



Banstead Commons Annual Report

Report and accounts for the year ended 31st March 2026



www.bansteadcommons.org



Contents



Page 3 -	Conservators and staff
Page 4 -	Clerk's Report
Page 5 -	Banstead Heath
Page 6 -	Banstead Downs
Page 7 -	Park Downs
Page 8 -	Burgh Heath
Page 9 -	Management Report, Habitat Management, Open Space Management, Conservation grazing
Page 11 -	Woodland Management and Tree Safety
Page 10 -	Statutory Duties
Page 11 -	Wildlife Monitoring
Page 11 -	Bat Conservation on Banstead Heath
Page 11 -	Public Engagement - Guided Walks
Page 12 -	Nature Detective Day
Page 12 -	The Contribution of Volunteers
Page 13 -	Thank You
Page 14 -	Looking Ahead to 2027
Page 15 -	Financial Report, Income
Page 17 -	Financial Report, Expenditure
Page 18 -	Audited Accounts
Page 19 -	5 Year Overview, Income and expenditure

BANSTEAD COMMONS CONSERVATORS

Established by the Metropolitan Commons (Banstead) Supplemental Act 1893

REPORT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2026 MEMBERS FOR 2025/2026

CONSERVATORS ELECTED BY REIGATE AND BANSTEAD BOROUGH COUNCIL AS SUCCESSORS TO THE VESTRY OF THE PARISH OF BANSTEAD

MR. V.W. BROAD (CHAIRMAN until 26 February, 2026)

MR. D. ATKINS

MR. J. MILL

MR. E. ISAACS

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 & GENERAL MANAGER

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



Banstead Commons are cherished open spaces that provide an important buffer against urban development while supporting valuable habitats that help tackle climate change and biodiversity loss.

Our dedicated team works closely with partners, funders and volunteers to deliver management priorities, ensuring the Commons remain safe, accessible and ecologically rich. The nationally important habitats found across our sites support many rare species, and local biological recording continues to show positive population trends of species that are in decline elsewhere in the UK such as the Grizzled Skipper and Chalk Hill Blue butterflies, Skylarks and Britain's only venomous snake, the Adder.

Progress against our Site Management Plans has continued throughout the year. In particular, we are proud of the significant advances made in the removal of invasive Cherry Laurel from our woodland areas, thanks to the efforts of our staff and volunteers.

Community engagement and visitor access remains a key focus. Our Nature Detective Day, supported by the Downlands Trust, attracted more than 140 attendees and featured eight partner organisations helping to raise awareness of UK's wildlife to families and young people. We are grateful to all those who contributed to the event's success.

Practical conservation volunteers continue to play an invaluable role, helping deliver sensitive habitat management across all four sites, enhancing habitats and supporting species conservation.

This year, we also worked closely with Reigate and Banstead Borough Council to secure a three-year funding agreement, providing stability during Local Government Reorganisation and the transition to the new East Surrey Unitary Council.

My sincere thanks go to our staff team, volunteers and partners for their continued commitment to protecting and enhancing the Commons, ensuring these special places can be enjoyed by everyone for generations to come.

Lucy Shea

CLERK & GENERAL MANAGER

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 Interest (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.

