

|   |                                   |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| <b>Committee(s)</b>   | <b>Dated:</b>                     |
| Epping Forest and Commons   | 13/09/2021                        |
| <b>Subject:</b><br>Epping Forest - Superintendent's Update for June to July 2021 (SEF 34/21)              | <b>Public</b>                     |
| <b>Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?</b> | <b>2, 5, 11 &amp; 12</b>          |
| <b>Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?</b>                                  | <b>No</b>                         |
| <b>If so, how much?</b>   | <b>N/A</b>                        |
| <b>What is the source of Funding?</b>   | <b>City's Cash<br/>Local Risk</b> |
| <b>Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?</b>                             | <b>N</b>                          |
| <b>Report of:</b><br>Director of Open Spaces  | <b>For Information</b>            |
| <b>Report author:</b><br>Paul Thomson – Epping Forest   |                                   |

### **Summary**

This purpose of this report is to summarise the Epping Forest Division's activities across June to July 2021.

Of particular note was a 64% increase in fly tips; fifteen successful Environmental Protection Act prosecutions by Enforcement Officers yielding fines amounting to £4,757 and cost recovery of £7,253.40; a fall in the number of reported rough sleepers; good performance on car parking income; positive news on skylark populations while Meadow Pippits were noted as absent across the Forest for the first time; significant progress regarding responses to three Local Plans affecting Epping Forest; major damage to the Forest and disruption to Forest traffic by a sequential series of Thames Water's ageing mains water infrastructure and the reopening of the highly successful Wanstead Flats Park run on 24 July.

### **Recommendation(s)**

Members are asked to:

- Note the report

## Main Report

### Staff and Volunteers

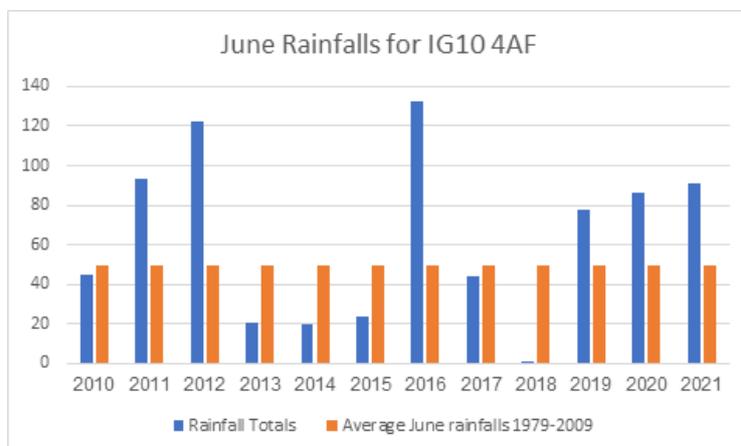
1. The new Support Services Team Leader started on 1 July 2021. There are currently six vacancies.

### Budget

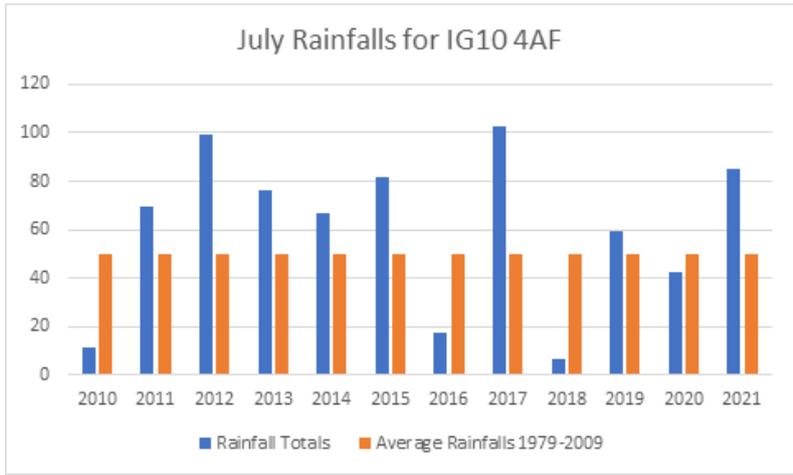
2. At end of July 2021, 33% through the financial year, total expenditure is at 31% of budget. Budgeted savings for this financial year include some lodge rentals, which have slowed due to unforeseen property defects, as well as £31,000 of unidentified savings which are planned through vacancy management. Car parking income, however, is currently exceeding forecast and subject to Autumn visiting patterns may compensate for the lodge rental shortfall by the end of the financial year.

