

Committee(s)	Dated:
Epping Forest and Commons	16112020
Subject: Epping Forest - Superintendent's Update for August to September 2020 (SEF 29/20)	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	2, 5, 11 & 12
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	No
If so, how much?	N/A
What is the source of Funding?	City's Cash Local Risk
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	N
Report of: Director of Open Spaces	For Information
Report author: Paul Thomson – Epping Forest	

Summary

This purpose of this report is to summarise the Epping Forest Division's activities across August to September 2020.

While all work continued to be dominated by COVID-19 restrictions, of particular note was work to restore of Cow Pond, Leyton Flats led by the amphibian charity Froglife, and Wanstead Flats, led by staff, to restore the acid grassland at the former Temporary Mortuary Site. Cattle grazing was trialled at Wanstead Park with positive public and conservation results. Considerable work has been undertaken on Planning matters both in relation to the EFDC and LBWF Local Plans, in addition to individual responses on development control matters. There has been good interest in the reopening of The View and a 52% increase in rounds on Chingford Golf Course.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- Note the report.

Main Report

Staff and Volunteers

1. A Visitor Experience Assistant retired at the end of September, after 12 years of service.

Budgets

2. At end of September, halfway through the financial year, spend is at 51% of total budget. Due to protracted negotiations with the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) grant income for this year has not yet been finalised and may vary significantly from the amount factored during budget setting. Activity, including a stop on all non-essential spending, to address COVID-19 shortfalls, due to essential additional spend and reduced income, has reduced the anticipated budget deficit to approximately £250,000, with work continuing to further reduce the deficit.

Weather

3. August 2020 was the wettest August recorded since rainfall data collecting began at High Beach (1979) 140.4mm rain fell over the space of 15 days. The average rainfall for August is 43.15mm.
4. In contrast, September was slightly drier than the average for this time of year (42.76mm) with 34.8mm of rain falling over 9 days throughout the month.
5. Storms Ellen and Francis were two of the most notable August storms in the UK in the last 50 years. Storms Ellen (19th to 21st) and Francis (25th) brought wind gusts of 4-50mph across inland areas.

Forest Services

Fly-tipping

6. There were a total of 75 fly-tips recorded over the period of August-September 2020, this is a 18% decrease over the same period in 2019.
7. Roadside locations represented 80% of the tip locations over the period, while household waste represented the largest category of items tipped over the period at 26 (35%), builders waste represented 17 tips (23%). There were 11 fly-tips in the Wanstead Flats area over the period which represents 15% of all tips. 4 of these tips were on Centre Rd and 3 on Capel Rd.

Enforcement Activity

8. Due to COVID-19 court restrictions no Environmental Protection Act prosecutions took place during the period under report. Two Fixed Penalty Notices were issued totalling £100.

Licences

9. A total of 51 licences for events were issued during the months being reported, which yielded an income of £ 16,017.85 plus VAT. 43 licences were issued during the same period in 2018/19 (income of £19,914.54).

Unexplained Deaths

10. There have been no unexplained deaths over the reporting period.

Rough Sleepers

11. There were 10 rough sleeper camps over the reporting period which have been managed in line with No Second Night Guidance (NSNO) in partnership with the St Mungo's Trust, and subsequently cleared:

- Victoria Rd J/W Forest Side
- Bushwood South
- Bushwood North
- St Thomas Quarter
- Great Monk Wood
- Triangle Wanstead Flats
- Gilberts Slade
- Warren Pond Rd
- Piercing Hill/Green Ride
- Bushwood, Wanstead

Unauthorised Occupations

12. There have been no traveller incursions over this reporting period.

13. There have been 13 Spontaneous Social Gatherings and 4 Unlicensed Music Events on Forest Land, which were addressed by Forest Keepers with, where necessary, excellent support from local Police Forces.

Dog Incidents

14. During the period there were two reports of dog related nuisance over the reporting period:

- 30/08/2020 Dogs molesting cattle
- 17/09/2020 Dog biting young girl

15. Both incidents refer to the failure to control a particular dog and the owner has settled a Fixed Penalty Notice (FPN) and has agreed to a trial of specific precautionary measures to end of March 2021.

