

<b>Committee(s):</b>	<b>Date(s):</b>
Epping Forest & Commons	07 September 2015
<b>Subject:</b> Superintendent's Update for June and July 2015	<b>Public</b>
<b>Report of:</b> Superintendent of Epping Forest SEF 39/15	<b>For Information</b>
<b>Summary</b>	
<p>This purpose of this report is to summarise the Epping Forest Division's activities across June and July 2015.</p> <p>Of particular note is the launch of the public consultation on the Epping Forest Management Plan and staff attendance at local events to promote the consultation; fly tipping levels that have increased by 35% compared to the previous year; responses to major consultations including the EU REFIT study on Special Areas of Conservation and the Stage 1 Report of the Epping Forest District Council's Green Belt Review.</p>	
<b>Recommendation</b>	
Members are asked to note this report.	

## Staff

1. The Principal Litter Picker has retired from his post after 44yrs of service. A replacement is already in post as part of a reconfigured seven day a week litter collection service. The Forest Centres Officer (Lifelong Learning) has resigned and options for replacement are being evaluated.
2. A temporary contract for a Wayleaves Support Officer began on 3 August to support the Wayleaves revaluation and Oracle® data-cleansing analysis.
3. A new starter in the new post of Grazing & Landscape Projects Officer, replacing the previous Estates Management Officer role, was recruited and starts on 1 September 2015. The successful candidate has *Boviguard*<sup>TM</sup> (invisible) fencing and considerable conservation grazing experience.
4. Following an internal promotion after the retirement of the Senior Support Services Officer a new Support Services Officer will start in post on 7 September 2015.
5. A new Herdsperson, started work for our contract partner Wildlife and Countryside Services on 6 July.

## **Volunteering**

6. June and July 2015 saw 924 and 910 volunteer hours recorded across the Forest – this is down by about 10% on the same time last year, but as many volunteers provide their data in long arrears the numbers are likely to be more similar than this indicates.

## **Major Projects**

### **Higham Park Lake Large Raised Reservoir.**

7. The successful desilting works and the thinning of trees to the north of the Lake have prompted a positive reassessment of the Highams Park Lake Site of Special Scientific Interest unit by Natural England. Trials of the new draw down valve into the River Ching have been successfully completed and has prompted a review of the current silt curtain technology.

### **Baldwins and Birch Hall Park Ponds.**

8. Consultant investigations into the leaks at both ponds have been completed and scoping work by the Built Environment Team continues on the options for managing the leaking dams at both locations. The BE team are looking at hosting a workshop with the key stakeholders to confirm the future directions.

## **Land Registration Project**

9. The Queens Counsel commissioned for legal advice on encroachments remains gravely ill and alternative arrangements are being made to secure advice for the Working Party.

## **Grazing Expansion Scheme.**

10. The first cattle had gone out to the Copped Hall and Warlies Park buffer lands in May 2015. At the beginning of June there were 132 cattle in total (35 Longhorns and 97 Red Polls), eight of the old, original Longhorn cattle herd having been sold in May following assessments as to their suitability for Forest grazing. By early June cattle were spread between the sites of Copped Hall Deer Park (23 Longhorns), fields around the Warren House (8 Longhorns), Warlies Park (51 Red Poll) with the rest remaining at the Great Gregories barns (46 Red Poll, 4 Longhorns) as some of these cows were still expecting calves. A proportion of the cattle at Warlies and Copped Hall were trained for the *Boviguard*<sup>TM</sup> fence ready for putting out on the Forest. The number trained in June was limited by the availability of new collars provided by the French manufacturer, the receipt of which was delayed.
11. By mid-June the first cattle, four Longhorns, were put out onto the Forest at the Warren Wood Slope. These were within a new invisible fence area allowing this Forest grassland site to be grazed for the first time since commoners' cattle freely grazed the Forest in the early 1990s. These were followed shortly by four young Longhorn cattle at the northern heathland site of Deershelter Plain, also behind an invisible fence. By the end of July 5 new-born calves (4 of which were Longhorns) had been added to the numbers at Great Gregories.