### Weather

3. Rainfall for June 2021 registered 91.4 mm, representing a 59.51% increase on the average rainfall of 49.5mm (1979-2009) for the month. There were in total 13 days of rainfall in June 2021 with the wettest being the 16<sup>th</sup> with 20.6 mm of precipitation. June 2016 remains the wettest June recorded at High Beech in the last 10 years, with 132.2 mm.



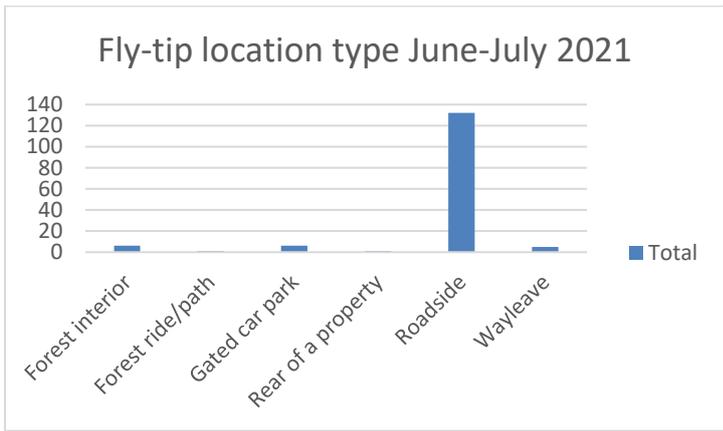
4. Rainfall for July 2021 registered 85.17 mm, representing a 52.13% increase on the average rainfall of 50mm (1979-2009) this month. There were in total 17 days of rainfall in July 2021 with the wettest day being the 25<sup>th</sup> with 20.44 mm of precipitation. July 2017 remains the wettest June recorded at High Beech in the last 10 years, with 102.4 mm of rainfall.



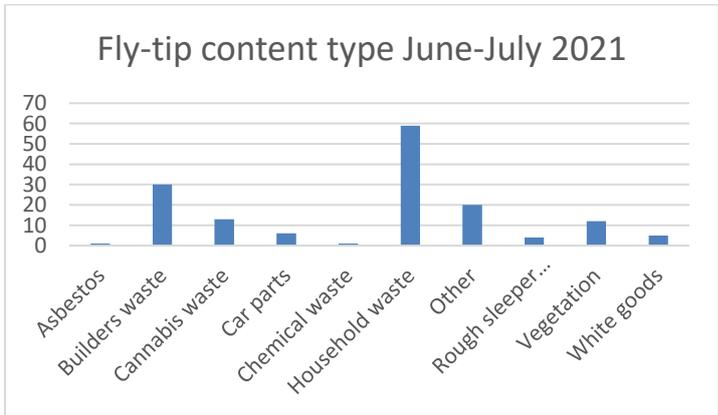
**Forest Services**

**Fly-tipping**

5. There were a total of 150 fly-tips recorded over the period of June – July 2021, this represents a 64% increase over the same period in 2020.

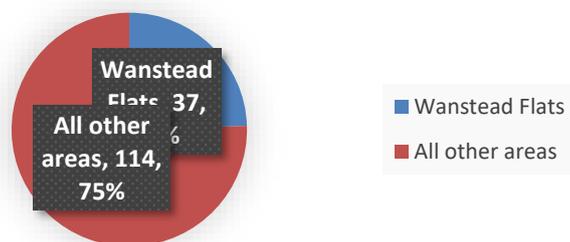


6. Roadside locations represented 87% of the tip locations over the period.



7. Household waste represented the largest category of items tipped over the period at 59 (39%), while 'Other waste' (concrete, polystyrene, wires etc.) represented 20 tips (13%).

