



# **BANSTEAD COMMONS CONSERVATORS**

**REPORT AND ACCOUNTS  
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31<sup>ST</sup> MARCH 2023**

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

**REPORT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2023**

**MEMBERS FOR 2022/2023**

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

Mr. V.W. Broad (Chairman)  
Mr. D. Atkins  
Mr. J. Mill  
Mr. N. Mollett  
Mr. D. Hatcher  
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

**Senior Keeper**

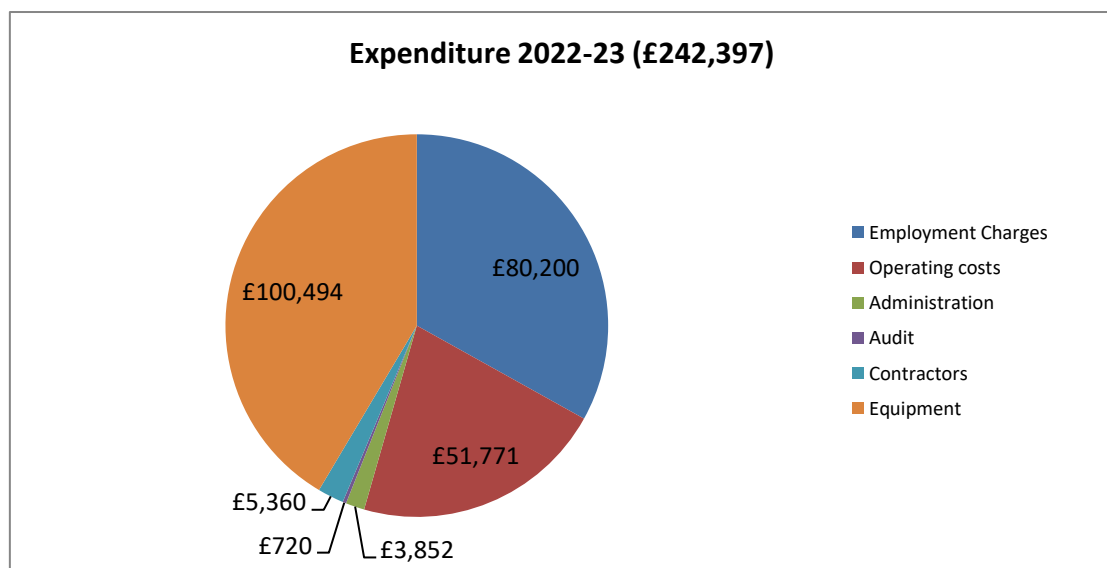
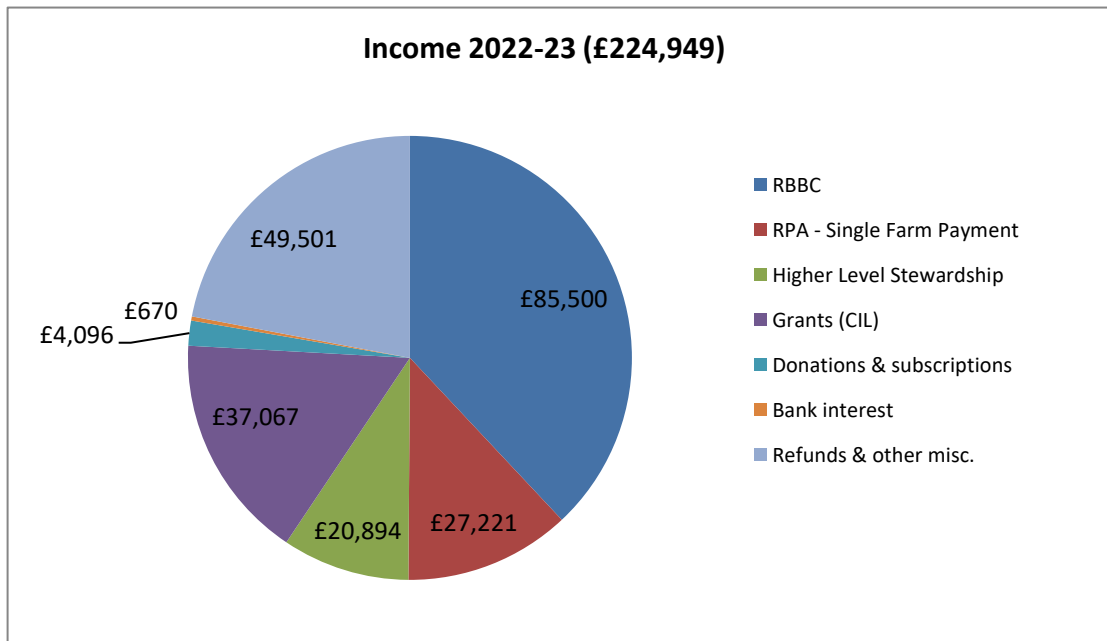
Gary Burford

**Commons under the Management of the Conservators**

Banstead Downs	177 hectares – part SSSI
Banstead Heath	310 hectares
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 and our grant will cease in 2024 resulting in a significant loss of income for the Conservators. At present, we haven't identified a replacement grant in the [ELM schemes](#) that we would be eligible for.

