



Annual Report

*Report and accounts
for the year ended 31st March 2024*



BANSTEAD COMMONS CONSERVATORS

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

REPORT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2024 MEMBERS FOR 2023 / 2024

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. B. STEELE

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
BANSTEAD HEATH, 310 HECTARES
BURGH HEATH, 33 HECTARES
PARK DOWNS, 30 HECTARES



Clerk's Report

It has been a productive and promising year for Banstead Commons Conservators.

Working together with the Downlands Partnership Grazing Team, we have expanded our grazing regime on Banstead Downs and Park Downs helping to conserve the species-rich chalk grassland. Twenty-four volunteer livestock monitors assist us with the delivery of daily welfare checks on the livestock.

Our Site Management Plans have been developed and are ready to go to consultation this Summer. The consultation period will enable the various user groups to comment on and influence the future management objectives for each of our four sites. The plans will be formally adopted by the Conservators at the Quarterly Meeting later this year.

Thanks to funding from Farming in Protected Landscapes, we published a new website and more recently introduced our regular volunteer task programme on the Commons. Six corporate volunteer groups have been facilitated and the difference they have made removing woody scrub from a compartment of lowland heath habitat has been significant – many hands make light work!

Our public engagement events are expanding thanks to the support of dedicated guided walk leaders who give their time and knowledge and Cllr. Rebecca Paul and Your Fund Surrey committing funds to support the introduction of events for families on the Commons this Summer.



We wouldn't be able to continue our work without the support of the local community and, whilst we can't list everyone, we would also like to acknowledge the support given by a few notable organisations: [Reigate and Banstead Borough Council](#), [The Downlands Trust](#), [Surrey Hills Society](#), [Leatherhead Youth Project](#), [Surrey County Council Countryside Team](#), [London and South West Surrey Branch of Butterfly Conservation](#), [Farming in Protected Landscapes](#), [Newt Conservation Partnership](#) and local [Resident Associations](#) who kindly help with the promotion of our work through their newsletters and websites.

There were changes to our staff team again this year. I would like to take this opportunity to recognise the commitment of our small dedicated team who continued to deliver our annual work programme despite working at reduced capacity for part of the year. Thank you.

With vast landscapes containing rare and diverse habitats and an abundance of red-listed species recorded on our four sites, the Conservators are committed to ensuring the next generation grows up in a biodiverse landscape, with butterflies aplenty and their ears filled with bird song at all times of the year.

We look forward to the year ahead managing the Commons for people to enjoy and wildlife to thrive.

Lucy Shea

CLERK TO THE CONSERVATORS



Our sites



BANSTEAD DOWNS

Banstead Downs is a rare Chalk Downland habitat and a designated Site of Special Scientific Interest. The area (177 hectares) is made up of a mosaic of habitats including species-rich grassland, scrub and secondary woodland which provide the perfect environment for a diverse range of flora and fauna.

PARK DOWNS

Park Downs is the smallest of the areas we manage (30 hectares) and forms part of Chipstead Downs Site of Special Scientific Interest. The site lies on a steep south-facing slope opposite Banstead Woods with breathtaking views over the valley.



BANSTEAD HEATH

Banstead Heath is the largest (310 hectares) of our four sites and perhaps the most varied. The site is designated a Site of Nature Conservation Importance and boasts a mosaic of different habitats. The landscape is made up of traditional heath, acid grassland meadows and pockets of secondary woodland.

BURGH HEATH

Nestled amongst high-density housing, Burgh Heath (33 hectares) is an important amenity for residents and has extremely high visitor numbers at all times of the year. Burgh Heath is designated a Site of Nature Conservation Importance, has four ponds and consists of areas of woodland with attractive glades where relative peace and tranquillity can be found at all times of the year.





Management Report



Our Higher Level Stewardship agreement covers approximately 164 hectares of species-rich grassland and areas of successional scrub that are managed to enhance the habitats and increase biodiversity. There are three main techniques that we deploy on the Commons depending on resourcing and the topography of the grassland – essentially cut and collect, mowing and grazing.

Conservation grazing

Grassland management commenced in September and working in collaboration with the Downlands Trust Grazing Team and a team of twenty-seven volunteers we introduced a mixed flock of wethers to Banstead Downs and a mixed flock of goats and sheep to Park Downs.

Conservation grazing is a sustainable and natural way to maintain chalk grassland which helps to increase species diversity and preserve the chalk downland.

“Volunteering as a livestock monitor has been brilliant! We have loved getting to know the sheep in the beautiful Banstead Downs.”

