

Committee(s)	Dated:
Epping Forest and Commons	10 03 2020
Subject: Epping Forest - Superintendent's Update for December 2019 to January 2020 (SEF 05/20)	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 December 2019 to January 2020.

Of particular note was the settlement of the Register of Commoners and arrangements for the election of Verderers; two funding awards for local volunteer organisations from the Enjoying Green Spaces and the Natural Environment funding theme; a new collaborative project with scientists from the Centre of Ecology and Hydrology (CEH) and the University of Reading on Acute Oak Decline and its impact on bird breeding numbers; the successful calving of 49 calves during the winter calving season; the effective testing of new GPS-cattle containment collars; continuing progress on positive engagement with the London Borough of Waltham Forest Local Plan and a major incident activation for the partial flooding in late December of Wanstead Park and a series of flood-related incidents across the Forest.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- Note the report.

Main Report

Staff and Volunteers

1. The City Corporation has successfully recruited a Stores person who started on 2 January and a Visitor Experience Manager who commenced work on 6 January.

Verderers

2. The Register of Commoners was settled on 20 January. Nomination meetings were arranged for 24 February. If elections in the Northern and Southern

Forest parishes, were required, arrangements have been made for 26 and 27 February respectively.

Budgets

3. With large changes in income and expenditure due to take place in the next two months, predictions show the Epping Forest local risk revenue budgets to be broadly on target for year end.

Weather

4. December 2019 was a very wet month with 25 days of rain in total, the wettest day was 12 December where 18.8mm of rain fell. The total rainfall for this month was 118.4mm of rain, which is 118.8% above the average of 54.1mm for this time of year.
5. There was 19 days of rain in total during January, with the wettest day being 27 January where 9.4 of rain fell. Total rainfall was 55.8mm, 11.7% below the average total rainfall for this month which is 63.2mm. January soil moisture deficits were close to zero across the whole of the East of England.

Projects

Enjoying Green Spaces and the Natural Environment

6. The Open Spaces Department's "Enjoying Green Spaces and the Natural Environment" funding theme, managed by the Central Grants Unit, awards grants annually, of between £2k and £15k to community, charity and voluntary groups under 4 sub themes.
 - a) Connecting communities with their green spaces
 - b) Improving the conservation value of the green spaces
 - c) Improving our knowledge of the biodiversity of the green spaces
 - d) Improving mental health through the use of green spaces
7. Eighteen submissions were received requesting grants totalling £225,000. A budget of up to £132,000 was available to award. Eleven applications across all divisions have been awarded a total of £120k.

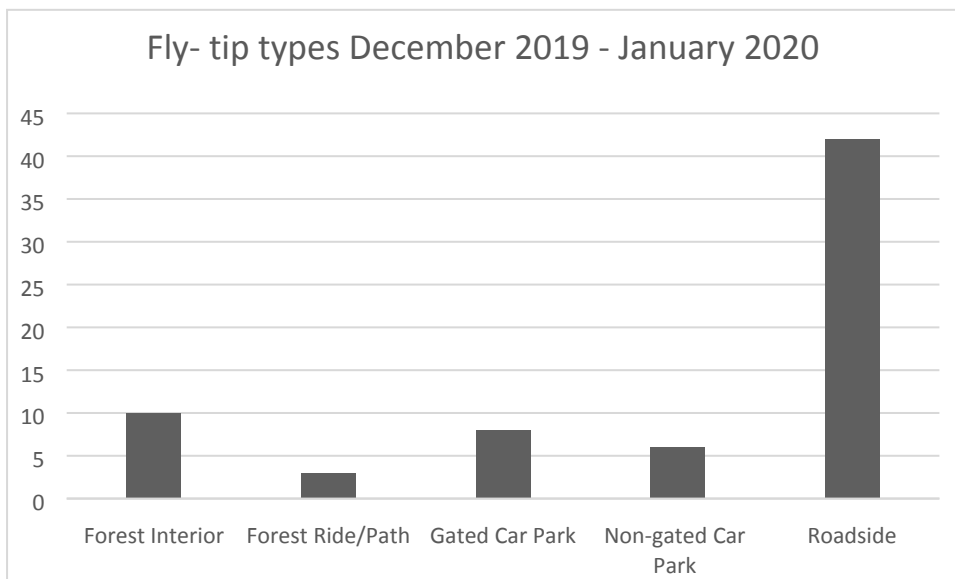
8. Two projects have been funded at Epping Forest as outlined below:

