

THE DERBY FESTIVAL 2025

Summary

June 6th & 7th 2025, saw the Epsom Downs racecourse Derby Festival take place, which included the 246th running of The Derby with Betfred continuing their sponsorship of The Derby Festival.

The two days were successfully delivered following almost a year of planning. Despite the wonderful dry spring, Epsom Downs Racecourse was initially forecast with a Storm with a Yellow Warning for two days of The Derby Festival. This weather front was eventually pushed back, and a dry and partially sunny Friday occurred.

However, even on Derby Day morning, the Yellow Weather warning was forecast to begin about 10am and continue through the day. There was also potential for thunder and lightning throughout the afternoon which could have led to the delay or abandonment of the Derby/DJ Set or indeed the entire afternoon's racing.

Luckily, the rain did not arrive until after the Derby and only affected the final 3 races on the day. The predicted thunder and lightning storms never arrived.

Build-up

Access to the Downs and our outer enclosures was granted by the Conservators for mid-May. The build period was predominantly dry, and the development of the Temporary structures progressed as a good speed.

The Temporary Structures were almost identical to those used in 2024, but with minor modifications internally.

This year Epsom Downs Racecourse once again applied for the closure of Footpath 50 for a 3-week period, and this again proved to be much safer for all involved during the build-up, with significantly less issues raised to Surrey CC.

Epsom Downs Racecourse would like to once again thank the Racehorse Trainers and Downskeepers for their co-operation and who, once again, worked well alongside the Racecourse during the build-up period and indeed during the de-rigg of the Temporary Structures.

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 Racehorse Training and Travelling community, as well as the importance of maintaining impeccable Health & Safety standards at all times.

Traveller Camp

Unfortunately, a handful of caravans turned up before the Official Travellers camping area was due to open. They parked just off Old London Road on the Downs on Jockey Club owned land. Our on-site security monitored this group, and the council and Police spoke with those concerned. The process to move the camp on was started by the Racecourse and 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, and this was confirmed by the Police.

Unfortunately, this happened in 2024 but was only brought to the Racecourse General Manager's attention a few weeks before the arrival of the unofficial encampment (UE). Despite erecting No Parking/Private Property signage, fixing the gate posts, barrier and padlocks, the UE still gained access to the site, much to the frustration of the residents whose back gardens adjoined the area of land the UE was parked on.

The Racecourse will raise the bank in this area before the end of this year to ensure it is as difficult as possible to get Caravans onto the land. The General Manager also made the acquaintance of Mr. Charlie Cooper who oversees the Travelling Community Camp. It is hoped that this relationship will help prevent a recurrence of the UE in 2026.

There were significantly fewer Caravans for the 2025 Derby Festival because of the clash with the Appleby Horse Fair. At the time of writing, the racecourse has received no complaints or reports of any incidents involving the Travelling Community Camp during the 2025 Derby Festival.

All travellers left site by close of play Sunday 8th June. They did not clear up all of their rubbish.

Royal Visit

Unfortunately, there was no Royal Patronage of the Derby Festival in 2025.

Ladies Day & Derby Day

Over the two days of the Derby Festival Epsom Downs Racecourse witnessed some fantastic racing action across 15 races. The Betfred Derby was won by Lambourn and was trainer Aidan O'Brien's record-extending 11th Derby success.

The Betfred Oaks was won by Minnie Hauk, also trained by Aidan O'Brien. The third Group 1, The Betfred Coronation Cup, was won by Jans Brueghel who completed a remarkable Group 1 Treble for Aidan O'Brien.

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.

The weather forecast for the two days of the Derby Festival was appalling and contributed to the low attendance of c34k, verses a 2025 attendance of 40k.

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 Southeast 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 Derby Festival in 2025.

The low attendance was almost certainly caused by the poor weather for the Derby Festival and the cost-of-living crisis.

Jim Allen