



Grazing Animals in our Parks



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Introduction

The Council currently grazes cattle at two of its parks, Pishiobury Park in Sawbridgeworth and Red, White and Blue to the north of Grange Paddocks in Bishop's Stortford. We also have sheep grazing at Southern Country Park in Bishop's Stortford.

We have grazed animals on some of our parks on and off for many years now. We are supporting the local economy by working with graziers from Hertfordshire. Our current grazer is based in Hitchin and specialises in providing a unique conservation grazing service to local authorities.



Using traditional and rare breeds of cattle such as, English Longhorn and British White they provide the type of extensive grazing system that we require. Their animals will eat a much wider range of plants and grasses than modern commercial (often continental) breeds. This meets directly with one of Natural England's main objectives (see below). Another added benefit to grazing these native breeds in public parks, is that they are noted for being particularly docile and relaxed with people and generally even with dogs.

The animals share a historical relationship with the UK's parks. Breeds identical to these have grazed this and other parks across the country, since at least the 1750's and probably before. For this reason, the animals are particularly well suited to the park environment and fit perfectly with the landscape character and context of Pishiobury Park. They have been bred over the centuries to make best use of native grasses and wildflowers without the need for intensive grassland management through fertilisers and pesticides.



Our graziers are very keen to talk to, educate and share with the public their views regarding the environmental, landscape and genetic advantages of maintaining viable herds of these very special and rare animals. If you would like to meet them and find out more, they will be helping us with our annual

“Meet the Animals” events held at both parks in the summer. These events are normally held in July and further information is available on the Council’s website www.eastherts.gov.uk/getparkactive. The graziers are proud of what they do and they help us to play an important role in protecting our national landscape heritage.



As well as looking after the animals, the team at Maydencroft provide a friendly, approachable and informative day-to-day service to park users during their regular visits to inspect their animals. They will always be happy to talk to visitors about the animals or grazing techniques. They even provide advice to conservation graziers on a national scale and are leading experts on Longhorns.

Environmental Stewardship

We work with Natural England (NE) to manage these parks to a high and responsible standard by signing up to the government’s Environmental Stewardship scheme. This is an agri-environment scheme that was formally launched in March 2005. It is one of the areas of environmental management that NE delivers for the government in partnership with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra).

We currently operate under Countryside Stewardship, the forerunner of the new two level scheme at both parks and are working toward upgrading to the higher level scheme at Pishiobury Park.

Environmental Stewardship has a number of wide ranging objectives, which include:-

- Wildlife conservation
- The provision of public access to the countryside
- The protection of archaeological sites and historic features
- The conservation of rare traditional livestock breeds and varieties
- Protection of water and soil
- Prevention of erosion and water pollution
- Flood management

Through Countryside Stewardship nationwide, the type of grazing that we are promoting may have an important new, sustainable role as the ideal management tool for our most sensitive and valuable historic landscapes.

With expert support from both Maydencroft and the County’s Countryside Management Service (CMS), we adhere closely to the Natural England specification for habitat enhancement of grassland and historic parkland. This includes considering carefully the number of animals that we graze at any one time and for instance the way that we manage our hedge lines.

The Council benefits from expert advice and guidance from Natural England by taking part in the scheme and also receives financial payments to cover some of the work that is carried out such as fencing and to support the cost of the grazing. The Council also uses the savings made by not needing to cut the grass at the parks to fund the grazing regime.



To be absolutely sure that our grazing regime is working effectively we also receive advice from the County Council's Ecologist from their Hertfordshire Biological Records Centre. This involves an assessment of the grass habitats each year and discussions about the number and type of animals that we graze.

What does grazing achieve?

Most of our 'natural' heritage is, in fact, semi-natural in the sense that it is made up of collections of native plant and animal species which, over thousands of years, have adapted to the nation's farming activities, including grazing. These communities are now reliant on our continuing management of their habitats if they are to survive. Activities such as grazing are crucial to maintaining the quality of certain types of habitat.



The principle effect that we have been aiming for is the restoration of our parks to some of their original glory. The impact of the livestock is less uniform than a mower and thus the outcome is more "natural". In addition, the landscape is a pastoral one. The livestock and the movement they bring are part of it, not just maintaining it.



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When animals are grazing they keep down choking invasive tall grasses, scrub and, sapling trees in environmentally sensitive areas. This clearance allows for

a more species-rich spread of other grasses and wildflowers in valuable habitats such as grasslands, heathlands and fens. Cattle also turn over the ground with their hooves and, of course, produce natural fertilisers for the plant life!

