



Essex County Council

## Place Services and Economic Growth Policy and Scrutiny Committee

<b>10:30</b>	<b>Thursday, 29 October 2020</b>	<b>Online Meeting</b>
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The meeting will be open to the public via telephone or online. Details about this are on the next page. Please do not attend County Hall as no one connected with this meeting will be present.

**For information about the meeting please ask for:**

Lisa Siggins, Democratic Services Officer

**Telephone:** 033301 34594

**Email:** [democratic.services@essex.gov.uk](mailto:democratic.services@essex.gov.uk)

### Essex County Council and Committees Information

All Council and Committee Meetings are held in public unless the business is exempt in accordance with the requirements of the Local Government Act 1972.

In accordance with the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020, this meeting will be held via online video conferencing.

Members of the public will be able to view and listen to any items on the agenda unless the Committee has resolved to exclude the press and public from the meeting as a result of the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined by Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.

#### How to take part in/watch the meeting:

**Participants:** (Officers and Members) will have received a personal email with their login details for the meeting. Contact the Democratic Services Officer if you have not received your login.

## **Members of the public:**

### **Online:**

You will need the Zoom app which is available from your app store or from [www.zoom.us](http://www.zoom.us). The details you need to join the meeting will be published as a Meeting Document, on the Meeting Details page of the Council's website (scroll to the bottom of the page) at least two days prior to the meeting date. The document will be called "Public Access Details".

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## **Accessing Documents**

If you have a need for documents in, large print, Braille, on disk or in alternative languages and easy read please contact the Democratic Services Officer before the meeting takes place. For further information about how you can access this meeting, contact the Democratic Services Officer.

The agenda is also available on the Essex County Council website, [www.essex.gov.uk](http://www.essex.gov.uk). From the Home Page, click on 'Running the council', then on 'How decisions are made', then 'council meetings calendar'. Finally, select the relevant committee from the calendar of meetings.

Please note that an audio recording may be made of the meeting – at the start of the meeting the Chairman will confirm if all or part of the meeting is being recorded.

	<b>Pages</b>
<b>1 Membership, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations of Interest</b>	<b>5 - 5</b>
<b>2 Minutes of the Previous Meeting</b> To approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 24 September 2020.	<b>6 - 9</b>
<b>3 Questions from the public</b> A period of up to 15 minutes will be allowed for members of the public to ask questions or make representations on any item on the agenda for this meeting. No statement or question shall be longer than three minutes and speakers will be timed.  If you would like to ask a question at the meeting, please email <a href="mailto:democratic.services@essex.gov.uk">democratic.services@essex.gov.uk</a> before 12 Noon the day before the meeting (Wednesday 28 October).	
<b>4 Essex Country Parks and Essex Outdoors - Update</b> Members to receive report ( <b>PSEG/12/20</b> ) alongside a presentation from Cllr Simon Walsh, Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change Action, Sam Kennedy, Director for Environment and Climate Action, Dee O'Rourke, Head of Culture and Green Spaces and Mark Rowley, Commercial Operations Manager.	<b>10 - 25</b>
<b>5 Date of next meeting</b> To note that the next Committee meeting will be on Thursday 26th November. It is expected that the meeting will be held online, via Zoom.	
<b>6 Urgent Business</b> To consider any matter which in the opinion of the Chairman should be considered in public by reason of special circumstances (to be specified) as a matter of urgency.	

## **Exempt Items**

(During consideration of these items the meeting is not likely to be open to the press and public)

The following items of business have not been published on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information falling within Part I of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972. Members are asked to consider whether or not the press and public should be excluded during the consideration of these items. If so it will be necessary for the meeting to pass a formal resolution:

**That the press and public are excluded from the meeting during the consideration of the remaining items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information falling within Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972, the specific paragraph(s) of Schedule 12A engaged being set out in the report or appendix relating to that item of business.**

**7**

### **Urgent Exempt Business**

To consider in private any other matter which in the opinion of the Chairman should be considered by reason of special circumstances (to be specified) as a matter of urgency.

