

Committee(s)	Dated:
Epping Forest and Commons	20 05 2019
Subject: Epping Forest - Superintendent's Update for February to March 2019 (SEF 13/19)	Public
Report of: Colin Buttery. Director of Open Spaces	For Information
Report author: Paul Thomson – Superintendent of Epping Forest	

Summary

This purpose of this report is to summarise the Epping Forest Division's activities across February to March 2019.

Of particular note was an increase in fly tips, following a year of declining numbers; continued investment in work programmes to develop Countryside Stewardship application and a final version of the SAC Mitigation Strategy; works to remove fire damaged vegetation at Wanstead Flats; the submission of further evidence at the Epping Forest District Council Local Planning Examination in Public; improvements to Chingford Golf Course and a successful close to the grassroots football season.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- Note the report.

Main Report

Staff and Volunteers

1. A new Grounds/Greenkeeper was successfully recruited during the reporting period and commenced work on 10 April 2019.

Budgets

2. The Epping Forest Local Risk accounts closed with an overall £6,348.38 overspend which is 0.27% of the final overall net budget of £2,695,000. The budget for the purchase of three hybrid vehicles for the Forest Keeper service was transferred to capital accounts.

Weather

3. February was in line with the total rainfall for the past 5 years, with a total rainfall of 43.6mm, against an overall average for February 1979 – 2019 of 47.52mm. There was a total of 14 days of rainfall with the wettest day being the 28th where 8.8mm of rain fell. The unseasonably warm weather, the warmest since records began, saw paths beginning to dry out and water levels in brooks and streams beginning to fall.
4. March had a very wet start to the month with the total rainfall of 63mm falling in the first 18 days of the month. This total continues the pattern from 2018 of rainfall being well above the average of 38.33mm for this time of year. The second half of March was a stark contrast where no rain fell over the last 13 days. Temperatures were again above the long-term UK average with paths and brooks continue to dry out despite the very wet start to the month. Notable weather systems including Storm Freya (3rd-4th) and Storm Gareth (10th-13th) did not adversely affect the Forest.

Forest Services

Fly-tipping

5. There was a total of 70 fly-tips recorded over the period of February and March 2019, which is 11 (18.4%) greater than the same period last year. However, it should be noted that in 2018 the weather conditions were significantly different due to unseasonal 'Beast of the East' weather.
6. Roadsides locations dominate the most affected location type representing 45 or 64%. Some of the gated car parks have been targeted in the period, where dragons' teeth have been compromised or tips occurring during the day.
7. Builders waste and Household waste remain the dominant fly-tip waste type at 20% and 17% respectively. However, there has been a large increase in the amount of cannabis-related spent horticultural waste totalling 17% or 12 tips.
8. A much-reduced level of 20% of all fly-tips was recorded at Wanstead Flats.

Enforcement Activity

9. No Prosecutions or other case disposal took place during the period under report.

Rough Sleepers

10. The Forest Services team dealt with a number of rough sleepers in three local authority areas:
 - 10.1 London Borough of Redbridge (LBR) – Forest sites saw two rough sleepers were found in camps at Bushwood. Forest Keepers contacted the LBR outreach team and arranged a joint visit leading to successful placements for both rough sleepers. The camps were subsequently cleared by the litter team. LBR have increased the size of their homeless outreach team by four officers and have additional

resources to reduce homelessness within the Borough. Additionally, 5 old rough sleeper camps were cleared from various Forest locations.

- 10.2 London Borough of Waltham Forest. Also saw 2 rough sleepers who were found at Leyton Flats. Forest Keepers arranged a joint outreach patrol with St Mungo's and placements were found for both rough sleepers and the camps were cleared by the Litter team the following day.
- 10.3 Epping Forest District Council - Forest Keepers dealt with one rough sleeper who was approached by staff and was referred to the homeless team in EFDC, before being moved on.

Licences

- 11. A total of 54 licences for events were issued during the two months being reported, which yielded an income of £52,572.30 plus VAT (inclusive of 3 compounds totalling £34,671). 44 licences were issued during the same period in 2018 yielding income of £16,772.33.

Unauthorised Occupations

- 12. There were no unauthorised occupations during the reporting period.

Dog Incidents

- 13. Over the period of February and March, there were two dog incidents.

Deer Vehicle Collisions

- 14. Over the period of February and March, there were 17 recorded incidents of deer vehicle collisions.

