

## Re-opening of Essex Outdoors in response to COVID-19

**Forward Plan reference number:** 'Not applicable'

<b>Report title:</b> Re-opening of Essex Outdoors sites in response to COVID-19	
<b>Report to:</b> Councillor Simon Walsh, Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Action and Mark Carroll, Executive Director, Place and Public Health	
<b>Report author:</b> Samantha Kennedy, Director Environment and Climate Action	
<b>Date:</b> 28 July 2020	<b>For:</b> Information
<b>Enquiries to:</b> Dee O'Rourke, Head of Culture, Heritage, Tourism and Green Spaces	
<b>County Divisions affected:</b> Chelmsford, Colchester, Harlow, Maldon	

### 1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report sets out re-opening proposals for ECC's Essex Outdoors sites. Initially these will be for school summer holiday activities and some August bookings, as standalone activities and by way of preparation for school bookings taken for the autumn term in September. Some larger, 'business as usual' bookings will then resume in September in line with the autumn school term, although many schools will not be taking part in residential visits in autumn 2020 due to Government guidance to local authority run schools.

### 2. Recommendations

- 2.1 It is proposed that a re-opening of Essex Outdoors is approved, initially with reduced staff to child ratios, limited activities based on social distancing requirements, and additional cleaning regimes, from 1 August 2020.

Essex Outdoors Bradwell will not run summer holiday activities in 2020 due to social distancing limitations within its building for non-school group visitors.

### 3. Summary of issue

- 3.1 On 20 March 2020 ECC took the decision, in response to the Coronavirus pandemic, to close its Essex Outdoors sites, to ensure the safety of its staff and visitors, aside from to serve children in care, vulnerable pupils and pupils of key worker families. This was in line with national guidance around gatherings, events and social distancing.
- 3.2 The Essex Outdoors sites have remained largely closed to the public since, with only limited checks taking place within the facility, and no significant maintenance taking place or staff presence due to Health and Safety controls, specifically social distancing. There has been some usage to serve children in care, vulnerable pupils and pupils of key worker families.
- 3.3 New Government guidance on 23 June 2020 covered and permitted, in principle and with safe and responsible operation, the vast majority of Essex

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Outdoors' activities except for The Lock Climbing Wall in Harlow (NB The Lock has now reopened in line with subsequent government guidance).

- 3.4 ECC plans to re-allocate a limited number of non-furloughed staff across Essex Outdoors sites at Danbury, Harlow and Mersea in order to train and re-validate any certificates, carry out safety checks and maintenance, and plan for the safe and controlled return of members of the public. The sites will be ready to begin welcoming visitors back from 1 August 2020 for the school summer holidays.

### **4. Re-Opening Phase**

- 4.1 ECC will begin re-opening Essex Outdoors sites in Danbury, Harlow and Mersea from 1 August 2020 for summer holiday activities and some external August bookings. Bradwell will remain closed due to concerns regarding social distancing within its building.
- 4.2 Headline controls that will be in place to protect staff and visitors and encourage social distancing include:
- Amended staff to child ratios from 1:10 to 1:6.
  - Restricted capacity per session.
  - Restricted activities – only those activities which can be carried out whilst maintaining social distancing of 2m will be delivered.
  - Pre-booking online will be a requirement for entry.
  - Increased cleaning regime.
  - One-way routes and hand sanitiser stations will be in place.
  - Customers will bring own packed lunches.
- 4.3 Risk assessments have been produced for staff to return to ECC buildings, and detailed risk assessments will also be produced and refined for the specific risks faced and taking part in the activities. Training will take place with all staff by way of a 'return to work' and to ensure all staff are aware of and fully understand the new ways of working and all additional controls in place.
- 4.4 For the summer holiday activity programmes, visitors will be required to bring packed lunches as no on-site catering will be provided for them.
- 4.5 There will be extensive signage displayed throughout the sites. The signage will set out clearly that social distancing measures remain in place and that people should adhere to Government guidance regarding socialising. This messaging will be reinforced by staff.
- 4.6 For a detailed Recovery Plan, please see Annex 1.
- 4.7 Ensuring that communications remain clear about the social distancing and safety controls remains essential, to ensure that members of the public are aware of the reduced capacities, pre-booking requirements, the revised social distancing requirements and the possibility of limited access to some activities.

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4.8 A detailed communications plan is attached, see Annex 2.

