



BANSTEAD COMMONS CONSERVATORS

**REPORT AND ACCOUNTS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2022**

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

REPORT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2022

MEMBERS FOR 2021/2022

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

Mr. V.W. Broad (Chairman)
Dr. J. H. Peacock
Mr. D. Atkins
Mr. I Mockford (from November 2021)
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

Warden

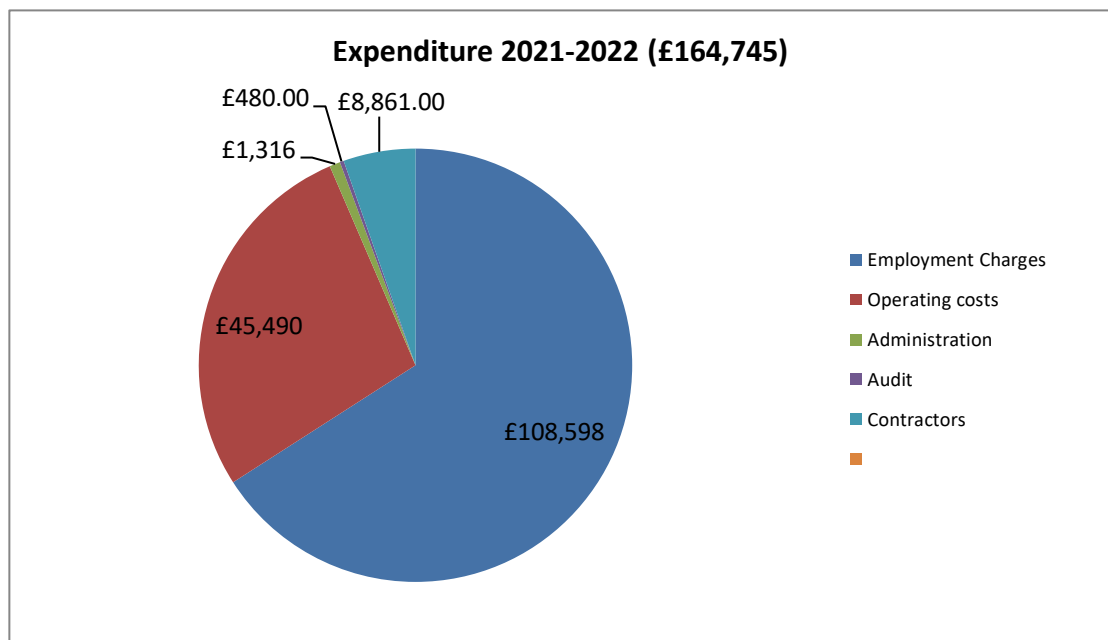
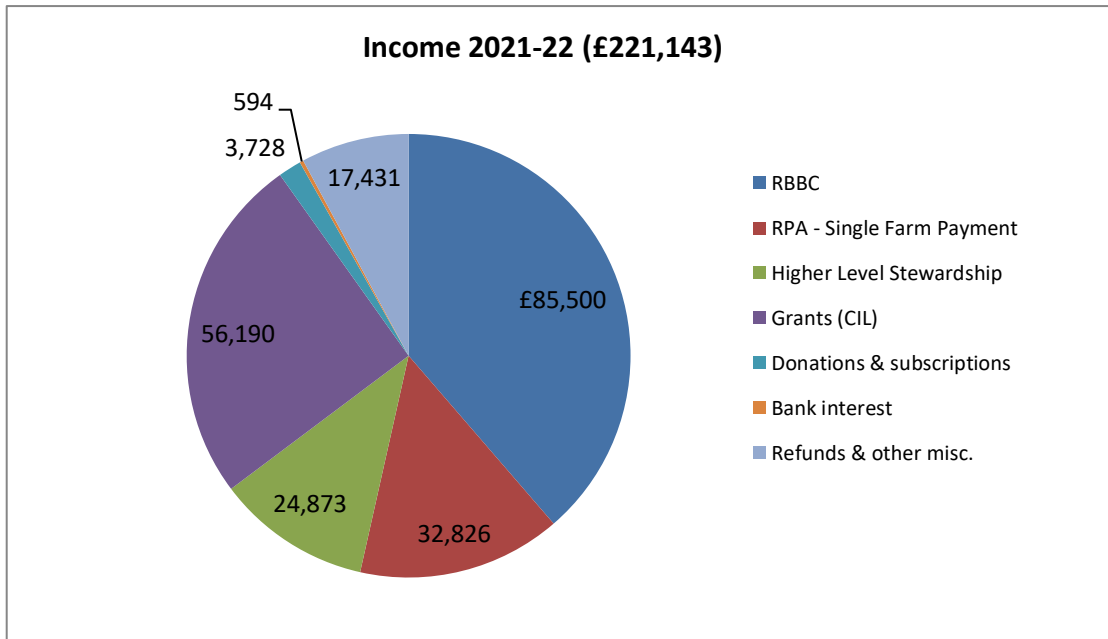
Richard Knights (retired in November 2021)