## Fly-tip in Wanstead Flats area: June-July 2021



8. There were 37 fly-tips in the Wanstead Flats area over the period which represents 25% of all tips. 19 of these tips were on Forest Land adjacent to Highway Land on Capel Road.

### Enforcement Activity

9. 15 Environmental Protection Act (EPA) prosecutions and 2 Byelaw prosecutions were heard in the period under report.

| Date     | Defendant Name | Offence Accepted 33:Deposit 34:Duty of Care | Court Name | Outcome | Costs Recovered |
|----------|----------------|---|------------|---------|-----------------|
| 07/06/21 | WARD           | Byelaw 3 36 & 39                            | Chelms     | Guilty  | £930            |
| 07/06/21 | KIRKBY         | Byelaw 3 45 & 47                            | Chelms     | Guilty  | £400            |
| 09/06/21 | TEOCAN         | 33 (1) a                                    | Chelms     | Guilty  | £560            |
| 09/06/21 | RABBY          | 34 (1) a                                    | Chelms     | Guilty  | £722.40         |
| 09/06/21 | MALIMA         | 33 (1) a                                    | Chelms     | Guilty  | £640            |
| 09/06/21 | WELSH          | 33 (1) a                                    | Chelms     | Guilty  | £600            |
| 07/07/21 | DOGAN          | 33 (1) a                                    | Chelms     | Guilty  | £400            |
| 09/06/21 | XENI           | 33 (1) a                                    | Chelms     | Guilty  | £1321           |
| 28/06/21 | ARMSTRONG, Jan | 33 (1) a                                    | Thames     | Guilty  | £640            |

|          |                    |          |        |         |      |
|----------|--------------------|----------|--------|---------|------|
| 28/06/21 | ARMSTRONG,<br>Joel | 33 (1) a | Thames | Guilty  | £640 |
| 28/06/21 | ELDAROV            | 33 (1) a | Thames | Guilty  | £400 |
| 09/06/21 | DANU               | 33 (1) a | Chelms | Warrant |      |
| 09/06/21 | TONGE              | 33 (1) a | Chelms | Warrant |      |
| 09/06/21 | MILLER             | 33 (1) a | Chelms | Warrant |      |
| 09/06/21 | LEAL               | 34 (1) a | Chelms | Warrant |      |
| 28/06/21 | GABRIEL            | 33 (1) a | Thames | Warrant |      |
| 28/06/21 | ILIE               | 33 (1) a | Thames | Warrant |      |

|  |                 |
|--|-----------------|
| <b>Total Costs Awarded to Epping Forest<br/>(Including Compensation)</b> | <b>£7253.40</b> |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>£7253.40</b> |

### Licences

10. A total of 69 licences for events were issued during the months being reported, which yielded an income of £55,275.80 plus VAT. 21 licences were issued during the same period in 2020 yielding an income of £9,749.30 which reflects the impact of COVID-19 restrictions.

Licences were issued as per the following categories:

|          |    |             |
|----------|----|-------------|
| Events   | 6  | £ 710       |
| Filming  | 28 | £ 46,724.50 |
| Land use | 4  | £ 7,246.90  |
| Schools  | 15 | £ 370       |
| Sports   | 15 | £ 224.40    |
| TOTAL    | 68 | £ 55,275.80 |

### Unexplained Deaths

11. There have been no Unexplained Deaths this reporting period

### **Rough Sleepers**

12. There were 10 rough sleeper camps located during the reporting period compared to 6 for the same period in the previous year. A number of these cases have been supported by Street Outreach Service (SOS), the London Borough of Waltham Forest's new outreach partner. The recent easing of current COVID-19 restrictions could be a contributing factor to why there are less this reporting period compared to last:

