under a share farming or joint venture arrangement?

Grazing licenses could work, but these offer no security for graziers to invest in the land's improvement. Need a degree of tenure to make it worthwhile putting time and energy into finding the right livestock, carrying out the right management and building relationships with the public / site users.

Who could the graziers be?

- **Existing graziers** already operating in the area who are willing to expand their operations. They already know the area, the challenges, and have the skills to deploy appropriate livestock as required.
- **Nearby farming businesses** looking for more grazing or diversification, and who may already have a base and the necessary equipment to temporarily graze in the nature reserve.
- **A new entrant** looking to establish a new farming enterprise? They may be young and motivated but would need a base somewhere and sufficient scale to be viable. There is a decent chunk of land and a couple of buildings at Jeskyns which could be helpful in this regard. Likewise, there may be other nearby landowners who could offer land to be part of a new enterprise. Could the nature reserve provide some means of support to help new young farmers get established?
- **A new entity** set up specifically to deliver grazing and owning livestock alongside a dedicated team and suite of resources, perhaps owned and managed by the nature reserve – a kind of 'in-house' solution.
- **A collective** of multiple graziers who can each contribute to the overall delivery, with each bringing specific capabilities (e.g. goats for scrub control and cattle for breaking up thatchy swards) and perhaps coordinated through a specific identity – like the Pembrokeshire Grazing Network in Pembrokeshire National Park.

A mixed approach might be good, at least to start with whilst different options are explored.

A common theme is that the grazier or graziers in the nature reserve will need to work with other nearby landowners to create viable enterprises that can carry animals all year round i.e. when the animals are not needed in the nature reserve areas. Depending on the animals, barns for winter housing may also be needed.

Summary and conclusions

There are upcoming opportunities, with interest from graziers, but there is a great deal of detail to be worked out. The grazing areas will need investment, and new knowledge will be necessary to enable effective and safe delivery of grazing objectives supported by routes to market that recognise the provenance of produce from the NNR. Partnership between landowners in the nature reserve and beyond will be crucial to make grazing enterprises viable.

Other graziers unable to make the meeting will be briefed on the discussions, and further opinions and thoughts sought as the project progresses.

APPENDIX 22: NOTES ON MEETING WITH LANDOWNERS – 7/11/24 – LODGE BARN, COBHAM, KENT

Purpose of the meeting

- Explain findings from site surveys and meetings with graziers
- Outline potential models for delivering grazing in the NNR
- Gather ideas on how to make grazing in the NNR more viable/feasible and overcome some of the identified barriers
- Explore the possibilities of working together for mutual benefit

Background

Over the summer, Russ Carrington and Emma Douglas surveyed the majority of the sites within the proposed new nature reserve, collecting information on a standard form. Around 500 hectares of the area were deemed as grazeable or in need of some animal intervention. At present some is already being grazed, some managed mechanically (toppers, mowers, etc.) and some not at all.

Site No.	Site Name	Total Area (ha)	Grazing area	Habitat description
1	Shorne Woods Country Park	124	6	Wood Pasture
2	Cobham Woods	76	64	Wood Pasture
3	Cuxton & Cobham Woodland Project	46	1	Wood Pasture
4	Ranscombe Farm	265	60	Chalk grassland
5	Ashenbank Wood	29	0.5	Woodland
6	Jeskyns Community Woodland	140	26	Wood and meadows
7	Shorne Common Rough	2	0.1	Wood and grass patch
8	Rochester & Cobham Golf Club	100	8	Grassland
9	Cobham Hall School	62	11	Grassland
10	Silverhand Estate	663	270	Mixed grassland + vines
11	West Park	21	21	Grassland
12	South Ashenbank Wood	7.5	1	Chestnut coppice
13	Great Crabbles Wood	34	?	Chestnut coppice
14	Crabbles Bottom	11.5	2	Orchard, wood pasture
15	Holborough Woodlands	581	25	Chalk grassland
16	Court Wood	38	?	Chestnut coppice
17	Shorne Pasture	3.5	0.25	Woods and chalk grassland
18	Scalers Hill Wood	19	?	Woods and horse pasture
19	Camer Park	18	6.5	Wood Pasture
		2241	**501**	

