

Residents' complaints about anti-protester measures ahead of Derby

21 June 2023



Epsom Derby organisers faced an “awful lot of complaints” from residents as they put up fencing and closed footpaths to minimise disruption caused by Animal Rising protesters. The activists had made clear before the event they planned to disrupt this year’s Derby, and one did make it to the track.

The Jockey Club, which owns **Epsom racecourse** among others, applied for an injunction ahead of the event on Saturday, June 3.

It also asked a special meeting of the **Epsom and Walton Downs Conservators**, held behind closed doors just days before the event, for permission to put up 4,000 metres of fencing across the Downs and suspend footpaths.

Simon Durrant, representing the Jockey Club at a meeting of the Conservators held on Monday (June 19), spoke of his “disappointment” at the fencing having to go up and that organisers were “constantly fearing the worst”. But he said due to the “unique” nature of the Epsom Downs, organisers quickly realised “it wasn’t about avoidance it was about how we were going to react to it”.

Mr Durrant set out the challenges ahead of this year’s event and addressed “frustrations” residents may have had. Adding

that he knew there would be councillors at the meeting who had heard from residents about their “frustrations and disappointment” he called it a “different and difficult” event this year.

He said: “It was made even more difficult because, for obvious reasons, we didn’t want to communicate why we were putting fencing up, why we were suspending the footpaths. We didn’t want to give the protesters too much information before that Saturday morning. We’ve had comments in from residents as well.”

He told the meeting that the Jockey Club had seen what the protesters were capable of when they disrupted the Grand National at Aintree in April. He said there were three types of protesters, the “really pleasant” peaceful protesters outside the grounds, those “intent on causing a scene in and around the racecourse” and then those who were trying to gain access to the racetrack.

Councillor **Bernice Froud** (Residents’ Association, Woodcote and Langley Vale) thanked Mr Durrant for the explanation of the security issues. She said: “I did have an awful lot of complaints where I think people just didn’t quite understand what was happening. I fully understand that none of us in this room that knew about it could really publicise that. So I think it’s really helpful that you’ve actually explained in detail what the reasoning was, and I hope that goes some way to actually reassuring the residents.”

At the meeting it was also confirmed that no working royals attended the Derby, and that as the late Queen Elizabeth II used to attend in a private capacity, it was not something that was “naturally be passed along” through the family.

Mr Durrant pointed to other complications across the weekend, including train strikes, and the FA Cup final between Manchester United and Manchester City that was played at

Wembley on the same day.

He told the meeting: “Two Manchester clubs, playing in London. It was great for the Manchester United fans because most of them live in London.”

With an event that he said gets “better and better every year”, Mr Durrant said of the Derby weekend: “As ever, in general, a fantastic, iconic event that puts Epsom on the map again.”

Image: Preparations for the Queen\'s Jubilee celebrations underway on the Hill seen from the Epsom Downs Racecourse. Credit: LDR Emily Coady-Stemp