

Committee(s)	Dated:
Epping Forest and Commons	08032021
Subject: Epping Forest - Superintendent's Update for December 2020 to January 2021 (SEF 11/21)	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 December 2020 to January 2021.

While all work continued to be dominated by COVID-19 restrictions through the changes between Tiers 2, 3 and then 4 in December, and the return to a third National lockdown beginning in January. Of particular note during December/January was two further months of above average rainfall following a very wet Autumn; a substantial overhaul of the Ground Source Heat Pump System at the Harrow Road Sports Pavilion; the first successful lets of the Baldwins Hill Lodge holiday let; further negotiations with the Rural Payments Agency on a potential Countryside Stewardship grant award; a presentation by Epping Forest staff to on cow collar conservation grazing as part of the Knepp Rewilding project and positive progress on SAC Mitigation by the SAC Oversight Group.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- Note the report.

Main Report

Staff and Volunteers

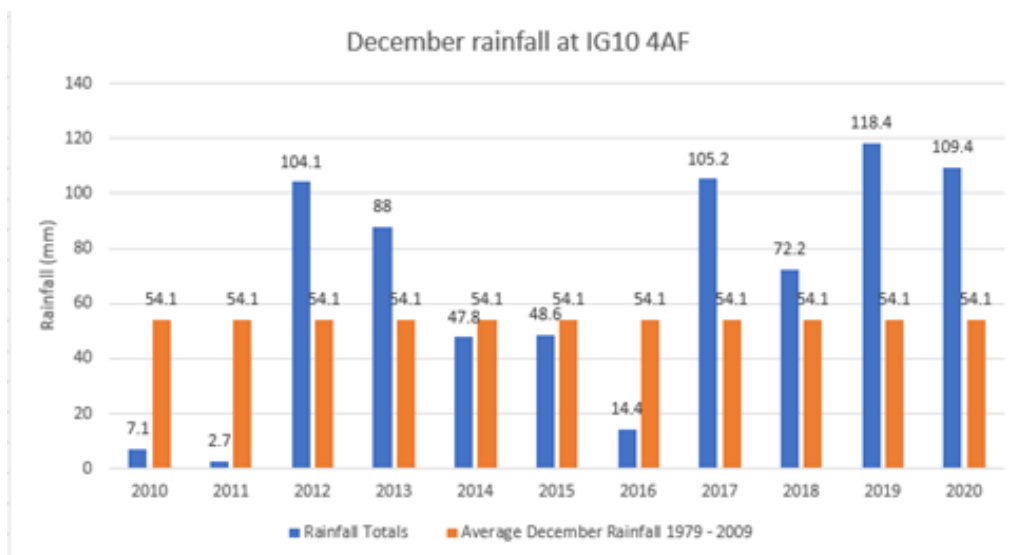
1. A Community Engagement Officer – Lakes and Ponds, funded through the Capital Programme, will be working over the next ten months leading on public engagement around works to the dams at Wanstead Park, Birch Hall and Baldwins ponds.

Budgets

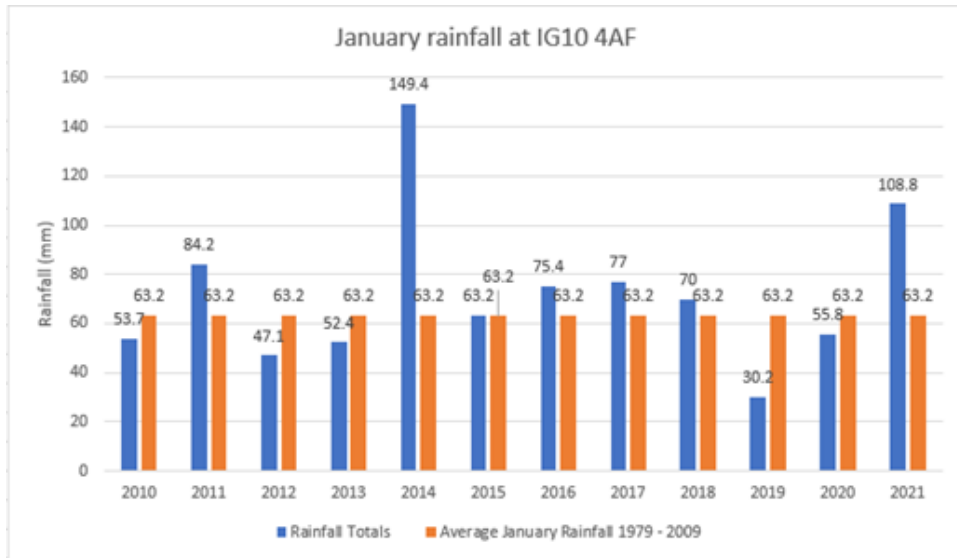
2. At end of January, 83% of financial year, Epping Forest Local risk budgets stand at 84% spend, although with some large sums to account for in the closing stages of 2020-21, including grant income to be finally agreed with the Rural Payments Agency, recharges and expenditure to achieve savings in the next financial year. Overall, the predicted overspend due to COVID-19 has reduced significantly through vacancy management and postponed expenditure and is now anticipated to be in the region of £150,000.

