



Leicester  
City Council

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# ***Update on Parks & Open Spaces Covid 19 Impact***

Report to the Heritage, Culture, Leisure and Sport  
Scrutiny Commission

Date of commission meeting: 25<sup>th</sup> January 2021

Lead director: John Leach

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## Useful information

- Ward(s) affected: All
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- Report version number: 1.0

### 1. Summary

This report provides an update on how parks and open spaces are being managed in line with current Government Covid19 guidelines. Previous updates were presented to HCLS Scrutiny Commission on the 22nd September 2020 and 16th July 2020. For the purpose of the scrutiny commission this includes Parks and Bereavement Services.

### 2. Recommendations

The Heritage, Culture, Leisure and Sport Scrutiny Commission are asked to note the contents of this report and comment.

### 3. Report

#### 3.1 Legislation

The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) Regulations 2020 came into force on the 26 March 2020. Since then there have been numerous changes to Government legislation and guidance on managing the impact of Coronavirus

Following on from a rapid rise in positive testing rates, Leicester progressed to tier 4 on 30th December before the whole of England was placed into its third national lockdown period which was confirmed on 4<sup>th</sup> January 2021. The services have continued adapt to changing guidance.

#### Current restrictions

All parks and open spaces, children's play areas and public toilets remain open to the public.

Personal exercise is permitted in public outdoor places:

- by yourself
- with the people you live with
- with your support bubble (if you are legally permitted to form one)
- in a childcare bubble where providing childcare
- or, when on your own, with 1 person from another household.

All recreational sport has been placed on hold and is not permitted.

- Tennis Courts – Closed, locked where possible and signage applied.

- Ball Courts – Closed, locked where possible and signage applied. The flood lights have been switched off at these facilities to discourage unauthorised play during the evenings. Additional security fencing has been installed at Spinney Hill & Nelson Mandela Park facilities to aid access prevention due to ongoing breach reports.
- Skateparks – Closed and signage applied
- Outdoor Gyms – Closed and locked where possible, signage is displayed, and hazard tape applied to machines.
- Bowls – Closed out of season.
- Football Pitches – No bookings being taken all league games cancelled, goal posts will be removed at locations where ongoing breaches are reported and ground conditions enable access.
- Rugby – No bookings being taken all league games cancelled.
- Daily Warden patrols supported by mobile security patrolling visits at all main park sites or known ASB/Non Covid -19 compliance hotspots/sites at weekends.

We have retained social distancing measures throughout the pandemic within parks & public open spaces. We have 2 metre social distancing notices at key entrances on all principle locations and painted Keep 2 Metre apart on parks footpaths at key strategic points and external to relevant toilet facilities.

Car parks remain open to ensure individuals with poor mobility or who live in areas of high density housing and have a lack of garden space we have taken the decision to maintain our car parks. The pay and display requirement was reinstated on 3rd August and will remain in place during this lockdown.

All group volunteering activities are suspended.

Parks office based staff are working from home where possible and all office buildings are covid secure certificated.

All grounds maintenance staff remain operational city wide, those who usually deliver services placed on hold due to Covid-19 are being redeployed as required to support parks education as covid Marshalls.

Samsic Security Services have been engaged to aid covid marshalling at weekends due to expected increased usage levels in line with previous lockdown periods.

Parks have also engaged additional agency cleaning staff, alongside working in close partnership with Building Cleaning Services and Cleansing Services to ensure public toilet regimes are completed 7 days per week.

### **Enforcement**

The Police are the lead agency for investigating and enforcing against individuals breaching Covid regulations.

The Police are following the “4 E’s” approach; Engage, Explain, Encourage, Enforce. Adopting this approach allows for effective engagement to take place prior to any

escalation to enforcement action. Enforcement will take place when there is any blatant disregard for the regulations or there is a refusal to engage and a continued refusal to adhere to regulation.

In terms of closing any City Parks, the breaches of Covid legislation are likely to occur when individuals do not wish to leave. In terms of closing the park, this would remain within the Local Authority's responsibilities. The Police would continue to support the Local Authority regarding their responsibilities. See Appendix 1 for decision making process to temporary close a site.

If the police have concerns over a site and are recommending a closure/part closure this will be communicated via an operational officer at Inspector or Chief Inspector level, and should in the first instance be directed to the Parks Security Officer for a decision. If there is not agreement this should be escalated to the P&OSOM or HOS for a decision.

Any decision to close a site will consider the impact on other local green space, and in terms of the closure of any car park the impact on the immediate local neighbourhood, e.g. displacement at Watermead has significantly impacted on Alderton Close residents in the past which has caused major issues for the local authority and police. In addition, consideration needs to be given to the wider population in terms of impact from removing the availability of an open space for exercise, which is a Government recommendation.

As part of the decision process all sites have been assessed and ranked in terms of their suitability for closure, as most sites cannot realistically be 'closed', e.g. Victoria Park has open access and would be resource intensive for both the local authority and the police to manage and enforce.

#### **4. Bereavement Services**

Bereavement Services has continued to operate at Stage 2 of its operational Pandemic Plan to meet the needs for burials and cremations

Gilroes Crematorium and cemetery depots have all been risk assessed as Covid19 Secure and remain fully operational. The wearing of face coverings is mandatory when attending an indoors funeral service.

