



**Meeting 595 of the BANSTEAD COMMONS CONSERVATORS
held at The Banstead Centre on Saturday 9 April, 2022**

MINUTES – Part 1

Present:	Mr. V Broad, Chairman	Mr. D Hatcher
	Cllr. N Moses	Mr. D Atkins
	Cllr. P Harp	Mrs. L Shea, Clerk
	Mr. N Mollett	

Apologies: Mr. N Cull, Mr. J Mill

Public Cllr. Nick Harrison

Gallery: Cllr. Rachel Turner
Jane Davies, Banstead Heath Consultative Group
Catalina Vassallo-Bonner, Banstead Federation
Ian Mockford
Andrew McManus

1. Apologies for absence

John Mill and Nick Cull

2. Appointment of Conservators and Election of Chairman

A proposal by Cllr. Peter Harp that Victor Broad be elected chairman for the ensuing year was seconded by Cllr. Nadean Moses.

The Chair welcomed new Conservators David Hatcher and Nathan Mollett and congratulated them on their appointment.

3. Minutes of last meeting

The minutes were agreed as circulated and approved by the Chairman.

4. Quarterly report

The Clerk recognised and gave a formal thanks to our two Keepers, who despite the absence of a warden and change in leadership, have continued with the winter work programme and have been supportive of the Clerk whilst new ways of working were established. It was noted that both Keepers have worked for BCC for over 10 years, are fully qualified and are very knowledgeable of the Commons and our working practices.

Dry weather in the new year enabled the team to commence scrub clearance on Park Downs (Higher Level Stewardship, prescription HK7) and have cleared an area c. 5,700 sq. m - it will take this area between five to ten years to transition to calcareous grassland.

On Banstead Downs, as part of our efforts to maintain successional scrub, c. 600 sq. m of blackthorn was cleared across two areas.

We had started hazel coppicing on Park Downs when work was disrupted due to Storm Eunice and Franklin. 53 trees were cleared from across the four sites, each one has been documented.

Work at Lonesome Ponds was completed – desilting ponds, invasive weed removal and



remodelling of the bank – and the area inspected by Surrey Amphibian and Reptile Group (SARG). They were pleased with the work carried out and would like to encourage the installation of another pond as highlighted in the 'An Environmental Appraisal of the Burgh Heath Path Proposal A Report for Reigate & Banstead Borough Council (August 2013)'.

The storms provided us with two large oaks trees that were planked for furniture. Three new benches on the Commons will be installed this Summer - Banstead Heath (dedicated bench, George Peskett), Park Downs and Banstead Downs – and 24 oak finger posts have been made to replace rotten and missing posts on the commons.

A barn owl box has been installed on Banstead Heath and is being monitored by Karl D Tarratt from Bisham Barn Owl Group. License and insurance details have been collected.

Conservator David Hatcher and the Clerk met with Kevin Morgan from SARG to inspect pond works at Burgh Heath and reptile monitoring on Banstead Heath. 20 new refugia will be placed on the Heath this year and three volunteers recruited to survey the site to help inform future management.

A meeting has been scheduled with Butterfly Conservation to establish a new butterfly transect on Banstead Heath and source a representative who can join the proposed advisory group. We have connected with the BTO Breeding Bird surveying team regarding the breeding bird survey which has been operating on Banstead Heath since 1995, a full set of biological data has been collected.

ASB on Banstead Downs continues to be a problem on the Back from the Brink Plantlife site and we are clearing rubbish and camps from the site on a weekly basis. Clerk has written to Natural England and Plantlife to express our concern regarding the irreparable damage to the site and is in regular communication with the Police.

Grazing and the Downlands Trust – We have been in touch with the Downlands Trust regarding reintroducing grazing on Banstead Downs and Park Downs this winter. The Downlands Trust are currently involved with the lambing season but will meet in person to discuss requirements and possible options.

Clerk would like to reinstate the Conservator walks on the commons during the summer months to address management concerns and identify winter work programme. Staff will be invited to attend. Unanimously agreed.