Green areas = already being grazed in some way
Pink areas = in need of grazing – either managed mechanically or not at all at present
? = unquantified at this stage but unlikely to need grazing

The known areas in need of grazing going forwards total 43ha, and range from 0.1ha – 26ha across 7 sites, although 2-3 of these sites are unlikely to be viable due to their small size, accessibility for livestock and high levels of public access. There have also been a few landowners identified who may have additional land nearby that could be grazed in conjunction with the areas in the nature reserve – perhaps helping to provide grazing during times of the year when chalk grasslands in the nature reserve need rest, and also a base for other grazing enterprise needs – such as buildings and yards for storage of equipment and housing animals at certain times.

There is also scope for adapting and improving the existing grazing which is taking place on 188ha across 7 other sites, ranging from 1ha to 64ha parcels, plus the Silverhand Estate's 270ha.

In general, and to further improve biodiversity and meet the aims of the proposed new nature reserve, the following are needed:

- **More grazing in general** – being a better option in many ways than doing nothing, and also better than mechanical intervention as a current proxy for grazing in some areas.
- **Right grazing at the right time** – many of the grassland and wood pasture habitats in the area need specific grazing at certain times of the year to support their protection, maintenance and enhancement.
- **Rotation of grazing**, with appropriate **rest periods** for grassland recovery – overgrazing can be as detrimental for biodiversity as under-grazing, so increased rest periods would enable wild species to better flourish.
- **Different herbivores for different jobs** – in order to restore or maintain habitats different grazing and browsing techniques are required that have different impacts on vegetation.
- **Bracken and scrub control** to restore grassland habitats and ultimately increase grazing viability.

Models for delivery – examples from around the UK

A selection of grazing projects elsewhere in the UK were outlined, including:

- The **Pembrokeshire Grazing Network** – which relies on the National Park for coordination and is increasingly using horses to graze due to the challenges with cattle and Bovine TB. Graziers do not pay for using the land, but some have been able to claim BPS and infrastructure has often been project funded. There is a lot of goodwill involved.
- **Anglesey Grazing Animals Project** – previously project funded, and not only coordinated grazing, but also routes to market for the subsequent produce. It was heavily reliant on one person doing all of the coordination and has unfortunately now ceased due to lack of funding.
- **Private grazing businesses** – such as Gower Meadow Beef, Pori Bach, Hilary Kehoe, Jeremy Cartwright – all of whom are striving to achieve a scale of operation that covers overheads, make use of volunteers and add value where they can through certifications like Pasture for Life. They individually work with landowners and negotiate arrangements alongside any subsidies for management, and capital grants for infrastructure. Some are subsidising their income with other off-farm enterprises or employment.
- **Grazing services for hire** – organisations such as Grazing Management Ltd, Kent Wildlife Trust and Bio Goats 2 Rent which offer a service paid for by landowners. They commonly use GPS collar technology and work closely with landowners to deliver specific habitat management, and also engage with the public and volunteers to check livestock. They use a range of payment models depending on the situation and level of input.

The low level of economic viability is a common thread in all examples featured highlighting that a means of financial support is essential for making grazing happen. The dependence on key people (both paid and volunteers) to enable effective delivery is also necessary across all, and shows the need to invest in knowledge, skills and a framework within which to host such people.

These grazing projects were, and in some cases still are, able to routinely show the improvement of habitat through well timed grazing with the appropriate animals and stocking rates.

Feedback from Graziers meeting

A meeting for local farmers and graziers was held on 25th September with the aim of engaging them in potential grazing opportunities and understanding their needs for being able to deliver an appropriate grazing service. A number of capable individuals from the area attended and the key topics of discussion and concern were:

- How to establish suitable infrastructure on grazing sites?
- How to create a viable and sustainable financial model for landowner and grazier?
- How to create increased knowledge on grazing and habitat management?
- How to engage with the public to bring the community along?
- What routes to market for any subsequent produce from the area?

Delivery of grazing in the NNR

We posed the following overarching question:

"How do we get from 19 disparate sites of mixed condition to a functioning landscape with mixed grassland and wood pasture in a favourable SSSI status?"

