

<b>Committee(s)</b>	<b>Dated:</b>
Epping Forest and Commons	12 September 2016
<b>Subject:</b> Epping Forest - Superintendent's Update for June and July 2016	<b>Public</b>
<b>Report of:</b> Superintendent of Epping Forest (SEF 34/16)	<b>For Information</b>
<b>Report author:</b> Paul Thomson – Epping Forest	

### Summary

This purpose of this report is to summarise the Epping Forest Division's activities across June and July 2016. Of particular note was that Epping Forest has received the Green Flag and Green Heritage Awards for a 14<sup>th</sup> consecutive year. Invasive alien species also featured prominently in this period. On the plus side was the work undertaken to clear Floating Pennywort from Perch Pond at Wanstead Park, which made significant inroads in dealing with this problem vegetation. On the other hand, however, the arrival of Ash Dieback was confirmed conclusively.

There were two significant incursions by travellers during this period which were dealt with successfully. In the meantime rough sleeping and fly-tipping were reduced compared to the same period last year. Local Plans continue to exercise a lot of officer time as well and this work is set to increase as new consultations are now in train.

### Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- Note the report.

### Main Report

#### Staff and Volunteers

1. The Sports Co-ordinator, Grasslands Team Leader, a Forest Keeper and two Litter Pickers left during the reporting period. Recruitment for the Forest Keeper and Litter pickers is progressing and staff are covering the Grassland Team Leaders post while the role is reviewed. The role of Wayleaves Support Officer has been extended a further four months to support the valuation of commercial wayleaves and a survey of forest accesses.

## Budgets

- Spend and income are on profile for the year to date, excluding stewardship grant income owed for this and previous years. Carry over requests submitted at Epping Forest have all been approved, they are work at Hill Wood car park (£43,000), refurbishment and improvements to the Chingford Golf Course café (£50,000) and contribution to car park charging infrastructure (£15,000) – plans are underway to achieve these spends before year end.

## Epping Forest Projects

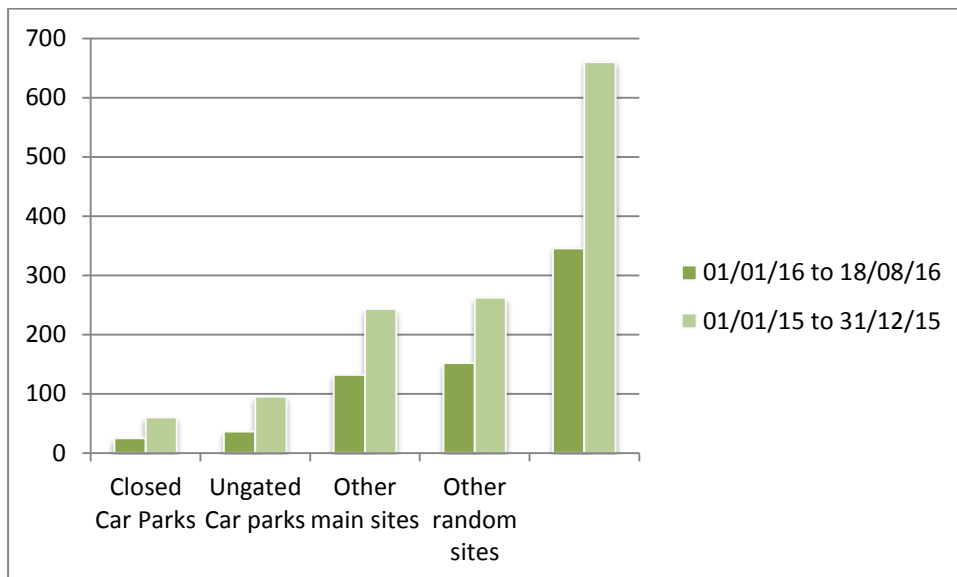
### Open Spaces Bill 2016

- The next stage, an Opposed Bill Committee, is scheduled for 13th September and will be attended by the Remembrancer; Director of Open Spaces and Superintendent of Epping Forest. This Bill Committee is to explore the remaining petition submitted by the Kennel Club.

