**APSE Briefing: COVID-19: New Guidance for Safer Public Places - Urban Centres and Green Spaces**

**To all APSE members in England and for information to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland**

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**Key issues**

- Following announcements by the Prime Minister on Sunday 10 May as to a route map out of lockdown, guidance has been produced for the owners and operators of urban centres and green spaces to advise on social distancing.

- This guidance provides the owners and operators of public spaces with information and examples of measures that may be undertaken to adapt and manage public spaces in order to help social distancing.

- This briefing therefore provides links to the latest guidance effective as of 13 May but subject to further updates on measures in relation to the safer use of Public Places - Urban Centres and Green Spaces.

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## 1.      Introduction

As government guidance on staying at home is gradually eased, there is the expectation there will be an increase in the number of visitors who will now be attending urban centres and green spaces, as these are the areas likely to experience high footfall.

The guidance, issued on 13 May, provides the owners and operators of public spaces with information and examples of measures that may be undertaken, to adapt and manage public spaces, in order to help social distancing.

This guidance only applies in England and did not impose any legal obligations. It was primarily for owners and operators of public places including but not limited to: local councils and town/city centre managers, landowners' commercial landlords responsible for public places and management companies. The guidance provides a framework for identifying the issues associated with the use of public places in light of the need for

social distancing. It also includes practical interventions, which are temporary, for adapting and managing public places.

It is intended to enable the owners and operators of public spaces to plan for the temporary adaptations and interventions that will be needed as the restrictions on leaving the home are gradually reduced.

The guidance asks owners and operators of public places to take into account the latest advice on social distancing, from the government, when identifying key issues in urban centres and green spaces.

The guidance measures are: -

**Social Distancing:** Public Health England (PHE) has advised maintaining 2 metres (6 feet) distance. Where social distancing is not possible, owners and operators as well as the general public, are advised to do everything they can to reasonably reduce the risk.

**Cleaning:** Owners and operators are advised to implement cleaning protocols to limit coronavirus transmission in public places. It is advising that touch points (e.g. handrails and gates) should be particular areas of focus for increased cleaning.

**Hygiene – hand washing:** To help everyone maintain good hygiene, consideration should be given to:

- Sufficient provision of automated hand sanitising dispensers in public places.
- Where possible, providing hand towels as an alternative to hand dryers in handwashing facilities.
- Using signs and messages to build awareness of good handwashing techniques and other respiratory hygiene behaviours, e.g. around coughing and sneezing in public places.
- Configuration of toilet facilities to ensure they are kept clean, with social distancing achieved as far as possible and with best practice handwashing followed.
- Provision of more waste facilities and more frequent rubbish collection in public places.
- Minimising use of portable toilets.
- Enhanced cleaning for facilities that are heavily used.
- Identification of issues in urban centres and green spaces

This guidance also sets out a process to identify issues and interventions for maintaining social distancing in urban centres and green spaces.

- Identifying public spaces that are more likely to be focal zones and require interventions: these could be transport hubs, high streets, shopping centres, areas for employment and commercial uses, and parks these are typically characterised by: high footfall and are constrained areas for transport modes, pedestrian, cycle and vehicular.
- Considering user groups, levels of footfall and activity in spaces with intensive usage.
- Assessing the key social distancing issues, potential conflicts and risks.
- Considering the interventions that can be made to mitigate and reduce the social distancing issues, level of conflict, and risk.
- Considering the statutory and legal implications and liaise with statutory bodies.
- Consider the implementation of temporary physical interventions, timings and procurement implications that will be suitable in the public realm.
- Considering the management of spaces and interventions including: guiding movement through the spaces and the potential need for any enforcement measures such as at entrance areas, to supervise and assist.
- Considering the maintenance issues such as cleaning and repairing.
- Monitoring use, management and maintenance, and effectiveness of measures.
- Reviewing and considering the phasing in and out of interventions.

**Management of Urban Centres**

Owners and operators are advised to consider the common issues and temporary interventions that have been identified for urban centres, high streets and town centres.

To ensure social distancing in urban centres, owners and operators are advised to consider the utilisation of pedestrian space, movement of people, queuing requirements and traffic management. The focus should be on temporary interventions in areas of highest footfall, particularly those that provide a range of attractions and services as they pose the greatest risk.

**Typical temporary interventions to consider for high streets and town centres:**

- Widen footways by utilising the carriageway
- Reduce traffic speeds using traffic calming measures
- Pedestrianize and consider impact on traffic movement
- Suspend on-street parking to facilitate other measures
- Minimise pinch points, whilst taking into consideration security and the needs of the disabled and elderly.

