



WHITE CLIFFS COUNTRYSIDE PROJECT



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MANAGING THE WESTERN HEIGHTS ABOVE CLARENDON and MAXTON

Current work of the White Cliffs Countryside Project

Previous articles in the Newsletter have described various stages in the work of the Project, keeping readers up-to-date with our activities. At present we are concentrating on an area of approximately 60 acres above Clarendon, Westbury and Maxton. This area, surrounding the north slopes of the fortifications, is a piece of good, chalk grassland that desperately needs grazing. It is an important place of recreation for local residents and is increasingly important for tourists. I understand that the North Downs Way long distance footpath is in the process of being re-routed across this site because of the upheaval at Aycliffe..

A leaflet outlining the need for grazing chalk grassland and our fencing proposals was delivered to 5000 households inviting them to attend one of two public meetings to discuss ideas.





The wildlife of the chalk grassland and the benefits of grazing.

Grassland is effectively a man-made habitat created by 'farming' activities with grazing animals. Over time a rare association of many varieties of plants and animals has developed and the 'pressure' created by grazing prevents the potentially dominant plants from smothering the rarer ones, like delicate orchids and fragrant herb species.

The presence of grazing animals benefits other wildlife such as mammals, birds, reptiles and insects who feed on worms and insect larvae. Downland butterflies benefit because grazing encourages the plant species and the habitat structure that they require for survival.

Without grazing the rank grasses will become dominant, smothering the valuable, colourful and fragrant chalk downland plants. Soon shrubs and trees invade the grassland and the shade they create kills

off the rarer plants and the animals that live on them. Eventually, the thorny scrub makes walking on footpaths difficult, the landscape becomes less colourful than before and fewer species survive.

Report on the public meetings and the progress of work.

After the meetings the fencing proposals were amended. For example, we had suggested three large fields but the residents preferred two to reduce the fencing in the landscape. Before any of this work was started a leaflet with the amended plan was delivered to every household that backs onto this part of the Western Heights - we waited for reactions!

A few residents commented on various aspects of the plans so we accommodated these changes where practical. After the public consultations the contracts were put out to local tender and the fencing began.

Residents in one part of the Heights were concerned about wild life access to and from their gardens, so, instead of the proposed stock netting that would have restricted animal movement, we used barbed wire. This allows wild animals to squeeze through but it restrains cattle.

Public access is extremely important and so we installed pedestrian gates on all the main footpath routes and also included shared access gates from gardens that back onto the fenced area.

Now the fencing is almost complete and the grazing programme will start in early summer. Only one of the two fields will be grazed at any one time. This 'rotational' grazing means that, for example, a field may be grazed for three or four months at a time, then the cattle are moved to the next field. In this way there is always 'cattle free' walking space on the Western Heights.

Grazing is essential to preserve the grassland of this wonderful area, and to maintain it as a site for rare wild life and a place for future Dovorians and tourists to enjoy.

Please consider becoming a Voluntary Warden for the White Cliffs Countryside Project.

We need people to help us care for this place.

Please contact me, Melanie Wrigley, at the W.C.C.P., 6 Cambridge Terrace, Dover or telephone me on Dover 241806