12. In addition to the cattle movements, modification work was undertaken on the *Boviguard*<sup>TM</sup> network during this period as a result of the new signal generators not providing a strong or consistent enough signal along the new longer loops despite successful trials in 2014. This work resulted in delays to cattle going out onto both Chingford and Fairmead grasslands. The first four Redpoll cattle went out to Chingford Plain in mid-July, but a fault in their collars required the removal of these cows before the end of the month. They have subsequently been replaced by four Longhorns that began grazing at Chingford in the first week of August.
13. The Grazing Auditor, Dr Peter Dennis (Reader at the University of Aberystwyth), made a 3-day visit to Epping Forest to observe the cattle grazing and examine the state of the grasslands and heathlands. He was accompanied by the Head of Conservation and the Biodiversity Officer and held full discussions on each area visited and on the overall direction of the monitoring programme. He has begun compiling a report but will also be re-visiting in late October because of this year's later start to grazing. His visit coincided with fieldwork by two separate MSc students looking at the impacts of grazing and the management of the wood-pasture vegetation.

#### **Wanstead Park – Conceptual Options and Cost Plan.**

14. Consultants LDA Design are completing revisions to the Conceptual Options and Cost Plan which will be discussed by the Wanstead Park Steering Group in August 2015. Work is also beginning on preparations for the abstraction licence renewal in 2016 which now forms part of a national application scheme.

#### **Heronry Pond Concrete Repairs**

15. Water levels in Heronry Pond are being lowered to facilitate the repair of damaged concrete section in the pond's current lining. There are currently downstream implications for the cascade lakes of Perch Pond and Ornamental Water where water levels continue to fall. Work started on 17 August to control populations of the Invasive Non-Native (INN Floating Pennywort (*Hydracotyle ranunculoides*). Around 100 fish, mainly young Bream died at Perch Pond during hot weather in early July, this may be related to spawning exertion and oxygen depletion due to warm weather, reduced inflow and possibly the growth of Floating Pennywort.

#### **Consultations**

##### **Iron Age Hill fort survey**

16. In preparation for the management plans for Ambresbury Banks and Loughton Camp, a questionnaire was available for Forest visitors to help understand what they value about these two sites. The survey ran between 1 May and 14 June 2015 and was available through the City of London website and via paper forms at our visitor centres. Additionally volunteers surveyed visitors in the Forest; with over 30% of responses via this method this was a valuable contribution. The results of the survey will form a statement of significance of community value that will feed into both conservation management plans.

## **Epping Forest – The next 10 years**

17. The consultation went live on the 20 June. This was a five days later than anticipated due to a major IT sever incident at The Warren. Subject to response levels the consultation will close on the 20 September 2015.
18. Officers have attended numerous local events to promote the consultation. These include; Chingford Village Festival, Waltham Abbey Town Show, Epping Town Show, Theydon Bois Donkey Derby, Highams Park Day, Fairlop Fair, City of London Festival and Paws at the View and Music in the Park. Leaflets are available in all Forest Centres and have been distributed at over 13 City of London run events such as guided walks, bushcraft events, craft workshops, family learning events, open air theatre, angling days and football tournaments. 729 users are registered on the system with 122 having provided responses to date.
19. We will continue to promote the consultation and distribute reminder emails to members throughout the remaining consultation period.

## **Forest Services**

### **Licences**

20. A total of 48 licences were issued across the two months being reported, yielding an income of £1,2907 inc. VAT. 52 licences were issued during the same period in 2014. The Director's delegated powers were used to approve this year's Music in the Park event and the forthcoming Newham Fireworks in November.

