GUIDANCE FOR URBAN CENTRES AND GREEN SPACES

DfC

Department
for Communities
www.communities-ni.gov.uk

Contents

1. Introduction

This guidance focuses on the design principles for safer urban centres and green spaces. The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 impose temporary statutory restrictions, including on the use of certain premises and public outdoor spaces, and are under constant review by the Department of Health.

This guidance contains information on assessing possible issues and provides some examples of interventions that may be undertaken by the owners and operators of public spaces to keep people safer as and when the restrictions are relaxed and these places become busier.

This guidance applies in Northern Ireland only and does not impose any legal obligations. It is mainly intended 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
- Management companies

It is intended to enable them to plan for the temporary adaptations and interventions that will be needed as the restrictions on staying at home are gradually reduced and we move through the stages of the COVID-19 Recovery Plan. This guidance has been prepared on behalf of the Northern Ireland Executive.

This guidance should be considered alongside Public Health and Safety requirements.

Whilst this guidance is mainly intended for owners and operators of public places, it remains the responsibility of the individual user of such places to act on all guidance to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission (some examples are provided in the Appendix to this guidance).

We expect it will be updated over time – this version is up to date as of 23 June 2020.

1.1 How to use this guidance

This document sets out guidance for urban centres and green spaces that the NI Executive advises should be assessed and adapted as necessary to operate safely in line with social distancing measures and the restrictions in place.

Each owner/operator is advised to translate the principles and examples in this guidance into the specific actions they need to take, alongside other guidance produced by the NI Executive. Comprehensive guidance has been produced by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government for use in England and is a useful reference document: (**https://www.gov.uk/guidance/safer-public-places-urban-centres-and-green-spaces-covid-19**).

1.2 What we mean by 'urban centres' and 'green spaces'

The focus of this document is those urban centres and green spaces likely to experience high footfall, particularly as the restrictions on staying at home are gradually eased through the stages of the Recovery Plan.

Urban centres – in Northern Ireland normally those settlements with populations over 5,000 inhabitants are considered urban but in this guidance can be used in all settlements – with a focus on publicly accessible areas such as high or main streets, transport hubs and shopping areas.

Green spaces – are publicly accessible open spaces focussed in, but not limited to, urban and suburban environments including parks, burial grounds and cemeteries.

2. Principles for safer urban centres and green spaces

Owners and operators of public places should take into account the latest advice on social distancing from the Public Health Agency when identifying key issues in urban centres and green spaces.

Guidance on social distancing, protecting the most vulnerable, face coverings, cleaning and hygiene are covered below:

2.1 Social distancing

Public Health Agency has advised maintaining 2 metres (6ft) distance from others (outside of your immediate household) to reduce the risk of transmission of coronavirus. 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.

2.2 Protecting people who are at higher risk

Individuals who are shielding (and have been advised they are included within the clinically extremely vulnerable group) are now able to leave home. They, along with people who are clinically vulnerable and may be at higher risk of severe illness (for example, people with some underlying medical conditions), have been advised to take extra care in observing social distancing. Further guidance can be found here: **https://www.nidirect.gov. uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19- advice-vulnerable-people**

2.3 Face coverings

It is recommended that individuals consider using face coverings in particular circumstances - short periods in enclosed spaces where social distancing is not possible and where they will come into contact with people they do not normally meet.

In practice, these circumstances will largely mean on public transport and in shops.

In green spaces, consider using face coverings in more frequently used areas such as car parks.

The use of face coverings is not mandatory; however, this may change in the future and adherence to Public Health Agency guidelines on this should apply at all times.

Crucially, individuals should not get a false sense of security about the level of protection provided by wearing a face covering. Face coverings do not replace social distancing. If anyone has

symptoms of COVID-19 they and their household must isolate at home. It is essential that everyone continues to:

- practise social distancing as much as humanly possible
- wash their hands thoroughly throughout the day
- 'catch it, kill it, bin it' when they sneeze or cough

Face coverings should not be used by children under the age of 2, those with respiratory problems or those who may find it difficult to manage them correctly.

It is important to use face coverings properly and wash hands before putting them on and after taking them off.

2.4 Cleaning

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

Increased cleaning may not be appropriate in some green spaces where the risk presented by touching rails is low.

