

# ■ Plans could include electric fences Heathland grazing brings cows home

## IN SUMMARY

English Nature's project manager Jeremy Clitherow has said heathland grazing 'conserves internationally important habitats and species in the most sustainable and natural way'. However, the scheme could require electric fencing to contain cattle and livestock

THE grazing of Scilly's vulnerable heathland – a potentially controversial issue if only for the type of fencing to be used and the exclusion involved – is high on the agenda of the islands' Wildlife Trust conservation body dedicated to the care of all untenanted areas.

The 2003-launched Habitat Management Plan is a ten-year programme to re-establish grazing on wildlife sites – and already Shetland ponies graze Bryher's Gweal Hill, while cattle are cropping certain areas of St Agnes and St Mary's.

The trust has held consultation meetings on all the off-islands on the grazing matter – and last week, on St Mary's, unfolded a public display in the Council Chamber of maps for proposed grazing sites as well as their designs for gates, fencing and stiles.

Among those present was English Nature's project manager Jeremy Clitherow, Scilly's conservation warden David Mawer and local trustees.

The trust sees the introduction of cattle/livestock to crop heathland as vital to Scilly's current and future well-being.

"Grazing maintains the essential qualities of the environment that forms a key asset for the economically important tourism industry," says a Wildlife flier.

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important habitats and species in the most sustainable and natural way."

However some time ago the trust's grazing scheme for certain St Mary's areas used by the public, in particular the possibly unwary visitor, caused a stir relating to electric fencing.

The trust point out that heathland grazing cannot be imitated by machinery. They list three containment options open to them – repairing/re-using existing dry stone walls, three strand wiring or electric fencing. They pledge that the type of fencing would depend on a site-by-site requirement and would be cleared by English Heritage.

"Care will be taken to ensure that all permissive footpaths, tracks and paths remain open including access for vehicles," says the flier.

It placates horse riders by ensuring that all paths being used would remain open.

The Garrison is to split into 'A' and 'B' compartments. Semi-permanent electric fencing would enable walks to be protected. Permanent fencing would be hidden by scrub. At Bant's Carn semi-permanent electric fencing would exclude the Ancient Village, which is just one element in Scilly's remarkable claim to possess the densest concentration of Bronze Age remains in the world.

The types of features that could be used in the fencing programme range from step-stiles, through dog gates to the traditional 'kissing gate'. Indeed one of the latter is scheduled for the junction of the road from the Steval to the main Garrison road. The fencing/grazing scheme relates to the 'Waves of Heath' project that sees collaboration with local farmers on grazing and also the possible introduction of an abattoir. Planning per-

mission for the latter – at the Industrial Estate at Porthmellon – has already been obtained.

Some 44 per cent of the funding has come from the Heritage Lottery Fund, the rest coming from English Heritage, the wildlife trusts, the Duchy of Cornwall and Tresco Estate.

Two summers ago internationally-acclaimed botanist David Bellamy was at a trust function at Penninis Head, when he stressed the crucial need to keep heathland under control in order to allow plants to survive and, indeed, maintain an attractive landscape back-cloth to the islands' key industry, tourism.

Trust plans are in hand to:

■ Extend Bryher grazing from Gweal Hill to take in Shipman Head Down, Great Pool, Heathy Hill and Samson Hill. There are now six Shetland ponies and six head of red ruby cattle.

■ Rebuild and/or replace dry stone walls on St Agnes for fenced off grazing on Wingletang Down.

■ On St Mary's graze the Garrison, Bant's Carn and Innisidgen, re-establishing appropriate fencing.

The breed of animals used will vary.

"A combination of cattle and ponies is best suited to restoration grazing," insists the trust.

However sheep, goats or donkeys were not initially being considered.

Integration is sought between trust's heathland grazing and that by farmers' animals on their own land.

The conservation body also aims to keep a "conservation herd" of cattle and ponies.

The trust is conscious of potential confrontation with the public.

"It is our wish to deal sensitively with – and accommodate – local concerns," it says.

A start in the programme is subject to the gaining of Scheduled Monuments Consent among other things.