

THE DERBY FESTIVAL 2026

Summary

June 5th & 6th 2025, saw the Epsom Downs Racecourse Betfred Derby Festival take place, which included the 247th 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 unfortunately hit by extremely adverse weather the week before the Derby and on Derby Day. The extremely high winds and heavy rain in the week before the Festival, led to many operational challenges. Whilst Ladies Day was reasonably bright, the 'mini hurricane' that hit the Racecourse on Derby Day, changed the ground from Good to Soft to Soft before the Derby.

Despite the dreadful weather, the day was operationally successful with Christmas Day winning the Derby at odds of 7/1. The highlight of the day was the Official visit from the King & Queen who arrived just before 3pm and left around 5pm. This was incredibly dutiful of their Majesties, who had flown by helicopter in adverse weather, from a family wedding in Gloucestershire. Their support for the Derby is extremely beneficial for the race and for Epsom.

Build-up

Access to the Downs and our outer enclosures was kindly granted by the Conservators from May 11th. The build period was predominantly dry, and the development of the Temporary structures progressed as a good speed.

The Temporary Structures were all very different to those used in previous years. The Jockey Club conducted a Temporary Structure procurement tender and switched supplier from 'Arena' to 'Fews' for the provision of almost all of the temporary structures.

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. For 2026, the Racecourse chose to leave the tunnel footpath open for the Derby Festival.

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-rig of the temporary structures. Almost every temporary structure was modified from previous versions and there were additional new features such as Lamp Post banners depicting

previous winners of The Derby on the roadside (approval provided by Surrey Highways), a refreshed footpath tunnel with a mural provided by Nescot College and a fabulous Community Zone in the centre of the course.

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 new 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.

Several Racehorse Trainers have commented on how the build was one of the smoothest they have experienced.

Traveller Camp

Unfortunately, as in 2025, 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.

Despite erecting No Parking/Private Property signage, fixing the gate posts, barrier and padlocks, earth moving and concrete blocks, 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 would like to see additional banks raised in this area before the end of this year to ensure it is as difficult as possible to get Caravans onto the land.

As in 2025, there were significantly fewer Caravans for the 2026 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. There were however issues raised by the local residents in Langley Vale, who reported that younger people were firing catapults at their homes and cars. This report was passed to the Police.

All travellers left site by close of play Sunday 7th June. They did not clear up all of their rubbish but did leave the site in a respectable condition. The Appleby Horse fair will once again clash with the Derby Festival in 2027.

Royal Visit

Epsom Downs Racecourse was delighted to welcome the King and Queen to the racecourse on Derby Day. Despite attending a family wedding in Gloucestershire in the morning, their Majesties flew into Epsom Downs Racecourse at 3pm on Derby Day, before viewing the Derby contenders in the Parade Ring and presenting the trophy to the winning connections of Christmas Day. Their Majesties left the Racecourse by helicopter around 5pm.

Epsom Downs Racecourse was honoured to receive their Majesties. Their visit further elevated to the Derby on a national and international stage.

Ladies Day & Derby Day

Over the two days of the Derby Festival Epsom Downs Racecourse witnessed some fantastic racing action across 16 races. The Betfred Derby was won by Christmas Day and was trainer Aiden O'Brien's record-extending 12th Derby success and his fourth in a row. This is the only time in Derby history this feat has been achieved.

The Betfred Oaks was won by Thundering On, trained by Aidan O'Brien's son and ex-Jockey Joseph O'Brien. The third Group 1, The Coolmore Stud Coronation Cup, was won by Bay City Roller who provided his Trainer George Scott with his first Group 1 victory.

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.

There was an unfortunate incident at the end of racing on Derby Day when a drunken brawl broke out amongst a few individuals in the Grandstand enclosure. One person was taken to hospital and currently remains there.

The Grandstand enclosure was sold out on both Ladies Day and Derby Day for the first time since 2022, contributing to an attendance of 48,261 over the 2 days, considerably up on 2025.

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 will be returned to stakeholders on-time and free of litter/temporary equipment. There was some damage to the golf course caused by joy-riders a few days before the Derby. This is being investigated.

This was my second 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 2026, which has been viewed as a great success despite the weather.

Jim Allen