

Committee(s)	Dated:
Epping Forest and Commons Epping Forest Consultative	07 09 2020 21 10 2020
Subject: Epping Forest - Superintendent's Update for July 2020 (SEF 20/20)	Public
Report of: Colin Buttery, Director of Open Spaces	For Information
Report author: Paul Thomson – Superintendent of Epping Forest	

Summary

The purpose of this report is to summarise the Epping Forest Division's activities across July 2020.

Of particular interest was the decommissioning of the Temporary Mortuary Facility at Manor Flats; attempts to stage 65 Spontaneous Social Gatherings and Unlicensed Music Events on Forest Land as the COVID-19 measures continued to be eased; survey work identifying some 169 low-level Oak Processionary Moth caterpillar nests in Epping Forest; the use of green-hay techniques to re-establish wood pasture sward in Bury Wood; commencement of a trial of GPS managed cattle collars to direct hefting; a 64.6% increase in rounds played at Chingford Golf Course accompanied by 651% rise on online bookings and the completion of the Chairman's responses to the DEFRA Environmental Land Management Consultation and the Epping Forest District Council's (EFDC) Green & Blue Infrastructure Strategy consultation.

Recommendation

Members are asked to:

- Note the report.

Main Report

Staff and Volunteers

1. The management of COVID-19 measures continues to dominate the work activity of staff, with very welcome additional support from volunteers who returned to support roles.
2. Staff recruitment is current subject to vacancy management while measures are undertaken to mitigate the loss of income over the current financial year.

Budgets

3. The impact of COVID-19 costs and restrictions on Local Risk budgets has contributed to a significant projected loss in income. However, the return of public participation in Golf from 19 May and the DCMS approval of comprehensive action plans for Cricket and Grassroots Football, for July and August respectively, indicates that some income streams can be partially restored. The rental waiver extended to selected tenants, and the need for significant extra hours in the Keeper and Litter Picking teams, together with the cost of disposing of unprecedented amounts of waste, will oblige further in-year savings, or the development of new income streams, to reduce the projected overspend.

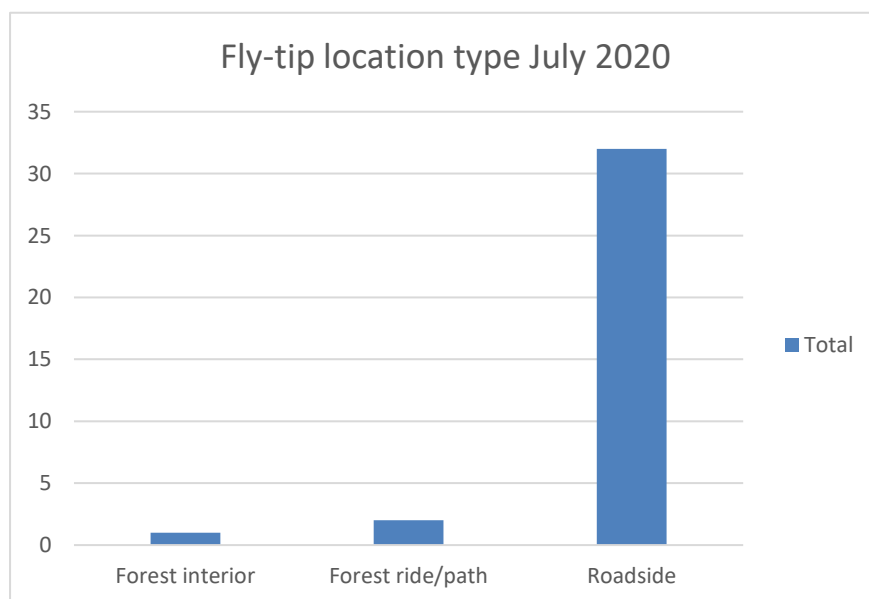
Weather

4. July saw a total of 11 days rainfall spread throughout the month. There was a total of 42.2mm of rain. The average temperature for July was 17.08 degrees Celsius

