SOCIAL DISTANCING OPTIONS

ANNEX G: PUBLIC SPACES

CURRENT MEASURES:

- Indoor and outdoor public spaces closed - those listed in the Regulations include entertainment venues, libraries and museums, and places of worship.
- Public parks remain open, although many have put restrictions in place. Guidance to exercise outdoors once a day at most, and not to travel to other locations (e.g beauty spots) for outdoor exercise. In Wales, they have enabled the closure of public paths (e.g. in Snowdonia).
- In terms of impact of these measures: footfall on high streets is down ca. 75% year on year. High street commercial tenants are struggling to pay rent. Only 47% of retail rents were paid last quarter, according to the latest survey; the outlook for next quarter payments (end June) is worse. If we can give people confidence that high streets can be operated safely and more shops are open then we can start to unwind these losses. Latest Google Mobility data also shows traffic around transit stations down 70% and parks down 37%.

Part 1: MEASURES PROPOSED

1. **Update and clarify rules to ease the restrictions on leaving the home, including**: clarification that individuals are permitted to travel (within reason) to public spaces, are able to exercise outdoors more than once a day, and can sub bathe with members of their household. Greater publicity of these exceptions as part of keeping healthy and reducing isolation.
2. **Open most outdoor spaces** to the public (including closed areas in parks such as outdoor gyms and selected sports facilities - it may be necessary to keep playgrounds closed due to inability to maintain social distancing - and National Parks where currently closed).
3. **At a later stage (but not yet) reopen other indoor spaces,** starting with those that are important to wellbeing or learning e.g. places of worship, community centres and libraries. In later phases, we would consider cinemas, theatres etc. but with reduced ticketing. Opening places of worship is connected to proposals on allowing people to gather in larger numbers.

All these measures could be segmented in a number of ways, and would all need to be subject to social distancing guidelines (2m gap etc.) and adjustments put in place to ensure places are safe.

Part 2: BENEFITS OF THESE MEASURES

- Covid Health: Minimal risk of opening outdoor spaces subject to social distancing guidelines. In general, the more space that is available to people, the more space between people can be maintained. Spaces with hard surfaces (e.g. outdoor gyms) and where social distancing is

harder (e.g. playgrounds) will increase the risk of transmission. Opening indoor spaces would heighten the infection risk - potentially significantly.

- Economic/public services: Some benefit by reopening public spaces which are also businesses (National Trust, public gardens etc); greater public confidence in the safety of public spaces and greater messaging that they are open may lead to more people feeling confident in using other outdoor spaces (e.g. for work or travelling to work).
- Social: Significant benefit to wellbeing through opening of outdoor spaces and places of worship, and relaxed guidance on exercising, and reduced isolation. Facilities like community or youth centres can help to address other vulnerabilities e.g. to youth crime. There are studies that set out the societal and economic benefits of open public spaces[1].
- Non-Covid health: Mental and physical health benefits by increased ability to exercise outdoors. This will be particularly important over the summer months.
- Fairness: Significant benefit, particularly for those who do not have access to outdoor space. Opportunity to clarify guidance in areas that policy is being implemented inconsistently e.g. enabling cycling in parks, fishing in rivers and public spaces.
- Sustainability: Moderate, with risks that need to be managed actively (eg reopening could be undermined by people failing to observe social distancing, media amplifying those instances, and owners / operators of spaces reacting by closing them).

Part 3: RISKS OF THESE MEASURES

- COVID health: Increased use of public spaces (including playgrounds) will lead to more social contacts and interaction between households. This could push the rate of transmission up greater than what can be afforded. [Opening some but not all public spaces - such as tennis courts in parks, but not in tennis clubs - means those that are open may be busier. An increased number of people gathering will heighten demand for PPE, which could impact on supply to frontline settings.
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- Fairness: Would need to open both public and private places (e.g. golf courses, community centres - where some are charity-run and others are LA-commissioned) to avoid risk of disconnect or undue economic impact.
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- Sustainability: Social distancing is more challenging to enforce in outdoor environments where this relies more heavily on individuals' discretion.
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- Public Services: Additional enforcement may be required for mass events to ensure members of the public are appropriately social distancing in public places.
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- Comms and guidance. Given the breadth of types of public spaces, specificity as to which venues can and cannot reopen will be challenging, and any guidance is likely to need to be broad. If encouraging visits to national parks, beaches etc. we could open up associated issues with second homes and holiday rentals - we would need to be clear that the reasons for leaving home did not extend to travel of this nature.
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[1] https://www.nber.org/papers/w25107.pdf; 'The Social Value of Public Spaces', Joseph Rowntree Foundation;

