

**Biggleswade Common** is an area of permanent pasture on the northern side of Biggleswade which predates the Domesday Survey of 1086. It is privately owned and managed in accordance with an agreed Constitution and Environmental Stewardship Schemes overseen by Natural England.

King Henry I granted “Biggleswade Manor” to the Bishop of Lincoln and his successors as an endowment for the Cathedral in 1132. It’s ownership and current management is steeped in history.

**What is common land?** Land owned by one or more persons where other people known as “commoners” are entitled to use the land or take certain resources from it.

**What are commoners rights?** The right to take resources from a piece of common land is called a right of common/common right.

**What are the resources at Biggleswade Common?** The main right is that of Pasturage – so the right to put livestock out to feed on the grass.

**Who owns the rights of common at Biggleswade?** There are 108 rights of common at Biggleswade Common owned by a variety of individuals, companies and organisations. Biggleswade Town Council owns two ‘common rights’.

Rather than 108 people putting livestock on the Common, The Fen Reeves arrange for graziers to graze the Common.

**What is a Reeve / Fen Reeve?** Historically; a person elected by the Tenants who collected rents.

Now; a person elected under the constitution between the Fen Reeves and the Common Right Holders. There are seven Reeves (a Head Reeve and six other common right holders). The ‘Acting Reeve’ deals with the day-to-day management of the common. A ‘Herdsman’ is appointed to help the Acting Reeve with this management.

**How is the land managed?** The land is in Entry Level and Higher Level Environmental Stewardship Agreements to balance the grazing of limited numbers of cattle (rates set by Natural England) to maintain the common’s historical landscape features alongside maintenance and improvement of environmental features and habitats for other plants and animals. DEFRA randomly inspect the common to ensure management prescriptions are being complied with.

**Why are the common land boundaries not fenced?** On private land it is the landowner’s responsibility to fence livestock “in” but it’s against the law to prevent or impede access to common land so no boundary fencing can be erected unless it is consented to by the Secretary of State for the Environment. It is therefore the responsibility of adjoining or near land and property owners to fence the common’s livestock “out”.

**Public access rights** There are a number of public footpaths, permissive paths and bridleways that cross Biggleswade Common which the public can use in accordance with the legislation that governs them.

Under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 Biggleswade Common is open access land. This means there is a public right of access under which:

YOU CAN	YOU CANNOT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• walk</li> <li>• run</li> <li>• sightsee</li> <li>• bird-watch</li> <li>• climb (if applicable)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ride a horse or bicycle</li> <li>• drive a vehicle (except mobility scooters and powered wheelchairs)</li> <li>• bring an animal, other than a dog</li> <li>• disturb livestock, wildlife or habitats with intent</li> <li>• damage hedges, fences, walls, crops or anything else on the land</li> <li>• leave gates open, that are not propped or fastened open</li> <li>• leave litter</li> <li>• remove, damage, or destroy any plant, shrub, tree or root with intent</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• camp</li><li>• play organised games</li><li>• use a metal detector</li><li>• run commercial activities on the land such as:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• film, photograph or make maps</li></ul></li><li>• light, cause or risk a fire</li><li>• post any notices</li><li>• commit any criminal offence</li><li>• hang-glide or paraglide</li></ul>
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**In addition, you cannot fly model aircraft or drones anywhere on Biggleswade Common.**

The law states that visitors using their open access rights must keep dogs on a short lead of no more than 2 metres between 1 March and 31 July each year and **at all times** near livestock.

**Managing dogs and cattle** Dogs need to be kept on a lead **at all times** on the Common. Chasing is a normal dog behaviour, whatever their breed, age or size so dog owners have a responsibility to keep their dog under control around all livestock for everyone's wellbeing.

This can be done by keeping dogs on leads and close to their owners whenever they are nearby or within seeing, hearing or smelling distance of livestock.

It is important that the cattle on the common never feel threatened. 'Worrying' livestock isn't only about chasing or attacking, it can be simply about them knowing that a dog is nearby.

If the cattle feel threatened they can panic, hurt themselves or those nearby and abort their pregnancies. Dog owners must be responsible and considerate. It is an offence to allow a dog to worry livestock under the Dogs (Protection of Livestock) Act 1953.

**Managing dogs and other wildlife** Dogs should be discouraged from entering the River Ivel and Potton Brook from the Common to avoid disturbance to the flora and fauna and wildlife found there, including fish, wildfowl and mammals during nesting/ breeding seasons.

**If exercising your rights on Common Land please do so safely, considerately and within the parameters of the law.**