

|                                                                                                                       |                        |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|
| <b>Committee(s):</b>                                                                                                  | <b>Date(s):</b>        |
| Epping Forest & Commons                                                                                               | 7 March 2016           |
| <b>Subject:</b><br>Superintendent's Update – January – February 2016                                                  | <b>Public</b>          |
| <b>Report of:</b><br>Superintendent of Epping Forest (SEF 10/16)                                                      | <b>For Information</b> |
| <b>Summary</b>                                                                                                        |                        |
| This purpose of this report is to summarise the Epping Forest Division's activities across January and February 2016. |                        |
| <b>Recommendation</b>                                                                                                 |                        |
| Members are asked to note this report.                                                                                |                        |

### Staff and Volunteers

1. A new Litter Picker started work in January.
2. January and February 2016 saw 1026.5 and 967.5 volunteer hours recorded across the Forest – this is down by about 18.95% 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.

### Epping Forest Projects

3. **Open Spaces Act** – The Bill is going through House of Commons first before consideration in the House of Lords. The second reading on the Commons was on 2 February and was not debated, so the Bill will now proceed to its first Committee stage. Two petitions have been received, one from The Kennel Club and another from an individual petitioner.

### Forest Services

4. **Weather** – Storms Frank; Gertrude; Henry and Imogen have only resulted in minor damage to standing trees in Epping Forest. Epping Forest received 170% of the average January rainfall which has led to very wet conditions and localised flooding throughout the Forest.
5. **Fly tipping** - Fly tips for the current period being reported in 2015 were 84 compared to 63 in the same period in 2016, giving an approximate 20% decrease.
6. **Rough Sleepers** - The figures for the rough sleepers for the first two months in 2016 were 17, compared to 4 for a similar period in 2015,, an increase of over 400%, challenging the progressive falls recorded in 2015. The increased numbers possibly reflect the unusually mild temperatures; increases in

homelessness recorded by London =’s homeless link and increases in rough sleeper identification through the novel use of Thermal Imaging Devices.

7. **Enforcement Activity** - No prosecutions were heard during the period under report.
8. **Licences** - A total of 23 licences were issued during the two months being reported, which yielded an income of £2,496.50 plus VAT. 27 licences were issued during the same period in 2015 - income 2015 of £5,701 if which was down on last year. This may be due to the weather and ground conditions. Last year was busy with filming but enquiries are much reduced, including student filming.

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

### **Basic Payment Scheme (BPS)**

9. The Basic Payment Scheme grant of £95,743.78 was received at the beginning of February. The Rural Payments Agency (RPA) has given clear guidance that businesses which are sufficiently linked will be required to merge their business identification. Work is being undertaken prepare the paperwork to submit to the RPA for them assess if we are sufficiently linked to the Burnham Beeches & Stoke Common and City Commons ‘businesses’ which also claim BPS. The consequences for merging will be one Single Business Identifier for all three sites, a single channel for administration of the grants and all three sites submitting joint future BPS claim forms. Furthermore, payment will be made in one amount, and penalties for breach of the rules of BPS (Cross Compliance) will be taken off this joint payment.

### **Birch Hall Park Conservation Statement**

10. These are both being prepared by Place Services, part of Essex County Council’s consultancy arm. These will be ready by the end of March 2016.

### **Environment Agency water abstraction licences**

11. Applications for renewing the abstraction licences that feed Jubilee Pond and Heronry Pond were submitted. Furthermore, an enquiry application was also submitted to the Environment Agency to explore the possibility of abstraction from the River Roding in winter time (November – February).

## **Land Management**

12. Request received from Orion Harriers Running Club to extend the changing room facility at Jubilee Retreat. Proposal to include welfare facilities for adjacent Chingford Golf Course staff. (Report attached)

## **Town and Country Planning**

13. EFDC – Epping Long Green – removal of industrial building, loose box and hard-standing; redevelopment of previously developed land to provide four residential dwellings. Conflicts with Green Belt policies. Access to the site is across Forest Land.

14. EFDC – Pipers Farm, Lippitts Hill – Demolition of equestrian buildings – three residential dwellings. Conflicts with Green Belt policies.
15. EFDC – Land at Warren Hill, Loughton – 34 space car park for Oaklands School – decision outstanding.
16. LBWF – St Margaret’s, Woodford Green – Four residential dwellings – Access across Forest land – decision outstanding.

## **Operations**

17. The Operations team undertook a further two weeks trial of a forestry mulcher machine. In contrast with the trial of the summer 2015, the teams focused on work to clear holly on wood-pasture restoration sites. As part of the review process we arranged for a range of staff to see the machine operating and the nature of the finish it produced, which is different from the established work procedures. These discussions along with an inspection visit by Natural England’s Supervising officer have helped to confirm that the forestry mulcher will be an important tool for managing scrub in future years.
18. We hired a specially adapted open topped double decker bus for week to lift the crowns of trees along highways within the Forest. The bus hire was surprising cheap and proved a cost effective way of meeting our commitments for managing highway vegetation. Reports from the arborists working on the bus confirmed that there were many branches showing damage from high topped vehicles hitting them. In this phase of works we avoided working in the congestion charge zone where extra charges apply however in 2016/17 a second phase of activity will see roads in this area being worked.