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 the 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 three years and our grant will cease in 2025 resulting in a significant loss of income for the Conservators.

The operational grant provided by Reigate and Banstead Borough Council was £85,500 this year. The Conservators continue their dialogue with the Council regarding future funding.

The Conservators were successful in obtaining two grants from the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) fund. One was to carry out additional clearance and pond work on Burgh Heath and the other to contribute to the cost of a new tractor. We express our sincere thanks to Cllr. Mark Brunt and all the local ward Councillors for their support with the applications. In addition to the CIL funding, the Conservators privately sold their small tractor. The income of the sale will contribute to the cost of the new tractor, which is due to arrive in summer 2022.

Operational expenditure remains constant each year because our in-house team are experienced in Countryside Management and have an extensive knowledge on how best to maintain the various habitats and landscapes of Banstead Commons.

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.

MANAGEMENT REPORT FOR THE YEAR 2021/2022

We have now completed our ten-year Higher Level Stewardship agreement with Natural England which consisted 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. Representatives from Natural England visited Banstead Heath, Park Downs and Banstead Downs in June. To quote “Banstead Heath is simply spectacular” and Park Downs, which are units four and seven of the Chipstead Downs Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), was awarded the Favourable Conservation Status in the assessment. Natural England invited the Conservators to apply for a twelve-month extension which was accepted with appreciation.



Image: Representatives from Natural England looking over Park Downs.

As in the previous year, neither Park Downs nor Banstead Downs were grazed this winter. The grazing pen areas were included in the forage harvesting programme on these sites. This method of clearance is used on our chalk grassland sites as the growth is cut and arisings removed to help to reduce nutrients in the soil, which helps to increase species diversity and preserve the chalk downland which is a nationally rare habitat.

Dry weather in the winter enabled the team to commence scrub clearance and approximately 5,700 square meters of scrub was cleared on Park Downs to extend and restore the grassland. It will take this area between five to ten years to transition to rich calcareous grassland.



Image: Creating calcareous grassland. This area will transition within 5-10 years.

On Banstead Downs, as part of our efforts to maintain successional scrub, two areas of blackthorn were cleared and the area will be left to regenerate. The maintenance of previously cleared areas and opening of small 'windows' to create pockets of successional scrub helps to create niche habitats which supports the complex ecology of the site.

In February, Storm Eunice and Franklin hit the UK and caused havoc on the Commons and over fifty trees came down across the four sites. Clearance work along our boundaries, footpaths and bridleways was carried out systematically and dead wood left onsite. Deadwood is an important component of a woodland, it provides food and a place to hide for invertebrates which in turn helps to feed small mammals and birds.

The storms provided us with two large oak trees that were planked for furniture. Three new benches on the Commons will be installed in the summer. In addition to the benches, twenty four oak finger posts have been made from the timber which will be used to replace rotten marker posts on Banstead Downs.

