

## **COVID-19 RESPONSE AND WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE**

Presented by the Chief Executive

### **SUMMARY**

This report provides an update on Covid-19 in relation to activities of the Authority and an update on the 2020/21 Work Programme.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

Members Note: (1) the report.

### **BACKGROUND**

- 1 The Government has introduced emergency public health guidance (i.e., social distancing) in response to the Covid-19 pandemic which has affected the Authority's operations.

### **COVID-19**

- 2 Members have been kept apprised of the Authority's response to the Covid-19 crisis over the past month. Here are the headlines.

- 3 **a) Venues**

All of the sports venues closed on 20 March, as directed by the Government. Officers had been working with Lee Valley Leisure Trust Ltd (the Trust) to plan closure of the venues ahead of the Prime Minister's announcement and the process went smoothly. The sports venues and staff returned to the Authority on 1 April and with the venues being closed at the time this was a relatively straightforward exercise.

- 4 Our approach to the non-sports venues has been different. The campsites have been closed but the 'resident' static caravan owners have been allowed to stay. Around 85% have decided to do so. The staff on site have provided practical support to the static caravan owners, a number of whom are elderly, with a shopping delivery service. The marinas are operating as normal but have ceased providing any repairs and maintenance service to boat owners. Hayes Hill Farm, Picketts Lock Golf Course and the WaterWorks Centre are all closed. The milk machine, which is managed by

the working farm, is still operating and popular at the moment so this will continue for as long as it is still being used sufficiently.

**5 b) Open Spaces**

Along with all parks and open spaces the Lee Valley Regional Park has become much busier during the lockdown period. The only area of open space that has been closed is Myddelton House Gardens. There has been close coordination with the Royal Parks, London Legacy Development Corporation and the Corporation of London (responsible for Epping Forest) as we have sought to manage the much higher usage in accordance with the social distancing policy. As a result, all open spaces car parks were closed for the Easter weekend and the current plan is to continue this for subsequent weekends and bank holidays. The weekday usage is being closely monitored and currently the levels of use appear to be manageable.

6 The Ranger teams are operating and providing a front line presence in the open spaces.

**7 c) Managing and supporting staff**

Working from home or being furloughed has meant a major adjustment for staff. Senior officers have been keen to ensure that staff have all of the support they need, from IT equipment to regular contact with colleagues. Regular communication with staff is vital at this time especially those staff who have recently come over to the Authority with the venues. Emails, video messages, video conferencing and e-bulletins are all being used.

**8 d) Emergency Budget 2020/21**

The Authority's budget will be significantly affected by the impact of the Covid-19 emergency. The main income generators, the venues, are closed as we enter the peak season (April-October). 70% of the venues annual income is earned during this period. In addition, the Authority's rental income is being impacted as tenants seek a rent holiday or deferral. The officer position is to offer a deferral but we will consider rent holidays in certain circumstances.

9 The level of income lost in 2020/21 will depend on how long the venues are closed and the type of operation and level of demand that emerges post the lockdown.

10 In response to the loss of income the Director of Finance & Resources has been leading on constructing an emergency budget for 2020/21. All budget holders have been instructed to reduce expenditure budgets and/or defer spend to 2021/22. This process is well underway and a detailed report will be presented to the May Executive Committee meeting.

11 The Authority should benefit from the 100% business rates relief that all leisure venues are to receive in 2020/21. However, the Trust has been receiving 80% relief over the past 5 years so an additional 20% will be the benefit.

12 The Government's furlough initiative is something that may also benefit the Authority. The application portal opened on 20 April and 65 staff are on the

