

Barnham Cross Common Update.

Sheep and Cattle return after over 40 years to graze Barnham Cross Common.

From Thursday the 22nd of May 2017 the Barnham Cross Common will be home to a small herd of Dexter Galloway Cross Cattle. The following week they will be joined by a small flock of native breed of beulah sheep.

The Common is internationally recognised because it is rare grassland heaths and associated species. The Town Council has carried out extensive restoration works and a management plan for the site, approved by English Nature includes the introduction of grazing animals. Over recent years fencing has gone up and the removal of large areas of scrub and trees has begun. Having animals grazing the Common is crucial for providing the right habitat for the rare plants that inhabit the common. Once regularly grazed again it should produce a varied grass sward and open patches suitable for many of the Brecks specialties such as Spring and Fingered Speedwell, Prostrate Perennial Knawel, Spanish Catchfly, Field Wormwood and Tower Mustard.

Initially grazing will be introduced to the Nunnery Drive (east) side of the common. This means that residents can choose to avoid the animals by using the Elm Rd side of the common or perimeter areas. Signage will remind dog walkers that dogs must be on a lead no longer than 2 metres in areas with livestock and in all areas between March 1st and July 31st.

In a recent poll of 173 residents 75% thought that grazing the common was a good or a very good idea. People were however worried about restricted public access to the Common. Residents can rest assured that the Town Council owns the land which is a Common and it is designated as Open Access land under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. This means that the public has a right of access that is protected by law.

Some residents have been confused at the council not allowing fly grazing when they are introducing grazing animals on the site. The reasons why the council is stamping out the fly grazing is that for conservation and animal welfare purposes the grazing has to be carefully managed and this cannot be done by animals who are illegally left on the common.

Respondents in the survey were also worried about the welfare of animals but they will be regularly checked by the livestock owner. However the Town Council is inviting regular users of the Common who would be willing to keep an eye on the livestock, learn more about the project and report any concerns that they may have. Training will be offered to any volunteers that come forward to offer their time.

To volunteer to watch over the animals or further information please contact Roz Barnett at **Thetford Town Council Tel 01842 770253 or email: rosalindbarnett@thetfordtowncouncil.gov.uk**