

Committee(s)	Dated:
Epping Forest and Commons	14 May 2018
Subject: Epping Forest - Superintendent's Update for February to March 2018	Public
Report of: Director of Open Spaces and Heritage (SEF 21/18)	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 2018 to March 2018.

Of particular note was the provision of Royal Assent for the City of London Corporation (Open Spaces) Act 2018; end-of-year budgeting to within 1.6% of budget target; a marked fall in reported rough sleeping in Epping Forest; savings of almost 6,000 on the first 3 months of the revised waste management contract; completion of 222.5 acres of wood pasture restoration; the birth of 28 calves through winter calving and the successful reorganisation of the Sport turf teams.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- Note the report.

Main Report

Staff and Volunteers

1. A new Business Administration Apprentice has started with the Resources team, through the City Apprenticeship Scheme. Fixed term contract arrangements for the Policy Officer contract working on the Epping Forest Management Plan and the Assistant Forest Keeper have now been completed. Following a promotion to the Markets Directorate the Visitor Operations Manager has left Epping Forest. Two Criminal Investigations & Waste Management Officers commenced employment replacing previous Forest Keeper roles. Details of a broad staff reorganisation for Sports turf teams is included in the Visitor Services section of the report.

Budgets

2. With accounts still awaiting the final stages of the closing process, indications are that Epping Forest is likely to record a small overspend of £46,000 (1.69%). The overspend is related to procurement contracts where late delivery of equipment has prevented the corresponding drawdown of grant income before year end and a significant overcharge on a new contract for water supply which will be corrected in the new 2018/19 financial year.

Weather

3. February 2018 saw slightly below average rainfall, with total monthly rainfall 18.4% below the average rainfall for February since 1979 (47.3 mm). There were 15 days of rainfall in total, with the wettest day being 8th February, which saw 8.0 mm of rainfall.
4. In contrast to February, March 2018 was much wetter than average, with total monthly rainfall 101.2% above the average rainfall for March since 1979 (35.9 mm).
5. There were 25 days of rainfall in total, the wettest day being the 30th March, which saw 9.6 mm rainfall.
6. The cold and wet conditions have extended the close riding season which will now move to Open Riding from 5th May.

Epping Forest Projects

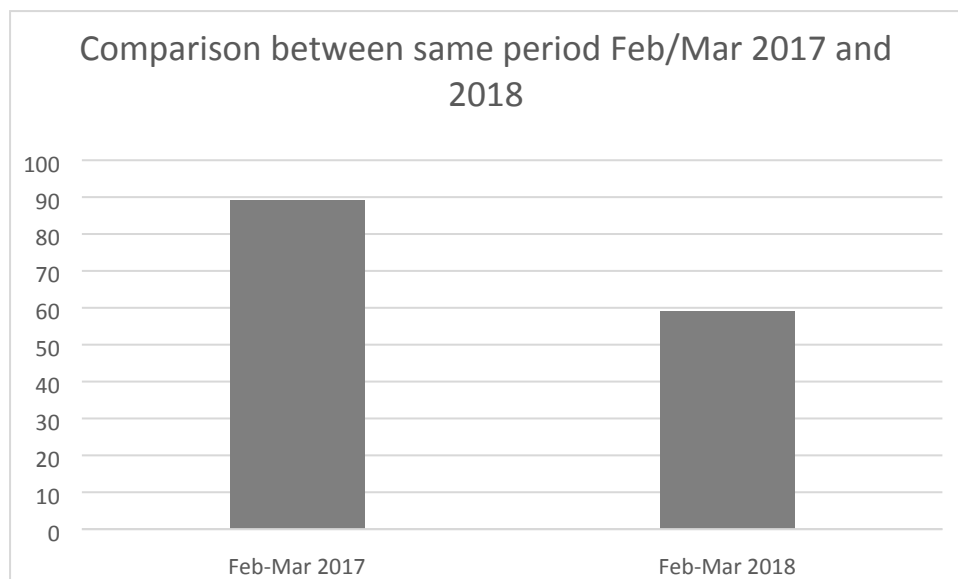
Open Spaces Bill 2016

7. Royal Assent was given on 15th March 2018, and so the Bill is now the City of London Corporation (Open Spaces) Act 2018. Work is now underway to explore and prioritise new powers of enforcement, licencing letting of vacant premises.