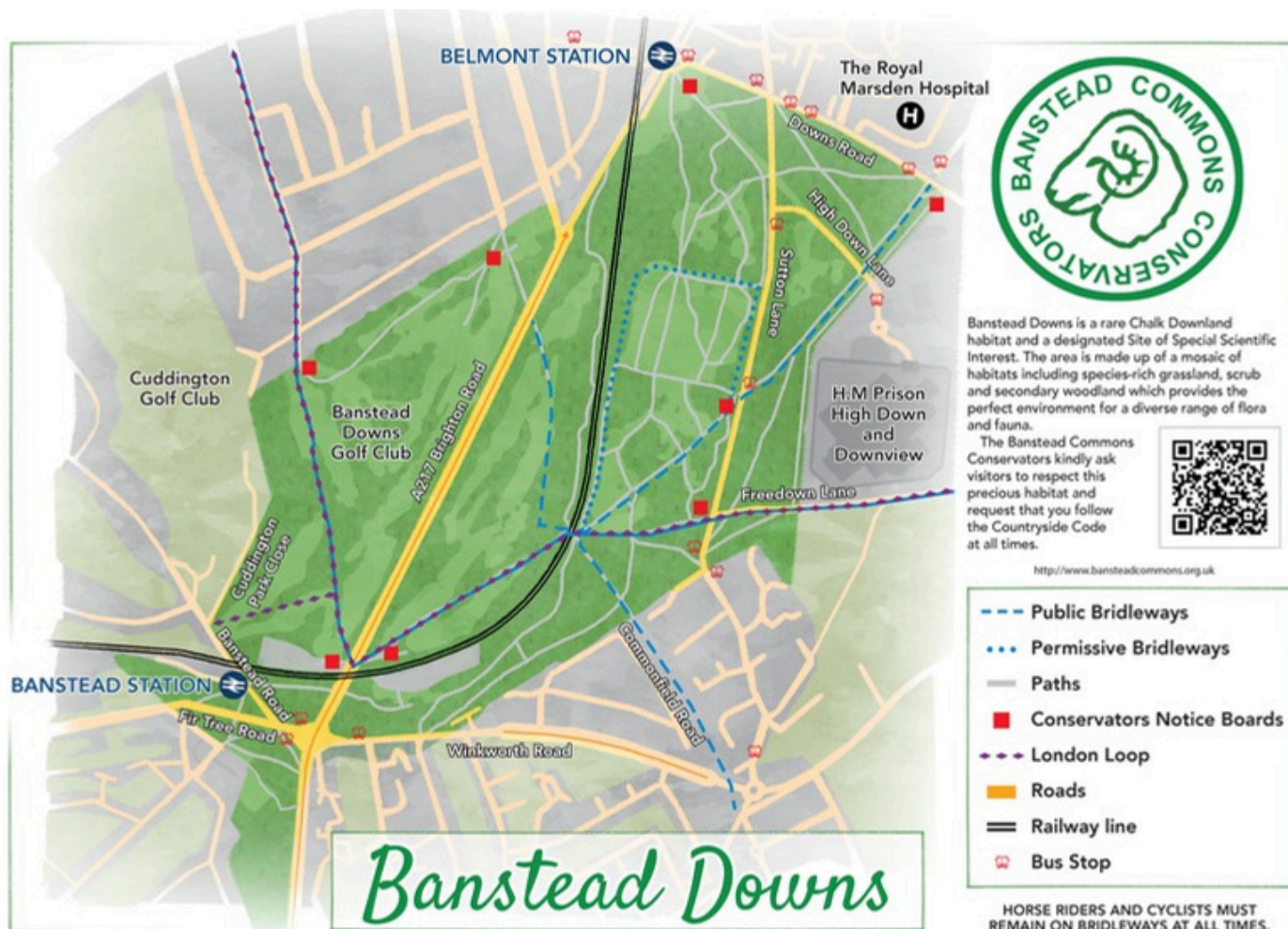


Banstead Downs

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.