Heritage; Landscape and Nature Conservation

Biodiversity and nature conservation

- 15. Two field surveys were carried out in relation to the acid heath/grassland and scrub habitats in the southern half of the Forest, which are important components of the SAC and SSSI interest. A specialist ecological consultancy, under the guidance of the Environmental Stewardship Officer and Head of Conservation, consolidated previous survey work from your officers and a botanical consultant and also conducted interviews with the Head Forest Keeper and London Fire Service. Following their own fieldwork, they then prepared detailed map-based management proposals for Wanstead Flats and Leyton Flats.
- 16. Many of these proposals may be eligible for Countryside Stewardship grant-aid. The proposals will form part of detailed Individual Site Plans to be considered as part of the Forest's new Management Strategy and also, possibly, for Leyton Flats, as part of the SAC Mitigation Strategy. However, due to the residual fire damage, works at the Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) area of Wanstead Flats (between Centre and Lake House Roads) proceeded immediately in March. A map of the proposed works is appended to this report.

17. The works at Wanstead Heath (the SSSI area) involved the removal of all burnt vegetation and dead scrub within the main fire areas on the SSSI so that all potential fuel for a future fire was removed from site. This work was undertaken by the Operations Team. The work was followed by the creation of soil scrapes, where the polluted and nutrient-rich top layer of soil was removed to expose the low nutrient gravelly and sandy soils below. Scrapes like these, but on a smaller scale, have proved very successful across the Forest and at Wanstead Flats itself in the past. These scrapes will now form the substrate for the recovery of rare and scarce heathland plants, including Heather which of course is specifically protected by the Epping Forest Act as well as under the SSSI notification (see photos below under *Contractors* section). In addition to the scrapes, a new low embankment of the removed soil has been formed and this should provide a free-draining area for nesting solitary bees and wasps for which the SSSI is renowned.

Agri-environment Schemes

18. Detailed work continued on the preparation for the Countryside Stewardship Scheme (CSS) application. By the end of March over 1,500 ancient trees were surveyed for consideration for pollarding and crown restoration.
19. Detailed exchanges also took place with the Rural Payments Agency and Natural England advisors to ensure compliance with the detailed evidence requirements for the Scheme as the application is developed. As part of the assembling of evidence, the GIS Officer, working with the Environmental Stewardship Officer, continues to prepare detailed maps of the environmental record for each of the many tens of parcels of land that will make up the Epping Forest application.
20. On 28th March a formal request for a CSS application pack was made and Epping Forest was registered as an applicant site. This now allows a full application for CSS grant-aid to be submitted later this year.

Grazing

21. Three members from the Knepp Wildland projects grazing team met with the Epping Forest grazing team and visited sites across the Forest as well as Great Gregories winter housing facility. Information and ideas were exchanged, and further return visits have been planned to both sites for future knowledge sharing.
22. Continued investment in the Grazing project saw three new fixed water supplies on grazing sites that previously had water transported to them twice weekly by truck. A longer tractor drawn livestock trailer was purchased with hydraulics that can carry more animals and lower to the ground for loading. This allows animals to walk onto the trailer rather than climb up a steep ramp which often increased loading times when the animals were reluctant to climb. A new sliding security gate for Great Gregories was installed, alongside additional CCTV camera coverage with the provision of diesel fuel tank storage which has eliminated weekly journeys back to The Warren to re-fuel.
23. Eight Longhorns were purchased from the Rhyfel herd in Wales, which increases the Forest herd total to 195 animals.

24. A competitive tender was sought, and a local contractor appointed for a 3-year contract to cut and bale our winter feed for the cattle. Improved equipment used for feeding the cattle has enabled us to increase the bale size going forward with the new contract. This has meant a 25% financial saving per bale and will mean a decrease in the amount of plastic used and that would otherwise require recycling.

Heritage

25. Further detailed survey work, by the Biodiversity Officer and Grazing & Landscapes Project Officer, continued in relation to Copped Hall Registered Park and Garden to map and cost proposals for future management based on earlier recommendations from heritage consultants. These proposals, once considered by the Divisional management team would be brought as a report through the Committee process, ahead of any wider consultations and any potential grant applications in 2020 and beyond.
26. At Copped Hall some exploratory checks and excavations of sections of the ha-ha by specialist contractors, working for colleagues in City Surveyors, have also taken place to ascertain the work required for the preservation and repair of this important historic structure in the parkland. A report from City Surveyors on the condition of the ha-ha and the planned restoration work is expected later this year.

