



BANSTEAD COMMONS CONSERVATORS

**REPORT AND ACCOUNTS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2021**

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

REPORT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2021

MEMBERS FOR 2020/21

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

Dr. J. H. Peacock (Chairman)
Mr. D. Atkins
Dr. W.S. Bellenger
Mr. V.W. Broad
Mr. J Mill
Mr. N. Cull (Nominated by the London Borough of Sutton)

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

Cllr. N. Moses
Cllr. P. Harp

Clerk

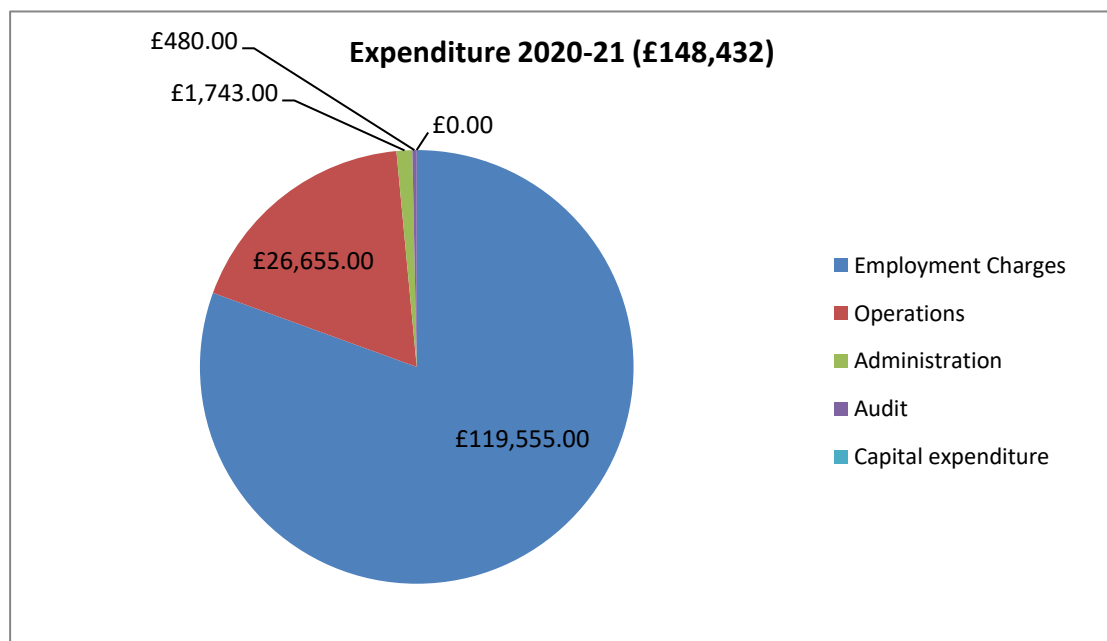
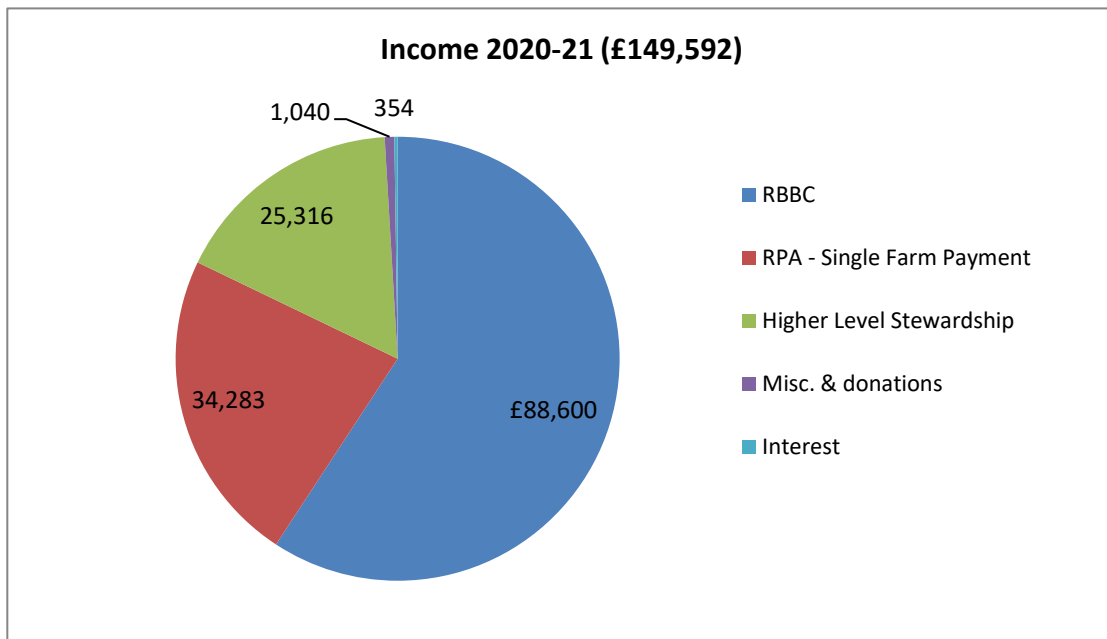
Lucy Shea

