

<b>Committee(s):</b>	<b>Date(s):</b>
Epping Forest & Commons	26 January 2016
<b>Subject:</b> Superintendent's Update for October to December 2015	<b>Public</b>
<b>Report of:</b> Superintendent of Epping Forest <b>SEF 01/16</b>	<b>For Information</b>

### Summary

This purpose of this report is to summarise the Epping Forest Division's activities across October to December 2015.

Of particular note was an improvement in dissolved oxygen levels in major Forest water bodies; a positive 'duty of care' prosecution on fly tipping; the annual closure of the Forest to open riding; reduced water levels in the Wanstead Pond cascade due to dam repairs and containment of Floating Pennywort; and a major incident which saw a ruptured water main under Fairmead Road create a 'geyser' effect on 2<sup>nd</sup> January that has flooded sections of the Forest and damaged a significant stretch of public highway.

### Recommendation

Members are asked:

- Note this report.

### Main Report

#### Staff

1. The Head Keeper retired 20 November 2015, with the new Head Keeper Martin Newnham having started in post on 11<sup>th</sup> January 2016. Following retirements and staff turnover, the Head of Visitor Service is holding a series of vacancies including two Golf Course Green keepers; two part-time Information and Learning Assistants and a football groundkeeper/custodian in anticipation of the revision of some roles.
2. The Directorate-based Learning Team has successfully recruited a Head of Learning. Interviews will now be held during January for a Volunteer Development Officer; site-based Schools staff and peripatetic interpreters.

#### Volunteering

3. October and November 2015 saw 1,510 and 1,194 volunteer hours recorded across the Forest – this is down by about 11.04% on the same time last year, but as many volunteers provide their data in long arrears the numbers are likely to be more similar than this indicates.

## Major Projects

4. **Baldwins and Birch Hall Park Ponds** - Work has been complemented on repainting the Millennium Bridge which has now freed Department of Built Environment staff to complete the scoping assessment on the two leaking dams.
5. **Land Registration Project** - Progress on the registration of title has been provided to the Property Investment Board. The Comptroller and City Solicitor has issued further instructions to Queens Counsel for additional advice to support the scrutiny of the Working Group. Work is underway to commission a local historian to research the development history of various disputed boundary areas.
6. **Grazing Expansion Scheme** - the cattle finished the grazing of the Forest during the first week of November. They were removed from the last Forest site at Fairmead to the Buffer Lands ahead of the end of the commoners' grazing season on 15<sup>th</sup> November. All the access gates in the perimeter fence-line and at the cattle grid bypass gates were opened a few days later and will remain open until the cattle return in spring 2016.
7. All the Forest cattle were moved to the Great Gregories winter housing in mid-December. All the cattle have been TB tested this January and the herd was given the all-clear by the vets on 7th January. The City Commons herd of Sussex cattle arrives on 14th January with around 20 Sussex to be accommodated there until April.
8. Retrospective planning consent is being sought for an addition to the cattle pens that allows them to be washed down at the end of the season and which also helps contain water more conveniently during periods of heavy rain. This is a drainage sump between the two outside pens which at times may contain some slurry when animals are present. Environment Agency officers have agreed that it enhances the management of the pens but have also advised that it would need to be classified as a slurry storage pit. As such it requires planning consent. The sump is small containing only about 10.5m<sup>3</sup> of liquid. Local residents have been consulted ahead of the application of which the local authority is aware.

## Wanstead Park – Conceptual Options and Cost Plan.

9. The Head of Operations and the Wanstead Park Project Manager met up with sports tenants of the Wanstead Sports Grounds Ltd (WSGL) to discuss the proposed Conceptual Options Plan. It was evident that they had not been as fully informed of the project as we had assumed. Overall there was good support for the Plan's aims however there were a number of the long term aspirations that gave cause for concern, such as relocating the tennis courts. The discussion also highlighted that the sports heritage of Wanstead Park had not been fully recognised in the conceptual options plan. The sports tenants and WSGL agreed to feedback back on their concerns as part of the Conceptual Plan development process for the end of January 2016. In addition they agreed to prepare text to help prepare a sports heritage aspect to the conceptual options plan.