Weather

3. December 2020 was much wetter than the average for this time of year (54.1mm) with a total of 109.4mm, nearly double the average. There was a total of 23 days of rain with the wettest day being the 3rd with 23.8mm of rainfall.



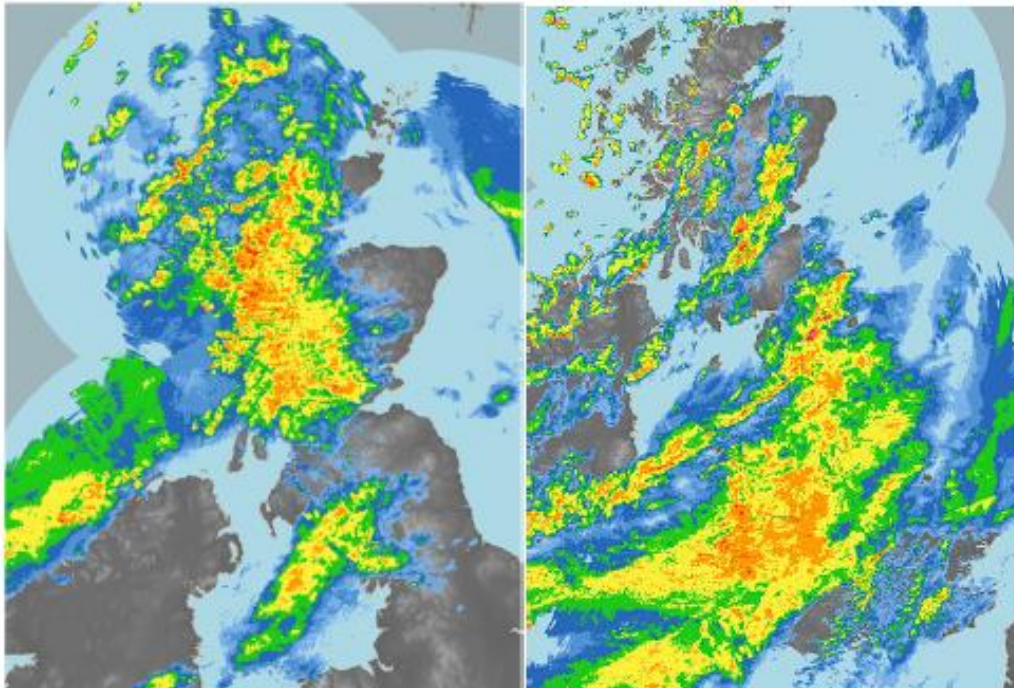
- January 2021 rainfall had a total of 108.8mm which was above the average for this time of year (63.2mm). There was a total of 24 days of rain with the 13th being the wettest day, seeing 25.2mm of rainfall.



- Storms Bella – 26-27 December brought persistent heavy rain across and strong winds overnight 26 to 27 December. This was one of the most powerful storms of the year, and the heavy rain falling on already saturated ground caused many areas to flood, following the earlier flooding of Ornamental Water by the River Roding on 21 December.

