

## Site Report

### Agenda Item 4

Reference number: GTP/04/20

<b>Report title:</b> Site Report	
<b>Report to:</b> Great Notley Country Park Joint Venture Partnership Board	
<b>Report author:</b> Claire Bunn, Park Development Manager	
<b>Date:</b> 2 December 2020	<b>For:</b> Information and Discussion
<b>Enquiries to:</b> democratic.services@essex.gov.uk	
<b>County Divisions affected:</b> Not applicable	

#### 1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To receive the latest update relating to Great Notley Country Park, as set out in the attached report.

## Site Report

### Great Notley Country Park Joint Venture Partnership Board Meeting November 2020

#### Staffing

In response to the Coronavirus pandemic we have restricted the numbers of staff on site, with staff rotating between working on site and working from home, in order to reduce numbers in the workplace.

Two staff members from the Sky Ropes team have also been assisting with the park's day to day duties – again on a rota basis - whilst Sky Ropes has remained closed due to Covid. They have become valuable members of the team over the last few months.

The roaming rangers have lost one of their members of staff, as they moved on to somewhere new, and we will monitor the situation to see whether this has an impact on the park.

#### Play Trail and the Park

During the first lockdown the roaming rangers continued to visit the site and complete all the essential grass cutting and strimming tasks. This is a huge task, as it involves cutting along all the rides and pathways and strimming around all the park furniture, such as signposts and benches etc. and needs to be done throughout the growing season.

We were very pleased to have received some capital funding to resurface sections of the bridleway. The work was completed towards the end of October and most of this path is now accessible through the wetter parts of the year. Ideally, we would like to resurface more sections of the bridleway and other areas of pathway, particularly the one in the mid-section of the play trail. However, this would be dependent on more funding.

Our ranger has been completing the autumnal cut back of the hedges and the meadows around the park. October has, again, been a very wet month, which has hindered the work, along with having to share equipment with other sites. There is still more hedge flailing to be done at the park and on areas of our other sites, including the Flich Way. Tree work is ongoing on site and we currently have several trees needing to be bat assessed before any work can be carried out on them. Hopefully, this will be done this weekend and we will take action on the trees depending on the results of the surveys. Any work will to be carried out will be completed by a mixture of on-site staff, the roaming rangers and contractors.

Several play equipment pieces are currently out of action, mainly due to maintenance issues. These include the climbing forest and climbing frame, the suspension bridge, the jack straws and the zip line. As the play equipment ages the maintenance costs increase with each piece, which is causing pressure on our budget. We are looking at sources of capital funding to help with these costs, as well exploring the feasibility of replacing the safety surfaces.

#### Visitor Numbers

The park was closed due to government regulations for a section of the first lockdown. Whilst the car park gates remained locked many people walked into the park via the underpass or the Tesco's entrance. Once the parks reopened at the start of summer our visitor numbers steadily increased.

## Site Report

We made the decision to keep the overflow carpark closed over the summer and autumn period in order to reduce the number of people on site at any one time and to reduce queues at the car parking machines and toilets open to the public. The number of toilets in use has been reduced to allow for social distancing. Although we were busy throughout the school holidays our numbers were lower than previous years, due to the fact that we kept the overflow car park closed.

During this second lockdown we have seen an increase in visitors during the week, as people use the park to meet a friend or family member, and to enjoy a coffee from the café!

### **Café**

The Skylark café has been opened and is now run by ECC staff. We have two part time staff to run the café, with casual staff to help in the busier periods. Currently the café is only offering a takeaway service but we hope to be able to offer a seated service once the pandemic eases.

### **Sky Ropes**

As mentioned, Sky Ropes has been closed in response to the pandemic; however, we plan to reopen it once the pandemic eases.

### **Events**

All third-party events have been cancelled either by ECC or by the third-party organisers themselves, although some - such as virtual 5k races - are being held as virtual events, so that their charities are still able to raise some much-needed income.

Over the October half term, the Sky Ropes team also ran a Halloween trail, which was very popular.

### **Flitch Way and Volunteers**

We haven't had many volunteer work parties this year due to Covid, but the volunteers have been as keen as ever to get out along the Flitch Way. The work parties started back up again, briefly, in Autumn where the volunteers carried out their annual cutting back along the Dunmow Cutting of the Flitch Way. The work parties had to be organised in a slightly different way to allow for social distancing and smaller groups to meet government guidelines and the cleaning of tools after each use. We expect the lower number of work parties this year may have an impact on the maintenance of the Flitch Way, as the volunteers do such a fantastic job in assisting the ranger to keep on top of ever-growing vegetation.