



Press release: 011

Release date: Wednesday 14 October 2020

Essex Country Parks awarded Green Flag status for Excellence

EXPLORE Essex is delighted to announce that the Essex County Council owned country parks have been recognised for their excellent standards by being awarded Green Flag status.

The Green Flag awards recognise and reward well managed parks throughout the country and demonstrate that the spaces meet the needs of the communities that they serve.

This international award, now in its third decade, also confirms to the public that the park boasts the highest possible environmental standards, is beautifully maintained and has excellent visitor facilities.

To celebrate receiving the Green Flag award, the visitor centre at Great Notley Country Park will be lit up in green on Wednesday 14 October. Six other county parks - Thorndon, Weald, Belhus Woods, Danbury, Cudmore Grove and Hadleigh - all received Green Flag status and will proudly display their new flags within the park grounds.

Essex Country Parks have an important role in helping people with their physical and mental health – particularly relevant in these current times – by providing access to large green spaces in which to walk, cycle, ride, play and run free. Exercising and playing outdoors is well-known for improving wellbeing and helping to lower stress levels.

The parks also boast a diverse range of beautiful landscapes and important habitats. Each park offers visitors something unique, from the deer enclosure at Weald, to the longest children's play trail in the county at Great Notley or the five lakes at Belhus Woods.

Councillor Simon Walsh, Essex County Councillor Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change Action, said: "We are delighted that our country parks have been awarded the prestigious Green Flag status once again. It truly is a testament to our park development managers and rangers – as well as our highly regarded and respected voluntary and friends' groups – and the fantastic work they do which ensures our green spaces meet this excellent standard.

"During the summer months, more members of the public accessed our parks when compared to the previous three years, which is wonderful and shows just how important and beneficial these green spaces are for our communities. Also, our specially designed, natural children's play areas are a great way for our younger members to keep active and have fun.

"As autumn and winter approaches, we would hope everyone will be able to take advantage of our green spaces and to keep visiting our parks by wrapping-up warm and enjoying the great outdoors."

Allison Ogden-Newton OBE, Keep Britain Tidy Chief Executive, said: "This year, more than ever, our parks and green spaces have been a lifeline and we know that people have used them to relax, meet friends, exercise or simply escape for a short time.

"It is testament to the incredible dedication and hard work of parks staff and volunteers that, despite the challenges that went along with record numbers of visitors, Essex Country Parks have achieved the highest international standards demanded by the Green Flag Award."

-Ends-

Editors Notes:

For more information please contact:

Emma Williams, Marketing & Communications Lead, Emma.Williams@Essex.gov.uk or telephone: 07780 493 400 or Chris Davies, Marketing and Communications Officer, Christopher.Davies@Essex.gov.uk or telephone 07738 885659.

Explore Essex: Explore Essex brings together a unique group of parks and heritage venues which are owned by Essex County Council. Its mission is to deliver a broad range of exciting facilities and events for the people of Essex. www.explore-essex.com

Explore Essex visitor numbers have remained high throughout September 2020, with **120,000** visiting instead of the **75,000-85,000** the parks have had in the last three years. This means the cumulative total is **698,000** visitors so far this year, which is nearly **100,000 more than our three-year average** at the same point. This **16%** increase is remarkable when considering that for seven-weeks the parks were without visitors in April and May.

Green Flag Awards Scheme

The Green Flag Awards Scheme (<http://greenflagaward.org/>) is run by the environmental charity Keep Britain Tidy, under licence from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, in partnership in the UK with Keep Scotland Beautiful, Keep Wales Tidy and Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful. The scheme also operates in an additional 14 countries including Portugal, New Zealand and USA.

Keep Britain Tidy is a leading environmental charity. We set the standard for the management of parks and beaches, inspire people to be litter-free, to waste less and to live more. We run programmes including Eco-Schools, the Green Flag Award for parks and green spaces and the Blue Flag/ Seaside Awards for beaches. To find out more about Keep Britain Tidy, our programmes and campaigns visit www.keepbritaintidy.org.

Any green space that is free to enter and accessible to the public is eligible to enter for a Green Flag Award. Awards are given on an annual basis and winners must apply each year to renew their Green Flag Award status. A Green Flag Community Award recognises quality sites managed by voluntary and community groups. Green Heritage Site accreditation is judged on the treatment of the site's historic features and the standard of conservation.