1200 UTC 26 December 2020

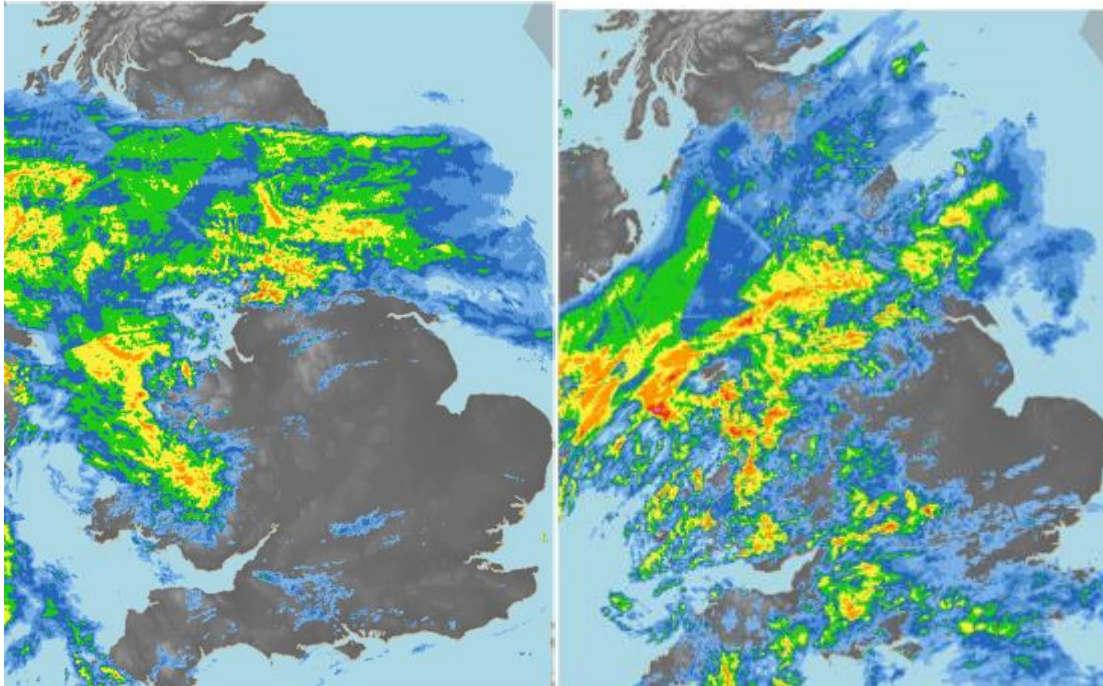
0000 UTC 27 December 2020



6. Storm Christoph 18 to 20 January 2021 brought some exceptionally wet weather, strong winds and snow.

1200UTC 19 January 2021

1200UTC 20 January 2021



Sustainability

7. The City Surveyor Department has successfully completed an £89,000 investment in the installation of a new Ground Source Heat Pump and ground array at the Harrow Road Sports Pavilion. The new system complies with the Microgeneration Certification Scheme (MCS), a Government sponsored quality assurance scheme, it is designed to meet 100% of the peak heating load.
8. Opportunities for environmental improvements to empty lodges are being investigated, some require considerable investment to achieve legal minimum Environmental Performance Classification prior to letting.

Epping Forest Projects

Golf Welfare

9. The construction and fit out of staff welfare facilities at Jubilee Retreat, servicing Chingford Golf Course, is close to completion, with handover originally due for 12 February, being delayed due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Lodge letting

10. Although Baldwins Hill is closed to holidaymakers, some restriction-exempt bookings have been possible during this period, with excellent feedback received. Rangers Road has works planned to develop into the Charity's second holiday

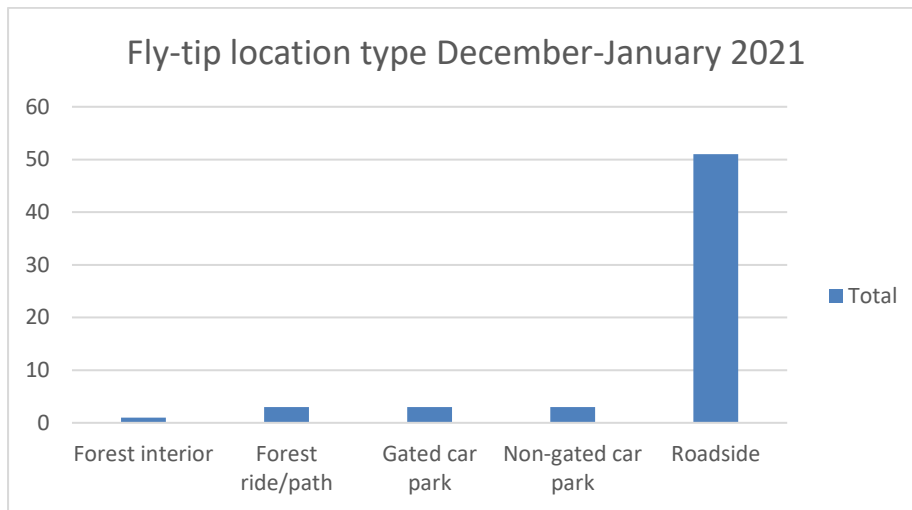
let, but with significant internal restructure required.

- 11. Works are underway at flats 1&2 Jubilee Retreat ready for domestic Assured Shorthold Tenancy (AST) lets early in the next financial year, with works scoped for other assets to follow shortly.

