



Leicester
City Council

Update on Parks & Open Spaces Covid 19 Impact

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

Date of commission meeting: 28th April 2021

Lead director: John Leach

Useful information

- Ward(s) affected: All
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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, 16th July 2020 and 25th January 2021. 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 the third national lockdown period which was confirmed on 4th January 2021 a government spring update released on 22nd February 2021 mapped out a roadmap to recovery.

Roadmap to recovery – key steps and dates

Step One - From 29 March 2021

1. Outdoor gatherings (including in private gardens) of either 6 people (the Rule of 6) or 2 households will also be allowed.
2. Outdoor sports facilities such as tennis and basketball courts, and open-air swimming pools, will also be allowed to reopen, and people will be able to take part in formally organised outdoor sports.
3. The 'stay at home' rule will end on 29 March 2021 but many restrictions will remain in place.
4. People should continue to, work from home where they can and minimise the number of journeys they make where possible, avoiding travel at the busiest times and routes.

Points 1 & 3 will make it more challenging for Parks Wardens to challenge larger groups in terms of ascertaining compliance within groups of 6 people being made up residents from only 2 households.

Point 2 will enable various sports and fitness facilities to be re-opened including: -

- o Play area's (Remained open since June 2020)
- o Outdoor Gym Equipment – To be re-opened, permanent COVID-19 signage already installed at all sites and cleaning will resume alongside inspections.
- o Tennis Courts – Re-opened.
- o Football/Basketball (MUGA) Courts – We are delivering a ball court reopening trial starting 19th April. The trial includes the reopening of 3 park ball courts - located at Spinney Hill Park, Home Farm and Gilmorton Avenue. These facilities will be closely monitored to ascertain the scale of group usage and compliance with the Covid-19 restrictions. Appropriate intervention will take place if required, working alongside police colleagues. All other park ball courts will remain closed whilst the trial takes place. These facilities are open access and have required additional support and attention previously in order to mitigate against risk associated with non-compliance with the COVID-19 restrictions. We are therefore being cautious in our approach in terms of re-opening these facilities.
- o Governing bodies of sports (bowls, football, rugby etc) will determine the timeframe for organised sports/leagues to resume play. Parks Services are working closely with Sports Services to ensure any sports specific maintenance requirements have sufficient lead in time prior to sports restarting.
- o Skate parks have re-opened on the basis that it is an individual activity, reduced physical contact or numbers required to participate. Although we remain mindful skateparks can encourage gatherings between service users.

Point 4 working from home guidance has been adopted where possible across the service and will continued to be adopted.

Step 2 – No earlier than 12th April 2021

1. Opening of non-essential retail; personal care premises such as hairdressers and nail salons; and public buildings, including libraries and community centres.
2. Indoor leisure facilities such as gyms will also reopen (but only for use by people on their own or in household groups);
3. Most outdoor attractions and settings including outdoor hospitality venues, zoos, theme parks, and drive-in cinemas.

Point 1, will enable community bookings of parks buildings with community spaces to resume (Abbey Park Education Centre, Evington Park House & sport on parks buildings).

Point 2, may aid reduction in outdoor gym facility usage.

Point 3, permits the reopening of Abbey Park Pets Corner if COVID-19 secure improvement work has been completed to increase hand washing facilities and bird flu outbreak nationally doesn't prevent reopening. Parks are currently working closely with Health and Safety and Estates & Building Services to agree a redesign of neighbouring toilet block and secure the required funding to complete works.

Point 3, Annual Fun Fair Bookings – Fun Fair contractor confirmed on 24 February 2021 they will be formally writing to cancel the Easter fun fair. However, they have confirmed they are considering requesting a Whitsun (24 May fun fair at VP) and then the summer fun event at Abbey (July/August).