And then considered each of the concerns brought forward by the graziers:

<u>Establishing suitable infrastructure</u>

- **Water**. The options for providing water on each of the sites where it is not already in available, are mains connections, boreholes or bowsers. One partner had recently paid £5,000 for a new mains water connection. Boreholes can cost £20,000 with no guarantee the water will be suitable (there was limited knowledge in the room of anyone installing these in the area to know whether this is a possible solution). Bowsers can be a fiddle and a bit of a turn off for graziers, but a good last resort – and could be shared across different sites (if the same grazier is moving their animals around). There was however **general enthusiasm for neighbouring landowners to install sub-meters and pipe water from existing mains connections over the boundaries to where it may be needed**. These pipes could be mole ploughed in, and fixed or temporary water troughs provided for a matter of a few thousand pounds. This is already being done between Plantlife and WKDCT with a simple agreement in place.
- **Fencing**. This was recognised as one of greatest costs for getting many of the sites ready for grazing, but that **there are funding opportunities**, not least via Natural England whereby support can be provided as part of agreements for habitat management – such as through Countryside Stewardship (FG1 and FG2 capital grant options). **Everyone recognises the need for suitable fencing, at least on the perimeter of sites** (even if livestock are managed within the areas using GPS collars or temporary fencing). This is because of the busy roads nearby, and to provide security and peace of mind to potential graziers. Some partners have had success with metal 'Clipex' fencing which is long lasting and soon weathers in. There is also an abundance of chestnut fencing materials in the area – and that actually need a reason to be harvested – although noted chestnut posts do not last so long on clay soils. Shorne Woods Country Park have a post pointing machine that other partners may be able to borrow.
- **Corrals and handling facilities**. Plantlife have a number of corrals established across their site which were constructed with the help of volunteers out of chestnut materials and are used by the grazier Andrew Lingham. These have proved useful but other graziers have also managed with mobile hurdles – which they sometimes provide themselves. The need is very much site specific, but a means of safely bringing animals together for treatment, testing, or loading is essential. Handling equipment may be grant fundable.

- **GPS Collars**. It was felt these could play a role for loosely controlling both cattle and goats within grazing sites to specifically target grazing needs and provide a means of **supporting graziers, landowners and the public** with daily livestock responsibilities and interactions. There may be some limitations with their use in the heavily wooded areas (where tree cover may limit GPS connectivity), and where phone signal is particularly poor, but these need investigating further for each site. The National Trust are interested in trialling them at Cobham Woods. There may be ways to fund purchasing collars, although there are no specific grants from Natural England at present. FiPL has funded some elsewhere in the Southeast in the past. Costs of the Norwegian 'NoFence' collars are around £250 per unit, plus an annual subscription fee of £50 per year as a guide. It would also be worth a cohort of graziers and landowners visiting Epping Forest where Longhorn cattle are successfully grazed using collars on the edge of London and amongst high levels of public access.
- **Safe Access.** Russ and Emma's site surveys included an appraisal of site access for livestock vehicles and for many areas this is something that needs to be improved to make transporting animals to and from sites safe and straightforward, and sometimes distinct from other access points used by the public. It was agreed that this is something that will need planning ahead for and may need to involve the highways authority in some cases. In any event access for livestock vehicles (land rover and trailer type) should be borne in mind with any other site developments taking place for other reasons (such as public access enhancements).

<u>Viable and sustainable financial models</u>

For the most part conservation grazing does not provide animal keepers with sufficient return from a meat or milk production perspective. This is because the available forage is usually of low quality in comparison to more modern hybridised grass and clover varieties, and many modern animal genetics have become reliant on these higher quality inputs. This means more traditional native breeds of animals are better suited to the available grazing but in turn often don't meet the requirements of the modern-day commercial buyer looking for a specific shape and quality.

Whilst the story of how animals are grazed for the benefit of biodiversity does add some value to the animals and their subsequent produce, the premiums don't necessarily go far enough to justify the extra work which conservation grazing or exploiting niche markets can involve. There is therefore need to find alternative ways to make grazing viable, which could involve the graziers being paid.