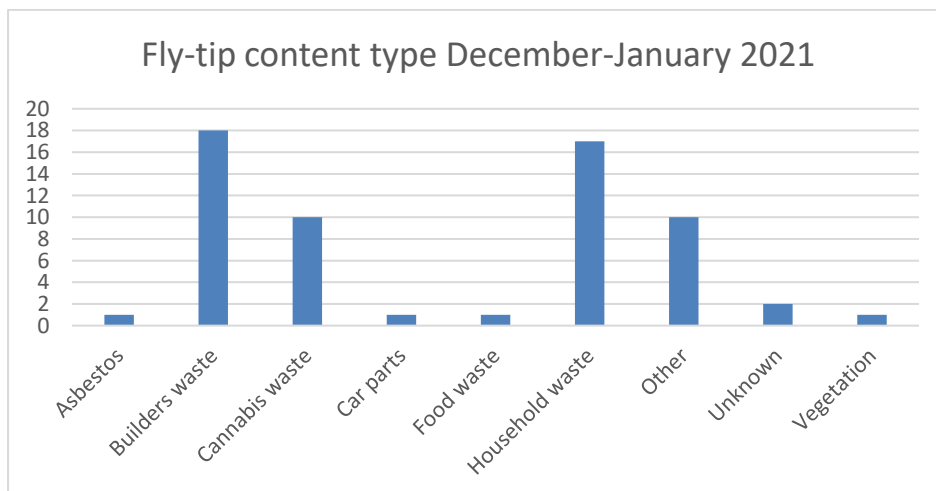
Forest Services

Fly-tipping

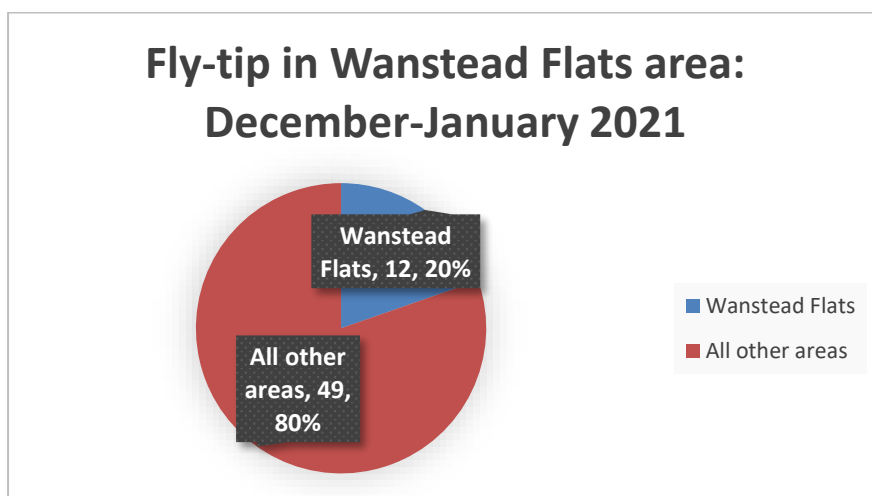
- 12. There were a total of 61 fly-tips recorded over the period of December 2020 – January 2021, this represents a 6% decrease over the same period in 2019-2020.



- 13. Roadside locations represented 84% of the tip locations over the period.



14. Builders waste represented the largest category of items tipped over the period at 18 (29%), while household waste represented 17 tips (27%).



15. There were 12 fly-tips in the Wanstead Flats area over the period which represents 20% of all tips. Five of these tips were on Forest Land adjacent to Highway Land on Capel Road.

Enforcement Activity

16. No EPA prosecutions were heard in the period under report. 3 Conditional Cautions were issued.

Date	Defendant Name	Offence Accepted 33:Deposit 34:Duty of Care	Court Name	Costs Recovered
08.12.2020	Not for disclosure	Conditional Caution Damage to Forest	N/A	£300
13.01.2021	Not for disclosure	Conditional Caution Sec:34	N/A	£200
23.01.2021	Not for disclosure	Conditional Caution Sec: 33	N/A	£500
Total Costs Awarded to Epping Forest (Including Compensation)				£1000
Total				£1000

Licences

17. A total of 21 licences for events were issued during the months being reported, which yielded an income of £7,254.50 plus VAT which reflects the impact of COVID-19 restrictions. 30 licences were issued during the same period in 2019/20 yielding an income of £17,700.03.

Unexplained Deaths

18. There have been 2 unexplained deaths over the reporting period.

- Hollow Ponds 19/1/21
- Wanstead Flats 7/2/21

Rough Sleepers

19. There were 3 rough sleeper camps located during the reporting period which have been managed in line with No Second Night Out (NSNO) guidance.

- 5/12/20 Woodredon Hill refused Street Link and left site.
- 8/12/20 Wanstead Flats vacant camp cleared 15/12/20
- 9/12/20 Wanstead Flats vacant camp to be removed.

Unauthorised Occupations

20. There has been 1 traveller incursion over this reporting period, which was removed within 4 hours of trespass.

- Bury Road car Park 19/1/21 16 caravans and 70 plus persons.