The operational grant provided by Reigate and Banstead Borough Council in 2022/23 was £85,500. The Conservators continue their dialogue with the Council regarding future funding.

The Conservators were successful in obtaining a grant from the [Community Infrastructure Levy \(CIL\) Local Fund](#) to pay for the development of Site Management Plans for each of our four sites. We express our sincere thanks to the Leader of the Council Cllr. Mark Brunt and all the local ward Councillors for their support with the application and look forward to developing this project.

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The Conservators would like to acknowledge the following organisations, local groups and individuals who have supported us in 2022/23:

Reigate and Banstead Borough Council, Natural England, The Downlands Partnership, Banstead Federation and associated Resident Associations, Downlands Trust, Surrey Hills Society, Leatherhead Youth Project, Mole Valley Ramblers, Butterfly Conservation UK, volunteer stock checkers, wildlife monitors.

We also thank the various local groups and individuals who organise formal and informal litter picking days on the Commons.

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## **MANAGEMENT REPORT**

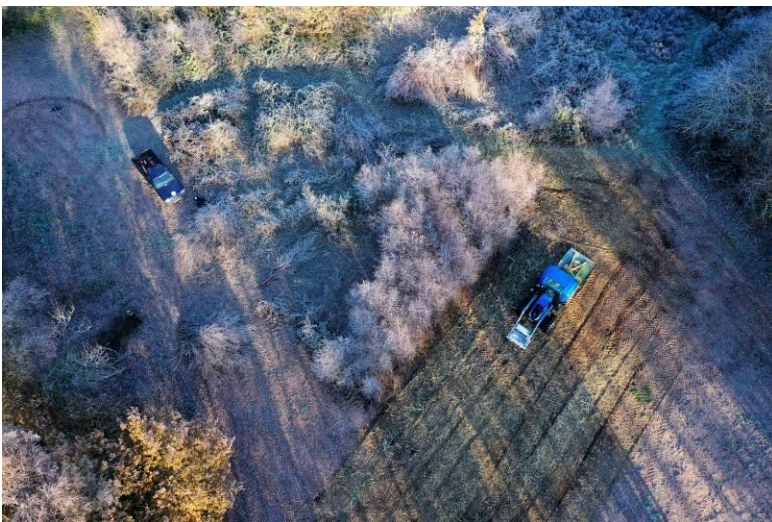
The UK experienced its 6<sup>th</sup> driest summer on record in 2022 and the grassland areas across the Commons became an increased fire risk. During the dry spell, the fire brigade was called out to manage two creeping litter fires on Banstead Heath. Firebreaks were maintained and increased and signage was installed across the site asking visitors to refrain from using disposable barbecues and smoking on our sites.

Our Higher Level Stewardship grant from Natural England was extended for another 12 months and we were successful in obtaining a new five year extension which will run until February 2028. The agreement covers c.164 hectares of grassland that are managed to improve and maintain certain aspects of the common such as the quality of calcareous grassland on the Downs and regeneration of heather and control of bracken on Banstead Heath.

Working in collaboration with the Downlands Partnership we reintroduced a mixed flock of Herdwick and Beulah speckled face wethers to Park Downs in October. The sheep grazed three enclosures and were taken off the site at the end of March. Conservation grazing is a sustainable and natural way to maintain chalk grassland which helps to increase species diversity and preserve the chalk downland.



We'd like to take this opportunity to thank the eight volunteers who carried out the daily welfare checks on the flock.



Winter is the busiest period for conservation work on the Commons. Vegetation is largely dormant and clearance work can be carried out with limited impact on the flora and fauna. This winter the team focused on scrub clearance on Banstead Heath and have cleared just over an acre of scrub from three separate compartments to restore open heathland habitat and create a cycle of successional scrub habitat.

Regular site management duties include clearance work along our boundaries, footpaths and bridleways to ensure safe access for the various user groups.

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## MONITORING FLORA AND FAUNA

Volunteers with Butterfly Conservation UK continue to monitor the butterfly populations on Banstead Downs and Park Downs. Working in collaboration with Butterfly Conservation UK Banstead Heath was surveyed this year and a new transect will commence in Spring 2023.