### **Fly tipping**

21. Fly tips for the first seven months of the year totalled 367(1.7/day), compared to 272(1.3/day) for the equivalent period in 2014. This represents a 35% increase on the number of fly tips for the previous year. There have been a considerable number of cannabis factory-related fly tips recently, which include plant pots, compost, harvested plant stems, fertilizer containers and various equipment for growing the controlled drug-

### **Rough Sleepers**

22. Enforcement action on illegal camps is continuing at a similar rate to last year, with 24 camps cleared so far this year. A very large, well concealed camp of seven large tents, close to the tube line on Leyton Flats was discovered on 06-00hrs on 6th August containing between 15 to 20 people. A joint operation with the Metropolitan Police, TRIO and staff from London Borough of Redbridge was utilised to deal with this large camp. Several occupants were given advice on hostels and welfare issues and were then advised that they had to vacate the site. This camp is located in an area due to be cleared shortly with a mulching machine as one of the fire breaks identified for Leyton Flats.

### **Enforcement Activity**

23. A sentence for fly tipping of 200 hours of community service and £910 costs was successfully appealed by the defendant at Chelmsford Crown

Court, it was reduced to 100 hours community service but the costs were not altered. No warning letters or prosecutions have been issued in this two month period.

24. Woodridden Hill was temporarily closed by Forest keepers to allow a heavy lifting truck to remove an abandoned BMW. The vehicle which had no known owner and had left the road and had become trapped low down on the hill beyond the reach of conventional vehicles.

## **Heritage; Landscape and Nature Conservation**

### **Basic Payment Scheme (BPS)**

25. This scheme replaces the Single Payment Scheme and provides funding from DEFRA to maintain land in Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition. The move from SPS to BPS saw significant changes to the entry requirements and other rules. As a result the two divisions of Epping Forest and Burnham Beeches, Stoke & City Commons worked closely together over the course of a year leading up to the application deadline of 15 June, to understand the scheme changes and support each other in the preparation of applications which were successfully submitted.

### **EC Regulatory Fitness and Performance Programme (REFIT)**

26. The European Commission is undertaking a programme of policy evaluation for regulatory frameworks to ascertain if they are fit for purpose. During June and July the Commission undertook a public consultation on the EU Birds and Habitats Directives, which govern the protection of the *Natura* 2000 site network. In Epping Forest this relates to the Special Area of Conservation (SAC) designation and its beech woodland and heathland habitats. The Head of Conservation worked with the, Conservation Officer at Burnham Beeches to submit a response on behalf of the Open Spaces Department. The response highlighted the difficulties with the prime notification for Atlantic Beech wood, which failed to adequately reflect the wood-pasture habitat type and its invertebrate fauna. Recommendations were made on the need for Buffer Zones around SACs (and other *Natura* 2000 sites) and more training for Local Planning Authorities expected to act as 'competent authorities' for the SAC.

### **Birch Hall Park Conservation Statement**

27. Epping Forest officers have supported colleagues in the Heritage Estate section of City Surveyor's to prepare documents to tender for the preparation of a conservation statement for Birch Hall Park (Deer Sanctuary).

### **SSSI condition – liaison with Natural England**

28. The Conservation Section has been in close liaison with Natural England throughout the summer to review the favourable condition status of the SSSI and discuss the work required for areas that remain in unfavourable or recovering condition. One of these areas is the Leyton Flats compartment, the acid grasslands of which have been subject to a detailed grassland survey this summer. In addition a full aquatic vegetation survey

of Hollow Ponds, the first for over 15 years, was completed. Both botanical surveys have quantified the distributions of key indicator species to help inform future management and closer condition monitoring.

29. Further interaction with Natural England and other conservation bodies took place during the summer in relation to habitat management. In particular, the Head of Conservation attended workshops at Wyre Forest National Nature Reserve in the West Midlands to provide advice on Wood-Pasture restoration including a presentation on invisible fencing. (see also the Heart of England Forest officers visit reported below).
30. Another important conservation project made progress during this period. The new PhD student, supported by Natural England, Windsor and ourselves in a partnership with Cardiff University, visited Epping Forest twice with her supervisor Professor Lynne Boddy. Directed by the Head of Conservation and Biodiversity Officer samples of Beech branches and trunks were collected for analysis to examine the fungal communities involved in heart-wood decay. The sampling trips were very successful and were ably assisted by the Senior Conservation Officer and arborists from the Hornbeam Team.