Since the war an increasing shift from mixed farming systems to the more profitable arable has meant that in many areas grazing animals are no longer found. The result is many fragile habitats, and the wildlife they support, are in danger of being lost.

Another important consideration is the fact that our customers tell us frequently that they like the animals! They give families the opportunity to see livestock in an otherwise, predominantly arable landscape. They provide an accessible opportunity to introduce children to the realities of where their food comes from.

In 2005 the Council commissioned an independent landscape architect consultancy to provide an historical landscape character assessment of the park; the Pishiobury Park Restoration Plan. The following observations and recommendations were made:

The fact that grazing has continued at all is to be commended. Grazing of public open spaces can often be problematic and EHC is to be congratulated for maintaining this form of management. The presence of stock contributes immeasurably to the park's rural character and the natural processes of grazing animals (dung) will be increasing the sites value to biodiversity. Alternative forms of grassland management, such as hay cutting or worse, regular amenity mowing are expensive operations and would detract from the park's interest. Every effort to maintain grazing should be made; this might include simple measures such as improvements to water troughs and perimeter fencing.

Whilst it could be argued that sheep would be better grazers and lead to the short sward that would have been the desired grassland for a designed parkland, the fact that the park is heavily used by dog walkers prevents such a change in stock on animal welfare grounds alone (sheep worrying). The cattle seemed remarkably uninterested in passing dogs during site visits, and vice versa.

It could also be suggested that rare breed cattle might be more suited to the parkland landscape at Pishiobury. This might be the case if the option ever presented itself, but the priority must be given to maintaining grazing first, before aesthetics.

If you would like to read more of the plan there is a copy along with some of our other management plans at <http://www.eastherts.gov.uk/index.jsp?articleid=10080>

Is it safe to graze animals where the public have access?

Between April 1996 and March 2006, 46 incidents involving cattle and members of the public were investigated by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) across Britain. Seven resulted in death. Almost all these incidents were in fields and enclosed areas. Many other incidents are not reported to, nor investigated by, HSE. They advise that the two most common factors in these incidents are cows with calves and walkers with dogs. The more in

depth reports list many of the cows that have been involved in these rare but tragic incidents as being cross bred with larger and more aggressive European breeds.

All large animals are potentially dangerous. Farmers try to ensure that the cattle they own or breed from are of a normally quiet temperament. However, when under stress, e.g. because of the weather, illness, unusual disturbance, or when maternal instincts are aroused, even normally placid cattle can become aggressive. Even gentle knocks from cattle can result in people being injured. Natural England advise that all breeds should be treated with respect.

If dogs are not kept under proper control and run off close to cattle, the cattle may instinctively give chase. The dog is most likely then to run back to its owner with a cow in hot pursuit and potentially with the rest of the herd naturally following behind. Not only is the owner potentially put at risk in this way, but the cattle are also in danger. The RSPCA have concerns about the number of livestock that are injured or killed each year by dogs.

East Herts Council takes this risk very seriously and have looked closely at ways to ensure that we can use this effective and sustainable method of managing the grass in a way that does not conflict with the public's enjoyment of the park.

We have looked at all the potential risks and have minimised these wherever we can. We are confident that by using specialist graziers, by choosing our animals very carefully and by making the public aware of their own responsibilities when visiting the countryside, that our parks are safe and cared for in the best possible way.

What are the risks?

We have considered the advice provided by Defra and the HSE in relation to cattle in publicly accessible spaces and have carefully implemented this advice into the way we operate.

Employers and the self-employed are required under health and safety legislation to assess the types of risks that are associated with grazing animals, and take such steps as are reasonably practicable to reduce them to an acceptable level. There is also a relevant duty of care under the Animals Act 1971.

Section 59 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 bans bulls of recognised and dairy breeds from fields crossed by public rights of way. This law does not apply in open areas such as moorland; however, bulls of dairy breeds are very unlikely to be kept in such circumstances.

Bulls of breeds used for rearing beef are generally less aggressive than dairy breeds, but individual temperaments also vary significantly. With this in mind,

we do not graze bulls in our parks. They can endanger visitors to open access land. Rather than considering methods to separate them from the public, we have chosen simply not to have them in our parks at all. A bull is an uncastrated male.

Castrated males however are known as bullocks or steers and have a different temperament entirely. They are naturally boisterous and may sometimes even appear aggressive to visitors. This is due however to their inquisitive nature and very rarely results in injury.



Steers are young castrated males, usually raised for beef. A Heifer is a young cow that has not yet given birth to a calf but again is well tempered and suited to an environment where there is likely to be interaction with the public. Our graziers choose the herds for our parks from these types of animals.