Mei, Livestock Volunteer



Habitat management

Woodland and scrub management duties are carried out during the winter months. Large areas of scrub were cleared with machinery on our chalk downland sites, Park Downs and Banstead Downs.



Lowland heath is a priority habitat for conservation in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan. The Conservators created two Heather scrapes on Banstead Heath in September and seed collected from an adjacent Heather compartment was spread on the newly cleared areas.

Working together with six different volunteer groups, thorny scrub was removed by hand from an area of heath approximately 600 square meters in size. Tree poppers were used to remove the root balls and we are looking forward to monitoring the regeneration of the area in comparison to areas that have been mechanically cut in the past.

The Conservators have engaged with the Newt Conservation Partnership and our ponds are getting surveyed in 2024. Funding permitting, the intention is to create a new pond on Burgh Heath and restore two ponds on Banstead Heath as highlighted in our management plans.

Visitor accessibility and enjoyment

Storms Isha and Jocelyn brought high winds to the UK in January and the team spent some time clearing public rights of way and footpaths across the Commons.



Following feedback from riders on Banstead Downs, the permissive ride was widened this winter to make it safer for the riders. Footpath and bridleway maintenance is carried out on all four of our sites each winter.

Tree safety

Oak Processionary Moth (OPM) has extended its reach across Surrey and additional nests were reported on Banstead Heath this year. We have adopted the risk-based approach to management of OPM on our sites.

Ash Die-Back is widespread on Banstead Commons. The Conservators would like to thank Reigate and Banstead Borough Council who have committed to funding all tree safety works associated with managing infected trees that are situated along boundaries, footpaths and bridleways.

Wildlife Monitoring

Banstead Commons Conservators would like to recognise the volunteers who give their time to collect valuable biological data on the Commons and the conservation bodies who manage the national recording schemes.



- [UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme](#) Transects are running on Banstead Downs, Park Downs and Banstead Heath.
- British Trust for Ornithology coordinates a [Breeding Bird Survey](#) on Banstead Heath each year.
- Monthly bird transect walks are held on Banstead Heath and Banstead Downs and biological data submitted to [BirdTrack](#)
- There are sixteen reptile refugia placed on Banstead Heath and data is submitted to [Surrey Amphibian and Reptile Group](#).
- Volunteers from Plantlife have been monitoring the colonies of Early Gentian (*Gentianella anglica*) and Broad-leaved cudweed (*Filago pyramidata*) since 1995.



Volunteering

872 volunteer hours were given to conservation tasks on Banstead Commons this year - an approximate economic value of around £11,000. In addition to increasing capacity, conservation volunteering can help to enhance people's health and their enjoyment and understanding of natural habitats, whilst conserving biodiversity.

Volunteer work parties are usually held on the first Tuesday and third Thursday of each month. In addition to our regular task days, we work together with local groups, youth groups and corporates to host volunteer tasks to preserve and enhance our nationally rare habitats.



"It was great not only to be able to learn more about the flora on my doorstep but to do so while contributing to the conservation of this beautiful natural grassland. I have since checked out a local wildlife site nearby and rather than viewing it as a "patch of grassland" used my new skills to pick out knapweed, rattle and birdsfoot trefoil!"

Sarah Horrocks, Head of Air Quality and Emissions at Atkins



Guided Walks

The Conservators hosted seven guided walks on the Commons this year and we were delighted to be joined by ninety-seven walkers. All of our walks have been well received and fully booked.

Next year's programme of events will include a Dawn Chorus Walk, Fungi Foray and a Winter Bird Walk.

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 duties to protect and preserve Banstead Commons.

New Environmental Land Management schemes are being introduced by the government. We hope to be able to explore further options available to us for grassland management and apply for a WD2: Woodland Improvement grant to improve the biodiversity of our woodlands and make them more resilient to climate change and the increasing threat of tree pests and diseases.