### **Town and Country Planning**

31. Land at Woodside, Thornwood – despite our objections and those of the local authority officers, the Planning Inspector granted on appeal a change of use of land for the stationing of caravans for residential purposes for 1 no. gypsy pitch together with the formation of additional hard standing, the provision of a stable block and a utility/dayroom ancillary to that use.
32. Full details awaited on a pre-application submitted by Oaklands School, Loughton for 34 car parking spaces and drop-off area on land adjacent to Warren Hill which is believed to be on covenanted Yellow Land
33. The Head of Conservation attended a Green Belt Review meeting at Epping Forest District Council (EFDC) in June and this is the subject of a separate Committee report. In addition, he participated in a 'duty to cooperate' Sustainable Development Forum hosted by EFDC and attended by 6 other local authorities from north London, Hertfordshire and Essex focusing on housing allocations amongst local authorities adjoining EFDC but also considering wider duty-to-cooperate/Local Plan issues.
34. In addition there was a meeting of the M25/A10 officers' group which considered the latest update on the Northern Gateway Access package (NGAP) study being conducted by consultants on behalf of the London Borough of Enfield.
35. Finally, another strategic planning matter arose during this period which was the opening consultation by Her Majesty's Planning Inspectorate (HMPI) into the large expansion plans proposed for the North London Heat & Power plant at the EcoPark at Edmonton in the London Borough of Enfield. The Head of Conservation attended a workshop hosted by HMPI examining the key issues on which consultation was being carried out and for which preliminary environmental impact assessments had been completed.

## Land Management

36. Open Spaces Wayleaves Review – 1000+ letters to Motorgate and Handgate accounts for 1st October billing were sent out on 7 & 11 August respectively. Handgate Wayleaves fees to be doubled in price and Motorgate Wayleaves fees to be structured based upon Council Tax banding which is intended to reflect the value of access rights over open space land to the third party property that it serves.
37. The temporary access to the Arboretum residential development across Forest Land at Bury Lane has been extended until the end of November.
38. Negotiations are continuing with Kier Conservation regarding construction access via the Woodford Green Wayleave that serves the White House Estate.
39. The Deputy Chairman and Superintendent met with the site agent for Albany Stud to discuss the relocation of the consented development outside the covenanted land at Albany Stud.

## Operations

40. The Arborist teams have dealt with a large Oak tree that fell on three gardens at Armstrong Avenue, Woodford Green and a willow that fell near Roebuck Green, Buckhurst Hill. Staff have undertaken an investigation into the failure of the tree at Armstrong Avenue and it appears that the reason for the failure would not have been spotted though the Visual Tree Assessment process. Works on trees identified in the hazardous tree survey have continued including the felling of the significant English Oak at the corner of Brook Road and the Red Oak at Knighton Wood, both of which were significantly decayed. The winter program of wood-pasture restoration has commenced with work started at Walthamstow Forest and Rushey Plain. As part of continuing works to improve the Warren yard operations a restructure of the yard has been completed. Most central area site lines have been cleared..
41. The grassland team have been working through their annual cutting program with key areas such as the greens on Woodford and Buckhurst Hill cut. A contract cutting program has also been let to local farmer Tom Smith and depending on it being satisfactorily implemented it can be extended for three years. Contract teams have also started replacing the derelict fencing at Fernhills and started on a program of scrub clearance. The Senior Management Team hosted a fact finding visit from the Heart of England National Forest staff and trustees. This proved very stimulating with a good insight into income generation approaches and the two organisations are collaborating on joint visit to the New Forest. South Korean Parks and Open Spaces managers were hosted for a morning visit and presentation about Epping Forest and its management. It was very heart-warming to see the exclamations of delight made by the visitors on first seeing Connaught Water.

## **Visitor Services**

### **Green Flag and Green Heritage**

42. Epping Forest has again secured Green Flag and Green Heritage certification for 13 successive years respectively in awards announced during Love Parks Week 2015. Epping Forest participated in Love Parks Week 2015 through an active social media campaign. Traditional lawn games, including croquet, were also provided at The Temple to further promote Wanstead Park.