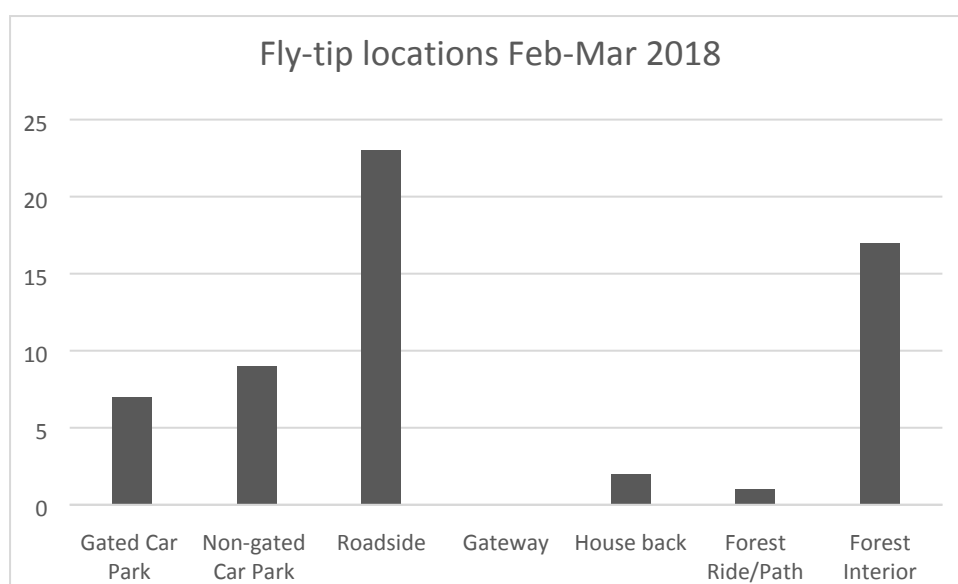
Forest Services

Fly tipping

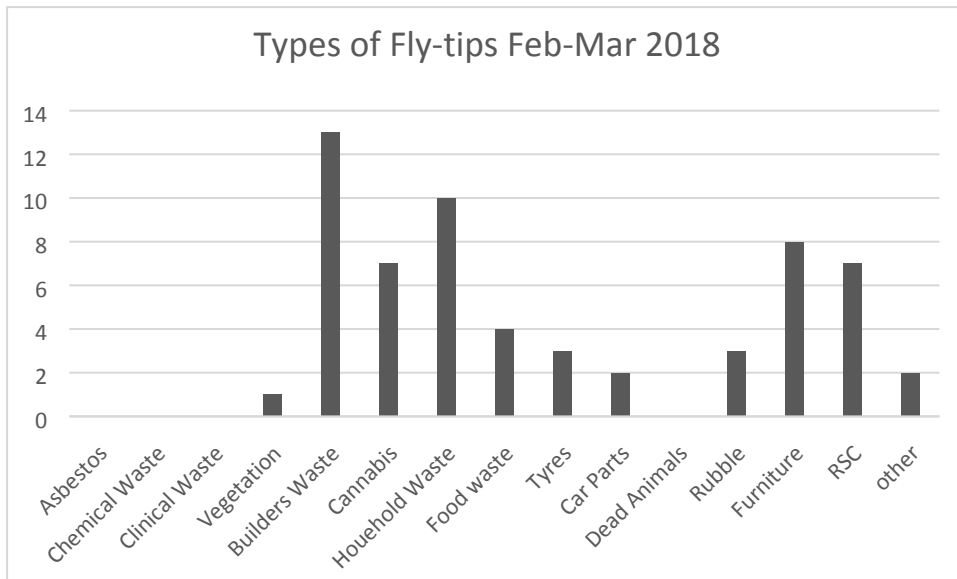
8. Over the period of February/March 2018 there was a total of 59 fly-tips recorded on the Forest, this was a 33.7% reduction on the 89 fly-tips recorded over the same period in 2017. This reduction after a year of increases reflects data for December and January and may reflect a decline in building activity as a result of the 'Beast of the East' weather period and three significant and impactful snow events.



