

## **Statement for Schools on Coronavirus      Wednesday 10th June 2020**

*This statement is to ensure all schools due to visit are up to date with the present situation at Plas Pencelli.*

### **Plas Pencelli is open from Tuesday 1st September 2020.**

Our thoughts are with those particularly hard hit by the current Coronavirus Pandemic. The centre was closed to groups at the end of March as the UK entered lockdown. Since then we have extended the closure period in steps as the Pandemic progressed and guidelines evolved always giving reasonable notice. We do want to reopen Plas Pencelli however, so that we are able to offer life changing experiences once again. Much is likely to change over the next 3 months hopefully in a positive way if present trends are an indicator. We are optimistic that Plas Pencelli will reopen for schools in September and we are planning for that.

### **Why was the closure of Plas Pencelli extended until September 1st?**

The UK government's *Plan to Rebuild* published in May stated that providers of meals or accommodation couldn't open until July 4th at the earliest. This includes Plas Pencelli. Furthermore Welsh Government guidance and legislation is more severe with many more restrictions than in England and the indication is that this is set to continue until the end of July with significant restrictions on outdoor activities. Swindon Borough Council haven't allowed staff to return to the work environment at present. Most staff at Plas Pencelli are now furloughed. It's now been announced that schools won't fully open until September. For these reasons the best course of action at this time is to extend the closure until September. This will give much more time to monitor developments and plan for the reopening.

### **We were due to visit Plas Pencelli between now and 1st September. What should we do?**

If you haven't done so already, it's best to contact the office (note new contact details below) as soon as you are able. We'll talk through further options. For some, you may consider transferring your booking until later in the year. This is unlikely to be possible for some students. We still have some vacancies and for bookings between December and February there is a £20 reduction per student. We have effective central heating and lots of warm personal protective clothing to loan, so visiting in the winter isn't as testing as some may imagine. There are just the same benefits. Some schools have decided to bring two school years for their visit next year instead (2021). If this isn't possible then we will request that if you have a booking next year you transfer your deposit to this course as it will now be due. If you aren't able to do this due to internal financial arrangements then we will refund all monies paid on this occasion for schools booked in this period.

### **We would like to cancel our upcoming booking due to coronavirus concerns. What happens next?**

We respectfully remind schools that booking conditions do apply. They are set out on the back of the booking form. For any booking a deposit is non refundable within 12 months of the course start date. For those cancelling within 3 months of the course date the full course fee is chargeable based on minimum numbers of students. These are typical booking conditions for providers allowing commitments to be made with staff and suppliers to guarantee that courses go ahead safely and to a good standard. We understand that school finances are always a concern as Plas Pencelli has similar concerns. We would not want schools to face financial difficulty and that is why you are urged to contact the centre to discuss alternative arrangements. These are set out above. Where we can't link your deposit to a future booking it will likely be forfeited. I recognise the financial pressures all schools are under and so urge all that contact be made so that we can ensure that penalties can be avoided. Thanks for your understanding.

### **We have a booking for Plas Pencelli from September onwards. Will this still go ahead?**

We certainly expect it to. As with all we can only react to developments including in Government guidance. There is no indication at present that we wouldn't be operational from September onwards.

### **When Plas Pencelli opens will it be back to normal?**

No, there will be many changes and adaptations. Social distancing and enhanced hygiene measures will be important control measures along with other steps. As will be the case in schools, it's likely that we will ensure that there are limited people in a room at one time, one way entry and exit systems and extra cleaning and hygiene measures. Furthermore, we will be adapting other parts of our operations. It's likely

that outdoor activities, whilst retaining their value, will be adapted. There will be a changed programme, though it will be in a similar format with students engaged throughout the day in the outdoors and with an evening programme. Minibus transport will be adapted to prevailing standards at the time.

Groups will probably be dispersed across larger accommodation areas than usual with less people in each room to achieve distancing. We will look at each week separately. The centre has 130 beds, arranged in 3 separate areas, with a clear divide between the top and bottom of the site. We also have large grounds and we often dine in outdoor structures where spacing is possible. We have the ability to use some tented accommodation also of the “glam” camping style.

There are likely to be other changes also. We will consult the latest advice as we approach any week and ensure that we are making suitable arrangements in good time. Prior to each week these arrangements will be mapped out in more detail and this information will be supplied to schools. Schools will have the opportunity to influence and clarify these plans. Parents will be able to consider these arrangements before allowing their child to attend. As with all areas of risk we will be risk assessing the effects of Coronavirus in line with standards set by the Health and Safety Executive. These risk assessments will be available on the centre website at that time.

### **Will it be safe?**

Young people will be as safe at Plas Pencelli as they would be in their home environment. As outlined, precautions and systems will be established to ensure a safe environment. It has been established that Coronavirus is less likely to survive outdoors, so the risk of spread is reduced when engaged in outdoor activities, provided guidelines are followed. Students will have a degree of responsibility to follow guidance and directions. They will be supervised and monitored and where standards slip this will be addressed. Any student persistently unable to follow social distancing guidelines may have to leave the course, unfortunately. Plas Pencelli staff will work with visiting staff, who retain a pastoral role and some supervisory responsibilities.

### **Is the future of Plas Pencelli secure?**

Sadly, although no schools or parents/guardians have faced any financial penalty, the centre has suffered significant financial losses, as many costs apply even when the centre is vacant. We have given good notice of closure and waived booking conditions, unlike much of the commercial sector. However, this does put the centre's existence at risk. If any school decides to cancel a course that is due to run because of the outbreak of Coronavirus, the costs of the trip are likely to be covered by your school's insurance. We would welcome schools who are considering canceling for this reason, that they look into this possibility, so that some of the costs could be recovered by Plas Pencelli without penalty to the school. We are happy to talk to you about this. The support of schools in accessing insurance funding, rescheduling bookings, “doubling up” next year and transferring deposits will all help. Thank you for your continued support and do hope we are able to secure the future.

Thank you

### **Contact Details until Further Notice:**

**Office hours:** Monday to Friday 9am-3.30pm

**Email:** [Office@plaspencelli.co.uk](mailto:Office@plaspencelli.co.uk)

**Post:** Plas Pencelli Outdoor Education Centre, Pencelli, Brecon, Powys LD3 7LX

**Telephone:** Office number 01874665241 (maybe a message). Alternative mobile number: 07507 963127

*The centre is closed but occupied for administration & security purposes. Staff and centre resources have been made available to assist with the well-being of Swindon residents and the local community at this time.*