Following the examples shared from elsewhere in the UK, the following points were raised:

- **Government Support**. One or more iterations of the ELM scheme will likely play a key role in providing financial support for the bespoke management of the grasslands. Some of the areas already being grazed have Countryside Stewardship agreements in place, and depending on the arrangement with graziers this is either paid to them directly and they pay more for grazing the land, or received by the landowner and the grazier pays less, nothing or gets paid. For sites without existing agreements there are now new options to consider, and the potential payments may be useful to incentivise graziers. It will most likely need to be dealt with on a case-by-case basis as objectives are slightly different on each site and for each landowner.
- **Liability and risk**. By implementing grazing the landowners do not want to increase their liability or risk. Whilst each of them should have public liability insurance, this is also about peace of mind - something that may be worth paying for.

- **Control on delivery**. By paying for grazing to happen the landowners felt this should give them control on what does and doesn't happen, when and how grazing is conducted. For example, the right stock at the right time, no calving issues and no people being chased!

Increasing knowledge

Like the graziers, the partners and landowners in the area also recognised the need to increase skills and knowledge to help with implementing a grazing strategy. We looked at these needs and their possible solutions in some detail:

- **Ecological knowledge.** Getting the ecological outcomes right will be key to progressing the status of the grasslands and wood pasture, and so ecological guidance will need to be fed into discussions with graziers on a case-by-case basis. The meeting recognised this knowledge exists in fragments between the different organisations in the area, but some kind of dedicated input will be needed on the ground to work with and support the graziers in real time – as the weather and seasons unfold, but also as the sites develop and evolve.
- **Animal management.** Everyone involved needs to have a greater understanding of animal management in the very specific circumstances of each site. To a large extent this is the kind of knowledge that is likely to be best developed with graziers on the ground once activity commences. However, in preparation, it was felt that some training for key personnel would provide a useful foundation – most likely via the RBST's Grazing Animals Project course, or the similar version offered by Kent Wildlife Trust.
- **Community knowledge building.** Linked to public engagement (see below) those present agreed the need to increase knowledge about grazing with animals in the local community. It was felt this would help the community to take some ownership of habitat improvement, get them involved in voluntary capacities, create respect and patience for the work being done and support their understanding of why the project is happening. Several partners offered up their existing open days and events to showcase graziers and grazing projects to help get the knowledge out into the community. Other specific events could be organised to target specific audiences or communities.
- **Getting on the same page.** As the NNR partnership develops, it was agreed it is going to be important that partners are also on the same page from a grazing perspective. It was felt this meeting was helpful for beginning to bring that together but that it will need to continue being developed so that everyone is behind the same strategy and its implementation.

Overall, someone or some organisation is going to need to **hold, coordinate and disseminate** the knowledge if it is to be increased and used in the most effective way to guide and support the grazing. There was a sense that partners already have enough commitments within the realms of their current resources, so a shared coordination resource could make this grazing project more achievable, and impactful. The Pembrokeshire Grazing Network was discussed and further questions raised around running costs and liabilities – which Russ and Emma will research further for inclusion in their final report.

Public engagement

Everyone agreed that engaging the public in any changes to grazing activities was going to be essential, especially after recent events at Cobham woods. The following ideas and suggestions were made:

- **Collaboration**. Working together across the NNR will help ensure there is a consistent message and that awareness is raised far and wide.
- **Intentional communications**. Use social media and face to face events or meetings to proactively get the message across. Information can be distributed at existing scheduled events and open days, and perhaps some 'meet the grazier' days – particularly around school holidays. It was felt some of the public may have more respect for the farmers and graziers than the landowners.
- **Time**. It was noted that it can take time to get the message across and for new arrangements to be accepted. This can be helped along by being really clear and consistent, and also by being up front about what is happening.
- **Site layouts**. It may be useful in some circumstances to change the layout of paths so that the public have alternative paths to use when the livestock are in other areas.
- **Signage**. This is an obvious area of focus but is often not done well. The signage at WKDCT is one of the best examples used in the NNR so far – they have drop down signs that signify when livestock are present. It would be good to have a similar style of signage across the NNR and to ensure they are readjusted when livestock leave – so that the public don't become complacent. For any sites using NoFence GPS collars it is also possible to put a QR code on the signage which will show visitors the locations of the livestock within the last 15 minutes – such that they can plan their access routes accordingly.
- **Volunteers in the community**. Volunteers could play a number of roles to help disseminate information and support grazing in the area: Recruiting a number of local people to become livestock checkers (with training) will be a help to graziers and keep on top of any issues that may arise, as well as be ambassadors within the community for what the grazing is aiming to achieve. This has been highly effective in other parts of the country.
- **Livestock densities**. Whilst there may be good farming reasons to have animals bunched up from time to time, it will be important that they have space to run from or move away from any perceived threats such as dogs or people. Having animals grazing too densely can mean that they turn to defend themselves when they feel threatened or cornered. This is an important consideration when landowners are working with graziers and organising the layout of sites.
- **Incident protocol**. It could be worth the NNR partners agreeing a standard protocol for the event of any incidents involving grazing livestock such that everyone can be informed and supported, and the risk of any negative publicity minimised. Many already have this in place.

