

Report title: Site Report – Great Notley Country Park	
Report to: Great Notley Country Park Joint Venture Partnership Board	
Report author: Mark Rowley, Commercial Operations Manager (Essex County Council)	
Date: 1 September 2022	For: Information
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County Divisions affected: Not applicable	

1. Purpose of Report

To provide an update on activity at Great Notley Country Park. Members are asked to note the report.

2. Staffing

We are currently down to a skeleton staffing crew at the Country Park, with staff currently off sick, on maternity leave, or roles currently still out for recruitment. New roles were created during the last restructure, these being a new 0.3 FTE caretaker and two 0.25 FTE Park Operations Assistants (POA). We have filled one of the POA positions, and Barbara is a much-welcomed member of the team. We also now have help from the Ranger based at Cudmore Grove Country Park, as he works at Great Notley CP every Wednesday.

The Roaming Rangers will be losing one of their members of staff, Laura, as she moves on to a new opportunity. We wish her all the luck with her new role near Manchester.

3. Play Trail and the Park

We have now had many of our play trail elements surfaced with tiger mulch, which is a bonded rubber material. It was decided that this is more economic in the long term than woodchip, as it requires little maintenance and does not need topping up every year. After some much needed repairs we also have most of our play equipment open, after ECC reserves funding was sought to complete the work. We have redesigned the climbing forest, making it into an imaginative toddler play area. Work will continue on this after the summer holidays. Unfortunately, due to budget restraints the water play remains closed.

The Ranger will be completing the autumnal cut back of the hedges and the meadows around the Country Park soon after the summer holidays, and along the Flitch Way and Blackwater Rail Trail towards the end of the year too. Strimming many of the wildflowers around the park will continue in September once they have 'gone over'. The seeds are currently a valuable food source for birds. Work has been carried out on the trees along the Flitch Way, the Country Park and Blackwater Rail trail in accordance with the tree reports.

4. Visitor Numbers

We are now well into the summer holidays and the building and car parks are now fully open after Covid. We are finding the summer holidays to be quiet so far. We think this is mainly due to the extreme heat we have been having as Great Notley CP has little shade and the fact that many people want to get away for summer holidays without restrictions.

5. Café

Skylark Café is now fully open and allowing people to sit in to enjoy food and drinks. We have welcomed three new part time Café Assistants and a new Food and Beverage Manager (Kelly), who manages the cafés across Essex Country Parks. The new Food and Beverage Manager has only just started her role with ECC and it will be exciting to see the changes to the cafes that she puts in place.

6. Sky Ropes

Sky Ropes is now fully open with many of the timeslots being fully booked over the summer period. The Sky Ropes team are now made up of our one Sky Ropes member based at the Country Park and others based over at Essex Outdoors Danbury.

7. Events

All third-party events are now back on track, and we have welcomed many of our regular events back, including Parkrun, Junior Parkrun, Born2Tri, the Greyhound Walks and North Essex Astronomy Group. We've had several races along the Flitch Way too. We are working with the events team to attract more third-party events to the park.

The events team have produced a summer trail, to encourage families to visit our parks and enjoy some exercise in the fresh air.

8. Flitch Way and Volunteers

We have welcomed the Friends of the Flitch Way volunteer group back and they have recommenced their twice weekly work parties, which mainly involves cutting back and clearance work along the Flitch Way. They have also completed some maintenance work at one of the Halts along the Flitch and completed one clearance project at the lakes at the park. They are currently on a break for the summer holidays, but work will continue next week or so, at the Country Park, where they continue with another lake project of clearing some the reeds from the main lake. We continue to thank them for all the hard work and effort they put in.