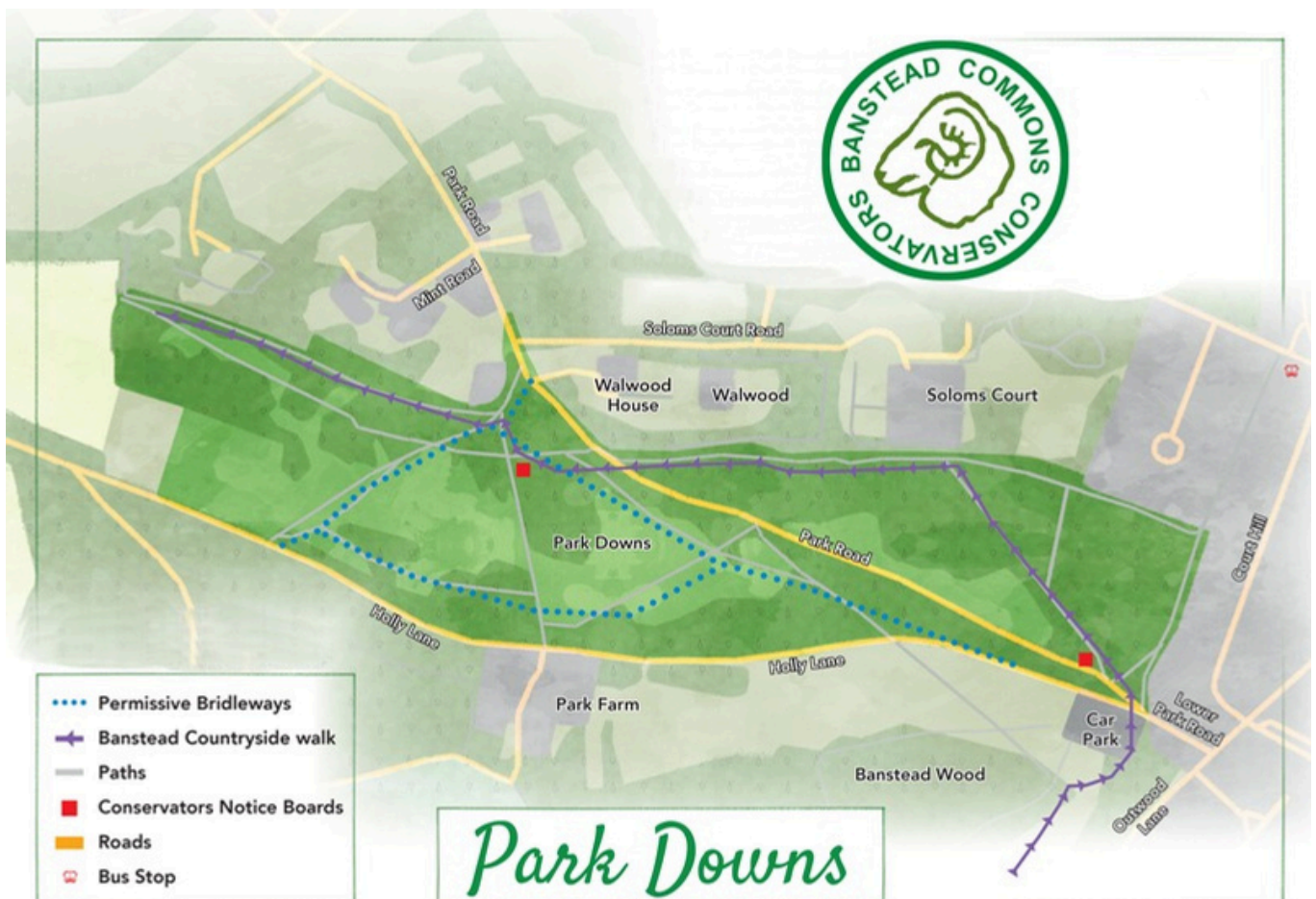


Park Downs

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 Interest (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.



Management Report



Habitat Management

Open Space Management

Banstead Downs and Park Downs are designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) due to their rare and diverse assemblages of flora and fauna associated with 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 Natural England's Higher Tier Agreement, 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 a range of habitat management techniques across the Commons, including cut-and-collect mowing, conservation grazing and, this year, the reintroduction of hay baling on selected grassland areas of Banstead Heath.

Conservation grazing

Conservation grazing is a sustainable and natural method of managing chalk grassland, helping to enhance species diversity and secure the long-term preservation of this rare habitat. In partnership with the Downlands Partnership Grazing Team, we currently manage approximately 12.5 hectares of chalk downland through targeted grazing across six designated grazing compartments.