## Wanstead Park Cascade

### Heronry Pond Concrete Repairs

10. Water levels on the Heronry have now been reduced to a level where essential repair works on concrete panels cracked through tree growth can be undertaken. The Built Environment Team have met with contractors to assess the work and it is hoped these will be undertaken in February 2016 with the lake levels returned to normal for the end of Spring 2016. The low water levels have been a source of adverse comment through letters and press coverage in recent months reflecting the considerable interest taken in the management of Wanstead Park by local people
11. **Perch Pond** – The containment of the highly invasive Floating Pennywort in Perch Pond is continuing, which is contributing to reduced water levels in Ornamental Pond. Work is almost complete on the clearance of lakeside scrub which will enhance the appearance of the lake and improve access for contractors scheduled to remove and treat the Pennywort.
12. **Abstraction Licence for 2016-19** – An application to the Environment Agency was completed for the renewal of the existing 3 year abstraction licence to supply part of the Wanstead Cascade with 290,000 cubic metres of water each year from aquifer. Previous local licensing has been replaced with a more stringent national approval scheme.

### Consultations

13. **Inovem™ Inclusionware** - No new public consultations were launched during October – December 2015. Consultees who responded to the initial consultation on the Open Spaces Bill were provided with access to the final Parliamentary Bill to facilitate further feedback.

### Forest Services

14. **Licences** - A total of 59 licences were issued during the two months being reported, which yielded an income of £12,393.63 plus VAT. 45 licences were issued during the same period in 2014, which yielded an income of £16,093.33, a decrease on last year.
15. **Fly Tipping** – Fly tips for the year totalled 665 (1.9 per day), compared to 506 (1.39 per day) for the equivalent period in 2014. This represents a 31% increase on the number of fly tips for the previous year. Fly tips of builder's rubbish make up the majority of the waste tipped which is heavy in weight and requires more trips to the tip for disposal.
16. **Rough Sleepers** – Compared to last year camp numbers have dropped from 53 in 2014 to 40 in 2015 a decrease of 25%. This could be due to several factors; the weather was much wetter throughout the year which would deter those 'choosing' to camp out. Also some sites identified as 'regularly used' have been crown lifted or cleared of scrub. Partnership working co-ordinated by the keeper team in the south has also resulted in a drop of rough sleepers who have been moved off or helped with more suitable accommodation.
17. **Enforcement Activity** - One prosecution was heard during the period under report. Shehzad Khan was convicted under the EPA Act Section 1a, at Chelmsford Magistrates Court. He was fined £420.00, Costs £405.00 Court Costs £145 and victim surcharge £42.00. This prosecution represents an intensification of Epping Forest's prosecution regime with the action taken

under 'indirect' 'duty of care' responsibilities rather direct responsibility for fly tipping. Forest Keepers also successfully used new evidence presentation techniques provided by recent training with a Queens Counsel specialising in fly tipping matters.

18. **Open Riding** – The Open Riding season closed on 2 November reflecting rainfall levels and Forest floor conditions in October.
19. **Fireworks** – In July the London Borough of Newham made their usual application to hold a firework display on Wanstead Flats on Sunday 1 November 2015. All preparations went ahead on site including the installation of platforms but unfortunately due to dense fog the event had to be cancelled. Newham paid £8,250 for the site and it was agreed no deposit would be taken but all damage/reparation would be settled post event. No refunds were made. Newham have not set a date for 2016, but presumably will make their usual application sometime in the summer.

