



Annual Report

Report and accounts for the year ended 31st March 2025



www.bansteadcommons.org



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BANSTEAD COMMONS CONSERVATORS

Established by the Metropolitan Commons (Banstead) Supplemental Act 1893

REPORT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2025 MEMBERS FOR 2024/2025

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. D. Hatcher

MR. J. Mill

MR. N. Mollett

MR. B. Steele

CONSERVATORS APPOINTED BY REIGATE AND BANSTEAD BOROUGH COUNCIL AS OWNERS OF THE SOIL

CLLR. P. Harp

CLLR. N. Moses

CLERK

Lucy Shea

SENIOR KEEPER

Gary Burford

COMMONS UNDER THE MANAGEMENT OF THE CONSERVATORS

BANSTEAD DOWNS, 177 HECTARES

PARK DOWNS, 30 HECTARES

BURGH HEATH, 33 HECTARES

BANSTEAD HEATH, 310 HECTARES

Clerk's Report



Banstead Commons are vast, cherished open spaces that provide a vital buffer against urban sprawl, while supporting natural ecosystems that help address climate change and biodiversity loss.

Our small but dedicated staff team works closely with partners, funders and volunteers to deliver management priorities. Preserving these special places, ensuring they remain safe and accessible, and restoring priority habitats across the landscapes.

Last year we finalised Site Management Plans for each site, outlining our work programmes for the coming years. Our conservation grazing programme on the chalk grasslands continues to achieve results. With additional funding, we hope to introduce grazing on Banstead Heath in the future.

This year our public engagement activities were especially rewarding as we hosted three successful Nature Detective Days, engaging families and young people for the first time in recent years. These events have helped us develop an annual blueprint to inspire young people to connect with nature on their doorstep. We are looking forward to delivering the fun and engaging events again this Summer.

Our practical conservation volunteers remain invaluable, helping us apply sensitive management in small glades and woodland rides—supporting vital species conservation efforts.

The UK government's announcement for local government reorganisation in Surrey, including the creation of unitary councils, presents one of the biggest threats the Conservators have faced since their formation. Land ownership of the Commons will change and there will be no certainty of future funding. We are committed to working closely with decision-makers at Reigate and Banstead Borough Council with the aim to secure funding and ensuring continuity of management during the transition.

Finally, my sincere thanks go to all our staff, volunteers, trustees and partners for their ongoing dedication to maintaining and improving the Commons. Keeping these precious spaces open for the enjoyment of all.