Step 3 - No earlier than 17 May 2021

1. The government will look to continue easing limits on seeing friends and family wherever possible, allowing people to decide on the appropriate level of risk for their circumstances.
2. This means that most legal restrictions on meeting others outdoors will be lifted - although gatherings of over 30 people will remain illegal.
3. Indoor hospitality will reopen - and as in Step 2, venues will not have to serve a substantial meal with alcoholic drinks; nor will there be a curfew. Customers will, however, have to order, eat and drink while seated.
4. The government will also allow some larger performances and sporting events in indoor venues with a capacity of 1,000 people or half-full (whichever is a lower number), and in outdoor venues with a capacity of 4,000 people or half-full (whichever is a lower number). In the largest outdoor seated venues, where crowds can be spread out, up to 10,000 people will be able to attend (or a quarter-full, whichever is lower).

Points 1 & 2 is likely to result in a marked increase in larger group gatherings, with parks wardens and local police still retaining responsibility to challenge single groups of more than 30 people. This could result in further support on site being required by Police to address groups of 30+ people, where they refuse to separate or move on as parks do not have sufficient enforcement powers to enforce compliance.

Point 2 will enable the return of Leicester Environmental Volunteering group sessions consisting of a maximum of 30 people including staff leading the sessions.

Point 2 the decision to reopen parks and open spaces ball court areas to be reviewed, in line with increased group gatherings numbers permitted (Max 30).

Point 3 may result in a reduction of groups gathering to consume alcohol on parks and open spaces but it is unlikely to eradicate the issue altogether as parks will remain the preferred environment for some.

When it is determined that festivals and events return to the city (within permitted parameters) this will be managed by the festivals and events team who manage bookings and associated support processes. However, such considerations may require additional support from the parks and cleansing teams in terms of for example, event layouts and waste management etc.

Enforcement

If there is a problem the Police will resolve it by communicating clearly and encouraging people to behave responsibly.

The Police are following 'the 4 Es': Engage. Explain. Encourage. Enforce.

First they will try to engage with someone, explain how we think they are breaking the rules, and encourage them to change their behaviour to reduce the risk to public safety and health.

If people still do not follow the rules the police can: -

- tell them to disperse
- tell parents to stop their children breaking the rules
- fine them

If someone continues to ignore the instructions, the police can arrest them if they think it is proportionate and necessary.

Fines in England

The Police are the only enforcement body with the legal powers to issue fixed penalty fines in relation to Covid-19.

Fines differ depending on which country you are in. People who do not pay a fine could be taken to court, where they could be fined an unlimited amount.

People aged 18 or over can be fined: -

- £200 for the first offence, lowered to £100 if paid within 14 days
- £400 for the second offence, then doubling for each further offence up to a maximum of £6,400

Site closure decisions

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 Regulatory Manager for a decision. If there is not agreement this should be escalated to the Parks and Open Spaces Operational Manager or Head of Service 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 challenges for all concerned. 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.

Ongoing Police Partnership Communications & Agreed Actions

- Parks to share emerging or ongoing problem profiles with Police where common days/times identified to aid additional Police/joint patrols.
- Parks to adapt evening patrol hours in line with daylight hours.
- Samsic security mobile patrols will be reviewed ongoing and adapted as required including weekdays during the evening and weekends/bank holidays.
- Samsic security static patrols to be used should ongoing and significant problems emerge and possibly during school holiday periods on known site with problem hotspots (ball courts etc)
- Sports Services/FA will support enforcement; allocation of possible penalties should league clubs be found to be breaking current regulations.

There is shared concern regarding the potential increase in use of parks and open spaces with the warmer weather and longer daylight hours. With increased demands across services, the above agreed actions will look to ensure that we are sharing relevant information to help us manage concerns / incidents and to prioritise our responses.

Other service actions

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.

All 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 2020.

Parks office-based staff will remain working from home until June 2021 where possible and all office buildings are covid secure certificated.

All grounds maintenance staff remain operational city wide, those who have been redeployed to aid other services within Parks are being returned to their regular roles and responsibilities in line with the road map to recovery.

Parks will continue to work in partnership with Cleansing and Building Cleaning to continue providing the enhanced public toilet cleaning regimes 7 days per week.

4. Bereavement Services

Restrictions on funeral attendance

Funerals can be attended by a maximum of 30 people (excluding funeral staff).

The restriction on numbers attending a funeral remains in place and unchanged at all stages of the Government's roadmap through to the 21st June at the earliest.