- Transport hubs are likely to face particularly acute pressure (eg crowding outside stations if transport demand outstrips supply).
- Operational challenges and delivery risks: in updating public spaces to be Covid safe, including capacity, financial, technological, procurement, planning and enforcement restrictions. For some operations, it may not be economically viable to open, particularly if additional staff are needed. Many local authority run facilities (such as libraries) have diverted staff and volunteers to work on Covid-19 response, so may not be able to re-open immediately - though this could enable them to re-open as some form of support hub.

Part 4: POTENTIAL MITIGATION TO ADDRESS THE RISKS

- Safer spaces: To mitigate the increased rate of transmission, a programme of work to make public spaces safer should be rolled out. This means bringing together Local Authorities, stakeholders (including religious groups on places of worship), PHE and HSE to develop and issue guidance on safer places. This should include: (a) maximising safety where possible, for instance through cleaning regimes; (b) being ready to take rapid action if inadequate space is available, for example due to a greater uptake in demand; (c) expanding the amount of public space in high streets and outside stations to reduce overcrowding, e.g, by closing areas to vehicle traffic; (d) adding to public guidance, e.g. by asking people to always keep to the left when walking or running; comms on effective social distancing including case studies of where it is being done well. Certification schemes should be considered subject to HSE, local authorities or national umbrella bodies being able to enforce them.
- Financial support that was made available to owners and operators of public spaces to make adjustments for safety and provide more regular cleaning would ensure this is more likely to happen and give the public confidence that it will.
- Provision of PPE, cleaning and other mitigations for those working in public spaces (subject to scientific advice).

Part 5: IMPLICATIONS OF TRACK, TRACE AND TEST FOR THESE MEASURES

- When track, trace, and test, is available, those who have been in contact with anyone symptomatic will be asked to isolate - this will reduce the number of asymptomatic people using public spaces and decrease infections. A negative test could then allow anyone in isolation to return to using these spaces.
- Effective data collection from track, trace, and test could allow any hotspots for infection to be closed and further measures taken before they are reopened.

ANNEX G2: Full list of public spaces relevant to measures

1. High streets
2. Shopping Centres
3. Areas around transport hubs
4. Car parks
5. Public Toilets
6. Places of Worship
7. Crematoria and Burial Grounds
8. Public Buildings with public facing roles – e.g. town halls, job centres
9. Community Centres
10. Public spaces around office developments
11. Greenspaces: parks and playgrounds, National Parks and the Countryside including beauty spots, festivals and mass events in green spaces
12. Beaches, National Forests
13. Public Participatory Events – e.g. planning examinations in public, the Courts (MoJ)
14. Providing or attending social hospitality settings (consumer-facing), including pubs, bars, cafes, restaurants, hotels, B&Bs and holiday lets
15. Providing or attending ticketed entertainment and events, including cinemas, theatres, bowling alleys, amusement arcades, soft play areas, bingo halls, casinos, skating rinks, festivals, concerts, professional sport and sport gatherings
16. Providing or attending cultural properties and attractions, including museums, galleries, heritage sites, visitor attractions, amusement parks and zoos
17. Participating in non-professional sport and physical activity including gyms and sports courts
18. Broadcasting and creative production, including for TV, film, music
19. Sports grounds, leisure centres, swimming pools, lidos

Annex G3: Full list of public spaces closed to the public by the Regulations (excluding 'high street' retail establishments)

1. Places of worship
2. Community Centres
3. Cinemas
4. Theatres
5. Nightclubs
6. Bingo halls
7. Concert halls
8. Museums and galleries
9. Casinos
10. Spas
11. Skating rinks
12. Indoor fitness studios, gyms, swimming pools, bowling alleys, amusement arcades or soft play areas or other indoor leisure centres or facilities
13. Funfairs (whether outdoors or indoors).
14. Playgrounds, sports courts and outdoor gyms
15. Car showrooms
16. Auction Houses