

## **Statement regarding Girlguiding's announcement about activity centres (Waddow Hall)**

Following Girlguiding's announcement on 18 May about the activity centres, we feel it's important to communicate with our members about this decision and in particular Waddow Hall.

Girlguiding's board of trustees has made the recommendation to sell the 5 activity centres Girlguiding owns - this includes Waddow Hall. The proposal is to keep the sites operating until 31 December 2023. The trustees made this recommendation to help financially secure the organisation, so that Girlguiding can continue to be a place where girls know they can do anything for years to come. The recommendation is not a reflection on the activities and experiences both staff and volunteers have enabled over many years, and the trustees have thanked everyone who has been involved with the activity centres. Girlguiding has now started a period of consultation with the staff who are affected by any implementation of this recommendation (as is required under employee legislation).

Waddow Hall is the activity centre that is based within our region, and likely to be the one closest to the heart of our region members. Waddow is not too far from the region office and our regional trustees, volunteers and staff members are all very saddened and upset to hear the news about a cherished activity centre we are all so fond of. We would like to say a huge thank you to our volunteers, friends and staff at Waddow Hall, who make Waddow Hall a place of adventure, fun and have helped to make ever-lasting memories for many adult and young members over the years.

At Girlguiding North West England we are very aware how much Waddow Hall means to our members. Therefore at our region Finance Committee meeting on Saturday 20 May we naturally considered the issue of Waddow. The meeting was to discuss our annual budget. At this meeting we consider what we need to deliver in the coming year (2024) and review what funds are available to deliver the events and activities across the region. As part of this meeting we discussed the activity centres announcement and in particular Waddow Hall and we explored how we could possibly help.

Girlguiding North West England is a charity in its own right, and our aims and objectives are to ensure that girls and young women develop their potential through supporting and valuing its leaders. Our vision is to widen and increase our membership to enable all girls and young women to have the opportunity to develop their potential through guiding. As a charity we must ensure that we use any of our funds wisely and for the benefit of our members to deliver our aims and objectives.

For 2024 we will be proposing that we run the region events and activities with a deficit budget. This is something that we believe is the right thing to do, given that people are experiencing a cost-of-living crisis and other challenging circumstances, we therefore want to keep guiding as accessible as possible.

We understand that there has been a lack of capital investment in Waddow Hall over a number of years, which means that in order to buy and invest in the Hall, we would need to find a considerable amount of money, which we simply don't have.

Some countries and regions within the UK do manage and run activity centres, but over the last few years they have all had to make difficult decisions about whether or not these sites remain open. As you may now know Netherurd was sold by Girlguiding Scotland and Broneirion is currently being sold by Girlguiding Cymru. There are many challenges that running a activity centre brings with it;

- decreasing numbers of members using the facility
- decline in overall membership numbers
- the impact of Covid-19
- ever-increasing financial costs (cost of living crisis)
- Waddow Hall is a grade 2 listed building which means it's difficult to make changes and ensure that the site is fit for purpose

Considering all of this, we simply do not have the funds to invest in Waddow Hall. We explored other ideas at the Finance Committee such as;

- Increasing membership subscriptions so that we could raise the funds to run Waddow. If we did this then we would need to increase members subscriptions from £8.50 (where they were in 2023) to over £200 per member for the next 2024 subscriptions (this would be the cost before other levels add their levies)
- Joining forces with other Regions. We understand that other regions do not have the appetite to do this and have their own property challenges

I am sure you will agree this makes these options simply untenable.

## **What Can We Do?**

We all love Waddow Hall and are sympathetic to the situation that they find themselves in. We understand that many of our members are also upset by the recommendation made by Girlguiding, therefore there are a number of things that we will commit to doing;

- We will talk to Waddow Hall to see how and if we can help
- We are willing to talk to anyone in the membership who has ideas about how we can support Waddow Hall going forward

We understand that this may not be the outcome that our members wanted and if Girlguiding do close Waddow Hall, then it will be a significant loss to our members. However, at this time this is a recommendation. Girlguiding will now enter a statutory process (required by law) with affected staff and with their employee representative group. A further announcement will be made in August. Girlguiding North West England's priority remains our members, we are here if you need anything or have any ideas or questions about Girlguiding's decision.

Girlguiding have a special support team in place, to give volunteers and members the support needed. Any member or parent who has questions about this announcement should contact [enquiries.property@girlguiding.org.uk](mailto:enquiries.property@girlguiding.org.uk) or 020 3839 8466.

You can also contact us regionally with any ideas or suggestions about how we can help, please email [northwesthq@girlguidingnwe.org.uk](mailto:northwesthq@girlguidingnwe.org.uk) and these will be considered.

We will make a further announcement to our region members in August once the final decision has been made and Girlguiding have announced their next steps.

**Girlguiding North West England**