Religious, belief-based or commemorative events linked to a person's death, such as stone setting ceremonies, the scattering of ashes or a wake, continue subject to the following roadmap restrictions on attendance:

- 29th March - maximum attendance 6 people
- 12th April - maximum attendance 15 people
- 17th May - maximum attendance 30 people
- 21st June - no legal limits on maximum attendance numbers

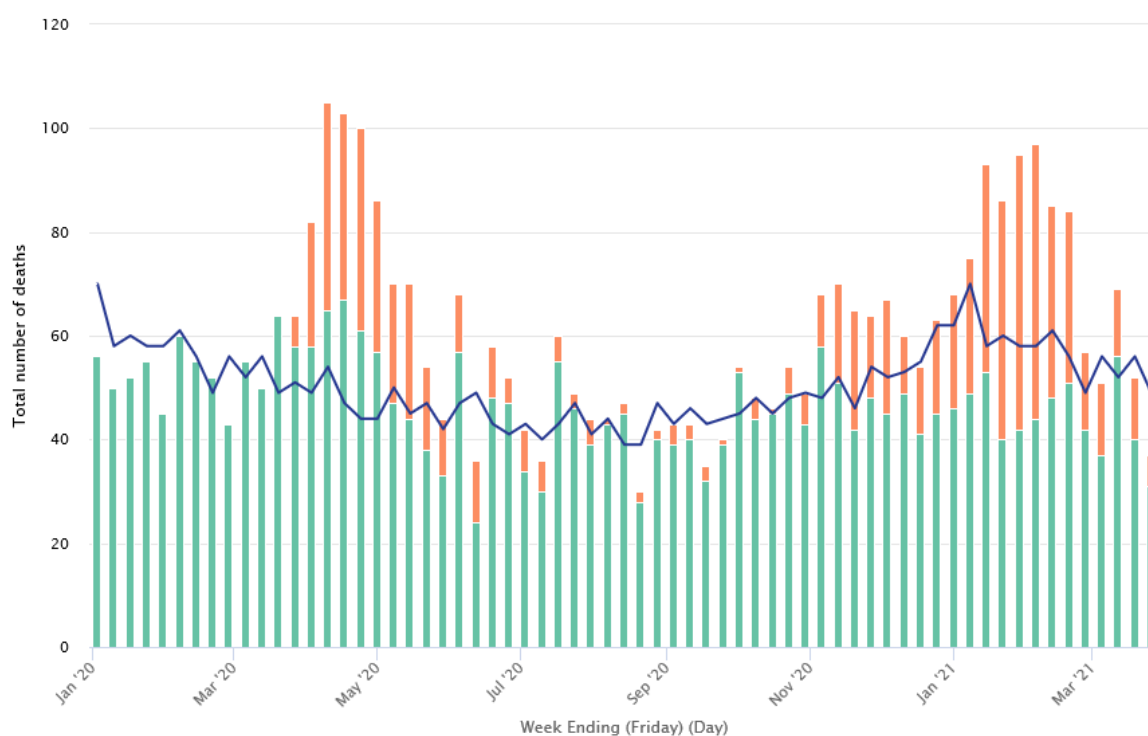
Implementation of future steps on the roadmap are subject to the Government's confirmation as currently these are 'at the earliest' dates and therefore may change.

Impact of Coronavirus

As at 13th April 2021, Bereavement Services had undertaken 635 funerals following confirmed Covid deaths.

Figure 1 below highlights that although the highest peak for deaths occurred during the first wave in April 2020, the second wave has resulted in more deaths than the first as this wave has lasted longer. Government modelling forecasts a third wave as highly likely later in the year.

Figure 1: Number of deaths (Leicester residents):



The following graph, Figure 2, shows the demand for burial services. In total 1,054 burials took place between 1st April 2020 and 31st March 2021, an increase of 28.3% on the previous 12month period.