Action: Clerk to organise Conservator site walks

Cllr. Peter Harp raised the concern that BCC should employ an archaeological watching brief when carrying out any excavations on the Commons. Concern was noted by the Clerk and it was confirmed that no new excavations had taken place during this years' winter work programme.

Please see accompanying photos.

5. Matters arising

1. Encroachments, concerns & legislative duties



The Green, Tadworth. RBBC sent work out to tender and contractors have been selected. RBBC senior surveyor carried out a site inspection on 29 March. Conservators have raised their concerns to RBBC in writing (9/3, 25/3) regarding the layby and resident parking. No response from RBBC has been received to date.

Chips Folly boundary concern. Inspection was carried out 5/2. Our examination found no evidence of the “boundary and ditch rule” assertion. At some point, the area in front of Chips Folly has been levelled to turn it over to car parking. In the circumstance, there is no good reason whatsoever for the fence to be moved from its present location. The inspection also revealed the fact that an area of the common has been cleared to the side of Chips Folly and we have written to the property owner to insist that the area be allowed to naturally “rewild” itself. The inspection did bring to light the extension that has been added to Chips Folly along the flank that abuts the common. It appears that this may have been constructed upon the common and we have requested the fullest possible information as to the plans and drawings, the date that the same was constructed, and whether building regulation consent and/or planning consent was obtained in respect of the structure.

When examining the land adjacent to Chips Folly, we also examined the recently erected fencing of the property to the rear for which it is suggested that consent was provided by the former clerk to the Conservators, John Milner. Having examined the records of our proceedings, it appears the proposal that consent should be given for the re-siting of this fence was never raised with the Conservators and would not have been forthcoming had it been. The Conservators consider the extension of this fencing to be inappropriate.

Reigate & Banstead Borough Council Licence between Tadworth Cricket Club (TCC), Chinthurst School and BCC drafted and shared with BCC on 16/3. Awaiting discussion meeting with RBBC before sharing the licence with TCC and Chinthurst. Discussions are being facilitated by RBBC Senior Asset Manager Jo Stillwell.

ASB (Anti Social Behaviour) on the Commons continues to be a problem on Burgh Heath and Banstead Downs. A Section 59 was issued to persons on Burgh Heath on 7/2 – vehicle can be seized on subsequent visit. Police were authorised vehicular access to Banstead Downs on 26/2, and their presence was promoted on social media.

Discussion: Cllr. Nick Harrison suggested BCC request to join RBBC Joint Action Group (JAG) which is facilitated by the RBBC Joint Enforcement Team (JET).

Action: Clerk to connect with Mark Wilson from the Joint Enforcement Team and ask to be invited to JAG meetings.

Flytipping, litter and green waste. Letter drop regarding fly tipping has been carried out at Hatch Gardens, Commonfield Road, Court Hill and High Field.

Meeting was held with Julie Evans, Head of Reducing Reoffending, and John Fraser A.U.M. Industries & Business and Community Engagement Manager at HMP on 30/3 regarding the litter issue along High Down Lane. Discussion around road ownership was raised. The prison doesn't have resources to manage litter issues along the road and felt that much of it was a result of casual parking rather than visitors to the prison.

Commercial Dog Walkers and Byelaws. We have received complaints regarding commercial dog walkers operating on Banstead Heath. Meeting with RBBC dog warden was held on 6/4.



Clerk has been in touch with the warden at Horsell Common Preservation Society and Ministry of Defence to discuss licencing and introduction of new byelaws. The Conservators agreed that introducing a licence or new byelaw should be explored further.

Action: Clerk to explore further with RBBC and other relevant bodies and report back at next Quarterly Meeting.

2. Public engagement & volunteering

Guided Walks. Five walks have been advertised, one is fully booked, the others have limited space left.

Presentations given to Walton on the Hill and District History Group 2/3 and Kingswood Resident Association 29/3.

