



BANSTEAD COMMONS CONSERVATORS

REPORT AND ACCOUNTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2018



BANSTEAD COMMONS CONSERVATORS
(Established by the Metropolitan Commons (Banstead) Supplemental Act 1893)

REPORT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2018

MEMBERS FOR 2017/18

Conservators Elected by Reigate and Banstead Borough Council as successors to the Vestry of the Parish of Banstead

Mr. D. Atkins
Cllr. R. Mantle
Mr J McCrea
Mr J Mill
Dr. J. H. Peacock (Chairman)

Mr. N. Cull (Nominated by the London Borough of Sutton)

Conservator Appointed by Reigate and Banstead Borough Council as owners of the soil

Cllr. V Broad

Clerk

John Milner

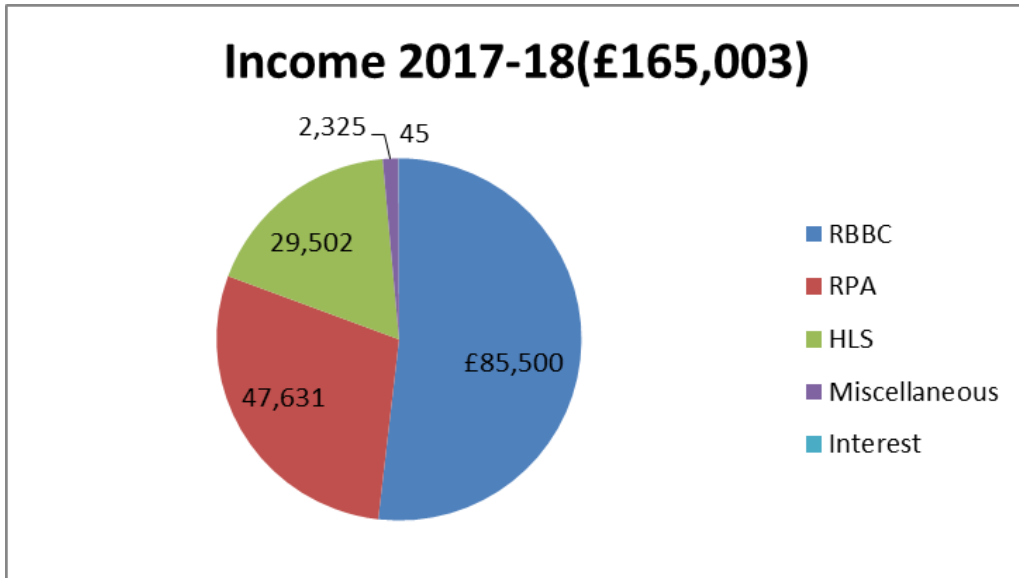
Commons under the Management of the Conservators

Banstead Heath	310 hectares
Banstead Downs	177 hectares – part SSSI
Burgh Heath	33 hectares
Park Downs	30 hectares – all SSSI