- 04/06/2021 - Capel Road Vacated 07/06/2021
- 06/06/2021 – Blake Hall Road E11 Vacated 10/06/2021
- 07/06/2021 – Blake Hall Road Vacated 10/06/2021
- 07/06/2021 - 36 Woodcote Road E11 No Trace
- 27/06/2021 – Wake Valley Car Park Vacated 27/06/2021
- 01/07/2021 – Lido Site Hollow Ponds Vacated 03/07/2021
- 01/07/2021 – Lido Site Hollow Ponds Vacated 10/07/2021
- 14/07/2021 - Earls Path North Vacated 14/07/2021
- 24/07/2021 – Button Seed Corner Vacated 24/07/2021
- 24/07/2021 – Button seed Corner Vacated 02/08/2021

### **Unauthorised Occupations**

13. There have been no Traveller Incursions this reporting period.

14. There has been 2 reported Unlicensed Music Events (UMEs) or Spontaneous Social Gatherings (SSGs) on Forest Land.

- 13/06/2021 Wanstead Flats – Opposite the Golden Fleece
- 10/07/2021 Wanstead Flats - Off Woodman's Ride, Bury Road

### **Dog Incidents**

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

- 17/07/2021 - Hollow Ponds, dog chasing swans
- 20/07/2021 - Bell Common, dog not under effective control

### **Deer Vehicle Collisions**

17. Epping Forest staff dealt with a total of 10 deer vehicle collisions (DVC) during this reporting period.

- 01/06/2021 Bell Common/Theydon Road
- 03/06/2021 Snaresbrook Road just before the Flats
- 06/06/2021 Wanstead Flats
- 07/06/2021 20m North Robin Hood Roundabout, Epping New Road
- 10/06/2021 Bell Common Road
- 15/06/2021 Holly Hedge Field, Epping New Road
- 22/06/2021 200yds North Robin Hood Roundabout, Epping New Road

- 23/06/2021 Piercing Hill opposite Golf Course
- 24/07/2021 220yds South Robin Hood Roundabout, Epping New Road
- 25/07/2021 B1393 opposite Thornwood Road

### North Essex Parking Partnership Red Route Figures

19. There have been 60 Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) issued manually during the reporting period. These figures do not include PCNs issued from the NEPP camera car footage. The total number of PCN's issued on the red route to date now totals 1761. A review by NEPP of the Red Route Scheme is planned for late summer.

### Car Park Charging Scheme

11. The car parking scheme has settled in during June and July, with income from season permits declining and income from hourly charges increasing.

Connaught Water, Hollow Ponds and High Beach Pillow mounds were the busiest car parks during this period.

|       | Hourly P&D Income** | Permit Income | Penalty Notices |
|-------|---------------------|---------------|-----------------|
| June  | 29,405.39           | 4,831.35      | £3,432.96       |
| July* | 26,969.17           | 2,875.00      | £3,882.60       |

\*July figures are not yet verified, awaiting fees and refunds deductions.

\*\* Hourly P&D income includes income from the RingGo systems and car payment machines at High Beach (collected by Horizon).

Net income from the scheme (pending deductions for July) currently stands at £106,322.79.

## Heritage; Landscape and Nature Conservation

### Climate Action Strategy

12. Works to create the wildflower meadow at Patmore's Field (formerly Netherhouse) were tendered and work will begin in September. A site meeting will be held with the current tenant in August to agree hand-over details.

13. In addition, ecological surveys started in July on Patmore's and Gifford's Meadow to capture their current condition. These surveys will be carried out across the late summer to assess a range of taxonomic groups, including plants and insects, so that a baseline for biodiversity value can be established and changes as a result of the new management regime can be tracked and recorded.

