**Covid-19 Re-opening plan for the Zoological Society of Hertfordshire & Paradise Wildlife Park**

**12th June 2020**

**Introduction**

This document sets out a possible route for Paradise Wildlife Park, the Zoological Society of Hertfordshire to reopen from Saturday 20th June 2020. It is inherent in this plan that decisions on reopening will be dependent on government rules and guidelines. Therefore, this document serves as guidance and a series of options, which may be utilised to facilitate a reopening. Components of this plan may be reordered where appropriate.

A phased approach consisting of multiple components is detailed below. It is possible that there may be phases of further lockdown and therefore this reopening plan may be used on several occasions in this uncertain period where the epidemiology of the SARS –CoV-2 virus is not yet fully understood. If this is the case, then we will learn what aspects of reopening work well and what may need revision.

There are aspects of the virus that are sufficiently understood that they should inform this plan, however. Covid-19 predominantly affects older age groups most severely, and in recent analysis from the UK 9/10 fatalities have occurred in patients with comorbidities. Older people (70 plus) with an average of 2.7 comorbidities were the most prevalent individuals in death outcomes. Younger people are less severely affected. At the timing of writing (11th June 2020), deaths in the UK associated with Covid have mainly occurred in over 60’s and the majority are over 80’s. There are sex differences in both severity of the illness and fatalities, with men much more likely to be hospitalised after contracting the disease and make up at least twice the fatalities at all age groups (as seen in multiple jurisdictions). Blood group has also been linked to outcomes, as has obesity (though generally not listed as a comorbidity). It is clear that for most people (80%+) the illness is not severe and affected individuals may have mild symptoms. Indeed, there may be a very high number of asymptomatic carriers, particularly amongst the young, who have the potential to spread the disease, as they are unaware that they have the virus. Precautionary assumptions should inform reopening.

Even if the Zoo opens’ we must be aware that visitors may be nervous about visiting. However, we do know from a recent survey in the USA that open-air visitor attractions, such as zoos, had a high level of confidence when the public was surveyed about what they would be most happy to visit after lockdown was relaxed. The zoo is 32 acres of fresh air and wide paths and therefore a safe place to visit. This is a strong message that should be woven into all communications. It is also clear that a pro-longed lockdown has ramifications for poorer mental health and the zoo setting of beautiful parkland with animals is a restful and beneficial environment. Recent studies have shown that visiting natural looking zoo exhibits leads to a drop in both blood pressure and cortisol hormone levels, scientifically underpinning the health benefits for all visiting a natural looking zoo such as Paradise.

It would be prudent to make very clear publicly the stages of reopening and the precautions that we are taking in order to instil further confidence. In addition, as reopening plans are becoming apparent in continental Europe, zoos are being included in early stages of reopening (Germany, Czech Republic and Switzerland).

Many visitors will arrive by their own private vehicles. Some will also arrive by public transport i.e. the train at Broxbourne station, which is only 5 minutes from the zoo, then take taxi.

This plan is subject to change as we learn more about Covid-19 and the position on the curve in which the UK is currently placed.

**Considerations**

We must, primarily, consider the health and wellbeing of our own staff and animals before any decision is taken to reopen, even with government relaxation of lockdown. To ensure the safety of our staff, and to minimise risk, protective screening will be installed at indoor ‘contact’ points. These include the front admissions desk, the catering outlets and retail shop counters. We have conducted several inhouse site surveys and assessed where protection could be fitted using clear acrylic sheeting of the appropriate standard (10mm). These screens are now fitted, and signage will be installed soon. These can be easily removed but also easily reinstalled.

In conjunction, government guidelines on social distancing will be adhered to throughout the zoo. Signage reminding both staff and visitors of social distancing, frequent handwashing and covering mouth if sneezing etc. will continue to be displayed in both public and staff areas.

Although it is not mandatory, we will advise visitors to wear face masks while visiting the zoo. This is only advisory but will help protect our staff, animals and other visitors. We will additionally sell masks at the zoo for purchase on arrival.

We understand that after several weeks of lockdown that visitors may be very keen to return and we can envisage on the first day/first week of reopening that we may find that we have high numbers, which could be potentially problematic whilst coming out of a lockdown scenario. Therefore, we will implement a limited numbers approach initially, to judge how social distancing methods and facemask advice is being adhered to by visitors.

