



# Banstead Commons Conservators

Presentation to Reigate and Banstead Borough Council's  
Overview & Scrutiny Committee  
9 November, 2022



CHAPTER cvii.

An Act to confirm a Scheme under the Metropolitan Commons Acts, 1866 to 1878, relating to Banstead Downs, Banstead Heath, Burgh Heath, and Park Downs, in the parish of Banstead, Surrey. A.D. 1893.  
[29th June 1893.]

WHEREAS the Board of Agriculture have in pursuance of the Metropolitan Commons Acts, 1866 to 1878, duly certified a scheme for the establishment of local management with respect to Banstead Downs, Banstead Heath, Burgh Heath, and Park Downs, situate in the parish of Banstead, in the county of Surrey: 29 & 30 Vict. c. 122.  
32 & 33 Vict. c. 107.  
41 & 42 Vict. c. 31.

And whereas the said scheme is set forth in full in the report which was made by the said Board for the year ending the thirty-first day of December one thousand eight hundred and ninety-two, and which was duly laid before both Houses of Parliament:

And whereas by the said Metropolitan Commons Acts it is provided that any such scheme shall not of itself have any operation, but shall have full operation when and as confirmed by Act of Parliament, with such modifications, if any, as to Parliament seem fit:

And whereas it is expedient that the said scheme should be confirmed, subject to certain modifications:

Be it therefore enacted by the Queen's most Excellent Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, and Commons, in this present Parliament assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:

1. The scheme for the establishment of local management with respect to Banstead Downs, Banstead Heath, Burgh Heath, and Park Downs, situate in the parish of Banstead, in the county of Surrey, certified by the Board of Agriculture, under their seal, Scheme in schedule confirmed.

A 1

# The Metropolitan Commons (Banstead) Supplemental, Act

Banstead Commons Conservators have been managing Banstead Commons since 1893.

The 1893 Act gave the Conservators total control of the commons (apart from shooting and fishing rights).

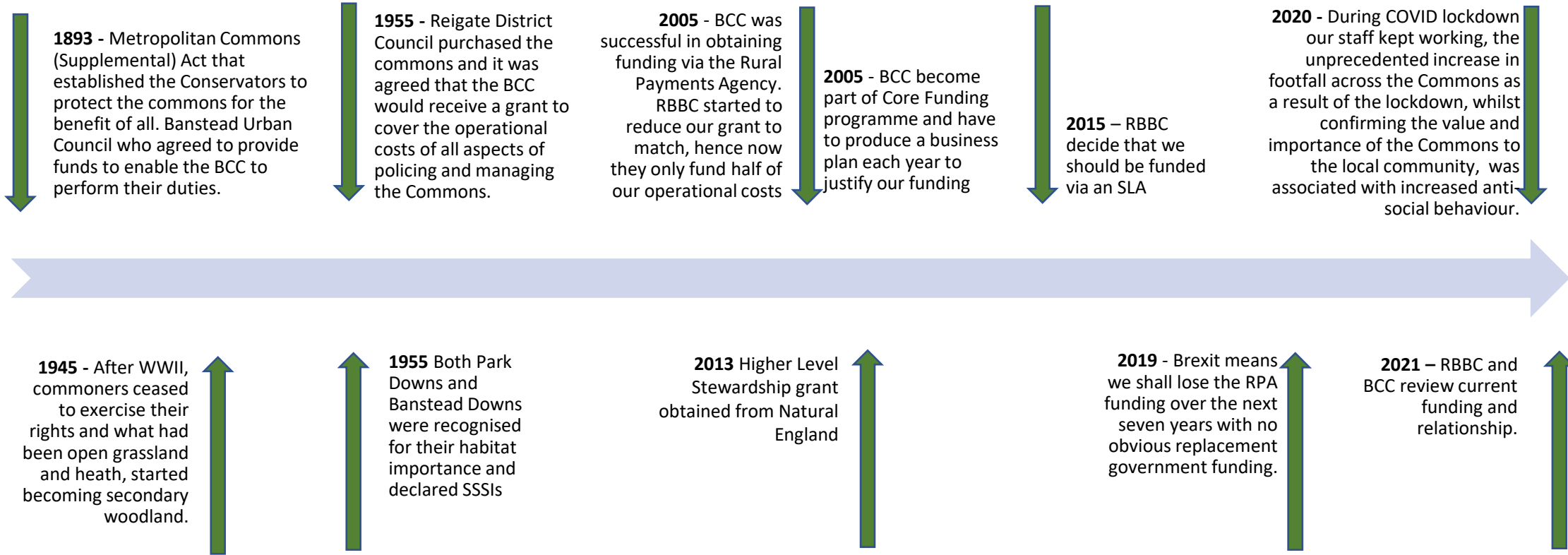
The 1893 Act did not provide the Conservators with any means of funding. Any income raised on the Commons goes to the landowner. The reason why our 1893 Act didn't put funding in place is because we were the first Commons protected by statute against the wishes of the land owner.