Deer Vehicle Collisions

16. Epping Forest staff dealt with a total of 10 deer vehicle collisions (DVC) during this reporting period with 4 around the Wake Arms roundabout, Woodredon Hill and A104 near the Shell garage.

Open Riding

17. As from 00:01 on Monday 12 October 2020, Open Riding closed in Epping Forest, with activity restricted to the surfaced and posted ride network

Heritage; Landscape and Nature Conservation

Biodiversity

18. In partnership with the national amphibian conservation charity *Froglife*, and its contractor Maydencroft with funding provided by the National Heritage Lottery Fund (NHLF) and Veolia Environmental Trust, the second phase of the restoration works at Cow Pond (Leyton Flats) was completed in mid-September. This work is part of *Froglife*'s "The London Toad" project. The scheme is focusing on habitat work on wildlife sites within London with an aim on creating and maintaining green corridors to allow UK amphibian species safe movement between natural spaces. This conservation work is imperative for the survival of the common toad, as recently published research undertaken by the University of Zurich analysing *Froglife*'s 30+ year toad database, has concluded that toads have suffered a population decline of around 68%. This significant decline has mostly been due to habitat fragmentation and loss with particular declines being in the south east.
19. Cow Pond was reprofiled and deepened, alongside the removal of some dominant carr vegetation, which had blanketed and contributed to reduced water retention in the pond, to help create an open water habitat supporting a greater diversity of wildlife. This restoration work sits close by the new meadow at Whipps Cross junction that was created on land restored to the Forest in October 2019. Together these two conservation restoration projects should significantly enhance the environment of this area of Leyton Flats and provided for an important new gateway into this area of the Forest.
20. The **Temporary Mortuary Facility** on Manor Park Flats at Wanstead Flats was removed, the fencing was taken down and replaced with temporary mesh fencing in the first week of August. Remediation funding from London Council was used to restore acid grassland habitat.
21. Before this restoration work could take place the area, which lies within an Archaeological Protection Area (APA) for Greater London was examined carefully by archaeological consultants (LP Archaeology) and a report prepared on the history of uses of the site and its heritage context. The report found no archaeological remains of significance in the immediate area requiring restoration. Therefore, no heritage mitigation work was required.
22. The whole area (1.67ha) was then prepared for re-seeding by harrowing and rolling in early September. A wildflower seed mix was sown on 28th September, of which 25% by weight was made up of seeds harvested in August from the neighbouring SSSI area on Wanstead Flats. The site remains protected by the mesh fencing with two noticeboards explaining the phases of restoration work. All the neighbouring residential properties were sent a leaflet explaining the work before it took place. The restoration also attracted considerable national media attention.
23. Wanstead Flats was also the centre of attention on 30th September when the Chairman, a Verderer and officers met the Wren Group for a walk around the

area and a discussion of its biodiversity importance in relation to the staging of large events. In addition to the important acid grassland, the site is regionally significant as a stop-over and feeding area for threatened migratory passerine birds, like **Spotted Flycatchers** and **Whinchats**, two birds subject to enormous declines in numbers nationally. Both species were present on the Flats during the morning and a group of three Whinchats were observed early in the site visit.

24. **Fungi:** considerable interest in the Forest's importance for fungi, and on the problems of fungi-foraging, continues in the national and regional media. On 25th September Radio Essex made it the focus for one of its morning programmes. Other print media outlets also picked up the story. Seven people were successfully prosecuted during this autumn for foraging large quantities of fungi.
25. In the meantime, on the Forest itself the fungi fruiting season has seen abundant fruiting bodies because of the warm wet late summer and autumn weather. Amongst the species noted was the Clustered Bracket Fungi (*Inonotus cuticularis*) (a relatively uncommon fungi found on an ancient beech. A report also came to light that a rare and legally protected Oak Polypore (*Piptoporus quercinus*) was found and damaged near the Furze Ground, (Compartment 12). Unfortunately, the perpetrators of the damage were not identified.
26. The Barbastelle bat (*Barbastella barbastellus*) was recorded for the first time at Connaught Water. This is currently the third location for this species within the Forest. This is a rare species within the UK and is listed as Near Threatened on the global IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.

