

## Cambridgeshire Outdoor Education Centres

To: Children and Young People Committee

Meeting Date: 17<sup>th</sup> January 2023

From: Jonathan Lewis, Service Director: Education

Electoral division(s): Sawtry and Stilton

Key decision: Yes

Forward Plan ref: KD2023/031

Outcome: As a result of this report, the committee will:

- Be aware of the pressures facing the current operating model for Outdoor Education and Learning
- Consider the options for future provision and operating model for Cambridgeshire Outdoors Education Centres

Recommendation: The committee is recommended to:

- a) Approve the closure of Stibbington Centre, retaining the operation of Burwell House and Grafham Water Centre for the provision of outdoor education day and residential visits from September 2023.
- b) Authorise the Service Director: Education to work alongside other colleagues to administrate the necessary consultation processes to enact this decision.
- c) If the closure is agreed, a proposal to made to Strategy and Resources Committee for the earmarking of the capital receipt to support the investment and sustainability of Burwell House and Grafham Water.

Voting arrangements: Co-opted members of the Committee are eligible to vote on this item.

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## 1. Background

- 1.1 Cambridgeshire County Council currently operates three outdoor learning centres, namely Grafham Water, Burwell House and Stibbington. All of these centres currently offer day and residential visit opportunities, encompassing adventurous and curriculum-based activity courses, outreach services and conference facilities.
- 1.2 It is important to note that in proceeding with this recommendation, the Council's statutory duties with regard to Children and Young People remain unchanged, as these facilities do not currently contribute or deliver against the Council's statutory duties but they play an important role in the wellbeing and experiences of young people across the County.
- 1.3 In 2017, Cambridgeshire Outdoors (the three centres) became part of the Council's Outcome Focussed Review (OFR) process, which considered and assessed their future viability. Upon conclusion of this review in July 2019, the Council's Commercial and Investment Committee voted to retain all three sites as CCC operated outdoor education centres, alongside agreeing to a series of wide-ranging improvements for the centres. It was also agreed to keep the centres under review for their financial viability.
- 1.4 The key identified aims of the improvement programme were:
  - i. To ensure the centres are operated in a business-like, efficient and commercial manner, achieving the best value for money,
  - ii. To ensure that the centres are co-ordinated with each other and contribute to CCC's wider policy agenda for Children and Young People in a clearly defined manner.
  - iii. To improve the condition of property and other material assets at all three sites, and to ensure the centres are effectively led and managed
- 1.5 To support and monitor progress and impact, a programme board was established at this time, consisting of a mixed group of officers and elected members. The programme board oversaw the transition of the centres, in April 2020, from the Place and Economy Directorate to the People and Communities Directorate within the Education Service. This was undertaken to ensure closer working with schools and to work alongside other traded services. Due to the successful implementation and improvements secured, the Programme Board no longer meets.
- 1.6 It is important to note that the findings of the original OFR process in 2017 highlighted that the centres could not realistically be expected to generate significant income for the Council, but rather focussed upon reducing the amount of Council subsidy, with the longer term potential of a more sustainable surplus position.

## 2. Main Issues

- 2.1 The Cambridgeshire Outdoors programme of investment has now concluded, having realised a total capital investment of £970k across the three sites. This was disseminated as follows:

<b>Centre</b>	<b>Capital Investment</b>
Burwell House	£135k
Grafham Water Centre	£644k
Stibbington	£112k
*plus shared project costs across all three investments (c.£79k)	

- 2.2 It has since become apparent that further significant investment will be required at Stibbington Centre, in order to ensure that this remains a safe and viable outdoor education centre. This is due to multiple factors, not least including the use of modular buildings which are considered beyond their usable lifespan and would require a wholesale capital investment and solution.
- 2.3 Dependent upon Members approval of this proposal, the Stibbington site could be sold, with the capital receipt realised from ceasing use of the site being re-invested to sustain and improve other areas of the Outdoor Education service at both Grafham Water Centre and Burwell House – thus further mitigating the impact of this decision.
- 2.4 Whilst the Covid-19 pandemic has understandably had a significant detrimental impact to each of the centres, being closed between March 2020 and May 2021, all centres have now been operational since September 2021. Both Burwell House and Stibbington operated on a reduced capacity, given uncertainties of guidance which has since been clarified.
- 2.5 Attendance/capacity for each of the current sites is outlined below for the 2021/22 academic year.