The Muslim funeral hall (Janazgah) at Saffron Hill Cemetery has been re-opened with Covid measures in place, and revised conditions of use circulated to Muslim funeral arrangers in the city.

#### **Current restrictions on funerals**

Funerals can be attended by a maximum of 30 people (excluding funeral staff). This remains the same restriction on numbers in the national lockdown as at all Tier levels.

Religious, belief-based or commemorative events linked to a person's death, such as stone setting ceremonies, the scattering of ashes or a wake, can also continue with up to 6 people in attendance. During Tiered restrictions this was limited to 15 people.

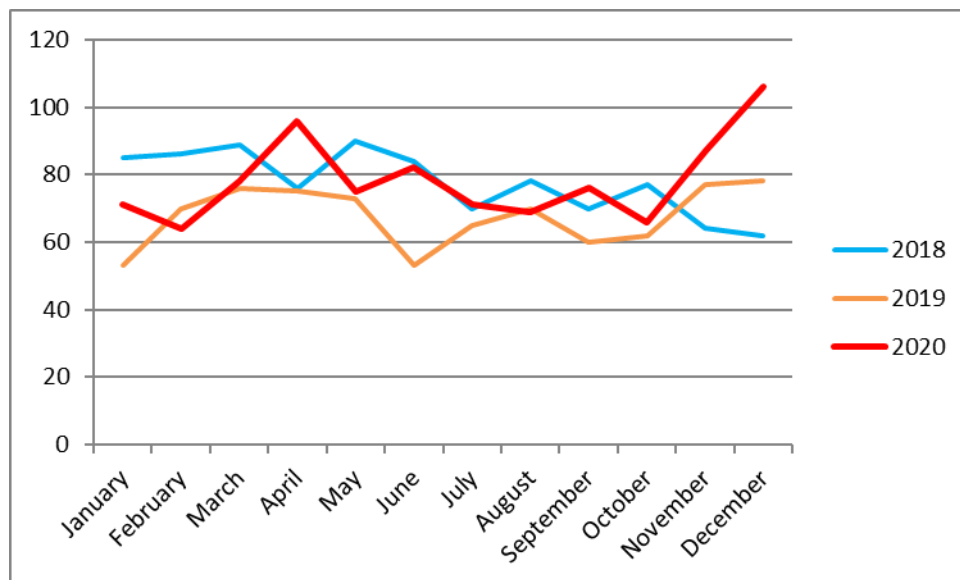
**Impact of Coronavirus**

Government forecasts indicate that deaths arising from Coronavirus will continue to rise before peaking in February 2021.

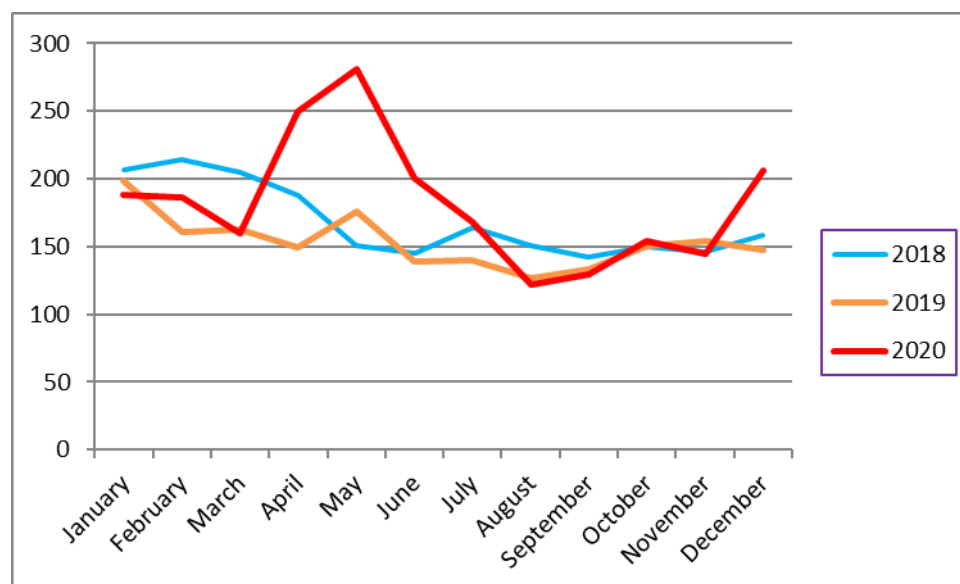
As at 13<sup>th</sup> January 2021, Bereavement Services had undertaken funerals for 403 confirmed Covid deaths.

During 2020 the service undertook 941 burials (+15.8%) and 2,189 cremations (+19.0%), representing significant increases from 2019 due to high numbers of excess deaths

Number of Burials:



Number of Cremations:



The tender for a new multi-media system for Gilroes Crematorium has now been completed and installation is planned for the end of February 2021. This will include enhanced access to music, visual tributes, funeral recording and funeral webcasting services to support bereaved families who cannot attend a funeral. The contract was won by Vivedia Ltd t/a Obitus who are a leading provider of these services to crematoria across the UK.

**5. Summary of appendices:**

Appendix 1 – LCC decision making process to close a site

## LCC Decision making process for Police site closures requests

