

REINTRODUCTION OF GRAZING TO JUNIPER HILL

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Wards affected:	College Ward; Town Ward; Woodcote and Langley Vale Ward;
Appendices (attached):	Appendix 1 - Implementation Plan

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.

At the conservators meeting held on 23rd June 2025, it was agreed to progress the project, using robust fencing and for an implementation plan to be brought to the January committee.

Recommendation (s)

The Conservators are asked to:

- (1) Support the reintroduction of grazing to Juniper Hill, subject to securing external funding for initial infrastructure and nominate and authorise the Senior Countryside Officer, in conjunction with the Clerk of the Conservators to progress this initiative to completion.**
- (2) Agree recommendations as set out in the Implementation Plan.**
- (3) Agree the timetable as set out in the Implementation Plan.**

1 Reason for Recommendation

- 1.1 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.
- 1.2 Due to the site's importance to the Borough's Biodiversity, appropriate resources should be provided to manage it to its full potential as soon as possible.

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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.
- 2.6 Following research and consultation it is proposed to use the Downlands Grazing Partnership to supply the grazing animals due to their experience and expertise. They also offer a weekly check of the animals along with training of staff and volunteers.

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.

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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

4 Financial Implications

- 4.1 As set out in the Implementation Plan, the initial outlay for infrastructure and installation will be approx. £17,500, which will be covered by external grant funding.
- 4.2 Ongoing revenue costs are expected to be around £4,500 annually, for the hire of the animals and on-going project management. A provisional allocation of £4,500 has been included in the proposed revenue budget for 2026/27 to fund these costs if the proposal is agreed. If the scheme does not go ahead the provisional allocation will be contributed to the working balance.

Section 151 Officer's comments: The officer time and ongoing costs for this scheme will be funded from existing EWDC staffing and budgets.

5 Legal Implications

- 5.1 Epsom And Walton Downs are governed by their own specific local Act of Parliament, The Epsom and Walton Downs Regulation Act 1984,(the Act) under which provision is made for the Downs to be controlled by the "Epsom and Walton Downs Conservators". Section 11 of the Act also provides for the Conservators to make Byelaws, and the current set of such byelaws were confirmed by the Secretary of State in 2005.
- 5.2 The Conservators primary duty, set out on Section 10 (1) of the Act is as follows:
- 5.3 "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....."
- 5.4 The duties of the Conservators under the Act, is to regulate, preserve and control the Downs- "section 10. 1 (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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5.5 The nature of the works being requested fall within section 10 of the Act. However, it is important that any works are carefully considered and executed.

5.6 **Legal Officer's comments:** None other than as stated above.

6 Policies, Plans & Partnerships

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

- 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. The Climate Change Officer is aware as is supportive of the project.

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, Downlands Grazing Partnership, Downlands Trust, Surrey Wildlife Trust, Surrey Botanical Society, Butterfly Conservation and 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:** It is vital that the policy of conservation grazing management of Juniper Hill is continued to be supported by East Surrey. There should be a smooth transition as it is proposed to use the Downlands Grazing Partnership to assist in managing the project, who will also become part of East Surrey.

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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 at the bottom of the linked webpage

Other papers:

- [Feasibility Study to reintroduce grazing to Juniper Hill – Report – 23 June 2025](#)
 - [Appendix 1 – Feasibility Study to reintroduce grazing to Juniper Hill – 23 June 2025](#)