### **Grafham Water**

A total of 13,731 young people visited Grafham Water Centre from September 2021 to September 2022.

### **Stibbington Centre**

A total of 3,489 children visited the centre from Sept 2021 to Sept 2022. During 21/22, 85% school occupancy and 19% self-catering occupancy. The majority of usage is from day visits.

### **Burwell Centre**

A total of 3,633 children visited the centre from Sept 21 to Sept 22. During this period, there was 94% school occupancy and 27% weekend and school holidays.

Both Burwell and Stibbington Centre can only have one school residential at a time onsite

- 2.6 At 2021-22 Financial Year End, the three centres demonstrated the following deficit outturn:

	<b>Burwell House</b>	<b>Grafham Water</b>	<b>Stibbington</b>
<b>Year End Deficit 2021/22</b>	£127k	£404k	£151k

2.7 Financial forecasting undertaken at the end of Q3 in the 22-23 Financial Year (December 2022) provides the following anticipated position:

	<b>Burwell House</b>	<b>Grafham Water</b>	<b>Stibbington</b>
<b>Forecast Year End Deficit (Surplus) 2022-23</b>	(£46k)	+/- 0k	£134k

2.8 As evidenced by the financial positions outlined above (2.4 and 2.5), both Burwell House and Grafham Water Centre have recovered well from the pandemic, demonstrating an increase in enquiries and bookings. The same is not true at Stibbington Centre, where there remains to be a significant overspend. The pressures currently experienced at Stibbington Centre are only forecast to continue growing, unless changes which would impact upon service delivery and quality were enacted, which would also be considered to be counter-intuitive.

2.9 Since the time of the pandemic, both Burwell House and Grafham Water Centre are able to demonstrate how they have utilised additional investments to diversify, innovate and commercialise their offer. This is evident through investments such as bell tents at Grafham Water (to provide more and different accommodation options) and a TV studio at Burwell House to broaden their offer to prospective clients. In contrast, Stibbington Centre investments have been primarily focussed upon areas of remedial need, aligned to the ageing conditions of the site and buildings.

2.10 When considering the Cambridgeshire County Council position against our geographic neighbours, it would suggest that this proposal is in line with the market position for local government operations of outdoor learning centres, as outlined in further detail below:

- West Northamptonshire Council: significant reduction in provision across the Northamptonshire county, leaving just one provision (Everdon Outdoor Centre) under West Northamptonshire.
- Hertfordshire County Council: rationalisation of provision, leaving just one remaining provision (Hudnall Park) under Hertfordshire County Council.
- Essex County Council: retains the operation of four centres, but via an arms-length service delivery model (Essex Outdoors)
- Suffolk County Council: retain one centre, operated via a Trust model, with divested liability held by the Trust.
- Norfolk County Council: undertook a review of provision in 2020, leading to the sale of one site (Holt Hall) and retention of another (Whitlingham Adventure) under a different operating model (Educator Solutions).
- Further afield, both Cornwall Council and Warwickshire County Council are understood to have divested of their direct interest and ownership in their outdoor education centres, demonstrating the broader local government direction of travel.

- 2.11 Based upon the above research, even when accounting for the loss of the Stibbington Centre as part of these proposals, Cambridgeshire County Council could still reasonably be seen as directly owning and operating more Outdoor Education Centres than other neighbours, demonstrating the ongoing commitment and promotion of the skills and experiences provided.
- 2.12 Considerable work has already been undertaken at Grafham Water Centre and Burwell House to align staff contractual Terms and Conditions, with a view towards ensuring continued market competitiveness and financial sustainability of these provisions, which demonstrates initial signs of successful impact, with a more commercial outlook promoting the longer-term financial investments of these sites.
- 2.13 To date, this work has not been undertaken at Stibbington Centre, with a number of contracts connected to provisions of Statutory Teachers Pay and Conditions Document (STPCD) which leads to a less financially sustainable position than others who are on NJC contracts, terms and conditions.
- 2.14 Any contractual changes to Stibbington staff terms and conditions would be subject to full consultation and associated pay protection, which would lead to the significant considerable overspend becoming further compounded in future years. As a result of market uncertainties and financial volatility, the centre has ensured that any organic staffing changes currently being experienced have been replaced on fixed term contracts and NJC Terms and Conditions which reduces the potential financial liability of these decisions should the recommendations progress.
- 2.15 The shared leadership arrangements currently in place amongst Burwell House and Stibbington Centre have already started to pro-actively consider how provision and services could continue to operate from Burwell House, rather than Stibbington Centre if this recommendation is approved, to mitigate against the loss of any key provision and still be able to provide a broad offer to both existing and new clients.
- 2.16 As part of any HR consultation process the aim would be to retain, wherever possible, the redeployment of existing Stibbington Centre staff, their knowledge and skills. In addition, it is felt that existing staff employed at Burwell House and Grafham Water Centre also have the versatility, skills and experience to offer the same quality provision to schools and children, simply from a different CCC location. Centre Leaders would particularly look at retaining World War II, Victorian and Rivers courses – many of which have previously been delivered from the Burwell House site.
- 2.17 Ongoing engagement and work with relevant community partners can also continue to develop alongside provision operated from Burwell House, rather than Stibbington Centre.