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.



We currently receive two operational grants from Rural Payments Agency. One from Natural England Higher Level Stewardship for Grassland and Heathland management; the other from the Single Farm Payment, which was introduced under EU legislation for production or keeping the land in good agricultural and environmental condition. Following Brexit, the UK Government are incrementally reducing payments of the Single Farm Payment over the next four years which will result in a significant loss of income for the Conservators.

Reigate and Banstead Borough Council confirmed that our current grant will remain the same for the financial year 2021/2022 and we are in discussion with them to address future funding requirements.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Conservators appreciate the help and assistance received from Reigate and Banstead Borough Council and Natural England as well as the various local groups and individuals who organise formal and informal litter picking days on the commons.

REPORT FOR THE YEAR 2020/2021

This year has been overshadowed by the Coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic and the knock on affects the pandemic has had on human activity on Banstead Commons. National and local lockdowns have resulted in an unprecedented increase in visitor numbers and antisocial behaviour on all four of our sites.

Government social-distancing guidelines were introduced and staff quickly adapted to new safe ways of working. Tree safety works were paused during the first lockdown and day-to-day management duties were prioritised with an emphasis on the widening of footpaths and woodland rides to encourage users to stick to the existing network, whilst enabling social distancing. The operational team absorbed the responsibility of managing the sharp increase in antisocial behaviour on the commons which included regular clearance of weekend encampments, flytipping, litter and dog waste.

We developed an open dialogue with Reigate and Banstead PCSO team to manage motorbikes and quad bikes on Banstead Commons which resulted in the Police issuing a section 69 to a rider, which acted as a deterrent for a short period.

The increase in visitor numbers will have a detrimental effect on footpath erosion and paired with an extremely wet winter has meant that the extent of the damage cannot be assessed until this coming summer.

We have now completed nine 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 apparent and have again passed inspection by Natural England.

Last year, neither Park Downs nor Banstead Downs were grazed this winter. The areas were included in the forage harvesting programme on these sites. 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 native broadleaf trees has provided the right habitat for the many species of birds, butterflies and other insects, as well as mammals which inhabit the area.

Reptile monitoring has commenced on Banstead Heath and 12 tin refuges have been placed across the Heath to help monitor the population of Adders and other reptiles. Data is collected in-house and all sightings reported to Surrey Amphibian and Reptile Group.



Juvenile Adder recorded on Banstead Heath in March 2021

Two grant applications were submitted to the Community Infrastructure Levy fund to carry out additional clearance work on Burgh Heath, which included habitat management work to Lonesome Ponds. The clearance work around Lonesome Ponds was carried out this winter, with the remaining works scheduled for Winter 2021/22. Due to the presence of the Great Crested Newt the Conservators engaged with Surrey Amphibian and Reptile Group who made a number of pond management recommendations which are being explored. Subsequent funding applications for pond management works have been encouraged by Reigate and Banstead Council. We would like to acknowledge the help of Cllrs. Harper, Bray and Harp and the local resident association representative Ian Mockford in this process.