In 1955 Reigate District Council purchased the commons and it was agreed that the BCC would receive a grant to cover the operational costs of all aspects of policing and managing the Commons.



# A little bit of history

BCC manages 550 hectares – just under half the green spaces in the entire borough.





## Mission Statement & Objectives

**‘To protect and enhance the Commons and ensure free legal access for all to the Commons.’**

### **Management objectives**

The BBC management objectives fall into two distinct categories. Firstly those demanded by statute

1. To maintain and protect the integrity of the Banstead Commons
2. To ensure the free, legal and safe access of all to the Commons
3. To provide safe and healthy working environment for employees.
4. To maintain and improve status of SSSI (surrogate for RBBC)

Secondly, those related to the recognition of the commons as important amenity and activity areas for local residents and visitors from farther afield, together with recognition of the diversity of wildlife in these areas:

1. To maintain and improve the Commons as an amenity for all.
2. To maintain and improve the Commons as wildlife habitat.

It will be seen that they do not share equal priority in terms of management input. The statutory duties must take precedent at all times whether in terms of financial or physical considerations.

In undertaking our statutory duties, BCC has to be mindful of the following legislation and local policies:

- Metropolitan Commons (Banstead) Supplemental Act 1893
- Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981
- Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017
- Forestry Act 1967
- Highways Act 1980
- Road Traffic Act 1988
- Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW)
- Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006
- Environment Act 2021



## A few statistics

- We protect and manage **550 hectares (1350 acres)** of common land – *that's just under half of the green spaces in the borough.*
- Two of our four sites are Sites of Special Scientific Interest and have prescriptive management duties.
- There are 16.96km statutory footpaths – 21.85km statutory bridleways – 8.5km permissive rides to maintain.
- On average, the Clerk responds to c.70 enquiries every quarter.
- Our operating budget is approx. £170,000 each year
- We manage an inhouse operational team which enables us to be efficient and nimble in operations.
- Banstead Downs was the first site in Surrey to have a butterfly transect. Active wildlife monitoring is happening on three of our sites and we hold biological records for each site.
- The Commons are home to at least nine of our priority species.
- We have 1000s of visitors on the Commons each and every month.

**The Conservators were established in 1893 and are part of the cultural and historical makeup of Banstead. Our archives date back to 1893.**

# Banstead Downs

- Total area 174 hectares (430 acres)
- Designated Site of Special Scientific Interest
- Statutory Footpaths 1.47 km (0.91 miles)
- Statutory bridleways 5.74 km (3.56 miles)
- Area of grassland 59.6 hectares

Banstead Downs is north-facing chalk downland site with interspersed scrub and areas of secondary woodland.

Banstead Downs was designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest in 1955 due to the flora and invertebrate species that can be found on site. The variety of habitats provide feeding and breeding grounds for a range of invertebrates and birds, and eleven species of invertebrate rare to Surrey have been recorded here.

Due to a Higher Level Stewardship grant from Natural England, compartments of Banstead Downs are under prescriptive management.



# Park Downs

- Total area 30 hectares (74 acres)
- Designated Site of Special Scientific Interest
- Statutory footpaths 2.26 km (1.4 miles)
- Permissive Bridleway 1.55 km (0.96 miles)
- Areas of grassland 13.4 hectares

---

Situated on the dip slope of the North Downs, Park Downs is a steep slope chalk grassland with associated scrub and secondary woodland. In 2021, the site was cited Favourable by Natural England. The grassland areas are bursting with biodiversity in the summer months. Park Downs has breath-taking views across Chipstead Downs SSSI.

Park Downs is under prescriptive management from Natural England.





# Burgh Heath

- Total area 37 hectares (92 acres)
- Footpaths 3.83 km (2.38 miles)
- Statutory bridleways 1.15km (0.71miles)
- Permissive bridleways 0.68 km (0.40 miles)
- Area of grassland 3.2 hectares

Nestled amongst high density housing, Burgh Heath is an important amenity for local residents and has extremely high visitor numbers at all times of the year.

Despite these factors, Burgh Heath still provides areas of woodland and woodland glades where relative peace and tranquillity can be found.