## **Agenda item 1**

**Committee:** Place Services and Economic Growth Policy and Scrutiny Committee

**Enquiries to:** Peter Randall, Senior Democratic Services Officer

### **Membership, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations of Interest**

#### **Recommendations:**

To note

1. Membership as shown below
2. Apologies and substitutions
3. Declarations of interest to be made by Members in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct

#### **Membership**

(Quorum: 5)

Councillor I Grundy  
Councillor A Erskine  
Councillor I Henderson  
Councillor S Hillier  
Councillor P Honeywood  
Councillor D Kendall  
Councillor S Lissimore  
Councillor B Massey  
Councillor R Moore  
Councillor C Pond  
Councillor R Pratt  
Councillor W Schmitt  
Councillor C Weston  
Councillor A Wood

Chairman

# **Minutes of the meeting of the Place Services and Economic Growth Policy and Scrutiny Committee, held digitally on Thursday, 24 September 2020**

## **Present:**

Councillor I Grundy (Chairman)	Councillor S Lissimore
Councillor A Wood	Councillor C Pond
Councillor R Moore	Councillor R Pratt
Councillor A Erskine	Councillor W Schmitt
Councillor S Hillier	Councillor C Weston
Councillor P Honeywood	Councillor I Henderson
Councillor D Kendall	

## **AGENDA**

### **1. Membership, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations of Interest**

There were no changes to the membership of the committee since the last meeting.

No formal apologies were received.

There were no declarations of interest.

### **2. Minutes**

Members approved as a correct record Minutes of the meeting held on 25 June 2020.

### **3. Questions from the Public**

There were no public speakers

### **4. Call in Notification: FP/794/08/20 Concession Contract for an Electric Scooter Hire Trial Scheme**

Members noted the report.

### **5. Planning for the Future - The Planning White Paper**

The panel for this item was:

Cllr Tony Ball, Cabinet Member for Economic Development.

Graham Thomas, Head of Planning

Matthew Jericho, Spatial Planning and Local Plan Manager

Members received a presentation from Cllr Tony Ball and officers. Key points included:

- The Planning White Paper (PWP) Is designed to reform an outdated planning system and boost growth. The focus will be on: planning for development, planning for beautiful and sustainable places and, planning for infrastructure and connected places.
- The PWP aims to correct imbalances in the current planning system by: streamlining and modernising the planning process, improving outcomes with regards to design and sustainability, reform developer contributions and, ensure more land is available when needed.
- Under proposals, housing quotas would be set by central government for each local authority.
- A greater focus would be placed on periodically reviewed local plans, with all available land designated as either growth, renewal or protected. Different planning restrictions would exist in each of these categories, with planning made significantly simpler and more streamlined in growth areas.
- A greater focus would be made on digital planning, with an opensource mapping software made available to allow greater access to planning opportunities.
- The infrastructure levy would replace s106 funding and Community infrastructure levy. This would be a flat rate set nationally based on the value of the final development.
- Members were informed that this was a time-sensitive item. This session formed part of the consultation response to central government from ECC. This would be submitted in late October.

Members discussed the presentation and papers with officers. Key points raised included:

- How land will be categorised – members were informed that land would be categorised as part of the local planning round with plans adopted by full council. With quotas being set by central government, councils would have to ensure that robust conversations around land designations took place, with enough land designated as growth land to ensure targets were met.
- Dilution of local planning processes and democratic accountability. With land designated as ‘growth’, the planning process will be significantly minimized with only basic permitted planning required.
- Sustainability assessments – these have been removed as a requirement with nothing to replace them. Members were informed that this was likely to streamline proposals, but little information given as to why these were deemed unnecessarily bureaucratic. Environmental questions raised in planning process similarly removed.

- Reduced consultation times – again, likely to streamline process.
- Exemptions to 106 and CIL funding – under the new infrastructure funding requirement there won't be any exemptions. However, as the value of levy will be determined after the structure has been built, local authorities will have to prospectively borrow to manage costs.
- Exemption of accessible and green spaces in document – officers agreed to raise this as part of response to consultation.
- Process for consultation response – Members were informed that this would be the only response from ECC and would be taken through PLT and local planning officers' network.

ACTION: Officers agreed to hold a member development session before consultation response submitted.

Cllr Grundy thanked the Cabinet Member and officers for their time.

