

EPSOM AND WALTON DOWNS HABITAT MANAGEMENT PLAN 2023-2028

Head of Service:	Ian Dyer, Head of Operational Services
Wards affected:	All Wards
Appendices (attached):	Appendix One – Epsom and Walton Downs Habitat Management Plan 2023-2028 Appendix Two – Epsom Golf Course Habitat Management Plan 2023-2028

Summary

To present the Conservators with the Habitat Management Plans 2023-2028 for Epsom and Walton Downs and Epsom Golf Course.

Recommendation (s)

The Conservators are asked to:

- (1) Approve the contents of the Habitat Management Plans and the prescription table, which sets out the ideal actions for future management of the Downs and Golf Course.**
- (2) Agree that officers work towards the three main objectives of this five-year plan as set out in 2.5 of this report.**

1 Reason for Recommendation

- 1.1 The Epsom and Walton Downs Regulation Act 1984 Section 10, paragraph one states:

10.-(1) *It shall be the duty of the conservators to preserve the Downs so far as possible in their natural state of beauty and to have regard to the rules of good forestry and the desirability of conserving flora, fauna and geological or physiographical features of special interest and subject there to they may-*

(a) do any works necessary for preserving, restoring, planting and maintaining the turf, trees, shrubs, plants and grass and for landscaping and temporarily fence off such parts of the Downs as they may think necessary;

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- 1.2 The Habitat Management Plans provide the Conservators with a guide of best management practices and sets out in its prescription table the actions required to preserve the Downs in its natural state of beauty which will help the Conservators fulfil their obligations under the Act.

2 Background

- 2.1 The current editions of the Epsom and Walton Downs and Epsom Golf Course Habitat Management Plans have been revised and updated to assess the current state of the habitat and highlight areas which are well managed and those areas which are in decline and would benefit from further investment. Both Plans can be viewed in Appendix One and Appendix Two of this report.
- 2.2 These updated plans have been authored by Sarah Clift, Senior Countryside Officer from Epsom & Ewell Borough Council's Countryside Team.
- 2.3 The Senior Countryside Officer spent many hours conducting on-site surveys and reviewing previous recommendations and actions to assess future requirements to prevent deterioration of this important site.
- 2.4 It was decided that for ease of use, the Epsom and Walton Downs Habitat Management Plan and the Golf Course Habitat Management Plan should form two separate documents so that a copy of the Golf Course Plan could be given to Epsom Golf Club as they have responsibility for carrying out some of the work prescribed.
- 2.5 For simplicity both Plans suggests three main areas to focus on over the next five years:

Epsom and Walton Downs Management Plan:

- Draw up a project plan to reintroduce grazing on Juniper Hill.
- Cut and collect arisings from key chalk grassland areas using cut and collect mowing equipment
- Actively try and set up an Epsom and Walton Downs Volunteer Group to compliment the volunteer work provided by Epsom & Ewell's Countryside Volunteers, the Lower Mole Partnership, and the Butterfly Conservation Volunteers.

Epsom Golf Course Management Plan:

- Cut and collect arisings from grassland areas outside of the Fairways (as above).
- Clear and subsequently manage scrub in key Chalk Grassland areas.
- Actively try and set up a dedicated site-based volunteer group to compliment the volunteer work already happening on site (as above).

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- 2.6 Of the three objectives Officers believe that acquiring a cut and collect machine would provide the biggest impact on the overall management of the Downs and the Golf Course. Cutting and collecting the grass takes away the nutrients allowing the wildflowers the opportunity to flourish.
- 2.7 The ideal time to cut and collect is late summer to early autumn each year and therefore to commit to the prescriptions in this plan it is proposed that Epsom & Ewell Borough Council Grounds Maintenance service acquire a cut and collect machine which will be used on the Downs as well as other areas of the Borough which benefit from the same maintenance regime.
- 2.8 Grounds Maintenance on the Downs is provided by the Council and is paid for via an annual recharge to the Conservators, therefore the purchase of a cut and collect machine will not have a direct on the Conservators budgets and will be included in the current recharge.

3 Risk Assessment

Legal or other duties

3.1 Equality Impact Assessment

- None for the purpose of this report

3.2 Crime & Disorder

- None for the purpose of this report

3.3 Safeguarding

- None for the purpose of this report

3.4 Dependencies

- The success of this Habitat Management Plan will be dependent on remaining focussed on the key objectives set out in paragraph 2.2

3.5 Other

- None

4 Financial Implications

- 4.1 To fulfil the main objectives of this five-year plan, there may be requirement for additional budget to implement the prescriptions particularly in the case of the reintroduction of grazing. However, the funding implications for any new measures will be fully explored and reported to the Conservators before they are introduced.
- 4.2 **Section 151 Officer's comments:** Funding will need to be identified to progress any new initiatives in the Habitat Management Plan.

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5 Legal Implications

- 5.1 As set out in paragraph 1.1 the Conservators have a legal duty under the Epsom and Waltons Downs Regulation Act 1984 to preserve the Downs in its natural state of beauty and these management plans if implemented will help to fulfil this duty.
- 5.2 The Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006 currently includes a duty on public authorities to have regard to the conservation of biodiversity. The new Environment Act 2021 has amended this duty so that there is an expectation on public authorities to look strategically at their policies and operations from time to time (at least every 5 years) and assess what action they can take 'to further' the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity. They must also have regard to the relevant Local Nature Recovery Strategies, Species Conservation Strategies and Protected Sites Strategies, as part of the consideration. The production and implementation of a management plan will be a key part of adhering to this duty.
- 5.3 **Legal Officer's comments:** None other than those set out above

6 Policies, Plans & Partnerships

- 6.1 **Council's Key Priorities:** The following Key Priorities are engaged:
- Green and Vibrant
 - Safe and Well
- 6.2 **Service Plans:** The matter is not included within the current Service Delivery Plan.
- 6.3 **Climate & Environmental Impact of recommendations:** Well managed eco systems is key to ensuring climate stability.
- 6.4 **Sustainability Policy & Community Safety Implications:** None for the purpose of this report.
- 6.5 **Partnerships:** The successful delivery of the Habitat Management Plan relies on sustaining relationships with a number of stakeholders such as the Borough Council, Jockey Club, Training Grounds Management Board, the public and volunteers.

7 Background papers

- 7.1 The documents referred to in compiling this report are as follows:
- Previous reports:** 17 April 2017 – Revision of the Habitat Management Plan to include Golf Club site.
- Other papers:** none