

Committee(s)	Dated:
Epping Forest and Commons	09 May 2016
Subject: Superintendent's Update for February and March 2016 (SEF 21/16)	Public
Report of: Superintendent of Epping Forest	For Information
Report author: Paul Thomson – Epping Forest	

Summary

This purpose of this report is to summarise the Epping Forest Division's activities across February and March 2016.

Of particular note is the successful renewal of abstraction licences for Jubilee Pond and the Wanstead Cascade; the installation of new entrances and gates for Genesis Slade and Jacks Hill car parks; major progress on works to London Plane Trees affected by massaria disease; the improved circulation of a revamped Forest Focus magazine and the activation of the Forest's Emergency Plan to deal with World War II unexploded ordnance found at Lower Forest.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- Note the report.

Main Report

Staff and Volunteers

1. The former role of Senior Forest Keeper (South) was made redundant in April 2016. As part of the same redundancies the former role of Volunteer Development Officer has been included within the Forest Keeper team. A new litter picker was recruited to cover the southern area. The role of Wayleaves Support Officer has been extended for four months to support the valuation of commercial wayleaves and a survey of forest accesses.
2. A new temporary post of Chingford Golf Course Golf Course Assistant has been created to help manage the golf booking service. A Golf Manager has been appointed and is expected to commence work at the beginning of May. and the part-time Manger will manage all golf course operations as well as the green keeping team.
3. Temporary appointments have also been made for a pavilion caretaker and groundsman for Wanstead Flats. To maintain cover in the Forest Keeper team four casual Forest Keeper contracts have also been awarded.

4. The months of February and March 2016 saw 1,335 and 1,219 volunteer hours respectively recorded across the Forest. This is down by about 11.3% on the same period last year, but as many volunteers provide their data in long arrears the numbers are likely to be similar to previous years.
5. The end-of-year figures for volunteers for 2015 /16 totals 15,328 hours. This figure is down on the 2014/15 total by 4.68%; however, these figures do not include the substantial hours provided by the Friends of Epping Forest (FoEF); Epping Forest Centenary Trust (EFCT) or the Epping Forest Conservation Volunteers (EFCV).

Epping Forest Projects

Open Spaces Act

6. We are awaiting details of the next phase of the Parliamentary process where the text of the Bill will be open to scrutiny by select committee, particularly in light of the two petitions received. A further clause is being considered to reflect new Powers made available to waste collection authorities by The Unauthorised Deposit of Waste (Fixed Penalties) Regulations 2016.

Forest Services

Closed Riding Season

7. The Forest continued to receive above average rainfall for February and March, leaving the Forest floor in a very damp condition. Officers are continuing to evaluate the capacity of the Forest to support Open Riding which is unlikely to commence until May 2016.

Fly tipping

8. Fly tips for the current period being reported in 2016 were 53 compared to 86 in the same period in 2015, giving an approximate 45% decrease. This reduction may reflect the very wet weather in February and increased night time closure of car parks.

Rough Sleepers

9. The figures for rough sleepers found on the Forest for this period in 2016 were 7, compared to 4 in 2015, an increase of over 75%. This trend is reflected across neighbouring local authorities.

Enforcement Activity

10. No prosecutions were heard during February and March. Forest Keepers are due to undertake five prosecutions on 21 April 2016, with a further 3 pending to be laid with the court and two awaiting authorisation from Head Forest Keeper.

Licences

11. A total of 45 licences were issued during February and March, which yielded an income of £4,451.50 plus VAT. This represents an increase of 36% compared to the 33 licences which were issued during the same period in 2015 providing an income 2015 of £4,093.50.

Heritage; Landscape and Nature Conservation

Basic Payment Scheme (BPS)

12. Preparations for the BPS application have started. There seems to be continuing problems with the Rural Payment Agency's (RPA) online system. Epping, City Commons and Burnham Beeches are working closely together through this application process. In addition, documentation to merge the administration for these three sites with the RPA has been finalised. This means that the RPA will consider the three sites as one 'business' within the City of London.