21. There have not been any Spontaneous Social Gatherings or Unlicensed Music Events on Forest Land.

Dog Incidents

22. There have been 2 recorded dog related incidents during this reporting period.

- 21/12/20 Grimston's Oak Rottweiler not under control
- 21/12/20 Catacomb's Corner 2 dogs not under control

23. In addition to these figures, there have been 9 reports of missing dogs across the Forest over this reporting period. The organisation Dogs Lost, reports that COVID-19 has increased the demand for companion dogs which in turn is fuelling the theft of dogs off leads from Open Spaces.

Deer Vehicle Collisions

24. Epping Forest staff dealt with a total of 2 deer vehicle collisions (DVC) during this reporting period.

- 13/1/21 Coppice Row – Fallow Buck
- 19/1/21 Goldings Hill – Fallow Buck

NEPP/Red Route Figures

25. There have been 36 penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) manually during the reporting period. These figures do not include PCNs issued from camera car footage. The total number of PCN's issued on the red route to date now totals 1070.

Volunteer Figures

26. There has been a total of 775.6 volunteer hours completed over this reporting period by 17 volunteer wardens.

Heritage; Landscape and Nature Conservation

Climate Action Strategy

27. Work has continued to develop the plan for the Open Spaces Department's work on the Climate Action Strategy, the Department's project is called *Carbon Removals*, describing how the project will increase the ability of sites to absorb carbon dioxide (CO₂) from the atmosphere. Further details are given in a report to your Committee at this meeting, entitled *Climate Action Strategy – Open Spaces "Carbon Removals"* (SEF/10/21b). This report will also be presented to Open Spaces and City Gardens Committee in April 2021. The current work effort is focussing on:

- i. recruiting to the new roles,
- ii. preparing to commission feasibility studies, surveys and research,
- iii. planning for ground works to begin in autumn 2021.

Biodiversity

28. The main issue of note for this period was the high rainfall along with continued very high visitor pressure. This has led to further compaction and erosion damage to paths and trail edges and a loss of vegetation across many areas of grassland and some damage around the roots of ancient trees. The impacts of this are yet to be assessed and direct reparations and other solutions will need to be considered. Sample survey and recording work has been underway since June 2020 and further study is planned for the first quarter of 2021 and will be reported to your Committee later in the year.

29. The cold winter weather of January brought some notable bird movement and unusual winter migrants to the Forest. A large influx of **Russian White-fronted Geese** into eastern England from the continent saw 2 birds arrive and remain for several weeks at Wanstead Flats. In addition, both **Red Kites** and **Ravens** made appearances over the Forest and with the former seen as regularly in the south of the Forest as well as the more rural northern parishes.

30. The legally protected **Firecrest** was seen in additional sites to its known breeding areas and birds were seen both north and south of the A406 North Circular road in the Forest at Woodford and at Gilbert's Slade respectively. The mild winters of recent years have helped numbers of this rare bird increase, although the period of snow and below zero temperatures in January and February may yet have an adverse impact for this year's breeding numbers.

Agri-environment Schemes

31. The Director of Open Spaces and the Environmental Stewardship Officer met with the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) in early January to discuss further refinements to the pending Countryside Stewardship agreement. The Environmental Stewardship Officer is now working with the RPA and Natural England to revise and finalise prescriptions and update the timetable following the late changes to the agreement offer made by the RPA. A report giving more details of progress is presented to your Committee at this meeting (see report SEF 13/21).

Grazing

32. Following June's *BBC Countryfile* profile of the invisible fencing work at Epping Forest, the innovative project, now including the use of the new *NoFence*® GPS cow collars, continued to attract attention and requests for more information from other conservation professionals. As a result, the Grazing & Landscapes Project Officer gave an online presentation on "Collar containment grazing in high population and high traffic areas" to over 100 representatives from the conservation management sector in December.
33. This was part of a *Zoom* workshop series organised and hosted by Knepp Rewilding Estate officers following their visit to Epping Forest in the autumn. The Head of Conservation also took questions at the workshop and further meetings are planned with conservation organisations and graziers around the UK. These meetings will be aimed at ensuring that the system is fully understood and that the dialogue with government agencies and Defra officials continues, as operating procedures are refined, and the system becomes more widely used.
34. On the Forest itself, five cows were grazed successfully across Chingford Plain and Fairmead areas until the end of December. This was part of a trial on the feasibility of winter grazing with GPS collars. The GPS collars allow greater security for this work and the return of winter grazing would be an important step in providing the continuity of habitat for a range of species dependent on grazing. A report on this and future refinements to the grazing project will be brought to your Committee for information and consideration in due course.

Heritage

35. A licence was granted for a local group to carry out some ground-penetrating radar work in summer 2021 at Manor Park, Wanstead Flats (Compartment 38) in the search of further Roman infrastructure related to the settlement at Wanstead.

