

Annex 1 - Re-opening the city centre



Topic: COVID_19 Economic Recovery – re-opening the city centre

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Purpose

To set out the anticipated impacts of the government's timetable for the easing of lockdown on the city centre and the proposed responses and mitigations.

Recommendations

Delegate to the Corporate Director of Economy and Place in consultation with the Executive Member for Economy the following interventions:

- To provide temporary public toilets in the city centre during the initial stages of lockdown easing should they be required at a cost of £2k per week
- The expenditure of up to £200k ARG to fund the delivery of the principles for managing city and secondary centre spaces that are set out in this report
- The submission of any planning application required for temporary managed outdoor spaces
- Extend the Covid Marshalls until the end of June at a cost of £28k to facilitate the covid-safe management of the city through Covid Containment Grant funding

Background

On Monday 22 February the prime minister set out the proposed timetable for the easing of the lockdown measures that have been introduced in response to Covid-19. Over a series of 5 week periods – subject to meeting four tests relating to the prevalence of the virus at each stage – restrictions will gradually be released, reducing social distancing measures and allowing the reopening of the economy. These four stages begin on 8 March and will run through to all restrictions being lifted by 21 June at the earliest.

Roadmap to easing lockdown and the impact on the city centre

	March				Apr				May				Jun				
	8	15	22	29	5	12	19	26	3	10	17	24	31	7	14	21	28
Step 1	Meet one person outdoors Stay at home				Rule of 6 outdoors Stay at home ends Stay local												
Step 2					Seated pub beer gardens open with rule of 6 No need for a substantial meal or curfew All shops reopen Self-catering UK holidays for households								School holiday				
Step 3					Easter holiday				Pubs reopen Rule of 6 indoors Groups of 30 outdoors Outdoor and indoor entertainment (with limits) Hotels and B&Bs reopen								
Step 4													All restrictions end Potential social distancing				

Managing the city centre

The likely key impacts and consideration at each stage are as follows:

Stage one

8 March – there are likely to be no significant changes or implications for the city centre. The reopening of schools will potentially increase those travelling on public transport and changing buses in the city centre. The flexibility to meet one other person outside of your household is only a minor change to the existing ability to meet for exercise, including a walk.

29 March – the stay at home order will be lifted although people are encouraged to remain local. This is likely to see an increase in both residents and regional visitors to the city centre, whilst the ability to meet up to 5 other people outdoors will probably mean groups meeting and potentially drinking alcohol in public spaces. There will be increased custom for businesses that are already open in the city centre, particularly those serving takeaway food such as the Shambles Market. The school Easter holidays which run up to the 12 April may see a further increase in footfall and volumes of people

Key considerations

- *Public health messaging and reiterating the stay local message – the city isn't open to visitors*
- *Footstreet hours to remain at 5pm to facilitate closed hospitality businesses running takeaway services*
- *Consideration of additional public toilets to respond to higher numbers of people and eating and drinking in public spaces?(cost of approximately £2k per week)*
- *Covid Marshals and BiD Rangers to focus on ensuring social distancing, particularly in busy areas such as Shambles Market*

Stage two – no earlier than 12 April

The ending of the stay local messaging, beginning of self-catering holidays, and reopening of all shops, hairdressers and pub beers gardens is likely to result in a significant influx of people to the city centre.

Although the need to have a substantial meal has been removed, the requirement for people to be sat outdoors to drink and no indoor opening allowed will limit the majority of hospitality premises capacity to open, putting pressure on those that can and potentially leading to groups drinking in public spaces. The government guidance states that the “*requirement to order, eat and drink while seated (table service) will remain*” which includes pavement café licences and pub beer gardens. It is not yet confirmed whether the new licensing laws introduced last year to allow alcohol to be purchased and consumed off premises will remain, although the prime minister’s spokesperson has suggested that they will. This will be crucial in determining whether a managed outdoor seated area like last summer’s College Green is permissible.

It has been confirmed that pubs operating with outdoor spaces will be allowed to let customers use their toilets.

The removal of the 10pm curfew should reduce the pressure at bus stops and taxi ranks at the end of the evening.