Livestock are rotated between these areas, with grazing intensity and timing adjusted in response to seasonal grassland condition assessments and specific conservation objectives. This year, we were pleased to introduce five British Feral Goats to complement the grazing efforts of our sheep and assist in the management of woody scrub growth on Park Downs.

In addition to their valuable contribution to habitat management, the livestock are a popular feature of the Commons, enhancing the rural character of the landscape and providing visitors with a connection to traditional farming practices.

Management Report



Woodland Management and Tree Safety

Regular tree inspections are carried out in accordance with our Tree Inspection Policy (June 2023), with remedial work undertaken either by our in-house team or, where appropriate, in collaboration with the Council and external contractors. We continue to work in partnership with Reigate and Banstead Borough Council to address the impacts of Ash Dieback across the Commons.

Whilst we adopt a limited intervention approach to woodland management, our Site Management Plans have identified bridleway and ride management and the control of non-native species, particularly Cherry Laurel hedge plant as management priorities. Over the past 14 months, we have been delighted by the progress achieved through the dedication of our volunteers and support from the local community.

Statutory Duties

As part of our statutory responsibilities under the Metropolitan Commons (Banstead) Supplemental Act, 1893 and associated Byelaws, we continue to protect the Commons from activities that threaten their ecological, landscape and recreational value. Despite limited resources, significant staff time is devoted to monitoring the Commons, responding to incidents and working with partner organisations to address breaches of the legislation.

Green waste dumping remains a persistent issue, particularly along residential boundaries, where inappropriate disposal can damage sensitive habitats and facilitate the spread of invasive plant species.

The unauthorised use of motorised vehicles also continues to be a concern, particularly on Banstead Downs, Burgh Heath and Banstead Heath. The use of quad bikes and off-road motorcycles can cause damage to habitats, disturb wildlife and negatively impact the experience of other visitors. We continue to work closely with enforcement agencies and local partners to deter such activity and improve reporting and response mechanisms.

To address growing public concern regarding illegal vehicle use, we hosted a public meeting attended by more than 110 Commons users. The event provided an opportunity for enforcement agencies to engage directly with the community, outline ongoing enforcement activities and discuss measures being taken to tackle the issue.

Management Report



Statutory Duties - continued

Protecting the Commons from encroachment remains a key statutory function. Throughout the year, staff monitored site boundaries and reviewed planning applications adjacent to the Commons, issuing enforcement notices and providing statutory comments where necessary.

Wildlife Monitoring

Banstead Commons Conservators are grateful to the volunteers and conservation organisations that contribute valuable biological records and support national monitoring programmes across the Commons.

Long-term monitoring continues through UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme transects on Banstead Downs, Park Downs and Banstead Heath; annual Breeding Bird Surveys coordinated by the British Trust for Ornithology; monthly bird transects with records submitted to BirdTrack; reptile monitoring on Banstead Heath in partnership with the Surrey Amphibian and Reptile Group; and ongoing surveys of Early Gentian (*Gentianella anglica*) and Broad-leaved Cudweed (*Filago pyramidata*) by Plantlife volunteers, which have been undertaken since 1995.

Bat conservation on Banstead Heath

This year, we partnered with the Surrey Bat Group to gather additional data on the bat species present on Banstead Heath. Building on this work and our wider programme of biological monitoring, we have also begun working with volunteers from the Surrey Amphibian and Reptile Group on a new project to identify focal areas used by our Adder populations and track individual snakes to improve our understanding of their habitat and foraging preferences.

Information providing through biological recording will help inform future site management, including targeted habitat creation to support species conservation efforts.

Public Engagement - Guided Walks

This year, the Conservators hosted four guided walks across the Commons, welcoming just over 60 visitors to the events in total.

Conservator David Hatcher led a popular fungi walk, revealing the fascinating and often overlooked world of fungi on the Commons.

"Thank you for organising our guided tour of Banstead Common this morning which we all enjoyed very much. Our guide did an excellent job and we were all bowled over by how much there was to see. We learnt a lot."