Forest Protection and planning matters

Town & Country Planning

36. The major progress in this period has been the meeting of the **SAC Oversight Group** on 21 January to decide on potential governance arrangements, the extent of in-perpetuity funding for the SAC protection and the detailed proposals approved by your Committee in November for more comprehensive Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Measures (SAMMS). These SAMMS proposals were presented to the meeting by the Head of Conservation. Natural England officers also provided guidance on governance and in-perpetuity issues. As a result, two sub-groups for the Oversight Group have been established. The first is to finalise the governance arrangements and the second sub-group will decide on in-perpetuity funding levels for the SAMMS and other mitigation measures. Importantly, Natural England is assisting the coordination of both these sub-groups and the Greater London Authority (GLA) will also be present to provide a strategic overview for the London Boroughs.

37. **Epping Forest District Council (EFDC) Local Plan:** With the Air Pollution Mitigation Strategy (APMS) now agreed with Natural England, the remaining focus in January was on the Green & Blue Infrastructure Strategy (G&BI Strategy) and the policies underlying and securing all the SAC Mitigation packages. A meeting was held with Natural England and EFDC officers on 21 January at which modified SANGS proposals were put forward as part of the G&BI Strategy. Subsequently, on 29 January, the crucial updated draft policy wording was provided for Policies DM2 (Epping Forest) and DM22 (Air Pollution). Responses will be made to both new proposals as reported in the accompanying report to this Committee on the EFDC Local Plan.
38. **London Borough of Waltham Forest (LBWF)** A detailed response to the LBWF Local Plan Regulation 19 and Regulation 18 Site Allocations proposals consultation was made on 14 December by the Town Clerk, in consultation with the Chairman and Deputy Chairman under delegated authority (see attached to this report - **Appendix 1**). This has since been followed up by LBWF officers and their consultants in January as reported in the accompanying report to this Committee on the LBWF Local Plan.

Town & Country Planning – Development Control

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

- Good Intent Pub – infill property in former club car park (500 m from SAC)
- 2 The Uplands Loughton – infill of two properties in garden (250m from SAC)
- 9-11 High Beech Road, Loughton – alteration from offices to flats (300m from SAC, increased recreational impact).
- 75-77 Queens Rd, Buckhurst Hill – 15 apartments at former shops/restaurant (200m from SAC, increased recreational impact).

40. *Next* PLC development was refused in December 2020 at EFDC Planning Committee. However, it has now been referred to Full Council with the date for decision still undecided. In the interim, Epping Forest officers have challenged the compliance of the *Next* plc project-level Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA). This HRA had not taken account of the proposed introduction of a right-hand turn ban into Forest Side/Clay Pit Hill which might impact the SAC and also effect Forest visitors. As a result of Epping Forest officers challenge, the HRA was updated and its findings presented at a meeting on 26 January. The proposed response to this presentation and subsequent clarifications forms part of the accompanying report on the EFDC Local Plan at this Committee meeting.

Land Registration, Access Audit & Wayleaves

41. An historic wayleave debt of £1,500 has been successfully addressed and £2,551 of debts have been written off, where billed residents have moved or were found to be deceased.
42. The continuing Access Audit has also revealed further commercial wayleaves which require review of payments and management of the access.

Operations

Habitat Works

43. Wood pasture Management: Around 120 new pollards created over the last 10 years were reworked with their second repollarding on Ditches ride, Grimston's Oak ride and Almshouse Plain.

Insurance works

44. In a joint project with Theydon Bois Parish Council and the St Mary the Virgin Church, the wrought iron fence was freed of encroaching vegetation to allow its repair and restoration by the Church. At the same time, wider vegetation management was undertaken to improve views to the Church from the green. The work is still ongoing.

Risk Management Works

45. Tree Safety – At the end of January, 166 trees were still to be worked from the 2020 tree safety assessments and 21 from the 2019 assessment. This is further through the list than first anticipated due to the staff absences with COVID-19 and the need to focus on COVID-19 tasks. The annual contractor-led tree safety assessment has begun and is on schedule for completion in March 2021.

46. Fire Safety: As part of the Fire Management Plan (FMP) required actions, old growth gorse was cleared from the Central Line boundary at Leyton flats. Old gorse is especially flammable and clearing this was one of the last outstanding improvement actions in the FMP. The cut material is still to be chipped and is pending improved ground conditions.

Access Works

47. Damage assessments of the path network are being undertaken. This involves a red, amber, green assessment of the path and verge condition and follows the best practice established by the National Trust at Hatfield Forest. The predominantly clay soils, wet conditions and the very high public access on many routes has led to widespread damage and muddy condition much in excess of normal winter wear and tear.

