

Committee(s)	Dated:
Epping Forest and Commons	20 04 2020
Subject: Epping Forest - Superintendent's Update for February to April 2020 (SEF 13/20)	Public
Report of: Colin Buttery, Director of Open Spaces	For Information
Report author: Paul Thomson – Superintendent of Epping Forest	

Summary

The purpose of this report is to summarise the Epping Forest Division's activities across February to April 2020.

Of particular note and sadness was the passing of former Verderer Michael Davies, one of the longest-serving Members in recent times.

In addition, key points of remark for this period included a 54.2% rise in fly-tips associated with the closure of local authority household waste site; continued progress regarding the protection of the Special area of Conservation (SAC) through developing Local Plans; completion of the engineering assessment of the Wanstead lakes cascade and widespread changes to the management and presentation of the Forest following close liaison with the Essex and Metropolitan Police Forces with regard to social distancing measures introduced under the COVID-19 national health emergency.

Recommendation

Members are asked to:

- Note the report.

Main Report

Staff and Volunteers

1. Two new Schools Officers have been recruited for Epping Forest as part of the Directorate's Learning Team. . A staff member has volunteered to support pan-London Mortuary Management as part of standing mutual aid arrangements. It is with deep regret that your Committee is informed of the death of Honorary Reeve Michael Davies. Michael served as an Epping Forest Verderer for 25 years from 1984 to 2009, representing the northern parishes. In addition to this important role, he provided wise counsel on grazing management, assisting with its reintroduction to the northern parts of the Forest in 1995 at the heathland site of Long Running. At this time he used his own small herd of English Longhorn, a breed which he championed as an influential member of the English Longhorn Society.