Cllr Erskine left the meeting at 11.28

## **6. Sustainable Travel in Essex – Update.**

The panel for this item was:

Cllr Kevin Bentley, Cabinet Member for Infrastructure

Tracey Vickers, Head of Sustainable Travel

Members received a presentation from Cllr Bentley and officers. Key points raised included:

- ECC's transport agenda intends to achieve a shift to walking, cycling and public transport by increasing choice for residents.
- Aim is to improve health of Essex residents, as well as reduce congestion in major transport hubs.
- Residents should be encouraged, not forced. Positive adoption can only be achieved if people want to get involved.
- This can be achieved by better informing travellers through smart lighting, smart parking and smart deliveries for local businesses.
- Safer and smarter community safety and traffic management can regulate traffic flows, reducing congestion.
- Initial response to Covid funding has been spent on schemes in central locations, making pavements and cycle routes safer for people to use while maintaining social distancing.
- Application made for further central government infrastructure funding for schemes in Basildon, Braintree, Brentwood, Chelmsford and Colchester. Each area has a distinctive proposal designed to address unique need and characteristics of each town. The focus will be on making walking and cycling a meaningful alternative for shorter trips or part of a longer journey. Panels have been put together, chaired by local county councillors, to inform and influence the spending of funding in corresponding areas.



- ECC is responsible for community rail, sustainable travel planning, transport infrastructure, the overall transport strategy and active and sustainable transport. All these areas feed into an overall sustainable transport policy.
- The Essex Walking Strategy launched at the end of September. This aligns with overarching sustainable investment strategies to promote walking as a mode of travel for short trips.

Members discussed the presentation and papers with officers. Key points raised included:

- Likely timeline for approval of central government funding – Members were informed that officers were anticipating a decision in October.
- The lack of funding for Tendring or Loughton – the Cabinet Member assured committee members that Tendring wasn't omitted, it simply didn't feature in the initial wave of funding. It would feature in future funding bids. Members were also referred to the 'Tendring big bikes' scheme currently active in the area. The Cabinet Member informed members that this is a major policy change, with limited funding in the first instance. Change will be incremental.
- Areas of low population – A rural transport strategy is in development and expected.

Cllr Grundy thanked the Cabinet Member and Officers for their time.

## **7. Meeting dates for 2021**

Meeting dates agreed

## **8. Date of Next Meeting**

The next full committee day will be Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> October

## **9. Urgent Business**

None received

## **10. Urgent exempt Business**

None received

**Close of meeting**

## AGENDA ITEM 4

<b>Report title:</b> Essex Country Parks and Essex Outdoors - Update		PSEG/12/20
<b>Report to:</b> Place Services and Economic Growth Policy and Scrutiny Committee		
<b>Report author:</b> Dee O'Rourke, Head of Culture and Green Spaces		
<b>Date:</b> 29/10/20		<b>For:</b> Discussion
<b>Enquiries to:</b> <a href="mailto:Dee.orourke@essex.gov.uk">Dee.orourke@essex.gov.uk</a>		
<b>County Divisions affected:</b> All Essex		

### 1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To update the Committee on the operation of country parks throughout the pandemic and future plans for safe reopening and development.

### 2. Background

- 2.1 As part of the work planning session in early 2020, Members of the Place Services and Economic Growth Policy and Scrutiny Committee requested an update on the current operation of Essex Country Parks.
- 2.2. This will include an update on the impact of the pandemic upon Essex County Parks and the operation of Essex Outdoors, as well as an overview of current and upcoming capital projects.

### 3. Session Aims

- 3.1 Members are asked to discuss the presentation with the Cabinet Member and Officers, providing scrutiny and outlining areas for further discussion.

### 4. List of Appendices

- 4.1 Appendix A: Essex Country Parks - update

# Essex Country Parks & Essex Outdoors Update

October 2020



October 2020

# Essex Country Parks

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A scenic landscape photograph of a coastal cliff. The cliff face is a mix of reddish-brown earth and grey rock, with several trees growing on top. The trees have bare, gnarled branches, suggesting a late autumn or winter setting. The sky is a clear, pale blue. In the foreground, there is a sandy beach with some fallen leaves and debris.

## Summary Overview

- Essex County Council manages 8 Country Parks, and 30 woodlands across the county.
- We also maintain multiple heritage sites including Cressing Temple Barns, the Jaywick Martello Tower and 5 Mills.
- We usually have an estimated 900,000 visitors annually to the parks, monitored via car parking (note we are unable to record walking visitors, nor do we record visitors to woodlands).
- We deliver a variety of educational and outdoor activities such as Wild Wednesday at Danbury Country Park as well as themed walking trails at Thorndon and Weald Country Parks.
- Cressing Temple Barns is our main event site and we host a variety of seasonal events there.
- We also deliver weddings and conferences at Cressing Temple Barns.