48. Following a hiatus due to COVID-19 work has now started to develop the informal log play area at Wanstead Park. Outline ideas have been developed and potential logs identified from across the Forest based on naturally fallen branches and trees and logs arising from tree safety works. Development of this will be undertaken through the spring and it is hoped to have a simple natural play facility ready for the summer. The play area is being developed in partnership with local parents in the development of this facility.

49. In response to local community requests and discussion with the Head of Visitor Services an enhanced maintenance regime has been started along Harrow Road in the vicinity of the changing rooms. The aim is to restore the open character beneath the London plain avenue to deter anti-social behaviour and to open views onto Wanstead Flats for residents living opposite. Annual verge cutting will maintain this open character.

Visitor Services

Events

50. Due to the Tier 4 and Lockdown restrictions, no events took place. Planned events were cancelled or postponed and customers offered refunds or alternative dates as appropriate.

Learning and Education (Learning Team)

51. The learning team continued to offer their outdoor-only COVID-safe school programme during December 2020. A highlight was the festive wreath making sessions for schools, alongside a log fire in the beautiful setting of Barn Hoppitt. The sessions were designed to promote wellbeing and connection with the Forest.

52. As part of the Green Talent Programme, the team ran regular weekly sessions for students from White Trees School – a specialist school for young people who experience behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. The young people have benefitted from a varied programme designed to build confidence and transferable skills. The group spent time in the Forest, learnt new skills such as orienteering and wood carving, and contributed through activities such as litter picking.

53. With schools closed in January, members of the learning team have been entered, part-time into the Government's furlough scheme in order to reduce losses for the City Corporation. The team are ready to return to work full time as soon as it is feasible to run a full programme and are continuing to innovate and engage learners where possible.

54. The team have shared a bank of nature-focused learning activities with over 800 London schools via our school newsletters, and in February the resources were shared with teachers across the UK via the Learning Outside the Classroom website and the UK School Trips newsletter, which has a search reach of over 400,000 educators. Teachers will be able to share these with children at home as well as those at school. The activities were created during lockdown one, and include videos teaching children how to do a bug hunt and create eco art, or worksheets demonstrating how to make a bird feeder or sun catcher. The team is in contact with food banks and community centres to continue to share the activity sheets which have been designed to engage children and families who may have limited access to resources or outdoor space. The activity sheets will be printed to include families who may not have access to a computer or a printer.

55. The team also linked with the CoL Education Strategy Unit to provide content for the launch of a new digital platform called 'Find Fusion'. Find Fusion will enable people to find events/courses/experiences that are relevant to learners (focused on school pupils) and will connect offers around themes such as learner type, age group, curriculum area and fusion skills. The Learning Team have shared activity sheets and videos which support learning through engagement with nature.

56. The Green Talent programme had been planning to continue its successful programme of activities for young people from White Trees school; this is currently postponed but will be relaunched as soon as it is safe to do so. In the meantime, Green Talent is delivering a series of virtual sessions to students at a pupil referral unit based around careers in the outdoors and is working with the Refugee Council on a virtual engagement session to introduce young refugees to Epping Forest.

Chingford Golf Course (LR)

57. Due to Tier 4 and Lockdown restrictions the Chingford Golf Course has remained closed. The golf front of house team has been re-deployed into maintenance and other roles. The green keeper team have continued to use this time of no play to work on actions pending from the work plan which progress slowest during play. Due to the very wet conditions it is hoped that this rest, after the heavy play of late 2020 will allow the greens and tees to recover in time for the resumption of play in 2021.

Wanstead Flats

58. Due to Tier and Lockdown restrictions, football at Wanstead has been suspended on non-elite sport. Clubs will be reimbursed for matches not played, as a season extension is not currently feasible.

59. The grounds team have been working on pitch restoration during this time as well as increased litter picking / clearing due to an increase in weekday recreational use of the Flats.