Lucy Shea

CLERK TO THE CONSERVATORS

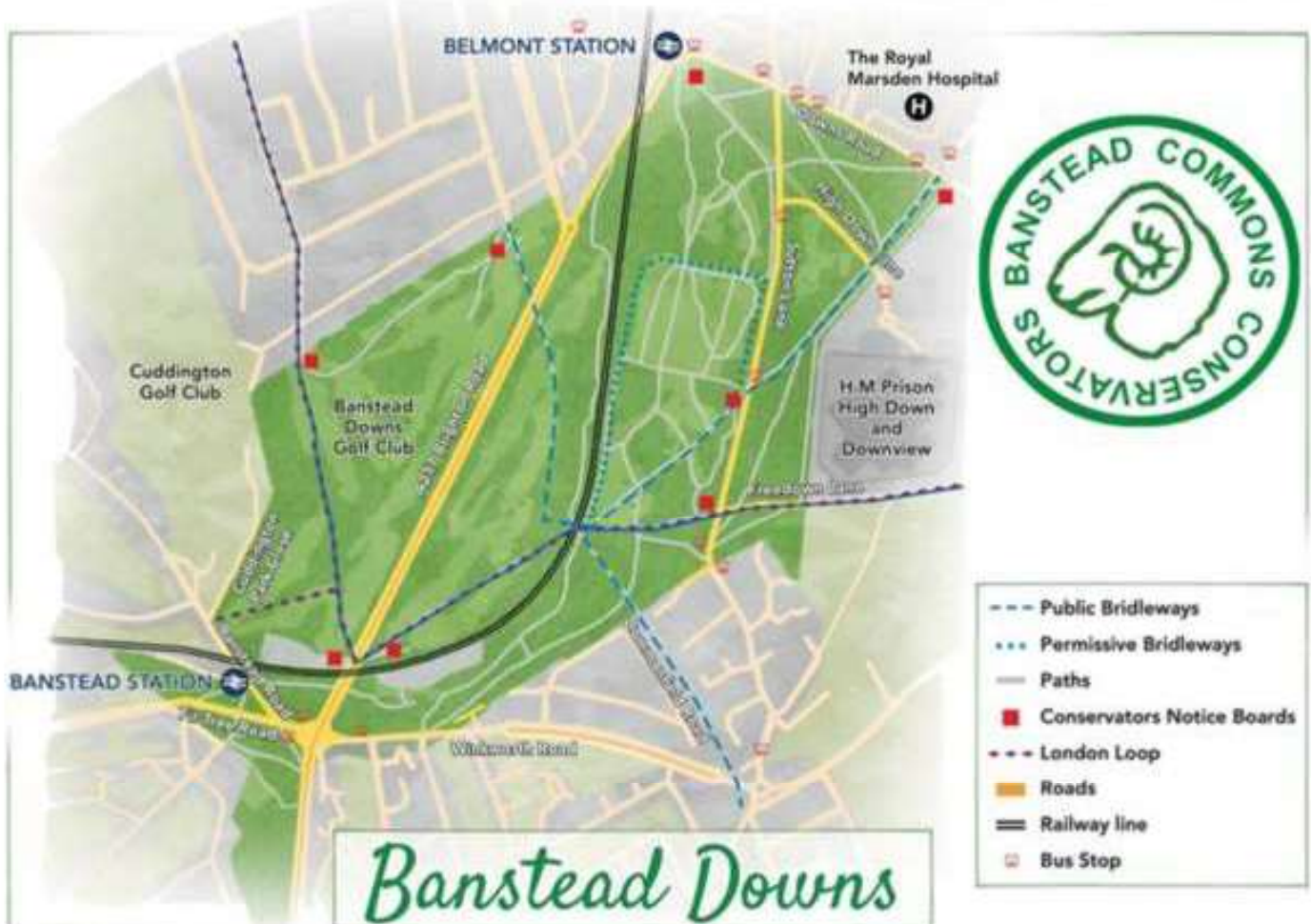
Banstead Downs



Banstead Downs is a rare Chalk Downland habitat and a designated Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

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.

Our open grasslands on the site support some of the UK's rarest and most threatened species, including the Small Blue and Grizzled Skipper butterflies, the enchanting Glow-worm, and the nationally scarce Early Gentian plant.