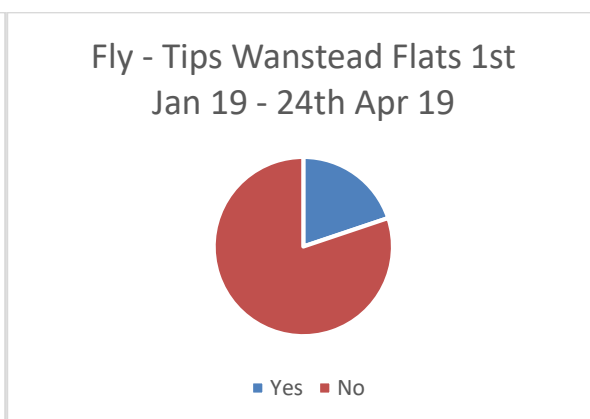
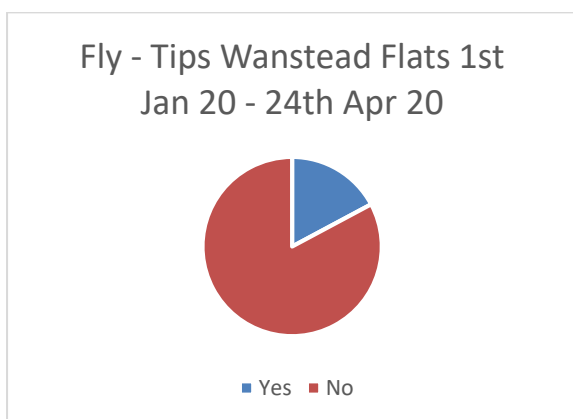
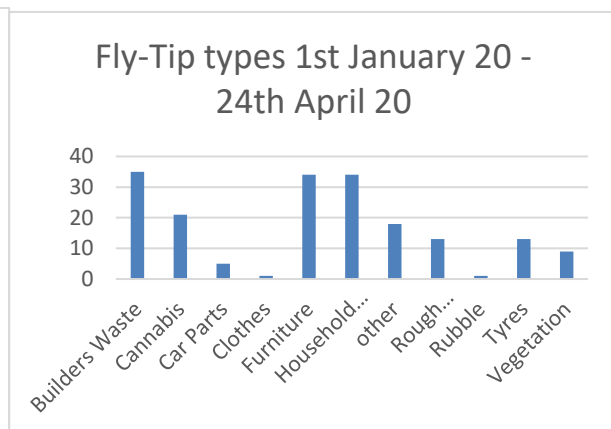
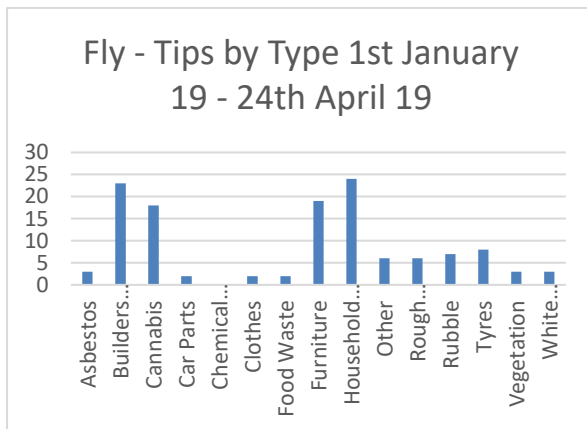
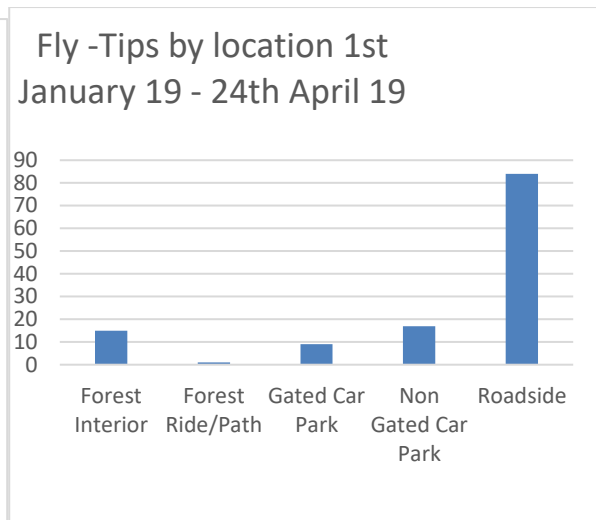
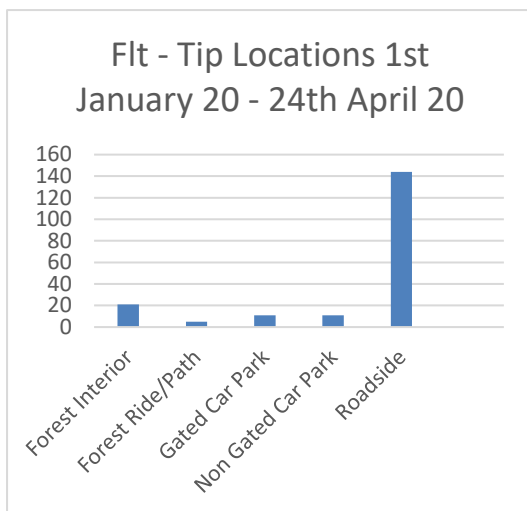
2. Michael did this in his own time, taking no payment for this work and it ensured the recovery of this largest of Epping Forest's heathlands. With the arrival of Bovine Spongiform Encephalitis (BSE), and loss of other commoners' cattle after 1996, Michael's cattle provided the only link with the Forest's unbroken history of grazing. This was a crucial demonstration of their importance to the Forest and set a benchmark for the wider re-establishment of grazing.
3. Following this success, extensive grazing was established seven years later in 2002, when Michael began grazing the areas of Chingford and Fairmead, under a grazing contract which allowed him to increase the herd size and employ a dedicated herdsman. He carried this work on until March 2011, even after retiring from Committee, having ensured the physical re-establishment of this ancient tradition whilst also achieving broad acceptance amongst Forest visitors.
4. Having helped with initial trials of some bespoke GPS-based invisible fencing (IF) in 2007/08, it was Michael who alerted us to a technical report on an experimental French system in 2010. This led, after his retirement, to the opening of a new chapter in the re-establishment of Forest-wide grazing and provides an important legacy to his pioneering conservation work.

Budgets

5. At end of the 2019/20 financial year the Epping Forest Local Risk budgets were £22,000 overspent, with £100,000 of work on Lodge Refurbishment and Golf Course Welfare Facilities being spent from Forest Fund. In addition, a further £36,000 of carry forward from the overall Open Spaces underspend has been approved for items at Epping Forest which could not be realised in-year due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Forest Services

6. This year to date there has been a total of 192 Fly Tips. Over the same period in 2019 there were 126, this is an increase of 54.2% increase over the same period and is undoubtedly associated with the closure of local authority household waste sites



Enforcement Activity

7. 7 Environmental Protection Act prosecutions took place during the period under report. Three conditional cautions totalling £850.