Organisation Name	Purpose of the Grant	Funding Awarded £
Love North Chingford CIC	Regenerating a historic village green, through horticulture, education and outreach.	2,645
Tinder Sticks CIC	Funding for the 'Across the Road' project which provides a targeted programme of Forest health walks, mindfulness sessions, bush craft sessions, conservation tasks and Forest bathing for staff and patients at the Whipps Cross Hospital.	5,176

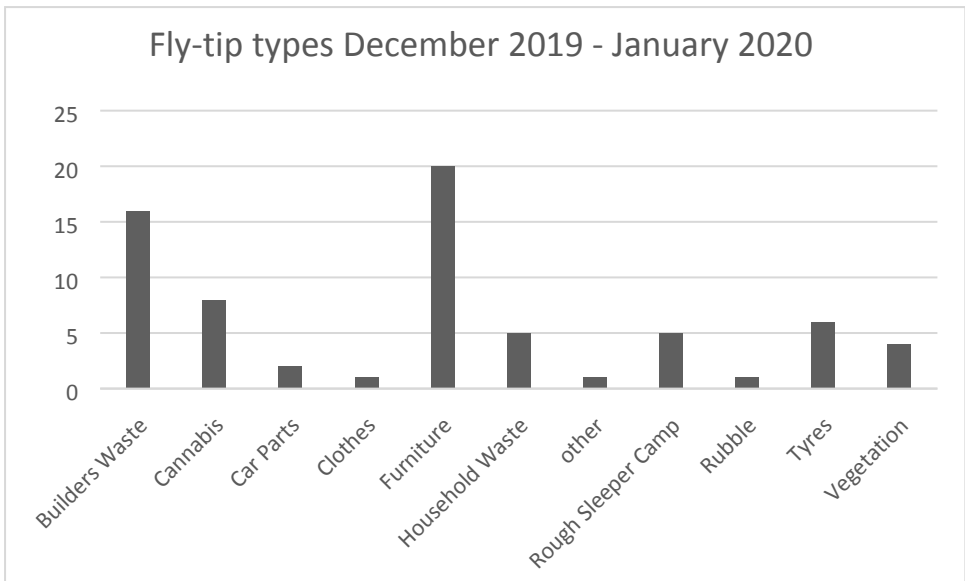
Forest Services

Fly-tipping

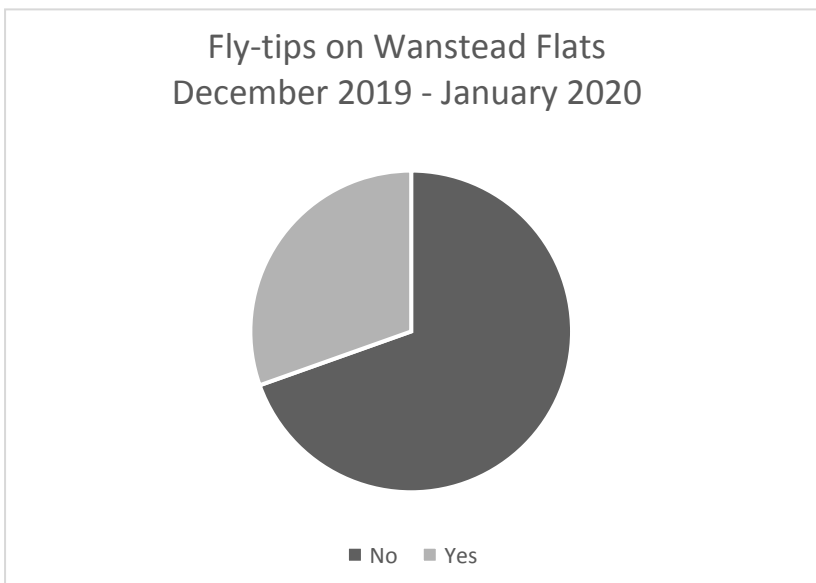
9. During this period there were a total of 69 Fly-tips collected. This period last year there were 28 this is an increase of 146%



