

FEASIBILITY STUDY TO REINTRODUCE GRAZING TO JUNIPER HILL

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Wards affected:	College Ward; Town Ward; Woodcote and Langley Vale Ward;
Appendices (attached):	Appendix 1 - Feasibility study to reintroduce grazing to Juniper Hill

Summary

One of the three main objectives of the current five-year Epsom and Walton Downs Habitat Management Plan (2023-2028) is to draw up a project plan to reintroduce grazing to Juniper Hill.

The grassland of Juniper Hill bears special attention as it has been considered to be the best of its type in Surrey. It is regarded by the Epsom and Ewell Local Biodiversity Action Plan working group as a top priority to conserve and enhance.

Recommendation (s)

The Conservators are asked to:

- (1) Agree in principle to reintroduce grazing to Juniper Hill, subject to a further report presented to the Conservators at their January 2026 meeting which will include detailed capital and revenue expenditure requirements and funding options.**
- (2) Decide if permanent or temporary fencing should be used to secure livestock.**

1 Reason for Recommendation

- 1.1 Grazing has always been and is likely to remain, the preferred management option on Juniper Hill as it has been responsible for creating and maintaining the biological interest, allowing the wildflowers to flourish and a vital aid in controlling the scrub.

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2 Background

- 2.1 The management recommendations for this area are essential for the maintenance and restoration of this nationally scarce and important habitat.
- 2.2 Juniper Hill contains an area of very diverse calcareous grassland, however, with current resources, the rougher grasses and scrub are becoming invasive, leading to a reduction in this diversity.
- 2.3 In the grassland and the surrounding woodland, there are also several Juniper bushes. In Southern counties, Juniper is in a critical state of decline with evidence of habitat fragmentation, so it is a priority to protect the population we have.
- 2.4 There has been a huge amount of partnership working and volunteer effort that has gone in to open up and restore this area over the last 25 years, which should not be lost.
- 2.5 Grazing was carried out on Juniper Hill in the recent past at the end of the 90s and early 2000s. It was very successful and made a real difference to the habitat. Since grazing has ceased the habitat is degrading and we are losing the diversity of plant life that was once there.

3 Risk Assessment

Legal or other duties

3.1 Equality Impact Assessment

3.1.1 None for the purposes of this report.

3.2 Crime & Disorder

3.2.1 By ensuring that our sites are well looked after and managed well, visitors tend to respect the area and less vandalism will occur. By having Juniper Hill more actively managed there will be more presence on site which will also lead to less antisocial behaviour.

3.3 Safeguarding

3.3.1 The plan to graze will encourage the use of volunteers to assist in managing and enhancing the biodiversity of Juniper Hill. Volunteer activities will include opportunities for vulnerable adults.

3.4 Dependencies

3.4.1 None for the purposes of this report.

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4 Financial Implications

- 4.1 Investment will be needed to purchase the infrastructure needed to allow grazing to occur. The initial outlay will be between £10,000-£15,000. It is intended to look for grant funding for this which will take officer time to progress. On-going costs will need to be factored in as animals will need to be hired in each year and there will be inevitable maintenance costs to the fencing etc. It is likely that this fund could be covered by grant funding, for example, countryside stewardship.
- 4.2 If the committee agree to support this project in principle a fully costed implementation plan along with details of proposed funding options will be presented to the Conservators at their meeting in January 2026.
- 4.3 Officer time will be required to prepare the next stage of the feasibility study
- 4.4 **Section 151 Officer's comments:** Any Officer time or investment agreed will need to be found within existing EWDC staffing and budgets.

5 Legal Implications

- 5.1 The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (NERC) gives all public bodies "a duty to **have regard** to the conservation of Biodiversity in exercising their functions" The 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. It should be noted that '**Have Regard**' will change to '**Take Account**' once the relevant section of the Levelling up and Regeneration Act is Enacted. It is expected to be enacted later in 2025, when broader planning reform is introduced – guidance will be renewed at that point.
- 5.2 Local authorities (excluding parish councils) and local planning authorities have a duty under section 40A to report on the performance of this duty. We will have to report at least every 5 yrs on our progress. By improving the management of Juniper Hill, which is chalk grassland, an identified priority habitat under the NERC act, we will be helping to fulfil our biodiversity duty.
- 5.3 **Legal Officer's comments:** None other than set out above.

6 Policies, Plans & Partnerships

- 6.1 **Council's Key Priorities:** The following Key Priorities are engaged:

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- **Green and Vibrant** – by managing our chalk grassland resource, which is identified as a priority habitat, to the best of our abilities we will be ensuring an improvement in biodiversity. Well-functioning ecosystems are vital not only for biodiversity but also to help manage the climate.
- **Safe and well** – by providing well managed green spaces for people to go out and enjoy we are helping to improve our residents' and visitors' health and wellbeing. The grazing project will also offer up opportunities for people to volunteer in their local green space and become more active.

6.2 **Service Plans:** The matter is not included within the current Service Delivery Plan.

6.3 **Climate & Environmental Impact of recommendations:** Reintroducing grazing will only have a positive effect on the climate and environment.

6.4 **Sustainability Policy & Community Safety Implications:** Managing the Biodiversity resource of Juniper Hill is inherently sustainable. By having well managed open spaces for wildlife and people, you could argue encourages more people to use them, respect and value them and therefore make them safer places to be.

6.5 **Partnerships:** The site has already been lucky enough to have had input from other partners, including the Lower Mole Partnership, Downlands Partnership, Surrey Wildlife Trust, Surrey Botanical Society, Butterfly Conservation, The Countryside Team Volunteers. Partnership working has been instrumental in managing our nature reserves in the Borough and the grazing project will foster our current partnerships and inevitably lead to more.

6.6 **Local Government Reorganisation Implications:** If it is decided to progress the grazing of Juniper Hill, it is vital that this policy of management carried forward into whatever organisation we become.

7 Background papers

7.1 The documents referred to in compiling this report are as follows:

Previous reports:

- Epsom and Walton Downs Habitat Management Plan 2023-2028 which can be found on the EEBC website

<https://www.epsom-ewell.gov.uk/residents/access-nature/countryside-and-parks/epsom-and-walton-downs>

Other papers:

- Feasibility Study in to reintroducing grazing to Juniper Hill.