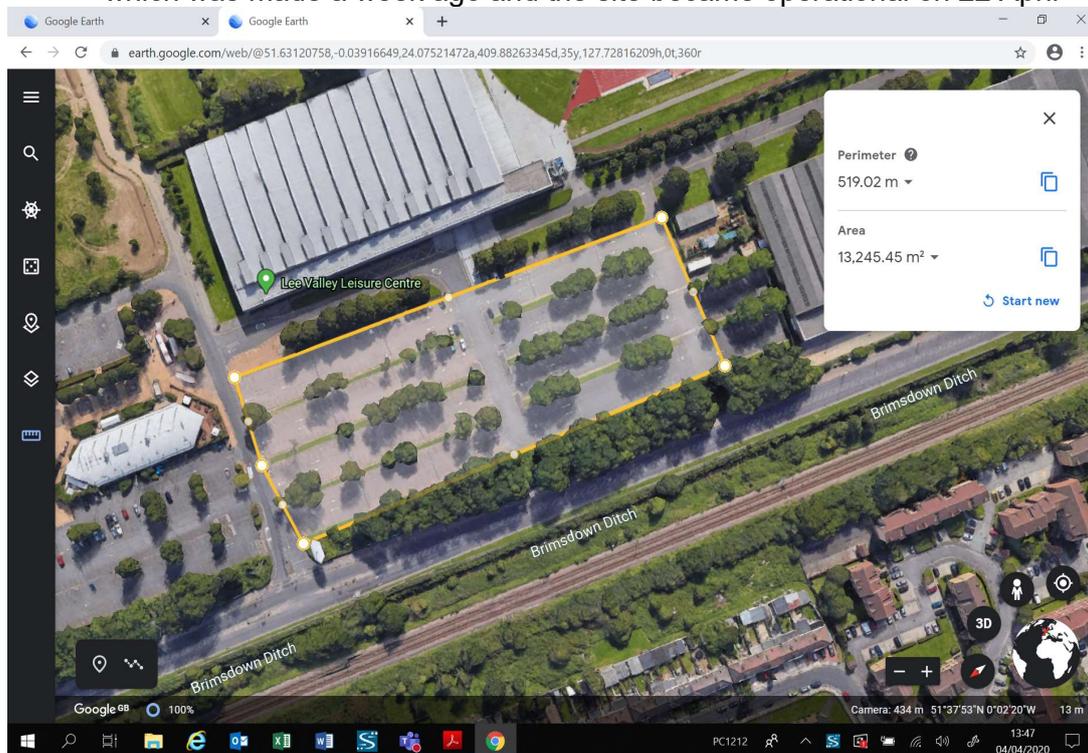
initial list. More will be added over the next couple of weeks. It is hoped that 80% of the monthly salaries (up to £2,500 per month) can be claimed for the furloughed staff. The initiative has now been extended to the end of June.

- 13 The Authority does have reserves to enable it to get through 2020/21 (based on worst case scenario with venues closed for all of 2020/21) but the challenge will be around cash flow.

14 e) **Providing support for the Covid-19 Emergency**

The Authority has significant assets which could play their part in supporting this national emergency. Early on contact was made with riparian Boroughs, Essex, Hertfordshire and the GLA to offer the Authority's support, be that our venues or open spaces.

- 15 There has been interest expressed for a couple of the venues but to date no specific requests have been made. However, the Government has requested use of the car park at Lee Valley Leisure Complex as a drive through Covid-19 Testing Centre. Officers responded swiftly to this request, which was made a week ago and the site became operational on 22 April



- 16 The Authority has been contacted by the YHA in Cheshunt to seek permission for them to grant an under-licence to Broxbourne Council who wish to use the hostel for temporary accommodation for homeless people. Initially this will be for a 3 month period. Officers are working with YHA on this urgent request.

- 17 The Authority has also been approached by the London Borough of Enfield (LBE) who need volunteers to assist with deliveries of food and medicine to the old and vulnerable in the Borough. A note went out to all Authority staff last week and a number have already contacted LBE to offer their support.

## AUTHORITY WORK PROGRAMME

18 The Authority's work programme has naturally been affected by the Covid-19 emergency. However there a number of projects and initiatives which are being progressed.

19 a) **Ice Centre**

The Ice Centre project's planning application has been relatively unaffected by the Covid-19 emergency. The planning consultation process was concluded ahead of the lockdown and the decision making process is on track for a London Borough of Waltham Forest (LBWF) Planning Committee meeting in July. With the GLA/Mayor dimension to factor in it is hoped that a final decision will be made in early autumn. Recent meetings with the LBWF planning team have been very positive. LBWF see the Ice Centre scheme as being an important investment project for the Borough during the pending period of social and economic challenges.



