

## **The Derby Festival 2023**

2023 saw the 244<sup>th</sup> running of The Derby and this year, both the Oaks and Derby was sponsored by Betfred. The two days were successfully delivered following the months of planning that go into an event of this size but it is fair to say that there was drama both on and off of the racing surface.

### **1.1 Build-Up**

Access to the Downs and our outer enclosures was granted by Conservators for Monday 15<sup>th</sup> May. Blessed with fine, dry weather the build-up of

Sincere thanks to the Trainers and Downs Keepers who, as always, worked well alongside the racecourse in sometimes some challenging situations. The Derby is like no other event and the build schedule is based on limited time so it does require all parties to work together during this period. Marquee and structure contractors were all briefed before and during the event so as to ensure they were aware of horses being around and whilst I am of a couple of incidents during the lead in, I am unaware of any serious issues or concerns.

### **1.2 Traveller Camp**

Access to the area was available from Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> May, upon arrival of Charlie Cooper. I am aware of approximately 6-8 caravans arriving on Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> May and parked on an area of land by the roundabout at Buckles Gap. Our on-site security spoke with those concerned who were amicable and understood that they had arrived early. We allowed them to stay in that location until the morning whereby they moved into the main area without concern.

All Travellers left the site by close of play Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> June.

### **1.3 Ladies Day & Derby Day**

Over the two days we witnessed some fantastic racing action. 15 races, an 8<sup>th</sup> race being staged on Derby Day for the first time, and AUGUSTE RODIN, trained by Aiden O'Brien and ridden by Ryan Moore.

It was sadly no fairy tale ending for jockey Frankie Dettori who rode in his final Derby this year, announcing his retirement for the end of this year. However, he did achieve success in both the Oaks and Coronation Cup riding Soul Sister and Emily Upjohn respectively.

Conservators once again gave approval for BBQ's to be permitted within two locations on the Hill. Working alongside our cleaning provider, Surrey Fire & Rescue and an independent fire safety partner, I am pleased to report that this once again worked well with no issues reported.

### **1.4 Breakdown**

The breakdown of the site is on-going but it is pleasing to hear that all gallops, access routes and areas of the golf course were all returned to stakeholders on-time and free of litter/temporary equipment.

### **1.5 Protesters**

As you will be aware, members of Animal Rising – the organisation which unlawfully breached security at Aintree on Grand National Day and caused a short delay to the race – planned another illegal protest on Derby Day. They made no secret of their intentions to access the track itself in an attempt to delay the race or stop it from taking place altogether, in the process compromising the safety of all participants – both equine and human – the thousands of racegoers present and, indeed, themselves.

With this in mind The Jockey Club lodged an application for an injunction relating to trespass at Epsom Downs over The Derby Festival. As you will appreciate the decision to take this highly unusual step was not straightforward and followed lengthy consultation with Surrey Police and a number of stakeholders.

We were successful in our Injunction application at the High Court and it was a significant and welcome step forward.

Whilst this injunction did not offer the power of arrest it did act as another layer, another deterrent to those wishing to cause disruption to the race.

In addition to the injunction a number of other measures were introduced to the event and the site so as to reduce, so far as practicable, the threat that AR were openly discussing. At a special meeting of the Conservators, approval was given to erect fencing across the site and coupled with the temporary suspension of the various footpaths across the Downs, we were able to control access to the site in a much more structured way. Whilst I understand there are likely to be complaints made by members of our local community who had their normal access diverted, the implantation of these measures assisted greatly with the safe running of the race.

I would personally like to record my thanks to Epsom & Ewell Borough Council, Surrey County Council, Reigate & Banstead Council, Surrey & Sussex Police, Surrey Fire & Rescue and South East Coast Ambulance Service. Working as true partners with the event organisers, their help, knowledge and flexibility ensured that The Derby 2023 was delivered, despite some challenges along the way and a somewhat tense period during the running of the race itself.

Simon Durrant