Contractors

27. A local contractor completed habitat conservation restoration and fire management control works at Wanstead Flats. The work followed up the mulching work of the Operations Teams and these are described in detail above under the *Biodiversity and nature conservation* section above.

Land Management

Town & Country Planning – Forward Planning – Local Plans

28. February and March involved the attendance of several Hearings at the Examination-in-Public of the Epping Forest District Council (EFDC) Local Plan. Representations were made on a number of matters raised by the Local Plan Inspector. These included discussions on the Green Belt, specific housing allocations around Harlow and green infrastructure (GI) and areas for alternative green spaces. As a result of representations made by your officers and consultants at the Hearings, EFDC officers have now promised that a GI Plan will be forthcoming having originally been left out of the Local Plan.

Town & Country Planning – Development Control

29. A moratorium on determinations of residential housing and other applications remains in place in Epping Forest District as a result of the issues surrounding the SAC (see above). However, a planning submission has been made in relation to Suntrap Field Centre and it has been agreed with the submitting party, London Borough of Waltham Forest, and the determining authority EFDC, that this application would be considered as part of the SAC Mitigation Strategy in recognition of the important contribution and benefits that may be provided by the continuation of the education service at this historic centre.

30. In addition, Natural England has issued advice to EFDC and all other authorities determining planning applications within the 6.2km Zone of Influence around the SAC. This advice includes the London Boroughs of Redbridge and Waltham Forest.

Land Registration

31. Ahead of the Lands Tribunal case for Forest Land at Broomhill Road, Woodford Green, discussions continued with the solicitor of the respondent.
32. In addition the Land Agency, Savills, was contracted by City Surveyors to begin negotiations on a new round of commercial wayleaves that remain to be resolved.

Operations

Habitat Works

33. **Arboricultural Teams** – one of the teams carried out mulching works using a hired machine during March. The priority work involved clearance of the burnt woody debris of broom and birch at Wanstead Heath, the SSSI section of Wanstead Flats. The work involved an extensive area of the SSSI and required careful working to the plans described under *Biodiversity and nature conservation*.
34. Other mulching work involved preparing ground for a London Borough of Culture event and clearing along the historic Bush Wood Lime Avenue to ensure that this feature remains clearly demarcated and protected in the landscape.
35. **Grassland Team** – The Grassland Team have progressed remedial works from the fire restoration plan. Rubble was removed following subsoiling works and the burnt scrub was cut back for fire prevention.

Risk Management Works

36. **Subsidence works** at Newlands Avenue and White Hall Lodge were completed and the cyclical maintenance works continue on subsidence issues.
37. **Tree Safety**: The contractor tree survey is now complete with 519 tree safety jobs identified.
38. The tree safety work programme for 2018/19 is almost complete and continues with work having been completed along the new Forest Boundary at Forest Glade, Highams Park. Work is underway with the local community to resolve a series of the boundary issues along the unadopted highway at Forest Glade.
39. **London Borough of Culture (LBoC)** – Large timber logs, which had been felled as part of the Tree Safety works, were supplied to the London Borough of Waltham Forest for chainsaw calving to be used for the LBoC Sculpture Trail.
40. **Highway Verge Management**: An order has been placed for the contract work of the Highway Verge Management programme for 2019/20. This work is due to start late summer.

Access Works

41. **Queens Green** - Oak bollards have been installed to replace failing chestnut posts along the boundary of Queens Green, High Beach to maintain parking restrictions.
42. **Bury Road Car park** – a new access point in to Bury Road Car Park has been created to allow access to and from the Chingford Golf Course overflow car park. A work programme to improve the overall ambience and function of the site has started with vegetation management and the repainting of the fencing around the café.