10. There was a marked increase of Roadside fly-tipping, comprising 42% of all fly tip types.



11. The fly-tipping of furniture and general builder’s waste, which comprised 20% and 16% respectively where the most common fly tip types. There have however been several recent successful prosecutions for section 22 EPA 1990 as documentation was found within these tips. The conviction of the depositors will hopefully act as a deterrent to others.



12. Fly tipping on Wanstead Flats has further reduced to 27% of all fly-tips.

Enforcement Activity

13. No Environmental Protection Act prosecutions took place during the period under report. One written warning was issued.

Licences

14. A total of 30 licences for events were issued during the two months being reported, which yielded an income of £17,629.63 plus VAT. 27 licences were issued during the same period in 2018/19 (income of £7,604.60).

Unexplained Deaths

15. There have been no Unexplained Deaths over the reporting period.

Rough Sleepers

16. There have been 8 rough sleeper camps identified over this reporting period

Locations of camps;

Date	ID No	Location	Cleared
18/12/2019	(289)	Gilbert Slade	18/12/2019
18/12/2019	(291)	Loughton Golf Course	06/01/2020
19/12/2019	(290)	Bush Wood	09/01/2020
29/12/2019	(292)	Wanstead Flats nr Alexandra Lake	08/01/2020
01/01/2020	(297)	Leyton Flats	Needs clearing
12/01/2020	(293)	Leyton Flats	Needs clearing
26/01/2020	(295)	Wanstead Flats	09/03/2020
27/01/2020	(294)	Bury Wood	21/02/2020

Unauthorised Occupations

17. There have been no traveller incursions over the reporting period.

Dog Incidents

18. During the period there have been 2 reports of dog-related incidents over the period:

- 12/12/2019 Dog attacked an assistance dog in Wanstead Park
- 18/12/2019 Huskies harassing Horse riders in Bury Wood

Deer Vehicle Collisions

19. There were a total of 21 Deer Vehicle Collisions (DVC) during this reporting period.

Heritage; Landscape and Nature Conservation

Biodiversity

20. On 31 January a site meeting was held in the Forest with scientists from the Centre of Ecology and Hydrology (CEH) and the University of Reading. They are continuing work on Acute Oak Decline (AOD) and wish to use the Forest as a site for research into bird behaviour and breeding success in relation to AOD. A research programme was agreed, which will involve the siting of nest boxes across the central areas of the Forest so that the scientists can study the breeding success of several bird species, including Great Tits and Nuthatches.

21. Your officers advised on the areas of trees to be chosen and have provided feedback on the research itself and will continue to work with the scientists throughout the project. The work will be carried out under licence over the next 3 years as part of a PhD studentship and represents a continuation of the Forest's involvement and assistance with scientific research into AOD, one of the most significant tree diseases for the UK's native tree populations.

Agri-environment Schemes

22. The Rural Payments Agency (RPA) continue to process the Countryside Stewardship Scheme grant application and wrote to us in January to confirm that the new deadline for completing the process would be 31st March 2020. If successful the grant would be backdated to 1st January 2020, which is the date any of this year's batch of agreement is due to have started. Given that sites with shared grazing rights, like those at Epping Forest, are considered at the end of any application process and the Forest's application is large, there is some uncertainty as to whether RPA will meet the 31st March deadline.

23. In anticipation of a successful grant application, one of the arborist teams has been trialling the veteran tree operations, with particular focus on re-pollarding the ancient Hornbeam pollards. The team has also trialled the recording software so that all works can be appropriately monitored and reported to the RPA if required during the 10-year agreement period. This trial work has been taking place in two locations in Bury Wood, at Ludgate Plain and near Cuckoo Pits.

Grazing

24. 49 calves were born during this period, with another 7-8 due before the end of the winter calving season.