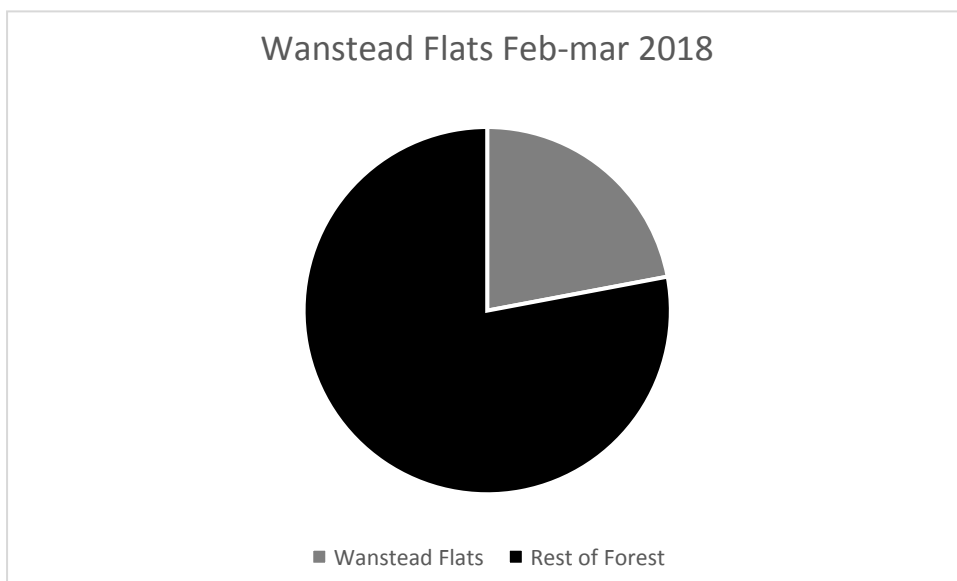
9. Roadside locations again made up the largest point for illegally dumped waste on the Forest with 23 recorded incidents (39%) There was a marked increase in Forest Interior fly-tips, though half of this figure can be attributed to waste collected from Rough Sleeper Camps. The result for gated car parks is skewed by daylight deposits and locked car parks that currently only have a single entrance/exit, review and improvement of this infrastructure should see this figure decline further.



10. Builders Waste continues to be the largest tip type making up 22% of all tips over this period. There was a marked increase in household waste, possibly a result of missed refuse collections during the disruptive weather.



11. Only 22% of Fly-Tips occurred on Wanstead Flats, this could be attributed to the closure of Centre Road Car Park for repairs, which were delayed due to snow periods. Since the completion of the car park and the new security arrangements including alligator teeth, there has been a noticeable reduction on litter quantities in general at this site.



Rough Sleepers

12. There was just 1 reported case of rough sleeping for the report period, representing a reduction of 80% and 86% from 5 and 7 cases for the two preceding report periods. The litter team removed a large amount of rubbish which was being collected and stored on the Forest by a rough sleeper with a hoarding disorder. The location was on Leyton Flats adjacent to Whipps Cross Road near the hospital. With the assistance of the local Police team a male habitual rough sleeper was taken to hostel accommodation by outreach support from the Local Authority. Additionally, a large old unoccupied rough sleeper area on Leyton Flats was also cleared by the litter team.

Ponds and Lakes Surveys

13. The Forest Keeper team with the help of Volunteer Wardens and contractor Dewell Fisheries Services completed surveys on 13 water bodies. .
14. In addition to recording fish species and numbers the electro-fishing surveys increasingly focus on the removal of Introduced Non-Native Species (INNS) intentionally released in the ponds. Common removal includes goldfish and Koi – the coloured varieties of Amur Carp, more exotic removal in the last period include the first recorded example of a species of Tetra from Earls Path Pond and an armoured South American catfish (*Plecostomus Commersonii*) from St Johns Pond.

Enforcement Activity

15. No prosecutions were heard during the period under report.

Licences

16. A total of 44 licences for events were issued during the two months being reported, which yielded an income of £16,772.33 plus VAT, representing a 50.5% increase on the 40 licences were issued during the same period in 2017 with an income of £8466.46.