### 3. Alignment with corporate priorities

#### 3.1 Environment and Sustainability

The following bullet points set out the details of implications identified by officers:

- The recommendation to consult upon closure of the Stibbington site would see a reduction in a recognised environmental education centre. However, it is felt that much of this service delivery could be transferred and retained by the two remaining sites, alongside an enhanced outreach offer in order to avoid loss of this provision for children and young people.
- Without significant capital investment, Stibbington is an ageing site, which also houses inefficient modular buildings. It is therefore not considered that the existing site contributes positively towards the Council's ambitions related to tackling climate change.

#### 3.2 Health and Care

The following bullet points set out the details of implications identified by officers:

- If the recommendation proceeds the Council may have fewer opportunities to positively influence the healthy, active lifestyles of children and young people through having less facilities to operate from. However, retaining the remaining two sites should be seen as a direct mitigating factor for this, as this sustains the opportunity for children and young people to learn outdoors and continue delivering as many existing programmes as possible.

#### 3.3 Places and Communities

There are no significant implications for this priority.

#### 3.4 Children and Young People

The following bullet points set out the implications identified by officers:

- It is recognised that this recommendation will reduce the capacity and offer of outdoor learning and education provision within Cambridgeshire. This will have some impact upon children and young people, as well as those visiting from nearby areas to utilise the residential aspect of provision. However, in reducing the number of centres, the Council can still demonstrate the positive impact that the other two centres can have upon Children and Young People and these alternatives can be accessed by existing users of the Stibbington site.
- It is important to note that in proceeding with this recommendation, the Council's statutory duties with regard to Children and Young People remain unchanged, as these facilities do not currently contribute or deliver against the Council's statutory duties.
- Members should note that in the 22/23 Academic Year, for Stibbington Centre, 42% of bookings came from Cambridgeshire schools and academies, with the remaining 58% being clients from other schools and academies outside the Local Authority boundaries. This split was similar within the 21/22 Academic Year.

### 3.5 Transport

There are no significant implications for this priority.

## 4. Significant Implications

### 4.1 Resource Implications

The following bullet points set out details of significant implications identified by officers:

- The proposal would reduce the Council's revenue costs and provide the opportunity to realise an asset, thus releasing capital funding and reducing the Council's asset liability position. Progressing the recommendation would also avoid the need for significant capital investment to provide for the current and future operations of the site. The current asset is not considered to be energy-efficient and thus does not demonstrate appropriate credentials to achieve the Council's climate change ambitions.
- Current budgets (as outlined) demonstrate that the existing provision continues to operate at a deficit budget and therefore isn't considered to be delivering value for money, particularly in comparison to the two alternative sites of a similar nature which achieve far better financial outturns.
- As outlined in 2.3 the proposed recommendation would seek to reinvest any capital receipt into the remaining two centres.
- If approved, proposals would be subject to a full HR consultation process, which may result in the change or loss of employment for some current employees.

### 4.2 Procurement/Contractual/Council Contract Procedure Rules Implications

The following bullet points set out details of significant implications identified by officers:

- Progressing with this proposal is likely to reduce the cost and scope of some existing Council contracts (e.g., waste management), otherwise, there are no other known procurement and contractual implications at this time.