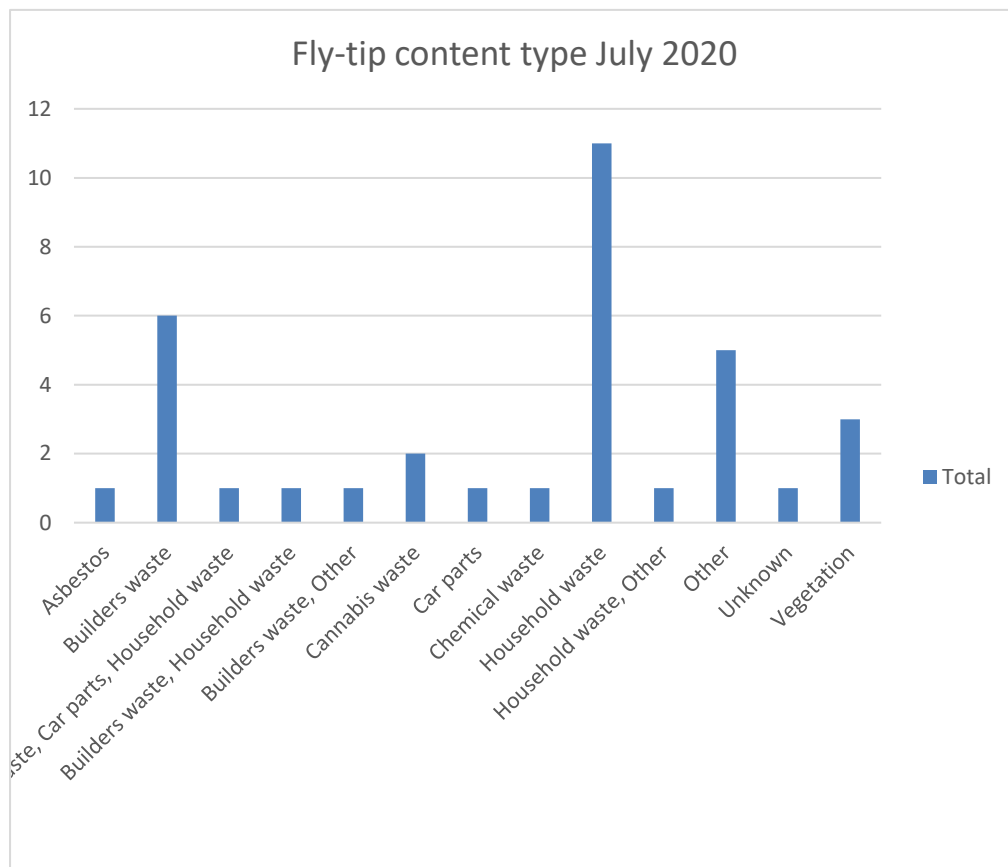
Forest Services

Fly Tipping

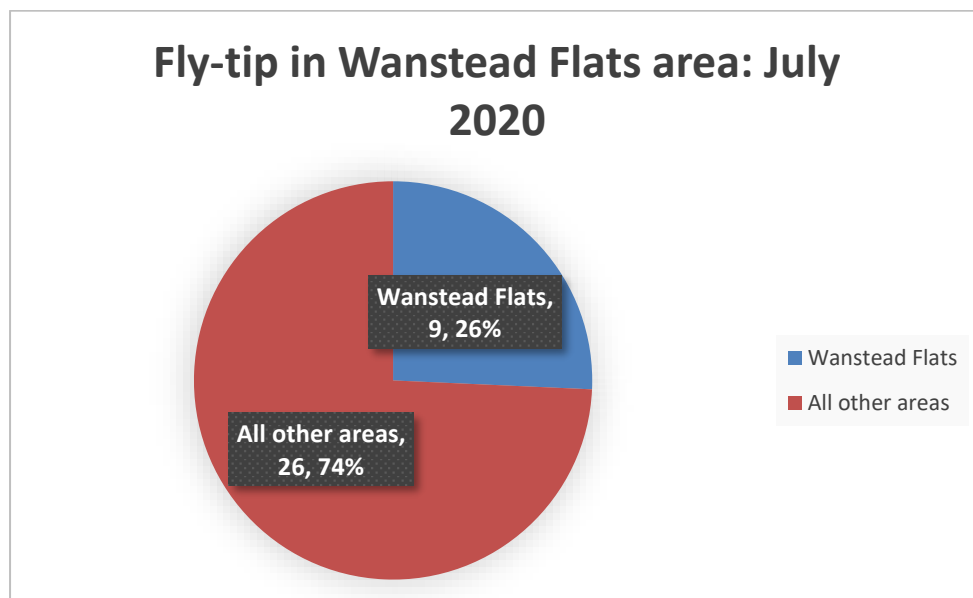
5. There were a total of 35 fly-tips recorded over the period of July 2020, this represents a 27% decrease over the same period in 2019.