Pinch points will be at the entrance, catering outlets, toilets and the shop. Therefore, at these areas, floor stickers will be utilised to demarcate social distancing to allow safe spaces. In addition, indoor animal houses have a potential to be more crowded, therefore we will keep these to a one-way system with social distancing floor stickers implemented. We hope to have some volunteers help monitor visitor numbers present in the house at any one time.

Catering outlets will operate as takeaway only initially, as outdoor seating is available. We do note however the necessity of regular cleaning of outdoor seating areas – whether outlets or seating at other areas of the zoo.

The gift shop can be reconfigured to provide a separate entrance & exit points, to try and manage the visitor flow through the site.

Playgrounds (indoor/outdoor) will remain closed initially. Whilst children may be more likely to be asymptomatic, there is also some evidence that they have low infectivity due to reduced viral loads. This is still a matter of research.

First aid services will be of course still provided in the zoo. We will assume that all visitors potentially have covid and could be asymptomatic and therefore staff attending to first aid incidents will wear face mask/face shields/protective apron, stored with the other emergency first aid materials. There will be a specific team of staff that will adhere to first aid support onsite each day.

It is likely that moving between phases 1, 2and 3, in the Paradise plan will be predicated upon government guidelines relaxing lockdown for the UK and best practice amongst the wider zoo community in Europe. Further information will be sought from zoo associations as regards to best practice (BIAZA/EAZA) and from colleagues in other zoos. Foremost, our own judgements as to visitor behaviour and adherence to rules will be used to make decisions of movement between phases.

**Communications Plan**

Our reopening will be clearly communicated with our staff, and prior to any public reopening we will ask all our staff and volunteers to come in and start walking around the grounds to acclimatise the animals to visitors again. We will limit the first week of opening to our members only – we have so far seen high retention of membership and it would be right to reward that loyalty.

**General information on reopening Paradise Wildlife Park**

* Days open: 7 days a week but may reduce to 5 days in Winter. This will be monitored carefully over the Summer.
* Hours: 9:30am to 6pm
* Paradise Wildlife Park and Zoological Society of Hertfordshire will be operating as a card only payments site offering no cash payments anywhere or any cashback.
* The only exit point will be the large delivery double gates at the Welcome Centre which will be staffed throughout the day to prevent visitors exiting via the double gate system and having to touch the buttons
* Office based staff will work some days from home if possible to do so to prevent large numbers in one building.

**Purchasing tickets to Paradise Wildlife Park**

* The Park will be open for annual members only from Saturday 20th June.
* Tickets can only be bought online in advance. 1,000 available per day in half hour timeslots from 9:30am to 1pm to stagger arrivals to ease congestion at the Welcome Centre. Annual pass holders will need to purchase a free ticket from the website prior to visiting so we can control admission numbers. On arrival to Paradise they will show their pre-booked ticket along with their valid membership card.
* Any visitors who previously held complimentary tickets will be accepted and as these cannot be pre-booked online, comp tickets can be used on the gate but any additional participants must have booked their tickets online in advance.
* From Saturday 27th June 2020, Paradise Wildlife Park will open to the general public with 250 tickets allocated for Annual pass holders and 750 for the general public.
* From the beginning of August, all being well, ticket capacity will be increased to 1,500 per day with 500 being allocated for Annual Pass Holders and 1,000 for the general public.
* From the beginning of October, all being well, ticket capacity will be increased to 2,500 per day with 500 being allocated for Annual Pass Holders and 2,000 for the general public.

Prices: Tickets will be our summer prices for when we re-open in June**:**

* £22 per adult
* £20 per child
* £18 per senior citizen
* £18 per disabled with carer.
* Under 2’s visit free.

The 6% discount online will no longer be available online.

There will be a staff member at the Welcome Centre gates to ensure people have their tickets scanned on arrival, so that we do not exceed our restricted capacity.

**World of Animals**

* A one way system will be in place around the animal park.
* The woodland area will be closed with no access to the foxes, deers or wolves. The Wolves can be viewed from the World of Dinosaurs walk.
* The Lion overhead walkway, Tapir overhead walkway and Penguin overhead lookout will all remain open as they have a separate entrance and exit.
* The Farmyard, Big Cat Territory and Ranger Lookout at the lions will all be open as they have separate entrance and exits.
* The Reptile House, Amazon & Beyond and Rainforest will remain closed as indoor spaces – this will be reviewed in August.
* The Outback Trail will remain closed due to its double door gate system – this will be reviewed in August.
* The Big Cat overhead walkway and the gibbon raised platform will both be closed. There are restrictions in movement & space on these platforms which compromise the safety of our visitors.
* There will be no shows taking place at our Birds at Paradise arena – this will be reviewed in August.
* No animals talks will take place to prevent crowding in areas – this will be reviewed in August.
* We will not be selling animal feed
* There will be no animal experiences until at least the end of July, therefore there will be no access to the Discovery Centre. This decision will be reviewed in late July as to whether to resume experiences in August.