Small Copper

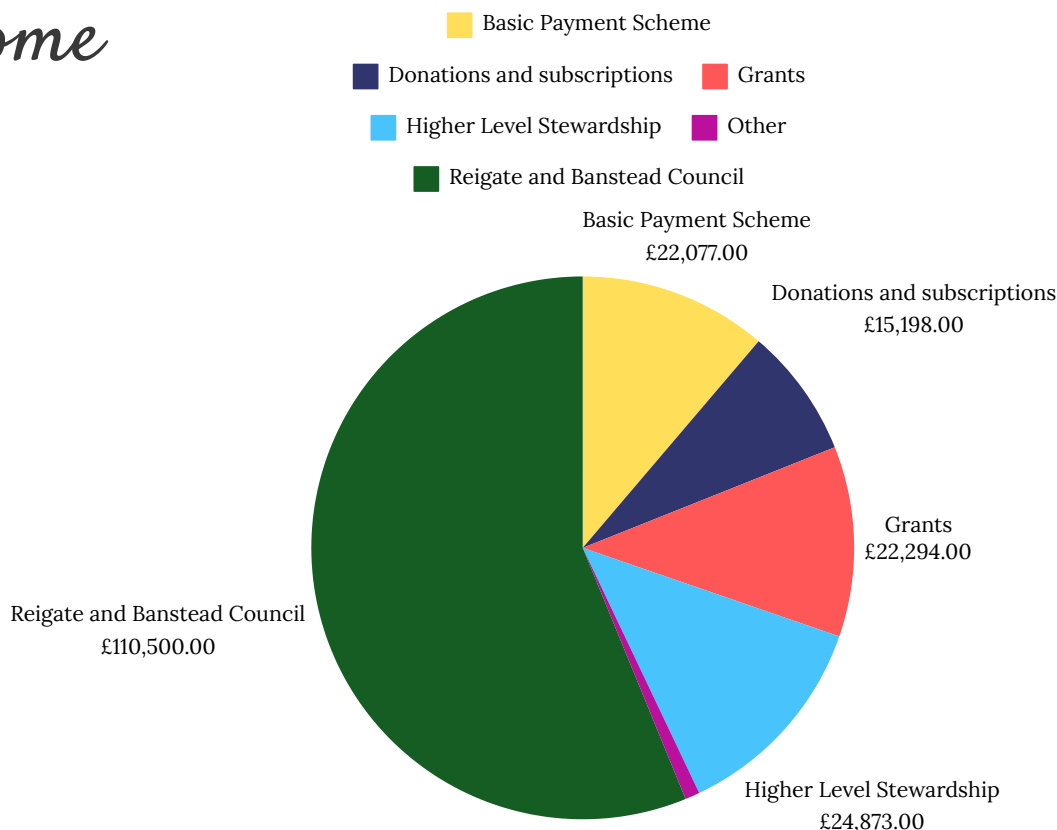


Brown Argus



Financial Report

Income



Reigate and Banstead Borough Council are our primary funder and an operational grant of £110,500 was provided this year. Additional grants to purchase equipment have also been provided through the [CIL Local Fund](#).

The Conservators thank the Council and its Officers for their financial and, in some cases, practical support.

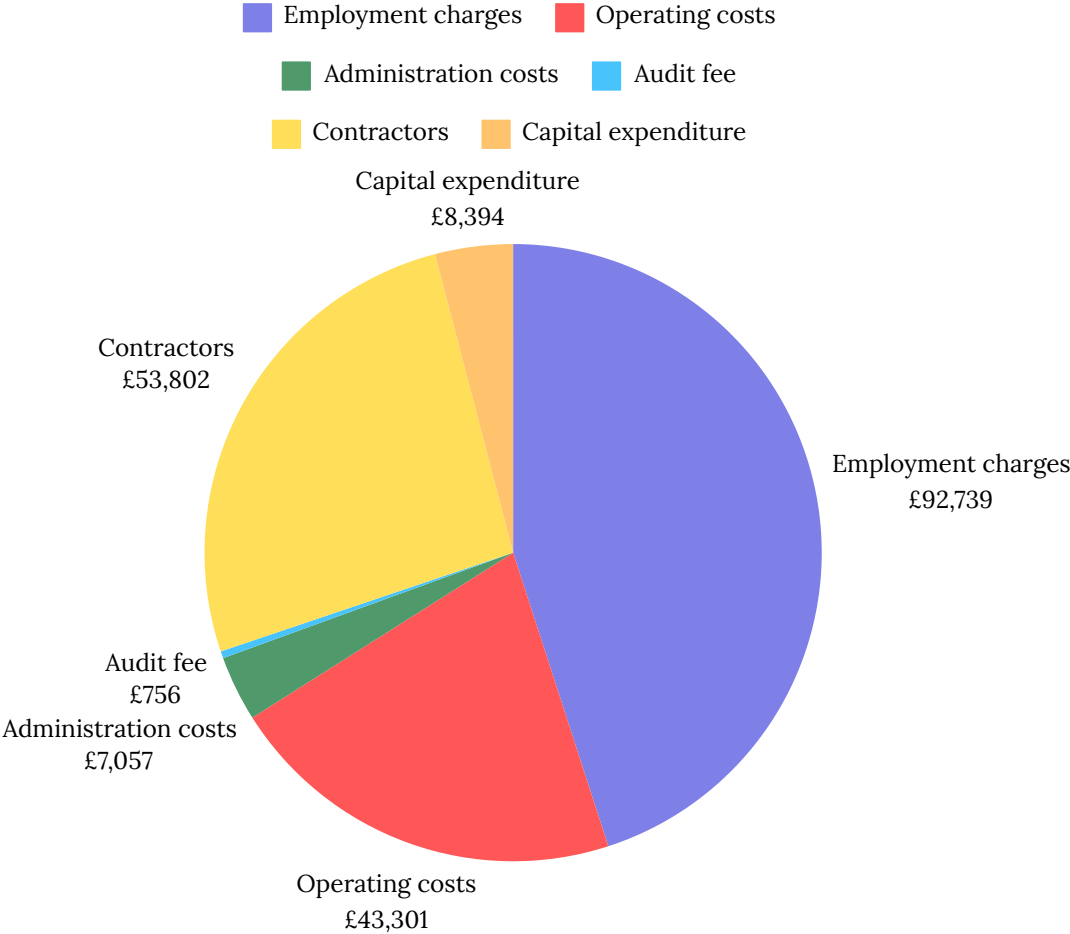
Two grants are received from the Rural Payments Agency - one from Natural England Higher Level Stewardship for grassland management; the other from the Single Farm Payment. The Single Farm Payment will cease this year and we are researching opportunities under the new [ELM schemes](#) and a woodland improvement grant.