6. Roadside locations represented 91% of the tip locations over the period.



7. Household waste represented the largest category of items tipped over the period at 14 (40%), while builders waste represented 9 tips (26%).



8. There were nine fly-tips in the Wanstead Flats area over the period which represents 26% of all tips. Three of these tips were on Centre Road and four on Capel Road.

Enforcement Activity

9. No Environmental Protection Act prosecutions took place during the period under report due to COVID-19 court restrictions. There are two EPA Trials, one EPA Hearing and seven Bye-Law Hearings pending. One written warning and one conditional caution of £80 was issued during the period under report.

Licences

10. A total of 17 licences for events were issued during the month being reported, which yielded an income of £9,007.40 plus VAT. 34 licences were issued during the same period in 2018/19 (income of £27,408.54).

Unexplained Deaths

11. There have been no unexplained deaths during this reporting period.

Rough Sleepers

12. There have been a total of 5 Rough Sleeper camps on Epping Forest:
- Bushwood – Waiting to be cleared
 - Buckhurst Hill – Waiting to be cleared
 - Genesis Slade Theydon Bios – 02/07/2020
 - Snaresbrook – Cleared 12/07/202
 - Whipps Cross Rd – Waiting to be cleared

Unauthorised Occupations

13. There have been no traveller incursions over this reporting period. There have been 51 Spontaneous Social Gatherings and 14 Unlicensed Music Events on Forest Land.

Dog Incidents

14. During the period there have been 4 reports of dog-related incidents over this period.
- 1 x Bushwood
 - 1 x Wanstead Park
 - 1 x Connaught Water
 - 1 x Gilbert Slade

Deer Vehicle Collisions

15. There were 2 reported Deer Vehicle Collisions (DVC) during this reporting period.
- 1 x Woodredon Hill
 - 1 x unknown location

Heritage; Landscape and Nature Conservation

Biodiversity

16. Under consent from Natural England, green-hay spreading has been undertaken by the Conservation Team, working with our hay-making contractor, across three sites within Bury Wood. Hay was cut by the contractor and then collected from several diverse grass swards on the Forest

and blown onto marked plots using the in-house tractor-drawn cattle-feeder / bedder.

17. Green haying is a technique developed a couple of decades ago for the restoration or creation of grasslands using local sources of seed. The hay has to be spread on the day of the harvest and as the spread hay dries this allows the ripe seed to fall onto the new ground but protected by the hay.
18. Additionally, the great advantage green hay as a seed source is that it allows the collecting up of seed that could not otherwise be easily obtained by other seed-harvesting techniques. This allows the spread and seeding of species which might not normally be available in commercially available conservation seed-mixes.
19. In this case the work is being carried out as a trial to demonstrate the effectiveness of the green-hay technique in a wood-pasture situation rather than the normal grassland or open land site. The aim is to enhance the recovery of the sward in wood-pasture restoration sites which have been under the heavy shade of over-grown Hornbeam pollards for more than 100 years and where the seed bank of the open-grown species will have become depleted or lost. The trials will last 3 years and focus on areas that are due have pollarding and canopy reduction works.
20. At Warlies Park, the “new hay meadow” that was created from scratch by the sowing of a wildflower seed-mix 13 years ago, has now developed into a very important site. Not only have the wildflowers firmly established themselves and developed into significant population sizes, with Bird’s-foot Trefoil and Lady’s Bedstraw the most prominent, but the insect populations that are supported there have become important. In addition to supporting hundreds of visiting pollinators, like bees and solitary wasps, the population of the Meadow Grasshoppers (*Pseudochorthippus parallelus*) and Roesel’s Bush-crickets (*Metrioptera roeselii*) was amongst the densest of any site in the Forest or Buffer Lands this year. Two other orthopteran species were also present.
21. At a time when insect species are under considerable threat the Buffer Lands are providing significant additional habitats in the countryside around the Forest, fulfilling one of the key roles that the City Corporation envisaged for them at the time they were acquired.

