

Construction Industry COVID-19 Operational Guidance

March 24, 2020

Last night the Prime Minister ordered:

- people to stay at home, except for very limited purposes;

- closure of non-essential shops and community spaces; and

- the banning of gatherings of more than two people in public.

The UK Government in its guidance confirmed that travelling to and from work was permitted, but only where this is absolutely cannot be done from home. Following the Prime Minister's announcement the Communities and Housing Secretary tweeted advice for the construction industry, *"If you are working on site, you can continue to do so. But please follow Public Health England guidance on social distancing"*.

This has been confirmed by the Cabinet Minister Michael Gove, who this morning stated *"... construction should continue on sites. People should exercise sensitivity and common sense and follow social distancing measures, but construction in the open air on those sorts of sites can continue ... It is important that when we have construction work that is going on which can be done safely in the open air on new sites that does continue."*

It is difficult to reconcile this guidance with the construction industry, which is by its nature a collaborative effort involving teams of people working in close proximity. Government guidance exempts from the order preventing public gatherings of more than two people, any gathering which is essential for work purposes but these meetings should be minimised as should all other gatherings in the workplace.

So what conclusions can developers and contractors drawn from the various Government announcements?

Construction is not an industry which the Government has ordered to close and the Government consider it is important the industry continues and stay open, but the sites should only stay open if it is safe to do so. It will be for each developer and contractor to determine if the construction operations can be carrying out safely while maintaining social distancing measures. In particular, can welfare facilities operate safely while still maintaining social distancing measures? The Construction Leadership Council (CLC) has published Site Operating Procedures, which should assist in making these difficult decisions. The CLC's SOP announcement is available [here](#).

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