

Frequently Asked Questions about grazing at Burnham Beeches

Why Graze?	Up until the early 20th century, grazing animals were released every year onto the Beeches – their grazing helped create and maintain the wildlife rich habitats that we have today. When grazing stopped areas became overgrown and habitat value started to decline. Grazing contributes greatly to the diversity of the habitats found here, which is better for the wildlife. As an SAC and SSSI we are legally obliged to manage the reserve in a way that ensures the features of European importance do not decline in value – grazing helps us to do this.
Why not mow?	Whilst mowing will keep areas open, it cuts everything to the same length, producing no variation in structure – this is not so good for wildlife. As livestock do not always graze the same places, a diverse structure is produced – this is very good for wildlife. Livestock can graze in areas where machinery can't get to such as near dead wood or uneven ground. Mowing also uses fossil fuels.
What about cow/horse poo?	The livestock will produce dung whilst on the reserve but as they are herbivores and only eat <u>vegetation already growing</u> on the reserve; there is no increase in nutrients to the ecosystem. Cow/horse poo decomposes quickly as there are many insects and fungi which have evolved to feed on it – it is an important part of the ecosystem. In contrast dog mess decomposes slowly, is made up of nutrients from off the site and adds nutrients to it when left behind.
How many animals will there be on site and where will they be?	20 – 30 (currently 10) They will be able to roam nearly everywhere but will be excluded from some areas like the car parks and café. The herd will be increased in size slowly, not all at once and as they will be grazing a much larger area the density will be about the same.
When will the livestock be on site (and when not), how will I know?	The cows and ponies will be released around April - May and taken off around October - December. There will be signs on the reserve stating whether they are on or off site.
How do you keep the animals in?	This will be done with the existing fenced boundaries and we will trial the use of a system of invisible fencing which works via a buried cable and collars on the animals. The wire transmits a radio signal and if the animals get too close to the wire they will get an audible signal, if they get too close they then get a shock, similar to what is given by a traditional electric fence. They soon learn (after just one or two shocks) that the signal means 'keep away from the fence'. If trials prove successful we will expand to the whole site, if not we will use other systems, possibly including cattle grids
Does the invisible fencing hurt the animals?	No – the livestock will get a small shock equivalent to what you may expect for a traditional electric livestock fence but after one or two they learn to keep away.
Will the fencing affect other things like phones?	No
What will you do if they escape? What if the battery/collar/fence fails?	As they learn where the fence is, even if the fence/collar fails the livestock will most likely not want to cross the line. An escape from the enclosure is unlikely but should this happen, it would be no different from an animal escaping the existing traditional fences/grids; we already have procedures to recover them and these will remain the same.