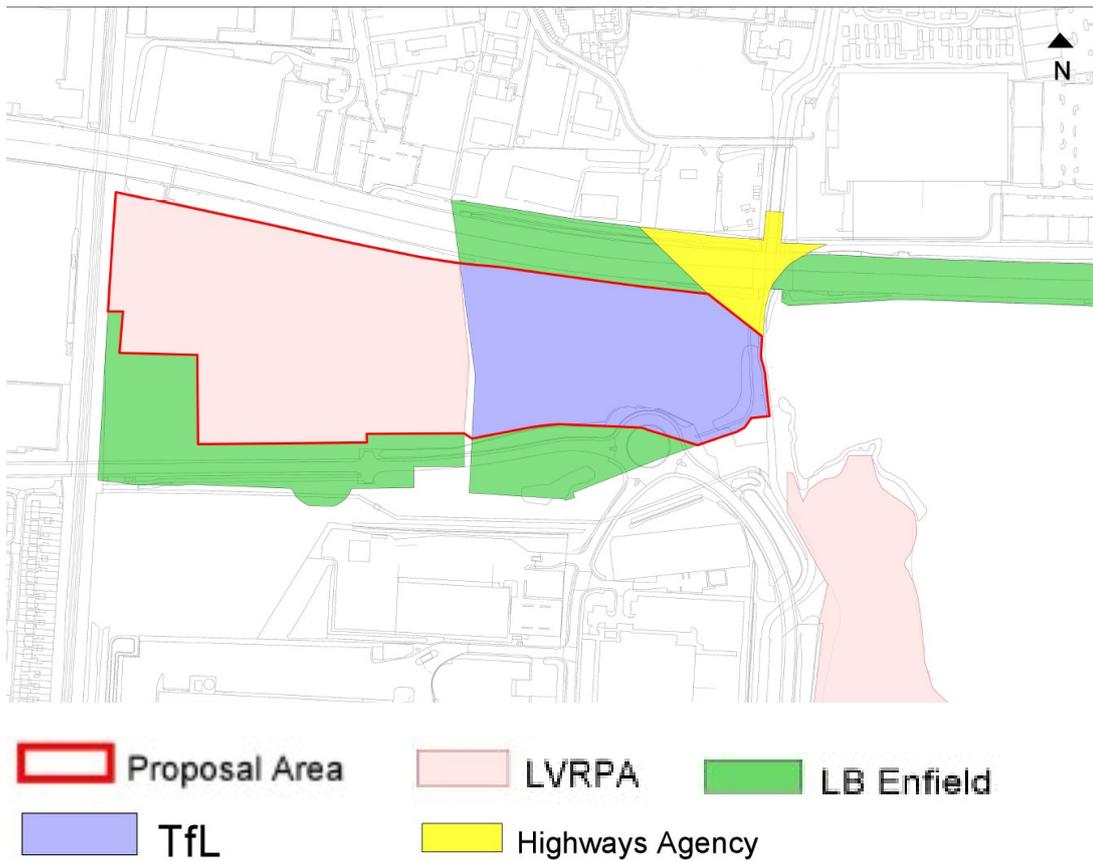
20 b) **Wildlife Discovery Centre**

The new Wildlife Discovery Centre is replacing the Bittern Watchpoint in the River Lee Country Park. Construction is underway for the £897k development. Despite challenges presented by the Covid-19 situation the project is currently going to programme with build completion expected in July. The habitat works have been delayed but it is hoped that once the Covid-19 restrictions are relaxed these works can commence. Due to the breeding bird season it is likely the habitat works will recommence in August sometime.



21 c) **Land and Property**

Officers are in the process of seeking to agree a land swap with LBE, Harbets Hump (Authority owned) for land that LBE own as part of the Rammey Marsh West area. LBE require the land at Harbets Hump for flood alleviation in connection with the Meridian Water development. A report will hopefully be presented to the Executive Committee in May. If the Authority is able to complete this transaction then consideration could be given to exploring market interest in the Rammey Marsh site.



22 Discussions have also been continuing with Broxbourne Borough Council (Broxbourne) on the development of a masterplan for the 200 acre Spitalbrook site. Broxbourne has shared some high level scenarios for the site. These will be discussed with Members at the next Land & Property Working Group.

23 **d) Trust Matters**

Members will have received copies of recent correspondence between the Authority and the Trust. The matters covered in the correspondence will be discussed in part 2 of the Authority meeting on 23 April.

**ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

24 There are no environmental implications arising directly from the recommendations in this report.

**FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

25 There are no financial implications arising directly from the recommendations in this report.

**HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

26 There are no human resource implications arising directly from the recommendations in this report.

## **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 27 There are no legal implications arising directly from the recommendations in this report.

## **RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS**

- 28 There are no risk management implications arising directly from the recommendations in this report.

## **EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS**

- 29 There are no equality implications arising directly from the recommendations in this report.

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## **BACKGROUND REPORTS**

None

## **PREVIOUS COMMITTEE REPORTS**

Authority A/4274/19 Work Programme: Progress Update 17 October 2019

## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

the Trust	Lee Valley Leisure Trust Ltd (trading as Vibrant Partnerships)
LBE	London Borough of Enfield
LBWF	London Borough of Waltham Forest
Broxbourne	Broxbourne Borough Council