Date	Defendant Name	Offence Accepted 33:Deposit 34:Duty of Care	Court Name	Outcome	Costs Recovered
13.02.2020	HOAD	S34	Chelmsford	For Trial 02.07.20	
13.02.2020	ESSID	S33	Chelmsford	Guilty	Costs £502 Fine £320 V/S £32
13.02.2020	COUTO	S33	Chelmsford	Guilty	Costs £760 Comp: £120 V/S £85 300 Hrs Com Service
13.02.2020	NIAZ	S34	Chelmsford	Guilty	Costs £720 Comp £1605 V/S £150
19.02.2020	MARKU	S33	Chelmsford	Trial 30.07.20	
15.04.2020	GURLEA	S33	Thames	Guilty	Costs £900 Fine £1000 Comp £705 V/S £100
Total Costs Awarded to Epping Forest (Including Compensation)			£5312		
Total Fine			£1320		
Total Victim/Surcharge			£367		
Total			£6999		

Licences

11. A total of 48 licences for events were issued during the months being reported, which yielded an income of £20,946.50 plus VAT. 74 licences were issued during the same period in 2018/19 (income of £61,143.80).

Unexplained Deaths

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

Rough Sleepers

9. Since the 1 January 2020 to date there have been a total of 31 Rough Sleeper camps on Epping Forest.
10. There are only two remaining camps left to clear, one of which still has an occupant who has been passed to Street Link.

Unauthorised Occupations

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

Dog Incidents

12. During the period there have been 6 reports of dog-related incidents over the period, mostly associated with large groups of dogs which are not under suitable control.
 - 07/01/2020 Dog walker with 2 Huskies, a Black and white dog and a chow, allowed dogs to circle a horse and distressing the rider. Bury Wood
 - 10/01/2020 Individual dog harassed by 7 dogs. Knighton Woods
 - 03/02/2020 Dog walker with 6/8 dogs all off lead allowed the dogs to harass another walker's dog and was rude when asked to put them on leads. Bury Wood
 - 04/02/2020 Two dog walkers walking 5 dogs in allowed a dalmatian to take small child's sandwich. Wanstead Park
 - 05/02/2020 Dog walker walking six large dogs all off leads. leading to complaints by other dog walkers
 - 11/02/2020 Dog walker with 6 dogs and only one on lead allowed one of the dogs to chase a young puppy. Wanstead Park

Deer Vehicle Collisions

13. There was a total of 17 Deer Vehicle Collisions (DVC) during this reporting period.
 - 9 along A105 Epping New Road
 - 2 Honey Lane/ Woodredon
 - 1 Theydon Road
 - 1 Piecing Hill
 - 2 unknown locations
 - 1 Coppice Row
 - 1 Coopersale and North Weald

Heritage; Landscape and Nature Conservation

Biodiversity

12. Herons have returned for a second year to Connaught Water to nest and more birds were involved in nest-building this year. The success of the nest is not yet clear but it is possible that this might make for the beginnings of a new Heronry in the Forest after many decades of absence as a breeding bird. However, it may depend on the success of the large heronry at Walthamstow Wetlands and whether this continues to "export" young birds looking for new nesting opportunities.

13. April saw the arrival of many of the migrant warblers to the Forest. However, although Willow Warbler numbers are holding up at Trueloves, at Chingford Plain only two territories have been occupied down from 5 in 2011 and 9 in 1995. This is a species in decline in the south-east as a result of climate change and its main foothold is now the new willow coppice at Trueloves. Management work will continue to try to provide the new, cooler spaces that this species may need in the next decade by adapting management of the willow scrub that is key to its continued presence.
14. Although a single Nightingale has been recorded and a small number of Cuckoos this year, at present there is no likelihood of the re-establishment of either species in the Forest in the Forest itself. However, the Cuckoo remains a breeding bird in the diverse wider countryside provided by the Buffer Lands and Cobbins Brook Valley.