<u>Routes to market</u>

Many of the graziers at the recent meeting felt it was only right for animals (particularly cattle and sheep) grazing in the NNR to find their way into the human food chain, rather than use them purely for delivering conservation until they reach old age and have to be culled at salvage value. It was felt this would also be the best approach for helping to make the animal's management worthwhile.

As with most agricultural products however, supply chains for beef and lamb are being increasingly consolidated and although there are opportunities for smaller, local supply chains, these are not easy for producers or consumers to navigate – made especially challenging by the loss of abattoirs across the UK. This means that anything that is a bit different or doesn't conform to industry specification is not fully valued in many mainstream markets.

This is relevant to the NNR because some animals highly suited to delivering conservation grazing may be comprised of more traditional native breeds that can produce a different shape and quality of carcass,

and require longer to fatten. Selling these into the mass market would mean that their full value may not be realised.

Furthermore, the meat derived from conservation grazed animals is generally proven to be of higher nutrient density and healthier for humans to eat than animals fed intensively on grains and soya, so in theory these additional qualities could be valued via some non-conventional supply chains.

Following discussion there were two distinct routes to market highlighted as relevant for the area:

- **High-end niche and premium**. Given the proximity to London and the affluent parts of the southeast, there should be consumers willing to pay more for the kind of products coming out of the NNR.
- **Low-end budget**. A large proportion of the population in North Kent are living in poverty, and landowners felt the NNR project should be supportive, and have intent for, feeding the deprived areas.

There is ultimately a price point at which producing meat works for the graziers, and either of the routes to market. This is changing all of the time but one solution – that meat wholesalers would manage, is to use these two routes to balance carcasses – with cheaper cuts of meat from a carcass going into the low-end markets, and the higher value cuts going into the high-end markets. This is similar in principle to how organic carcasses of beef are often managed – there being higher demand for organically certified premium cuts than the cheaper cuts – which end up being downgraded and sold without any organic claim.