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

Visitor Numbers

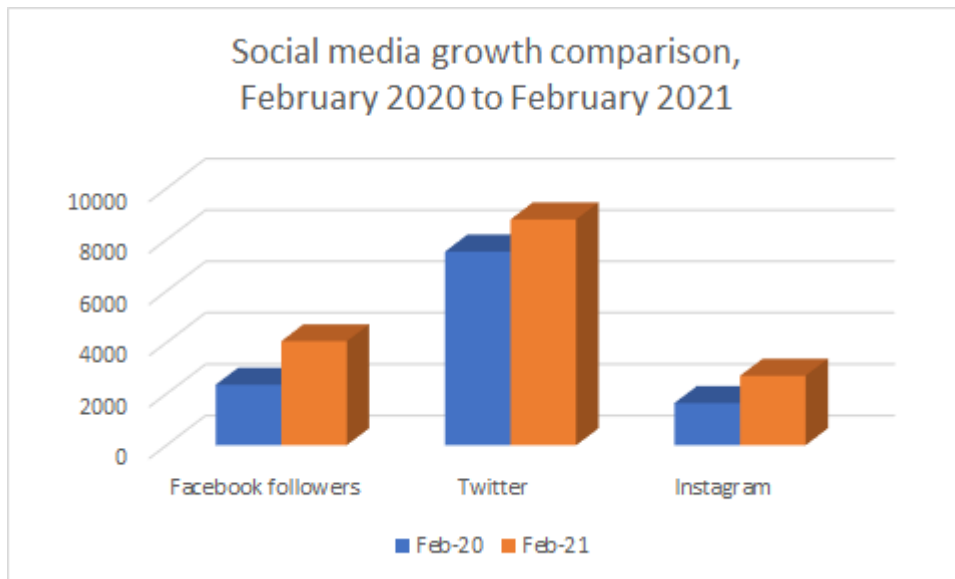
61. Due to Tier and Lockdown restrictions, the Visitor Centres have been closed during December and January. The View operated a 'Click and Collect' service, however due to limited take up post-Christmas the front of house team was placed on furlough and the retail offer suspended. The toilet facilities have remained open (Mon- Fri) due to redeployed cleaning staff from other sites in the Square Mile.

Communication and Information

62. As of 17 February 2021, our social media following is:

- Twitter followers: 8,794, an increase of 17%
- Facebook likes: 3,653, an increase of N/A as not recorded last year
- Facebook followers: 4049, an increase of 72%
- Instagram followers: 2,704, an increase of 65%

63. Please find below comparison spreadsheet for social media followings:



64. The top tweet for December 2020 – with 8,881 impressions:

Delighted to see this special coral tooth fungi in [#EppingForest](#).

It has rarely been recorded here in the last 15 years. This particular fungi is generally found on beech trees. Our wonderful range of fungi is one of the reasons much of the woodland is designated as SSSI/SAC.

pic.twitter.com/PLw5SMtOh1



↩ 6 ↻ 12 ❤ 84

65. The top tweet for January 2021 – with 6,550 impressions:

The continued wet weather means that **#EppingForest** is incredibly wet and muddy and there are large areas of localised flooding. It's best to avoid the Forest this weekend or stick to the main paths and come suitably attired!

pic.twitter.com/Gl4t1qdZ4z



↩ 8 ↻ 13 ❤ 59

66. The top Facebook post for December 2020 – with a reach of 4,332:



Epping Forest City of London

Published by Yvette Woodhouse (P) · 31 December 2020 · 🌐

Happy New Year, from all at #EppingForest.

The Forest is likely to be very busy over the long weekend. If you can, please cycle or walk to the Forest and visit the area local to you.

Visit www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/eppingforest for ideas and suggestions of areas to visit closest to you.... See more



67. The top Facebook post for January 2021 – with a reach of 38,961:

 **Epping Forest City of London** Published by Yvette Woodhouse (71) · 27 January · 🌐

Have your say on car park charging in #EppingForest. For more information and a link to the survey please visit <https://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/.../whats-n.../car-park-charging>



68. The top Instagram post for December 2020 was a Merry Christmas post – with 136 likes:



 **coleppingforest** ...

 coleppingforest We wish you all a very Merry Christmas, from #EppingForest

...

#MerryChristmas #Christmas #forest #woodland #cityoflondon #london #londonlife #nature #naturephotography #eastlondon #ancientwoodland #royalforest #queenscommonwealthcanopy #beautyiswhereyoufindit #chingford #walthamforest #urbannature #winter #britishnature #thisislondon #eppingforest #forest_photo_fairy

7w



Liked by [eppingforestjohnmuiraward](#) and others

DECEMBER 25, 2020

69. The top Instagram post for January 2021 was a snow day post – with 170 likes:



70. Monthly updates continue via Mailchimp are in place of the quarterly, printed Forest Focus publications, due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This is continuing to be well received and allowing us the opportunity to report on very current updates in Epping Forest throughout the constantly changing pandemic and the impact it is having on visiting the Forest.

71. The Epping Forest Management Strategy has now been produced and is on the Epping Forest website, with printed copies in production for distribution imminently.



Major incidents

COVID-19 National Health Emergency

72. From Thursday, 5 November there was a 4-week second National Lockdown, which was replaced with Tier 2 'High Alert' level restrictions for London and Essex on 2 December. London and SW Essex entered Tier 3 'Very High Alert' level restrictions on 16 December, quickly followed by Tier 4 'Stay at Home Alert' levels on 19 December. A third National Lockdown was in place from 5 January 2021.

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