ACCOUNTS AND FINANCE

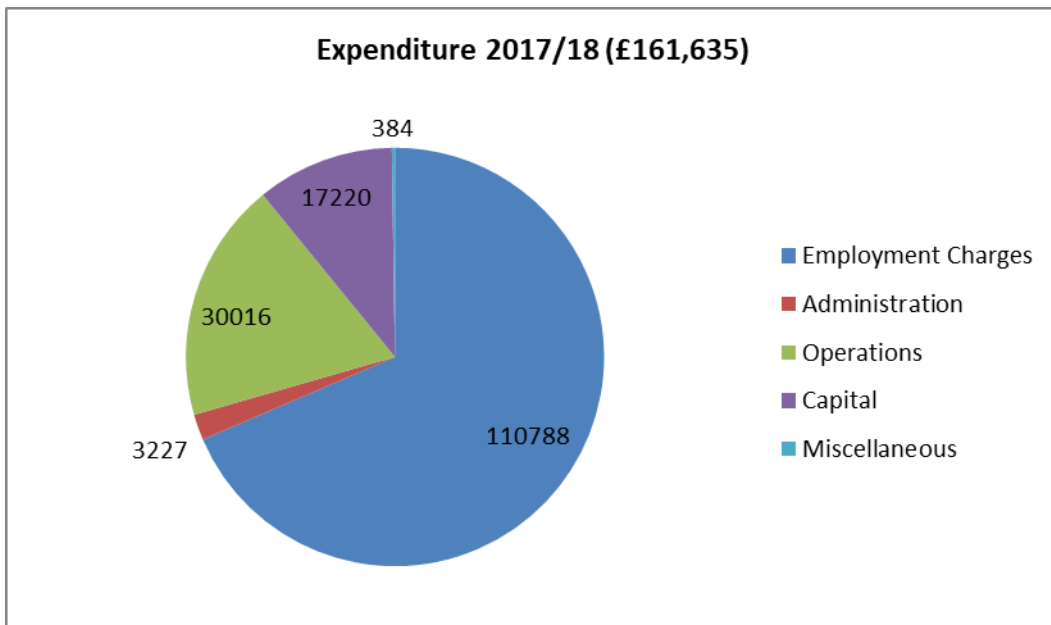
A copy of the Accounts for the year under review is attached (App. 'A'). The Conservators express their thanks to Reigate and Banstead Borough Council and others for their co-operation, financial and, in some cases, practical support.

The agreed practice of using monies received from the Rural Payment Agency for special projects and the purchase of capital equipment continues but, as funding from all sources is decreasing, Reigate & Banstead Borough Council have agreed such monies may also be used as revenue.



HLS includes £10,847 late payment from 2016-17 and we are owed £6,218 for 2017 – 18.

RPA includes £3,643 adjusted payments for 2016 – 17.



We currently qualify for the Basic Payment Scheme which is paid via the Rural Payment Agency under EU legislation for production or keeping the land in good agricultural and environmental

condition. The UK Government has indicated that farmers will continue to receive such a payment once Brexit has been achieved but have not yet indicated that the same will apply to commons.

During the year we have continued to negotiate with RBBC to produce a Service Level Agreement acceptable to both parties which will form the basis of future funding and take the place of a grant from the council. Although this has not yet been achieved we feel we are very close to an agreement.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Conservators appreciate the help and assistance received from Reigate and Banstead Borough Council and Natural England as well as the various volunteer work parties who have also helped by clearing scrub and ponds. Thanks are also extended to local groups and individuals who organise formal and informal litter picking days on the commons.

REPORT FOR THE YEAR 2017/18

During the course of the year all roadside ditches, banks and post have been inspected, increased and improved in an effort to prevent unlawful intrusion by vehicles. There are, however, still some areas over which we have little control.

The wet weather has saturated the ground so machinery cannot reach areas in need of spring maintenance. Staff have therefore been concentrating on areas where machinery is not necessary or where it can reach without damaging the ground.

We have now completed six of a ten year agreement with Natural England for Higher Level Stewardship which consists of an agreed programme to improve and maintain certain aspects of the common such as the quality of chalk grassland on the Downs and regeneration of heather and control of bracken on Banstead Heath. Positive results from the previous years' work are now becoming apparent and have again passed inspection by Natural England.

Routine work embraces the clearance of numerous footpaths and Permissive Rides on the Commons to keep them accessible to the public, the restoration of damaged areas and the improvement of soil conditions, particularly on chalk downland, for the benefit of indigenous plant species and maintaining open spaces for public use.