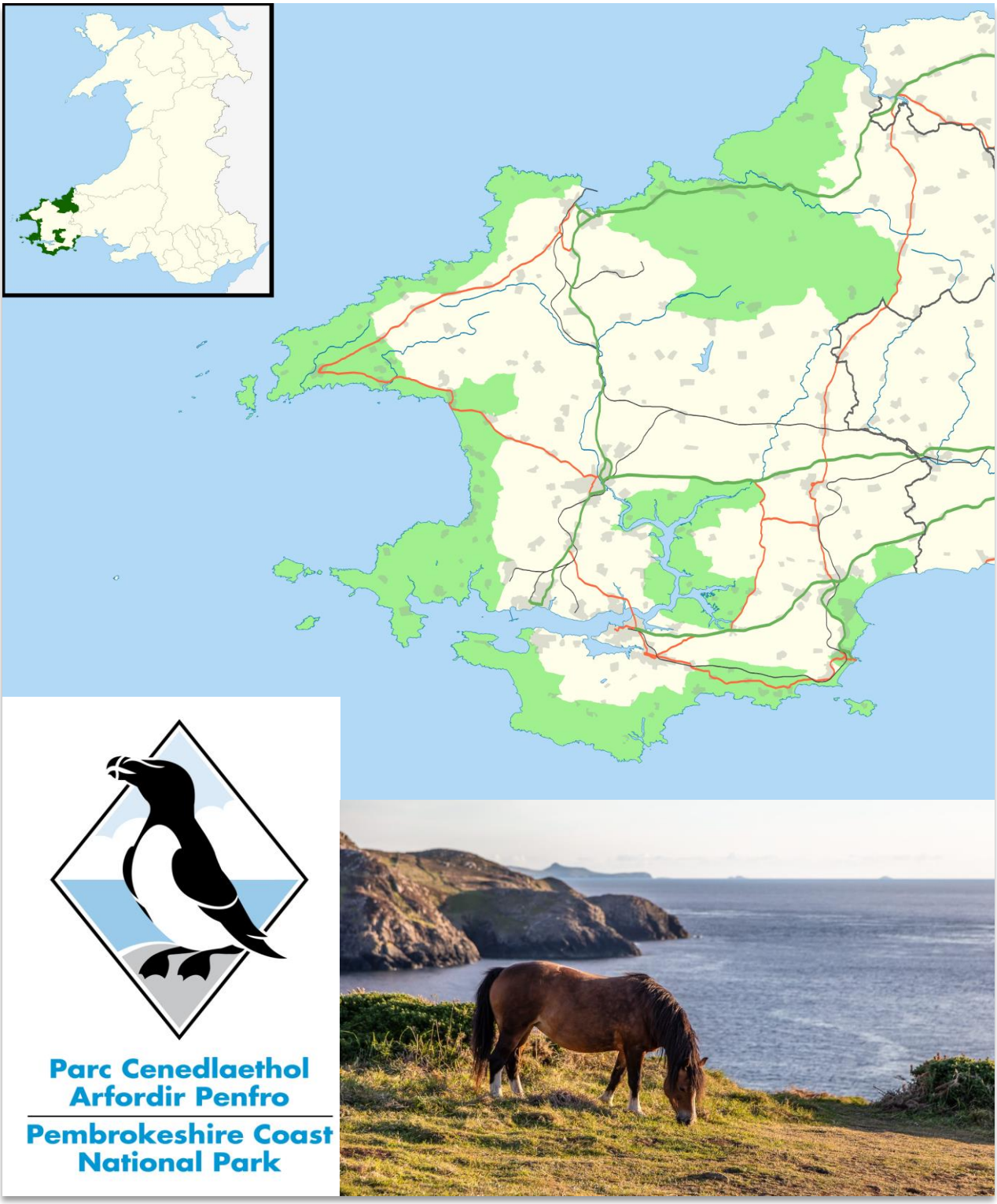
Supplying the local community with food from the NNR should be part of a bigger picture conversation which will hopefully be taken forward at some point. There is a lot to consider, most notably the lack of abattoirs or abattoirs with capacity for supporting local supply chains, and associated businesses (e.g. butchers) involved in getting product to consumers. However, whilst there was enthusiasm for local food for local people, there was also consensus that the quality and associated messaging had to be got right / be done well.

Summary and conclusions

Many of the considerations for each landowner are similar and there are several topics where some collaboration between partners would be worthwhile and help ensure a consistent outward message and shared approach to the NNR's reputation and status. Collaborating on creating an opportunity for one or more graziers could be one example worth exploring in more detail, and for which a further meeting would be needed – with further information and insight to be gathered from other relevant sites and professionals.

APPENDIX 23: CONSERVATION GRAZING CASE STUDIES

Case study: Pembrokeshire Grazing Network



Established:

1999

Area managed:

1500ha owned by third parties and 500ha owned/leased by Pembrokeshire Coast National Park (2000ha in total).

Summary:

Facilitated by Pembrokeshire Coast National Park involving three of their staff, their Farm Liaison Officer and two conservation officers with assistance from other staff where necessary. The network holds a list of land that requires grazing and a list of graziers who have approached the network over the years. Suitable graziers are matched with land belonging to third parties, facilitated by the National Park staff who then go on to work together unaided unless assistance is called for. On other sites that need very specific management a list of three, main, trusted graziers are used to graze several sites according to a grazing plan. These graziers are paid a nominal fee for their time.