- Safe, level crossing points
- Seating areas for the disabled and elderly
- Introduce cycleways
- Phase delivery timings in loading bays
- Queue marking indicators on pedestrian areas, focusing queues along the building frontage where appropriate
- Signs on social distancing and circulation, particularly at conflict points such as junctions and crossings
- Use existing street furniture (e.g. lamp posts) for signing to avoid impacting on pedestrian flows
- Allow space where multiple queues meet
- Signs to limit queue length, helping manage multiple queues and pedestrian flows
- Stewards to help manage queues and pedestrian flows
- Keep building entrances and footpaths clear, whilst taking account of the needs of the disabled, elderly and security considerations
- Maximise access and introduce one-way entry and exit points
- Signs reminding users to socially distance at bus stop waiting areas
- Additional cleaning regimes and maintenance
- Signs at public toilets for queuing, social distancing and automatic sanitising

Green spaces typically include parks, recreation grounds, publicly accessible playing fields, public open spaces associated with housing developments and public burial grounds. These areas are likely to be enclosed by a variety of boundary treatments with 'pinch point' at entrances. The surrounding streets tend to have limited space. Green spaces will have high levels of use during warmer weather and daytime hours. Those in urban centres typically have high levels of footfalls and greater likelihood of congestion at entrance and exit points.

The Guidance advises owners and operators to consider the common issues and temporary interventions that have been identified for green spaces. Common issues outlined include managing high footfall and restricted entry and exit points. It also suggests potential interventions to these issues from signage to floor markings and widening of footpaths.

**Typical temporary interventions to consider for parks:**

- Widen footways on approach streets to main entrance.
- Widen footways within park.
- Provide movement guidance around park including consideration for one-way circulation.

- Reduce traffic speeds.
- Increase space for pedestrians and cycles beside park entrances.
- Minimise pinch points, whilst taking into consideration security and the needs of the disabled and elderly.
- Reduce unnecessary obstacles, for example planters and add markings / tape on seating to maintain social distancing.
- Queue marking indicators at main entrance, popular park destinations and toilets.
- Signs on social distancing and circulation, particularly at conflict points such as junctions and crossings.
- Use existing street furniture for signing to avoid impacting on pedestrian flows.
- Allow space where multiple queues meet.
- Stewards to help manage queues and pedestrian flows.
- Maximise access and introduce one-way entry and exit points.
- Additional cleaning regime and maintenance.
- Safe level crossing points to access parks.

**Additional communication, technology and regulatory considerations.**

In considering the design interventions, owners and operators are advised to also take account of signing and communications, opportunities through technology and regulatory considerations.

Temporary signing and communication considerations:

Owners / operators are advised to provide clear and concise information to the public on how to adhere to social distancing. They are advised to emphasise the latest government advice on safety procedures and carefully consider social distancing guidelines in public places. This could include: -

- Using simple, clear and accessible images and messaging to explain guidelines, with consideration for groups whose first language may not be English or where alternative formats may be required.
- Showing the maximum number of people who can queue safely (accounting for social distancing).
- Signs and announcements about safe travel and maintaining social distancing. Signs should be placed strategically to maximise impact.
- Information on changes for disabled users and how they can continue to access public places in a safe way.
- Providing stewards in the busiest areas.

- Marking appropriate spaces for queuing, accounting for queues and space required by neighbouring premises whilst taking security considerations into account.

**Additional digital considerations**

Owners / operators should consider the use of data and digital tools to make it easier for people to maintain social distancing, and to aid decision making regarding the management and modification of spaces. This could include: -

- Making data available that shows the current footfall of spaces, especially those spaces that are prone to overcrowding; access to data and digital tools will allow people to more effectively plan their journeys and choose alternative spaces or use spaces at other times of day.

Owners / operators should consider using data and digital tools to monitor the usage of spaces, and to make modifications to the access and use of those spaces as required.

- Data and digital tools may also be needed to anticipate and plan for the changing use of public places over time, to expect and mitigate the potential for overcrowding at certain sites during peak usage times, and to take any necessary corrective measures to make it easier for people to socially distance.
- Consider how existing e-booking systems can be utilised to support the effective capacity management of public spaces, such as outdoor sports courts, and provide key guidance for usage.

**Additional security and enforcement considerations.**

A revised layout may present new security risks, particularly where multiple queues are created. Owners and operators of public places are advised to consider the security implications of temporary interventions to support social distancing.

**The guidance**

This is a link to the full guidance document which runs to 36 pages and contains downloadable resources for owners and operators of urban centres and green spaces.

[Coronavirus (COVID-19): Safer Public Places - Urban Centres and Green Spaces](#)

**Further support**

The APSE COVID-19 support hub was set up to ensure quick information is available on frontline services to our member councils. You can access the hub using [this link.](#)

APSE has also introduced new services to support our members including a rapid response network query service, dedicated WhatsApp groups, dedicated COVID-19 briefings and online forums for remobilisation of council services. To access these services please enter your details using [this link.](#)

If your council is not a member of APSE you can enquire about joining using [this link.](#)

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