

Provincial Grand Lodge of Mark Master Masons of Essex  
Keystone Province  
150th Anniversary Keystone Province  
Grand Patron – Mark Benevolent Fund



R.W.Bro Terence. D. Sheern  
*Provincial Grand Master*

*Coronavirus Update 8*

Dear All,

As things appear to be moving at a faster than anticipated pace I thought it prudent to give you an update and outline some decisions coming from Mark Masons Hall, as well as other Provincial news.

So let me start by talking about the lifting of the suspension for our meetings. You will all by now have received a copy of the letter from MMH stating that as of 17<sup>th</sup> July 2020 the general suspension to meetings is lifted, so what does that mean? I have of course heard many comments about it being too early so I wanted to set out for you the thinking behind that decision. The lifting of the suspension is one of the steps back to a resumption of meetings; the decision was made in the full knowledge that for most, our meetings in reality will not start again until September. So lifting the suspension now gives Lodges the opportunity to start planning their approach for future meetings when the conditions are right for them.

**To ensure every member is absolutely clear on this point, no one should return to meetings unless they feel it is right for them, no one is under any pressure to return or being in any way coerced to do so. The decision on when to return to a meeting is an individual one based on his own circumstances.**

So what does this lifting of the suspension mean for Essex? There are no Lodges due to meet in July and only on Lodge due to hold a meeting in August (Craftsmen of Walden), eight Lodges are due to meet in September. As we know, the advice we have been receiving changes on a regular basis, but based on current advice the majority of Lodges still have some months to think about and prepare for their next meeting.

I am aware a number of Lodges have taken advantage of the Business Zoom meeting facility and can announce that this scheme will now be extended until a date to be decided, but will be

reviewed in December. A new 7 step approach will be issued by Grand Lodge shortly. This approach now gives Lodges further options, which I will come on to shortly.

For Lodges that have sufficient members willing to return to meetings and resume ceremonies, guidance is being issued by Grand Lodge and should be available in the next couple of weeks or so. This guidance will explain how ceremonies need to be adapted under the current covid-19 restrictions. For Lodges that have candidates in the waiting you will within a few weeks be able to discuss this with them to determine whether they wish to be advanced under the conditions set out. The guidance will also give an explanation on how Installation meetings should be conducted.

Before any meetings can take place of course there needs to be a centre open to accommodate the meeting. My understanding is that the Craft is taking a lead on this and is in conversations with centres around the Province to determine their readiness. I am aware that several centres have been preparing to reopen and are confident they have suitable precautions in place. If the centre where your Lodge meets is not able to re open in time for your meeting, there are three options available. Abandon the meeting, hold a zoom business meeting or hold the meeting in another location.

If after due consideration members of a Lodge feel they are unable to attend meetings and there are insufficient members to hold the meeting, there are two options, abandon the meeting due to the lack of a quorum or hold a business meeting via zoom or other similar means.

As I have stated the Business meeting scheme is to be extended until December 2020. Therefore any Lodge that has insufficient members to hold a meaningful regular meeting, and it falls between 17<sup>th</sup> July and end of December, they may conduct Business meetings in this way.

I have also heard several comments about not attending meetings because there will be no festive board to enjoy. The decision not to allow Festive Boards is of course based on advice and is in place to prevent singing or the normal toasts and speeches, all of which run the risk of spreading air born germs. Currently we are unable to dine because we are only allowed to attend restaurants in our own bubbles as set out by the Government, If we dined there would be at least 30 different bubbles if the maximum number attended the meeting.

So let me recap

1. No individual brother is under any pressure to return to meetings until they feel it is right for them
2. Between 17<sup>th</sup> July and 31<sup>st</sup> December Lodges have the option to hold a business meeting via zoom or other suitable means rather than an actual meeting
3. If a Lodge has sufficient members willing to attend meetings and wish to conduct a ceremony/Installation, guidance is being issued in the next few weeks.
4. A number of other documents have been distributed by Grand Lodge which you may find is worthwhile refreshing your memories on, all of which can be found on the website

Moving on, One of the Lodges due to meet in September is the Installed Commanders and Masters Lodge 1044. It is my intention at this time to go ahead with this meeting (subject to all the conditions set out above). The meetings will consist of Installations of new Worshipful Commander in the RAM & Worshipful Master in the Mark. It is also my intention to install the new Dep PGM and APGM at that meeting. I say this because these installations are an important

milestone for the Province as well as the individuals and I would like their installation to be in person, rather than them taking office by virtue of a patent of appointment. The ceremony will of course have to be adapted to comply with the current restrictions, as will the temple layout and numbers attending. We are however working on these factors at the moment. This meeting will of course depend on a masonic centre being open to accommodate the meeting.

The Province also needs to hold an annual meeting to finalise its end of year business. Also to make the necessary appointments to ensure the Province continues to function in the correct manner. I am considering how best to achieve this and will inform you once this has been decided. However it is looking like this may be a zoom type meeting, but will update you as soon as I can

Whilst I do not know the details yet I have been informed that Grand Lodge will shortly be releasing details of a financial package to assist Lodges and individuals resuming Masonic activities. This will be circulated to you as soon as it arrives

You will no doubt be aware that the Craft have allowed Zoom type meetings for Lodge of Instructions (With several conditions and do's and don'ts). I can inform you that Grand Lodge have seen the benefits of this approach and will be releasing similar details.

Because of the changes and instructions currently taking place Grand Lodge will also be releasing a FAQ paper to assist Lodges to resume meetings and the administrative requirements for the resumption of meetings.

I will of course keep you updated on any further changes as they happen.

In relation to other Provincial matters, can I thank those of you who have made donations to the Essex Mark Welfare Fund and your support of the Essex Bonus Ball scheme. The funds raised have allowed us to continue supporting local charities and other worthy causes.

For those of you who are not aware our MBF meals on wheels scheme finished on Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> July, and due to your support was I believe a great success. If you get a minute take a look at some of the photographs, videos and letter of appreciation on the website ([www.essexmark.co.uk](http://www.essexmark.co.uk))

The scheme has provided over 2200 meals (in the 13 weeks it ran) to some of our most vulnerable members, widows and family members. The meals were distributed by a pool of 80 volunteers, both Mark and Non Mark men, and from three of our masonic centres, something the province should be proud of, thank you to all involved.

Thank you

*Terry*