### **Heritage; Landscape and Nature Conservation**

20. **Basic Payment Scheme (BPS)** - The Rural Payment Agency (RPA) are now paying UK farmers for their BPS claims. Payment has not been received yet, which will be around £93,000. The farming press reports that the RPA aims to pay the 'vast majority' by the end of January 2016.
21. **Birch Hall Park Conservation Statement** - The consultants undertook further fieldwork within the study area and are preparing the Conservation Statement.
22. **SAC Conservation Status and Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) Favourable condition** –The Natural England (NE) Conservation Adviser for Epping Forest made a visit in November with a brief reconnaissance of Compartment 17, which covers part of High Beach. One of the concerns for this compartment has been the prevalence of Sycamore and, as a result, the Conservation Section undertook a survey of Sycamore in this compartment. The results will be passed to Natural England and demonstrate that Sycamore cover, both mature trees and young saplings, is less extensive than anticipated by NE. The condition of this compartment will be re-assessed in early 2016 on a return visit by Natural England encompassing the new survey results.
23. Other non-native species are, of course, giving rise to concern and amongst these one of the most immediate potential problems is present by Oak Processionary Moth (OPM). Monitoring for this species by Epping Forest officers at various locations in the southern part of the Forest began in 2014 in coordination with the Forestry Commission's overall assessment of the spread of OPM across London. In late summer 2015 the monitoring was repeated at the same 4 locations using pheromone lures to attract any flying adult moths. Fewer were caught in 2015 than in 2014, four as opposed to six. In 2015 one moth was caught on the edge of City of London Cemetery and one on Leyton Flats with two caught in August at Walthamstow Forest,

### **Town and Country Planning**

24. **EFDC – Land adjacent to Warren Hill, Loughton** - development of a 34-space car park and dropping-off area for use by Oaklands School. The proposed car park would be situated within the bounds of Epping Forest Arbitration Land. This land benefits from a restrictive covenant which states

“that no building shall ever be placed thereon”. The fact that this land was protected in perpetuity in this way demonstrates its importance in preserving the Forest’s amenity and its “buffering” of the Forest landscape. We consider that this amenity should continue to be protected. Our objection is made on the basis that this application, if granted, would allow the intensification of use of land adjacent to the Forest, increasing traffic noise and pollution, and if enacted, would soon encourage demands for improvements and upgrades to both the surfacing and ancillary infrastructure, such as lighting.

25. **EFDC – 16 String Jack P.H, Theydon Bois** – There was a split vote at the District Development Management Committee and the application was considered at an Extraordinary Council Meeting on 23/11/2015. Permission for 11 flats was refused by 20 votes to 15. A previous application for 13 flats went to appeal and the decision is outstanding.
26. **EFDC – Knolly’s Nursery** - at an Extraordinary Council Meeting on 23/11/2015, Councillors voted to grant approval, against the Planning Officer’s recommendation and subject to a legal agreement, to build 79 new homes and a children’s day nursery in the Green Belt on the site of Knollys Nursery to the north east of Waltham Abbey, Essex. No formal decision has been finalised.



## Operations

27. **Hypoxia Incidents** – Major work has continued to aerate lakes affected by Hypoxia (oxygen depletion). Oxygen levels at Highams Park have recovered from the late summer low of 7% to an average over the lake of 64% where levels should be expected to be 70% for this period. Increased rainfall and wind speeds, together with lower water temperatures, should encourage sufficient oxygen diffusion for the rest of the winter.
28. The woodland teams have been focussed on delivering our wood-pasture restoration commitment with works during October and November undertaken at Lords Bushes, Long Running and the Pillow Mounds. The annual program of grass cutting was completed successfully with a number of additional tasks undertaken on areas where the warm weather led to continued grass growth on amenity areas such as off Nursery Road in Loughton. The contractor grass cutting program was also finished on schedule and we were very pleased with the high quality of the work undertaken at Trueloves and hope to extend the

contract for the next couple years with the supplier. Different contractors also completed stock fencing the Copped Hall boundary alongside the M25.