## **Visitor Services**

### **Communication and Information**

19. As of 4 Feb our social media following is;
  - Twitter followers: 4,370
  - Facebook likes: 211
  - Instagram followers: 37 (recently launched)
20. The winter edition of Forest Focus was far more widely distributed including local rail / underground stations and hospitals. We hope to increase distribution with the spring edition (due out week of 8 February). Now that we no longer directly post Forest Focus the take up of our email Mailchimp version has increased with 665 people on the mailing list. 21 people to date have opted to pay for the postage costs to have it mailed directly.
21. An advert placed in Primary Times has also gained us some valuable, free editorial coverage. Wanstead Village Directory and the Essex Life publications, (January), included the Superintendent’s article on the Open Spaces Bill and Epping Forest history. An Epping Forest (High Beach) walk is to be featured in a forthcoming Waitrose Weekend publication, including an introduction by Julia Bradbury.

22. The website continues to be improved and updated and a google AdWords campaign will drive visitors to our weddings page.
23. More work is needed on physically mapping paths and detail within the Forest before updating the official map. We are therefore doing a further print run of the current map to keep us in stock until the new version is produced later in the year.

### **Family Learning Events**

24. **Scavenger Bags** - Over January, we've created what we're calling Scavenger Bags, a kit of half a dozen activities aimed at families to encourage them to get out into the Forest to play, discover and interact together. The kits include one or two art activities which children can do at home or at one of our Centres. We will aim to produce about 12 of them a year with seasonal and event-themed activities.
25. Each bag will be priced at £2.50 (inc VAT) to include a relevant little gift of coloured pencils, ribbon, magnifying glass or similar as a tempter and so that parents can relax knowing children have everything in the bag they need. We are allowing up to £1 per bag to cover cost of bags and gifts. We are developing this idea to aide engagement, income generation, learning and as a good news story to promote on social media and in the press.
26. We are discussing exploring developing these in partnership with Friends of Epping Forest for sale at High Beach, possible customised bags for children's parties at an extra charge, and whether it would be cost effective to have promotional printing with website and social media details on one side of the bag.
27. A Chingford Times reporter was enthusiastic about the project and came to interview and photograph bags at The View.

### **Half term events:**

28. **February Forest Fun 16-18 February** - The three-day half term event looks to have attracted about 200-250 people each day with vigorous winter activities in the Hunting Lodge, View and outside, including traditional skipping, hoop races, impromptu juggling workshops, tug-of-war and an opportunity for children to build twig towers.
29. Story telling sessions and a Tudor toddler inside activity area centred around our children's book about the Hunting lodge, 'The King's Coming' and attracted between 15-20 toddlers with adults for each session at 11.00 and 3.30pm each day.
30. The mix of lively physical activities with a heritage spin has proved very successful in engaging and attracting participation of adults as well as children, with older grandparents helping as rope turners and more adventurous adults digging out their skipping prowess and playground skipping songs. This mix of activities has the advantage that it can be run without extra staffing. It's likely we'll build on this theme to offer a two-day skipping festival for February half term 2017.

31. **Laser Tag in the Forest 16-18 February** - Run by Silver Showdown, this was a 5v5 event that took place at Barn Hoppett. All sessions were run alongside our existing activities and drew in a large crowd, in excess of 50 paying participants daily. £5 per session (20 Minutes) or £10 for 3 sessions (1 hour). This activity drew in a very wide and diverse community, who had never visited the forest before and were unaware of The Hunting Lodge and The View.
32. Loughton Festival have applied for a license to run a similar event during their festival period in May, using the same contact.

### **Wanstead Flats Football**

33. Football Bookings continue to go well with income at £76,000 (against a revised target of £7,000) and up until end of January we have hosted 2299 football matches and 8 Lacrosse Matches. Summer Bookings for football tournaments and school sports days have begun in earnest. 30<sup>th</sup> January saw the 250<sup>th</sup> WFPF parkrun which was celebrated by 125 runners, this event has now seen nearly 2,650 runners running over 95,000km.

### **Major incidents**

34. A single event was recorded by the rupture of a 500mm high pressure water main under Fairmead Road operated by Thames Water. Water from the main has damaged Fairmead Road, washed away Forest topsoil and flooded parts of Fairmead Plain. The repair and repressurisation of the water main has involved large excavations in the Forest and further ruptures in the ageing iron main. One rupture resulted in the closure of the Hill Wood car park and consequently Mins Tea Hut. Discussions with Thames Water regarding compensation and repair are ongoing.

**Paul Thomson**

**Superintendent of Epping Forest**

T: 0208 532 1010

Email: paul.thomson@cityoflondon.gov.uk