The British Trust for Ornithology continues to carry out their breeding bird survey on Banstead Heath. The barn owl box which was installed in 2021 sadly did not attract a resident; it will be left in situ for another year before we try a new location.



Male adder recorded on Banstead Heath

The Conservators have increased the amount of reptile refugia placed on Banstead Heath and records are submitted to Surrey Amphibian and Reptile Group.

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 remains significant and it has also resulted in glow worms, stag beetles and other fauna being killed.

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.

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## **TREE PESTS AND DISEASES**

Oak Processionary Moth (OPM) has extended its reach across Surrey and additional nests were reported on Banstead Downs this year. Due to the SSSI designation on Banstead Downs the nests were removed by contractors manually, without any chemical treatment. OPM has not been recorded on our other sites yet although we are expecting them to arrive in the near future.

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 in areas of high risk along boundaries, footpaths and bridleways.

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## **PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT & VOLUNTEERING**

The Conservators continued their programme of guided walks on the Commons and we were delighted to welcome 96 walkers to our six walks which were held on three of our sites, Banstead Heath, Park Downs and Banstead Downs.

Local Resident Associations and voluntary groups continue to give support to Banstead Commons Conservators and we were invited to give talks to six 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 1.3K followers, there are 263 Twitter followers and we set up an Instagram page which has so far attracted 111 followers. To maintain interest and a larger following, the BCC is developing a Communications and Engagement Plan.



Banstead Heath Consultative Group held regular meetings 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 Commoner's rights.

Working collaboratively with the Surrey Hills Society, Mole Valley Ramblers and Surrey County Council, the Banstead Commons Conservators have hosted four volunteer task sessions on the Commons this winter totalling 437 volunteer hours. A successful appeal was launched in Spring to raise funds for hand tools and the Banstead Commons Conservators look forward to introducing practical conservation volunteer tasks on the Commons next year. Thank you to the Downlands Trust, Farming in Protected Landscapes and the local Residents' Associations who all gave generous donations to enable us to purchase equipment and resources to support volunteer activities on the Commons.



**Image:** Leatherhead Youth Project on Banstead Heath, 26 October

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## **FLY TIPPING, LITTERING AND ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOUR**

Anti-social behaviour on the Commons continues to be a concern. Regular incidents related to motorised vehicles, the use of barbecues and concerns related to dog control and dog fouling are reported each year. Dog fouling on Banstead Heath is of particular concern as visitor numbers and dog ownership continue to grow in the borough. Litter bins which are maintained by Reigate and Banstead Borough Council have been installed along New Road and Mill Road which have alleviated some of the issues with dog mess.

Fly tipping and litter persists across all four sites.



**Image:** Month of Remembrance Guided walk on Banstead Heath

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## **STAFF AND HEALTH & SAFETY**

Our two Keepers remained in post and have worked hard winter 2022/23 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.

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## **THE FUTURE**

The biggest challenge facing the Conservators over the next five years is securing sufficient funding to enable the Conservators to continue to deliver their statutory and management duties to protect and preserve Banstead Commons.

Banstead Commons are important greenspaces for the local community to enjoy and visitor numbers increase each year. 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 protecting Banstead Commons for people to enjoy and wildlife to thrive.

Lucy Shea  
**Clerk to the Conservators**

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## BANSTEAD COMMONS CONSERVATORS

RECEIPTS & PAYMENTS ACCOUNT  
for the year ended 31st March 2023

	2022/2023	2021/2022
<b><u>RECEIPTS</u></b>	<b>£</b>	<b>£</b>
Reigate and Banstead Borough Council	£85,500	85,500
CIL & other grants	£37,067	£56,190
Higher Level Stewardship	£20,894	£24,873
Bank Interest	£670	£594
Refunds, sales, other	£49,501	£17,431
RPA - Single Farm Payment	£27,221	£32,826
Fundraising, donations and subscriptions	£4,096	£3,728
	<u>£224,949</u>	<u>£221,143</u>
<b><u>PAYMENTS</u></b>		
Staff employment costs	£80,200	£108,598
Operating costs	£51,771	£45,490
Administration costs	£3852	£1,316
Audit fee	£720	£480.00
Contractors / consultants	£5360	£8,861
Equipment	100,494	
	<u>£242,397</u>	<u>£164,745</u>
<b>EXCESS OF RECEIPTS OVER PAYMENTS</b>	<u>-£17,448</u>	<u>£56,398</u>
<b><u>OPERATING FUNDS</u></b>		
Opening balance	£232,121	£175,723
Movement in year	-£17,448	£56,398
Closing balance	<u>£214,673</u>	<u>£232,121</u>
<b><u>ANALYSIS OF CLOSING BALANCE</u></b>		
Cash at bank (less outstanding liabilities)	£215,809	£235,134
Add prepayments	£2,868	£2880
Less accruals/creds	-£4,004	-£5,892
<b><u>AVAILABLE AS WORKING CAPITAL</u></b>	<u>£214,673</u>	<u>£232,121</u>