Waste Management and Recycling

	Recycling Savings		
	Costs 2017	Costs 2018	Saving
January	£ 508.44	£ 311.14	£ 197.30
February	£ 508.44	£ 360.00	£ 148.44
Mar	£ 508.44	£ 360.00	£ 148.44
	£ 1,525.32	£ 1,031.14	£ 494.18
	Transit Savings		
	Costs 2017	Costs 2018	Saving
January	£ 2,834.91	£ 1,711.06	£ 1,123.85
February	£ 2,747.00	£ 1,808.61	£ 938.39
Mar	£ 2,966.76	£ 1,417.50	£ 1,549.26
	£ 8,548.67	£ 4,937.17	£ 3,611.50
	Bywaters Waste Savings		
	Costs 2017	Costs 2018	Saving
January	£ 1,693.10	£ 395.92	£ 1,297.18
February	£ 482.91	£ 384.00	£ 98.91
Mar	£ 1,689.42	£ 1,299.42	£ 390.00
	£ 3,865.43	£ 2,079.34	£ 1,786.09
Total Savings For Jan, Feb & March Only			£ 5,891.77

17. The new waste management trial period is in the third month of operation and savings of £5,891.77 appear encouraging. There has been a significant increase in amounts sent to recycling rather than landfill, and a reduction in mileage from our own litter vehicles.

Heritage; Landscape and Nature Conservation

Agri-environment Schemes and habitat restoration

18. Two contractors have completed 50.6 acres (20.5 hectares) of wood-pasture restoration between September 2017 and March 2018. This is significant progress in the habitat restoration work supported by the Environmental Stewardship grant. A tender for further works to be delivered by contractors was advertised at the end of March 2018. This, together with the work done by in-house teams and volunteers, should ensure that the targets for restoration will have been met when this grant comes to an end in winter 2018.

Grazing

19. The 28th and last Longhorn calf was born on 25th February. Overall the gender split for this year's calving was 17 bull calves and 11 heifers. This brings the total herd size to 138. The Sussex cattle had 13 calves in total and were transported back to City Commons on the 22nd March.
20. Through some very tough, wet and cold weather conditions in the middle of March staff installed 4.8km of invisible fencing cable. This successful installation bettered previous work-rates by contractors, a great achievement by the operations staff and the Grazing Officer. These new and revised loops at Chingford Plain / Bury Wood, Sunshine North / South and Big View will add an extra 222.5 acres (90 ha) to the grazeable area on the Forest, making a total of x acres (x ha).
21. New fences were installed at Hornbeam Lane and Fairmead car park. The Hornbeam Lane post and rail fence replaces the regularly vandalised temporary electric fence that prevented cattle from straying onto the West Essex Golf Course. Cleft chestnut fencing has been installed around Fairmead car park with 3 pedestrian access gates, this fence enables the livestock team to safely round up the cattle in an enclosed space before going into the pound for loading or the adjustment of collars. The fenced area also acts as a business continuity fall back arrangement should there be a failure of the containment system or a disease outbreak. In the rare event that these events occur, the cattle could be temporarily contained, fed and watered on the fenced car park area.
22. Three significant investments in equipment for the grazing project have been made. A new Nissan Navara truck has been leased. The truck's ULEX compliant Euro 6 engine provides a 3.5T towing capacity for daily checking and moving of cattle around grazing sites, increasing flexibility as a tractor is no longer always required for this work. A tractor-mounted straw chopper / blower has also been purchased for spreading bedding for the cattle. Importantly, it also chops hay which increases cattle feed intakes and palatability of forage and considerably reduces the labour and spending on straw bedding. Lastly, a staff welfare cabin has been installed at Great Gregories. The cabin will significantly improve the welfare of staff based at the farm. Included in the cabin is a toilet, kitchenette, office and drying room. The installation of services to the cabin will take place later in the summer, after upgrades are carried out to the power supply feeding the Police Barn.

Heritage

23. Consultants, *Rural Advice*, have produced the first draft of the Copped Hall Parkland Plan. This has been reviewed by Epping Forest officers, staff at City Surveyors and the Built Environment, as well as Natural England and Historic England. Feedback is being used to prepare the final draft prior to consideration by your Committee.
24. The most significant part of the report was the confirmation of the size and importance of the Tudor Square Pond at Rookery Wood and its part in the historic landscape, emphasising the national significance of this element of the Grade II* Registered Park & Garden.