### 4.3 Statutory, Legal and Risk Implications

The following bullet points set out details of significant implications identified by officers:

- As identified within the detail of the paper, the proposals do not impact the Council's statutory duties, as the provision of Outdoor Education is non-statutory.
- If, following the proposal, the Council decides to release and realise the asset, there may be additional legal implications to consider, but these are not related to this proposal.
- It is anticipated that, despite offering alternative provision at Burwell House or Grafham Water Centre, the Council could suffer reputational implication and risk as a result of this proposal, particularly from long-standing users of the facilities and community representatives.
- It is considered that there is higher risk (financial and premises) presented to the Council if this proposal does not proceed. It is anticipated that progressing this proposal will reduce the risk profile of the Council.
- Without considerable investment, if proposals outlined are not pursued, there is the potential for risks to heighten in relation to Health and Safety of the site and its operation.

#### 4.4 Equality and Diversity Implications

There are no significant implications within this category.

#### 4.5 Engagement and Communications Implications

The following bullet points set out details of significant implications identified by officers:

- There may be some implications in relation to voluntary groups and charities who are currently involved with the Centre. If they considered appropriate, this involvement could transfer to continue supporting activities delivered from the Burwell House or Grafham Water Centre sites.
- Affected employees have not yet been consulted – however, pending approval of this recommendation, the proposals and associated changes will be subject to a full HR consultation.
- Local members have been consulted, with their views taken into consideration.
- An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed and is appended to this report for reference.
- As proposals progress, communications and engagement would be required for existing bookings and regular users. This would be done alongside sharing alternative provision available at either Burwell House or Grafham Water Centre. Any bookings made until September 2023 would be honoured, with a commitment for any booking beyond this timeline to be prioritised at the remaining two centres.

#### 4.6 Localism and Local Member Involvement

The local member has been briefed on the issues within the paper.

#### 4.7 Public Health Implications

There are no significant implications within this category.

#### 4.8 Environment and Climate Change Implications on Priority Areas

##### 4.8.1 Implication 1: Energy efficient, low carbon buildings.

Positive Status

Explanation: Progressing with this recommendation would see an ageing building and site become removed from the Council's asset-base, thus reducing the overall stock of inefficient, high carbon buildings within the Council's ownership.

##### 4.8.2 Implication 2: Low carbon transport.

Neutral Status:

Explanation: It is not anticipated that these recommendations will have either a positive or negative impact with regard to this implication.

##### 4.8.3 Implication 3: Green spaces, peatland, afforestation, habitats and land management.

Negative Status

Explanation: The proposal may lead to less accessibility to environmental education programmes and outdoor learning opportunities. However, this negative implication is mitigated through the usage of other existing sites as outlined within the paper.

4.8.4 Implication 4: Waste Management and Tackling Plastic Pollution.

Positive Status:

Explanation: Proposals will reduce the amount of waste generated by the Council by rationalising facilities and providing similar services from a fewer number of buildings and sites. Environmental programmes that will continue to be delivered will retain a focus upon children and young people's awareness of reducing waste and plastics and promoting recycling.

4.8.5 Implication 5: Water use, availability and management:

Positive Status:

Explanation: The Council will cease to utilise an ageing site and building, thus reducing its overall water usage.

4.8.6 Implication 6: Air Pollution.

Neutral Status:

Explanation: It is not anticipated that these recommendations will have either a positive or negative impact regarding this implication.

4.8.7 Implication 7: Resilience of our services and infrastructure, and supporting vulnerable people to cope with climate change.

Neutral Status:

Explanation: It is not anticipated that these recommendations will have either a positive or negative impact related to this implication.

Have the resource implications been cleared by Finance? Yes

Name of Financial Officer: Martin Wade

Have the procurement/contractual/ Council Contract Procedure Rules implications been cleared by the Head of Procurement? Yes

Name of Officer: Clare Ellis

Has the impact on statutory, legal and risk implications been cleared by the Council's Monitoring Officer or Pathfinder Legal? Yes

Name of Legal Officer: Linda Walker

Have the equality and diversity implications been cleared by your EqIA Super User?

Yes

Name of Officer: Josette Kennington

Have any engagement and communication implications been cleared by Communications?

Yes

Name of Officer: Simon Cobby

Have any localism and Local Member involvement issues been cleared by your Service Contact? Yes

Name of Officer: Jonathan Lewis

Have any Public Health implications been cleared by Public Health?

Yes

Name of Officer: Kate Parker

If a Key decision, have any Environment and Climate Change implications been cleared by the Climate Change Officer?

Yes

Name of Officer: Emily Barton

## 5. Source documents

5.1 Appendix 1: Introductory paragraph to each centre.