Agri-environment Schemes

15. Countryside Stewardship Scheme grant paperwork was received at last on 1 May from the Rural Payments Agency (RPA), after 4 months delay. This is currently being checked and reviewed ahead of sign-off by the Director and return to RPA before the end of the May. During the long delay, close liaison was maintained with Natural England and a series of very late queries from the RPA were answered.
16. In addition, a trial was organised for the proposed Hornbeam pollarding that would form a central part of the conservation work over the next 10 years. Using new technology for finding trees and recording operations, the trial made excellent progress with conservation work completed on 80 ancient trees and their surrounding area of wood-pasture.

Grazing

17. Following veterinary checks and pregnancy testing of the herd in April, the cattle were all moved out into the Buffer Lands grasslands at Gt Gregories and Warlies. Training with the invisible fencing system has begun at the former site for the first of the cows to go out at Chingford Plain in mid-May, after the Bank Holiday weekend.
18. To continue the improvement of the quality of the herd a number of cows were removed from the herd and sold during the winter. These cattle have now been replaced with the arrival of 8 new cows from a renowned Longhorn herd from Rousham in Oxfordshire (amongst the top 50 herds in the UK as scored by the Longhorn Society).

Heritage

19. Some further work was commissioned from heritage consultants to pull together all the different documents for Knighton Wood so that a heritage action plan can be formulated for key aspects of the site.

Contractors

20. The early contractor work has involved the spraying of the Rhododendron regrowth at The Warren Plantation to ensure that the *Phytophthora ramorum* does not sporulate from these plants. This remains a critical part of the control work to reduce the chances of this disease taking hold in the ancient beech

wood pasture. The contractor used special biosecurity procedures in carrying out the work.

21. In addition, another local contractor carried out some supplementary seeding of the Whipps Cross Meadow. This is on the land that was returned to the Forest after the completion of the highway junction improvements by the London Borough of Waltham Forest (LBWF) under the *mini-Holland* scheme. The meadow should look at its best this June and will be visible to those taking local walks in the Forest as well as others passing by on the Whipps Cross Road.
22. The *Froglife* Project at Cow Pond, just north of Leyton Flats, also began during this period with the removal of some overhanging trees and the cutting of an access track through from the Snaresbrook Road-old Lido entrance to the Pond. The work on the pond, aimed at restoring its open water and enhancing it for Toads in particular, is due to start in late August/September. Taken together with the new Whipps Cross Meadow creation described above and some work to open up the oak wood-pasture around Hollow Ponds by the in-house Operations Team, this should see biodiversity gains and an improved landscape for visitors to Leyton Flats.

Land Management

Town & Country Planning – Local Plans

23. The local authorities' actions for the SAC Mitigation project restarted again during this period with a series of significant meetings and publication of documents. In mid-February, the London Boroughs within the Epping Forest SAC Zone of Influence (for recreation/visitors) came together at the invitation of the LBWF. As part of developing its Local Plan LBWF was concerned to bring parties together and for the first time the Greater London Authority attended. This proved a useful step forward and a dialogue with the GLA has now been established by your officers as a result.
24. Following on immediately from this a larger meeting took place hosted by Epping Forest District Council (EFDC) on 24 February. This was only the second meeting of the Oversight Group in two years and followed the completion of the analysis of the 2019 Visitor Survey of the Forest coordinated by EFDC as part of evidence gathering for its Local Plan mitigation package for the SAC. The Visitor Survey was discussed, and an outline Green Infrastructure Strategy was introduced. It was agreed that the London authorities, including the GLA, alongside Essex County Council would now attend this forum for all future SAC Mitigation development work. Importantly, a further meeting is scheduled for 5 June.
25. EFDC consulted on the preliminary draft of its Green Infrastructure Strategy with various stakeholders over 10 days in late February. Your officers provided a detailed response to the 2 March deadline and this has subsequently been welcomed by the EFDC Local Plan team who have found the comments helpful in developing the details of their Strategy. The 15 April EFDC Cabinet

meeting approved the draft GIU and the 6-week consultation is planned to begin in early June.