## **Biodiversity**

14. The first vegetation re-survey across the SSSI area of Wanstead Flats, since the wildfire in 2018, has revealed excellent heather and other acid grassland plant species recovery. New young plants of heather have been ~~observed~~ recorded in their previous location before the fire ~~main-centre-of distribution~~ but also in new outlying areas to the north of this area. The control of Broom regrowth, however, remains the main challenge to maintain the renewed floral diversity and prevent over-shading. Broom will be mown and removed as part of wildfire control measures, but other forms of intervention may be required or more frequent cutting to prevent its dominance of large areas of the sward.
15. On Wanstead Flats four singing male Skylarks were observed in early June, with at least three of these paired up and visiting likely nest areas with females. No Meadow Pipits were recorded as present, representing, one of the first breeding seasons without Pipits present as a breeding bird anywhere on Forest Land. The Meadow Pipit is on the *Amber* list of Birds of Conservation Concern (BOCC4) as its population has declined in the UK by more than 25% (but less than 50%) in the last 25 years. It is possible it may recover its toehold in Epping Forest, but in general small passerine birds are fairly site-faithful and once a population is lost it is difficult for it to recover.
16. At the other end of the Forest, on Copped Hall estate, Skylark numbers were high with at least 4 singing males across Cobb Field and Cludens. In the same area there was also the highest count of Yellowhammer males for several years with 4 males, at least, seen and similarly high numbers of Linnet pairs. All three of these species are on the Birds of Conservation Concern *Red* List (BOCC4) due to steep ~~their precipitate~~ declines in breeding population over the last 25 years, all by more than 50% - so the success of the breeding populations at Copped Hall is significant.

## **Damage to Forest and Buffer Lands habitats**

17. Further to the problems associated with Thames Water sewage leaks in the spring there was a significant mains water leak on The Warren Slope (Compartment 29) within the SSSI/SAC. Although involving clean chlorinated water, previous leaks here have killed off vegetation, including small shrubs and trees. The same mains pipeline has also caused significant damage to ancient oaks in Barn Hoppitt. As a result, the Head Forest Keeper and Head of Conservation met Thames Water managers on site to assess the extent of the flooding, which was found to have affected nearly 0.75 hectares of SSSI grassland. There was also a follow-up meeting to consider reparations and a long-term solution, including the addition of hydrants to allow better access for pipe inspections in future. Compensation for damage done to habitats continues to negotiated with Thames Water.
18. A letter of concern is being prepared regarding the impact on the Epping Forest SAC of increased traffic queues associated with Thames Water mains failures leading to road closures at Baldwins Hill; Earls Path; Buckhurst Hill High Road; and Honey lane. When combined with gas main replacement by Cadence on

Epping New Road, much of Loughton's traffic was routed to and from Goldings Hill leading to very large traffic queues throughout the Forest.

### **Agri-environment Schemes**

19. Preparations for a Countryside Stewardship application for Wanstead Park have started with officers meeting Natural England and the first engagement with the Wanstead Park Liaison Group to explore this application at their 7<sup>th</sup> June 2021 meeting.
20. A Countryside Stewardship Mid-Tier application for Great Gregories Yard has begun to be explored to fund future-proofing infrastructure works aimed at reducing air and water pollution.

### **Grazing**

21. A Red Tractor Beef & Lamb audit was undertaken and passed. This audit checks the Trust's record keeping and animal welfare procedures against a benchmark of standards.
22. Cows returned to the wet heaths of Long Running with 10 cows grazing for 8-weeks over an area of 21ha. Grazing had been suspended at this site after several dangerous incidents in 2019 where deer brought down the electric fence resulting in animals getting onto the Epping New Road. New NoFence GPS collars were used on the 10 cows with no escapes reported over the entire period. The flexibility of the virtual GPS boundary over electric fencing allowed an increase in the grazing area from 5ha to 21ha. This increase in area allowed the inclusion of areas of heathland restoration funded by HLS between 2008-2018.

### **Heritage**

23. Members of Historic England's Archaeological Investigation Team visited Rookery Wood at Copped Hall to examine the Tudor water features which are highly significant heritage features. They will be advising on how to understand these features better and how the site can be managed in the long-term, including potential protection measures which may be incorporated into a future Countryside Stewardship application.

### **Forest Protection and planning matters**

#### **Town & Country Planning – Local Plans**

24. The SAC Mitigation Oversight Group met again on 2<sup>nd</sup> July, chaired as usual by Natural England (NE). Progress continues to be slow, with legal opinion on 'in perpetuity' still awaited. On site mitigation measures were also discussed again and some measures were modified. A query was made about the post of SAC Mitigation Project Officer and whether it should be full-time. A short response to this query will be prepared ahead of the next meeting of the Oversight Group in September. Cross-border cooperation on SANGS provision was raised by NE and LBWF and London Borough of Redbridge agreed to discuss options for provision.

