



Greenham & Crookham Common Commission Meeting
Minutes of Thursday 29th May 2025 @7pm
West Berkshire Council Offices, Market Street, Newbury RG14 5LD
in the Roger Croft Room

Commissioners Present

Sue Ellis (WBHF & Chairman)
Ken Neal (Commoner and Vice Chairman)
Chris Austin (Commoner)
Derek Cutt (Commoner)
Billy Drummond (NDC Councillor)
Roger Hunneman (NTC)
John Parker (Conservation Volunteers)
Simon Pike (Thatcham TC Councillor)
Claudia Sievers (Commoner)
Maxwell Slater-Nunn (Natural England)
Tony Vickers (Mid & West Berks Access Forum)
WBDC Appointed Officer: Paul Hendry
Secretary GPC Clerk:
BBOWT Advisers: Julian Cooper

1 Apologies

Judith Curson (Commoner)
Tony Ferguson (Greenham Trust)
James Field (Commoner)
Tom Hayeard (BBOWT)
Frank Huxtable (Commoner)
Nicole Rorie (Commoner)

2 No Declarations of Interest were raised.

3 Public Session

- One grazier attending but no comments for the public session.

4 Minutes of the last meeting 30th January 2025

The minutes of the meeting held 30th January 2025 were approved. No matters arising not on the agenda.

Matters for Decision and presentation

5 Cattle on the Commons – update

The graziers had confirmed in May that 50 cattle had been depastured on the Common. Sue Ellis reported that partway through May she had discussed grazing with BBOWT, and sent an email to the graziers raising concerns with the lower level of grass available, because of the dry weather, and asking whether they would consider holding off depasturing more cattle at the start of June. She also provided a notice that it might be necessary to ask formally under the Regulations for some cattle to be removed in July (the Regulations require at least 56 days notice for any formal request of this nature).

Ken Neal had responded, on behalf of the graziers, on 29th May, and read the email he had sent out to the meeting (appended). In summary, he noted that the graziers regularly checked the condition of the grazing and their cattle, that the vets also checked the condition of the cattle, that there was sufficient grass and other grazing for the cattle at present, and that they were eating herbage which BBOWT would otherwise need to remove, and that consequently the graziers did not consider this warranted interference by the Commission.

Derek Cutt asked whether BBOWT had a view on this. Julian Cooper for BBOWT agreed that the cattle he had seen were in good condition, and the common was also in good condition, and that the cattle were eating the gorse and underbrush as he would wish.

Ken Neal advised that on 1st July the graziers would in any case be removing around 20-30 cattle to take them to the bull, and that they would be off the common for six to eight weeks.

Simon Pike queried whether a shorter period of notice for taking cattle off the common ought to be considered. Sue Ellis advised that the 56 day notice had been decided because it was recognised that the graziers needed a reasonable notice period if they were asked to remove some cattle. Tony Vickers suggested that it was unlikely to be necessary to ask for cattle to be removed in July.

Simon Pike asked how much notice the graziers needed. Noel Slattery, who was attending on behalf of the graziers, explained that taking cattle off in July would create problems for the graziers, as this was the period when the cattle are with the bull, and extra lay back land would not be easily available. He was also concerned that it appeared the Commission was making the problem the grazing cattle, rather than the condition of the grazing, and he commented on the prevalence of the gorse on the common.

Julian Cooper for BBOWT addressed the issue around gorse, which he agreed was too plentiful, and which BBOWT is planning to reduce. He also confirmed that the grazing regime was important for the wellbeing of the common. He suggested that

there was a value in BBOWT and the graziers working closely, and possibly meeting on a monthly basis to look at the grazing and discuss any issues they had.

ACTION: Julian Cooper to explore regular meetings with graziers and BBOWT.

Tony noted that there is a conservation element to the grazing but that the graziers also need to make a profit.

Chris Austin asked who has authority regarding the notice to reduce cattle on the common. Sue Ellis explained that an initial notice of at least 56 days was given by her as Chair, but agreed that a formal decision to ask graziers to remove some cattle must be voted on by the Commission. The 56 day notice can always be rescinded if its not acted on. There was a discussion around the extent of the gorse and the processes which were used to remove it, with Ken Neal pointing out that nothing replaced the gorse if it was removed, so this was not increasing the grazing. Julian Cooper said he was aware of this, and also that flailing is still leaving gorse stumps on the ground. Sue Ellis asked whether we could reseed bare ground, and Julian Cooper explained that the seedbed is there if the area is scraped back to let grass grow.

Ken explained that historically the gorse was controlled by grazing and burning. This had left a high carbon soil, but the MOD operations in the 1940's and later removed this, leaving a low mineral soil, and suggested that gorse burning might suit the common better. Maxwell Slater-Nunn suggested that scraping back might be more helpful than burning. Ken pointed out that continued burning and carbon build up provided soil nutrients, and queried whether larger areas burned might have a more beneficial effect and give a higher level of clearance than the small areas currently cleared by burning. Julian Cooper pointed out that the fire breaks would need extending if larger areas were cleared by burning.

ACTION: Gorse to be discussed at next Commission meeting (for agenda).

6 Greenham 25th Anniversary 2025 Forward planning

This event had gone very well, with good attendance and excellent weather. Sue Ellis thanked Ken Neal for his role in opening the event and his speech to the attendees.

7 Temporary Fencing Proposal

A paper from BBOWT had been put forward regarding a proposal to add two sections of temporary fencing along the firebreak six months ago. This protected vulnerable areas where there were nesting birds. The observed impact was that fewer people were using the firebreak as a footpath. Julian Cooper noted that a couple of other areas have been suggested by the wardens, one near the ponds. He confirmed that the ponds will remain accessible for the cattle. There has been one letter in NWN from a dog walker objecting to areas being fenced. Sue Ellis had noted this and provided a polite response.