**Catering Outlets**

* The only catering outlets open for visitors from 20th June are Dino-Bites BBQ, Monkey Mayhem and the Ice Cream Parlour as they are all outdoors and allow for social distancing. Acrylic screens have been installed at all of these catering outlets.
* Tiger Treetops café will remain closed for the moment but will be reviewed in the coming weeks depending on queue waiting time.
* The Safari Diner will remain closed for the moment but will be reviewed in August.
* Tumble Jungle will remain closed for the foreseeable future until deemed safe to open.
* Paradise Lagoon and the pool outlet will remain closed for the foreseeable future until deemed safe to open.
* Team members in this area should wear gloves at all times and the credit card machine should be sanitised after every non-contactless use.

**Retail Shops**

* The Gift Shop and Dino-Store will both be open as per all non-essential shops.
* Acrylic screens have been installed at all of these retail outlets.
* There are separate entrances for entry and exit in both retail shops.
* Team members in this area should sanitise the credit card machine after every non-contactless use.

**Other attractions**

* World of Dinosaurs will be open.
* Dino Day-care and Dino Sand-pit will remain closed – this will be reviewed in August.
* The Rex Express TRain will be open with contactless card payment only. Only every other carriage will be used to allow a 2 metre distance per carriage and family.
* The Crazy Golf will be open. Each club & ball will be sanitised when returned before being available to use for a new player. These can be paid for in the Gift Shop by contactless card payment only.
* The Speedway Museum will remain closed as an indoor area.
* All outdoor playgrounds around the site will be closed – this will be reviewed in August.
* There will be no shows on the Safari Stage to reduce crowding in this area.
* All ride on coin in slot machines will be removed.
* The face painting cabin will remain closed for the foreseeable future.
* The shuttle bus for staff and the public will not operate.

**Communicating with our visitors**

* Clear public signage regarding hand washing, face masks and social distancing visible and frequently displayed from entrance onwards, including in staff only areas
* Tannoy system at the Welcome Centre will play a pre-recorded message on a loop regarding social distancing, safety on-site etc.
* Social distancing markings for queuing areas around site; when entering, outlets & some animal habitats.
* If older age groups are still recommended to self-isolate, then we ask that those age groups act with caution and do not attend the zoo in this phase – this is publicised on our website prior to visiting.
* High risk individuals (those with underlying health issues) if still recommended to self-isolate then ask that those individuals act with caution and do not attend the zoo in this phase - – this is publicised on our website prior to visiting.
* Staff will monitor social distancing if any visitors seem to be flouting the rules.

**Safety & PPE around site**

* All staff are required to bring their own breakfast and lunch in for the foreseeable future to reduce close contact with the public when queuing and to keep our catering area waiting time as low as possible for the visitors.
* We have approx. 30 fixed hand sanitizer dispensing pumps for visitors placed throughout the site.
* All visitors will be advised to wear face masks but this will not be mandatory.
* The zoo team will be advised to wear face masks at all times due to their close contact with the animals and at times will be walking against the flow of visitors in the one way system.
* Acrylic screens have been installed at staff/visitor contact points and acrylic screens at the Welcome Centre were already in place
* Staff members in other departments have the option to wear face masks if they wish but as we have acrylic screening in place in customer facing areas, this may not be necessary.
* Social distancing between unrelated households to be maintained at all times.
* Regular sanitising at front desk – team can choose as to whether they would like to wear gloves or not as hand sanitiser will be available

**‘Back to normal’**

* Moving back to a ‘normal’ zoo opening with no numbers restrictions is likely some time away and will be dependent on the pattern of the spread of the virus across the UK, on access to Ab tests for the community, antigen testing availability, track and trace apps, antiviral treatments and vaccine development. All members of the community will be welcomed if government relaxes self-isolation guidance and we will adhere to government advice.

All of the above document is all subject to change due to government guidelines. We will keep this document updated as and when further information becomes available.

We look forward to welcoming you back to Zoological Society of Hertfordshire, Paradise Wildlife Park.