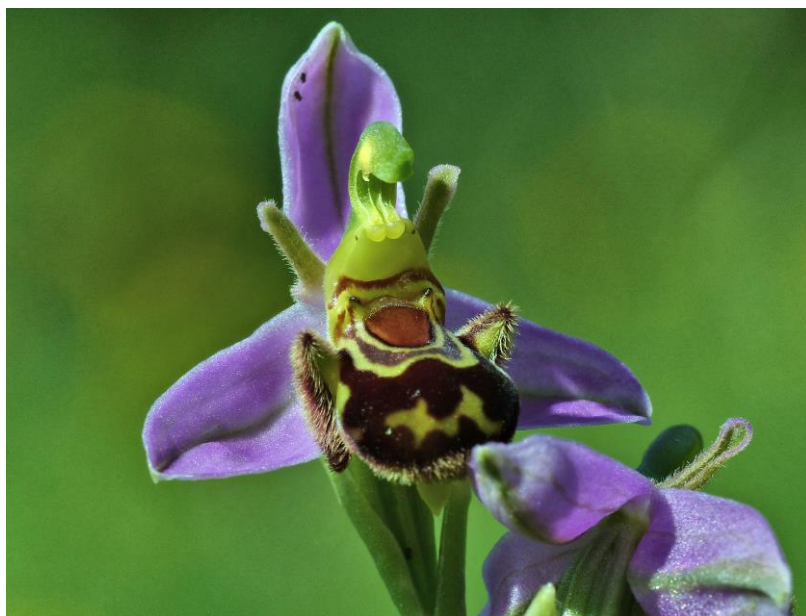
On-going scrub clearance and regeneration of heather are also important tasks which assist in improving growing conditions for plants by increasing the sunlight and airflow to them. This year the task has been one of maintaining the scrub clearance across all commons rather than concentrating on clearing larger areas of one common.



Early Gentian

Photograph: John Peacock

Substantial areas of both Banstead Downs and Park Downs were again subject to forage harvesting. This method of clearance was used in these more sensitive sites as the growth is cut and removed. Forage harvesting helps to reduce nutrients in the soil, encouraging the growth of the chalk downland flora; this flora is a prime reason for the original SSSI designation.



Bee Orchid

Photograph: John Peacock

The maintenance of previously cleared areas and opening small ‘windows’ to improve the views from well-used tracks has also encouraged wild and often rare plants to flourish. Our policy of retaining sufficient undergrowth and mature indigenous trees has provided the right habitat for the many varieties of birds, butterflies and other insects, as well as larger creatures which inhabit the area.



Snowscape

Photograph: Jennifer McRea

Three areas on Park Downs and one on Banstead Downs were grazed over the winter. We again purchased the sheep which were tended by a local shepherdess and at the end of the period she acquired ownership of them. This method worked extremely well for both BCC and the shepherdess; we were able to move them between the different pens and graze more areas with the added bonus that it was cheaper than methods previously used.



Grazing on the Downs

Photograph: Jennifer McRea

EVENTS AND SPORTS

The Conservators have acceded to requests from local organisations to use the Commons in support of their activities. These include the annual Banstead Rotary Charity Ramble on Banstead Heath; the Wheels of Steel Charity Cycle Ride around Banstead Heath in support of The Children's Trust and the Burgh Heath Exemption Dog Show on Burgh Heath Green which the organisers have indicated will probably be the last one to take place. In addition, the Commons host many organised sporting events of golf, cricket, football, rugby, cross-country running and orienteering. We have, however, found it necessary to introduce a small fee for organisations making use of the commons.

The area known as 'The Cricket Field', off Dorking Road, is regularly used by Tadworth Cricket Club. It is a popular venue and requests to use it have been received from other sporting clubs. Use of this area continues to be discussed by RBBC, the Conservators and the current users in respect of costs and availability of the grounds. The cricket club have declined to pay a fee for use of the ground until the Conservators show that they have a right to charge for such use which is currently being determined.

Local schools use the open playing areas of the Common for sports and pupils have again joined our Warden and Keepers in making bird and bat boxes. Children from the local primary schools and Cub Scouts have also visited and studied the countryside throughout the seasons.

PUBLIC RELATIONS

Our web page, www.bansteadcommonsconservators.org.uk offers a wealth of information and our brochures are available to the general public in the local libraries and Help Shops.

Banstead Heath Consultative Group, which was established by the Conservators in 1998, held regular meetings throughout the year under the chairmanship of Cllr. Victor Broad. The Group has more than twenty members whose diverse interests include ornithology, archaeology, dog walking, rambling and riding and includes one individual among the membership who enjoys Commoners rights. The Group enables the Conservators to keep in touch with a wide range of views in relation to their management of the Heath and provides them with a regular opportunity to discuss and advise the general public of their restraints, objectives and work schedules.