Agri-environment Schemes

22. During the month, the Rural Payment Agency (RPA), having made amendments to the long-delayed agreement for the proposed 10-year Countryside Stewardship Scheme (CSS), requested further documentation in relation to the commoners’ rights. With the assistance of the City Solicitor a detailed legal document was prepared to respond to the RPA request.
23. Nonetheless, this period also saw continuing work on tenders for contracts with further detailed development of specifications carried out with the assistance of City Procurement.

Environmental Land Management

24. The City Corporations detailed response to the DEFRA consultation on the future content of the ELMS was completed on 30 July (Appendix 1).

Grazing

25. During July, 10 Global Positioning System (GPS) cattle collars arrived from the Norwegian company *Nofence AS*. We are trialling the ability of collars to keep cattle hefted to particular areas along with 5 other sites in the UK before a full UK rollout is undertaken. We are still working closely with Natural England, DEFRA and APHA to ensure that data from the trial and new animal welfare evidence is made available to them to help shape future legalisation and potential grant funding for this technology. There has been great interest in this trial from others and many contacts for more information have been made.
26. This technology could have large positive impacts on how we graze the Forest and reduce labour resources associated with managing the current buried transmitter wire invisible fencing network (*Boviguard®*), which has now been in use for 10 years.
27. As part of the grazing programme this year we have allowed large areas of the grazed grasslands on the Forest to mature and flower in full before grazing. This is part of a management approach that allows for year-to-year variation in the grazing regime to ensure as a variety of conditions for recovering plant species, often in low densities, in this continuing restoration phase.
28. At the end of the month 21 cows began grazing the wood-pasture of the Bury Wood / Fairmead area within the existing *Boviguard®* system invisible fence area. Using the new *NoFence* technology, another 7 Cows were de-pastured for grazing the heathland of Sunshine Plain south and its linked heathy wood-pasture areas of Wake and Rushey Plains. Elsewhere on the Forest 10 cows with calves began grazing the fenced area of Fernhills.
29. Hay cuts have been taken across our land holding for winter feed. Due to the exceptionally dry months of April and May, yields are around 30% down on last year.

Heritage

30. There was no additional work carried out on heritage issues during July.

Contractors

31. The de-commissioning of the Temporary Mortuary Facility (TMF) at Manor Park Flats, part of Wanstead Flats began this month. Several meetings were held with the contractors running the site to ensure a smooth transition back to open Forest Land and to agree the restoration works. A hand-over site inspection was carried out on 30 July to ensure that the site had been cleared of any debris or left-over rubbish and that the ground conditions were suitable for restoration work to begin in August.

Land Management

Town & Country Planning – Local Plans

32. Local Plans work continued with your Committee's approval for the Chairman's response to the Epping Forest District Council's (EFDC) Green & Blue Infrastructure Strategy consultation. The letter was sent out on 13 July (see Appendix 2).
33. On 15 July attention was turned to London and the SAC Mitigation Strategy with a meeting convened by your officers with Greater London Authority (GLA) and Natural England Officers. The aim of the meeting was to agree a way forward to achieve a unified approach to suitable alternative natural greenspaces (SANGs) and to seek the GLA's assistance in bringing the London Boroughs together to agree to signing up to an updated Memorandum of Understanding.
34. These issues were not resolved, and a further meeting was held with Natural England (NE) on 30 July to explore the next steps in agreeing a London "SANGS" approach, which NE is describing as a "toolbox" of options. Further work by City Corporation officers is likely to be needed to make progress on this part of the SAC Mitigation Strategy.