Visitor Services

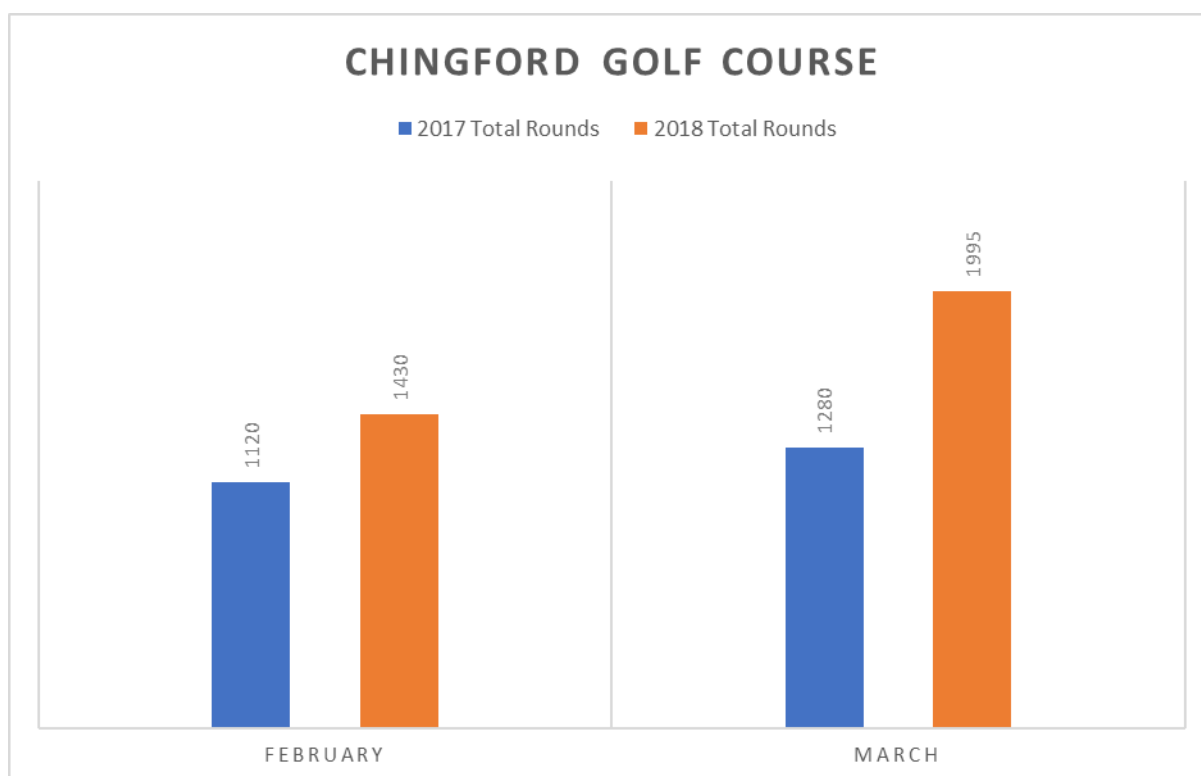
Chingford Golf Course

43. The Head Green Keeper and his team replaced the irrigation boxes on holes 1, 2, 10, 17 & 18 with new gate valves. This will help reduce the amount of water wasted from leaks during the summer period when the irrigation system is in use. All tees were spiked to help reduce compaction and promote better growth. Re-levelling & seeding of the 11th tee has been completed ready for play in May. Work was also carried out to the winter tee on the 18th hole where this was levelled and seeded. All machinery has been serviced and units ground and set up.
44. Total revenue from online sales this period is £4609.00, total revenue from reception was £33,637.48 broken down into

Breakdown of figures from Reception			
	2018/19	2017/18	Difference (+/-)
Green fees:	£27,092.55	£15,173.11	+£11,919.44
Drinks:	£752.90	£236.90	+£516.00
Hire Equipment:	£2578.00	£903.50	+1674.50
Shop Sales:	£1546.65	£1381.50	+164.15
Wanstead:	£1615.27	£572.50	+£1042.77
Horse Riding:	£52.11	NA	+£52.11

45. Compared to last year the total difference in revenue equates to an increase in income of £18,407.47 (93%)
46. Online bookings for the same period last year was £1571.50 compared to £4609.00 this year, making an increase of £3037.50 (193%).
47. Total revenue from reception last year was £18,267.51 compared to £33,637.48 in the current year, an increase amounting to £15,369.97. £52.11 of this year's takings is however from horse riding licences, which was administrated from The View last year.