MONITORING FLORA AND FAUNA

Volunteers with the Butterfly Conservation continue to monitor the butterfly populations on Banstead Downs and Park Downs. Banstead Downs was the first site in Surrey to have a butterfly transect and as a result, the Conservators have robust biological records dating back to 1986. The transect on Park Downs commenced in 1998. Whilst data has shown us there hasn't been a significant change in counted butterflies on either site, it does show fluctuations in the various species.

The British Trust of Ornithology continued to carry out their breeding bird survey on Banstead Heath which commenced in 1995.

The Conservators have increased the amount of reptile refugia places on Banstead Heath and records are submitted to Surrey Amphibian and Reptile Group. Next year, the Conservators would like to recruit a volunteer to regularly monitor the site.

Working together with a local volunteer who is a licenced BTO Bird Ringer and representative of Bisham Barn Owl Group, a barn owl box was installed on Banstead Heath and we hope to attract a breeding pair this Spring.

Sadly, anti-social behaviour continues to be a serious concern on the Chalk Spoils on Banstead Downs where volunteers from Plantlife have been monitoring the colonies of Early Gentian (*Gentianella anglica*) and Broad-leaved cudweed (*Filago pyramidata*) since 1995. Damage to this nationally important site last winter was significant.



Image: Chalk spoils on Banstead Downs (Feb 2022)

Banstead Commons Conservators would like to thank all the volunteers who give their time to collect valuable data related to the flora and fauna found on Banstead Commons and the various conservation bodies who manage the national recording schemes.

TREE PESTS AND DISEASES

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. Due to the escalating costs, as legal landowners, Reigate and Banstead Borough Council has stepped forward to support the removal of trees that are situated in areas of high risk along boundaries, footpaths and bridleways.



Image: Oak processionary moth nest



Image: Picture of the canopy on an Ash at Banstead Heath

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

The Conservators launched their guided walk programme this year and we were delighted to welcome seventy walkers to six walks which were held on three of our sites, Banstead Heath, Park Downs and Banstead Downs, last summer.

Local Resident Associations and voluntary groups continue to give support to Banstead Commons Conservators and we were invited to give talks to eight groups and associations. Articles were supplied to nine different newsletters.

Social media continues to be the best medium to engage supporters. Our Facebook page currently has 1,152 followers and there are 179 Twitter followers. To maintain interest and a large following, we aim to post weekly on our social media pages and keep content relevant to Banstead Commons and its wildlife.

BANSTEAD COMMONS CONSERVATORS

SPRING AND THE BANSTEAD COMMONS

The Banstead Commons Conservators are responsible for important natural areas on Kingswood's doorstep. We hope that this article by Lucy Shea will introduce the Conservators and will be the first of a series which will help us all to explore and understand the Commons better.



Skylark on Banstead Heath *Footpath on Banstead Heath*

If there's one thing COVID has shown us, it is the greater appreciation of the simpler things in life – Nature and the Great Outdoors. Living in the Banstead area we are spoilt with beautiful green spaces on our doorstep, but did you know that Banstead Commons Conservators are responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of 550 hectares of the spaces we enjoy?

Formed under a Parliamentary Act in 1893 Banstead Commons Conservators were tasked to protect Banstead Commons from the activities of Lord of the Manor. Whilst society and the local area has changed greatly over the past 130 years, the role of the Conservators has remained essentially the same, to protect the integrity of the Commons from external pressures.

Banstead Commons consist of four main sites: Banstead Heath, Burgh Heath, Banstead Downs and Park Downs. Banstead Heath, bordered by Tadworth, Kingswood and Walton, is at 310 hectares the largest of the four sites and perhaps, the most varied. The site boasts a mosaic of different habitats – traditional heath, grassland meadow and secondary woodland – which is bursting with healthy invertebrate, mammalian and bird populations. A true jewel of the borough at all times of the year.