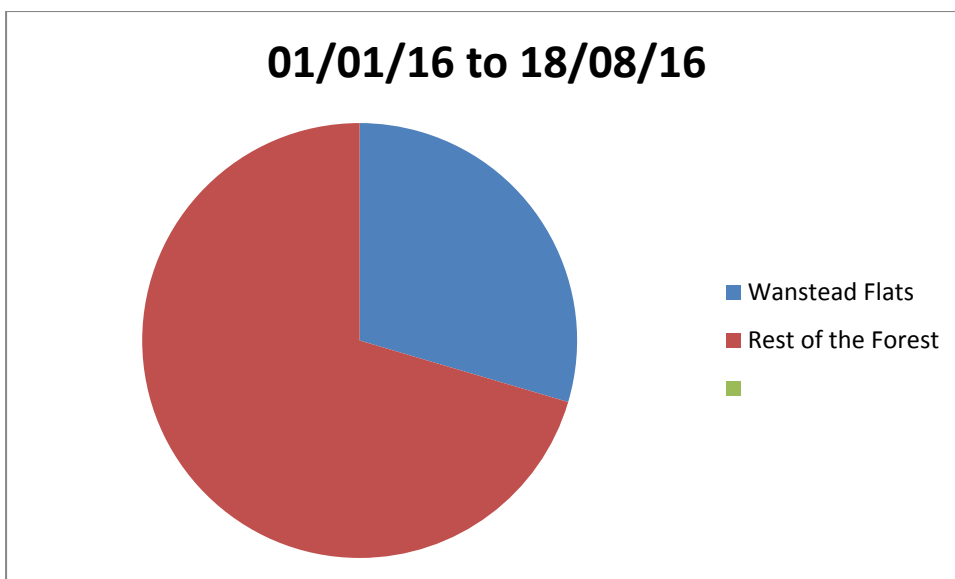
## Forest Services

### Fly tipping

- Fly-tips for the current period being reported in 2016 were 102 compared to 121 in the same period in 2015, a decrease of 15.7%. The closure of the car parks has not accounted for the decrease in fly tips and we have no evidence which explains this trend. The only significant drop in car park fly tips occurred in Centre road car park where 59 fly tips occurred last year and 24 this year.



The proportion of fly tips occurring within the whole forest is 345 year to date and 102 of these occurred in Wanstead Flats.



### Rough Sleepers

5. So far this year there have been up to 21 camps compared to 26 for the previous year, a fall of 14%. We continue to work closely with street rescue, local authorities and the police services to resolve this problem. The warm summer weather normally encourages new camp formation which is being monitored by regular patrols in the key areas.
6. A long term rough sleeper on from Leyton Plats. After extensive Problem Resolution in a Multi-Agency Environment (PRIME) work with a Mental Health assessment; Public Health intervention and placements with Thames Reach (Thames Reach supports homeless, vulnerable and isolated men and women through a range of services, activities and accommodation projects) -In this instance all these offers of help were rebuffed by the individual. The Rough Sleeper was given notice to move on 02 May 16 and evicted on 30th Jun 16. This resulted in a multi-agency removal with initially 2 officers rising to 6 officers after the breach of peace, 10 keepers, 6 litter pickers and a specialist waste contractor who were used to clear the site and remove human waste and hazardous materials. In addition to Police time, the contractor cost was £1,428.00, with a staff bill of £1,440.00 which gave a total cost of £2,860.00 to complete the eviction.

### Enforcement Activity

7. Six prosecutions were heard during the period under report.

Name	Offence	Location	Costs
Daniel CANE	Bye-Law 3 (17a) Carrying guns, endangering the public, causing a nuisance	Chelmsford Magistrates Court GUILTY	Cost: £264 Fine: £120 V/S: £20

	etc.		
Arnas IVANAUSKAS	Bye-Law 3 (11) Vehicles on Forest	Chelmsford Magistrates Court GUILTY (Heard in absence)	Costs: £264 Fine: £200 V/S £20
Karolina BUDREIKNITE	Bye-Law 3 (11) Vehicles on Forest	Chelmsford Magistrates Court GUILTY (Heard in absence)	Costs: £264 Fine: £200 V/S £20
Simcha HIRSCH	Bye-Law 3 (11b) Vehicles on Forest	Chelmsford Magistrates Court GUILTY (Heard in absence)	Costs: £264 Fine: £200 V/S £20
Phil BUTLER	Bye-Law 3 (11b) & (45) Vehicles on Forest & Improperly using or disfiguring the Forest	Chelmsford Magistrates Court GUILTY (Attended)	Cost: £264 Fine: £50 V/S: £20
Martin FOX	Bye-Law 3 (11b) & (45) Vehicles on Forest & Improperly using or disfiguring the Forest	Chelmsford Magistrates Court GUILTY (Attended)	Cost: £264 Fine: £50 V/S: £20

### Licences

8. A total of 53 licences were issued during the two months being reported, which yielded an income of £25,054.83 plus VAT.
9. 51 licences were issued during the same period in 2015 (income of £10,865). The rise in income has been achieved through proactive engagement with contractors regarding site compounds and additional filming opportunities.

