This grazing information sheet is meant to provide a few pointers and questions to assist when thinking about introducing grazing to a site. It presents some of the things we have learnt along the way and is in no way comprehensive or exhaustive.

I. Initial considerations when introducing stock to your site

Infrastructure requirements:
- new stock fencing,
- water provision,
- vehicle access required.

Consultation with stakeholders such as:
- Parish Council. Local members.
- Neighbours, visitors/users of site (especially dog walkers).
- Statutory bodies (Natural England, English Heritage).
- Landlord.
- Rights of Way Officers, Dog Wardens.
- Commoners or grazier.
- Natural England for Higher Level Stewardship funding.

Funding may be required for:
- New fencing, including gates, water trough, holding pen.
- Livestock.
- Livestock transport.
- Staff training.

II. Introducing stock onto a site

- Consider the type of stock required, the timing of grazing and the stocking levels. What type of stock were grazing the site in the past? Will grazing at certain times of the year remove the flowers of important plants or damage the site through poaching? Is long term grazing with few animals better than short term grazing with more stock? Are you able to move animals around at short notice to protect features of the site from over grazing? Inappropriate grazing can be more damaging to the biodiversity of a site than not grazing at all.

- Grazing is not a substitute to all other management. Stock may be “pushed” during initial grazing period to have more of an impact on scrub, thick grass tussocks or dense thatch. If a site, however, is so heavily grazed as to remove scrub from the site as a permanent management technique the site is definitely overgrazed and will lack many of the components, such as flower rich areas and diverse structure, which are desired in a well managed site.

- Please remember that abrupt changes from ungrazed grassland to very short turf may cause the site to lose all its invertebrates of long-grass habitat without gaining any species that require short turf. Slow gradual changes in habitat management are preferential.
II. Introducing stock onto a site

- Site used as dog exercise area or Access Land (CROW2000)? This will make it difficult to bring livestock grazing onto the site without extensive consultations. The grazing of common land also requires more work with stakeholders and permission to fence. Refer to “A Common Purpose”. http://naturalengland.communesis.com/naturalenglandshop/docs/CP1.pdf Using cattle as the grazing tool will not place so many restrictions on dog-walkers.

- Having yew trees or steep archaeological earthworks on site will force the use of sheep as the grazing tool. Cattle whether young or old can cause damage to earthworks. Yew is poisonous to cattle, however Manx Loaghtan sheep happily eat the leaves and bark.

- Fencing: cattle can be controlled by just 2 strands of barbed wire. Sheep, however require stock netting and better quality gates, adding substantially to the costs. Dog walkers like sheep type stock fencing as it stops their pets running out onto nearby roads.

- Permanent v temporary fencing: Temporary electric fencing will control cattle and sheep, however if they are attacked by dogs or frightened by fireworks etc. they will break through and escape. Always try and use permanent fencing for all boundaries and if affordable for internal fencing.

III. What stock to use

- If possible always use cattle unless other features or habitat requirements force the use of sheep. Cattle provide a more diverse grassland structure with tussocks, bare areas, paths and most importantly flowering plants. Generally sheep eat all orchids immediately, then any flowers and you end up with a short turf (30-40mm) with low forbs that can hold less invertebrate interest. Ponies will graze differently again and can produce a shorter turf similar to sheep, but may browse more on trees and bushes, including holly and gorse. Combinations of grazing animals, such as cattle and ponies, can result in a very diverse habitat structure. Cattle and ponies are more able to break up rank vegetation than sheep.

- Sheep can be ‘pushed’ to eat a greater proportion of dead or matted grass tussocks, however, cattle will break through fences well before this.

- Different grazing animals have differing grazing preferences. Sheep can be used to eat small amounts of roseate ragwort plants and Manx Loaghtan sheep will control docks and stop thistles from flowering. Highland cattle preferentially eat wild parsnip plants and sapling oak trees.

- Ponies, which are not ruminants, extract less energy from the plant matter they consume and need to graze more plant matter. The dung resulting from different stock may support different species of invertebrate, for example the larvae of Hornet Robberfly Asilus crabroniformis feed on dung beetle larvae most commonly associated with cattle and horse dung. Where sheep are shepherded and kept in a fold overnight most of the dung is deposited here. This can be used as a nutrient transfer method, reducing the fertility in the daytime grazing areas which can be useful in some grassland systems.

- Stock already owned or nearby grazier? This depends greatly on fertility of site, as poor heathland/chalk grassland grazing cannot support fattening animals for commercial production. HCC has moved into owning its own stock as nobody else was interested in grazing small chalk grassland and heathland sites. However this puts a burden on site resources for funding stock, lookering, movements, transport, handling stock, veterinary treatments and associated livestock regulation paperwork. Local graziers will not place so many restrictions on dog-walkers.

- Young versus old stock, young cattle are curious and will follow visitors and their dogs around the site, sometimes causing fear and Complaints. They will also run around the site perimeter or charge over to visitors. Old cattle are slower, quickly become accustomed to dogs, visitors and become ‘bomproof’. Cows with young calves will ‘protect’ their offspring against dogs or visitors who approach to closely. Some continental breeds are known for this. Ponies may also be very curious and can be habituated to pester sites visitors if fed by the public, this can lead to intimidation of the public and other conflicts such as biting or kicking site visitors.

- The public perception of the health of the stock may vary with type. A ribby, but still healthy, pony may cause more complaints from the public than a cow in a similar condition.

- When kept in a more natural state livestock will lose weight/condition during the winter and early spring and then regain this during the spring flush. They possibly are more healthy for this reason, when they lose too much weight it takes a great deal of extra food to regain condition and they become more open to diseases such as pneumonia. Don’t let any animal get into poor condition as it raises animal welfare problems. When ruminants are grazing poor quality herbage during the winter, always provide high energy (molasses/sugar beet) licks to keep their rumens working. Consider extra feed such as hay if conditions become bad i.e. heavy snow.

- Always provide some shelter for livestock, some breeds will require winter housing whilst others such as Highland cattle need shade from the summer sun. This is easily provided by leaving trees and scrub around the periphery of grassland sites.

- Sheep can be grazed on busy sites, however this requires a greater input by staff into separating sheep from dogs, i.e. the Danebury Dog ‘traffic light’ system. If problems still occur consider closing nearby car parks whilst livestock are on site.