Agri-environment Schemes

27. The Conservation Team continue to liaise with the RPA on the long-delayed 2019 Countryside Stewardship Scheme grant application. While the Director signed the agreement in July, the RPA has now determined that this offer should be withdrawn and replaced. This has resulted in the detailed and complex tender process being put on hold. In addition, the new issues raised by the RPA, a year after the application, are now being examined in consultation with the Director and Legal Services.
28. A response on behalf of the City Corporation Open Spaces Department to a consultation on funding trees in urban and peri-urban areas for the future agri-environment scheme (Environmental Land Management scheme (ELMs)) was submitted. The Environmental Stewardship Officer represented the organisation in a workshop on the same topic run by the Forestry Commission and will attend a follow-up workshop in November 2020.

Grazing

29. In the 10th year in which the *Boviguard*TM system is being used, trials of a new invisible fence technology using GPS have been on-going on several sites with 8 cows involved. These trials have been a significant success. This technology will be a direct successor to the wired *Boviguard*TM system, which is nearing the end of its lifespan.
30. One of the successes for the new system was the trial at Wanstead Park with 3 cows utilising the GPS based NoFenceTM system to graze The Plain and its

important acid grassland with old anthills and significant butterfly populations. The trial was largely to determine whether the behaviour of park users would facilitate animals living in the park for periods of time. The trial received significant media attention in national and local papers. The project also attracted very considerable help from volunteers who were of great assistance in overseeing the cows and speaking to visitors. Overall, feedback from volunteers and many local users, many of whom visited the park specifically to see the cows, has been very positive.

31. Replacement fencing works were completed at Copped Hall Deer Park around the privately-owned lake. Combined with a successful extension to the grazing on a privately-owned part of the deer park next to the ha-ha, this project has improved relations with the neighbouring landowner and should assist in providing for more integrated management of this important heritage landscape.
32. A representative from Ashdown Forest Conservators visited to gain insight from the grazing management and use of collar-based containment systems at Epping Forest.
33. An annual veterinary assessment of the cows wearing collars was undertaken. This involves catching them up and holding them in a crush (restraining equipment) while the vet inspects the collar and their neck. No health issues were recorded and the high standards of cattle welfare were confirmed.

Heritage

34. A change in the approach to Corporate Work Programme funding in 2021/22 is likely to impact on schemes submitted for The Grotto and Copped Hall *Ha-ha*. The updating of the Conservation Statement for Knighton Woods continues to be progressed by mapping of detailed heritage features.
35. A PhD has started at University College London on researching archaeological evidence of Romany activity which will include Epping Forest as one of the study sites.

Forest Protection and planning matters

Town & Country Planning

36. **Epping Forest District Council (EFDC) Local Plan:** meetings continue to be held by EFDC officers and their consultants with your officers and Natural England in relation to the update of the Habitats Regulations Assessment of the Local Plan and proposed mitigation. On 6th August detailed proposals for an Air Pollution Mitigation Strategy were discussed.
37. In late August, the updated **Habitats Regulations Assessment** was published with 10 days given by EFDC for consultation due to its requirement to provide tranche 4 of its proposed Main Modifications to the Inspector by 14th September. Following the September Committee (7th Sept), a letter of response (attached) was sent to EFDC from the Chairman detailing our continuing concerns with the Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) and particularly with the lack of

recreation mitigation proposals for alternative visitor destinations outside the Forest.

38. In late September, the **London Borough of Waltham Forest** (LBWF) published one of its two consultations on its forthcoming **Local Plan**. This first document concerned site allocations for the Borough and included significant housing with 1km of the Epping Forest SAC boundary. Overall, up to 27,000 dwellings are proposed within the Borough over the next 15 years, all within the recreational zone of influence of the Forest.
39. The second LBWF consultation document on the Local Plan policies is due out at the time of writing this report. It is not yet clear when the LBWF Local Plan HRA will be made available for review. A separate report on the two LBWF Local Plan documents is provided for your Committee's consideration.
40. More detailed consultations on re-development of the library for housing and a new cultural centre adjacent to **Chingford Green** were promised in a briefing document in September. Chingford Green is part of the Forest under care and maintenance by LBWF and as well as protected as Forest is also listed as important heritage in London as an Archaeological protection Area (APA). The consultation is expected in November. Your officers responded to an enquiry by the local heritage group that is currently mounting a campaign against the proposals.