Biodiversity

25. The cold weather and snow during March ensured that winter migrant birds stayed on in the Forest in larger numbers than usual and spring arrivals were very limited. Large flocks of **Redwing** were seen throughout the scrub areas of Chingford Plain and Wanstead Flats in late March with gatherings of over 100 birds. **Fieldfare** also featured more than usual for this large thrush species that is often only seen in numbers on the less wooded agricultural areas of the Buffer Lands.
26. **Hawfinches**, featured in my previous report, also remained in significant numbers in Bury Wood with one group of 16 birds, one of the largest recorded for this rare finch in recent decades. However, perhaps the most notable winter movement came during the “beast from the East” easterly winds when hundreds of **Lapwings** made hard-weather movements west and southwards across the Forest with well over 250 birds recorded flying over both Chingford Plain and Wanstead Flats.
27. Away from the Forest, the Head of Conservation worked for a day with the **Cardiff University PhD student** in preparing samples of wood decay fungi from beech trees slices. The final fieldwork and laboratory work was completed at Cardiff in March, and along with detailed DNA analysis carried out by the student in the USA over winter, the results of the work are now being written up for the submission of the PhD in the next year. The PhD student has already contributed to a book chapter on the fungi communities in hollowing trees and further peer-reviewed scientific papers are planned.
28. The City of London, through a City Bridge Trust award, is now contributing to the funding of a follow-up PhD studentship at Cardiff, which will work on veteranisation techniques and hollowing of beech and oak at both Epping Forest and Burnham Beeches. The Head of Conservation met the new student and assisted with some of his early lab work on beech material from the Forest.
29. Ancient trees featured during a well-attended conference organised by Place Services Essex at Gilwell Park on 19th February, celebrating the **Forests of Essex** and, in particular, the late Professor Oliver Rackham’s unsurpassed contribution to the understanding of the ecological and cultural significance of these ancient landscapes. The keynote speakers were Professors Tom Williamson and Charles Watkins. The Head of Conservation also gave a

presentation highlighting Oliver Rackham's great insights into Epping Forest's history and management.

30. The Wren Group held its AGM on 21st March, and was able to celebrate another successful year, particularly with biodiversity recording and also its achievements in managing the grass and scrub habitats of the Exchange Land, Wanstead Park for butterflies. The Head of Conservation gave the main talk on Forest habitat conservation, ahead of the AGM and took part in a detailed question and answer session for members
31. Finally, water levels and the dampness of soils are very important determinants of biodiversity in woodlands and wood-pasture habitats, influencing flower species, invertebrate populations and bat and bird numbers reliant on the latter. Retaining water on the Forest for longer and ensuring areas of marsh, wet grassland and damp woodland is, therefore, of special importance especially with the vagaries of a changing climate with more extremes of conditions.
32. The Environment Agency (EA) is also interested in identifying areas where water can be retained, to reduce the flood risk for areas of housing within river and stream catchments around the country. There is much interest in sites where the two objectives can be achieved together. Epping Forest is one such site and on 29th March the Senior Keeper and Head of Conservation met EA counterparts to discuss the opportunities for achieving flood prevention and biodiversity enhancements around the River Ching and its catchment of tributaries. The EA officers were very interested in the possibilities and the ideas proposed and will be considering working these ideas up and gathering evidence during the next year.

Land Management

Town & Country Planning

33. Your officers commented on 4 planning applications during the period in question. Possibly the most significant of these was a proposed development in the London Borough of Waltham Forest (LBWF) at Chingford. At 13-15 Woodberry Way, E4 in a property adjacent to The Hawk Wood, Pole Hill, where an application has been made to develop the gardens at the rear of these properties into nine additional houses.
34. This is a typical *windfall* site which if considered in isolation could be overlooked as having a significant impact on the Forest. However, the response by your officers was to make the point to LBWF that as the competent authority under the Habitat Regulations 2017 it has a duty to consider the "in combination" effects of this development on the Special Area of Conservation (SAC), alongside others housing proposals across the Borough.

Local Plans

35. Your officers also continue to seek an early meeting with LBWF about its Local Plan review and its role as a competent authority in protecting the Forest. We are awaiting a response and an invitation to a meeting.

36. Following the comprehensive response by the Conservators to the Epping Forest District Council (EFDC) Local Plan, a meeting was convened by EFDC on 21st February to discuss both the Conservators' and Natural England's concerns and disagreements with the Local Plan proposals for housing and infrastructure. EFDC officers were seeking to find a way to agree a Statement of Common Ground with each organisation if possible.
37. In addition, the meeting also examined the continuing requirement for a Mitigation Strategy to be developed and considered the limited progress towards understanding both visitor and recreation impacts as well as those of traffic pollution. Further meetings were agreed to develop aspects of the Mitigation Strategy.
38. One of the early outcomes of the evidence-gathering for the mitigation has been the Visitor Survey 2017 Report. The six funders involved in this report agreed the final version at the end of March and the report will be made public in April. The key result of the Visitor Survey has been the clear demonstration of a 6km "Zone of Influence" with 75% of visitors to the SAC parts of the Forest coming from up to 6km away. This is important evidence in helping to decide which developments are likely to have the most impacts on the Forest and it fully justifies the concerns expressed by The Conservators to EFDC during the Local Plan Regulation 19 consultation.