Burgh Heath has four ponds on site and there is a population of Great Crested Newts that breed in three of the ponds.



## Banstead Heath

- Total area 310 hectares (766 acres)
- Statutory footpaths 9.4 km (5.83 miles)
- Statutory bridleways 14.56 km (9.03 miles)
- Permissive bridleways 6.27 km (3.90 miles)
- Area of grassland 92 hectares

---

At 310 hectares, Banstead Heath is the jewel in our crown with large open meadows with beautiful open vistas that change in colour as the seasons pass.

The Heath is popular with walkers and dog walkers and there is a network of well used paths. With eight miles of bridle paths and permissive rides on the Heath for riders to explore, horse riding is popular.

Millfield supports a healthy population of Skylarks and management of the unimproved grassland has remained the same for the past 100 years.



# Site Management



Habitat management



Topping, cut and collect and strimming

Bracken control and bramble clearance



Conservation grazing



Historical enclosures



Animal rescue



Safety signage & interpretation



Footpath & bridleway maintenance

Make and install furniture – including memorial benches.

# Flytipping & antisocial behaviour



We work together with local agencies and the emergency services to Police the Commons



# Back from the Brink Plantlife Site February 2022

Damage caused by motorised vehicles on the common



# Tree safety



Chalara Ash dieback



Oak Processionary Moth

Arboricultural work - 57 trees were cleared following the winter storms – that's approx. the same amount the RBBC Greenspaces Team dealt with.

The Conservators would like to give thanks and recognition to Reigate & Banstead Council for their financial assistance in managing Ash dieback and Oak Processionary Moth on Banstead Commons.

# Wildlife Monitoring & priority species



Adder (*Vipera berus*)



Species rich  
chalk downland



Small Blue Butterfly



Early Gentian  
(*Gentianella anglica*)



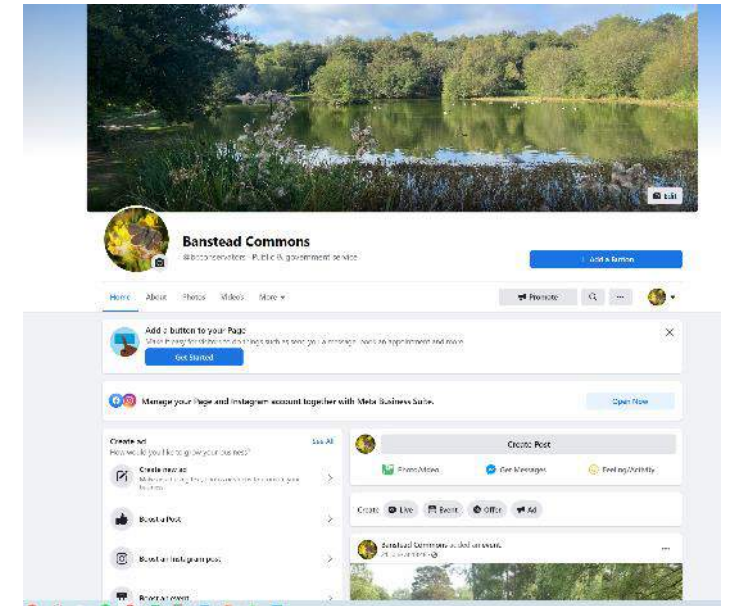
British Trust for  
Ornithology



Skylark (*Alauda arvensis*)

# Public Engagement

- Quarterly Meetings
- Consultative Group Meetings
- Guided Walks (just over 80 people attended walks this year)
- Talks to local community groups and organisations
- Social Media Pages
- Articles supplied to community newsletters
- Volunteer activities on the Commons







# Thank you to our volunteers!



Amy, Wildlife Monitor (Duke of Edinburgh Student)



John, Litter Hero, invasive species control and eyes and ears of Banstead Downs!



Leatherhead Youth Project, day of conservation volunteering



Toby, one of many of our Litter Heroes



# Methods of reporting

- Annual report
- Quarterly Meetings – *open to the public*
- Regular liaison meetings with RBBC's Countryside and Woodland Officer
- Annual walk on the Commons for borough Councillors
- Two Councillor representatives on the board of Conservators
- Bi-annual meetings with the Leader of the Council



# Recent Introduction of Technology

- Facebook , Instagram and Twitter social media.
- New accounting software enabling more accurate cost control and reporting.
- Drone technology allowing comparative land management.
- Introduction of GIS computer mapping capabilities.
- Vehicle tracker system being trialled.
- Updated and revised web site to be introduced (2023).



