

## 20. PROOF OF EVIDENCE OF JAMES POWER

- 20.1. James Power has worked in nature conservation for 20 years, for much of that time in senior management roles. He is currently employed by the Sussex Wildlife Trust where he is Head of Reserves, responsible to the Chief Executive for all aspects of the Trust's land management programmes. He has previously worked for Defra, the Department of National Parks and Wildlife in Malawi, the Severn Gorge Countryside Trust and for eleven years for the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust. Throughout this time, he has acquired extensive knowledge and experience of the management of land for nature conservation, particularly on the use of livestock in conservation grazing programmes. He has an MSc in Environmental Forestry.
- 20.2. The aim of the Sussex Wildlife Trust is to conserve the Sussex landscape, wildlife and its habitats, and to use its knowledge and expertise to help the people of Sussex to enjoy, understand and take action to this end. The Trust is the foremost nature conservation charity working in East and West Sussex: it has 32,459 members and 420 volunteers, works with 20,000 schoolchildren every year and employs 85 staff. It hosts and manages the Sussex Biodiversity Records Centre. The Trust is part of a federation of 47 Wildlife Trusts across the whole UK. The Wildlife Trusts have 670,000 members and manage 2,200 nature reserves covering more than 80,000 hectares (197,680 acres).
- 20.3. The Trust manages 33 nature reserves, covering 1,443 hectares (3,563 acres). The nature reserves are located across Sussex and include 2 National Nature Reserves, 10 sites with a European designation<sup>21</sup> and 20 Sites of Special Scientific Interest. They encompass a diverse range of habitats, including reedbed, chalk downland, wood pasture, ancient woodland, fen, and wet grassland, as well as acid grassland and heathland. Six of these nature reserves are registered commons.
- 20.4. Although a number of its nature reserves are now open access under the CROW Act, the Trust has exercised an open access policy on most sites for many years. Public access is, therefore, actively encouraged and a conservative estimate suggests that some 225,000 people visit the 33 nature reserves annually.
- 20.5. Of the twenty grazed nature reserves, twelve are grazed by the Trust's own livestock. These comprise some 1,000 sheep and, in the summer months, up to 100 cattle, including one bull. This has given the Trust extensive experience of managing livestock on publicly accessible land.
- 20.6. All of the sites grazed by Trust-owned stock are open to the public, yet complaints about the stock are infrequent given the number of visitors, averaging approximately 50/year. These largely centre on misplaced concerns about the condition of stock, but do include some 3-5 fatal attacks on sheep by dogs per year. Complaints about aggressive stock are extremely rare – there has been just one such complaint in the three years of the Trust owning cattle.

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<sup>21</sup> Special Area of Conservation, Special Protection Area or Ramsar site.



20.7. The core of the Trust's flock is made up of Herdwick sheep, while British White and Sussex cattle make up the bulk of the cattle herd. These three are all rare breeds and have been selected because they are well-suited to the coarser vegetation and scrub found on many of the Trust's sites. The Trust has also been very careful in the selection of its stock, ensuring that as far as possible they are quiet, docile animals. The bulk of its Sussex cattle, for example, were acquired from Middle Farm, Lewes, an 'open' farm where families are invited to pet the animals. The Trust's British White bull, Little Robin, is a very placid animal with a fondness for having his head scratched: he is on site with a group of heifers on any one of the publicly accessible nature reserves throughout the year. At no time, has his presence attracted any comment.

20.8. The success of the Trust's approach to the management and selection of stock is reflected in a perceived change in attitude amongst visitors to Stedham Common, Midhurst and more widely an acceptance of grazing animals on all other Trust nature reserves where grazing takes place. Stedham Common was fenced to facilitate grazing in 2000, following a successful application to the Secretary of State for the Environment. This site, in combination with the adjacent Iping Common, is very popular with visitors: there is a good sized car park (25 spaces), a good network of paths, and an open and varied landscape. It is likely that these two sites attract somewhere in excess of 20,000 visitors per year. At the time of the application, there was considerable opposition to the fencing proposal whereas now, the presence of British White cattle is seen by many as a highlight of their visit – one of the original objectors has now adopted an informal looking role, keeping an eye on the cattle and reporting any issues or concerns. Given the proximity of the northern boundary to the busy A272, dog walkers have also been known to express the view that the presence of a fence reduces the likelihood of their dog straying on to the road. This experience is reflected on the three other Commons grazed by Trust stock.

20.9. The Trust strongly supports the proposal to fence and graze Chailey Common. Heathland vegetation such as that found here has evolved over hundreds of years in response to grazing pressure and tree and scrub clearance: the absence of extensive grazing for so many years is a major factor in the decline of the heathland and for the loss of many of its associated species. Our experience is that it will only be through the reinstatement of grazing on the common, that the site's special character will be restored and safeguarded.