Management Report



Nature Detective Day

Nature Detective Day once again proved to be a popular and successful community event, bringing families together to explore and learn about the wildlife of Banstead Heath. Attendees took part in bug hunts, visited interactive nature stalls, enjoyed hands-on activities and learned more about the importance of local conservation. The event was extremely well received by visitors, with one attendee commenting:

"We took our three grandchildren to the Discovery Day at Banstead Commons. We can't thank them enough for such a wonderful day. So well organised, so much to see and do, and we have all learnt lots. Fantastic idea – well done to all of you."

The success of the event was made possible by the dedication of our volunteers, the support of our partners and the generosity of our funders. Their continued commitment enables us to inspire people of all ages to connect with nature and appreciate the unique landscapes and wildlife of Banstead Commons.

The Contribution of Volunteers

In 2025 to 2026, our volunteers contributed an impressive 3,400 hours supporting our work – equivalent to an estimated £53,992 in economic value.

Volunteers continue to support a wide range of activities, including governance, practical conservation, livestock monitoring, wildlife monitoring and specialist roles such as photography, publishing and expert advice.

We have a team of 25 Livestock Monitors who carry out regular welfare and infrastructure checks on the livestock grazing enclosures on Banstead Downs and Park Downs.

Practical volunteer work party sessions are held each Thursday. Each month, the team focuses on tasks that benefit from sensitive management, including scrub and bracken management, invasive species control, tree popping and scything. In addition, we work with local groups, youth organisations and corporate teams to deliver joint volunteering days that help to conserve and enhance our nationally rare habitats. Our Banstead Commons Consultative Group continues to help shape our site management through participation in quarterly meetings, where specific queries and management issues are discussed. We also consult with our biological recorders to ensure that we undertake landscape-scale conservation management while remaining mindful of the distribution and requirements of individual species across our habitats.

"When people ask why I volunteer, it's moments like this - being here with a lovely group of people, watching the sunbeams coming through the trees and feeling the warmth of the sun... it's magic."

Management Report



Thank you

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

With limited resources, we also rely on the ongoing support of several 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.
- Downlands Trust
- Downlands Partnership Grazing Team
- Surrey Bat Group
- London and South West Surrey Branch of Butterfly Conservation
- Surrey Hills Society and Leatherhead Youth Project.
- Local Resident Associations, who support us and help to raise awareness of our work through newsletters and websites.
- Our volunteers.

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

Management Report



Looking ahead to 2027

We know that our proactive management of habitats is delivering positive outcomes for wildlife, with continued improvements in species abundance and diversity across Banstead Commons. Beyond its conservation value, this work also contributes to community health and wellbeing by providing attractive, accessible and wildlife-rich landscapes for people to enjoy.

Partnership working remains essential to our operations. By collaborating with conservation organisations, local groups and community partners, we can carry out biological recording, deliver public engagement, education and volunteering opportunities alongside our statutory responsibilities. The contribution of our volunteers has been particularly significant, enabling us to achieve more than ever before through an expanded programme of practical conservation work and community events.

Increasing periods of drought and heavy rainfall associated with changing climate conditions are likely to place additional pressure on resources for managing tree safety and visitor access across public open spaces. These conditions may require more frequent inspections, reactive tree works, path maintenance and temporary access restrictions to ensure visitor safety, placing additional demands on staff time, equipment and available resources.

As Banstead Commons Conservators rely on financial support from the local authority, we will continue to engage proactively with newly elected members and decision-makers at the new East Surrey Council to demonstrate the importance of our work and the value of preserving these unique and cherished landscapes for future generations.

Finally, we extend our sincere thanks to our staff, volunteers, partners, funders and local community for their continued support. Your commitment makes our work possible and helps ensure that Banstead Commons remain protected, enhanced and enjoyed by all.