26. Air Quality (AQ) mitigation plans were proposed in April and a Teams meeting by video conference was held by EFDC on 28 April to discuss these. In attendance were their consultants *Aecom*, Natural England and the Head of Conservation. The discussions were fruitful, and the mitigation proposals were considered a big step forward. Further work is to be carried out on the AQ modelling as there remain many scenarios to be tested. Fortunately, all the critical traffic and habitat data was gathered before lockdown interrupted the fieldwork. Nonetheless the analysis for the Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA) has been delayed and further consultation is planned for June but the final HRA is not expected now until October. EFDC has written to the Planning Inspector with the adjusted timetable proposals.
27. Finally, the Chairman's letter approved at March Committee was sent to all competent local authorities including ECC and GLA. EFDC's Cabinet member for the Local Plan has already responded to the Chairman welcoming our comments and agreeing that there is a constructive way forward for the SAC Mitigation proposals both related to recreation and Air Quality.

Town & Country Planning – Development Control

28. Two planning objections with comments were submitted by the Land Agent & Planning Officer to Epping Forest District Council
- 47 Forest View Rd, Loughton: replacement of single dwelling with two dwellings, objected on grounds of no consideration of Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) & Special Area of Conservation (SAC) or developments position within Impact Risk Zone
 - Potters Close, York Hill, Loughton: development in garden of existing property (this was the appeal), objected on the same grounds as above

Land Registration

29. The City Solicitor and Comptroller has been instructed to object to the registration of land, believed to be part of the original arbitrator's award at a location on Bell Common, Epping.

Operations

Leyton Flats

30. Car parks at Hollow Ponds were closed off by the Operations team as part of the COVID-19 response. The car park has been set aside for hospital staff at Whipps Cross. The newly sown grass area, that forms part of the new cycleway improvement scheme and will be returned to the Forest, has had a temporary fence put around it by operations team staff to protect the growing grass and wildflower plants.

Wanstead Park

31. An engineering assessment of the large raised reservoirs in the park has been received by the City. This is assessment forms part of the response to the LRRs being classified as 'High Risk' by the Environment Agency under the Flood and Water Management Act 2010. The Assistant Director Engineering is in the process of querying aspects of the findings and the implications of the report are still to be fully considered by the Wanstead Park Ponds Project Board and thence your Committee.
32. The onset of the COVID-19 crisis and managing people in a Social Distancing world became even more of an anxiety as the Bluebells at the park started to come into flower. As one of the year's highlights in the park with large numbers of people visiting in a short period of time, it was a concern as to how this could be managed safely. A one-way system was trialled with periodic monitoring by staff and overall visitors appeared to observe and respect the social distance protocols, ensuring visitors could enjoy the stunning spring show.

Insurance works

33. Tree root nuisance claims: During the reporting period we have had nine new claims for tree root related subsidence. Staff are still investigating and challenging these during the COVID lockdown process. The dry summers of the last two years, it is expected will result in an increase in claims for tree root related subsidence over the next few years and that certainly seems to be the case on the first quarter of the years response.
34. During the period there have had five claims for damages ranging from Ivy damaging a wall that it is growing on, a smashed car window from a stone jettisoned out from a mower to alligator teeth puncturing tyres. Work on responding to these is still being undertaken during lockdown period.

Risk Management Works

35. COVID-10 works have been main area of risk management activity for the Forest Operations team working alongside the Keepers, Contractors and local Police. The main actions completed are:
 - I. Site preparation works for the mortuary facility on Manor Flats, grass cutting, new entrance and gate installation
 - II. Contract rat control around Manor Flats which is ongoing
 - III. Staff and contractor work to install barriers to close all car parks across the Forest and to deter parking on road verges. The rapid support of local contractor Tim Matthews was also a significant help in closing off road verge parking which he undertook at cost as part support for the City's COVID response
 - IV. Seating areas across the Forest were closed using barriers to deter people from breaking social distance guidelines

30. Tree safety: Routine tree safety works have been temporarily suspended. Emergency tree works are still being implemented to respond to trees that are an imminent threat to life.
31. Reservoir management: Large raised reservoirs are being monitored as standard during the COVID-19 crisis and operational staff are still undertaking regular clearance of spillways.
32. Highway verges: The Highway verge contract has been sent to the term contractor for pricing for this year's program. Staff are also undertaking road verge cutting during the COVID-19 crisis with the verges through Woodford Green having their first cut complete. Additional road verge work is scheduled for May.
33. Oak Processionary month: Planning works to undertake the first caterpillar spraying were completed during the period and the first of two initial sprayings completed on Monday 27 April. Rain stopped the second initial spray which will be undertaken in early May with the two later secondary applications.