Town & Country Planning – Development Control

35. Comments were submitted to EFDC planners on just one application in July objecting to the development of housing at Thornwood Rugby Club, and further comments were sent to the Planning Inspectorate in response to an appeal for Newstead, 19 Coopersale Common, Coopersale. There were no developments in the London Boroughs requiring comment at this stage.

Land Registration

36. Dialogue was initiated with the London Borough of Redbridge (LBR) with the intent of reintegrating the former Western Sewage Works at Hatch Forest, Chingford as part of the Forest, following its compulsory purchase in 1885. Initial feedback from LBR appears favourable that the land is of no operational value to them, so disposal is likely to be recommended.

Operations

Insurance works

37. Three new public liability claims were received during the period. Two were related to tyre damage caused by the alligator teeth at the car parks and one concerning a branch falling from a tree and damaging a car and injuring the occupant. Monitoring and maintenance works on the alligator teeth are all up to date and typically an insurance payment is not made. On further investigation the tree that hit the vehicle was not on Forest land, though the fallen branches had been deposited on our land.
38. EF staff and the insurance team held a periodic review of claims management and outstanding claims in July. Currently there are 36 insurance claims

outstanding against EF with a total claim value of over £1.6 million. One outcome of the review was that paying for mitigation works, such as installing a root barrier, was clarified as a Local Risk budget item. Recently we have been successful in defending claims, however, there are potentially a few claims in the pipeline where root barriers will be proposed, and these could result in significant additional local risk budget expenditure.

Risk Management Works

39. Oak Processionary Moth (OPM) (*Thaumetopoea processionea*): Overall staff and contract surveyors identified 188 OPM low-level nests on 108 trees requiring removal. During July staff removed 74 nests from 48 trees and contractors removed 114 nests from 60 trees. The presence of OPM on Oak trees is increasingly impacting arboricultural works with some tree works having to be delayed until additional equipment can be hired in to aid in the safe working of the trees.
40. Tree safety: Tree safety works continue, however, as raised in the May-June 2020 Superintendents report, we have a substantial backlog of works following the COVID Lockdown period and these will not be completed within the planned timetable. Staff received a 48-hour response task to complete on a large Poplar in the Churchill Avenue at Woodford Green which required the felling of the tree. This is a further indication on the declining condition of this prominent avenue previously reported to your committee. The backlog of work following COVID-19 Lockdown has meant the proposed avenue regeneration works have had to be delayed until September 2021, however, some arboricultural work will be required on at least 8 trees this year.
41. Reservoir management: The delayed six-monthly inspection visit by the reservoir inspecting engineer was undertaken during the period. No significant additional maintenance works were identified. Arborist staff have been preparing a BS 5837: 2012 Tree Assessment for works report for the reservoir safety works proposed for the dam at Deer Sanctuary for the Department of Built Environment. The tree work proposals for the dam were talked through with the Consulting engineer and the trees proposed for felling were agreed. The grass cutting maintenance work on the reservoirs overall is a little delayed this year due to the impact of COVID-19 on staffing levels.

Access Works

42. Path verge cutting commenced in July with work focusing on the main access routes in the Forest.
43. Staff and contract grass cutting across the Forest has also progressed during July in-line with previous years activities on this annual task. Additional areas were also put out to contract and, for example, Woodford Green was cut by our contractor for the first time this year.

