



**March 2020**

## **Norfolk County Council Outdoor Learning Review Briefing Document for Schools**

### **Content**

- Introduction and scope of our review
- What a refreshed approach to outdoor learning in Norfolk could look like
- Topics being explored as part of the review
  - Should Norfolk County Council focus and invest in its leadership role for outdoor learning?
  - What opportunities could a refreshed leadership approach offer?
  - Should Norfolk County Council continue to be a direct provider of outdoor learning?
  - What would ceasing direct council run outdoor learning provision mean for customers of our current outdoor learning centres?
- What will happen next and how you can be involved in our review

## **Introduction and scope of our review**

Norfolk County Council is reviewing its role in outdoor learning by exploring what is currently on offer across the county so we can help ensure that Norfolk's children, young people, families and communities get the very best outcomes from outdoor learning. This briefing has been prepared to provide schools, partners and other key stakeholders with background information about the review and provide an opportunity for schools and other partners to share their thoughts about the questions we are considering.

We are reviewing the Council's current arrangements that include acting as a direct provider of outdoor learning at Whitlingham Adventure and Holt Hall outdoor learning centres, as well as our educational visits advisory support to schools.

We have carried out wide-ranging research, spoken to experts in the field including other local authorities who have carried out similar reviews and undertaken fact-finding engagement with providers of residential outdoor learning activities in Norfolk. This has helped develop a picture of what long term difference we want to make, the outcomes we need to achieve and what we might need to focus on. We are now keen to engage with you on your ideas about our focus as a Council in terms of outdoor learning.

Norfolk County Council is committed to securing better outcomes for children, young people and their families through being able to access high quality, accessible, comprehensive and progressive outdoor learning experiences. We need to take account of national policy direction, research on the value of outdoor learning and best practice elsewhere.

## **What a refreshed approach to outdoor learning in Norfolk could look like**

We are fortunate to have a wide range of outdoor learning providers in Norfolk, offering diverse activities and experiences for children, young people and families. As part of this review process, we have embarked on fact finding discussions with over 10 other providers of residential outdoor learning activities. These providers are listed in Appendix 1.

Building on best practice and new and emerging national educational and environmental policies, we want to build a strong partnership approach with outdoor learning providers across Norfolk and with those working with children, young people, families and communities, so that all Norfolk residents can access and obtain maximum benefit from safe, high-quality outdoor learning experiences throughout their lives.

We want:

- Children, young people's and families' lives to be enhanced through being able to participate in outdoor learning experiences
- Those working with children, young people and families to have high levels of knowledge, standards and good practice around outdoor learning
- The wider strategic benefits of outdoor learning to be maximised by those responsible for wider policies and development

## **Should Norfolk County Council focus and invest in its leadership role for outdoor learning?**

We are exploring the options and opportunities open to us to maximise the outcomes and impacts we want to achieve, with the understanding any future approach will need to be financially sustainable.

We are considering the potential to expand our leadership role and advice and support service to support the whole outdoor learning offer across Norfolk.

This could include:

- Developing the Council's strategic leadership role for outdoor learning, building partnerships across the sector, including leading the development of an Outdoor Learning Research Hub for the Eastern Region
- Retaining and expanding the local authority's role as adviser, including health & safety oversight, training and support to schools, groups and communities. Existing expert health and safety and visit planning support functions for schools would be maintained

## **What opportunities could a refreshed leadership approach offer?**

**For participants (children, young people and families) this could mean:**

- Improved information, accessibility and resources to increase understanding of and access to the natural world
- More promotion of and support to take part in and influence local and national campaigns and programmes

**For Schools this could mean:**

Support, guidance and advice:

- Continuation of the existing Education Visits Advisory function and access to EVOLVE
- Increased guidance around achieving curriculum and character education goals through outdoor learning
- Improved information to assist with planning, organising and booking off-site outdoor learning experiences

- Increased on-site guidance and support to develop and deliver your own outdoor learning experiences and make the most of your green spaces

#### Information, resources, training and accreditation

- Improved information about the wide range of outdoor learning opportunities in Norfolk, enabling informed choices that meet needs and aspirations
- Increased support and nationally accredited training for EVCs and visit leaders
- More teacher training and information sessions
- Greater support to achieve awards and accreditations including LOtC Quality Mark

#### Involvement and influence

- More support and information to take part in local and national campaigns and initiatives
- Increased opportunities to actively contribute to research and improvements in outdoor learning practice

### **Should Norfolk County Council continue to be a direct provider of outdoor learning?**

As a Council, we run two outdoor centres: Holt Hall in North Norfolk and Whitlingham Adventure in Trowse. One of the aims of the outdoor learning review is to examine this provision and make recommendations as to whether this should continue.

