



BANSTEAD COMMONS CONSERVATORS

REPORT AND ACCOUNTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2020



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

REPORT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2020

MEMBERS FOR 2019/20

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

Mr. D. Atkins
Dr W.S. Bellenger
Mr V.W. Broad
Mr. R.S. Mantle
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. N. Moses

Clerk

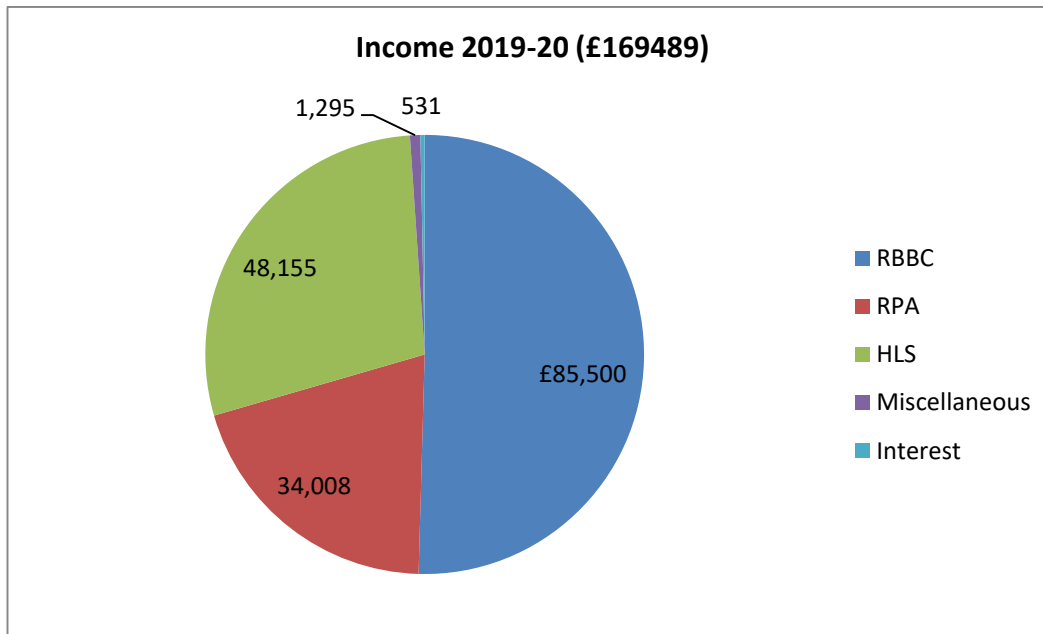
John Milner

Commons under the Management of the Conservators

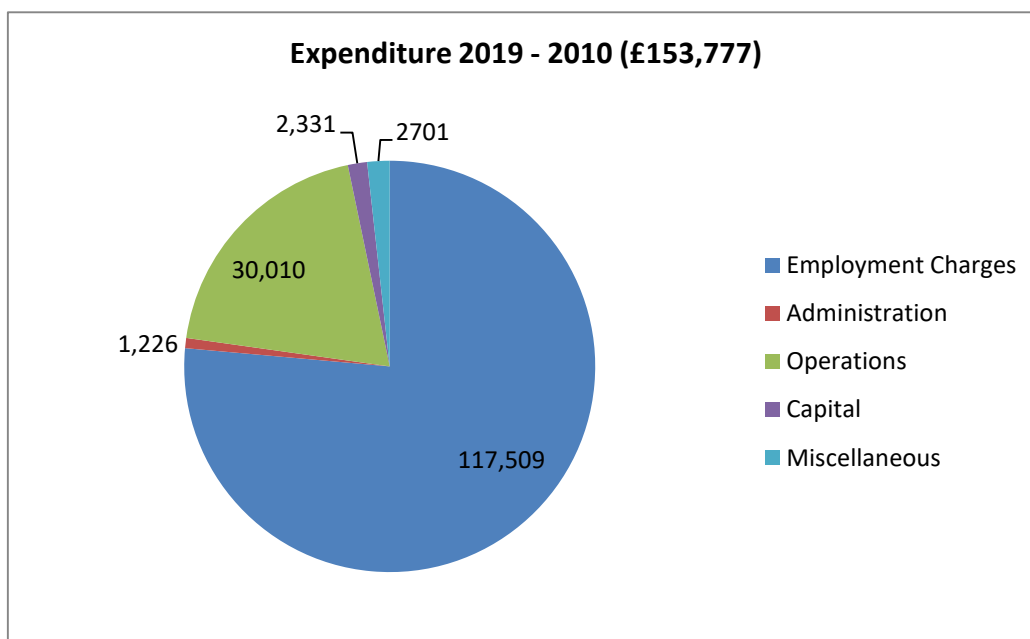
Banstead Heath	310 hectares
Banstead Downs	177 hectares – part SSSI
Burgh Heath	33 hectares
Park Downs	30 hectares – all SSSI

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.



Includes £23,282 in back payments for HLS for 2018 – 2019.



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. Now that Brexit has been secured, the UK Government has indicated these payments will be incrementally reduced over the next seven years and replacement grants will be introduced.

Negotiations with RBBC to produce a Service Level Agreement acceptable to both parties to form the basis of future funding and take the place of a grant from the council were unsuccessful and we have reverted to grant allocation.