With Spring around the corner, Nature's calendar welcomes a burst of life on the Heath for residents to enjoy. The Millfield proudly boasts one of the largest nesting skylark populations in Surrey; throughout Spring and Summer you can take pleasure in their song flight as they rise almost vertically above the meadow and hover above the ground. The warmer and longer days awaken the resident Adder population who, if you are very quiet, can often be seen basking close to their hibernaculum. The landscape is a purple hue

BANSTEAD COMMONS CONSERVATORS



Burgh Heath Pond

from the Birch tree stand and you will find the Pussy Willow bursting buds just in time for Easter.

Burgh Heath, though smaller in size, provides areas of secondary woodland, woodland glades and a network of ponds where relative peace can be found on a bright sunny morning. The Conservators' responsibilities also include the woodland strips alongside the A217 which act as a valuable wildlife corridor connecting Burgh Heath and Banstead Heath.

The chalk grassland habitat found on Banstead Downs and Park Downs offer a different experience to the other sites with an explosion of spring flowers and the start of a continuing succession of butterflies through the year.

With approximately 30 miles of paths, permissive rides and bridleways to explore on Banstead Commons, we suggest you grab a packed lunch and see what you can discover on your next local adventure. Why travel further afield when there is so much to enjoy on your doorstep?

Banstead Commons Conservators plan to host Guided Walks over Banstead Heath this year. Follow us on Facebook for updates and events. For more information about Banstead Commons Conservators or our planned guided walks, please email bansteadcommons@aol.com



Lucy Shea
Clerk to the Conservators

DAVID W. LEGG
TREE FELLING - TREE SURGERY - HEDGE CUTTING
ROOT REMOVAL - GROUND CLEARING - FULLY INSURED

Seasoned hardwood logs available *Local Authority approved*



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Image: article printed by Kingswood Village Voice

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

FLY TIPPING, LITTERING AND ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

Sadly, antisocial behaviour on the commons continues to be a concern during all four of our seasons and motorised vehicles are often reported on Banstead Downs and Burgh Heath at the weekends. The Conservators have developed a dialogue with Surrey Police and the Police proactively patrol when there is any increased activity on a site.

Litter bins were installed by Reigate and Banstead Borough Council along New Road and Mill Road which has alleviated some of the issues with dog poo bags on the Common.

Fly tipping and litter persists across all four sites.



Image: Guided walk on the History & Countryside management of Banstead Heath

STAFF AND HEALTH & SAFETY

Our Warden of thirty years Richard Knights retired from his post at the end of November. Due to our concerns regarding future funding, a decision was made to leave the position vacant until the new financial year and until our discussions with Reigate and Banstead Borough Council concerning funding have progressed further.

Our two Keepers remain in post and have worked hard this winter to ensure our work programme was unaffected despite the reduced staff capacity. The Conservators would like to thank them for their commitment and hard work.

Risk assessments are reviewed, and minor adjustments made at the beginning of each new year and circulated to the operational team. New reporting procedures have been introduced this year to ensure the safety of our staff at work. No significant accidents were recorded.

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 a difficult 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 effective site management on behalf of the landowners, Reigate and Banstead Borough Council.

The international pandemic has shown the local community just how important our greenspaces are to the health and wellbeing, both mental and physical, of residents. In addition to being a precious local amenity, Banstead Commons are nationally important sites for some of the UK's red listed and priority species.

This imparts significant responsibilities on the Conservators to preserve and protect each site and provides a timely reminder of the relevance the Conservators, and our Act, have in modern day society.

It will be our 130 year anniversary next year and we aim to continue our legacy for the next one hundred years to ensure future generations can enjoy Banstead Commons and its wildlife as we are able to do today.