Visitor Services

44. Visitor centres at High Beach and Chingford have remained closed throughout July, while work was undertaken to prepare Chingford for opening in August.
45. During July 'pop-up' visitor centres were trialled at both Wanstead Park and High Beach, on both weekends and weekdays. Engagement numbers with visitors indicated that High Beach provided the best use of staff time both on weekdays and weekends. The cargo bike from a previous project at Wanstead Park was re-used for this trial.
46. Numbers of visitors who engaged with the pop-up offer, have ranged from 13-52% of the visitor numbers to all visitor centres during the same period in 2019. Engagement with visitors at the pop ups has however, been steadily increasing; from 48 interactions on 18 July to 122 on 2 August.
47. Work to enable the re-opening was completed by August and the visitor centre at Chingford is open for 3 days a week while also offering continued 'pop-up' visitor centres at both High Beach and at Barn Hoppitt to engage with other visitor groups.
48. The visitor services team have also continued with litter picking as well as visitor counts at various locations. The final counts have now taken place and data has been sent to contractors for analysis against historic data. Observational surveys also took place during July, running alongside an online survey promoted through social media. The online survey returned nearly 500 responses. While there is still the need for further analysis of this the headline results so far are:
 - Over half of respondents (56%) indicated that they are visiting Epping Forest more frequently currently compared to pre-lockdown.
 - 27% are visiting just as often as before and 13% are visiting less.
 - 16% of respondents said they visited at least once a day prior to the lockdown, compared to 31% visiting at least once a day now.
 - 44% of respondents have visited new sites/areas for the first time since the start of lockdown.
49. The Queen Elizabeth Hunting Lodge hosted a wedding on 4 July, the first day legally permitted. The happy couple had an enjoyable day, if somewhat different to the one they imagined when booking. The team worked in collaboration with the registry office to ensure that all government guidelines were followed and that guests had an enjoyable and safe day.

Museum and Heritage

50. Whilst the heritage venues have been closed, staff have been researching the people and keepers living in and around the Forest from the c.16th yielding interesting information about who lived at Queen Elizabeth Hunting Lodge. This will be used to create more informative interpretation around the costume on display at the Lodge. In addition, research was undertaken regarding slaving links to Epping Forest place names as part of a review of naming conventions.

51. Work on the connection of the records and other documents housed in the National Archive has taken place to allow more efficient work once those public records re-open for use.

Learning

52. Throughout July, the learning team have continued to be proactive in reaching schools, communities and families in need, including children with limited access to resources such as computers and outside space. Activity sheets were designed so that children could create something themselves at home and a bespoke Epping Forest heritage activity was developed to enable children to explore the Forest's fascinating history from home or school. The activities were shared via community networks including 8 Waltham Forest community centres and a Waltham Forest food distribution centre for vulnerable families, as well as over 800 schools. The team continued to produce a series of videos which inspire children to be active in nature through activities such as bug-hunting and eco art, which is a valuable resource for learning in the school grounds. Resources can be found here: <https://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/things-to-do/green-spaces/learning-programme-resources>.
53. Over July, the team planned and prepared a series of facilitated nature activities for families in Epping Forest, ready for launch at the beginning of August.

Chingford Golf Course

54. The high volume of visitors continued throughout July with a total of 4,334 rounds compared to 2,633 for the same period last year: an increase of 1701 or 64.6%. Early start times continued to be limited to allow ground staff to be able to get ahead of play to continue to carry out course maintenance work which included regular cutting schedules for the greens and tees, strimming overgrown areas, irrigation repair work to pop ups and weekly spraying on the greens to help the improve putting surface quality.
55. Total revenue from online sales was £28,145.00 Total revenue from reception was £81,768.05, broken down into:

Breakdown of figures from Reception for July			
	2020/21	2019/20	Difference (+/-)
Green fees:	£73,880.87	£13,162.23	+£60,718.64
Drinks:	£813.80	£850.00	-£36.20
Hire Equipment:	£3697.50	£3417.50	+£280.00
Shop Sales:	£1972.70	£1484.60	+£488.10
Wanstead:	-	-	-
Horse Riding:	£1403.18	£525.29	+£877.89

56. Online bookings for the same period last year was £3,751.00 compared to £28,145.00 this year, an increase of £24,394.00 or 651% - all bookings continue to be pre-booking over the phone or online only. Total income from reception last year was £31,750.58. Overall income for this period last year amounted to £35,501.58 compared to £109,913.05 this year, an increase of £74,411.47 . The high increase for this period is because a 9-month season ticket was reintroduced from 6 July (and run until 31 March 2021). This income is ordinarily shown in April for the full 12-month season ticket.