Individuals must practice good hygiene to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission whatever the environment.

2.5 Hygiene – hand washing

To help everyone maintain good hygiene, consideration should be given to:

- Provision of handwashing facilities and, where not readily available or accessible, sufficient provision of automated hand sanitising dispensers
- Where possible, providing either paper towels or electrical hand dryers in handwashing facilities
- Using simple, clear and accessible images and messaging to build awareness of good handwashing technique and other respiratory hygiene behaviours, e.g. around coughing and sneezing in public places, with consideration for groups whose first language may not be English or where alternative formats may be required
- 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

In addition, Public Health Guidance on COVID-19 can be found on the Public Health Agency website below: **https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/covid-19-coronavirus**

3. Issues for Public Spaces

It will be important to identify the key design issues and potential temporary interventions related to social distancing in urban centres and green spaces. This will be particularly important in places with the densest development and where high levels of footfall are expected. The following steps, which are mentioned in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government guidance for use in England, could be applied:

1. **Identify your public spaces.** These could be transport hubs, high streets, shopping centres, areas for employment and commercial uses and parks; typically characterised by high footfall or constrained areas for transport modes, pedestrian, cycle and vehicular

2. Consider **user groups**; who will be using the space and the level of activity/ footfall expected

3. Assess the key social distancing **issues, potential conflicts and risks**

4. Consider the interventions that can be made to **address** these issues, conflicts and risks

5. Consider the **statutory and legal implications**, and liaise with statutory bodies

6. Consider the **implementation of temporary** physical interventions, timings and procurement implications that will be suitable in the public realm

7. Consider the **management of spaces** and interventions including;
   a. Guiding movement through the spaces
   b. The potential need for any enforcement measures such as at entrance areas to supervise and assist

8. Consider the **maintenance issues** such as cleaning and repairing

9. **Monitor** use, management and maintenance and effectiveness of such measures

10. **Review** and consider the phasing in and out of such measures.

Urban Centres
4. Management of urban centres

In managing urban centre 'hotspots' owners and operators should take account of any issues identified in their assessments and consider applying temporary interventions to ensure social distancing as it is these areas, which provide retail services, which pose increased risk when restrictions are eased.

It is recognised that despite common issues our urban centres have their own unique identities and that interventions may have to be tailored or adjusted to fit.

To ensure social distancing in urban centres, owners and operators are advised to consider:

- How their pedestrian space is managed?
- How people are moved around within the centres?
- What queuing requirements are necessary?
- The management of traffic.

4.1 Potential interventions that could support social distancing

In terms of managing pedestrian space you should consider the following:

- Footway widening to accommodate distancing between pedestrians, including the use of temporary barriers in the carriageway; changes to parking bays, loading bays and cycle lanes
- Reducing unnecessary obstacles, for example planters, and add markings/tape on seating to maintain social distancing
- Security considerations
- The impacts of measures on people with disabilities and other groups needs to be kept under consideration and may call for an objective approach
- Signing and communications to remind pedestrians of distance requirements

In terms of managing pedestrian movement you should consider the following:

- One-way movement of pedestrians to maintain 2m (6ft) distancing
- Signing to encourage pedestrians to wait and allow others to pass at entry ways or along footpaths
- The provision of separate entry and exit routes for pedestrian access with clear signs
- How to make best use of access to entry and exit routes to minimise queues
- The movement of bus stops/shelters to areas which can accommodate queuing in line with social distancing requirements

In terms of managing queuing you should consider the following:

- Defined areas to indicate where pedestrians should stand when queuing using spray markings or temporary barriers
- The management of multiple queues for different businesses through clear signing and the use of stewards/staff as appropriate

- "Do not join the queue" signs provided at popular destinations, when capacity reached

In terms of traffic management, you should consider the following:

- How traffic lanes could be closed, made one way or completely pedestrianised
- How delivery access and timing and essential access for street works and maintenance should be scheduled
- Reducing car parking layout and spacing even if this means reducing capacity
- Suspending on-street parking to facilitate other measures
- Signing to inform pedestrians and road users of changes to road layouts
- Any security considerations, and the impact of measures on people with disabilities and other groups, need to be kept under consideration. (This includes access for blue badge holders and may call for a balanced approach.)