25. The Grazing and Landscape Project Officer and Stockman have again been assisting the volunteer hedge layers to lay a hedge at the Railway field at Great Gregories. This field can be seen from the Central underground line running from between Epping and Theydon Bois.

26. Uther our senior breeding Longhorn bull died suddenly of a suspected heart attack after being in with the cows for 3 weeks. He has produced over 100 offspring in his 3 years in the herd.

27. New GPS-enabled cattle containment collars have been tested for signal strength on grazing sites across the Forest. It is hoped that this technology would become the successor to the current Invisible fencing wired-based technology. The new collars will be trialled on the cows this spring. Should it prove effective it would enable a much wider range of grazing sites and grazing regimes to be considered and reduce the labour involved with running the system.

Heritage

28. In addition to the wide-ranging external redecorating works to The Temple Folly at Wanstead Park during December and January, works revealed the

serious deterioration of the Portico bearer plate which has been replaced with a new oak plate.

Contractors

29. A site visit was carried out in January at Cow Pond, Leyton Flats with contractors commissioned by *FrogLife* as part of the HLF-funded restoration of this pond for toads. The work on clearing access is due to start in February with the pond excavation work carried out in late summer or autumn this year.

Land Management

Town & Country Planning

30. Epping Forest District Council (EFDC) Local Plan work continued during this period as EFDC seeks to respond to the Inspector's interim findings and requests for further modifications or further research. The Head of Conservation attended a meeting on 12th December in London with Natural England and EFDC to determine the most appropriate air pollution modelling methodology.
31. Following this meeting, in January, Forest data was provided to EFDC's consultants to allow the pollution model to be matched to the distribution of vegetation, including ancient trees, for which the Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and SSSI are notified.
32. In the meantime, your officers were invited to the first duty-to-cooperate meeting with the London Borough of Waltham Forest (LBWF) on 5th December. At this meeting your response to the LBWF Regulation 18 consultation on its Local Plan was discussed and LBWF officers agreed to make a range of changes to the Plan text and policies to better protect the Forest. In addition, they were able to set out timelines for the various supplementary documents that will require scrutiny in the near future, including the all-important Strategic Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA).

Town & Country Planning – Development Control

33. An objection was registered with Epping Forest District Council (EFDC) against a proposal on Forest Land for a 22.5m mobile phone mast by the operator Vodafone (Cornerstone) which had been proposed on Forest Land at the junction of Warren Hill and The High Road, Loughton. This application was refused by EFDC in early January with one of the reasons cited being the protection of the 'natural aspect' of the Forest.
34. The most significant item of development control work related to a detailed objection that was submitted by your officers opposing the proposed *Next Plc* distribution centre at Dowding Way, Waltham Abbey. The hearing that was due in January was postponed due to further work required by *Next* to respond to Highway Agency requests for further details. When the hearing date is finally announced your officers aim to attend to make representations to the EFDC Planning Committee in person. Natural England also made comments in a similar vein to those of your officers in relation to the *Next* transport plan.

35. An objection was registered with Epping Forest District Council for retrospective planning for four ancillary buildings (stables, horse shelter, material store and vet stables) at Albany Stud Farm, Buckhurst Hill. The planning was opposed as a matter of principle, citing that in addition to Green Belt conflicts the construction is within 'Yellow Land' restricting the land to Agricultural and Horticultural users as designated by the Arbitrator's award of 1882 and a restrictive covenant of 1957. Architects representing the owner have conceded that the buildings need to be removed and a timeframe for their demolition and movement to within allowed 'pink land', where broader development is allowed, subject to planning consent will be produced shortly.

Land Registration

36. No further registrations were made during the period. However, the City Corporation did become aware of the registration of a piece of land at Mill House Farm, Bell Common which is believed to be Forest Land. The City Corporation would view this matter as an encroachment case. Epping Forest Officers are now in discussion with the litigation team regarding potential appeal in the first instance to the Land Registry.

Operations

Wood pasture

37. In anticipation of the start of the new Countryside Stewardship Scheme in 2020 the Arborist team undertook a two-week trial to test recording systems and rates of work. There is a more onerous activity recording process that needs to be followed as part of the new CSS program and the trial was testing how best this can be undertaken using existing IT systems.