25. **Epping Forest District Council (EFDC) Local Plan:** Liaison on EFDC's proposed Air Pollution Mitigation Strategy continued with informal discussions about future mitigation options.
26. The Main Modifications consultation on the EFDC Local Plan was launched by the Planning Inspectorate in July. A response to this has been prepared and a report is before this September Committee meeting so that it can be approved in outline ahead of the 23<sup>rd</sup> September deadline.
27. **London Borough of Waltham Forest (LBWF) Local Plan:** close liaison continued in relation to the LBWF Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) and, in particular, the choice of suitable SANGS sites. In addition, in late July a draft joint Statement of Common Ground (SoCG) was prepared with LBWF officers and a report on the SoCG is presented for approval to this September Committee meeting.
28. **London Borough of Enfield (LBE) Local Plan:** the Regulation 18 consultation for this Local Plan was launched in this period with a deadline of responses by 3<sup>rd</sup> September. However, a duty-to-cooperate meeting has been organised with officers shortly after this date and the LBE Plan will also be discussed by councillors and members at the forthcoming Six Authorities Liaison Group (SALG) meeting.

#### **Town & Country Planning – Development Control**

29. The most significant planning issue in EFDC during this period was the *Next* plc proposed distribution centre near Junction 26 of the M25. At a full council meeting on 24<sup>th</sup> June, EFDC members voted 25 to 10 to refuse planning permission. The objection letter from the Conservators, with accompanying evidence, was cited several times by councillors during the meeting as an important summary of their concerns with the proposed development and its likely impacts on the Forest road traffic.
30. In the LBWF area, two letters were sent in response to the proposed Whipps Cross development, which had been discussed in detail at Committee in May.

#### **Land Registration, Access Audit & Wayleaves**

31. One planning application for EFDC was considered:
- 74 Queens Rd, Buckhurst Hill. 'Windfall' development, turning 2x commercial outlets into 3 dwellings. Application was opposed on the grounds that there was little/to no private amenity space and the Forest SAC/SSSI was advertised as the amenity space. Application was refused by EFDC on the grounds of bad design and failure to address EFSAC.
32. Work continues to resolve outstanding debts on wayleaves with just under £2,000 now received and a further £2,550 written off as a result of careful review.
33. Progress on commercial wayleaves reviews continues to be made with a significant increase in future annual wayleave income (>£15,000) achieved during this period.

34. Discussions on land exchange continued with LBWF in relation to recent highways dedications and changes to historic highways alignments adjacent to Forest Land.

## **Operations**

### **CSS Works**

35. Arborist teams commenced work on the new 10-year Countryside Stewardship actions with the repollarding of circa. 100 (BE6) veteran trees across six compartments in the Forest: North Long Hills (Compartment 22), Honey Lane Quarters (Compartment 9), Hill Wood (Compartment 21), Deershelter South (Compartment 11), Pillow Mounds (Compartment 14) and Walthamstow Forest (Compartment 34). Reassuringly work progressed as our estimates predicated, however, machinery breakdowns were a feature reinforcing the need to update some plant in the near future, e.g. the arm fed woodchippers. The ongoing wet conditions also meant that planned worksites had to be changed due to the unseasonably poor ground conditions.

### **Insurance works**

36. During the period there have been three new claims for subsidence due to root nuisance submitted. These are all being processed through the Vegetation Against Property process. The value of the tree safety management system has been shown during the period. Following two recent significant tree failures where buildings were significantly damaged, it appears our management has meant that the insurers have concluded the City of London has no liability for the damage.