Wanstead Flats

57. The increased litter picking duties continued from the high volume of visitors along with the unofficial raves across the Flats. Essential goal mouth renovations were carried out along with goal posts restoration works in preparation for a return for football in September.

58. Work to stop unofficial organised events on the flats has been ongoing, working alongside the Forest keeper team. Licencing procedures recommenced and work to renew licences/ get new users licenced started.

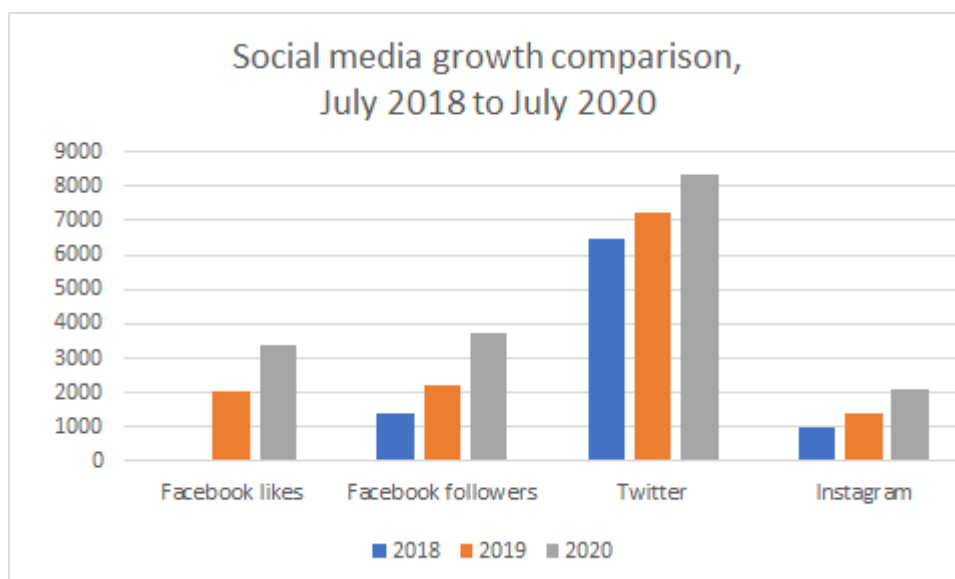
59. Parkrun is still not in operation due to COVID-19.

Communication and Information

60. As of 5 August 2020, Epping Forest social media following is:

- Twitter followers: 8330 8117 (15% increase)
- Facebook followers: 3709 (a huge 66% increase)
- Instagram followers: 2111 (52% increase)

61. The chart shows a comparison of our figures at the same point in 2018 and 2019:



62. As stated in the previous report, instead of a summer edition of Forest Focus, Forest Focus is being updated via mail chimp monthly. The July edition went out just before the summer holidays and included details of how to enjoy Epping Forest as a family, some information beech tree habitats, the purple

emperor butterfly as well as a reminder that fires / barbecues are not permitted in the Forest, and to take litter home.

63. The Top Tweet for July 2020 with 8,633 impressions related to a litter pick following an illegal rave in Bury Wood, Chingford.

64. The top Facebook post for July 2020 with 19,632 people reached was also relating to the clean up after the rave in Bury Wood.

65. The top Instagram post for July 2020 was a photograph of a beautiful pink sky sunset over Connaught Water from 31 July, with 257 likes and a reach of 1,543 people.

66. New codes of conduct have been promoted with three released this month. A generic code of conduct, along similar lines to the Countryside Code, and more specific codes of conduct aimed at dog walkers and cyclists.

Major incidents – COVID-19 National Health Emergency

67. Specific responses to the national health emergency are included in the body of this report.

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Environmental Land Management: Response

Appendix 2 - RESPONSE to the EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL GREEN & BLUE INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGY CONSULTATION – JUNE/JULY 2020

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