### Bushcraft

10. It has been a busy summer for the Forest Keepers and volunteers who make up the Bushcraft Team. They have delivered nine fully booked public events and three outreach events engaging with almost 250 children, young people and adults.
11. The Autumn Bushcraft programme shows diversification with, for the first time, adult Bushcraft courses being delivered in partnership with Woodlife Trails, a small local business who also deliver Bushcraft events at Hatfield Forest. Staff

and volunteers will be involved with the delivery of these events as a training and development exercise with a view to deliver our own in house adult Bushcraft events next year. On top of this, when the warmer months are behind us, three more Venison Butchery and Cooking Events will be delivered with 16 of the 18 places being filled within 24 hours of booking opening. Another first this autumn, children will be also enjoying a wild experience as hunter gatherers tracking, butchering, cooking and eating game.

12. Two new Bushcraft Buddies (volunteers) have been recruited and two out of the three volunteers are now delivering sessions within events and collectively have dedicated 48 volunteer hours from June to August. Staff interest has also increased with four Forest Keepers now assisting and delivering sessions.
13. All of the Bushcraft events generate income which, at first has been used to equip the project and will start to show profit towards the end of the year.

### **Travellers**

14. We have had two significant traveller incursions into forest land in late Jun this coincided with a traveller wedding. Of note:

**23rd June** - A group of 10(+) caravans and vehicles with families illegally occupied George Green Wanstead. They were successfully evicted by the Keeper team supported by the Met Police within 1 hour and forty minutes.

15. A second occupation took place at Bushwood later the same day and was also successfully evicted within 1 hour.

**1st of July** - A large number of travellers in the EF area first attempted to occupy Chingford Green ,Barn Hoppit and then Connaught Water. The groups were all small in number. They tried simultaneously to occupy the sites and establish a foot hold. The Keeper team were able to prevent them from occupying these sites. The small groups then all moved to Woodford Green and accessed then illegally occupied land adjacent to the Cricket club. The Keeper team assisted by Operations team staff carried out an eviction within 1 hour and the removal of travellers was hampered by poor ground conditions resulting in caravans being towed by CoL tractors. The response was a multi-agency co-ordinated eviction and the travellers were escorted by police and keepers from the borough area and onward to the M25.

### **Fire prevention**

16. After a number of small fires within the forest we have engaged with Essex Fire and Rescue (EFRS) to establish joint working practices and cross training. This is to ensure any fire hazards are quickly extinguished.
17. The EFRS have encountered difficulty accessing the forest and the EFRS vehicles are unable to travel cross country. The fire hoses they carry are insufficient operate in remote locations.
18. We have developed a strategy of moving bulk water into the forest and utilising light weight pumping systems to deal with fires in these remote areas. In addition Emergency Rendezvous points (ERV's) have been identified.