Neighbouring Local Residents' Associations were again invited to send representatives to attend our January Quarterly Meeting followed by an open discussion of matters of mutual interest. The discussion and feedback were very helpful to all in attendance and the invitation will be extended again next January.

FLY TIPPING AND GENERAL VANDALISM

Fly tipping continues to increase and is a constant drain on resources and finances, especially as time spent removing such litter could be more productively spent working elsewhere on the commons. Wherever possible vehicular access to the Commons has been blocked off but as the sites available for tipping are numerous, the problem remains constant. The financial aspect is exacerbated when asbestos and other toxic materials are dumped and have to be removed at our expense. The clearing of the increased amount of general litter being dropped in the area of Banstead Station and Asda at Burgh Heath is also resource intensive.

A practise has arisen whereby dog owners use plastic bags to pick up the excrement of their dogs and instead of disposing of them properly hang them from bushes or throw them on the ground. The excrement is usually biodegradable but plastic bags are not and will remain there for years to come.

Who do they think is going to remove them? It would be far better if they walked their dogs towards the centre of the common where the excrement could be left to biodegrade rather than foul the access points with excreta and plastic BAGS. Notices have been placed in the affected areas but to little effect.



Photograph: John Peacock

Why do people you would normally credit with common sense hang non-biodegradable plastic bags containing dog excrement from trees? Who do they think is going to remove them?

SPECIFIC CONCERNS

Apart from motor vehicles on the Common, fly tipping plastic bags of dog excreta and the perennial problem of keeping horse riders and dog walkers apart, there are no other recurring major problems.

THE FUTURE

As well as resolving the problem issues mentioned above the plan for the next year includes continued liaison with Natural England on the requirements and results of our Higher Level Stewardship status and working to maintain the high level they require. The financial support from the Rural Payment Agency (now Basic Payment Scheme) is lower than previously received and

other sources of income are ceasing or quickly reducing. We will, therefore become more reliant on the money we receive from Reigate & Banstead Borough Council or tailor our work accordingly.

There are several ongoing issues that need to be considered and brought to conclusion wherever possible. These include the tracks at Withered Corner and the use of the cricket ground, both of which involve liaison between RBBC and the Conservators. The payment for licences to place benches on the commons at The Bell and The Sportsman is now an accepted procedure and they will continue to be issued.

Some of the equipment purchased to replace that destroyed in the depot fire of 2011 is now past its best and consideration will have to be given to replacing it within the next 12 months.

STAFF

The Warden and two Keepers have remained in post throughout the year. All are fully trained in the safe use of equipment and refreshed in First Aid procedures. Together they form a close knit and hardworking team. The vacancy for a part time Keeper has not been filled putting further pressure on our staff but they have coped with it admirably.

The Conservators would again like to record their appreciation for the work put in by all employees in safeguarding, maintaining and improving the Commons.

On behalf of the Conservators

John Milner
Clerk

BANSTEAD COMMONS CONSERVATORS

RECEIPTS & PAYMENTS
for the year ended 31st March 2018

	2017/2018	2016/2017
<u>RECEIPTS</u>	£	£
Reigate and Banstead Borough Council	85500	85500
London Borough of Sutton	0	4500
DEFRA Stewardship Fee	29502	23281
Bank Interest	45	71
Miscellaneous	2325	657
Rural Payments Agency	47631	68075
		165003
		182084
<u>PAYMENTS</u>		
Staff employment costs	110788	107311
Operating costs	30016	29379
Administration costs	3227	3323
Audit fee	384	384
Capital expenditure	17220	14472
		161635
EXCESS OF RECEIPTS OVER PAYMENTS		154869
		<u>3368</u>
<u>OPERATING FUNDS</u>		<u>27215</u>
Opening balance	216952	189737
Movement in year	3368	<u>27215</u>
Closing balance	<u>220320</u>	<u>216952</u>
<u>ANALYSIS OF CLOSING BALANCE</u>		
Cash at bank (less outstanding liabilities)	220320	216952
Less Replacement Fund	132780	150000
<u>AVAILABLE AS WORKING CAPITAL</u>	<u>87540</u>	<u>66952</u>

John Milner
Clerk to the Conservators

