



Press Release

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Roadworks fiasco could force permanent closure of last surviving WW1 Aerodrome

Essex, June 27 2024: Stow Maries Great War Aerodrome in Essex, Europe's largest surviving First World War aerodrome, is facing permanent closure because the main access public road to the site has been closed without warning.

As a World War One Aerodrome in Europe, the treasured museum off Hackman's Lane between Maldon and Chelmsford – the last one of its kind - has seen its fair share of conflict. Throughout its operational life, hundreds of men and women lived and worked on the base as they defended Great Britain against Imperial Germany. Now the site faces an even greater challenge to its survival – and its one that is very much home-grown.

In April Essex and Suffolk Water began significant water mains work on Hackman's Lane which has necessitated road closures and diversions around the area.

Initially the water company advised some local households that the work would last for up to 10 days.

Instead that figure has been revised to 100 days and the knock-on effect to businesses in the area, including the highly acclaimed Stow Maries Great War Aerodrome charity, has been described as "catastrophic".

The aerodrome has seen a 50% drop in income as hundreds of potential visitors give up trying to navigate the labyrinth of – often very poorly signed – diversions to get to the museum.

While the Trustees of the charity and its 100 plus volunteers recognise that both the work and the necessity to ensure the workforce on the roads are kept safe are very important, they are extremely critical of Essex and Suffolk Water's failure to engage with businesses in advance of the work beginning.

Ian Flint, Charity CEO, said:

“We had no notice of the works – in fact, we only found out they were happening when we were passed a note from a neighbour. That note quoted a 10-day period of works, which was bad enough. We then discovered that it was actually going to be over 100 days. When we finally got representatives on site, they admitted they had no idea of our existence.

“With the drop in visitor numbers caused by these works, the survival of the museum is now really in question,” he added.

Other local businesses have been hit hard, too. Charles Ball, Landlord of the *Fox and Hounds* pub, said:

“We are in the same situation as the museum. We have seen a 50% drop in income. We have done what we can – we even paid for our own signage to try and encourage people – but it’s terribly, terribly hard.’

Stewart Cooper, of Cooper Custom Designs, opened his motorbike workshop business on Hackman’s Lane the week before the works.

“We are in real difficulties – the works have been badly communicated from day one and as a business start-up, it’s an uphill struggle as it is. We honestly don’t know what the next three months will bring or what situation we will be in by Christmas.”

Attempts by museum staff to engage with Essex and Suffolk Water and the roads division of Essex County Council, Essex Highways - to mitigate the effects of the closure, with far better signage a priority, have been frustratingly unsuccessful.

“The conversations we have initiated have given us no encouragement that things will improve. Essex & Suffolk Water and Essex Highways are pointing the finger at each other for the deficiencies in the operation. Meanwhile our lifeblood is draining away,” lamented Ian Flint.

“The only thing that can save the museum and secure this priceless facility for the community and nation is for the people of East Anglia to fight through the diversion and get to us. We need them to visit. We need them to buy a coffee, maybe grab a snack. We need them to visit one of our events or come on a regular Friday, Saturday or Sunday open day.

“If we don’t see a lot more people on site very soon, Essex & Suffolk Water and Essex Highways will have succeeded in doing something the Kaiser’s air force failed to do. They will have shut us down.”

Dan Snow, popular Historian and long-time Patron of the museum, added:

“It horrifies me to see such a vital part of our heritage in this situation. We cannot afford to lose Stow Maries after all the amazing work that has been done to preserve it. We need to resolve this issue urgently, before it is too late.”

Ends

Further information from the museum by contacting Ian on ian.flint@stowmaries.org.uk

Notes for editors:

- Stow Maries Great War Aerodrome, Hackman’s Lane, Purleigh, CM3 6RN is open from 10am until 4pm, on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays. To check out their packed events programme or to make a donation to their survival -visit www.stowmaries.org.uk
- A campaign to save the site in 2012 led to its purchase, following a generous grant from the Heritage Memorial Fund. It was placed in the care of Stow Maries Great War Aerodrome, a registered charity.
- Today the museum, still an operational airfield, is supported and maintained by over 100 volunteers. It is open each Friday, Saturday and Sunday from 10am until 4pm
- More information about Stow Maries Great War Aerodrome can be found at www.stowmaries.org.uk
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