19. Joint training will take place in September to test and confirm the concept for future use.

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

### **Biodiversity**

20. **Ash Dieback**, the fungal disease also known as *Chalara* dieback of ash, was confirmed as present in the Forest by officers in June this year. Samples were sent to the Forestry Commission (FC) for DNA testing and FC has formally confirmed the presence of the dieback-causing fungus. Monitoring of the eight Ash sample sites across the Forest and Buffer Lands, that has been undertaken for the last three years, will continue in order to monitor the progress of the disease and look for signs of any resistant trees.
21. FC staff identified **Oriental Chestnut Gall Wasp** (OCGW) galls in Wanstead Park on 30<sup>th</sup> June following a spot check for this alien pest species. As a result FC has placed a containment order on Wanstead Park and Bush Wood to prevent the movement of plant materials off-site. OCGW larvae attack Sweet Chestnut leaves, leaf stalks and buds to create abnormal swellings called galls which reduce the nut crop and, in sufficient numbers, will weaken the tree making it more susceptible to other pests and diseases, including Sweet Chestnut blight. Head of Operations, Geoff Sinclair, and Biodiversity Officer, Andy Froud, met with FC officials on Friday 1<sup>st</sup> July to discuss control measures, which include gall pruning and the netting of affected trees to prevent the parthenogenic (self-cloning) wasps from spreading.
22. In June scientists from the **Natural History Museum** returned to repeat their woodland and soil biodiversity monitoring project in an area of Bury Wood (Long Hills). The scientists last carried out their survey 6 years ago at a site selected by the Forest Conservation Team. It is part of a nationwide survey of the condition of all woodland habitats and especially their soils and soil invertebrates. A peer-reviewed paper analysing the changes measured is likely to be published in 2017/18. Epping Forest officers discussed the future integration of this study with existing long-term monitoring of the Forest.
23. The **Wren Group** ran its second Wanstead “**bioblitz**” weekend – an intensive period of biological surveying attempting to record all living species in an area. The event, held over the weekend of 24<sup>th</sup> – 26<sup>th</sup> June, was again very successful attracting many families (including over 40 children) to participate in the activities from moth-trapping to bat walks and wildlife identification sessions. Andy Froud, Biodiversity Officer, participated in the event recording bat species and numbers in Wanstead Park as part of the wildlife inventory work.
24. This ‘bioblitz’ weekend is part of an ambitious project by The Wren Group to record a full inventory of all taxa found in the Park and across Wanstead Flats over 12 months. So far after these two ‘bioblitzs’ and other recording efforts the number of species recorded is 1,353, including over 400 plant species and 270 moths and butterflies. Of the plant species Orchids featured a lot this year (it was a ‘good orchid year’ after damp winter and spring conditions) including **Bee Orchids** at The Exchange Land. The bird recording is also providing an

important picture of the value of the Flats and Park as a migration “re-fuelling” point. The number of migrant birds attracts predators including, this year, a young **Peregrine** Falcon which during its hunting provided the unusual view of it perched on the ground.

25. Other long-term efforts at recording the Forest’s important wildlife continue, including the weekly butterfly transect counts carried out as part of the national butterfly monitoring scheme. This year has been a generally poor butterfly year in the Forest, and indeed nationally, and the grassland Skipper butterflies are at a very low ebb. However, brighter news was provided by the continued strengthening of the **Purple Emperor** colonies with sightings a cross the Forest by a number of observers. This species also featured in the Head of Conservation’s July *Nature Notes* for the local Epping Guardian newspaper series.

### **Grazing**

26. Following meetings in June and July the current grazing contract is due to be terminated by mutual agreement with our contractor, Wildlife & Countryside Services, 18 months early on 31st October. The grazier’s Red Poll herd will be removed by that date and the Forest’s Longhorn herd will then be managed in-house over the winter period. New grazing arrangements for the Forest and Buffer Land sites will be proposed to your Committee with the aim of a tendering process that ensures Forest grazing can be managed effectively from spring 2017 onwards.
27. The Grazing Auditor, Dr Peter Dennis, visited the Forest on 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> July to carry out his annual inspection of the grazing sites and discuss monitoring work. This year the visit concentrated largely on Fairmead and the impacts of the grazing there. However, some smaller heathland sites were also visited on the 2<sup>nd</sup> day. His report will be presented to Committee in November as usual.

### **Agri-environment Schemes**

28. Following the EU Referendum there has been uncertainty about the funding for agri-environment schemes. For Epping Forest this includes the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS), the Entry Level and Higher Level payments under the Environmental Stewardship Scheme, as well as some smaller Forestry Commission (FC) grants. The Treasury announced on the 13<sup>th</sup> August that the current level of funding for the first of these, the BPS will continue until at least 2020; in 2015 Epping Forest received £95k from BPS.
29. However, funding for ELS-HLS is currently only guaranteed for existing agreements. The ELS-HLS grant for Epping Forest ends in October 2018 and is worth £165k annually. It is unclear at the moment whether the government will be accepting new applications for the successor scheme, Countryside Stewardship, as it stands or whether the scheme will be modified or new thresholds set.
30. It is expected that the smaller FC grants will be continue to be paid until the end of their agreements.