48. The number of rounds for February & March last year was 2400. This year number of rounds for February & March was 3425. An increase of 1025. (43%)



Wanstead Flats Football

49. The season ended very positively on 5 May) with no outstanding debts from leagues and no public complaints about play related litter this season; which is a testimony to the effectiveness of the new weekend staffing structure. The new booking procedure also worked well allowing efficiencies to be made on the number of changing facilities needing to be open at any one time.
50. Parkrun attracted 2091 runners during the reporting period. This was 570 more than the same reporting period last year.
51. The Chingford League hosted the seventh, and final, event of their winter series at Harrow Road on 9 March. Over 200 runners participated and the post-run homemade bakes sale raised a tasty £380 for charity.

Visitor Numbers

52. Visitor numbers have revived so far this year with the temple re-opening, events held at QEHL and rebranding and new stock at the View possibly accounting for increases. The better weather compared to last year will have also had an influence.

Visitor Numbers	QEHL 2018	2018	View	2018	Temple	2018	High Beach	2018	Total	Total 2018
February	3380 ↑	1563	2125 ↓	2942	286 ↑	131	1654 ↑	1485	7445 ↑	6121

March	1830 ↑	377	3236 ↑	2439	220 ↑	0	1554 ↑	1068	6840 ↑	3884
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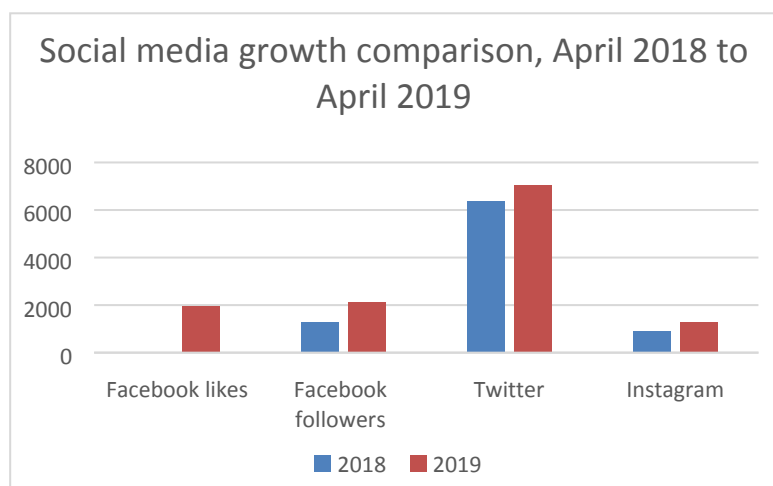
Visitor Services Events

53. London Borough of Waltham Forest Adult Learning Sessions continued with a full room of participants for Nature's Patchwork Purses.
54. There were hundreds of artwork contributions from children and adults as part of the Birds exhibition using new display material.
55. An Arts Council Museum development grant of £1,000 supported a diversity project based on sight impairment with a local Vision group. The Museum and Heritage Manager fed back the useful findings to London Museum Development Officers at a best practice training session.
56. New LED screens have been installed at the View and in the Caddy House at the Golf Course. A £500 museum grant subsidised the cost of the screen at The View. The screens highlight forthcoming events, special offers and suggested areas to visit on a rolling display.

Communication and Information

57. As of 24 April 2019 our social media following is:
 - Twitter followers: 7037 (10.5% increase on year)
 - Facebook followers: 2121 (63% increase on year)
 - Instagram followers: 1287 (45% increase on year)

58. The chart shows a comparison of our figures at the same point in 2018:



59. The Spring edition of 'Forest Focus' magazine was printed and distributed successfully, with articles including promotion of other CoL Open Spaces sites, pressures faced by Forest insects as a result of climate change, an update on London Borough of Culture, together with a digest of what is happening throughout Epping Forest.
60. A new Epping Forest leaflet was printed and will be distributed widely throughout the Epping Forest area.

61. New signage for Wanstead Flats is being designed, with implementation planned this summer.
62. New pop-up banners have been produced providing various Epping Forest awareness messages i.e. ground-nesting birds, fly tipping, fire safety, bluebells, fungi etc. in addition to general 'welcome' displays.
63. New Epping Forest wedding promotional banners have been produced and will be displayed in prominent Epping Forest locations.
64. A new, temporary, welcoming Epping Forest Visitor Centre frontage has been installed at the Visitor Centre in Chingford. The aim of this is to see whether visitor figures increase as a result of a more, bright and welcoming approach.
65. New, numbered and named signs have been produced, at the request of the Forest Keeper team. These are now in place on all gates throughout Epping Forest.

Major incidents

66. There were no major Forest incidents.

Appendices

- None

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