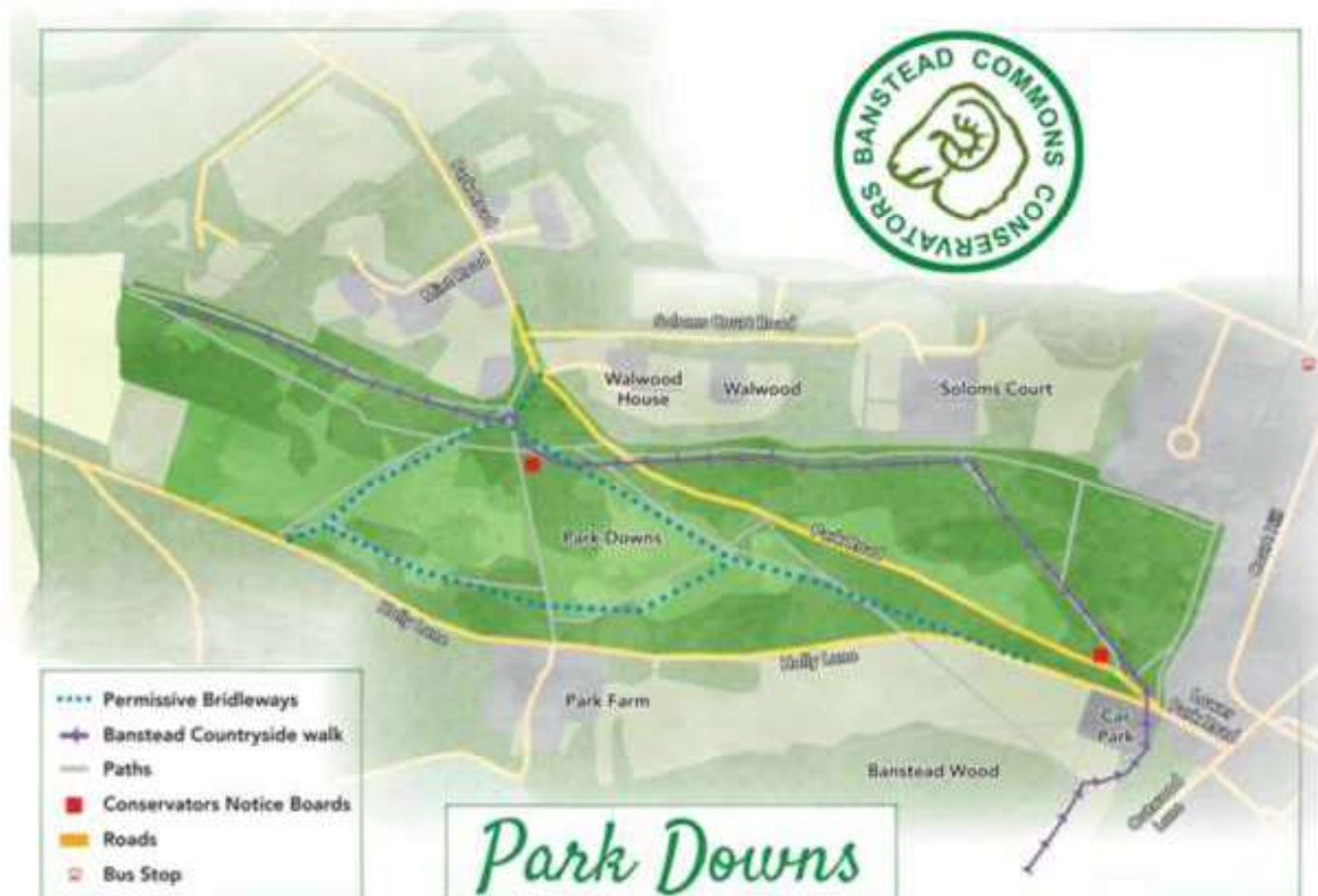
Park Downs



Park Downs is the smallest of the sites we manage, covering 30 hectares, and forms part of the Chipstead Downs Site of Special Scientific Interest.

Situated on a steep, south-facing slope opposite Banstead Woods, the site offers breathtaking views across the valley.

Thanks to years of sensitive management, typical chalk grassland species are once again thriving. The herb-rich meadows now provide a vital habitat for a wide range of invertebrates, including the Rufous Grasshopper and several of the UK's rarest butterflies.



Burgh Heath



Burgh Heath is an important amenity for residents and has high visitor numbers at all times of the year.

The site is designated a Site of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI) and consists of areas of woodland with attractive glades where relative peace and tranquillity can be found.

Burgh Heath has a network of ponds on the site that supports a fragile population of Great Crested Newts.



Banstead Heath



At 310 hectares, Banstead Heath is the largest of our four sites and perhaps the most varied.

The site is designated a Site of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI) and boasts a mosaic of different habitats.

The landscape is made up of traditional heath, acid grassland meadows and pockets of secondary woodland.

It is a true jewel of the borough at all times of the year.



Management Report



Habitat Management

Open Space Management

Banstead Downs and Park Downs are designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) due to the presence of rare and diverse assemblages of flora and fauna unique to chalk downland habitats. These areas support a wide range of wildlife, including birds, mammals, amphibians, and reptiles, and are central to our conservation efforts across the landscape.

Through a Higher Level Stewardship agreement with Natural England, we manage approximately 164 hectares of species-rich grassland and areas of successional scrub across three sites: Banstead Downs, Park Downs, and Banstead Heath. Our management aims to enhance habitat quality and increase biodiversity.

Depending on available resources and site topography, we use three primary habitat management techniques on the Commons: cut-and-collect, mowing, and conservation grazing.