38. December saw the final area of previously cleared 'wood pasture' land recut with tractor flails. This is part of an annual program of works to control scrub regrowth in wood pasture restoration areas across the Forest. A review of this maintenance work is to be undertaken to better understand the developing maintenance commitment that will be adopted following restoration works.

Leyton Flats

39. The winter project for the grassland team, following the seasonal cessation of grass cutting, has been scrub clearance on the north of Leyton Flats. The work will open up an access corridor linking the roadway improvement by Whipps Cross with Hollow Pond. Much of this land was former acid grassland and the clearance will contribute towards extending this important habitat type over time. The work also complements the Froglife project at the Cow Pond and overall the work in this area will result in a substantial improvement during 2020.

Wanstead Park

40. Major paths in Wanstead Park were substantially cut back during the period using the new multi-blade Quad saw. In particular, the path around the Ornamental waters and the routes leading to it were cleared along with a number of particularly enclosed path sections elsewhere. Further work will be undertaken on this area of work in autumn 2020.

Insurance works

41. During the period three new insurance claims concerning tree root nuisance were received and one public liability claim. The latter is a claim for injury following a rider's horse putting its hoof through a wayleave holder's manhole cover.

Risk Management Works

42. Routine tree safety works arising from the 2019 Survey are still being progressed but are on schedule for completion by the end of March 2020

Access Works

43. In partnership with volunteers from the Higham Park Snedders, a new 50m section of path with a water edge timber 'fishing' platform were installed at Highams Park during the period. Delays in getting the screw piles installed for the decking platform meant this work was later than intended in starting and was then further delayed by the wet weather. This project along with the installation of 13 new orientation signs around Higham Park was completed using funding obtained by the Higham Park Community Interest Company from the City Bridge Trust.

Visitor Services

Events

44. The seasonal Christmas event at Queen Elizabeth's Hunting Lodge, 'A Midwinter Night's Dream Installation' ran from 5 December to 5 January and attracted 1933 visitors (454 adults, 479 children) with a higher than average proportion of first-time and foreign visitors. 76 visitors left overwhelmingly positive comments: 'Love the atmosphere. Please, not enough dressing up for adults. Lovely discovery.': from Madrid. "First time at Lodge. 8 & 7-year-old loved reading about the poisons and all the beautiful exhibits. 'Stunning': from Enfield.
45. The first of a continuing series of forest-inspired adult art and craft Taster Sessions organised by London Borough of Waltham Forest Adult Learning team took place on 14 January at Epping Forest Visitor Centre at Chingford. This session, 'Capturing Winter in Charcoal' was attended by 22 older, and mainly local or wider London-based, participants, at no cost to City of London.

Chingford Golf Course

46. Despite the continuing wet weather the number of visitors increased by 512 rounds or 19% due to weather-related closures of other local courses. To maintain play, ditch clearance work for our main drain was been carried out improving the drainage for the entire course and grounds staff used the robin dagger aerator to help increase the drainage on some of the wetter greens. New irrigation valves have been installed helping reduce the amount of leakage.
47. Significant tree and overgrown vegetation removal works have been carried out on the 10th tee due to reduce anti-social behaviour in this low surveillance location. Th work will also allow the course to operate a two-tee start, which in winter months will allow the course to increase number of peak bookings taken. Tree pruning work was also carried out on the 5th & 7th tees helping to both improve presentation and the growing environment for the turf. Overgrown vegetation removal work was also started outside the flats located next to Jubilee Yard to help with site refurbishment work. Work to improve the staff welfare facilities started in mid-January.
48. The course also suffered some vandalism within the work yard with youths trying to steal a buggy and using it to cause damage to the compound gates.
49. Total revenue from online sales this period is £4,049, total revenue from reception was £32,267.73 broken down into:

Breakdown of figures from Reception			
	2019/20	2018/19	Difference (+/-)
Green fees:	£23,973.84	£19,739.84	+£4,234.00
Drinks:	£650.80	£408.20	+£242.60
Hire Equipment:	£1,121.00	£1,572	-£451
Shop Sales:	£1,651.10	£1,501.30	+£149.80
Wanstead:	£4,605.50	£3,908.40	+£697.10
Horse Riding:	£265.49	£333.20	-£67.71

50. Online bookings for the same period last year was £2,373 compared to £4,049 this year, an increase of £1,676 (71%). Total revenue from reception last year was £27,462.94 compared to £32,267.73 in the current year, an increase amounting to £4,804.79 (17%). Compared to last year the total difference in revenue equates to an increase in income of £6,480.20 (22%). The number of rounds for December & January last year was 2,764. This year number of rounds for December & January was 3,252.