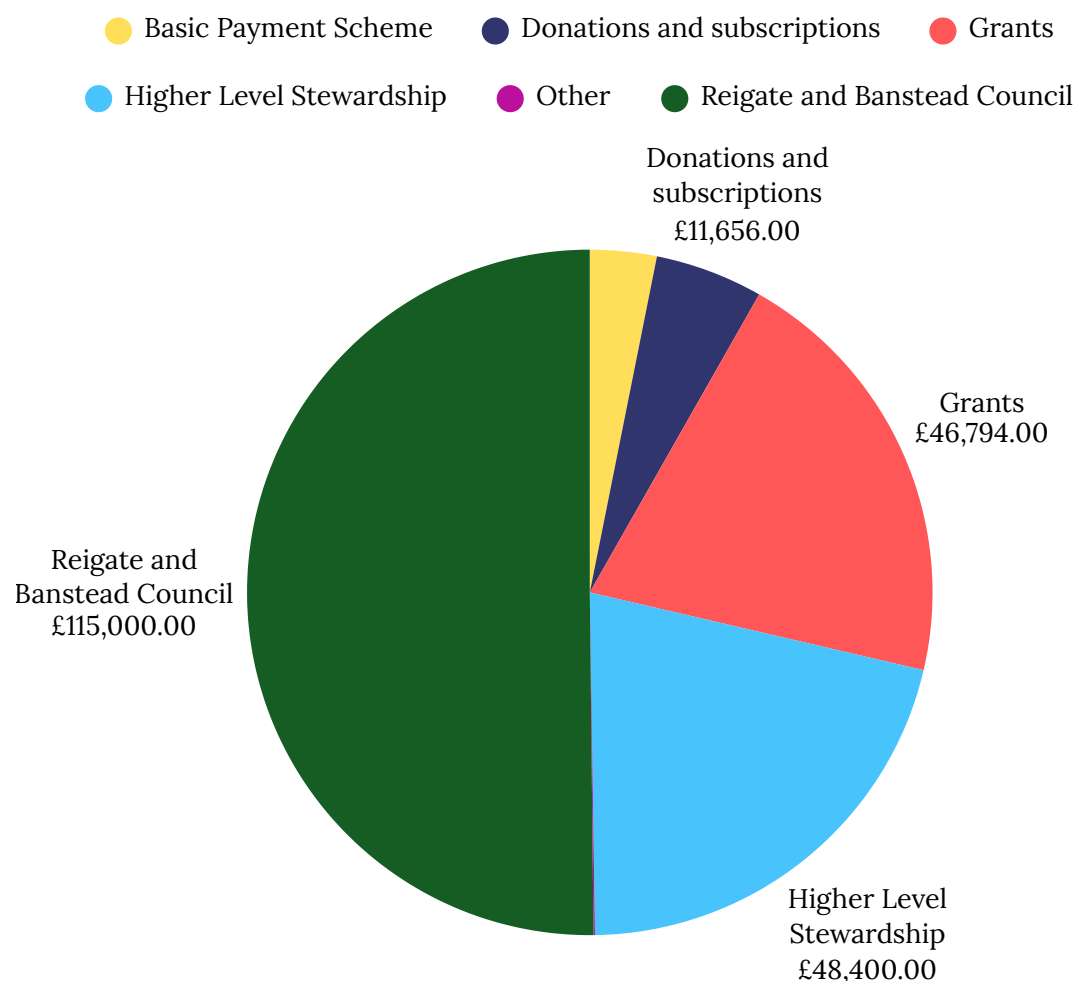
John Mill

CHAIR OF THE CONSERVATORS

Financial Report



Income



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

Budgeted income for the year was £157,273. Actual receipts for the financial year ended 31 March 2026 totalled £231,791. This included £46,794 in CIL and other grant funding, which supported several specific projects and purchases. These included Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding towards a new log grab and pick-up vehicle, together with funding from the Downlands Trust for a new water system to support conservation grazing, resources for Nature Detective Day and hand tools to support volunteer activities.