Why isn't the fence on the inside of the road?	The SSSI and SAC extends right to the boundaries of Burnham Beeches and so therefore the management needs to extend to those boundaries to ensure all the land is in 'favourable condition (a legal requirement). In addition, grazing creates a very distinct landscape which will make it feel like a special place when you come into the Beeches. This will help people realise that the whole area is a nature reserve, not just the land on the inside of the roads.
Will I be safe in the grazing area?	We choose breeds which are both docile and well adapted to the grazing available. We also do not use breeding livestock which can be protective of their young. You should however still not approach or try to stroke or feed the animals.
What about other site users like walkers, dog walkers, cyclists, horse riders etc?	All other site users will still be able to go to all the places where they have always been able to visit. Dog walkers should be aware that their dog must be under close control at all times and they may be asked to keep it on a lead. A large part of the site has already been grazed successfully for the last 20 years and animals are used to walkers, dogs, horseriders, cyclists etc.
I want somewhere free of livestock. Where can I go?	Livestock will be in most areas of the Beeches but will be excluded from key areas like the car parks and café area.
I'm frightened of livestock what can I do?	There will be relatively few livestock in 540 acres so there will be lots of space and it should be very simple to walk a slightly different route if you want to avoid them.
What if my dog doesn't like cows etc?	As explained above, livestock are an essential tool for managing the internationally important habitats that are found here and are also a significant part of the long history of the reserve – not using them is not an option. Therefore you may have to consider walking your dog elsewhere
What about the café or car parks – we don't want cows there?	Livestock will be excluded from the café and car parks.
What about the traffic?	For the trial there will be signage to warn drivers as well as 'simulated' cattle grids on the roads – such actions will be repeated and developed as required for future trials and any final scheme layout. For the final scheme any/the invisible fence loops will be designed to reduce any risk – the presence of livestock should help to 'calm traffic'. Other options to minimise risk include using reflective collars/leg bands and removing roadside shrubs/trees in key areas. We will continue to work closely with Transport for Bucks on such actions.
Are you legally allowed to do this?	Yes – indeed it is part of our wider legal obligation to protect the biodiversity of the Beeches that we are introducing this scheme.
What have you done to make people aware of your plans?	We held a public consultation in November 2009 at which 71% of respondents wanted to see as much of the Beeches grazed as possible, including using systems to enable the livestock to graze both sides of the public highways (e.g. cattle grids). In 2012 we have already carried out 2 grazing trials. There have also been regular updates on site, on our web page and in our newsletter.
Is this sort of thing happening in other places?	Yes at Epping Forest they carried out a successful trial of the same system where cattle were able to cross public roads. Livestock currently graze (using different enclosure systems) at Dorney Common and of course in the New Forest and Gower peninsula in Wales.

What breeds will you use?	British White cows, Exmoor ponies and possibly Berkshire pigs
Will you own the animals?	Burnham Beeches owns 6 cows and 4 ponies at the moment. The decision has not yet been made whether any extra animals will be owned by us or someone else.
Who will deal with welfare issues – what happens if they are unwell?	The livestock are checked a minimum of once daily by the Rangers. If we see any signs of ill health they are taken to our holding area where they can be looked at by a vet if necessary and receive the appropriate treatment. We are always grateful if visitors report problems when they find them.
Will you have breeding animals?	No. Breeding animals can sometimes be protective of their young
Can we touch/feed the animals?	No. The livestock are not pets, they are farm animals and whilst very docile, are large and like, any animal, can be unpredictable so should not be approached or fed. They are not used to being touched like some animals at farm parks. Whilst they are on the reserve we do not give them any supplementary feed as this would discourage them from grazing the natural vegetation and will increase nutrient levels on the reserve; higher nutrient levels would be bad for wildlife. Well-meaning visitors may think they are being kind but could be causing harm by feeding inappropriate foods. A particular concern is that feeding may also encourage them to follow and be a nuisance to other site users.
Can I put my pony out with the Beeches animals?	No. Only the City of London has the right to graze Burnham Beeches. In addition the numbers of animals are carefully calculated and grazing conditions carefully monitored. We also use breeds that are best suited to the conditions in the Beeches and the type of conservation grazing that we do.
Will the animals be managed on a commercial basis - will I be able to purchase Burnham Beeches meat?	There are no plans at the moment for this but it has not been ruled out for the future. If the livestock used are not owned by the City of London it is possible that 'locally produced woodland meat' <i>may</i> be available.
What will happen if they cause damage by eating everything and ruining the footpaths?	Grazing conditions are constantly monitored whilst the livestock are on the reserve. They are here to manage the vegetation by grazing and to keep the woodland and heathland areas open and will be removed if food becomes scarce. Whilst they may leave some footprints in some wetter areas, the gravel paths and boardwalks are very resilient and damage is minimal. You can help by reporting any that does occur so we can arrange repairs as soon as possible.
How can I show my support/can I be involved in some way?	There are lots of ways to show your support ranging from displaying one of our 'grazing it's amazing' badges to coming out with our volunteers and doing practical conservation work. You could also become one of our eyes and ears volunteers, looking out for and reporting any issues you see when you are walking on the reserve. As a charity, donations and bequests are always welcome and all funds raised go towards looking after the Beeches.