

Communities Secretary welcomes response to his call for parks to open

- More than 340 parks and green spaces reopen across the country in the last week
- Communities Secretary stresses that people must continue to follow guidance on social distancing

He welcomed the reopening of parks across the country following his request at last Saturday's Downing Street press conference, while stressing that people must continue to observe social distancing.

Parks reopened in the last week include around 340 parks and green spaces in East Devon, Central Park in Boston, Lincolnshire, Himley Park in Dudley, West Midlands, and Cusworth Park in Doncaster.

A survey by the National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces has shown that of 90% of Friends of Parks groups, which help maintain parks across the UK, have reported that all parks in their area remain open, while in areas with some closures they report that 90% of local parks are open.

Last weekend, the Communities Secretary called for more parks to be reopened to the public for the health of the nation while ensuring people continue to observe social distancing guidelines. He also asked councils to keep open or reopen cemeteries and graveyards, for people to be able to seek solace at the gravesides of those they love.

Communities Secretary, Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP said:

While the virus does not discriminate, we know that the lockdown is much harder for people who don't have a lot of living space, a garden, or anywhere for their children to run around. People need parks.

I'm grateful for the work of councils who have ensured, ahead of this weekend, that most parks across England are now open and cemeteries and graveyards in their area are also open for visitors. We'll continue to work closely with them to try to get the remaining parks open soon, wherever possible.

Importantly, I want to stress that we must all continue to play our part in the national fight against coronavirus by continuing to observe social distancing when we exercise in parks.

Chair of the National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces, Dave Morris, said:

We welcome the government's public recognition of the continuing vital importance of parks for the health and wellbeing of all our communities.

As the voice of the movement of over 7,000 local Friends of Parks groups we have been aware of widespread calls throughout the entire country for weeks for clarity on this matter."

Chair of the Parks Alliance, Matthew Bradbury, said:

We welcome the Minister's announcement and encourage councils to work with the government to keep parks open. It is well proven that parks provide considerable health and wellbeing benefits to all that use them.

During this crisis parks are enabling people to stay healthy across the country whilst following the government's guidance on social distancing. For those without gardens local parks have never been more important.

Under [government guidance](#) to help fight coronavirus, people should only leave the house for very limited purposes, including taking one form of exercise, like running or walking. People should also only use open spaces near their home wherever possible, to avoid unnecessary travel.

Most councils have kept parks open while adapting to keep people safe by taking extra precautions like putting up signs to help people keep two metres apart while they take their daily exercise.

Local Government Minister Simon Clarke MP has also [written to councils](#) this week about ensuring people have access to parks and cemeteries.

The government is updating its guidance to make it clear that burial grounds and cemeteries, grounds surrounding crematoria and gardens of remembrance may remain open.

- The government's priority is to save lives and the best way to protect yourself and others from illness is to stay at home. However, exercise is still important for people's physical and mental wellbeing, for the government has said people can leave their homes for exercise once a day.
- People should follow guidance to stay local and use open spaces near to their home where possible, avoiding unnecessary travel. You should only go outside alone or with members of your own household and should always keep at least two metres apart from anyone outside your household.
- Gatherings of more than two in parks or other public spaces have been

banned and the police will enforce this. Dog walkers should also walk their dogs on a lead in areas used by other people.

- The survey by the National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces can be [viewed online](#)