

The Hospital of St Cross – Questions and Answers arising out of Public Presentation held at St Cross Chapel on 10 October 2022

	QUESTION	ANSWER
	Management of the Park and Water Meadows	<p>Livestock are a vital part of the conservation management of this special habitat alongside the River Itchen. They are able to graze areas that it would not be possible to manage with machinery, either because they are awkward areas or too wet. This careful grazing creates grass swards of different heights which benefit a wide array of small mammals, birds and invertebrates. The cattle are moved regularly between fields depending on the quantity of grass and there may be times in the winter months when they will not be in the fields at all.</p> <p>Conservation grazing, which has minimal inputs, is very different from intensive farming where livestock are fed grain. For further information please see this link: https://www.pastureforlife.org/research/pasture-for-life-a-solution-to-global-warming/</p>
	Alternatives to Livestock Grazing	<p>It is possible to cut and collect the grass and make hay from some of the fields (and this has been done in the past) but some areas are not accessible with a tractor and machinery. There are other benefits to grazing rather than using machinery which include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The gradual removal of biomass, rather than sudden, mass removal; 2. Cattle dung is good for soil health and the invertebrates which depend on it; 3. Livestock sequester carbon in the soil; the use of machinery uses fossil fuels.
	Dog Walking in areas when livestock are present	<p>The Park and water meadows at St Cross are privately owned and there is a Right of Way across the land on the designated ROW footpath. This does not mean that dogs should be off the path and running through the water meadows, whether livestock are present or not. Dogs also disturb birds and other wildlife. Their natural behaviour is sniffing and flushing birds which can cause birds to cease feeding and use up energy to fly off. This could be the difference between life and death in the winter, or in spring and summer when finding food for young. When selecting nesting sites, it is known that birds will avoid areas with dog disturbance.</p> <p>The Hospital signs have always asked that dogs be kept on a lead if livestock are present but in 2020 the increased number of dog walkers with off-lead dogs made it necessary to change this message to Dogs on Leads at all times. It was also necessary to remove the livestock for a period of time due to livestock worrying which was detrimental to the management of the area.</p>

The Hospital of St Cross – Questions and Answers arising out of Public Presentation held at St Cross Chapel on 10 October 2022

		<p>Livestock owners have a duty to ensure the five freedoms, one of which is freedom from fear and distress. As herbivore herd animals they are alert to the presence of dogs, which are liable to approach and sometimes chase them. Whilst it may seem endearing to allow dogs to approach livestock, this is stressful to them and can lead to agitated behaviour in the cattle, such as hiding or pacing. It is therefore important to keep dogs on leads around livestock, so they can grow accustomed to dogs remaining close to their owners and behaving in a predictable way. This has made clear signage a necessity and is safer for everyone.</p> <p>We are very keen to find a balance between keeping the cattle safe as they graze the meadows and making it possible for the local dog walking community to enjoy the area as they have always done. We have therefore agreed to the following:</p> <p>There will be a sign on the gate as you enter one of the Hospital's fields to indicate whether livestock are present, and if they are <u>all dogs must be kept on a lead and on the footpath.</u></p> <p>If there is no livestock present in that particular field, dogs may be off the lead <u>if they are kept under control.</u> Under control means:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Your dog is near you and on the path - You are certain it will come if called - Your dog will not chase wildlife - You ensure that your dog's behaviour is not a threat to other visitors.
	<p>The Management Of The Streams and Structures</p>	<p>The river is managed for its high wildlife value and is a Site of Special Scientific Interest. The streams and ditches require ongoing maintenance, mainly keeping a central open area of water and a continuous flow to prevent the build up of silt. The general rule is that a third of the stream is marginal plants on either bank as cover for invertebrates, fish and mammals, with the central third flowing water. This is achieved through a combination of managed grazing, cutting or raking. The absence of grazing would make this management difficult. The aim is to let the water do the work of carrying silt through the system. There are several impoundments along the channel, such as old weed screens and</p>

The Hospital of St Cross – Questions and Answers arising out of Public Presentation held at St Cross Chapel on 10 October 2022

		<p>dilapidated sluice gates. These require a combination of removal and repair to enable silt to move through the water ways, rather than build up behind them.</p> <p>There is a strong population of water voles on the Lockburn stream, with many latrines on the stretch between Back Street and Garnier Road. We are dependent on neighbouring river keepers controlling mink to safeguard this population.</p>
	Public Amenity and Engagement	<p>Interpretation boards and chalk boards are being considered in order to highlight the wildlife seen through the seasons. Schools and other groups are welcome to attend the site with HIWWT or other organisations to learn about wildlife and the management of the water meadows (permission to be sought from the Hospital of St Cross in advance).</p> <p>There is one step down to the river where paddling is permitted but only in the immediate vicinity. Paddleboards, inflatables and swimming are <u>not</u> permitted in the river and BBQs are not allowed.</p>
	The Future Of The Farm	<p>The Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust has managed the land at St Cross since 2011 and their tenancy has now come to an end. During their tenure there have been many success stories including a strong water vole population, an expanding range for southern damselfly and restoration of the wildflower meadows and associated insects which have all been beneficial for the farm and also for visitor enjoyment. Without this careful conservation management the meadows would become overgrown and lose their unique and special character and the important wildlife that lives there. The new tenant is a neighbouring landowner who will continue to care for and graze the fields and the Wildlife Trust will continue to advise where necessary to ensure that this unique and special area is well cared for and can be enjoyed by all.</p>