Species of livestock used:

Predominantly ponies due to the prevalence of Bovine Tuberculosis in the area and their lack of complicated movement restrictions and land registration. Cattle and goats are used on some third-party sites, facilitated by the National Park, but not the core sites under close management. A trial of Nofence GPS collar-controlled grazing in woodland with cattle is proposed for the near future.

Number of Graziers:

Three main graziers and an extensive list of potential graziers and those matched with landowners seeking graziers. The three main graziers have a geographical split, one grazes the 36 sites in north of the National park, another grazes 20 sites in the West and another grazier focusses on the 12 sites to the South.

Habitats:

Rhos pasture, hay meadow, coastal heath, coastal grassland and limited woodland grazing.

Management of the Grazing Network:

At its inception Pembrokeshire National Park, the National Trust, PONT and the Countryside Council for Wales (now Natural Resources Wales) worked in partnership to get sites into appropriate management. Once suitable grazing was established there was less of a need for partnership working but there are recent moves to re-establish the partnership to share best practice, funding and ensure that sites are appropriately grazed. The grazing network is run by Pembrokeshire Coast National Park involving three of their staff, their Farm Liaison Officer and two conservation officers with assistance from other staff where necessary. They work with trusted graziers due to previous bad experiences when seeking new graziers.

Funding:

Pembrokeshire Coast National Park provide three members of staff part time on to work on the Grazing Network. They provide core funds to pay graziers for their time at £75 per site per month. The park will also pay an hourly rate to volunteer livestock checkers, if the site is provided with a volunteer livestock checker the rate is £50 per site per month. The grazing has to be carried out efficiently under the watch of National Park Staff. The grazing of the sites **costs £0.12/ ha** for management which cannot be replicated by machine for that cost or in ecological value. The payment is compensation for the heavily restricted grazing window and expectation that livestock may have to be moved at short notice due to adverse ground conditions.

Funding for capital items is found through external funding sought by the National Park or from Welsh Government Capital grants/ agri environment schemes. Some of the grazing facilitated on third party land may be paid for through landowners/ graziers claiming Basic Payment Scheme and agri-environment schemes.

Management of grazing:

Graziers are set up with a grazing agreement, a management prescription and have to have third party public liability insurance. This is checked by the National Park Staff. The conservation officers and Farm Liaison officer make site assessments and draw up a grazing timetable for the sites for each grazier. This is overseen by the staff and grazing altered as necessary. Trusted graziers are made aware of the outcomes required for the site and will aid in ensuring that they are grazed appropriately. Grazing has to be adaptive to respond to growing conditions etc. The Farm Liaison Officer is the main point of contact for the graziers and landowners and he will respond to problems as they arise, on some sites this is covered by the Conservation Officers. A list of species-specific requirements are taken into consideration in addition to general habitat prescriptions e.g. chough, reptiles, grassland fungi and marsh fritillary butterfly.

Equipment:

Some equipment such as a bowser and some limited handling equipment is held by the National Park and staff will assist where they can. Ultimately the graziers are responsible for providing their own equipment e.g. For transport.

Ecological knowledge:

Ecological knowledge is provided by two Conservation Officers employed by the National Park and the Farm Liaison Officers. SSSI and SACs are managed in conjunction with Conservation Officers from Natural Resources Wales. Graziers have gained extensive ecological knowledge over the years. It is important to have the right graziers involved in the scheme.

Timescales:

Sites which are fenced, have water and are ready for grazing can receive livestock almost immediately. Others can take a longer time due to political issues, funding for infrastructure and availability of livestock. Summer is where the greatest demand for stock is but there is less available during winter and spring. This is habitat dependent.

Shared initiatives:

The National Trust have their own livestock, Conservation Grazing Staff and equipment and graze their own sites and the Pembrokeshire Grazing Network works with them. The Network also works with private landowners, tenant farmers and Commoners Associations and will collaborate on projects.

