Meeting 613 of the BANSTEAD COMMONS CONSERVATORS
held on Saturday 3 October, 2026
at 9.30am Banstead Community Centre

MINUTES – Part 1

Present:	Mr. J Mill (JM), Chairman	Ms. Rachel Barnes (RB)
	Cllr. N. Moses (NM)	Mrs. L Shea (LS), Clerk
	Cllr. Peter Harp (PH)	Mr. D. Atkins (DA)
	Mrs L. Traynor (LT)	Mrs. A. Lewis (AL)
Apologies:	Mr B. Steele (BS)	Mr D. Hatcher (DH)
Public gallery:	Ian Mockford (IM), Rachel Turner (RT), Gillian Hein (GH), Catalina Vassallo-Bonner (CVB) Nigel Bennett (NB), Peter Mattey (PM), Cllr. Lynne Fletcher (LF)	

1. Apologies for absence & opening remarks

Apologies from BS and DH.

JM reminded the public gallery that there is to be no recording of the meeting and that we will be happy to accept questions at the end but not relative to issues in which we are already in correspondence.

Our new conservator, Angela Lewis was welcomed.

2. Minutes of last meeting

All agreed

3. Matters arising

Action - LS to write a formal authorisation letter to Surrey Fire and Rescue to conduct training and equipment checks at Burgh Heath pond.

4. **Quarterly Report**

LS: This quarter was characterised by hot and dry weather, making working conditions particularly challenging for the team, especially when wearing PPE. During periods of extreme heat, staff adjusted their working hours, starting earlier and finishing earlier where possible. Despite these challenges, we continued to deliver our management objectives, including bracken management, maintaining visitor access and the removal of Cherry Laurel.

Our grassland management programme commenced in September, and we have completed the majority of mowing across Park Downs, Banstead Downs and Burgh Heath. Parts of Banstead

Heath have been baled, and we are awaiting confirmation from the farmer regarding the remaining grassland. Our in-house team will undertake the remaining cutting on the Heath using a new gang mower kindly loaned to us by Walton Heath Golf Club.

As always, our grassland management incorporates a variety of methods tailored to the specific habitat and management requirements. These include cut and collect, hay baling, conservation grazing and cut and drop management.

We have also improved visibility and sight lines along Bonsor Drive and Tadworth Street.

Our conservation volunteers have continued to make a valuable contribution to habitat management and wildlife conservation. The historic enclosures on the Heath were scythed in July, followed by a well-earned break in August. Volunteer activities resumed in September, with the team undertaking scrub management and creating a beautiful glade on Banstead Heath. This month, we have returned to Withybed Corner to continue our ongoing efforts to eradicate Cherry Laurel.

A significant thank you goes to Reigate and Banstead Beat (Surrey Police) and a local resident for their assistance in tackling illegal dirt bike activity on Banstead Commons. Following the prompt action of a resident, Surrey Police were able to respond whilst the incident was taking place, apprehend the rider and seize the vehicle. This collaborative approach has helped prevent further unauthorised vehicle activity on the Commons.

Other activities this quarter have included hosting Surrey Biodiversity Day on Park Downs, progressing the development of our new office and welfare facilities at the depot, and celebrating their official opening with the Mayor – a big thank you to LT for organising this event.

We have also installed wildfire awareness signage and, more recently, welcomed the Surrey Hills Sheep Parade to Banstead Commons. The colourful flock will initially be based in Peacock's Field on Park Downs, where they will be visible from the road and, we hope, encourage conversations within the local community.

The sheep are joining us as part of an awareness-raising initiative to encourage positive conversations about livestock worrying and the importance of keeping dogs on leads around grazing livestock.

The flock will remain on Park Downs for approximately three weeks before moving to Banstead Downs for the October half-term (week commencing 19 October). They will remain on Banstead Commons until the end of November, before moving on to pastures new at West Horsley Place.

5. **Amphibian Fencing / Toad Patrol**

RB reported that around 8,000 amphibians had been rescued from the road crossing at Walton-on-the-Hill/Mere Pond, helping them reach the pond safely for breeding.
The local Toad Patrol is guided by the charity Froglife, and the group is currently exploring the possibility of installing temporary amphibian fencing to help protect amphibians as they migrate between habitats. The fencing is available at no cost through the Surrey Amphibian and Reptile Group (SARG), with approximately 20 pallets available.

The initial area being considered is from the corner of Deans Lane at Withybed Corner, along Mere Road towards the footpath, with the possibility of extending the fencing further along the road.

LS noted that amphibians are increasingly affected by fragmented habitats and that road traffic is considerably heavier than it was several years ago, increasing the risks they face when crossing roads.

RB explained that when the Toad Patrol began approximately 10 years ago, around 100 amphibians were being rescued. The significant increase to around 8,000 rescues demonstrates how the population has regenerated and the positive impact of the patrol's work.

LS advised that, from an authorisation perspective, the Conservators would need to consider the potential risks associated with the proposed fencing. These include the safety of volunteers working close to the road, as well as the possibility of visitors tripping or falling over the fencing. Images were shown of the amphibian fencing at Oxshott common which LS and LT visited recently.

JM suggested that a trial period should be implemented to assess the effectiveness of the fencing and identify any practical or safety issues before deciding whether the scheme should be extended.

RT asked whether Toad Patrol volunteers would still be required if amphibian fencing were installed.

RB confirmed that volunteers would still be needed to monitor specific sections and to empty the collection containers into which amphibians would be guided. The fencing would, however, make the patrol more manageable by concentrating amphibians in designated areas and reducing the need for volunteers to remain constantly vigilant along the roadside.

6. AOB

PH provided an update on the proposed Raven housing redevelopment at Tadworth/Preston, including the area adjacent to Lonesome Ponds. Following a meeting with Raven, they had agreed to establish a 15-metre curtilage to help protect Great Crested Newts (GCN).

PH also provided an update on local government reorganisation. East Surrey Council (ESC) has approved, at executive level, the creation of a Parish Council for the area from 1 April 2027. The public consultation had received support for the proposal.
PH explained that the proposed Banstead and Villages Parish Council would have elections in May, with 21 councillors to be elected. Candidates would be able to stand as representatives of a political party, as independents, or on behalf of a Residents' Association.
PH noted that representation for the area at East Surrey Council would reduce from seven councillors to two, which would result in fewer councillors representing the area at the unitary authority.
PH highlighted several matters of particular relevance to BCC arising from the creation of the new Parish Council. It is likely that:

- Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding would be administered through the Parish Council, potentially providing BCC with an additional opportunity to access funding.
- Under the new arrangements, the council would become the landowner and that East Surrey Council would appoint two Conservators, while the Parish Council would appoint six. This would result in greater representation by local representatives.
- The Parish Council would have the ability to introduce a precept which could be used to fund BCC.

PM raised the proposed removal of a small strip of land at Banstead Downs.
PH advised that BCC's assets would transfer to East Surrey Council and that any future matters concerning the land would therefore need to be negotiated with East Surrey Council as landowner.

CVB asked about the future of BCC's funding agreement.
JM explained that the existing funding agreement would be inherited by East Surrey Council from Reigate & Banstead Borough Council when the local government reorganisation takes place.

PH raised concerns regarding the process for deciding CIL applications, noting that the panel responsible for making decisions does not provide public transparency over individual votes, as voting records are kept confidential.

Meeting closed at 10:30

Date of next meeting/s TBC:

- 16 January 2027
- 17 April 2027
- 17 July 2027
- 16 October 2027