Conservation grazing

Conservation grazing is a sustainable and natural method of managing chalk grassland, supporting the enhancement of species diversity and the long-term preservation of this rare habitat. In collaboration with the Downlands Partnership Grazing Team, we currently manage approximately 12.5 hectares of chalk downland through targeted grazing—4.6 hectares at Park Downs and 8 hectares at Banstead Downs—across six designated grazing compartments. Livestock are rotated between these areas, with grazing intensity and timing adjusted according to seasonal grassland condition assessments and specific conservation objectives.

Management Report



Pond restoration

Banstead Commons are home to 13 ponds—nine on Banstead Heath and four on Burgh Heath. These ponds are rich in biodiversity, supporting rare species such as dragonflies, damselflies, and the UK's rarest amphibian, the Great Crested Newt.

Thanks to a community grant from Your Fund Surrey and support from County Councillor Rebecca Paul MP, we launched the Pond Restoration and Visitor Engagement Project. This work forms part of the Banstead Heath Site Management Plan and focuses on three key objectives:

- Restore three ponds on Banstead Heath to boost biodiversity.
- Equip staff and volunteers with tools for ongoing pond management across the Commons.
- Enhance visitor experience with interpretation boards and public engagement activities about pond conservation.



The project began in September and pond restoration work finished in February. The ponds will be monitored for the next three years. The new tools and equipment will support our autumn and winter volunteer work parties, enabling ongoing pond management across the Commons.

We're grateful to Your Fund Surrey and County Councillor Rebecca Paul MP for making this important work possible and helping to protect these valuable wetland habitats for both wildlife and people.

Management Report



Woodland Management and Tree Safety

We continue to work in partnership with Reigate and Banstead Borough Council to address the impacts of Ash Dieback across the Commons. Tree inspections are carried out in line with our Tree Inspection Policy (June 2023). Remedial work is undertaken either by our in-house team or in collaboration with external contractors, depending on the nature and scale of the task.

Progress on the WD2 Woodland Improvement element of our Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) agreement has been delayed due to an ongoing review and update of the HLS scheme by DEFRA.

We anticipate being able to revisit and explore available options in the coming year.

Our management plans have identified the need to control the spread of non-native Cherry Laurel within our woodlands. This work has now been incorporated into our operational programme, with tasks being undertaken by staff and supported by our dedicated conservation volunteers.



Management Report



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.



Public Engagement - Guided Walks



This year, the Conservators hosted eight guided walks across the Commons, welcoming 79 participants in total. Each walk was fully booked and warmly received, reflecting the growing community interest in exploring and understanding these unique landscapes. Looking ahead, we're excited to expand our events programme to include a Dawn Chorus Walk, a Fungi Foray, and a Winter Bird Walk—offering more opportunities for people to connect with nature throughout the seasons.

Management Report



Nature Detective Days

We were delighted to host three Nature Detective Days on the Commons—engaging over 130 children and adults from nearly 40 families in a range of fun, hands-on activities that brought nature that can be found on their doorstep to life.



Highlights included a Bug Hunt, a popular “Meet the Sheep” session (kindly supported by the Downlands Partnership Grazing Team and the Downlands Trust), a tree age-guessing game, a guided nature walk, and a hedgerow activity led by the Tadworth and Walton Tree Wardens.

Children especially loved feeding the sheep—who were more than happy to play their part! The events were filled with energy, curiosity, and plenty of smiling faces.



These much-enjoyed community days were made possible thanks to the generous support of Rebecca Paul MP, Your Fund Surrey, and our fantastic team of volunteers.

“It was excellent. My three loved it—they were so engaged and didn’t want to leave! Huge thank you to all involved for helping to nurture our next generation of naturalists.”

We look forward to growing these events in future, continuing to inspire young minds and connect families with the wonders of the Commons.

Management Report



The Contribution of Volunteers

In 2024–25, volunteers contributed an impressive 3,400 hours to Banstead Commons Conservators — equivalent to an estimated £49,800 in economic value.



Volunteers supported a wide range of activities, including governance, practical conservation, livestock monitoring, wildlife monitoring, and specialist roles such as photography, marketing, and proofreading.

