



Cornish Seal Sanctuary
Gweek
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WEB: <https://sealsanctuary.sealifetrust.org/>

Dear DEFRA,

We are writing to you from the Cornish Seal Sanctuary, a sanctuary run by the charity The SEA LIFE Trust. For over 60 years we have been rescuing, rehabilitating and releasing seal pups in need from around the coastline, and have aided well over 3000 pups in our time. A majority of our seals are released safely back into the wild, however those that cannot be released for medical reasons are offered a permanent home at our specially designed site in Gweek in Cornwall. Alongside the seals, we also offer a home to other animals in need, such as penguins, otters, sea lions, sheep, ponies and goats. Most of our animals have medical requirements that need expert care and medication, and our team are specially trained to deal with them.

Last week, despite the agreement to open gardens and outdoor land maintained for public use in June, you announced that zoos and sanctuaries are to remain closed to the public due to the Covid-19 outbreak; with an update to be given 18th June, but with no definite opening date in sight.

Being closed has had a major impact on us here at the Cornish Seal Sanctuary. As a rescue centre for seals and other animals, our work is vital in supporting those animals in need and must continue despite the current ongoing situation with Covid-19. Our running costs are substantial, due to ongoing care of our resident seals, many of whom have long term medical conditions that require expensive medication. It costs us a minimum of £23,000 a month just to look after our animals; this does not include other running costs such as utilities, insurance and non-animal related essential staff costs.

Furthermore, 80% of our funding comes from our visitors in spring and summer. These key months are essential in securing our operation in winter months, when our pup rescue season is taking place. Each rescued seal pup costs us on average £2,000 to rehabilitate and with 70 seals rescued each season, the costs stack up. We are now deeply concerned that the decision to remain closed until July, or further, will gravely impact our rescue and rehabilitation efforts. On top of this, we have some major essential on-site works with regards to our pools that we desperately need to undertake in order to keep our animals safe and happy which will lead us further into debt that we are currently incurring.

We have been working incredibly hard to ensure once the time is right we can re-open safely and have put the following safety measures in place:

- Full COVID-19 risk assessment in place
- Introduced capacity restrictions to ensure we can adhere to social distancing regulations, pre booked tickets only with timed arrival
- Social distancing guidelines information for guests
- Enhanced cleaning regime and provided hand sanitiser stations around the site
- Installed protective equipment to keep our staff and guests safe
- Temperature checks and staff PPE
- Staff training

The Cornish Seal Sanctuary is a SEA LIFE Trust Sanctuary
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We have 42 acres of outdoor spaces, and with no animal talks or feeding demonstrations taking place during opening hours, our operation is not that different from a gardens or lands and businesses that are currently allowed to open.

Like many others, we have had to avail ourselves of the Government support available during this time – furloughing 90% of our non-animal care team and securing a loan under the CBIL scheme. We also applied to the Zoo Emergency Support Fund but were unsuccessful in securing a grant. The reason for this was because we were granted the CBIL loan. Whilst we are very grateful to not face imminent closure due to this loan, we would like to point out that a loan is very different to grant support and comes with interest payments that would need to be paid back alongside the loan itself, which simply leaves our charity facing long-term debt. It will take us a number of years for us to fully repay the loan and to recover from the situation we have encountered.

Given the above, we would like to DEFRA to:

- Reconsider the decision on when outdoor facilities like ours are able to open to enable us to reopen to visitors and begin to bring in much needed income to support our animal care requirements and vital rescue work
- Consider offering additional support to sanctuaries, zoos and aquariums like ourselves in the form of grants that will help us to recover more quickly, so we can continue to provide exceptional animal care, education, research and rescue work, and not be hindered by worrying how we will repay our incurred debts during this unfortunate closure.

We would like to thank you for your time reading this letter as now, more than ever, we need your support.

Yours Sincerely,

Jana Sirova
General Manager
Cornish Seal Sanctuary