



## **HORSES' FIELD**

### **GRAZING ENGAGEMENT – RESPONSE SUMMARY**

Produced by:



On behalf of:



# Engagement response

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## Introduction

As stated in the original grazing engagement document, 'Three Rivers District Council (TRDC) would like to introduce cattle grazing to Horses' Field to improve management of the wildflower meadow. This aims to create an enhanced habitat for wildlife, a feature of interest for visitors and reduce maintenance costs. The aim of this public engagement is to confirm whether this proposal has local support'.

A period of public engagement took place between Monday 13<sup>th</sup> January and Monday 10<sup>th</sup> February. A document which outlined the current management of Horses' Field, benefits of cattle grazing and information about public access was posted on Three Rivers District Council's website, the document was also sent to local councillors and stakeholders. Posters and copies of the document were placed at all pedestrian entrances to Horses' Field; the aim being to capture the views of regular site users.

This document will summarise the response received, address issues raised and indicate the intended actions regarding cattle grazing at Horses' Field.

## Summary

Of the 45 responses received, 30 were in favour of grazing cattle, 7 were opposed and 8 indicated no preference but submitted comments for consideration. After review of the responses received, Three Rivers District Council have decided to introduce cattle grazing to Horses' Field.

Those in favour of grazing commented on recent works to restore the wildflower meadow at Horses' Field and expressed their support for sustainable, low intensity management that would further enhance this habitat for wildlife and improve biodiversity. It was also recognised that this could provide a valuable educational resource for all visitors, especially young children visiting the field and play area.

A few concerns were raised about the effect cattle may have on habitats for butterflies, moths and ground nesting birds. To maintain habitats for the greatest environmental benefit it is important that management remains appropriate to the site. To optimise grazing a regime which defines quantity of livestock and duration of grazing will be applied and monitored throughout the season. English Nature (now Natural England) states [here](#) that *"Livestock grazing is essential for the management of many of England's most important wildlife habitats. Grassland, heathland, wood pasture, floodplain and coastal marshes all require some grazing to maintain the structure and composition upon which a variety of plants and animals depend for their survival"*. This form of management helps to maintain and improve grassland diversity, providing a variety of foodplants for butterflies and moths. It also creates a varied habitat structure which provides essential micro-habitats used by insects and small animals for shelter and breeding, including ground nesting birds. The [RSPB](#) also state that 'Skylarks can nest successfully in grazed pastures if you can maintain a tussocky sward with a low stock rate through the spring and summer. Unimproved grasslands managed without inputs often hold high densities of skylarks'.

Feedback from the engagement showed that some had concerns about livestock welfare. Cattle will have constant access to fresh water. Troughs will be installed at Horses' Field that

automatically refill as the water level drops, ensuring a continuous supply. Cattle will be checked daily by a voluntary group consisting of interested members of the local community. A weekly schedule will be arranged with volunteers who will be responsible for visiting Horses' Field on their agreed day(s) to check on the cattle, their water access and condition of fencing, reporting any faults to the park ranger or grazier.

Other concerns included the presence of cattle in a public greenspace and proximity to residential properties. To reiterate, only breeds with a temperament suitable for grazing on public sites will be selected. There will be no restrictions to public access and dog walkers will be free to walk with their dog(s) in Horses' Field when livestock are present, as long as they are kept under close control on leads. This is good practise when walking near farm animals with dogs, for people's own safety and for the welfare of the animals. It is also worth repeating that livestock will not be on site permanently as this is not beneficial to habitat management. Cattle will graze Horses' Field between April and September each year, with exact duration dependent on ground conditions and availability of grass. Cattle will not be restricted to a particular area and will have access throughout Horses Field, with the exception of the play area. Therefore, presence of livestock would not be concentrated to areas within close proximity of surrounding properties.

The consultation demonstrated that there is a need to invest more time in familiarising people with sharing open space with grazing animals, as is normal in more rural parts of the country. As a result, 'meet the cows' events will be arranged in 2020 and subsequent years. Feedback also identified the necessity to run a second round of engagement later in the year to discuss stock fencing options. It will be important to explore options that provide an alternative to walking in the field with cattle, for example by creating a walking route around the South Way side with inset fencing. The second round of engagement will be publicised in the same way as the first, with all stakeholders and members of the public invited to comment on the proposal.