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14 May 2020

## Torrige District Council announce phased re-opening of facilities in line with Central Government guidance and directives.



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Torrige District Council have announced the reopening of some of the facilities it owns or operates in response to changes in Government guidance and directives

issued over last weekend.

Officers and Councillors have been reviewing which facilities can be safely reopened, how these would be manned and operated and what guidance needs to be given to ensure their safe use. As a result some facilities such as public toilets will only be opened where risk can be managed and an acceptable level of safe operation envisaged. So while individual cubicles and disabled person facilities will be unlocked communal facilities will remain closed as the risk of infection spreading through user proximity is too high.

A major change will be the reopening of the vehicular gates to Northam Burrows Country Park giving wider access to the burrows and the beach at Westward Ho! This follows the Governments announcements allowing people to travel further and more often for recreation and exercise. Coinciding with this the Council will be reintroducing the enforcement of dog restrictions on the beach so that all types of users can enjoy the beach together and also to ensure Blue Flag status for the beach is maintained.

The consideration by Councillors acknowledged that the reopening of some of the facilities, such as Northam Burrows, would be contrary to what some residents might wish to see at the moment. However Councillors felt that they needed to balance this against the benefits on residents health and wellbeing in taking action and also that a considered move to support the governments plan to return things to normal in a phased and controlled way was appropriate.

In summary the changes announced include the following:

- **Northam Burrows** – Vehicular gates will reopen from Friday 15<sup>th</sup> May with the exception of Westward Ho! gate, which will remain closed due to damage to the road surface that occurred during the winter. While the road leading from the gate is being resurfaced there will be limited parking available. The Council would ask visitors to bear this in mind and leave adequate space for social distancing when parking cars. A resumption of charging for entry will

commence following staff recruitment to support gate control, activities and advising public on the safe use of facilities.

- **Westward Ho! Beach** - Dog restrictions and enforcement will apply from Monday 18<sup>th</sup> May. RNLI Lifeguard cover will not be available from the reopening of the Burrows access points and the Council is advising users to carefully check and be mindful of tide information and conditions before entering the water.
- **Car Parks** – Wilkeys Field car park Westward Ho! and Bucks Mill car park to reopen from Friday 15<sup>th</sup> May. Enforcement of car parking charges in coastal car parks (Westward Ho!, Appledore) will be reinstated from Monday 18<sup>th</sup> May to ensure acceptable and fair use. Enforcement in all other car parks to recommence from 1<sup>st</sup> June in line with Government plans and directives on a phased return to work and gradual reopening of businesses.
- **Public Conveniences** – Individual cubicles and disabled person facilities will be reopened from Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> May but communal blocks will remain closed due to the higher risk of proximity and the spreading of COVID-19 virus. The disabled people cubicles will be made available for everyone to use.

Facilities that will reopen on 23rd as below (all genders unless otherwise stated):

- **Bideford** – Bideford Quay and Victoria Park disabled people cubicles.
- **Appledore** – Churchfield disabled people cubicles.
- **Holsworthy** – Bus stop disabled people cubicles.
- **Bradworthy** – The Square disabled people cubicles.
- **Hartland** – North Street two separate blocks and male urinal.
- **Torrington** – South Street and Commons disabled people cubicles.
- **Westward Ho!** - Slipway and Northam Burrows disabled people cubicles, Putting Green all individual cubicles.

The Council also announced that Skate Parks and other enclosed play-grounds in parks and elsewhere would remain closed for the time being. This aspect will be kept under review in line with the Governments guidance on

safeguarding public play areas, which remains unchanged for the moment.

**Councillor Ken James – Leader of Torridge District Council said:**

“We received the information about the lifting of certain restrictions by the Government at the same time as the general public over last weekend. So in the last few days we have been working hard to see how we can comply with the new guidance while continuing to safeguard our residents and also our operational staff.

We are thankful that due to the sacrifices of local businesses and residents we have seen a relatively low infection rate in our area. So we are emphasising that this is not a green light for holiday makers to return on mass and we would ask everyone that does visit or for local residents using facilities to continue to follow all the government guidelines that remain in place regarding social distancing and hygiene routines. If we all act sensibly and with thought for others we will hopefully continue to make progress towards a return to normal life.”

**Steve Hearse – Interim Head of Paid Service Said:**

“We are satisfied that our approach to reopening facilities is measured, and has been carefully thought out. As a result we hope to have minimised any risks as far as possible and issued guidance on how facilities should be used in the short-term to include such things as the ongoing need to maintain social distancing. As before and since the crisis began the success or failure of any changes implemented will depend on the public’s help and cooperation. The community spirit and actions in Torridge have been outstanding up until now and so we very much hope this continues as we try, with the rest of the country, to edge towards to a more normal way of operating.”

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