The operating deficit for Whitlingham Adventure and Holt Hall is projected to be approximately £239,000 in 2019/20, alongside significant capital costs projected to be at least £790,000 over the next 10 years.

Continuing the current arrangements will require savings to be made in other services in order to subsidise the Council's operation of the two outdoor learning centres. Removing the cost pressures from operating and providing outdoor learning as a Council would enable us to invest in and develop our advisory service and partnership approach.

We would also be able to overcome the additional challenge of being a direct competitor in a sector we are seeking to support and influence. Norfolk has a vibrant outdoor learning sector, and by working in a collaborative way with diverse private and voluntary sector partners and providers, we can jointly develop opportunities to promote, celebrate and bring together the offer across the county, including attracting investment and influencing national policy and campaigns.

## **What would ceasing direct council run outdoor learning provision mean for customers of our current outdoor learning centres?**

Whitlingham Adventure could continue as an outdoor learning venue, working in partnership with the Whitlingham Charitable Trust, but be operated by a third party secured by the Council. It would still be available to schools and other users.

The Council's delivery of outdoor learning from Holt Hall would cease and Norfolk schools and groups could be re-directed to make use of other residential provision in Norfolk. We know that Holt Hall currently accounts for under 7% of residential outdoor learning trips carried out by Norfolk schools across the UK each year. Holt Hall could be declared surplus to requirement.

## **What happens next**

Any decisions on the shape of the new outdoor learning service and the part the Council will play in the future will not be made until a report with recommendations is presented to Cabinet later in the summer.

## **Our engagement with you as schools, and other stakeholders will inform this paper.**

Regardless of any decisions made by Cabinet in the summer, current outdoor learning provision at Holt Hall will continue as planned for rest of 2020. It is anticipated that outdoor learning provision at Whitlingham Adventure would continue through any process of transfer.

## **How you can be involved in our review**

We are inviting schools, as the main customers of the Council's outdoor learning services to share their thoughts and views with us and we are holding three after school sessions:

**21/04/20: 16:30 – 17:30:** The Regency Room, Swaffham Assembly Rooms, 13 Market Pl, Swaffham PE37 7AB

**22/04/20: 16:30 – 17:30:** Victory suite, Great Yarmouth Racecourse, Jellicoe Rd, Great Yarmouth NR30 4AU

**23/04/20: 16:30 – 17:30:** Poplar Room, Norwich Professional Development Centre, 144 Woodside Rd, Norwich NR7 9QL

To request a place at one of these sessions please email [OLR@norfolk.gov.uk](mailto:OLR@norfolk.gov.uk), stating the session and number of places requested.

Schools, other customers and partners can also request to speak to a member of the review team or send their comments, via email to: [OLR@norfolk.gov.uk](mailto:OLR@norfolk.gov.uk).

### **3<sup>rd</sup> party providers of outdoor learning in Norfolk that we have engaged with as part of the review**

- Aylmerton Outdoor Education Centre (North Norfolk)
- Eaton Vale Scout and Guide Activity Centre (Norwich)
- Hautbois Activity Centre (Broadland)
- Kingswood (North Norfolk)
- Thorpe Woodlands Adventure Centre (Breckland)
- Brancaster Activity Centre (North Norfolk)
- How Hill Trust (Broadland)
- Norfolk Lakes Activity Centre (Manor) (Breckland)
- Whitwell Hall Country Centre (North Norfolk)
- Hilltop Outdoor Centre (North Norfolk)
- The Horstead Centre (Broadland)