### **Other – proposed planting of crocus bulbs at Theydon Green**

31. In June a request to the Superintendent was made by the two local Rotary Clubs of Epping and Roding Valley for the planting of spring crocuses on a small area of Theydon Village Green. The planting would be part of the *End Polio Now* campaign for which Rotary is playing a key fundraising and awareness role. The crocus's purple colour has become a symbol of the campaign as it is the colour that is used to mark the fingers of children immunised against the disease during the vaccination programmes. Every £1 donated or raised by Rotary is tripled in value by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.
32. The nominated part of the Green is a small triangular area adjacent Coppice Row, which is already planted up with daffodils. The Green is managed under a care-and-maintenance agreement by Theydon Parish Council

### **Land Management**

#### **Town & Country Planning**

33. Public consultations have begun on two Local Plan pre-submission drafts, namely the Broxbourne Borough Council and London Borough of Redbridge Local Plans with closing dates of 16<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> September 2016 respectively. Although the Broxbourne Borough plan does not cover Epping Forest the proposed increase in developments and housing in the Borough close to the A10 could have knock-on impacts on traffic through Waltham Abbey and possibly up to Junction 26 of the M25/A121 and other Forest roads. Responses will be made to these Plans during September.
34. In the meantime, discussions continued with Epping Forest District Council (EFDC) and the other three local authorities (LPAs) involved in the four-LPA housing market area (SHMA), over a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to help protect Epping Forest from damage due to Local Plan development and highways infrastructure changes. It should be noted that the government department has informed the four-LPAs that they need to allocate more housing than proposed in 2015. For EFDC this sees the allocation rise from just over 11,000 to 13,000.
35. The discussions during June and July included a meeting held at The Warren on 22<sup>nd</sup> July involving Natural England, EFDC, East Herts District and Harlow District Councils. At this meeting consultants for the four-LPAs presented their preliminary conclusion which suggested that there would be no significant damage to the integrity of the Forest from the Local Plan housing allocations and their related traffic. The impacts of additional recreational pressure were not examined by the consultants and this issue was raised. However, the MoU text proposed by the Conservators has largely been accepted and the issue now is to put together a sufficiently robust joint strategy for monitoring and mitigation based on the most up-to-date traffic modelling and visitor data, some of which the four-LPAs still need to collect and analyse. This may involve new visitor survey work on the Forest by EFDC as well as more detailed modelling of the traffic data.



36. Officers commented on 6 Planning Applications during the period in question. Key points included:
- a. EFDC – land at the Forest Lodge Commercial Complex (City Limits) – pre-planning application for 12 residential dwellings.
  - b. EFDC – Garden Centre, Crown Hill – Outline application for 21 residential houses.
  - c. EFDC – Sixteen String Jack Public House, Coppice Row, Theydon Bois – erection of 7 apartments, one cottage, communal garden, parking area and cycle store.
  - d. EFDC – APPEAL - Land adjacent to Warren Hill, Loughton – 34 space car park and dropping off area for Oaklands School – decision outstanding.

**Update:**

- d. EFDC – Land at Woodside, North Weald – Gypsy site – additional static caravan, one additional touring caravan, security gate and camera, associated brick pillars and walls - REFUSED

## **Operations**

### **Habitat Works**

37. **Wood-pasture Restoration and Management:** Work has continued on meeting our HLS commitments to restore over 400 ha of the Forest to a more open condition. During the nesting season we have been undertaking initial restoration works on less sensitive areas in Walthamstow Forest and Clay-pit Hill. The annual maintenance work to keep previously cleared areas open by cutting with tractor and flail have started will continue until October. Extraction of the felled cordwood commenced in July and is being taken to the Black Barns from where it is sold each year to local firewood merchants.
38. **Jubilee Pond:** Staff and volunteers worked together to complete works to protect two islands in Jubilee pond. Brushwood bundles (Faggots) have been tethered around the water edge of the islands which hopefully will reduce wave erosion on the sensitive bank and also promote sedimentation and vegetation growth. It is hoped these 'soft' management options will help us to avoid investing in considerably more expensive engineered options.
39. **Wanstead Park, Floating Pennywort control:** Following the initial removal of 40 tonnes of weed from the Perch pond a third herbicide application was undertaken on the 24th August. The herbicide application is working and is clearly having an impact in reducing the amount of the weed. However this work will be ongoing for some time to get the problem to a manageable condition.
40. **Highams Park Lake:** Following the death of two dogs, precautionary signage and press work was undertaken at Highams Park Lake in response to potential concerns over Blue Green Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs). Both subsequent tests by the Environment Agency and a post mortem of the one of the dogs revealed that the Lake is currently free of HABs.