Operations

Habitat Works

39. Warren Plantation: Prices to undertake Rhododendron control and felling and removal of the larch trees as part of the agreed Phytophthora control works have been obtained. Herbicide treatment of the Rhododendron will be undertaken in May by contractors.
40. Wanstead park: - The refilling of the lakes at Wanstead Park continues with daily pumping from the borehole for 16 out of 24 hours. The rate of inflow vs outflow from leaks appears to have reached an equilibrium on the Ornamental Waters with the water level approximately 75cm below 'full'. The whole lake surface is however covered with water and we are working on understanding the problem better.

Risk Management Works

Highways Verge Vegetation

41. Tree Safety - The 2018 tree safety assessment by independent arboricultural contractors has been completed across the Forest. The three arborist teams have largely been focused on completing the 2017 program and undertaking high priority risk management tasks identified in the 2018 survey
42. Hard surfaces Management: The contract to control weed and moss growth on hard surfaces around Forest buildings, including the visitor centres has been continued for a second year. The contract will be slightly extended to include the twice-yearly treatment of the gullies around car parks.

Access Works

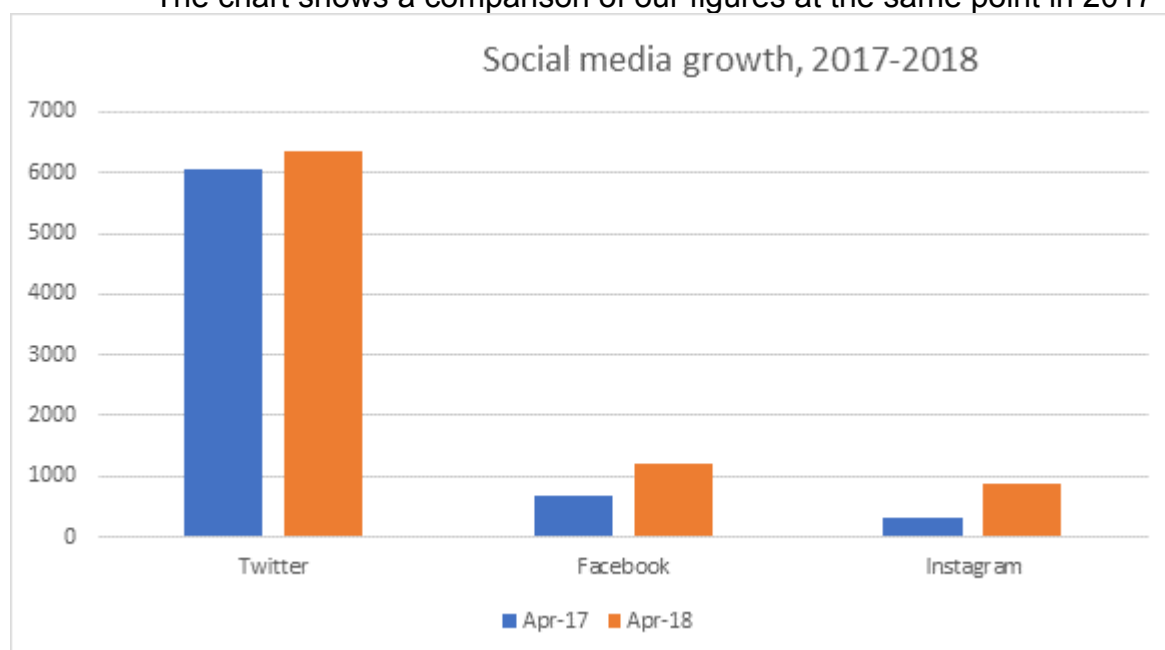
43. Ride Management: The winter program to open up surfaced rides to light and air and to remove overhanging and restrictive vegetation in the Forest has been completed by our grassland team. Work has focussed on the Bury wood area.
44. Staff and volunteers are continuing with the survey of promoted paths in the Forest. The southern and central sections of the Forest have now largely been audited with the whole network survey due for completion in May 2018.