### **Risk Management Works**

37. Oak Processionary Moth (*Thaumetopoea processionea*) (OPM): Contractor surveys of OPM nests on Oak trees in 11 high priority moth survey sites were completed. Arborist staff have subsequently plotted these trees on our tree management database. All OPM nests below 3m on oak trees will be removed by COL arborist staff. Nests at a higher level will normally be left however these will be risk assessed and where their removal is necessary specialist contractors will be engaged to undertake this removal work.
38. Tree Safety: Tree safety work has progressed slowly during this period due to reduced staffing and also a number of episodes of COVID self-isolation for Key staff. The tree safety program is behind schedule and we are focussing our efforts on completing work on trees in Red+ and Red zone trees where risk are higher. This does mean that for a second year we are unlikely to complete works on Amber zone trees. It is planned that temporary Agency Arborist staff will be employed to compensate for the current staff shortage. The corporate Risk Assessment has been updated to account for this issue.

### **Access Works**

39. Path verge management in the higher priority access areas has been contracted out on a three contract during the period. Works have yet to commence.

40. A log climbing structure has started to be constructed at Wanstead Park in partnership with local community groups. This is scheduled for completion in September. Further log play structures are proposed, and these are pending completion of local Conservation Area planning processes.

### **Wanstead Park Ponds Project**

41. The Ornamental Waters and River Roding interaction study has progressed during this period. Survey works have been completed to map levels along Ornamental Water eastern embankment, and hydrological information received from the Environment Agency. The study is due to be completed in August.

### **Birch Hall Park Pond (Deer Sanctuary)**

42. The works were tendered out in June. Unfortunately, no tender returns were received. The works will be retendered in the new year with a plan for works to commence in early summer when ground conditions are drier.

### **Visitor Services**

#### **Learning and Education (Learning Team)**

43. It has been a busy period for learning at Epping Forest. 898 school students participated in the learning programme in June and July. Schools participated in a variety of outdoor learning activities to develop their understanding of local history, explore habitats and biodiversity, and build their confidence and skills.

44. In July the learning team began a bespoke programme for Young Carers from Enfield and Waltham Forest. Recent studies have revealed a worrying decline in the mental health and wellbeing of Young Carers due to the Covid-19 pandemic, with the lockdown restrictions increasing the burden on young carers, increasing isolation and making it harder to access support. In response to these findings, the Learning Team have provided a series of respite sessions at Epping Forest, providing Young Carers with an opportunity to take a break and spend time in nature. The team will lead more of these vital respite sessions over the autumn.

### **Chingford Golf Course**

45. Total income generated from green fees and shop related sales amounted to £59,767.35 for June and July compared to £130,415.47 in 2020 a decrease of £70,6548.12. Golf season tickets started in June in 2020 for a 9-month ticket due to Covid-19 lockdown which highlights the high difference in income. Online bookings decreased this financial year compared to the previous year by £18,491.50, mainly down to the fact last year as we came out of lockdown, all visitors were asked to book online where possible.

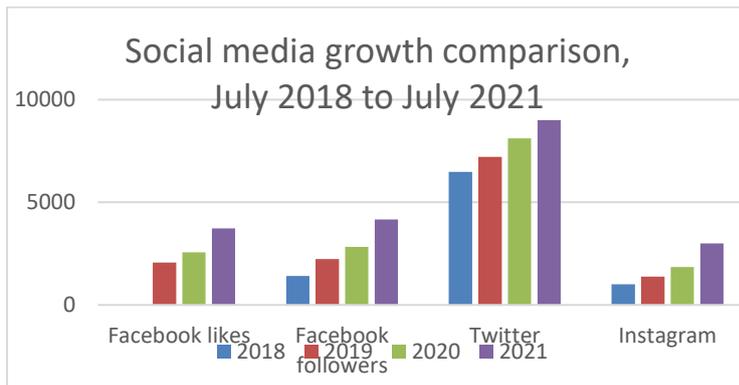
46. Ground staff have been carrying out regular cutting requirements to tees, fairways, rough, aprons and greens in order to keep the course set up for play but the weather this year has hampered grounds maintenance operations. The greens were sprayed with plant feed five more times along with staff verti-cutting and star-slitting every other week to help increase speed for better putting quality.