### Cressing Temple

Discover the walled garden and 13th century barns

### Great Notley

Climb Sky Ropes

### Cudmore Grove

Explore the beach and meadows and discover the wildlife

### Danbury

Picnic by the lake

### Marsh Farm

Spot the wildlife

### Hadleigh

Get on your bike

### Thorndon

Follow the Gruffalo Trail or take in the views

### Belhus Woods

Explore woods and meadows

### Weald

Play on the Stick Man trail

#### Belhus Woods

South Ockendon RM15 4JQ

#### Cressing Temple

Braintree CM77 8PD

#### Cudmore Grove

East Mersea CO5 8UT

#### Danbury

Danbury CM3 6AW

#### Great Notley

Great Notley CM77 7TS

#### Hadleigh

Hadleigh SS27 2SP

#### Marsh Farm

South Woodham Ferrers CM3 5WY

#### Thorndon North

Brimwood CM13 3RZ

#### Thorndon South



# Essex Country Parks

## Impact of COVID-19 pandemic

- On 22 March 2020 all ECC owned or managed Country Parks were closed. They remained closed for 8 weeks. Containing the spread of the virus and the safety of our staff and volunteers was our top priority.
- Public Rights of Way remained open throughout the lockdown for people to walk and run through the parks.
- Reopening the parks when it was safe to do so was uppermost in our planning. On 21 May 2020 - when COVID safe measures had been put into place for our visitors and staff, all 8 Country Parks were reopened.
- Additional cleaning was undertaken of toilet facilities, car parking machines and high touch areas. Signage was displayed throughout the parks and on social media.
- Access to play equipment was restricted and facilities closed off in order to support social distancing guidelines. On 4 July 2020 play areas in the Country Parks were reopened in line with wider government guidance on play equipment.
- In-park cafes and snack kiosks remained closed until mid July when a COVID safe operating procedure could be put in place. Cafes are currently offering a take-away service only – this has impacted park income.



# Essex Country Parks

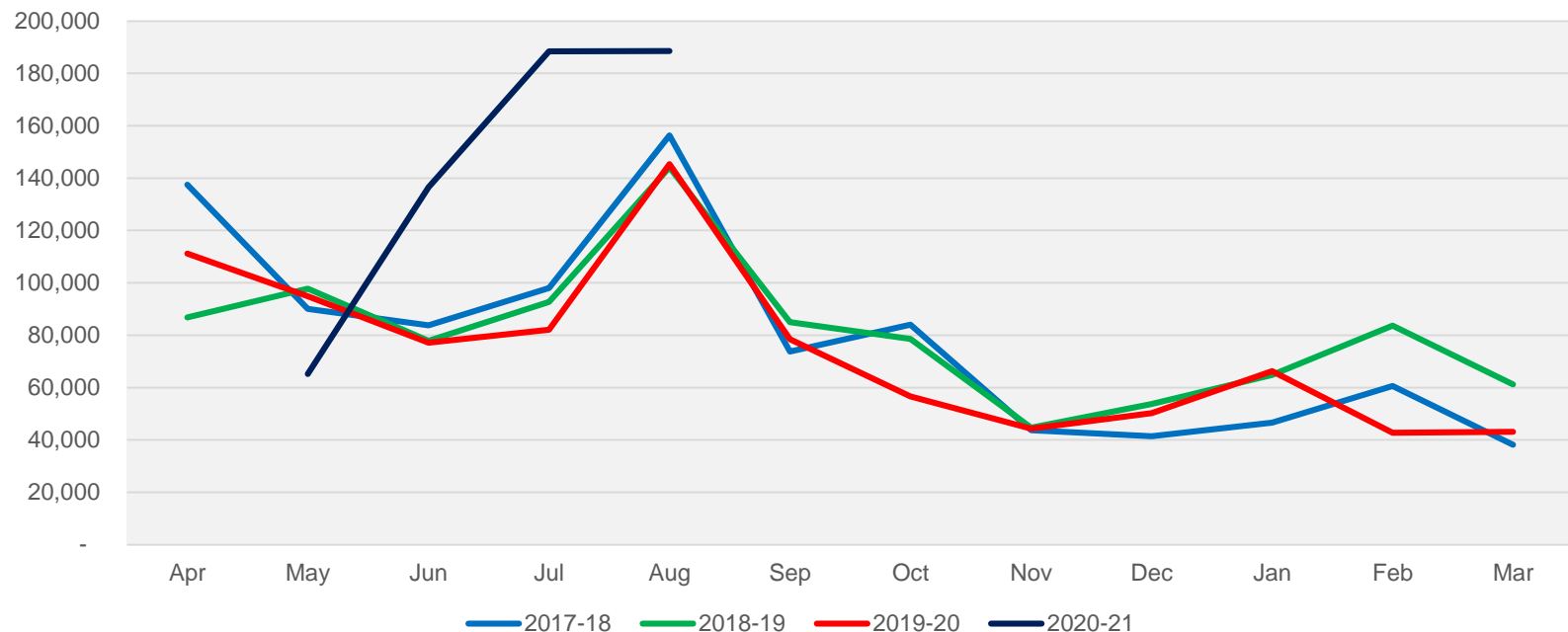
## Impact of COVID-19 pandemic CONT.