8 West Berkshire Council Delivery Budget Cutbacks, proposal to remove 7 Dog Waste Bins from the Common

Paul Hendry had confirmed that the bins are not going to be removed.

9 Run Forest Run – 10k race Sunday 5th October

A briefing note had been circulated. This is a race organiser who has held events before. Proposed to accept – Billy Drummond, Seconded Chris Austin – All in favour. The proposal was **AGREED**.

10 Martin Barden running event 22nd November

A briefing note had been circulated. Julian Cooper explained that this proposal was for a trail run. At this time of year, this could be an issue if the weather is or has been wet and no map or more detailed information had been supplied. It was agreed that no decision could be made without a map, more information on how this would be organised, and that it might be necessary to restrict numbers taking part.

ACTION BBOWT will go back to the organisers to get a better idea of the proposal including a map and information on numbers, marshalling etc. This needs to come back to the meeting on 10th July for a decision.

Additional papers and reports

11

Committee reports

Conservation Management Committee Meeting 31st March 2025

Himalayan balsam has been spotted along the roadside verge on Thornford Road, (both sides) Paul Hendry was asked to arrange for this to be cleared. **ACTION** Paul Hendry – speak to Derek Cutt for details.

Historic Environment Management Plan (HEMP) BBOWT and local archaeology service need to look at management of archaeological features on the common.

Governance Committee Meetings 6th February and 7th April 2025

Sue Ellis reported that a number of the actions had been completed. The Governance Committee were looking at obtaining copies of the original Register entries and maps to get better quality scans made, and would then be able to have copies available at WBC and the Commission. The Governance Committee is also correcting Register entries where the property either no longer exists, or the property rights have been split between too many new builds for exercise of the rights to be feasible. Encroachments are also being considered – there is a useful list taken in 2017, and additional encroachments noticed are being added. The aim is to tackle the more severe encroachments first.

Golf Club proposal

The proposed development has been refused at pre-planning stage.

Camping on Dartmoor judgement

It was confirmed that the recent judgement relating to camping on Dartmoor doesn't affect the common as the byelaws prohibit camping.

12 BBOWT Mid-Season Report

Julian thanked the Seasonal Wardens who had done a brilliant job. They had changed rotas to cover Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays, increasing public engagement.

12 AOB.

- Crookham Common Pools

Paul Hendry confirmed that a short report will be made to Executive and this should be approved by the end of the year, meaning the pools will then be formally included in the common land.

- Tent on the common

Sue Ellis explained that there is an encampment on the common – a homeless gentleman has been camping out in a tent for almost a year. There is a considerable amount of rubbish, a firepit, and he's put in a path and a set of solar lights. Paul Hendry is going to ask the Rough Sleeper Outreach Officer to visit, and may have to serve a notice on the gentleman to get him to move.

- Dog walking

Tony Vickers raised the issue of dog walking from the previous minutes. Commercial dog walking is not permitted under the byelaws – Julian Cooper pointed out that this falls into the district council remit, and notices could be given out, but it would require a council officer to enforce it. The more important issue is of dogs under proper control. The graziers were in agreement with this, as dogs worrying cattle is a major issue. **ACTION** Julian will look into this over the summer and see how much of a problem this is and what the wardens can do to educate dog walkers.

- Next meeting

Paul Hendry will be away on 10th July, but will arrange for another officer to deputise regarding the room and online access.

13 Date of all 2025 Meetings. Meeting frequency: normally four times a year. Dates confirmed and to be held at WBC meeting room.

- **July 10th, 2025**
- **October 7th, 2025**

Appendix 1 – Ken Neal's email of 29th May 2025

Dear All

Re Grazing on the common.

As cattle owners we have a legal duty of care for our animals imposed by law. Further to this duty of care, we monitor our animals on a daily basis. Many of our cattle have recently calved so we are keen for them to have sufficient nutrition to feed those calves. All the calves are in good condition and are growing steadily.

Also, our vets have a duty of care for our animals and, when they attend, they will bring to our attention any animals which are not in good enough condition. At our recent TB test, during which the vet inspects every animal over six weeks old and sees all the calves, our vet was happy with the condition of our animals.

We are quite happy with their condition at the moment and are confident that they will maintain that condition into the future as they are finding enough nutrition through browsing the plentiful deep-rooted herbage on the common. This herbage is still growing despite the lack of surface water.

I attach a couple of photos of cattle browsing on herbage that BBOWT would in future have to cut back if it is not browsed.

The cattle at the Greenham end also have access to haylage and water on my farm should they wish to supplement their browsing.

In view of the above we see no reason for the Commission to interfere in the management of our cattle as there has been no problems with the welfare of the cattle and the weather has delayed the development of any wild flowers. We have discussed the grazing with Julian who has previous experience of grazing cattle, and he has agreed to our current regime.

Should the browse be affected in the future by drought we will take action to safeguard the condition of our cattle. We require them to be in good condition to take the bull from 1st July when we put the bulls in and they need to keep their condition from then on to prevent the loss of the foetus. As the cattle weren't on the common over the winter there is a lot more browse available than in previous years so they should be able to find plenty of food for the foreseeable future.

We bought in over 160 tonnes of feed for the cattle when they were off the common over winter, so that approximates to the amount of extra browse that is on the common now. That means that, if it is not grazed, it is an additional amount of herbage that BBOWT will have to pay to remove unless they intend to let herbage impinge on the grass and heather.

We have spent a considerable sum investing in cattle which are admirably suited to thrive on nutrient poor common land so we feel that the Commission should let us get on with managing those animals and only intervene in dire circumstances. We do not need to be micro managed.

I look forward to discussing this further at the commission meeting.

On behalf of the graziers

Ken Neal

Commoner and grazier.