## Communications

47. As of 11 August 2021, Epping Forest social media following is:

- Twitter followers: 9,008 (11% increase on 2020)
- Facebook followers: 4,166 (48% increase on 2020)
- Instagram followers: 2,992 (59% increase)

48. The chart shows a comparison of our social media followers at the same point in 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021:



49. Epping Forest news continues to be delivered monthly via a digital edition of Forest Focus, in place of the printed magazine which had been temporarily stopped due to the pandemic. This continues to be well-received and an effective way of communicating seasonal messaging.

50. The Top social media post for June 2021 celebrated the 150 anniversary of the protest to save Wanstead Flats, with messaging around how CoL saved Epping Forest. The top social media post for June 2021 celebrated the ancient coppard beech at Lost Pond and photographs of Lost Pond itself.

51. Media interest around the release marking one year on since the closure of the Temporary Mortuary Facility at Wanstead Flats, with accompanying photographs of the wildflower meadow at the site now was very high, with coverage in over 200 outlets including national coverage in ITV News, Daily Mail and Yahoo News.

### Wanstead Park Permissive Cycling Extension

52. The extension has now been implemented. Temporary signage has been put up around the park at entrances and notice boards showing main paths where visitors can now cycle. More signs depicting the cycling code of conduct have been installed. The website has a frequently asked questions section, detailing the consultation and background reasons for the changes.

### Wanstead Flats

53. Three school sports days went ahead at Harrow Road following COVID-19 guidelines.

54. Ground staff carried out regular cutting duties, litter picking and pitch preparation work for the new season. Capel Road pavilion was repainted to cover the extensive graffiti.

55. Parkrun restarted on 24 July; this was the first race since 14 March 2020 due to COVID-19. Parkrun attracted 363 runners in the first two weeks with 15 volunteers helping with the restart.

### Horse Riding

56. Total income from horse riding licences for June & July 2021 amounted to £677.00 compared to £4643.00 the previous year. The figures showed a decrease of £3966.00. Last year licences did not start in April due to lockdown, a reduced 9-month licence started in June which highlights the difference in income.

### Visitor Numbers

57. Visitor Figures for June – July 2021 & 2020

| Visitor Numbers | QEHL 2021 | 2020 | View 2021 | 2020 | Temple 2021 | 2020 | High Beach 2021 | 2020 | Total 2021 | Total 2020 |
|-----------------|-----------|------|-----------|------|-------------|------|-----------------|------|------------|------------|
| June            | 0         | 0    | 1331      | 0    | 0           | 0    | TBC             | 0    | 1331       | 0          |
| July            | 0         | 0    | 1456      | 0    | 0*          | 0    | TBC             | 0    | 1456       | 0          |

\*Note, three theatre productions held at the Temple enclosure with at total audience of c.1000 persons over 4 shows.

58. The Visitor Centre at Chingford (The View) again saw reduced numbers compared to 2019, however with the buildings and gallery spaces open some visitors had returned. The building re-opened fully on the 19 of July in line with government guidance. However, safeguards and restrictions on numbers remain in place to ensure the safety of visitors and staff.

59. It is noted however that from June with restrictions easing green spaces nationally noticed a decline in visitor numbers compared with the previous year and usual figures.

60. The Temple enclosure hosted the return of open-air theatre, with Illyria putting on productions of 'Much Ado' and 'HMS Pinafore' to sold out crowds. A new company for Epping Forest; The East London Shakespeare Festival, held three performances across two days of their version of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream', with large audiences at all three performances despite this being their first run of shows.

### Memorial Benches

61. 10 benches and plaques were processed and in place across the Forest following a soft launch of the memorial bench scheme. The scheme has yielded a total income of £19,000 so far, with approximately £6,000 expenditure on benches and plaques.

## **Major incidents**

62. None.

## **COVID-19 National Health Emergency**

63. Following the four-step plan to ease England's lockdown published by the Government on 22 February, all Government restrictions have now been removed on 19 July. Some local restriction to remain in place arbitrated by third parties.

## **Paul Thomson**

Superintendent of Epping Forest

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