Visitor Services

Communication and Information

45. As of 19 April 2018, our social media following is:

- Twitter followers: 6,371 (54% year on increase)
- Facebook likes: 1,302 (82% increase)
- Instagram followers: 886 (169% increase)
- The chart shows a comparison of our figures at the same point in 2017

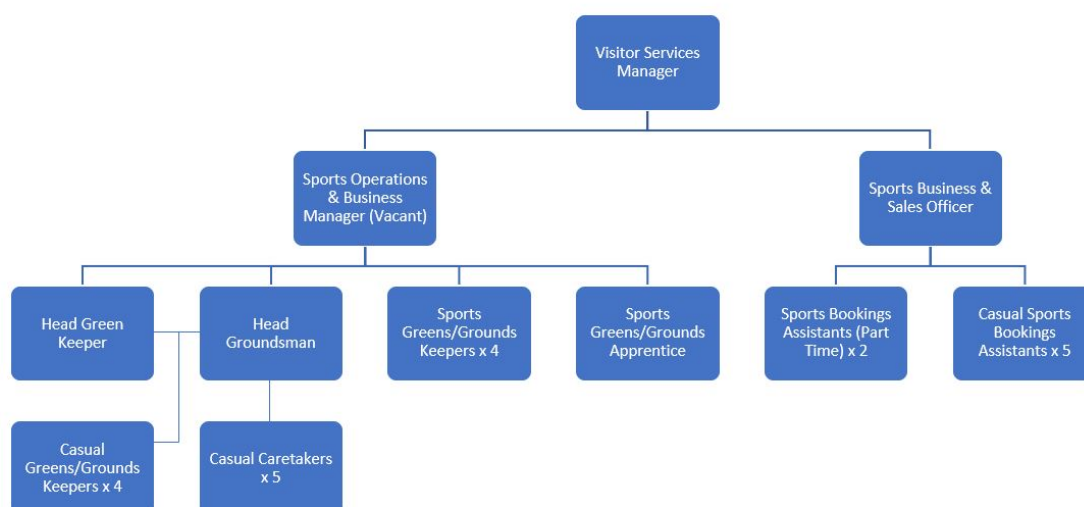


46. The spring edition of Forest Focus, was very well received and distributed widely in the local area. People enjoy reading a printed copy of this quality publication and can browse or take a copy from each of the Visitor Centres, as well as lots of local cafes, pubs, health centres, stations, etc. throughout the Epping Forest area, with favourable comments received verbally. The electronic mailing list for Forest Focus continues to grow very well.
47. Head of Conservation, Dr Jeremy Dagley, was interviewed and introduced by David Attenborough for Epping Forest's feature in the Queen's Green Planet documentary which aired on ITV on Monday 16 April 2016.

48. Bluebells in Wanstead Park were featured in local and national press (Time Out and The Times).
49. Facebook activity around promotion of bluebell season, with accompanying responsible visiting information (around not stepping on or picking the bluebells) has proved exceptionally popular, demonstrating the public interest in visiting woodland bluebells in April / May.
50. Instagram growth has been particularly notable recently with interactions and follows from some high profile, international organisations, photographers and creative individuals. This demonstrates Instagram as a powerful tool for networking internationally for promoting Epping Forest to creative individuals who may then gain an awareness for potential use of the Forest as a filming / photography location.
51. Bluebells and other spring flowers was the theme for the Epping Forest article included in the local Essex Life publication for April 2018. The March 2018 article featured spring / Easter events and promoted the new Short Walks book. The February 2018 article looked at some more unusual references to Epping Forest.
52. The new publication 'Short walks in Epping Forest' is now on sale and has been extremely well received in the local area. The promotion with local estate agents to promote the book and Forest Focus electronic subscription will now commence, providing us with some useful audience development feedback.
53. The new, revised Official Epping Forest map is now on sale and selling well with a special offer price if bought together with the book of short walks.

Epping Forest Sports Team

45. Work has been ongoing since Autumn to restructure the Epping Forest Sports Team to create a combined staff structure across Wanstead Flats and Chingford Golf Course leading to greater operational efficiency.