The Conservators also received £48,400 through the Rural Payments Agency

Financial Report



funded Higher Level Stewardship Agreement. The annual payment increased by 34.4% for the period 2025 to 2027. Of this amount, £2,273.48 is paid to Banstead Downs Golf Club to support grassland management on its course. The Higher Level Stewardship funding supports prescriptive grassland management duties to enhance species biodiversity.

Other income during the year included £11,656 from fundraising, donations and subscriptions, £7,200 in Rural Payments Agency Single Farm Payment income and £2,586 in bank interest.



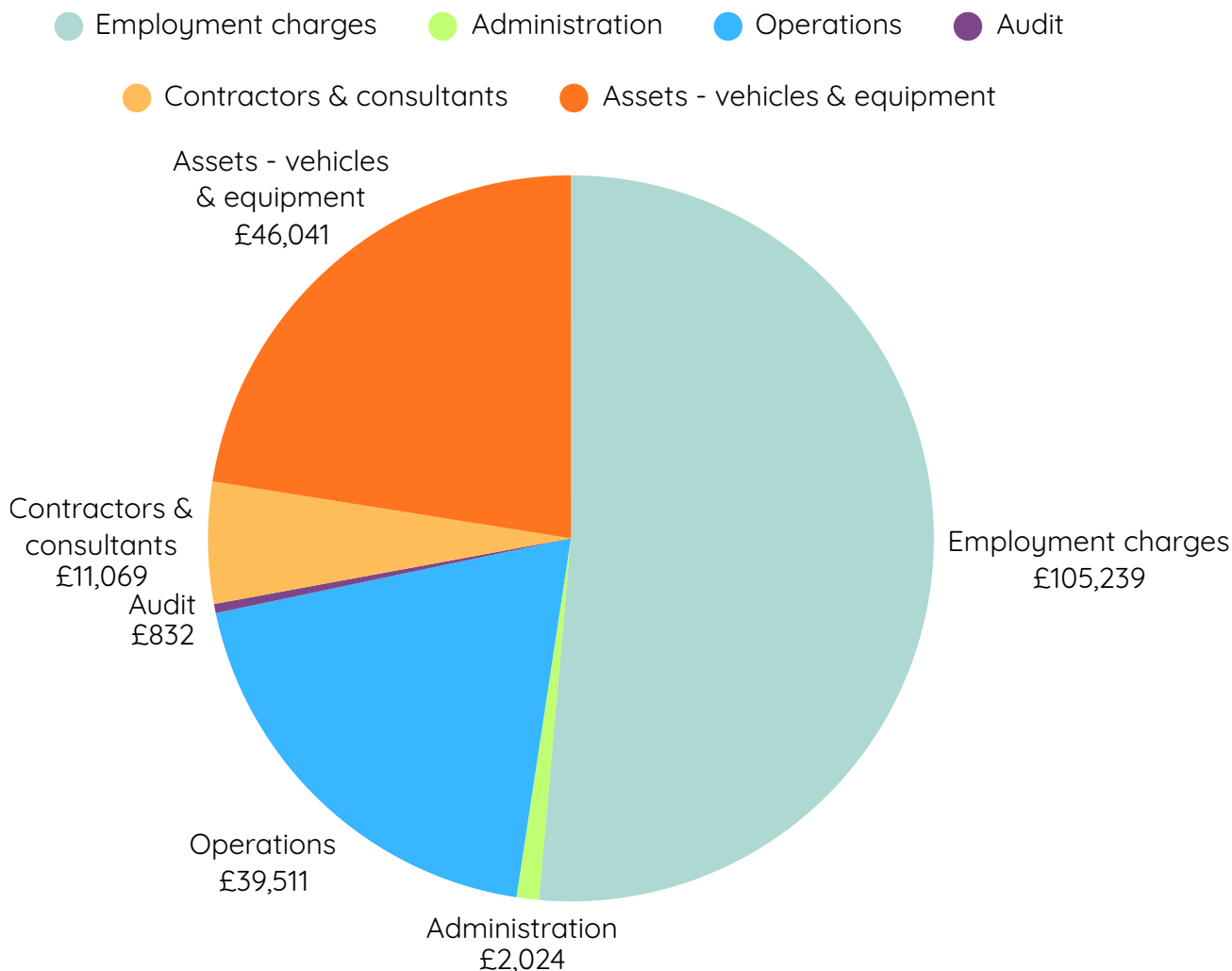
Payments for the year totalled £204,716. Staff employment costs remained the largest area of expenditure at £105,239, with operating costs of £39,511 and contractors and consultants accounting for £11,069. A significant investment was also made in vehicles and equipment, with expenditure of £46,041 during the year.