Access Works

34. Short grass areas through Woodford Green and in Loughton have been cut as normal to help provide accessible local green space. Work on the Greens through Loughton is still ongoing. Grounds maintenance at the three visitor centres is still being progressed by Operations team staff.

Visitor Services

36. A double exhibition in the View, Visitor Centre, on early 20th Century photographs taken by Walthamstow's William Vincent focussed on his series of Epping Forest nesting birds, The Joy of Eggs. A second exhibition, The Way We Were, looked at his social history photographs of local farming scenes in the Living Room. The latter invited the public to make themselves comfortable in the armchairs provided and have a go at drawing the Forest in a range of monochromes to experience the richness of the original sepia photography. The exhibitions will be retained for visitors to enjoy after the site reopens after lockdown. Stuffed birds, eggs and books from the museum collection were on display to support both exhibitions. Visitor Services are creating a short video based on the exhibition to promote the photographs online during lockdown.
37. From the first of April, the Visitor Experience Assistants team moved to a new rota pattern, to reduce the reliance on casual staffing. The practical implementation of this has been delayed due to the current closure of the visitor centre. However, the team are undertaking alternative work at home or around the Forest on these new hour patterns.

Events

38. Museum of London Archaeology (MOLA), delivered two (free) outreach sessions promoting Layers of London at The Temple on 5 March. Layers of London is a map-based history website developed by the Institute of Historical Research creating a social history resource of historic maps and user

contributed memories and information. A second day of workshops at the Epping Forest Visitor Centre at Chingford was postponed owing to lockdown.

Learning

39. A total of 19 sessions involved 384 children and 51 adults over the reporting period.

Q4	Jan-20	Feb-20	Mar-20	Total
EF No. Sessions	4	9	6	19
EF No. Students	120	157	107	384
EF No. Adults	8	23	20	51

*

Chingford Golf Course

40. Installation of the new irrigation holding tank has been completed. Tree work was carried out in February & March to help improve teeing areas with more light and air movement. The wet weather allowed staff to service all machinery ready for start of season requirements. In total, 25 irrigation valves have been replaced. All greens have now been fitted with new Bluetooth valves allowing watering tasks to be carried out automatically once set, rather than manually by staff. Overgrown vegetation and pond clearance work was carried out on the 10th tee. Tee stones were dug out, cleaned out and replaced to improve course presentation. A new path has been created alongside the ditch from the 2nd hole to the 3rd tee. Ditch clearance work and overgrown vegetation removal work around the practice field has been carried out along with removing the unsightly piles of earth and new posts put in. Greens were solid tined and top dressed & roped off to reduce any damage since lock down started and the course was closed on 24 March.

41. Total revenue from online sales February, March (2019/20) & April (2020/21) is £3919, total revenue from reception was £26,167.12 broken down into:

Breakdown of figures from Reception			
	2019/20	2018/19	Difference (+/-)
Green fees:	£20,525.32	£114,750.92	-£94,225.60
Drinks:	£557.30	£1356.40	-£799.10
Hire Equipment:	£1176.50	£4904	-£3727.50
Shop Sales:	£1214.75	£3512.40	-£2297.65
Wanstead:	£2618	£1702.27	£915.73
Horse Riding:	£75.55	£8612.45	-£8536.90

42. Online bookings for the same period last year was £9511.50 compared to £3919 this year, a decrease increase of £5592.50 (- 59%). Total revenue from reception for February, March (2018/19) & April (2019/20) was £134,850.44 compared to £26,167.12 for February, March (2019/20) & April (2020/21), a decrease amounting to £108,686.32 (-81%). Compared to last year the total difference in revenue equates to a decrease in income of £114,275.82 (-79%). The number of rounds for February, March (2018/19) & April (2019/20) was 5980. This year number of rounds for February, March (2019/20) & April (2020/21) was 2490. A decrease of 3490 (-58%), reflects decreased play & revenue due to course closing due to COVID-19 on Tuesday 24 March and preceded by very wet weather.

43. Golf season tickets and Horse-riding licences renewals have been suspended for 2020/21 at present due to the restrictions in place due to COVID-19.