We have a team of 25 Livestock Checkers helping to carry out daily checks on the welfare of the livestock grazing Banstead Downs and Park Downs

We're proud to share some words from our volunteers:

"Volunteering has totally transformed how I see the commons... I'd love to try scything if it were ever part of the programme!"



"We love the flexibility. We're happy to help with anything—moths, butterflies, bats, glow-worms—you name it. We're not afraid of nocturnal hours either!"

Management Report



Their contribution not only extends the capacity of our small staff team, but also supports volunteers' own wellbeing and strengthens their connection to the natural environment.

We held four practical conservation sessions each month. In addition we worked with local groups, youth organisations, and corporate teams to deliver joint volunteering days that helped conserve and enhance our nationally rare habitats. Volunteer tasks have included clearing lowland heath glades of woody scrub, tree popping, scything and the removal of invasive species.



Our practical conservation volunteers generously contributed 640 hours of their time this year, playing a vital role in supporting our habitat management efforts.

We are hugely grateful to everyone who gives their time and energy. Volunteer support remains vital to the protection of Banstead Commons.



Management Report



Thank you

Banstead Commons Conservators is a small, grant-funded organisation responsible for managing a large and ecologically important area of protected land. We are deeply grateful to our private donors whose generous contributions provide vital support—your commitment is truly appreciated.

With limited resources, we also rely on the ongoing support of a number of partner organisations who assist us both financially and practically. While there are too many to name individually, we would like to give special thanks to:

- Reigate & Banstead Borough Council and their officers for their continued financial and practical support.
- Rebecca Paul MP for championing our Nature Detective Days and Pond Restoration Project on Banstead Heath.
- The Downlands Trust, Surrey Hills Society, Leatherhead Youth Project, Downlands Partnership Grazing Team, London and South West Surrey Branch of Butterfly Conservation, Farming in Protected Landscapes, and the Newt Conservation Partnership.
- Our dedicated local Resident Associations, who kindly help to raise awareness of our work through newsletters and websites.
- And finally, a huge thank you to our fantastic volunteers — the heart of Banstead Commons. Their contribution is what helps make this such a biodiverse and cherished landscape for everyone to enjoy.

To all who support us — thank you. Your help makes our work possible.



Management Report



Looking ahead to 2025

Our focus for the year ahead is the successful rollout of a new licensing scheme to regulate professional dog walking on our sites. This scheme will bring this commercial activity in line with others, ensuring that businesses operating on the Commons contribute financially to the care and conservation of these valuable landscapes and their wildlife.

Banstead Commons Conservators have been managing the Commons for over 130 years. During this time, the decline of native wildlife and habitats across the UK has become a growing concern. Today, the UK retains less than half of its original biodiversity.

In Surrey, the proposed creation of unitary councils, through the amalgamation of existing borough and district councils, aims to simplify local governance, reduce duplication, and improve efficiency. However, the implications for Banstead Commons remain unclear. We anticipate changes in ownership and shifts in the funding landscape, though specific impacts have yet to be determined.

Despite this uncertainty, our commitment remains steadfast. We will continue to fulfil our statutory duties to protect and preserve Banstead Commons, ensuring they remain a special place for wildlife to thrive and for visitors to enjoy. Thank you for your continued support. You make our work possible.

