

Greenham & Crookham Common Commission Meeting

**Minutes of Thursday 21st July 2026: 7pm
West Berkshire Council Offices, Market Street, Newbury RG14 5LD
in the Roger Croft Room**

Commissioners Present

Chris Austin (Commoner), Sharon Bovingdon (Local Access Forum), Caroline Booth (WBC), Julian Cooper (BBOWT), Judith Curson (Commoner), Derek Cutt (Commoner), Billy Drummond (WBDC), Sue Ellis (WBHF & Chairman), James Field (Commoner), Tom Hayward (BBOWT), Frank Huxtable (Commoner), Debbie Lewis (BBOWT), John Parker (Conservation Volunteers), Steve Proud (BBOWT), Nicole Rorie (Commoner), Claudia Sievers (Commoner), Maxwell Slater-Nunn (Natural England)

Public: 2 Members of the public

Secretary: Jon Davey

WBC: Caroline Booth (administrative)

1. Apologies

Tony Ferguson (Greenham Trust), Paul Hendry (WBDC), Roger Hunneman (NTC), Sally-Ann Jay (Greenham PC), Ken Neal (Commoner and Vice Chair), Erik Pattenden (WBDC), Simon Pike (TTC)

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations over and above those registered already

3. Public Session

The members of the public made comments on the main agenda item and didn't speak in the public session.

4. Minutes of the last meeting 12th May 2025 and Matters Arising

The minutes were resolved to be a true and accurate record of the meeting.

Actions: No matters arising

5. Update on the delivery of the Greenham Countryside Stewardship Agreement (SP)

With a new Countryside Stewardship agreement required for January 2029, Steve Proud, as Land Management & Ecology Director at BBOWT, made it very clear that actions needed to be taken to address the shortfalls on measures to maintain the Common if DEFRA were to look favourably on any new agreement.

Steve Proud gave a presentation on the current condition of the Common, and the issues to be resolved. The Commons are an SSSI and the responsibility is to manage the heathland and grassland, provide nesting opportunities and refuges for birds, and suitable areas for invertebrates and reptiles. Currently the Commons are falling short on targets set by Natural England in the current Greenham Countryside Stewardship Agreement with BBOWT, West Berkshire Council and the Greenham & Crookham Commons Commission. Gorse and birch need to be kept at no more than 15% to 20% coverage, and currently stand at 20%. Climate change and grazing is having a huge impact on the ability for the swards to reach their optimum height. Over the last 15 years, even the sward in fenced off, ungrazed areas, is struggling to grow on Greenham Common. The grazing of cattle over winter and into the spring is also preventing the land reaching its optimum levels of grassland and heather coverage. All this impacts on the wildlife and reduces the value of the SSSI.

While the current £93,000 per year grant from Natural England is very welcome, the legal complications of not having the Stewardship Agreement in place, requiring each Commoner to apply for SSSI consent individually to graze cattle or to use the Common in any other way, would prove very onerous on the overall management of the Common.

The recommendation by BBOWT is that there are no cattle allowed on the Common from 15th December to 15th June and that the number grazing at any time to be reduced to 80 cattle (plus calves) from 15th June to 15th December.

Steve Proud explained that, if the proposal was accepted, the timeline BBOWT was looking at was to work on a new scheme design in Winter 2027 to Spring 2028, consult

on this in Spring/Summer 2028, and submit the application for a new Agreement in Autumn/Winter 2028 and certainly by 1st January 2029. It is possible that there will be an RPA Scheme inspection in 2028.

Following the presentation the Chair asked for comments from the members of the public present and the Commission.

Two of the graziers present raised objections to this proposal on the grounds that this would make it much more difficult economically for their herds, which rely on the use of the Commons for grazing, particularly at the moment when the cost of feedstuffs is extremely high. They also felt that the graziers were being blamed, unfairly, for the loss of grassland, and pointed out that in their view, the lack of summer rain had much to do with the poor state of the grass. They also raised concerns that the gorse which had been removed had grown back in some areas.

Chris Austin, Commoner and past Chair of GCCC, made the following case for the grazers:

1. It should be remembered that Greenham Common is a public open space and not a nature reserve.
2. This last winter was the first that we were asked to take all the cattle off the Common and we did.
3. We introduced about 50 head for the Spring and early summer. When we were permitted, we introduced some more but under the hundred limit that we have been set.
4. It should be remembered that in previous years before BBOWT was involved we were asked to graze the Common in the winter because this is the best time of year for gorse control.
5. Commoners' rights are outlined in the deeds of various properties and are not subject to seasonal or any other lets. They were instrumental in preserving the Common and if they had not existed we would none of us be sat here this evening.
6. We agree that the last few years have been very dry and the thin soils mean that the common is particularly susceptible to drought. Ironically, the cattle have never looked better and are living on leaves and twigs. We are very happy with the current rate at which the gorse is being controlled but the percentages quoted might be misleading in that a lot of the Common is mature Woodland where you would expect no gorse at all.
7. The Common is very well used by dog walkers and the park run but their interests are hardly represented on the Commission even though they are by far and away the biggest users of the Common.

Sue Ellis, for the Commission, pointed out that in fact the graziers were asked to remove the cattle from the Common in the winter of 2024-25, and had done so, and in the winter of 2025-26 the Commission had permitted up to 25 cattle to remain on the Common during January and February 2026, at the graziers' request, before all cattle were again removed between the start of March and the end of April. In addition, the limit to the number of cattle on the Common is set by the number of rights held by the graziers, currently 96 between them. In respect of Chris Austin's comment about Commoners rights, Commoners rights to graze are now also managed by the Regulations approved in 2023, which can limit numbers of cattle grazed and timescales for grazing.

Tom Hayward for BBOWT pointed out that gorse management is continuing and using more effective means than previously. In response to a question from Sue Ellis, Steve Proud confirmed that much of the money from the RPA currently pays for gorse clearance, and without the Countryside Stewardship Agreement this would be lost. It was felt by the WBC representatives present that funding from WBC for gorse clearance would be unlikely to be provided, given current resource constraints.

Derek Cutt disagreed with the view of the graziers that heather loss was not due to grazing, and drew the attention of the meeting to two photos taken some 20 years apart which demonstrated that former heathland with heather cover is now totally given over to grass and gorse, and also pointed out that climate change has not affected areas of heather cover which don't get grazed, suggesting that, in his view, grazing is responsible for a large part of the loss of heather on the Common.

There were no further comments.

The Chair called for a vote. With 9 For, 2 Against, it was RESOLVED: No cattle allowed on the Common from 15th December to 15th June and 80 cattle permitted from 15th June to 15th December.

6. Next meeting date: Thursday 15th October 2026

The meeting closed at 8:15pm