Figure 2: Number of Burials (April to March):

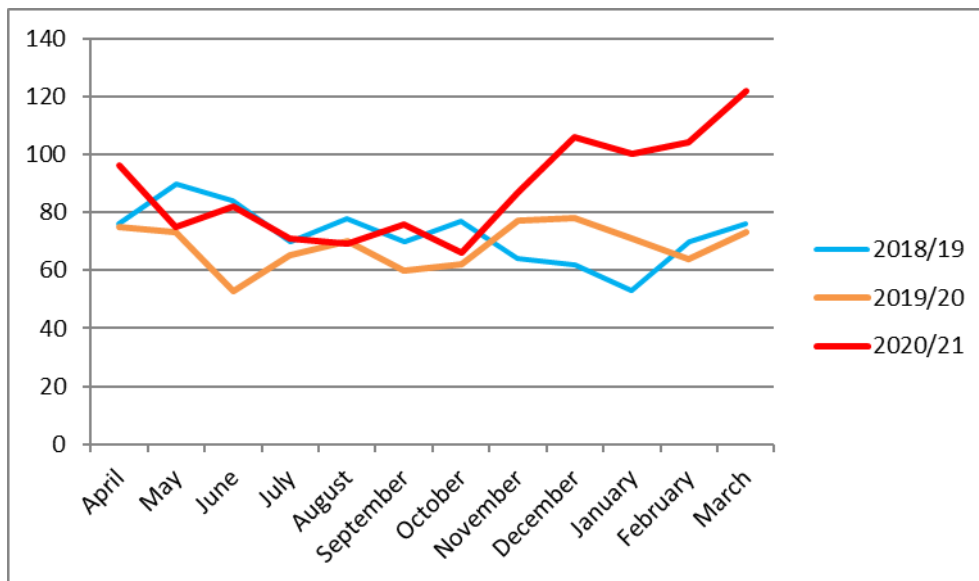
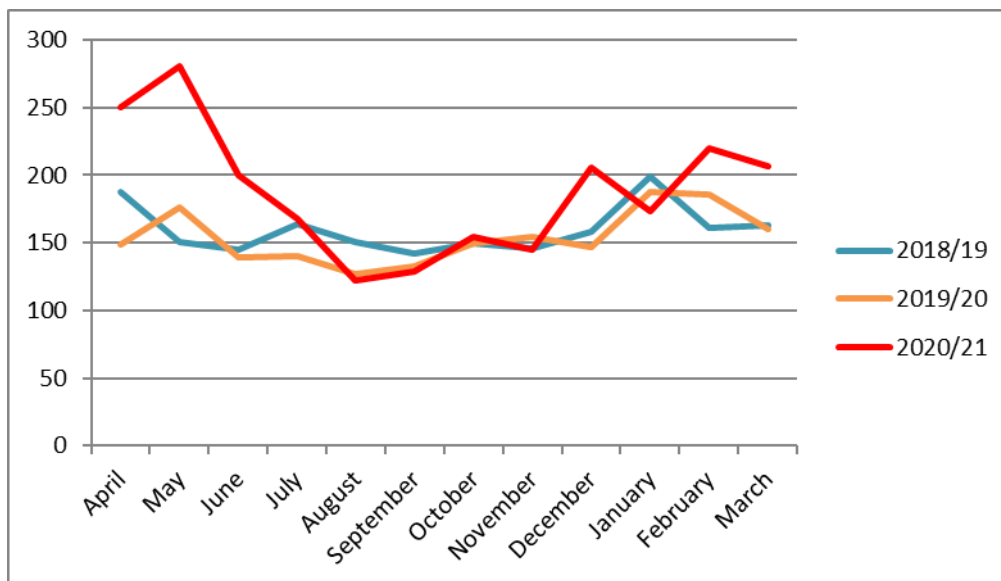


Figure 3 below shows the demand for cremation services. In total 2,255 cremations took place between 1st April 2020 and 31st March 2021, an increase of 21.9% on the previous 12 month period.

Figure 3: Number of Cremations:



During March 2021, 26 funeral services (13% of total) at Gilroes Crematorium were webcast on behalf of bereaved families following the installation of a new multi-media system. This is expected to grow significantly over the coming months.

5. Summary of appendices:

Appendix 1 – LCC decision making process to close a site

LCC Decision making process for Police site closures requests