Environment Agency water abstraction licences

13. Following negotiation by your Officers licences for Jubilee Pond and Heronry Pond were re-issued under the same abstraction volumes but with increased durations, The licence for Heronry Pond is a 6 year licence term ending in 2022, while the licence for Jubilee Pond is a 9 year term ending in 2025. Further renewal of the Heronry Pond licence is reliant on identifying solutions to various hydrological issues at Wanstead Park and communicating these to the Environment Agency. The Environment Agency has agreed to consider a further river abstraction licence for Ornamental Water with officers seeking external technical advice to support an application.

Lake management guidance

14. Guidance on managing vegetation and silt at the two Knighton ponds and managing water quality at Highams Park lake have been produced by a consultancy, funded through City Surveyor's Additional Works Programme (AWP) budget. The report for Highams Park Lake is an options appraisal of various methodologies for minimising silt build up and maintaining good water oxygen levels. The report for Knighton provides useful guidance on how to stabilise the banks of the ponds and manage the marginal plant communities which are gradually overtaking the pond.

Air quality meetings and research

15. The Environmental Stewardship Officer attended The Essex Natural Capital, Human Health & Pollution Workshop run by Essex County Council which examined the pollution issues in Essex and the relationship to the health and societal benefits of nature. Good contacts were made with the University of Essex and Essex County Council's consultancy arm Place Services who have developed a Natural Capital Asset Check which is designed for taking natural capital into account when considering the impacts of developments. Contact was also made with the Head of Commissioning for Sustainable Essex Protection, and as a result City of London Officers together with Essex Highways, and Epping Forest District Council are meeting up with the University of Middlesex who may be able to undertake research on air quality and roads pollution, hopefully on the Forest itself.

Land Management

16. Following approval by your Committee, the 18 month licence has been issued for fee of £40,000 to Kier Construction for use of a Forest track Wayleave at Woodford Green to enable extension of Woodford County High School.

Town and Country Planning

17. Officers commented on 4 Planning Applications during the period in question. Key decisions included:
 - a. Epping Forest District Council (EFDC) - Land at Warren Hill, Loughton – 34 space car park for Oaklands School – REFUSED
 - b. EFDC – Land at Mill House Farm, Bell Common, Epping – 10 x residential dwellings for the over 55's – decision outstanding.
 - c. London Borough of Waltham Forest (LBWF) – St Margaret's, Woodford Green – four residential dwellings – Access across Forest Land – decision outstanding.

Operations

18. Contractors have completed works to Genesis Slade and Jack's Hill – North and South - car parks providing macadam entrance aprons to manage wear to previous ground reinforcement tiles, together with gating to minimise night time fly tipping.

Tree safety Management

19. Work has been completed on the 104 London Plane trees identified as having Massaria-related problems in the last six monthly surveys. This is roughly a quarter of the London Plane trees owned by the City of London at Epping Forest. 30 of the 43 High priority tree safety jobs identified by our surveyors have been completed within the 3 month timeframe. The remaining tasks largely require traffic management and this work is being scheduled.

Jubilee Pond

20. A seven metre section of the eroded bank on the pond has been reinforced using large glacial boulders to form the revetment by the Estate works team. This is a trial technique to test an approach to reinforcement where we are unable to use techniques involving posts in the ground. We will monitor the repair over the coming months to test its effectiveness at preventing bank erosion. Material cost was around £300/m and we have approximately 80m requiring work to reinforce areas of vulnerable bank.
21. The Arborist teams have worked with the Happy Loppers volunteers to produce brushwood faggots to use to protect the eroded bank on the islands. The faggots will help reduce the pressure by wildfowl on the pond bank and allow vegetation to establish and hopefully provide long-term natural production on the pond edge. The faggots will be installed in May.

Wood pasture

22. Work has continued with small scale works on wood pasture restoration areas. The Biodiversity Officer has been able to identify areas not sensitive to nesting bird issues allowing us to continue work to achieve this challenging Higher Level Scheme grant target.