Key considerations:

- Public health messaging that York is open to visitors but please follow social distancing and behave responsibly
- Need to refresh Let’s Be York signage?
- Footstreet hours increased to 8pm to coincide with the reopening of hospitality and pavement café licences
- Continue or provide additional toilets due to the limited number of hospitality businesses with outdoor space leading to drinking in public spaces?
- **Key confirmation required – are off-licence alcohol sales allowed/what flexibility is there on table service?**
- Increased drive for pavement café licences and parklets
- Consideration of creating managed outdoor seating areas IF they are permissible under the rules of serving someone in a seated location
- Potential rise in anti-social behaviour as people rush to socialise

Stage three – no earlier than 17 May

The full reopening of pubs under the rule of 6 indoors and up to 30 people outdoors, plus improving weather, will likely lead to a significant rise of people visiting the city centre in the evenings and all day through weekends. However, the ongoing social distancing requirements will mean that some premises will struggle to operate on indoor custom only and may choose not to open or seek managed outdoor space support.

Demand for outdoor seating will flex with the weather.

Museums, cinemas and theatres can reopen, although there are likely to be little issues beyond ensuring Covid-safe compliance.

Reopening of hotels and B&Bs will again see further visitors to the city.

The racecourse would be able to start to run attended race meetings, although outdoor seated venues will be limited to 10,000 people (or a quarter-full, whichever is lower) although they are seeking clarity from government as to whether they fall under the sports stadia criteria. The first fixture that occurs in stage 3 (assuming the stage is not delayed) is 22nd May.

Key considerations:

- Public health messaging that York is open to visitors but please follow social distancing and behave responsibly
- Covid-safe events programme?
- Need for additional public toilets reduces due to pubs being able to open indoors? Or still required to facilitate any managed outdoor spaces/events?
- Ongoing need for outdoor seating due to social distancing and rule of 6 reducing pubs and restaurants indoor capacity
- Race dates may lead to a further spike in city centre footfall and visitors

Stage four – no earlier than 21 June

All restrictions end.

Key considerations:

- Public health messaging to be sensible
- Demand for outdoor seating may continue due to cultural change and summer weather
- Significant volumes of residents and visitors to the city centre

Proposed management of city centre spaces

The priority is to ensure that the city centre is managed through the transition periods, and at each stage, as effectively and safely as possible. The dates at which each stage will be changed are not fixed, and dependent on a number of tests. However, it is prudent to prepare for the best case scenario to ensure that the city centre is prepared if the restrictions do change at the earliest proposed point. Failing to do so could result in the necessary mitigations not being in place and significant organisational issues, compromised safety, and reputational damage to the council and the city. This does mean that measures that are put in place may not be needed at that point and required to run beyond the intended time period, but this is considered a necessary and lower risk than being unprepared.

Officers are working with Make It York and the BiD to identify interventions that respond to the above considerations and allow the successful and safe management of the city centre whilst maximising opportunities to support the local economy. This will follow the principles agreed during the previous reopening of the city centre from Covid restrictions; ensuing public spaces are well managed, Covid safe, and provide outdoor space to operate for businesses that are constrained by the size of their premises and social distancing restrictions.

The key clarification required from central government is the application of the guidance regarding hospitality's ability to serve alcohol. If this is limited to people sat within the boundaries of the premises then this will have a significant impact on the number of businesses that can open; whether managed outdoor seating is required or can operate in that phase; and the potential knock on impacts for people seeking to drink alcohol bought from shops in the city centre.

There is a budget of £200k from ARG funding to facilitate any measures, although this may need to flex if the implementation of any stage is delayed as it may be needed to facilitate ongoing business support grants. This does present a logistical challenge as a commitment to funding managed public spaces will be needed in advance of confirmation of when lockdown will be eased. To ensure the £200k budget can be ring-fenced it will require the freezing of new ARG applications in March, although the recent budget announcement's suggest there will be favour funding forthcoming, providing further reassurance of ring-fencing the £200k.

Should the free Behavioural Insight proposal set out in a further annex to this report be approved then that approach will be embedded in to the city centre management. In addition to the proposed approach to managing city centre spaces it is also proposed to extend the Covid Marshalls until the end of June at a cost of £28k, to be funded through Covid Containment Grant. This will allow them to provide ongoing support to residents, businesses, and visitors during the staged route out of lockdown.