TREE PESTS AND DISEASES



Oak processionary moth nest

Oak Processionary Moth (OPM) has extended its reach across Surrey and additional nests were reported on Banstead Downs this year; we are expecting OPM to arrive at our other sites in the foreseeable future. Due to the SSI designation on Banstead Downs the nests were removed manually, without any chemical treatment.

Ash Die-Back is widespread on Banstead Commons and the team are prioritising the felling of trees that are likely to cause damage, injury or obstruction to roads, people of property. In some areas we have combined forces with the Greenspaces Team at Reigate and Banstead Borough Council to work on stands and individual trees which are beyond our resources, either due to the road network or the risk the tree works pose to neighbouring properties. It is estimated that we will lose 80% of our ash trees to the disease and the tree works will be a significant drain on resources for the next five years.



Picture of the canopy on an Ash at Banstead Heath

EVENTS AND SPORTS

The Coronavirus prevented most events and sporting activities from taking place on the Commons for the majority of this year. Tadworth Cricket Club continued to use Banstead Heath as its home ground when they were able to play.

PUBLIC RELATIONS

Our web page, www.bansteadcommonsconservators.co.uk offers a wealth of information and we are in the process of working with a local agency to redesign the site.

Social media continues to be the best medium to engage supporters. Our Facebook page currently has 850 followers. Thirty five new updates were posted during the course of the year, with a combined reach of 32,433 – post reach is the number of specific users who read a post. Our new Twitter page was launched in September and we now have 53 followers.

Banstead Heath Consultative Group held regular meetings throughout the year under the chairmanship of Victor Broad. The Group has fourteen members whose diverse interests include ornithology, archaeology, dog walking, rambling and riding and includes one individual among the membership who enjoys Commoners rights.

Each year Local Residents' Associations are invited to send representatives to attend our January Quarterly Meeting. This January we had a record attendance and were fortunate to be joined the Leader of the Council, Cllr. Mark Brunt and Cllr. Jill Bray. Discussions were varied and it was reassuring to receive such positive public support from community leaders and local supporters.

Sadly, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, our public walk programme and attendance at Village Fairs were cancelled. We hope to engage more people through next years' public engagement programme of events.

FLY TIPPING, LITTERING AND ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

National lockdowns have resulted in an unprecedented increase in Fly tipping, litter and antisocial behaviour on all four sites.

Motorbike and Quad Bikes continue to cause problems on Banstead Downs and Burgh Heath. Wherever possible vehicular access to the Commons has been blocked off but as the sites available for tipping are numerous, the problem persists. The local community has risen to the challenge and we have seen the formation of Litter Picking Groups through social media and our sincere thanks go to all those who are helping us to preserve and protect Banstead Common for the enjoyment of the local community and wildlife.



Encampment on Banstead Heath

STAFF AND HEALTH & SAFETY

Our Clerk John Milner retired from post at the end of April and the Conservators welcomed Lucy Shea to the small team. The Warden and two Keepers have remained in post and have continued to operate throughout this difficult year. All are fully trained in the safe use of equipment and refreshed in First Aid procedures.

Due to the lack of funds, the vacancy for a part time Keeper has still not been filled.

Risk assessments are reviewed and minor adjustments made at the beginning of each new year and circulated to the operational team. We introduced new procedures to ensure safe ways of working under the COVID restrictions. No accidents were recorded this year.

The Conservators would again like to record their appreciation for the work put in by all employees in safeguarding, maintaining and improving the Commons, especially during such a challenging year in all areas of responsibility.

THE FUTURE

The biggest challenge facing the Conservators over the next five years is securing sufficient funding to enable our operational team to continue to provide site management on behalf of the landowners, Reigate and Banstead Borough Council.

The pandemic has shown the local community just how important our greenspaces are to the health and wellbeing of residents. Banstead Commons provided many people with peace and solace during difficult times. This provides a timely reminder of the relevance the Conservators, and our Act, has in modern day society and the importance of our role in protecting and preserving the integrity of Banstead Commons for future generations to enjoy.

