

Derby Festival 2024

2024 was the 245th running of The Derby and this year Betfred increased their support to include the whole festival, The Betfred Derby Festival. The two days were successfully delivered following almost a year of planning, and despite the un-typical summer conditions we were faced it was a highly positive event.

1. Build-up

Access to the Downs and our outer enclosures was granted by the Conservators for Monday 13th May. Initially blessed with fine, dry weather the build-up of the whole site progressed better than in previous years, despite a period of wetter weather in the week prior to the event. This year we applied for the closure of Footpath 50 for a 3-week period, and this proved to be much safer for all involved during the build-up, with significantly less issues raised to Surrey CC.

Sincere thanks to the Trainers and Downs Keepers who, as always, worked well alongside the racecourse during the build-up period. 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. The contractors were heavily briefed on the training community, and I am only aware of two minor issues that were dealt with swiftly.

2. Traveller Camp

We have unfortunately had more issues than usual this year that caused an increase in community complaints. Initially we had 6-8 vehicles arrive almost one week prior to the designated area opening, and park just off Old London Road on the Downs. Our on-site security monitored this group and the council spoke with those concerned, the process to move the camp on was started by the council but they moved into the designated area on opening. I am not aware of any antisocial behaviour or damage caused by this group in this location.

Access to the designated area was available from Thursday 23rd May, upon arrival of Charlie Cooper. After this date we are aware of a number of issues raised by the residents in Langley Vale, primarily around three young individuals causing significant damage to windows, doors and moving cars with 'catapults'. At one stage the armed police were called by residents to reports of gunfire. The residents have expressed deep concern and we will be engaging with them to discuss the issues and solutions, with a provisional date of 12th July.

All travellers left site by close of play Sunday 2nd June.

3. Royal Visit

We were delighted to welcome Their Majesties to the racecourse on Friday 31st May to watch their horse, TREASURE, run in the Betfred Oaks. Despite very short notification, the visit was a huge success and we have received highly positive feedback from all involved, and lots of media coverage across online and print.

4. Ladies Day & Derby Day

Over the two days we witnessed some fantastic racing action across 15 races. The Betfred Derby was won by CITY OF TROY, and was trainer Aiden O'Brien's record-extending 10th Derby success.

The Betfred Oaks was won by EZELIYA, trained by Dermot Weld, however there was no fairytale story of the royals with their horse TREASURE. The third Group 1, Holland Cooper Coronation Cup, was won by LUXEMBOURG on his first visit to the Downs, following an injury that kept him away from The Derby two years ago.

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 there were no issues reported.

5. 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.

It was my first Derby as General Manager and I would like to record my thanks on behalf of the whole team and wider Jockey Club for the support of the Epsom and Walton Downs Conservators, Epsom & Ewell Borough Council, Surrey County Council, Reigate & Banstead Council, Surrey & Sussex Police, Surrey Fire & Rescue and South East Coast Ambulance Service. Without all of us effectively working together we wouldn't be able to deliver an event of this size that showcases Epsom and Surrey to an international stage. It was a pleasure to be a part of the team to deliver a fantastic two days of racing this year, here's hoping for warmer weather in 2025!

Tom Sammes