Make It York plans (provided by Make It York)

12th April - Stage 2 in Roadmap

- Reopening for all traders in the Shambles Market
- Street food offer on Parliament Street to help alleviate some of the pressure on the Shambles Food Court (local traders only)
- Option of additional seating on Parliament Street – reliant on funding, tied into how accurate the steps are. If potential delays to steps it may be prudent to push for 17th May.

17th May – Stage 3 in Roadmap

- Potentially covered seating area on Parliament Street to help facilitate extra demand on local businesses following the success of the College Green offer. Confirmation on table service and licensing required. Also incorporating additional city centre spaces for a managed outdoor offering to move footfall around the city, including the Eye of York and Tower Gardens. Onus is on filling vacuums which developed last year and caused a spike in anti-social behaviour. We will push for offering to be broad, supportive and safe.
- Funding support would be required for the operational and infrastructure costs for a seating area on Parliament Street. Marshalling/security a necessity to ensure avoidance of flash points.

21st June – Stage 4 in Roadmap

- Option to launch the summer programme of events early to occupy Parliament Street and St Sampsons Square and potential offerings at Tower Gardens and the Eye of York. Objectives are to provide an innovative and welcoming offer to residents/staycation visitors and the Yorkshire hinterland. Event will allow for and encourage dissipation of footfall and be beneficial to the city as a whole. The summer showcase will be a focal point for recovery and civic pride.

To allow for managed space in the city centre from April/May Make It York will need funding support – they can provide sample costs and proposals but first need to understand if there is an in principle support from the council.

Decisions needed:

- Approve the principle of the proposal to allow further work to be undertaken

College Green

Officers are also working with the BiD to see what options are available to reinstate the successful College Green managed outdoor seating area for surrounding businesses which was in place last summer. The cost last year was £30k for a 10 week period which covered installation, management and security. It is the view of officers that a planning permission should be sought for the use of the space this year given the longer lead in time, and the application should be submitted now to enable whatever proposals emerge to proceed as soon as possible.

Decisions:

- Approve the principle of the proposal to allow further work to be undertaken
- Approve the submission of a planning application for the site to be used as a temporary meanwhile use

Minster School

The Minster School are considering a commercially led operation within the old school grounds to provide outdoor seating serviced by catered outlets. The council are not required to provide any financial support, but will need to respond in a timely manner to any regulatory approvals that may be required.

General outdoor seating opportunities

The BiD are working to identify a series of locations that may be suitable for small scale seating areas to be provided for the use of any businesses in the surrounding area. These would be formed of high quality robust picnic style benches with umbrellas and planters to protect them should they be adjacent to any highway.

The principle is that the neighbouring businesses would be expected to manage and keep these areas clean with the clear warning that should they not they will be removed.

This would need support from Covid funding but the number of spaces can be flexed and tailored to the available budget.

Decisions:

- Approve the principle of the proposal to allow further work to be undertaken

Public toilets

As noted in this report there is a potential need for additional public toilets given the numbers of people in the city centre who may be eating or drinking outside of pub premises and therefore wouldn't have access to those premises' toilets. This could lead to a potential rise in people relieving themselves in public. Temporary toilets were installed in Parliament Street last summer during the non-essential retail phase of re-opening at a cost of £2k per week. However, it should be noted that this was in response to government guidance at that point that business shouldn't open their toilets to the public, which this time is not the case. *This decision may depend on what managed outdoor seated spaces emerge and are approved, as the provision of large scale outdoor seating may require the toilets to be provided to facilitate them.*

Finance

The following table sets out the proposed measures and the estimated cost of each. The cost of the extended footstreets through to September was agreed by Executive in November and has been funded in the 2021/22 budget and is included to note.

It should be noted that the cost of the managed public spaces is an informed approximation based on the experience of College Green last summer. If they are agreed in principle they will be worked up in detail and then can be considered on their individual merits. It is proposed that £200k ARG is set aside to provide a £30k contingency.

Measure	Estimated cost	ARG	Containment grant	21/22 already budgeted
Covid Marshalls	£28k		£28k	
Public toilets (if required)	£20k	£20k		
Extended footstreet costs to September	£60k			£60k
Trader Initiative contingency	£80k	£80k		
Parliament Street (stage 2 and 3)	£50k	£50k		
College Green (stage 2, 3 and 4)	£40k	£40k		
General outdoor seating	£10k	£10k		
Total	£288k	£200k	£28k	£60k