## **Visitor Services**

### **Events**

29. The Pumpkin Carving event at October Half Term was again successful, with over 70 participants taking part raising over £250 on pumpkin sales alone.
30. Seasonal December events included a ticketed evening event; Christmas Greenery aimed at adults, offering the opportunity to make Christmas wreaths utilising forest greenery and a visit to the candlelit Hunting Lodge. This was a sell-out event with 50 tickets resulting in a profit £450 for the evening. Evaluation comments were 100% positive: 'Excellent start to Christmas', 'Really enjoyable evening'.
31. A Christmas exhibition at Queen Elizabeth's Hunting Lodge about Queen Elizabeth I's New Year's Gifts ran for three weeks into December and the New Year.
32. We held the very popular Christmas Grotto weekend on 12/13 December based at The Queen Elizabeth's Hunting Lodge & The View, attracting over 450 participants who paid to see Father Christmas in the lodge, generating a ticketed income of over £5,800. Other elements to the event, such as Reindeer and a wintry woodland trail, as well as a brass band also attracted a large crowd, with around 1,000 people attending daily.
33. Our third Wedding of 2015 using Christmas greenery from our two Christmas events, was the perfect setting for this intimate Christmas celebration, and generated an income of £585 for the 2 hour booking.

### **Communication and Information**

34. Social media continues to go from strength to strength. The Twitter account now has over 4,300 followers and was recently a very powerful tool in an attempt to identify the culprit of a fly tip, with our followers proving to be extremely keen to assist us in sharing the photograph and request for information. The Facebook page now has over 170 likes with the potential to grow substantially. Recently we promoted the festive grotto event on the Facebook page and even with just over 100 likes at that time the photograph was shared and the promotion reached 3,690 people, which demonstrates how well this medium can work for us. Our following is also growing on Instagram. Positive feedback was received for our winter edition of Forest Focus and great attention was given to distributing this edition in the local area. The spring edition of Forest Focus will be available in March. We have had some very positive articles in the local press, including the Essex Life publications. The website continues to be updated and refreshed regularly.

### **Visitor Centres**

35. This year the Visitor centres reduced their opening times across the Christmas period, however peak days such as Boxing Day and New Year's Day were open to the public. The Visitor Centre at High Beach has remained open Thursday – Sunday closing at 3pm for winter months.

## **Wanstead Flats Sports**

36. **2015/16 Season** – Football bookings continue to increase achieving financial year target of £66,000, and the projected end of year income could reach £80,000, an increase of £13,000 on previous year. By Christmas 2015, The Flats had hosted 1,863 football matches (and 6 Lacrosse matches) which is an increase of over 500 on the previous season.
37. **Community Payback Scheme** - In partnership with London Probation continues to go well and have delivered 2,300 community payback hours collecting 1,500 bags of rubbish since June 2015 in addition to a wide variety of cleaning and maintenance tasks every Monday at Harrow Road.
38. **Media** - Two music videos were shot at Wanstead Flats. Singer Lucy Rose's 'Till the End' which reached No 9 in UK charts, and a Real Lies video is currently in post-production. Wanstead Flats also featured on the Sky Sports Fantasy Football Club with ex England and Spurs footballer Ledley King reflecting on the importance of The Flats in his football development.

## **Major incidents**

39. **Fairmead Road Water Main:** A 500mm water main that runs under Fairmead Rd burst on 2nd January creating what could only be described as a high pressure geyser. Floodwater from the burst has created local flooding around the local ditch and stream network and has severely damaged Fairmead Road spreading eroded road material and accelerating pothole damage. Fairmead Road will remain closed from the top of the hill at the 'turnaround car parks' down to the gates at 'Fairmead Oak' car park until further notice. According to Essex Highways, Thames Water have up to 3 months to make good the road and any damage caused by the burst water main. At the present time Essex Highways cannot confirm that the road is safe to use due to any undercutting of the road surface which may have occurred.

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