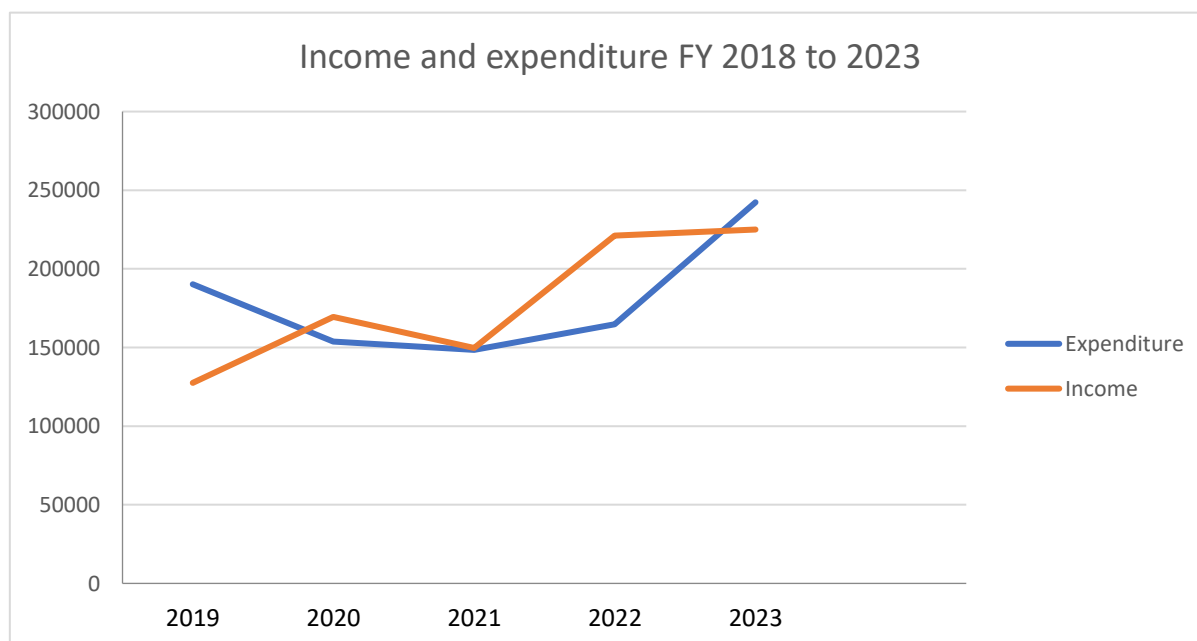
Lucy Shea  
Clerk to the Conservators

## INCOME AND EXPENDITURE – 5 year overview

INCOME	2018/2019	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023
RBBC	£85,500	£85,500	£88,600	£85,500	£85,500
RPA Single Farm Payment	£33,974	£34,008	£34,283	£32,826	£27,221
Higher Level Stewardship	£6,218	£48,155	£25,316	£24,873	£20,894
Donations & subscriptions			£1,040	£3,728	£4,096
Refunds, sales & other misc.	£1,505	£1,295		£17,431	£49,501
Bank interest	£404	£531	£354	£594	£670
Grants (CIL)				£56,190	£37,067
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£127,601</b>	<b>£169,489</b>	<b>£149,592</b>	<b>£221,143</b>	<b>£224,949</b>

Note. Increased income in the Financial Year 2022/2023 is a result of a CIL Local Grant and the sale of the old tractor. These funds (£35,326.80 CIL & £16,000 tractor sale) are restricted and are to be spent purchasing a new tractor and site management plans.

EXPENDITURE	2018/2019	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023
Employment charges	£114,209	£117,509	£119,555	£108,598	£80,200
Operations	£31,979	£30,010	£26,655	£45,490	£51,771
Administration	£1,131	£1,226	£1,743	£1,316	£3,852
Audit			£480	£480	£720
Contractors & consultants				£8,861	£5,360.00
Capital expenditure	£40,497	£2,331			£100,494
Misc.	£2,479.	£2,701			
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£190,295</b>	<b>£153,777</b>	<b>£148,432</b>	<b>£164,745</b>	<b>£242,397</b>





**Halsey & Co.**  
— Since 1952 —

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Registered Auditors

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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 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023, showing an deficit of receipts over payments of £17,448. We also 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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40 Upper Mulgrave Road  
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Date: 17<sup>th</sup> August 2023