Additional grants from local funding providers were received for hand tools, conservation grazing fencing, our new website and Spearhead multi-cut mower.



Donations to the Banstead Commons Conservators have increased as a result of increased public engagement. A private donation of £10,000 was given to adopt habitat management tasks on Banstead Heath for a period of twelve months.

Expenditure



Approximately a quarter of this year’s expenditure was spent on externally funded capital goods which have included the development cost of Site Management Plans and a new website and the purchase of hand tools and machinery.

Managing a small in-house staff team has resulted in our operational expenditure remaining stable with a mean cost of £153,000 over a five-year period. The Conservators are expecting conservation grazing, fuel and contractor fees to increase next year.



Audited Accounts

Receipts & payments account for the year ended 31st March 2023	2023/2024	2022/2023
Reigate and Banstead Borough Council	£85,500	£85,500
CIL & other grants	£22,294	£37,067
Higher Level Stewardship	£24,873	£20,894
Bank Interest	£1,715	£670
Refunds, sales, other	£0	£49,501
RPA - Single Farm Payment	£22,077	£27,221
Fundraising, donations and subscriptions	£15,198	£4,096
Reigate & Banstead Discretionary Fund	£25,000	
	£196,658	£224,949
Payments		
Staff employment costs	£92,739	£80,200
Operating costs	£43,301	£51,771
Administration costs	£7,057	£3,852
Contractors / consultants	£53,802	£5,360
Audit fee	£756	£720
Equipment	£8,394	£100,494
	£206,049	£242,397
Excess of receipts over payments	-£9,392	-£17,448
Operating funds		
Opening balance	£214,673	£232,121
Movement in the year	-£9,392	-£17,448
Closing balance	£205,282	£214,673
Analysis of closing balance		
Cash at bank (less outstanding liabilities)	£208,408	£215,809
Add prepayments	£2,575	£2,868
Less accruals/creds	-£5,702	-£4,004
Available as working capital	£205,282	£214,673



5 Year Overview

Income & expenditure

Income	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024
Reigate & Banstead Borough Council	£85,500	£88,600	£85,500	£85,500	£110,500
RPA Single Farm Payment	£34,008	£34,283	£32,836	£27,221	£22,077
Higher Level Stewardship	£48,155	£25,316	£24,873	£20,894	£24,873
Donations		£1,040	£3,728	£4,096	£15,198
Refunds, sales & other	£1,295		£17,431	£49,501	£0
Bank interest	£531	£354	£594	£670	£1,715
Grants			£56,190	£37,067	£22,294
Total	£169,489	£149,592	£221,143	£224,949	£196,658

Expenditure	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024
Employment charges	£117,509	£119,555	£108,598	£80,200	£92,739
Operations	£30,010	£26,655	£45,490	£51,771	£43,301
Administration	£1,226	£1,743	£1,316	£3,852	£7,057
Audit		£480	£480	£720	£756
Contractors & consultants			£8,861	£5,360	£53,802
Capital expenditure	£2331			£100,494	£8,394
Misc.	£2701				
Total	£153,777	£148,432	£164,745	£242,397	£206,049



Banstead Commons Conservators

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