Grass Cutting

23. Spring grass cutting works have been delayed by slow grass growth associated with continued low night time temperatures and waterlogging. Work has begun cutting grass on the more amenity focussed areas with Woodford and Buckhurst Greens being worked first. Both these areas were removed from the Rural Payments Scheme in 2015/16 which allows the previously approved work programme to provide some areas of shorter grass can be implemented fully.

Visitor Services

Communication and Information

24. As of 20 April 2016 our social media following is:
 - Twitter followers: 4636
 - Facebook likes: 335
 - Instagram followers: 56
25. Very positive press coverage with Epping Forest walk article, presented by Julia Bradbury, in the spring edition of Waitrose Garden magazine.
26. Easter advertisement in Primary Times publication successful.
27. The spring edition of the Forest Focus magazine was distributed widely and received positive feedback for design and content.
28. Trip Advisor profiles for Epping Forest and all Visitor Centres have now been claimed as City of London facilities, and these are now being monitored.
29. The Google My Business (GMB) profile for Wanstead Flats was claimed in February, which now completes all GMB profiles for Epping Forest allowing accurate information to be added for all sites.
30. The website received a high quantity of visits for February and March, despite the increased activity with GMB profiles.

Chingford Golf Course

31. The contract with the Golf Professional ended on 22nd March. A Golf Assistant is assisting the Sports Co-ordinator maintain the continuity of the golf course booking service with green fees are being collected at the Caddie House. The Tee House Café has closed along with the retail outlet that were both run by the Golf Professional. The upstairs flat has also been vacated. Public consultation on the tender for the café operation will commence shortly, with a view to appointing an operator before the end of the summer.

Half term events:

32. February Half Term: Tuesday 16 Feb – Thursday 18 Feb

Visitor Services ran a very successful '*February Forest Fun*'; activities included Tudor story time at the lodge, plus a number of traditional skipping activities for all the family. Attended by over 800 people during the course of the week.

Laser Tag:

33. During the February half term, Silver Showdown, worked in partnership with the CoL to pilot 'Laser Tag in the Forest'. This was an extremely popular event bringing new user groups to the forest. Sessions were 30 minutes long and priced at £5 per session with over 80 participants per day.

Forest Survival Camp: 20 February

34. The first of the new bush craft and forest survival courses was run by the Epping Forest Keeper Unit. The price was £22 per child, which included an accompanying adult. The 15 session places were quick to sell out and children were taught the basic survival skills such as camp building, fire lighting, whittling and camp fire cooking.

Easter Half Term Activities: Sunday 27 March & Monday 28 March

35. **Easter Fun:** Activities were free of charge with a £2 fee for crafts and a hardboiled egg, for our annual Egg rolling competition. New additions for 2016 saw a forest Easter trail as well as a building trail and a chance to meet the Easter Bunny! 550 people attended the shorter session on Easter Sunday and on the Monday 720 people attended and hard boiled eggs were sold out by 3pm! Just under £900 was made over the weekend.

Shakespeare & the Forest: 30 March

36. Elizabethan dressing up for all the family, kitchen displays and activities linked to our exhibition and Shakespearean language and lore.
37. The new 'Scavenger Bags' were launched at the View in February. These provide a range of fun activities to encourage families to identify local nature and interesting facts about the Forest. Bags cost £2.50 and come with a multitude of craft activities inside for the whole family.

Wanstead Flats Football

38. The Flats showed an improved financial performance of £80,200 (£67,685) against a target of £76000 with reduced expenditure of £182,914 (£198,260) against an original Budget of £198000 which resulted in a reduced subsidy of £102,714 (£130,575). Last weekend (17th April) saw the 3000th match of the season.

Major incidents

39. An ammunition case containing six live Projector, Infantry, Anti-Tank (PIAT) projectiles was found by walkers in Lower Forest on 29th March. The

discovery prompted the evacuation of the Forest under Unexploded Ordnance (UXO) protocols, while the rounds were destroyed by an Army Bomb Disposal team in a nearby field at Woodside. The Police have launched an appeal to find who left explosives in the Forest.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – ‘None’

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