### **Weddings**

43. Our first two weddings were held this summer at The Queen Elizabeth Hunting Lodge and were a great success. We have obtained the official wedding photographs and these will provide the images for the future publicity.

### **Events**

44. The Illyria series of outdoor theatre shows were again a sell-out success and Music in the Park at Wanstead received around 3,500 visitors. The City of London Festival event at the View was well received and had a large turn-out despite the rain. Many of the visitors asked for more similar types of event.
45. The 'Curiosity Cabinet' – a small new display room at The View – was opened to the public on 21 July. Repairs to the display cases (donated by the Museum London previously), a picture rail and a new cabinet were funded by a donation from the City of London Historical Society and created by a skilled young carpenter, Ben Lamb, with links with the Worshipful Company of Carpenters. The first display is of archaeological finds from the site of Gifford's Wood. Visitor Services will organise a rolling programme of displays of objects from the Epping Forest museum collection in the future. The ceremonial ribbon was cut by Alderman Gordon Haines for the City of London and Malcolm Dick for the City of London Historical Society.
46. The museum collection was promoted on 15 May with a twilight opening of The View, Museums at Night drop-in Drink' as part of the nationwide Museums at Night campaign to encourage new audiences to collections. The temporary display of 'objet trouvé' or discarded natural objects that have an aesthetic value from the Forest gave a common theme to a diverse range of museum objects from a Roman brooch, old Victorian bottles to a gilt Buddhist deity statuette found in the undergrowth at Whipps Cross. The event inspired exchange of Forest stories and experiences from the 20+ attendees and twitter engagement too.

### **Communication and Information**

47. Forest Focus – will be seasonal and include events. The Visitor Services team are working on a new format for Forest Focus. The publication will be distributed quarterly and we hope to increase sign-up to the online version of newsletter (via Mailchimp).



48. A new publication of the Official Epping Forest Map is in its final stages of development.
49. Social media – There were 4,126 tweets in July (3,919 in June). An average of 6.5 tweets directly sent per day which includes retweets and social engagement. As at 6th August, Twitter followers have continued to grow reaching 3,897.
50. The Public Relations Officer and staff at Epping dealt successfully with claims on social media that a cyclist has been injured by wire stretched across Forest rides; the imagery was related to a motorcycle incident in Hungary. Excellent additional publicity has been achieved in Time Out with reference to the work of Conservation Arborist Team Leader Gavin Bodenham. The Head of Conservation's popular Nature Notes series again appeared in the one of the June editions of The Epping Forest Guardian newspapers.

### **Family Learning Events**

51. On Sunday 5 July in Queen Elizabeth's Hunting Lodge, 88 visitors to our Family Learning Event (FLE) enjoyed learning about cows in Epping Forest past and present. They found out about the history of grazing here, the reasons cattle were reintroduced, the species the grazing helps, the breeds of cattle that can be seen on Forest land today, and about our special underground fencing system. Adults and children alike took part in a quiz based on a cow-themed display. They followed a trail of hoof prints to the mooing cow in The View, answering cow-related questions as they went.
52. Wednesday 24 June 2015 7pm-9pm saw another fully-booked craft taster workshop for adults in the Community Room at The View. Participants were given a demonstration on 'Floral Design' and each created an arrangement to take home. There were plenty of brightly coloured carnations and foliage with different shapes and textures, for the learners to experiment with.

### **Wanstead Flats Football**

53. The summer has been extremely busy with the Flats hosting 18 school sports days, 8 football tournaments of various sizes, including a large national competition in partnership with Khalsa Football Federation, the British Sikh Singh Sabha and a commercial corporate tournament that saw corporate teams from 8 countries taking part. We hosted our own football tournament that saw 135 teams of all ages competing to celebrate 125 years of football at the Flats.
54. Parkrun on Saturday morning goes from strength to strength with a new record attendance of 151 in May and an average of over 135 people per run over the summer, the Family Archery Club saw 58 people attend over 10 weeks and is now on a summer break.

**Major incidents**

55. None.

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