Wanstead Flats

44. Grassroots football went ahead as normal for February and start of March with normal cutting and line marking duties required along with litter picking. Football stopped from the weekend of 21 & 22 March due to COVID-19, subsequently all leagues have been cancelled and finished for the season. Leagues that have booked will be issued at 6-week refund and individual teams will be refunded unused games in credit. Normal cutting tasks have been carried out in April with higher demand for litter picking the flats due to number of walkers during the lockdown. Staff have also been assisting with the Forest Keeper team to help with other areas.

45. Parkrun attracted 1,568 runners for February, March (2018/19) & April (2019/20) compared to 1,568 For February, March (2019/20) & April (2020/21). Parkrun stopped on 15 March due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Visitor Numbers

46. Visitor Centres closed to the public on 15 March. Initially this was for a two-day period to allow a deep clean and re-sealing of the ground floor flag stones. However, the development and changes in government advice meant that the buildings did not re-open on the 17 March as scheduled and have remained formally closed from this date.

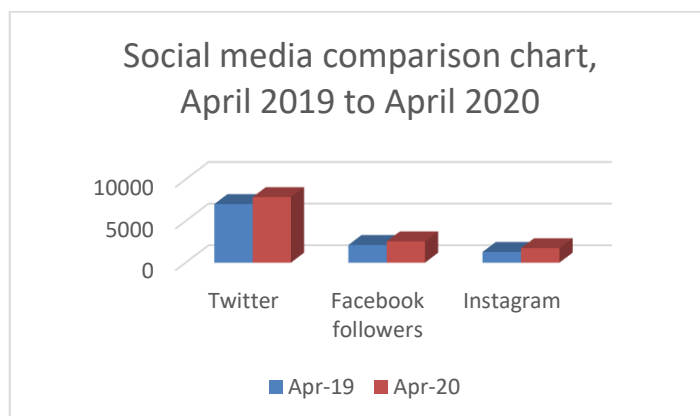
Visitor Numbers	QEHL 2020	2019	View 2020	2019	Temple 2020	2019	High Beach 2020	2019	Total 2020	Total 2019
February	1051	3380	2383	2125	77	286	TBC	TBC	3511	5791
April	0	2418	0	4135	0	1031	0	TBC	0	7584

Communication and Information

47. As of 28 April 2020, our social media following is:

- Twitter followers: 7870 (11.9% increase)
- Facebook followers: 2553 (20.4% increase)
- Instagram followers: 1740 (35.2% increase)

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



49. Spring Forest Focus was printed and distributed electronically. Sadly, with the lockdown implemented shortly after we received the printed editions, printed distribution was not successful this season and this was obviously beyond our control. Moving forward during the lockdown and social distancing measures caused by COVID-19 we will be producing a monthly Forest Focus newsletter via Mailchimp to be distributed electronically. The aim of this is to keep the information relevant and current, due to the fast-moving nature of communications during this difficult time. The April edition has received positive feedback to date with one reader calling it an 'excellent initiative'.

Major incidents – COVID-19 National Health Emergency

50. Following initial Government guidance on 16 March, followed by the introduction of more formal measures on 23 March, and working to an established Emergency and Business Resilience Plan, the City Corporation's Open Spaces Department has been obliged to move at pace to implement Government SD guidance, temporarily closing from 23 March areas in Epping Forest where social distancing could not be safely practised, including visitor centres, public toilets, play facilities and combined seating areas. Despite the closures of car parks at a number of popular London and Essex sites, Epping Forest continued to offer car parking across its 52 car parks.
51. The City Corporation's tenanted cafes and restaurants all closed in line with Government guidance over the following week. The Use Class A5 'Hot Food Takeaway' Tea Huts, which were permitted to remain open under Government exception, largely closed in solidarity with the national emergency, leaving only the Log Cabin at Leyton Flats remaining open. The City Corporation's City Surveyor continues to develop advice for Service Committees on the approach

to rent deferrals and waivers, alongside modelling the impact on Local Risk budgets.

52. Following daily appraisals of the public use of the Forest, joint Police checkpoint data from 5 April indicated that a large number of long-distance journeys were being made to access the Forest contrary to Government guidance. Discussions ahead of the Easter Bank Holiday weekend between Essex and Metropolitan Police Services and the Chairman & Deputy Chairman, saw an urgency decision made to keep the Forest open to nearby residents travelling on public transport, bike or by foot, but to reluctantly close all remaining car parks to restrict large social gatherings and particularly to manage the pressures posed by unnecessary long distance journeys.

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