### **5. Next steps**

5.1 Communications will start to be issued once approval is received. This will be across our websites and social media channels and will offer assurances re: the social distancing and hygiene control measures which will be in place.

### **6. Financial implications**

6.1 The 20 March 2020 CMA paper approving closure of the Essex Outdoors estimated the impact of the closure for the initial 6-month period to be £2.4M.

6.2 This was approved and the budget virement was put through with funds drawn down from the Emergency Reserve.

6.3 The CMA further showed the impact of the full year assuming the operations were ceased on an on-going basis to impact the MTRS by £3.5M.

6.3 The service to date have managed to reduce their anticipated financial exposure since the CMA publication, to c.50% of the CMA approved impact for the first 3 months.

6.4 The remainder of the year bookings are significantly down on expectations with the reduced capacity caused by on-going social distancing and other operational safeguarding techniques, it is expected that the Essex Outdoors will utilise the full Emergency Reserve drawdown on a different phasing to the CMA approved, and the Emergency Reserve funding is not reduced post the initial 6 months.

6.5 Re-opening the Essex Outdoors locations listed in the paper will utilise existing non-furloughed staff. Most staff that are currently furloughed, will remain furloughed until the current forecast cessation of the scheme in October.

6.6 Revenue assumptions compiled in the re-opening have been developed by the service, supported by non-cancelled orders post school return, and demand interest for the summer break.

6.7 Direct variable operating costs have been supplied by the service as a correlation of the orders and activities to be supplied.

6.8 For both 6.6 and 6.7, the service has assumed a very cautious approach based on the market conditions today, and once re-opened, may well generate enhanced contribution.

6.9 Based on the assumptions above, the impact for August 2020 to March 2021 (Open or Close) can be summarised as

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Summary (open)	Danbury	Harlow	Mersea	Total
Income	(£82,809)	(£31,000)	(£38,997)	(£152,806)
Staff Costs	£263,602	£96,876	£339,637	£700,115
Other Costs	£68,408	£17,968	£70,512	£156,888
Contribution	£249,201	£83,844	£371,152	£704,197
Summary (closed)	Danbury	Harlow	Mersea	Total
Income	-	-	-	-
Staff Costs	£263,602	£96,876	£339,637	£700,115
Other Costs	£21,685	£1,250	£62,481	£85,416
Contribution	£285,288	£98,126	£402,118	£785,531
Variance	(£36,086)	(£14,282)	(£30,966)	(£81,334)

6.10 Whilst the 8 months under both scenarios deliver a revenue budget pressure, re-opening the limited services, reduces the pressure, contributing £81,334.

6.11 Actual take up of the offer may be higher if Children's Services buy into this offer; discussions on this are underway.

### 7.1 Risk management implications

7.1 Staff will receive 'return to work' training as required across ECC, adapted for COVID-19 and inclusive of any and all site specific and job specific training required, in line with the risk assessments.

7.2 Risk Assessments have been produced and will be updated following approval of this paper and the return of staff to work to finalise and test the controls.

7.3 There is a risk of social distancing guidelines not being adhered to. Signage will be in place throughout and there is an emphasis on visitors' personal responsibilities as well. Reduced staff to child ratios will help further too. These risks are reduced for Essex Outdoors activities due to the structured nature of activities and booking terms and conditions.

7.4 There is a risk that visitors will not return to commercial leisure as frequently as before the pandemic, and that their spend propensity may be reduced as and when they do return. This risk is mitigated by ECC already paying some staff in full and still contributing a percentage to others on furlough, thus meaning a profit position, in terms of comparing operating against not operating, will likely be realised almost immediately.

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### Annex 1. Essex Outdoors Recovery Plan

No.	Proposed Measure	Benefits/Issues/Further info	Responsible	When	Status
1.	Essex Outdoors will reopen for the delivery of school holiday activity days from 1 August 2020, for limited existing bookings in August 2020, and for school bookings as normal from September 2020.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Staff will require intensive period of induction and retraining before delivery of activities.</li> </ul>	MR / Ops Managers	01-08-2020	Live
2.	Staff Guidance notes and Generic Covid Risk Assessment (RA) for Staff: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dealing with members of the public</li> <li>Clarity on staff responsibilities and behaviours</li> <li>H&amp;S advice</li> <li>Corporate First Aid advice</li> <li>Work related Violence Policy</li> <li>Corporate Comms Guidance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Operations Manager to produce Guidance Notes and site specific Covid-19 RA.</li> </ul>	Ops Managers	Complete	Live
3.	Rotas to be produced to reflect reduced capacities and maximise use of staff not on furlough.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Operations Manager to produce and finalise rotas with site staff.</li> </ul>	Ops Manager	Ongoing	Live
4.	Essex Outdoors to be managed in line with social distancing guidance and staff will not engage in any close contact or confrontation with the public.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Staff to remain 2m away from their colleagues and members of the public wherever practicable.</li> <li>Signage installed throughout sites encouraging adherence to social distancing and hand hygiene measures.</li> <li>Access to shared facilities such as toilets and showers to be controlled as per risk assessments.</li> <li>ECC Customer Behaviour Posters to be displayed at all sites and in all outlets.</li> </ul>	Ops Managers	Ongoing	Live