Case Study: Anglesey Grazing Animals Project (AGAP)

The Anglesey Grazing Animals Project, a partnership initiative running from 2005 to 2015, aimed to promote conservation grazing across the island. A dedicated staff member coordinated the grazing network, managing a trusted list of pony, cattle, goat, and sheep graziers. The project was designed to be self-sustaining, with grazing overseen by the coordinator, who conducted site visits, developed grazing plans, and facilitated communication between landowners and graziers. While funding supported infrastructure like a cutting room and chiller trailer, grazing itself was unpaid, though some graziers could

claim Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) subsidies. The project also helped establish a Wildlife Friendly Produce brand, training farmers in butchery, food hygiene, and HACCP standards, and supported the creation of a shop selling red meat that contributed to conservation grazing. Unfortunately, the project ended in 2015 due to lack of funding, leading to the loss of the single coordinator (and their knowledge) who managed all aspects of the initiative.

Above: Chiller trailer purchased by the AGAP project.

Case studies: Grazing livestock for hire

In both Wales and England, there has been an increasing interest in utilising livestock for conservation grazing, though the willingness to pay for such services varies. In Wales, there remains a certain reluctance to pay for grazing services, although some organisations, such as the Trunk Roads Agency, Natural Resources Wales (NRW), Pembrokeshire Grazing Network and local councils, have recognised the benefits of hiring specialist contractors, particularly for tasks like scrub clearance using goats. These companies, which offer bespoke conservation grazing management, are often employed when traditional grazing options are not viable, or when landowners face difficulties in securing suitable graziers.

In certain cases, agencies like Natural Resources Wales and Natural England have stepped in to fund grazing activities in areas where finding appropriate graziers has been a challenge. These specialised contractors handle all aspects of the grazing process, from training stock checkers and ensuring compliance with movement legislation to setting up grazing protocols and closely monitoring the

effectiveness of the grazing or browsing in achieving the desired conservation outcomes. This service comes at a fee, but the expertise provided ensures that conservation objectives are met effectively.

Above: Grazing Management Ltd and Bio Goats 2 Rent are two private companies established to provide a bespoke grazing service.

Case study: Gower Meadow Beef

Established in 2017, Gower Meadow Beef focuses on grazing a diverse range of habitats, including saltmarsh, limestone cliffs, marshy grassland, common land, unimproved grassland, traditional hay meadows, fen, wetland, and woodland/wood pasture. The company uses native breed cattle (80 head), goats (20), and Welsh mountain ponies (20) to help manage and restore these habitats and the cattle are sold as pasture-fed beef at around 30-40 months of age. The grazing takes place on designated and protected lands such as National Nature Reserves (NNRs), Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Wildlife Trust Nature Reserves, and land owned by the National Trust and Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust.

Rent is not paid for land, partner organisations contribute to capital items such as virtual fencing equipment, water supply, fencing, and mobile handling facilities. Income is generated through direct sales of pasture-fed beef (18-20 animals processed annually), positioning pasture-fed and conservation grazing as a unique selling point. While the ponies are mainly a hobby and do not generate income, activities like walks and talks help cover costs for emergency treatment, insurance, and disposal. The sale of hefted conservation grazing ponies is being considered due to increasing demand.

Despite the valuable conservation work carried out, the grazing service itself is unfortunately not paid for. Other key factors in the project's success include a trained team of volunteer stock checkers, access to a home farm for wintering and handling, and support from PONT which helped establish the grazing of many of the sies.

Above: Gower Meadow Beef logo – good branding has been essential to make grazing viable

Other Examples of Businesses Focussing on Conservation Grazing:

Other businesses interested in conservation grazing in Wales focus on using low input, native breed cattle such as T. Small Cattle Company, conservation grazing for Marsh Fritillary butterflies and curlew in Carmarthenshire and Brecon. Pori Bach in northern Powys, conservation grazing with the threatened Ancient Cattle of Wales. These businesses have low costs, no rent, low feed input and sell high value beef in boxes and produce heifers for sale with rare and grass fed genetics. Another business owned by a passionate conservation grazier from Ceredigion uses beef shorthorn cattle, which are commercially saleable. He does not pay rent for the land that he grazes but his calves fetch suitable prices at market to sustain the business. He has a large herd and does not want to carry many over winter nor does he direct sell beef. His low-cost system works to turn a profit from conservation grazing by selecting the right breed for the land that he grazes.

Above: Welsh black steers (with GPS collars) grazing wet heathland in Pembrokeshire.