Articles have been submitted to Banstead RA, Village Voice & TWRA Newsletters.

Social media. Facebook has 1,152 followers. 179 followers on Twitter

Volunteering. We have a Duke of Edinburgh Award student surveying ponds on Banstead Heath.

Surrey Hills AONB. (Area of Natural Beauty) David Hatcher introduced Christa Emmett from Surrey Hills AONB. Christa manages projects and volunteering for Surrey Hills and is keen to support volunteering activities on Banstead Commons. Surrey Hills AONB can provide staff (and perhaps get access to tools) to help support organised activities.

Common Therapy – due to the pressures facing Conservator organisations across the region, a network has been established to facilitate conversations between similar bodies in the South East. Those taking part at present Wimbledon & Putney, Tunbridge Wells & Rusthall, Ashdown Forest and Banstead Commons. It was noted that Wimbledon & Putney Conservators and Tunbridge Wells & Rusthall Conservators both enjoy the benefit of a precept and a productive working relationship with the local council and council officers.

3. Finance

Pfizer Clerk met with Roos Bruggink, Corporate Responsibility & Philanthropy Manager at Pfizer, on 1/4. Roos is looking to develop corporate volunteering with a focus on the environment across the whole business. Although corporate responsibility budget is low Roos will put BCC forward as a beneficiary for the staff Joy Fest and would like to explore corporate volunteering opportunities once restrictions have been lifted. Also interested in learning more about Adopt-an-Acre and will raise the possibility of a donation with colleagues. Roos will be back in touch later this year when restrictions are relaxed.

Walton Heath Golf Course – a donation of £500 was received for the damage caused to the common during the installation of their water irrigation system.

Kingswood Resident Association – David Floyd has introduced BCC to Inspired Villages and we are hoping to develop a corporate partnership.

CIL Funding application NE61 and NW108. Funding for the new tractor was received 7/3. Tractor is on order and joint promotion of the funding will take place and once the tractor has been delivered we will arrange a photo opportunity on the Common. In the meantime, the small tractor has been sold.



Discussion: The Conservators expressed their thanks and appreciation to Cllr. Mark Brunt and the local ward Councillors for their support to the application.

Discussions with RBBC. Our grant was approved at £85,500 for the FY 2022/23. Although future funding and our working relationship are not secure, BCC has a dialogue with Leader of the Council Cllr. Mark Brunt and a more transparent and productive approach is expected. The Council is formalising funding agreement which may be in the form of a Service Level Agreement or Funding Grant. Next meeting with RBBC is being held at the Town Hall on 27 April.

Business Rates. We have been in touch with RBBC regarding the introduction of Business Rates for the FY 2021/22 (£3742.50). To date BCC has never been charged Business Rates and this expenditure was not budgeted for. Our depot is used to house agricultural plant machinery and equipment used to manage 550 hectares of Council-owned land. The vehicles stored in the building are classified for agricultural use and are exempt from tax. Clerk has started the process for a check case with regards to the classification of the rateable value. This concern will be raised at our meeting with the council on 27 April.

Discussion: The Conservators and meeting attendees were surprised at RBBCs decision to introduce Business Rates (£3742.50 FY 2021/22, £3742.50 FY 2022/23) and are hoping that discussions on 27 April will address the concern.

Budget Financial Year 2022/2023. Our budget for the FY has been approved although it is noted that the Conservators are operating at reduced staff levels.

Any Other Business

Cllr. Nick Harrison: Asked if the minutes of Quarterly Meetings and the report could be shared with ward councillors, the suggestion was welcomed by the Conservators.

Cllr. Rachel Turner: Suggested increasing public profile, ie. public engagements, liaising with Residents Associations and other interested bodies.

Action: Clerk to circulate Quarterly Meeting minutes and accompanying picture report to ward and county councillors and also local Residents Associations.

Meeting closed at 11.10am

Dates of 2022 meetings to be held at the Banstead Centre

16 July, 2022; 15 October, 2022