- Explorer Pass car parking season tickets were suspended, and an additional 8 weeks given to permit holders to compensate for the time for which the parks were closed.
- Public reaction was positive to the parks re-opening. Many residents had been commenting on social media and messaging us to request that the parks be re-opened to them for exercise and leisure.
- Car parking income from the parks was lost due to the 8-week closure but has been mitigated in part by the exceptionally high number of visitors over the late summer months.
- No Country Park staff were furloughed during the height of the pandemic. Rangers and on-site staff continued to undertake their roles, carrying out maintenance work on buildings and the woodlands.



# Country Park Visitors

Country Parks Estimated Visitor Numbers from car parking  
All Country Parks Combined



- Our Country Parks and green spaces have become increasingly important for communities during the COVID-19 pandemic

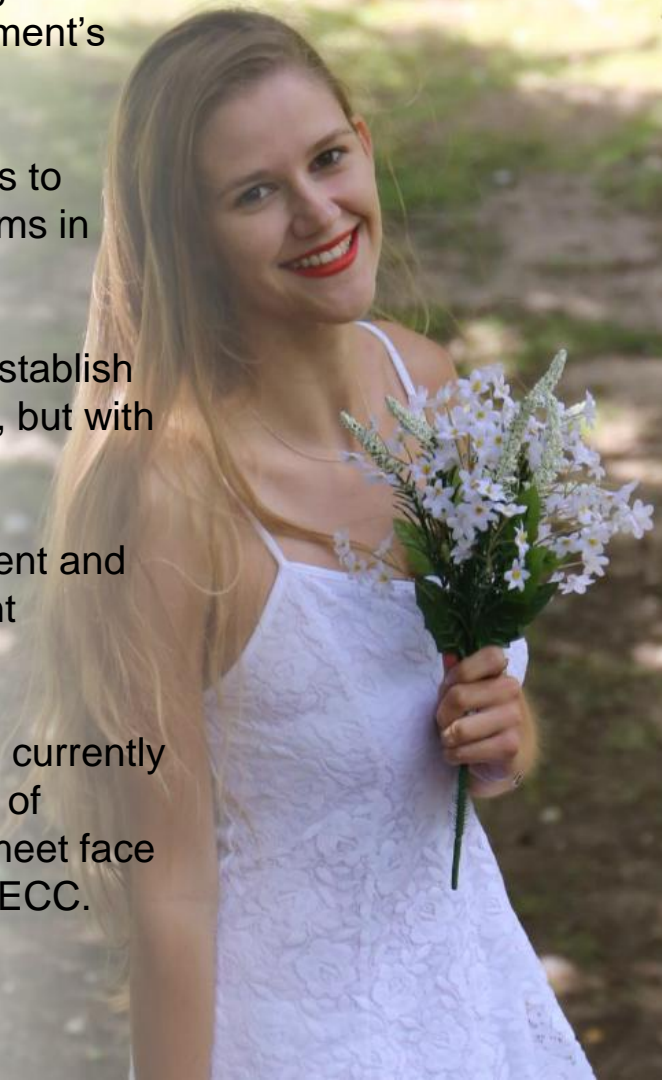
# Essex Country Parks

## Marketing & Communications

- In March 2020 the marketing and communications team in the service were at the forefront of ensuring that the public were kept up-to-date regarding the closure of the sites and the new restrictions that were in place.
- Throughout the lockdown period, consistent and timely messaging around the continued closure of the parks was updated frequently, including reasons why these changes were critical.
- In May, when the parks re-opened a carefully crafted programme of messages was released which highlighted the restrictions in place to ensure staff and visitor safety. The FAQ page was the most visited web page of the Explore Essex website as residents sought advice on when and how they could visit safely.
- To support the recovery of the county as destination, the marketing and communications team have supported the launch of a Visit Essex campaign and new website. Spearheaded by a video featuring Essex based celebrities, the campaign achieved national press coverage – making the BBC breakfast news on 14 October 2020.