Lucy Shea
Clerk to the Conservators

Appendix A

BANSTEAD COMMONS CONSERVATORS

RECEIPTS & PAYMENTS ACCOUNT
for the year ended 31st March 2022

	2021/2022	2020/2021
<u>RECEIPTS</u>	£	£
Reigate and Banstead Borough Council	£85,500	£88,600
CIL & other grants	£56,190	£0
Higher Level Stewardship	£24,873	£25,316
Bank Interest	£594	£353
Refunds, other	£17,431	£1,040.00
RPA - Single Farm Payment	£32,826	£34,283.00
Fundraising, donations and subscriptions	£3,728	
	<u>£221,143</u>	<u>£149,592</u>
<u>PAYMENTS</u>		
Staff employment costs	£108,598	£119,555
Operating costs	£45,490	£26,655
Administration costs	£1,316	£1,743
Audit fee	£480.00	£480.00
Contractors / consultants	£8,861	£0.00
	<u>£164,745</u>	<u>£148,433</u>
EXCESS OF RECEIPTS OVER PAYMENTS	<u>£56,398</u>	<u>£1,159</u>
<u>OPERATING FUNDS</u>		
Opening balance	£175,723	£174,565
Movement in year	<u>£56,398</u>	<u>£1,159</u>
Closing balance	<u>£232,121</u>	<u>£175,723</u>
<u>ANALYSIS OF CLOSING BALANCE</u>		
Cash at bank (less outstanding liabilities)	£235,134	£176,982
Add prepayments	£2,880.00	£3,613
Less accruals/creds	-£5,892	-£4,871
<u>AVAILABLE AS WORKING CAPITAL</u>	<u>£232,121</u>	<u>£175,723</u>

Lucy Shea
Clerk to the Conservators

CASH BOOK

Balance at 31 March 2021	£176,981.72
Receipts at 31 March 2022	£221,142.8
	£398,124.52
LESS Payments as per cash book	£162990.59
TOTAL BANK ACCOUNTS	£235,133.93
LESS Year end accruals	£5,892.33
Cash Book Year End Total	£229,241.60

BANK

Certified Balances at 31 March 2022		
	TSB Extra	£133,018.64
	TSB Instant	£72,075.85
	TSB Instant	£30,039.44
		£235,133.93
LESS Outstanding cheques (schedule below)		£0.00
LESS Year end accruals		5,892.33
Bank Year End Total		£229,241.60

Supporting schedules to Reconciliation

Year end accruals

Shine Electrics	£900.0
Software	£146.40
Fuel card.	£43.94
Spy Alarms	£363.6
Pension	£606.18
Reigate and Banstead Business Rates	£3742.5
Bank charges	£9.60
Mad4Tools	£80.11

Year end outstanding cheques

Year end prepayments

Aston Lark Legal to 24/07/21	£222.03
Aston Lark Agric Veh 25/07/21	£933.04
Aston Lark Comm Veh 28/07/21	£78.32
Aston Lark Combined 24/07/21	£1251.58
Autoenroll fees	£87.95
Sage Payroll	£107.74
Royal Mail PO Box	£199.23

£2,879.88

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE – 5 year overview

INCOME	2021/2022	2020/2021	2019/2020	2018/2019	2017/2018
RBBC	£85,500	£88,600	£85,500	£85,500	£85,500
RPA Single Farm Payment	£32,826	£34,283	£34,008	£33,974	£47,631
Higher Level Stewardship	£24,873	£25,316	£48,155	£6,218	£29,502
Donations & subscriptions	£3,728	£1,040			
Refunds & other misc.	£17,431		£1,295	£1,505	£2,325
Bank interest		£354	£531	£404	£45
Grants (CIL)	£56,190				
TOTAL	£220,548	£149,592	£169,489	£127,601	£165,003

Note. Increased income in the Financial Year 2021/2022 is a result of a CIL Local Grant and the sale of the old tractor. These funds (£40,310 CIL & £16,000 tractor sale) are restricted and will be spent purchasing a new tractor in the next financial year.

EXPENDITURE	2021/2022	2020/2021	2019/2020	2018/2019	2017/2018
Employment charges	£108,598	£119,555	£117,509	£114,209	£110,788
Operations	£45,490	£26,655.	£30,010	£31,979	£30,016
Administration	£1,316	£1743	£1,226	£1,131	£3,227
Audit	£480	£480			
Contractors & consultants	£8,861				
Capital expenditure			£2331	£40,497	£17,220
Misc.			£2701	£2,479.	£384
TOTAL	£164,745	£148,432	£153,777	£190,295	£161,635