The heifers especially are the most cautious. They tend to keep themselves to themselves but are naturally curious like many animals. They will sometimes approach and sniff out anything new. Our graziers work in and around them on a daily basis and have never seen any of the cattle that are brought into the park look angry or act aggressively. They graze efficiently, often in rows and munch through the grass quite quickly at times. They will occasionally break into a run if disturbed and can cover an area surprisingly quickly. This might perhaps look like a “stampede” but again they are simply acting naturally and mean no harm. Cattle can mimic you if you decide to run but only out of curiosity, they will stop well short and a small shout or wave of arms will stop them in their tracks.

We also graze Romanian Water Buffalo at Pishiobury Park in a separately fenced water meadow area. This section of the park is essentially a flood meadow and is therefore wet through most of the year. The water buffalo are ideal for this type of grazing. They again are known for their placid nature and should not be confused with their wild counterparts that are of course potentially dangerous. This breed has been reared domestically since the 1960s and is now far from “wild”!



Our graziers handle all their animals for some time before they are brought into our parks and know the full history of each of them. They are confident that all the animals chosen to graze our parks have a suitable temperament. They will reassure any visitor that their animals are as docile and friendly as they come.

We have been grazing Longhorns and British Whites at Pishiobury since 2008 and at Red, White and Blue for a year with only one incident at each park where visitors have become frightened of the animals and reported their concern to us. Both had dogs with them.



These two parks are extremely popular and are visited by many thousands of people each year. Our graziers and our Area Environmental Inspectors meet the public at both sites on a regular basis and receive many compliments from people about how they bring so much benefit to the park.

Cattle normally tolerate people well, particularly when they have become used to encountering them. However because of their size they can present a significant threat if they feel threatened whilst they are protecting their young. Heavily pregnant cattle may abort or give birth prematurely if chased by dogs. It is an offence under the Dogs (Protection of Livestock) Act 1953 to allow dogs to attack or chase livestock. The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW), does not entitle visitors to take a dog into the vicinity of livestock unless on a short lead though in relation to safety considerations, keeping hold of a dog's lead when attacked by cattle may increase the risk of serious injury or even death.

Defra advise that measures to separate cattle from visitors are only likely to be necessary when cattle are calving or have calves at foot in fields that provide public access. **Taking this all into consideration, we do not graze pregnant animals, those that are calving or those that are protecting their young in our parks.**

We minimise the risks considerably by choosing the type of animal we graze. There is still though a greater risk for visitors with dogs that are not under control.

Keeping dogs under close control

Natural England provides the following advice about visiting the countryside with dogs.

The countryside is a great place to exercise dogs, but it's every owner's duty to make sure their dog is not a danger or nuisance to farm animals, wildlife or other people.

- *By law, you must control your dog so that it does not disturb or scare farm animals or wildlife. On most areas of open country and common*

land, known as 'access land' you must keep your dog on a short lead between 1 March and 31 July, and all year round near farm animals.

- *You do not have to put your dog on a lead on public paths, as long as it is under close control. But as a general rule, keep your dog on a lead if you cannot rely on its obedience. By law, farmers are entitled to destroy a dog that injures or worries their animals.*
- *If a farm animal chases you and your dog, it is safer to let your dog off the lead – don't risk getting hurt by trying to protect it.*
- *Take particular care that your dog doesn't scare sheep and lambs or wander where it might disturb birds that nest on the ground and other wildlife – eggs and young will soon die without protection from their parents.*
- *Everyone knows how unpleasant dog mess is and it can cause infections – so always clean up after your dog and get rid of the mess responsibly. Also make sure your dog is wormed regularly to protect it, other animals and people.*
- *At certain times, dogs may not be allowed on some areas of access land or may need to be kept on a lead. Please follow any signs. You can also find out more by phoning the Open Access Contact Centre on 0845 100 3298.*

Sadly accidents have occurred when cattle have become agitated due to the presence of walkers with dogs, especially where there are cows with calves. It is important not to walk between a cow and its calf. Dogs do not need to be on a lead if they are properly controlled, but they must not chase livestock which distresses livestock and may result in injuries. In the event of an animal becoming interested in your dog be prepared to allow the dog to run off, as the animals will be more interested in the dog than the walker.

For further advice and information see "You and your dog in the countryside" leaflet which can be downloaded from the Countryside Access website; www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk.

Or Visit Natural England's [dog walking pages](#) for more information.



What action do we take about the remaining risks?

To be quite sure that any risk at all to our park visitors is kept to a minimum, we take the following precautions:

- We locate cattle watering and feeding stations away from routes or areas frequented by the public.
- We provide separately fenced holding areas in our parks where the graziers can take the animals for close inspection and to load and off load them. This also ensures that the animals are not unduly stressed by public interaction during these sometimes delicate operations.