# Areas of conflict

## Congestion as water firm works around heath land MP blames group over A217 chaos

By Chris Madden

TRAFFIC congestion arising from roadworks on the A217 are the fault of a local conservation group, says an MP. Crispin Blunt hit out at the Banstead Commons Conservators, for opposing plans by Sutton and East Surrey Water to build a vital pipeline underneath Banstead Heath, forcing them, instead to work under the busy A217.

Mr Blunt, who represents Reigate, believes the group must take some responsibility for delays to drivers on the route, who face a hassle against three sets of roadworks for the next six months.

He told the Mirror: "Responsibility for this lies in the unfortunate opposition of Banstead Commons Conservators to Sutton and East Surrey Water's original plan. We now have a route under the A217 for this water main, which is a necessary local infrastructure.

"It takes hours of people's time, and the people will have to pay. People should understand where responsibility lies."

### Opposition

Last summer Sutton and East Surrey Water's original plan to build across the heath was met with opposition from the conservators - the managers of the route - due to a lack of information on how the heath would be affected.

In March this year, the group celebrated its victory as the water company announced it would not attempt to lay the pipeline across the commons in the face of opposition and a possible public inquiry.

Residents in the area echoed Mr Blunt's sentiments, saying the route under the heath would have been preferable.



OBJECTIONS: Protesters protest against Sutton and East Surrey Water's plans. Inset: MP Crispin Blunt

John Cole of Josephine Avenue said: "An alternative cheaper, quicker and more environmentally friendly route under the local heath could have been used."

"This would have avoided road waste going to highly expensive landfill sites and months of long and costly delays for Surrey's road users."

But the conservators say they are frustrated at Mr Blunt's comments, branding suggestions they are to blame as "disingenuous and unhelpful".

Chairman John Prusack told the Mirror: "We feel it is most disappointing that some are seeking to apportion blame for a decision made by the water company - as a body whose statutory

duty is to protect the common land in the borough."

He claimed the group had suggested a "number of viable alternative routes", but had received little communication from the water company.

Errors remained unmentioned as the first two sets of roadworks and underpass. Viread Stephens, 32, from Reigate, who drives the route every day, said: "It is not the best option for us. All of this together is going to cause a problem."

Sutton and East Surrey Water says its initial proposal to cross the opposition was influenced by informal discussions with the conservators. And despite meeting the requirements of the borough council, it was still unacceptable to the group.

The lack of ability for the Conservators to raise money has, in modern day governance, resulted in the unanticipated potential conflict of interest from having the landowner and Local Government Authority inheritor of the Banstead Vestry role both being represented through the council's Leader.

Carrying out our statutory duties on occasions brings us into direct conflict with the land owner and one of our main funders, Reigate and Banstead Borough Council.

The Conservators are currently working together with Reigate and Banstead Borough Council to draw up an agreement which recognises our point of difference and enables both organisations to work together to continue to ensure that Banstead Commons are protected and habitats enhanced both for future generations to enjoy and wildlife to thrive.



# Areas for improvement

Areas identified for improvement are:

- **Visitor engagement and accessibility.** The Conservators would like to introduce interpretation boards on each of the four commons and update and redesign our website.
- **Development of Site Management Plans.** Legally, it is the landowner's responsibility to produce Site Management Plans. The Conservators have recently applied to the CIL Local Fund to work collaboratively with the Greenspaces Team and an external agency to develop Site Management Plans for each of the four sites. Site Management Plans will provide an overview of the ecology of each site and management prescriptions over a ten year period.
- **Work collaboratively with local agencies and corporates.** The Conservators have started to connect with other agencies operating in the area such as the Surrey Hills Society and Farming in Protected Landscapes programme to maximise funding opportunities, improve public engagement and introduce volunteer opportunities on Banstead Commons.



# Our reputation...

*"Banstead Heath is simply spectacular."*

**Georgina Terry, Lead Adviser Surrey at Natural England**

*"I grew up in Banstead and am a bit gutted that I never knew such a wonderful place existed. Banstead Downs is a precious site with such floristic diversity. It was an amazing experience to see so many Chalkhill Blues and Brimstones. It was simply one of the best days ever that I've had butterfly spotting!"*

**Mrs Nicola Campana-Etheridge, Local Resident**

*"The appreciation of preserving what we have is becoming ever more important. Banstead Commons Conservators must be very proud of the work you do to encourage biodiversity on Banstead Downs. I would like to openly express this and share a few of the pictures I have taken this week."*

**Mr John Buckland, Local Resident**









**Thank you!**