## Essex Country Parks - Events

- In March 2020 events and weddings ceased across all Country Park and heritage sites in accordance with government regulations. This has had a significant impact on income and we are seeking reimbursement for lost fees and charges under the government's scheme.
- The wedding and events team were redeployed for 6 weeks to support the Welfare Service and Financial Assessment teams in response to the COVID-19 crisis.
- Following government guidance and risk assessments to establish venues as COVID safe, on 4 July 2020 weddings resumed, but with limitations in place around numbers and receptions.
- In October 2020, the events team supported the development and deployment of LearnFest - a leading personal development programme offered to all ECC employees.
- With large event activity still restricted, the events team are currently rolling a proposition targeted at organisations, with an offer of external event space for hire, allowing their employees to meet face to face in a COVID safe way and generating a revenue for ECC.



# Essex Country Parks - Capital projects 2020/21

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- **Thorndon South Country Park:**
  - Toilets refurbishment completed.
  - Play area addition decision pending.
- **Capital maintenance projects:**
  - Belhus Woods – car park resurfacing works delivered.
  - Cudmore Grove – toilet refurbishment completed.
  - Gt Notley – pathway works in progress.
  - Thorndon North – pathway works in progress.
  - Thorndon North – sewage system being procured.
  - Weald – resurfacing works in progress.
  - Weald – damp works being procured.
- **Land of the Fanns match funding with NLHF:**
  - Thorndon new pathways in progress.
  - Weald new pathway in progress and bridge repaired.





# Essex Outdoors Overview

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# Summary Overview

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The four Essex Outdoors centres offer high quality outdoor learning opportunities and activities for children and young people across the county and beyond, supporting mental and physical well being.

The service is mainly used by Essex schools, many of whom come every year, valuing the experiences and skills that Essex Outdoors can offer. Last year the service was used by 129,961 visitors.

All of the centres are accessible to, and well used by, children with disabilities and special educational needs; we also provide opportunities through ECC's Short Breaks for Disabled Children (SBDC) scheme.

Throughout the year Essex Outdoors also delivers Forest School sessions, First Aid courses, and various professional and technical courses on behalf of national governing bodies including the Royal Yachting Association, British Canoeing, Mountain Leader Training, National Indoor Climbing Award Scheme,

# Essex Outdoors

## Impacts of COVID-19

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- On 20 March 2020 all Essex Outdoors activity centres and The Lock Climbing Wall were closed. Unlike some other activity day suppliers, Essex Outdoors offered those groups or individuals who had to cancel due to COVID-19 with a full refund or option to postpone their booking. Approx. 70 staff were furloughed from June.
- From 25 July 2020 and following advice from Public Health colleagues the activity centres began to re-open to the general public for school holiday activity club bookings and to schools for educational activity days. However activity levels were low across the summer. Bradwell, which focuses on sailing has remained closed throughout as it is not possible to offer socially distanced sailing.
- Residential stays are still restricted under government guidance and day activities only are being offered until further notice. COVID-safe measures around social distancing and additional cleaning of equipment have been put into place and a groups/ pods system introduced to limit numbers. Signage was displayed throughout the activity centres and a handwashing regime enforced. Three sites have successfully hosted schools in September and October though access to some activities is restricted.
- The peak season for Essex Outdoors runs between May-July so that loss of these weeks has had a significant financial impact this year. We are seeking lost fees and charges under the government's reimbursement scheme.

# Essex Outdoors Impacts of COVID-19

- School and education bookings are being taken for Summer 2021 for residential trips.
- Summer holiday options such as camping for the general public will be offered during August 2021 for residents as an affordable and low travel option for holidays and short breaks.
- Bookings for next year are currently about the same as previous years but we are awaiting guidance from DfE to confirm whether these will all be able to go ahead.
- Essex Outdoors continue to offer the *Book with Confidence COVID-19 cancellation guarantee*.





# Essex Outdoors

## Capital projects 2020/21

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- **Harlow high ropes:**
  - Suppliers for high ropes, climbing wall and office procured.
  - Planning permission application submitted.
  - Expected completion 2021/22.
- **Mersea accommodation / swimming pool development:**
  - Feasibility study completed.
  - Scope being revisited.
  - Moved in capital programme to 2022/23.