Warm Regards,

Banstead Commons Conservators



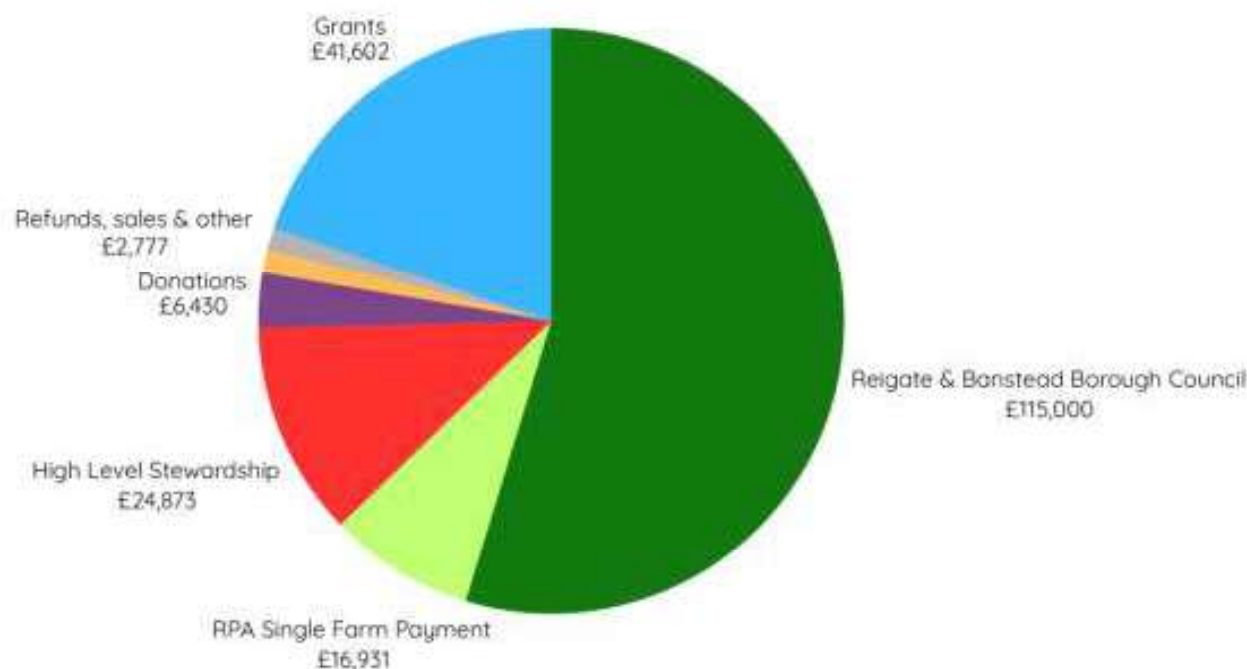
Financial Report



Income

Reigate and Banstead Borough Council remains our primary funder, providing an operational grant of £115,000 this year. The Conservators extend their sincere thanks to the Council and its officers for their continued financial - and in some cases, practical - support.

We also received targeted project grants from Surrey County Council's Your Fund and from the Downlands Trust, enabling the successful delivery of several initiatives outlined in this report.



Two grants continue to be received from the Rural Payments Agency: one through Natural England's Higher Level Stewardship scheme for grassland management, and another via the Single Farm Payment. It is important to note that the Single Farm Payment will cease next year, and we are actively exploring alternative funding opportunities through DEFRA-administered schemes and other potential sources.

Public donations to the Banstead Commons Conservators continue to be received, supported by our community engagement and outreach efforts.

In total, income for the year amounted to £210,155, providing the resources necessary to support our ongoing conservation work.