Town & Country Planning – Development Control

41. Comments were submitted to Planners for this reporting period as follows:

- Cornerstone (Infrastructure Services Company) applied a second time to place a 5G mast at the bottom of Warren Hill, Loughton. Despite being on Forest Land and having been previously refused by EFDC.
- A planning application has been made for 8 dwellings at the former Duke of Wellington PH in High Beach. City Corporation Officers are preparing a three-minute statement at the planning hearing on the 4th November.
- A planning application for the former Rising Sun PH on Woodford New Rd, was objected to due to its vicinity to the SSSI and SAC.
- 89 The Avenue, was a flat complex of 5 units next to the Forest.
- Santa Maria Nursery, objected to development of 2 new properties in replacement of 1. Objected to on grounds of being in Greenbelt.

Land Registration and Access Audit

42. Work continues with the mapping and referencing of all access routes across Forest Land to neighbouring properties by the Wayleaves Officer with the majority of compartments now completed as desk studies. In addition, the GIS officer has mapped a detailed grassland gazetteer for over 30 of the Forest's 38 Compartments. During this work, encroachments have been discovered by examining the 2019 aerial photographs, that recently became available, and overlaying these with the Land Registration information on the GIS system. A considerable amount of fieldwork will be required to follow up on both these important research and mapping projects.

Operations

Habitat Works

43. Contract and inhouse grass cutting works are on schedule for completion with additional areas also worked, especially on the Buffer Lands as part of the pasture management. Maintenance of the cleared areas of wood pasture has progressed with the main areas worked however we are still struggling to complete work on all areas and this will need a review and reassessment for the start of the 2021 season.
44. Wanstead Park: The contractor undertook two monitoring visits and identified one colony of Floating Pennywort in the Perch Pond. This was removed and a follow up survey found no other signs. It is proposed to continue with the contract monitoring inspections in 2021. Thames Water have also started a series of investigations into the condition and possible impact on drainage of their infrastructure around the Ornamental Waters. It is hoped the owner of a gas main under the Ornamental Waters will undertake the same assessment. Both studies will hopefully identify whether these utilities contribute in some way to the significant water loss of the Ornamental Waters.
45. Highams Park Lake: A proposal for financing the improvement of the lake edge vegetation at Highams Park Lake has been submitted to the London Borough of Waltham Forest. This is linked to compensation proposals linked to a planning application for a new fence around Woodford Primary School. The proposal at Highams Park would see a new reed bed created helping to clean surface water drainage entering the lake as well undertaking education work with pupils from the school.

Insurance works

46. There have been two public liability and two subsidence claims during the reporting period. One of the liability claims is complicated by the fact it has occurred on a path covered by multiple wayleave holders and the City Corporation Insurance Department will be working to ascribe liability on this. One claimant progressing a liability case which has been pending for nearly three years and was due in court in September, chose not to progress the case at the last minute. The following day another case elected to go to court. This is challenging as it asserts how the City Corporation should manage the safety of its visitors with respect to utility companies' infrastructure on the Forest.

Risk Management Works

47. Tree safety works are progressing and are the main focus of the Arborist Teams at present. With the delay of the Countryside Stewardship Application there has been an opportunity to catch up on the works postponed due to COVID-19 and it is hoped to significantly advance the amber tree safety zones.

Access Works

48. The annual program of work to improve the condition of main paths in the Forest continued during this period working of the path from Whitehall Plain to Charter road, Highams Park via Woodford Golf course. This involved a widening of the overstorey to allow air and sunlight to the path surface with the hope it will dry out quicker each year....a challenge for this October!

Visitor Services

Events

49. Queen Elizabeth's Hunting Lodge was re-opened to the public on 20 August via Eventbrite-bookable costumed tours allowing us to provide an enhanced visitor experience within COVID-19 health and safety guidelines. The tours introduce a topical note with displays and chat about Tudor medicine alongside the established history of the building. A single £25 ticket covers a maximum of 5 people. Three tours have been booked to date.
50. In September, Visitor Services researched and developed an Ambresbury Banks guided tour, offered at £25 for a maximum of 5 people, and used Twitter to get a sense of which days and times the public might be interested in attending. Walks were promoted via Eventbrite and sessions in October and November were quickly booked up prior to the first session.