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 2019/20

During the course of the year all roadside ditches, banks and posts have been inspected, increased and improved in an effort to prevent unlawful intrusion by vehicles. There are, however, still some areas which, because of the topography, are difficult to totally secure.

There have been two specific problems relating to trees. The first, 'Oak Processionary Moth', in caterpillar form nest in oak trees and can cause severe irritation to humans and animals, particularly dogs. Although becoming prevalent in Surrey, we are fortunate that they have only appeared on the commons on the western side of Banstead Downs and have, hopefully, been contained. The second problem is more widespread so far as Banstead Commons are concerned and that is Ash Die-Back. As the name indicates this affects ash trees, is virulent, and once a tree is infected it does not recover but eventually dies. It has, or is, affecting about 95% of the ash trees on the commons. Our staff have been busy felling those likely to cause damage, injury or obstruction to roads, people or property thus negating such outcomes and making safe those in more out of the way areas which can be totally cleared at a later time.

The very wet early months of 2020 meant that heavy machinery could not access the waterlogged commons but essential and maintenance work took place wherever possible. When the weather improved the country was hit with Coronavirus and as a result of the resulting restrictions of movement the staff have only been called on to deal with urgent matters.

We have now completed eight 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.



Fungus Circle at Withybed Corner

Photo by Richard Knights

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.

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. 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.

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.

The sheep had almost finished grazing Banstead Downs when, unfortunately, a week before they were due to be removed from the Downs, they were attacked by a dog despite there being no breach in the fence. Several sheep were injured, one of them badly, incurring vets bills, but they all lived and were obviously moved from the Downs immediately. No dog owner has admitted responsibility and we must now consider whether or not to continue this very useful grazing practise next year.



Self-evident

Photo by John Peacock

EVENTS AND SPORTS

The Conservators have acceded to requests from local organisations to use the Commons in support of their activities. 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.

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.co.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 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.

Despite our appeals the practise 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 continues.

The excrement is usually biodegradable but plastic bags are not and will remain there for years to come. 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.



Rubbish discarded in Lonesome Pond, Burgh Heath

SPECIFIC CONCERNS

Motorcycles and quad bikes are prevalent on the commons again causing danger and distress to lawful users of the commons, particularly Banstead Downs and Banstead Heath. We are once more trying to involve the local police to prevent this dangerous practise. The numbers of illegal bikers and the frequency they visit the commons are increasing, mostly during the evenings and week-ends but without the assistance of the police they are becoming more difficult to deter. 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.

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 ACCOUNT
for the year ended 31st March 2020**

	2019/2020	2018/2019
<u>RECEIPTS</u>	£	£
Reigate and Banstead Borough Council	85500	85500
London Borough of Sutton	0	0
DEFRA Stewardship Fee	48588	0
Bank Interest	530	404
Miscellaneous	1295	1505
Rural Payments Agency	33576	40192
	169489	127601
<u>PAYMENTS</u>		
Staff employment costs	117509	114209
Operating costs	28785	31979
Administration costs	3525	3275
Audit fee	402	335
Capital expenditure	2331	40497
	152552	190295
EXCESS OF RECEIPTS OVER PAYMENTS	<u>16937</u>	<u>-62694</u>
<u>OPERATING FUNDS</u>		
Opening balance	157626	220320
Movement in year	<u>16937</u>	<u>-62694</u>
Closing balance	<u>174563</u>	<u>157626</u>
<u>ANALYSIS OF CLOSING BALANCE</u>		
Cash at bank (less outstanding liabilities)	174563	157626
Less Replacement Fund		92283
<u>AVAILABLE AS WORKING CAPITAL</u>	<u>174563</u>	<u>65343</u>

John Milner – Clerk to the Conservators

RECONCILIATION OF ACCOUNTS YEAR ENDING 31ST MARCH 2020

Cash Book

Balance at 31 March	2019	157626.36
Receipts to 31 March	2020	169489.27
		327115.63
LESS Payments as per cash book		149306.60
		177809.03
LESS Year end accruals		4531.41
PLUS Year end prepayments		1285.84
		<u>174563.46</u>
	Cash Book Year End Total	<u><u>174563.46</u></u>

Bank

Certified Balances at 31 March		
TSB Current Account		106685.87
TSB Deposit Account		71123.16
		<u>177809.03</u>
LESS Outstanding cheques (schedule below)		0.00
		<u>177809.03</u>
LESS Year end accruals (schedule below)		4531.41
PLUS Year end prepayments		1285.84
		<u>174563.46</u>
	Bank Year End Total	<u><u>174563.46</u></u>

Supporting Schedules to Reconciliation

Year End Accruals

	PAYE	NI	Pensions	Bank Charges	Insurance	Other	Totals
Inland Revenue	979.40	1329.90					2309.30
Pensions			702.98				702.98
Bank Charges				8.25			8.25
Astonlark					62.68		62.68
Astonlark					1387.61		1387.61
Fuel Card						60.59	60.59
							<u>4531.41</u>

Year End Outstanding Cheques

Cheque No 0

Year end prepayments

Aston Lark					1193.63		1193.63
Aston Lark					92.21		92.21
							<u>1285.84</u>