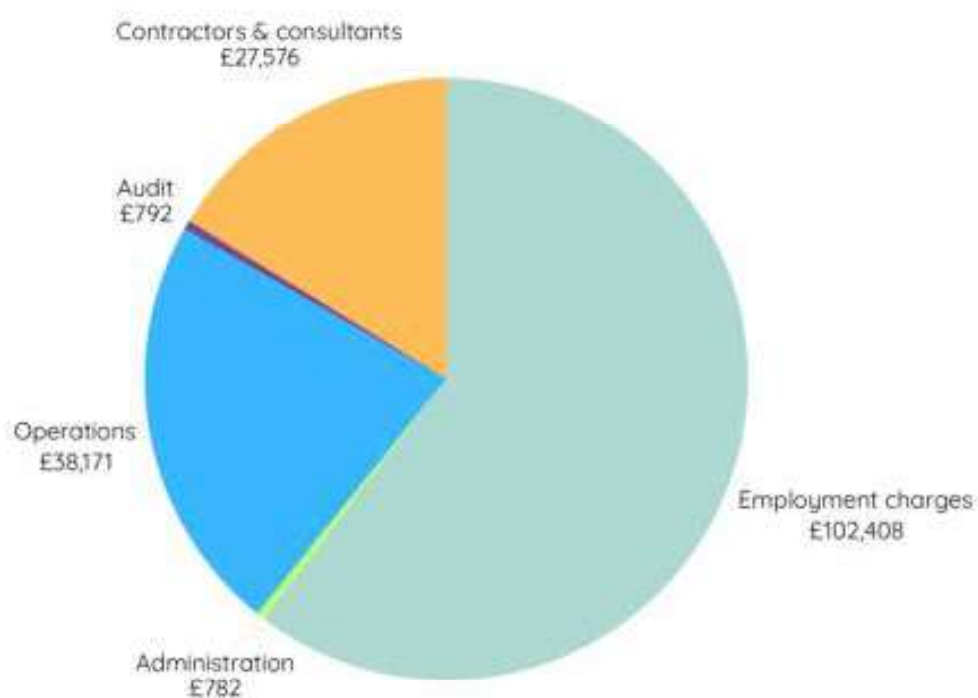
Financial Report



Expenditure

Expenditure for 2024/2025 reflects the efficient use of resources, with total spending amounting to £169,729. The reduction from the previous year is due to project funding that was received and fully spent during the financial year ending 2024. Some grant income has been accrued and will be spent as work is completed in the next financial year.

Maintaining an in-house operational team continues to provide a cost-effective and flexible approach to site management, offering greater control and responsiveness to environmental factors that can significantly affect habitat management.



Employment costs reflect our ongoing investment in skilled staff, which has reduced the need for external consultancy. There was no significant capital expenditure during the year.

These financial results demonstrate a responsible, value-driven approach that ensures Banstead Commons remain well-managed and continue to be a cherished asset for the community.

Audited Accounts



Receipts & payments account for the year ended 31st March 2023	2024/2025	2023/2024
Reigate and Banstead Borough Council	£115,000	£85,500
CIL & other grants	£41,602	£22,294
Higher Level Stewardship	£24,873	£24,873
Bank Interest	£2,542	£1,715
Refunds, sales, other	£2,777	£0
RPA - Single Farm Payment	£16,931	£22,077
Fundraising, donations and subscriptions	£6,430	£15,198
Reigate & Banstead Discretionary Fund		£25,000
	<u>£210,155</u>	<u>£196,658</u>
Payments		
Staff employment costs	£102,408	£87,739
Operating costs	£38,171	£43,301
Administration costs	£782	£7,057
Contractors / consultants	£27,576	£53,802
Audit fee	£792	£756
Equipment	£0	£8,394
	£169,729	£201,049
Excess of receipts over payments	<u>£40,425</u>	<u>-£4,392</u>
Operating funds		
Opening balance	£210,282	£214,673
Movement in the year	£40,425	-£4,392
Closing balance	<u>£250,707</u>	<u>£210,281</u>
Analysis of closing balance		
Cash at bank (less outstanding liabilities)	£245,394	£208,409
Add prepayments	£12,806	£7,575
Less accruals/credits	-£7,493	-£5,702
Available as working capital	<u>£250,707</u>	<u>£210,282</u>

5 Year Overview

Income & expenditure



Income	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024	2024/2025
Reigate & Banstead Borough Council	£88,600	£85,500	£85,500	£110,500	£115,000
RPA Single Farm Payment	£34,283	£32,836	£27,221	£22,077	£16,931
Higher Level Stewardship	£25,316	£24,873	£20,894	£24,873	£24,873
Donations	£1,040	£3,728	£4,096	£15,198	£6,430
Refunds, sales & other		£17,431	£49,501	£0	£2,777
Bank interest	£354	£594	£670	£1,715	£2,542
Grants		£56,190	£37,067	£22,294	£41,602
Total	£149,592	£221,143	£224,949	£196,658	£210,155

Expenditure	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024	2024/2025
Employment charges	£119,555	£108,598	£80,200	£92,739	£102,408
Operations	£26,655	£45,490	£51,771	£43,301	£38,171
Administration	£1,743	£1,316	£3,852	£7,057	£782
Audit	£480	£480	£720	£756	£792
Contractors & consultants		£8,861	£5,360	£53,802	£27,576
Capital expenditure			£100,494	£8,394	
Misc.					
Total	£148,432	£164,745	£242,397	£206,049	£169,729

Banstead Commons Conservators



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