### **Risk Management works**

41. **Highways Verge Vegetation:** The in-house teams have been working their way around the site lines for path and main road junctions with further work at the Robin Hood Roundabout undertaken to complete works started earlier but where a few trees were left which required traffic management while being cut down or pruned. Contract cutting of highways verge vegetation commenced in August and will run till the end of September. The good growing conditions has meant that we have had to cut some verge areas we had hoped to leave for a year. In these cases this work has been done by in-house teams eg at Lower Forest along the Harlow Road and along Rangers Road.
42. **Tree Safety:** Works continue to respond to the safety issues identified from the annual tree safety assessment. All trees requiring a quick response have been dealt with and we are working through the remaining program over the remainder of the year.
43. **Fire Safety:** Fire management strips have been cut across Wanstead and Leyton Flats as per the fire safety management plan prepared in 2014/15

### **Access Works**

44. Hill Wood Car Park: Contract works are progressing to improve the Hill Wood car park and the hope these will be complete for the end of August. Work has recently stalled due to material supply difficulties. Eight new picnic benches installed by the Estates work team have been well received by tea hut users and staff.
45. Ride Cutting: In house teams commenced cutting of the surfaced path verges in August. This an annual requirement to control encroaching vegetation

### **Visitor Services**

#### **Green Flag**

46. We were pleased to be awarded the Green Flag and Green Heritage award this July. It is the 13th year we have received the Green Flag Award.

#### **Communication and Information**

47. As of 17 August 2016 our social media following is:
  - Twitter followers: 4,946
  - Facebook likes: 433
  - Instagram followers: 106
48. Positive centrespread press coverage was achieved for Chingford Golf Course in the Chingford Times, alongside good coverage of summer Bushcraft events. [the three Illyria Open Air Theatre events were promoted effectively through press releases and an article in July Essex Life. The August edition presented the Epping Forest Gateways Heritage Lottery funded programme.
49. The summer 2016 edition of Forest Focus was successfully received and once again distributed very well in the local area. The autumn 2016 edition

has been completed and is currently being distributed. The online subscription marketing tool Mailchimp continues to grow Forest Focus subscription with very positive 'open' rates (approximately 50%), which measures how many email subscribers open the magazine.

### **Chingford Golf Course**

50. The new Golf Manager Gordon Dunn commenced work on 6th June. In addition to his role at Chingford he and his team have taken responsibility for Wanstead Flats football bookings after the departure of the sports co-ordinator.
51. A carry forward of £50k has been agreed and a scheme of works to improve the Caddie House is being drawn up including a re-wire of the building at a cost of £11,400.
52. Despite some malicious vandalism the greens team have continued high level of maintenance of greens which has drawn positive comments on Twitter.
53. Online booking has now been 'soft' launched since early August and we are beginning to see the benefits of selling our tee times via the internet attracting new customers that might not otherwise have considered our facility.
54. New marketing developments include building a customer database ( from scratch); utilising GroupOn promotion to assist building the customer base; promotion of our winter offers will begin in September, focusing on group bookings to help ensure a successful winter period and an offer for the October holidays of £30 per 4 ball, targeted at families to encourage new players.
55. The café tender is due to be sent out in September so whilst we await the refurbishment of the café, St Best's Catering have begun operating, offering breakfast rolls and Caribbean cuisine from a mobile unit.

### **Visitor Services Events**

56. Donkey Derby on Theydon Green in July was a success with the usual large turnout. The very wet weather meant that ground conditions had to be monitored right up to the event but fortunately they had dried up enough in time to let the event go ahead on the planned date.

### **Music in the Park**

57. Music in the Park held in June and organised by the Aldersbrook Families Association (AFA) was another huge success with an attendance of around 3000. The AFA have announced that this event was the final year they will be holding it. However we are in discussion with another local organiser about an alternative event at the same time and location next year.
58. A successful art exhibition: A Forest Path by Val Lawson in June made £200 in commission.

59. Our summer outdoor theatre season by Illyria in July has been its usual success with A Midsummer Night's Dream drawing a healthy crowd of 121 people. The adaptation of Gilbert and Sullivan's Ruddigore sold 150 tickets and both nights made an additional £200 in refreshment sales.
60. Paws at the View! held in early July was bigger than ever attracting around 500 people. Goddard's Vets sponsored the event, covering the overheads and the joint effort of Visitor Services and the Keepers teams, the day was a great success highlighting the importance of responsible dog ownership.

### **Major incidents**

61. A member of the Field Studies Council - Epping Forest centre – staff and their spouse were assaulted in the early hours of 30 July by a group of young men engaged in Anti-Social Behaviour. A Police investigation is underway, together with a review of security for the car parks at High Beach.

### **Appendices**

- None

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