- We locate informal routes across the parks in positions that steer visitors away from areas favoured by cattle wherever possible. The parks that we choose to graze animals in have good sight lines making sure that it is easy to see the animals from some distance away.

- We place signs at entry points to remind visitors of the requirements to keep their dogs on leads in the vicinity of livestock. Visitors are advised for their own safety and that of their dogs to keep clear of the animals wherever possible and to unclip their dogs' leads if they are chased by cattle.

- The specific breeds used by our graziers are known for their docile nature and each animal brought to the park is handpicked to form a herd that is best suited to grazing our busy parks.



- We monitor any incidents where staff or the public have witnessed behaviour in the animals that might cause concern. We keep a record of these on our customer enquiry database and ensure that our graziers are aware.
- Our graziers ensure that the cattle are handled frequently throughout their life and are used to the presence of other people in their enclosures.
- Our graziers and our staff maintain a good relationship with the local RSPCA officers to ensure that they are able to easily contact us about any concerns that may be reported to them.

- We check that fences, gates and signs are safe and fit for their purpose. This ensures that our cattle stay where they should and that they cannot get near to the highway.
- Our graziers check the cattle for illness (or other possible causes of changes in temperament) and inspect the fences surrounding the fields regularly.
- Our graziers plan how to safely move individual cattle, the whole herd, or part of it, from field to field and to and from the farm, again ensuring that there is no risk of them straying onto the road.
- We provide dog waste bins in our parks to help minimise the risk of infections from dog waste and to help emphasise that visitors are welcome to bring their dogs to our parks as long as they look after them responsibly.



A note about fencing

We use barbed wire in the park as it is recommended in the Natural England stewardship specifications for livestock control.



Natural England advise that if possible barbed wire should not be exposed where fencing runs alongside access routes. We have in fact treated the whole park and meadow areas as if they were public rights of way. All top barbed wire in the parks is on the side of the posts away from the public with a top strand of plain wire on that side of the posts to protect people. This is because visitors that do go near to the fences are

most likely to come into contact with it at that height.

Where people are brought unavoidably near to the fencing at certain access points or narrow areas, sturdy post and rail fencing that does not need barbed wire has been used to keep the cattle safe.

Please be aware of this when you visit the park and ensure that your dogs are kept under control. They could be at risk of injury from the lower barbed strands if they are allowed to run unchecked. We cannot change these for plain wire as the cattle are then at risk of breaking through the fencing and reaching the road.

What about sheep?

Sheep will often keep their distance from visitors, but are not usually troubled by considerate public use, and can habituate to it well.

The main concern is disturbance from dogs during the lambing season. When sheep are heavily pregnant or have young lambs at foot, disturbance by dogs can significantly increase the risk of lamb or ewe mortality.

We do not graze sheep that are either pregnant or have lambs at foot.

Sheep are also vulnerable to disturbance during gathering or handling. Both types of disturbance can be significantly eased when dogs are kept under control, as required under rights of way legislation. It is also an offence under the Dogs (Protection of Livestock) Act 1953 to allow dogs to attack or chase livestock.

We only graze sheep in our parks within areas that are restricted from public access or can be restricted during the period of grazing. They are handled only by the graziers.



The sheep in our parks consequently present no risk to the visiting public.

The Countryside Code

The Countryside Code is a useful reference in relation the use of open spaces, particularly our larger parks. It applies to all parts of the countryside. Most of it is just good commonsense, as it is designed to help us all to respect, protect and enjoy our countryside.

There are five sections of The Countryside Code dedicated to helping members of the public respect, protect and enjoy the countryside.

- [Be safe, plan ahead and follow any signs](#)
- [Leave gates and property as you find them](#)
- [Protect plants and animals and take your litter home](#)
- [Keep dogs under close control](#)
- [Consider other people](#)

There are three sections of the Countryside Code dedicated to land managers that help them to manage land safely and to act reasonably.

- Know your rights, responsibilities and liabilities
- Make it easy for visitors to act responsibly
- Identify possible threats to visitor's safety

If you would like to find out more about the code the full details are now on the Natural England web site at;

<http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/enjoying/countrysidecode/default.aspx>

And finally!

Please continue to visit our parks as many thousands do and enjoy them to their full in the knowledge that the presence of cattle is an important addition to the park.



Help us to keep the very low risk that this presents to an absolute minimum by following the countryside code and we can all enjoy these wonderful landscapes with their thriving habitats for many years to come!

(This information is correct at time of printing in July 2010)