



Epsom's Famous Turf Set for a Smoother Ride

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Racehorses galloping down Epsom's famous turf could soon enjoy a smoother start, after The Jockey Club won backing to re-route a battered path cutting across the six-furlong chute on the Downs.

The current crossing, used daily by racehorses heading back from morning workouts, has become so uneven it is now seen as a safety risk, with one official saying it's "unbelievably close" to where horses enter the starting stalls.

After years of wear and tear, heavy machinery, and wet weather, the path has been left in "horrible" shape and "uneven".

The Jockey Club says the surface has simply had its day, with horses "almost tripping up" as they head for the start line.

Under the plan approved by Epsom and Walton Downs Conservators on November 3, the existing crossing will be shut for good and replaced by a new route looping neatly around the back of the chute.

The redesign will tidy up the area, improve safety for riders and horses, and, importantly for locals, be fully paid for by The Jockey Club. Officials say there will be no cost to taxpayers and no loss of public access, since the old path was never a legal right of way.

"We would re-grass the section of the racetrack that the path would come up from [...] we are looking at a hardcore base topped up by suitable weather surface," said Clerk of the Course Andrew Cooper. He said the new path should be a permanent, long-lasting solution.

Mr Cooper was enthusiastic about the proposal, describing it as a "definite improvement" both for racing and for the look of the Downs. "You wouldn't have a track disturbing the start at Ascot," said Vice Chair Jim Allen. "We're trying to improve Epsom standing in the international horse racing world."

Officials say communication with Downs users will be key to managing the change, but most agreed it is long overdue.

"Of course, safety is really important," said Cllr Kim Spickett. "But people who live here really, really love the Downs. It's beautiful and they really care about it." The councillor for Cuddington said she approved of the designs and said the whole chute would look aesthetic.

"It's not just about safety," one member said. "It'll make the whole area look smarter and more in keeping with what you'd expect at an international racecourse."

The £10,000-£15,000 project could be completed before next year's Derby Festival, depending on The Jockey Club's budget approval. If all goes to plan, by the time the 2026 Derby rolls around, horses will be cantering to the stalls on a smoother, safer, and smarter stretch of turf.

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Image: View of uneven starting chute on Epsom Downs and racecourse. (Credit: Epsom and Ewell Borough Council documents)