Lucy Shea
Clerk to the Conservators

APPENDIX A

BANSTEAD COMMONS CONSERVATORS

RECEIPTS & PAYMENTS ACCOUNT

for the year ended 31st March 2021

	2020/2021	2019/2020
<u>RECEIPTS</u>	£	£
Reigate and Banstead Borough Council	£88,600.00	£85,500.00
London Borough of Sutton	£0.00	£0.00
DEFRA Stewardship Fee	£25,316.00	£48,588.00
Bank Interest	£352.61	£530.00
Miscellaneous	£1,040.00	£1,295.00
RPA - Single Farm Payment	£34,283.00	£33,576.00
	<u>£149,591.61</u>	<u>£169,489.00</u>
<u>PAYMENTS</u>		
Staff employment costs	£119,555	£117,509.00
Operating costs	£26,655	£28,785.00
Administration costs	£1,743	£3,525.00
Audit fee	£480.00	£402.00
Capital expenditure	£0.00	£2,331.00
	<u>£148,432.00</u>	<u>£152,552.00</u>
EXCESS OF RECEIPTS OVER PAYMENTS	<u>£1,159</u>	<u>£16,937.00</u>
<u>OPERATING FUNDS</u>		
Opening balance	£174,563.46	£157,626.00
Movement in year	<u>£1,159</u>	<u>£16,937.00</u>
Closing balance	<u>£175,723.00</u>	<u>£174,563.00</u>
<u>ANALYSIS OF CLOSING BALANCE</u>		
Cash at bank (less outstanding liabilities)	£176,982.00	£177,809
Add prepayments	£3,613.	£1,286
Less Accruals/creds	-£4,871	-£4,531
<u>AVAILABLE AS WORKING CAPITAL</u>	<u>£175,723</u>	<u>£174,563</u>

Lucy Shea
Clerk to the Conservators

**BANSTEAD COMMONS CONSERVATORS
RECONCILIATION OF ACCOUNTS YEAR END 31ST MARCH 2021**

CASH BOOK

Balance at 31 March 2020	£174,563.46
Receipts at 31 March 2021	£149,591.02
	£324,154.48
LESS Payments as per cash book	£147,217.79
TOTAL BANK ACCOUNTS	<u>£176,981.72</u>
LESS Year end accruals	£4,186.69
Cash Book Year End Total	<u>£172,795.03</u>

BANK

Certified Balances at 31 March		
	TSB Extra	£105,460.92
	TSB Instant	£71,520.80
		<u>£176,981.72</u>
LESS Outstanding cheques (schedule below)		£0.00
LESS Year end accruals		£4,870.78
Bank Year End Total		<u>£172,110.94</u>

Supporting schedules to Reconciliation

Year end accruals

HMRC	£2,393.73
Intelligent Finance - pension contributions.	£1,729.00
Bank Charges	£8.15
Lucy Shea expenses	£55.81
Spy Alarms	£513.60
Fuel Card	£170.49
	<u>£4,870.78</u>
Year end outstanding cheques	<u>£0.00</u>

Year end prepayments

Aston lark DAS legal to 24/7/21	94.44
Aston Lark Agric Vehcls to 25/7/21	1,193.63
Aston Lark Comm veh to 28/7/21	106.71
Aston Lark Comm Combnd to 24/7/21	1,317.79
Alliance Mobile Security	297.81
Autoenroll fees	253.28
Sage pensions	49.04
Sage payroll	104.76
Royal Mail PO Box	195.08
	<u>£3,612.55</u>



Halsey & Co.
— Since 1952 —

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INDEPENDENT ACCOUNTANT'S REPORT TO:

BANSTEAD COMMONS CONSERVATORS

Report

We have examined the statement of Receipts and Payments account for the year ended 31st March 2021 showing an excess of receipts over payments of £1,159 and test checked a sample of the amounts disclosed to the books and vouchers of Banstead Commons Conservators and certify the same to be in accordance therewith.

Richard J Halsey BSc (Hons) FCCA.
Association Chartered Certified Accountants
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Chartered Certified Accountants
Registered Auditors
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Date: 9th June 2021