Wanstead Flats

51. Grassroots football play has continued over the wet winter months, with the number of casual bookings his year is up by 10 amounting to an increase in income of £890. This improvement reflects the hard work of staff in keeping the pitches playable when other local pitches were being closed due to the wet

weather. The community Football League also made a 10-week block booking amounting to £3,270.50.

52. Parkrun attracted 2,556 runners in December & January this year. Numbers of runners for last year was 2,574, a decrease of 18 runners, which probably reflects the very poor winter weather.

Visitor Numbers

53. Visitor numbers in December were lower at View and QEHL as no Christmas event was held this year. The Temple opening in December, by contrast was very well attended and supported by activities run by Friends of Wanstead Park. The wet January still received a similar amount of visitors to the previous year.

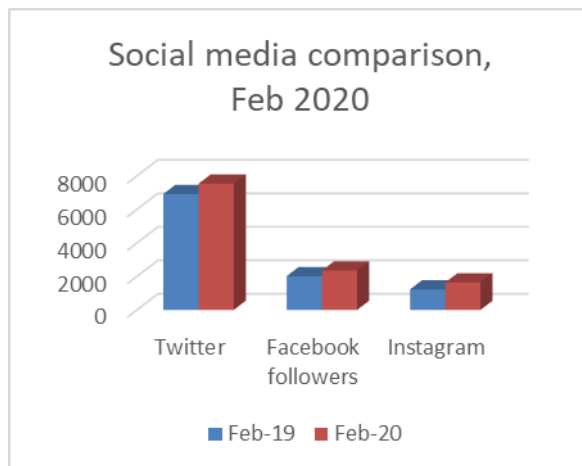
Visitor Numbers	QEHL 2019	2018	View 2019	2018	Temple 2019	2018	High Beach 2019	2018	Total 2019	Total 2018
DEC 19	1219	2473	2330	5488	590	121	1096	1001	5235	9083
JAN 20	1693	1817	3609	3517	159	308	1707	1513	7168	7155

Communication and Information

54. As of February 2020, our social media following is:

- Twitter followers: 7,539 an increase of 9%
- Facebook follows: 2,353 an increase of 17%
- Instagram followers: 1,640, an increase of 34%

55. The chart below shows a comparison of our figures at the same point in 2019:



56. The top tweet for December 2019 with 8,193 impressions provided information on how to spot the Forest's rare lightning trees. January's top tweet, with

6,066 impressions, told the story of the Forest's coal tax posts. The top Instagram Post for December 2019 with 82 likes used imagery of the cold winter light, while in January the top post with 139 likes promoted the relatively mud-free easy access trail as a visitor-destination. The top Facebook post for December 2019, with a reach of 1,234 people, promoted the artist-in-residence's sound Installation, while in January the Forest's New Year message achieved a reach of 950 people.

Major incidents

57. The first two major UK Storms of the 2019/20 winter season – Storm Atiyah 8-9 December - and Storm Brendan 13-14 January - did not adversely affect London and the East of England, and hence Epping Forest.

58. A major incident was declared for 22 December when the River Roding broke its banks and flooded parts of Wanstead Park. There were also a series of localised floods at Staples Hill and Powell's Forest where overwhelmed highways drainage schemes contributed to property damage. Otherwise all Flood Alleviation Schemes (FAS) were in safe operation, and with the exception of the Wanstead Lark cascade, all Large Raised Reservoirs (LRRs), and precautionarily-monitored Small Raised Reservoirs (SRRs) operated within safety tolerances.

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