Learning and Education

51. Following concerns over the impact of lockdown on mental health, the learning team developed a summer programme for families with activities designed to promote wellbeing through spending time in nature, learning new skills, being creative, and working together as a family. Activities such as eco-art and habitat building proved to be very popular. The team used an evaluation toolkit developed by UCL to measure wellbeing and are thrilled to report that participants' wellbeing increased by an average of 22%. Feedback from participants was very positive:

"We had a brilliant outdoor session in Epping Forest organised by the Learning Team and led by Katie. Our 9-year-old daughter had so much fun building a shelter in the forest and engaging in eco art activities such as leaf bashing and stick spider webs. As a busy family, it was fantastic to spend time outdoors together, work as a team and join in the fun and creative activities while learning new skills. The session was professionally organised, led by a very friendly and welcoming team member who put us at ease straight from the beginning. We highly recommend this session, we enjoyed it a lot!"

52. In September, the team launched their new COVID-19-safe school offer. The majority of the Epping Forest based programme has been adapted in line with COVID-19 safety measures, and the team are also offering two new programmes for delivery in schools, including a 'Nature and Wellbeing' session.

Chingford Golf Course

53. The golf course continues to be very busy compared to previous years. For August and September, the total number of rounds for this year was 7,504 compared to 4,941 for the same period last year, an increase of 2,563 (52%). Tee time intervals have remained slightly higher than normal to help avoid any congestion out on the golf course and help increase social distancing between groups. Essential renovation works were carried out in September on the greens which involved hollow coring the green, removing the cores and top dressing with sand. This helps to alleviate compaction, increases air and water percolation deeper into the rootzone improving the soil structure and will help prevent any turf disease in the winter months, all allowing for longer use of the surface increasing playability all year round. This is the first time this process has been carried out in 8 years and will be done once a year at a minimum going forwards.

54. Total revenue from online sales this period is £45,994.00, total revenue from reception was £72,773.34 broken down into:

Breakdown of figures from Reception			
	2020/21	2019/20	Difference (+/-)
Green fees:	£54,941.10	£53,911.72	+£1,029.38
Drinks:	£1773.70	£1810.80	-£37.10
Hire Equipment:	£7850.00	£6255.00	+£1595.00
Shop Sales:	£3875.80	£4179.20	-£601.00
Wanstead:	£3382.15	£2229.50	+£1152.65
Horse Riding:	£653.59	£280.18	+£373.41

55. Online bookings for the same period last year was £8,281.50 compared to £45,994.00 this year, an increase of £37,712.50 - *all bookings continue to be pre-booking over the phone or online*. Total income from reception last year was £60,384.93. Overall income for this period last year amounted to £68,666.43 Compared to £118,767.34 this year, an increase of £50,100.91 (73%).

Wanstead Flats

56. Start of season prep work was carried out by the grounds team installing the goal posts and line marking the pitches. Each site went through a COVID-19 secure risk assessment putting in place safety measures to protect all staff and visitors ready for the re-start. Due to the decline in football over the past few years and COVID-19, this year to help reduce unofficial play, staff labour and materials we have reduced the number of pitches down from 42 to 30

57. The season started in mid-September, with a total income from 1st instalments for season bookings and casual matches amounting to £19,326.93.

58. Parkrun still not in operation due to COVID-19.

Visitor Numbers

59. COVID-19 secure measures which have been in place at the visitor centres since re-opening and continue to restrict the capacity of the built space.

60. The Queen Elizabeth's Hunting Lodge remains accessible via pre-booked tours only.

61. The Temple remains closed pending the completion of surveyors work to assess the impact of the recent pest infestation issues.

Visitor Numbers	QEHL 2020	2019	View 2020	2019	Temple 2020	2019	High Beach2020	2019	Total	Total 2019
August	0	2957	1239	3221	0	463	0	2592	1239	10670
September	0	1719	1137	3604	0	69	0	1684	1137	6693

Communication and Information

62. As of 23 October our social media following is:

- Twitter followers: 8,483
- Facebook likes: 3,508
- Instagram followers: 2,326

Major incidents

incidents – COVID-19 National Health Emergency

63. The response to current COVID-19 restriction remain in place and planning is well advanced for managing any emergence from a second-wave lockdown.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Letter to EFDC on Habitats Regulations Assessment.

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