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No.	Proposed Measure	Benefits/Issues/Further info	Responsible	When	Status
5.	Toilet facilities will remain open for the public.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Toilets and changing rooms will be cleaned regularly.</li> <li>Signage will be installed at entrances to toilets to encourage social distancing when using toilet facilities.</li> <li>Access to toilets and showers to be controlled as per site-specific risk assessments.</li> </ul>	All staff	Ongoing	Live
6.	First Aid. ECC corporate Information for First Aiders – advice on CPR and Covid-19 will be supplied to all First Aiders across the service.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All First Aiders have a “Duty of Care” to protect individuals but in the first instance must protect themselves.</li> </ul>	Trained First Aiders	Ongoing	Live
7.	Have been advised by ECC Public Health Consultants that staff are to practice 2m social distancing and as such PPE is not essential for staff safety.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Staff to be provided with proper training and information regarding importance of social distancing at all times.</li> </ul>	Ops Managers	Ongoing	Live
8.	Limited activities delivered whilst Senior Instructors work through respective National Governing Body guidance information and staff scenario testing to assess safety of delivery given social distancing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clear communication on what activities can take place safely.</li> <li>More activities to be added as and when ongoing work is completed and activity found to be safe to deliver.</li> </ul>	Ops Managers	Ongoing	Live
10.	Members of the public to bring a packed lunch for the day sessions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduces risks associated with preparing and serving food.</li> </ul>	Ops Managers	Ongoing	Live

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### Communications Plan

<b>I</b>	<b>OVERVIEW &amp; AUDIENCE</b> This communication plan specifically relates to Essex Outdoors, owned and operated by ECC. The proposed communication plan has been drawn up in conjunction with EE operational areas and had been designed to ensure that timely and accurate communications are delivered. Key stakeholder groups (the 'audience') are identified as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff – Essex Outdoors staff</li> <li>• Staff – all ECC</li> <li>• General Public and prospective customers / parents</li> </ul>
<b>li</b>	<b>COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY</b> It is imperative that messages are consistent across all stakeholder groups and that communication around the re-opening of Essex Outdoors is managed in a way which supports the maintenance of public order, protects infrastructure and most importantly, ensures the safety of our site staff and visitors.
<b>lii</b>	<b>INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS</b> Internal communications are crucial to ensuring that a consistent message is delivered by all representatives of ECC. Corporate Communications will therefore be a key stakeholder in ensuring that the messages agreed in the comms plan are cascaded to all staff, particularly anyone who may be 'customer' facing. ECC employees with children of an appropriate age are also a target market for advertising in this instance.
<b>lv</b>	<b>EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS</b> External communications will be limited in the first instance to email bulletins, website updates and social media posts and a press release from central communications.
<b>V</b>	<b>KEY MESSAGES</b> The key messages to be included in communications to the public are as follows: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1. Essex Outdoors re-opening for limited numbers</b> Will need to be clear about changes in operation i.e. pre-booking essential, reduced activities, reduced capacity.</li> <li><b>2. Social Distancing</b> Social distancing should be adhered to at all times, members of the public are still asked to remain 2m apart from anyone outside of their immediate household.</li> <li><b>3. Toilet and changing facilities</b> Toilet and changing facilities will be open and we have a cleaning regime in place.</li> </ol>

<b>I approve the above recommendations set out above for the reasons set out in the report.</b>  <b>Mark Carroll, Executive Director Place and Public Health</b>	<b>Date</b> <b>30/072020</b>
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### In consultation with:

<b>Role</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b>Councillor Simon Walsh, Cabinet Member for Environment &amp; Climate Action</b>	<b>30/07/2020</b>