46. In February, the rota for the restructured golf shop commenced. Two part-time bookings assistants were employed to work alongside the Sports Business and Sales Officer, on a three-week rota. This ensures reliable cover in response to business need and to be less reliant on casual staff.
47. The rota for the restructured grounds team commenced on 1 March 2018 with existing casual staff securing a permanent contract and new staff joining from elsewhere in Open Spaces.
48. The casual staff team has been expanded to give depth of cover for annual leave, training and sickness within the team. Additional casual staff are as follows; 1 x Casual Sports Bookings Assistant, 1 x Casual Greens/Grounds Keeper and 5 x Casual Caretakers.
49. The Sports Operations and Business Manager remains vacant as recruitment has been unsuccessful. This role is being reviewed but continues to be covered by the Project Officer in the meantime.

Chingford Golf Course

50. The course was closed in February and March for a total of eight days due to snow. Although open during the rain there was of course less visitors compared to normal. During the long period of rain, all 18 greens were kept open for play with the use of temporary mats on the par 3's to protect the teeing area for the start of the season. All ditches were cleared, and extra drainage was added in the areas that needed it most such as holes 9 and 10. This helps to keep the course open and at its best all year round. New posts were put in around the back of the 18th green and 1st tee to replace the old white ones that had been rotting.
51. Daily bag tags have been introduced for all users. These bag tags are in 7 different colours and are changed on a weekly basis for each day. This provides a quick visual aid on the course to ensure that players have been in and paid. Feedback from users has been positive.
52. Total revenue from online sales was £156.60, total revenue from reception was £23,032.01 broken down into:
 - Green fees: £17,844.31
 - Drinks: £289.40
 - Hire Equipment: £1058.50
 - Shop Sales: £1575.80
 - Football: £1340
 - Filming Licence: £924
53. The greenkeeper's yard has again been broken in to and the tractor was stolen. This has been reported to the police and new fencing has been put up around the lockup with extra locks and measures to prevent the other tractor from being removed

Wanstead Flats Football

54. Due to the winter snow the season has been extended until the week ending 6 May. Off season works are being programmed to ensure readiness for the new 2018/19 season.
55. The 2017/18 seasons income was just under £65,000. This is an increase of around £3,000 on last season.
56. There are no outstanding debts this season.

Visitor Numbers

57. Visitor counts have been affected by the closure of The Temple following a ceiling collapse in January and snow in late February as well as a three-week closure of the Hunting Lodge for essential upgrades.

Visitor Numbers	QEHL 2018	2017	View	2017	Temple	2017	High Beach	2017	Total	Total 2017
February	1563	1678	2942	2820	0 closed	650	1485	1268	5990	6416
March	377 (QEHL closed for electrical upgrade)	1761	2439	2768	0 closed	473	1068	1311	3884	6313

Visitor Services Events

58. **Half Term Winter Trees, 13–16 February: Self-guided cluster of activities laid out across Queen Elizabeth's Hunting Lodge for half-term.** This included tree identification activities to encourage families to go out into the Forest; hands-on wooden building and drawing activities. The offer of a range of self-led activities for families has proven to be a popular and resource efficient away for Visitor Services to provide extra experiences for a targeted audience over several days. Kew Gardens staff admired and requested use of the Fractal Trees activity sheet for (COL acknowledged use) at their family events: we were pleased to share it with them.
59. **Hunting the King's deer: Epping Forest Poaching in the 16th and 17th centuries, Exhibition 24 February to 11 March and Illustrated Talk, Sunday 11 March.** This exhibition and talk designed and delivered by University of Nottingham PhD student and researcher, Tom Rose, was the culmination of a project which offered Tom the opportunity to learn how to adapt his academic work for a more general audience and get hands-on engagement with our visitors. Visitor Services in exchange benefited from Tom's expertise in fact checking interpretation and publications about the Queen Elizabeth's Hunting Lodge's Tudor hunting story.
60. **Exhibition:** You can't see the trees for the woods, Saturday 3 March to Monday 2 April: Marion Sidebottom's exhibition marked the completion of a year as Artist in Residence photographing the Forest's ancient trees and gathering stories of how people value and enjoy them. Marion's final choice of photographs comprised monotone collages with texts to illustrate a range of themes. Both

online on social media and in visitor books, there has been a very positive response from the public to Marion's images. Prints of her work have been available in the shop at The View.

Appendices

- None

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