Operational costs increased above projected budget levels, with additional expenditure arising across a number of activities including the significant rise in fuel costs. Contractor expenditure was primarily attributable to essential tree safety works undertaken along highways and site boundaries.

Financial Report



Expenditure



The year ended with an excess of receipts over payments of £27,076. This increased the Conservators' operating funds from £250,707 at the start of the financial year to £277,783 at 31 March 2026.

The closing balance represents available working capital after taking account of prepayments and outstanding accruals and creditors.

Working capital provides financial resilience and enables the Conservators to manage fluctuations in expenditure, including the high costs associated with the maintenance and running of agricultural machinery. Maintaining an appropriate level of working capital is particularly important given the scale of the Commons and the nature of the Conservators' responsibilities.

Audited Accounts



Receipts & payments account for the year ended 31st March 2023	2025/2026	2024/2025
Reigate and Banstead Borough Council	£115,000	£115,000
CIL & other grants	£46,794	£41,602
Higher Level Stewardship	£48,400	£24,873
Bank Interest	£2,586	£2,542
Refunds, sales, other	£156	£2,777
RPA - Single Farm Payment	£7,200	£16,931
Fundraising, donations and subscriptions	£11,656	£6,430
Reigate & Banstead Discretionary Fund	£0	£0
	£231,791	£210,155
Payments		
Staff employment costs	£105,239	£102,408
Operating costs	£39,511	£38,171
Administration costs	£2,024	£782
Contractors / consultants	£11,069	£27,576
Audit fee	£832	£792
Equipment	£46,041	£0
	£204,716	£169,729
Excess of receipts over payments	£27,076	£40,425
Operating funds		
Opening balance	£250,707	£210,282
Movement in the year	£27,076	£40,425
Closing balance	£277,783	£250,707
Analysis of closing balance		
Cash at bank (less outstanding liabilities)	£273,693	£245,394
Add prepayments	£8,521	£12,806
Less accruals/creds	-£4,431	-£7,493
Available as working capital	£277,783	£250,707

5 Year Overview

Income & expenditure



Income	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024	2024/2025	2025/2026
Reigate & Banstead Borough Council	£85,500	£85,500	£110,500	£115,000	£115,000
RPA Single Farm Payment	£32,836	£27,221	£22,077	£16,931	£7,200
Higher Level Stewardship	£24,873	£20,894	£24,873	£24,873	£48,400
Donations	£3,728	£4,096	£15,198	£6,430	£11,656
Refunds, sales & other	£17,431	£49,501	£0	£2,777	£156
Bank interest	£594	£670	£1,715	£2,542	£2,586
Grants	£56,190	£37,067	£22,294	£41,602	£46,794
Total	£221,143	£224,949	£196,658	£210,155	£231,791

Expenditure	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024	2024/2025	2025/2026
Employment charges	£108,598	£80,200	£87,739	£102,408	£105,239
Operations	£45,490	£51,771	£43,301	£38,171	£39,511
Administration	£1,316	£3,852	£7,057	£782	£2,024
Audit	£480	£720	£756	£792	£832
Contractors & consultants	£8,861	£5,360	£53,802	£27,576	£11,069
Capital expenditure		£100,494	£8,394		£46,041
Total	£164,745	£242,397	£201,049	£169,729	£204,716