Green Spaces
5. Management of green spaces

In managing green spaces owners and operators should take account of any issues identified in their assessments and consider applying temporary interventions to ensure social distancing in these areas.

Green spaces will typically include:

- Public parks
- Recreation grounds
- Publicly accessible playing fields
- Public open spaces associated with housing developments
- Public burial grounds

5.1 Issues around green spaces

Issues for maintaining social distancing around green spaces may include:

- High levels of footfall particularly in warmer weather, during the day and in dense urban centres
- Addressing different needs of multiple user groups including pedestrians, cyclists, young people, families, older people and those with disabilities
- Restricted entry and exit points limiting the flow of people and potentially creating queues

- Need to accommodate different users moving in different patterns across these spaces
- Visitor car parking, loading and maintenance access
- Ability to wash hands or hand sanitation

As with urban centres, to ensure social distancing in green spaces, owners and operators are advised to consider:

- How their pedestrian space is managed?
- How people are moved around within the spaces?
- What queuing requirements are necessary?
- The management of traffic

5.2 Potential interventions that could support social distancing

In terms of managing pedestrian space you should consider the following:

- Footway widening to accommodate distancing between pedestrians, including through use of temporary barriers, changes to parking bays and cycle lanes

- Reducing unnecessary obstacles, for example planters and the addition of markings/tape on seating to maintain social distancing
- The placement of signage and communications to remind pedestrians of distance requirements. This could be through spray markings and signing at entrances
- Any necessary security considerations and the impacts of these measures on people with disabilities and other groups needs to be kept under consideration and may call for an objective approach

In terms of managing pedestrian movement you should consider the following:

- Introducing one-way movement of pedestrians to maintain 2m (6ft) distancing
- Signage to encourage pedestrians to wait and allow others to pass at entry ways or along footpaths
- The provision of separate entry and exit routes for pedestrian access with clear signs
- The enlargement of entrances and exits to minimise queues

In terms of managing queuing you should consider the following:

- Having defined areas to indicate where pedestrians should stand when queuing using spray markings or temporary barriers
- The provision of "Do not join the queue" signs provided at popular destinations, when capacity reached

In terms of traffic management, you should consider the following:

- Any car parking layouts and spacing, reducing capacity as appropriate
- The need for delivery access and essential access for works and maintenance
- Any security considerations, and the impact of measures on people with disabilities and other groups, need to be kept under consideration. (This includes access for blue badge holders and may call for a balanced approach.)

6. Regulatory and communication considerations

6.1 Regulatory considerations

As an owner and/or operator of urban and/or green spaces it is important to consider all relevant legal obligations before implementing interventions outlined by this guidance. As set out above, this guidance does not impose any legal obligations and there may be processes required prior to you being able to implement the guidance. These regulatory considerations may include, for example, those in relation to traffic management, planning and fire risk/safety.

6.2 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 safer 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 safer 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

Appendix

Where to obtain further information:

General COVID-19 advice and guidance

NI Executive - Coronavirus (COVID-19):
Overview and general advice
**https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/
coronavirus-covid-19-overview-and-advice**

**https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/campaigns/
coronavirus-covid-19**

NI Executive - Coronavirus recovery plan
**https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/
coronavirus-recovery-plan**

Public Health Agency - COVID-19
**https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/covid-
19-coronavirus**

Social distancing
**https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/
coronavirus-covid-19-staying-home-and-
self-isolation**

**https://www.gov.uk/government/
publications/staying-alert-and-safe-
social-distancing**

**https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/news/
social-distancing-essential-battle-
against-coronavirus**

Vulnerable people
**https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/
coronavirus-covid-19-advice-vulnerable-
people**

Face coverings
**https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/
coronavirus-covid-19-overview-and-advice**

**https://www.gov.uk/government/
publications/staying-safe-outside-your-
home/staying-safe-outside-your-home
#face-coverings**

**https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/covid-
19-coronavirus/covid-19-information-public**

Hand washing and hand hygiene
**https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/
hand-hygiene**

Safer Public Places - Urban centres and
Green spaces (England)
**https://www.gov.uk/guidance/safer-public-
places-urban-centres-and-green-spaces-
covid-19**

THIS LIST MAY NOT BE EXHAUSTIVE