

Context for decisions

On 23rd March, the Government announced people could no longer leave their homes unless it fell into one of the following four categories: (a) for medical reasons, (b) for essential shopping, (c) to travel to work if unable to work from home, and (d) for daily exercise.

Alongside this, the Government also provided clear rules for the public to follow in terms of social distancing and self-isolation.

The Council takes its role as a lead organisation for the city very seriously. Part of that role is to support and uphold the requirements and guidance set out by Government and to lead in setting an example to others.

This is particularly relevant in terms of what activities the Council continues to operate and support, and whether they are genuinely essential for residents and can be safely undertaken without unnecessary risk to the public or staff.

As a general rule, public facing activities will only be continued by the Council where they are helping provide essential support to residents and/or responding to a public health concern and/or where social distancing arrangements can be safely adopted. The Council will prioritise its resources (e.g. staff) towards these essential services.

FAQ 1: WHY ARE YOU NOT COLLECTING BROWN BINS AT THE MOMENT?

The amount of black and green bins collected each week is between 350,000 and 400,000. Our priority is to continue the collection of these black and green bins, on the scheduled day. Four weeks into the “lockdown” we had managed to complete every route on every day, including over the Easter bank holiday period. Our crews have emptied over 1.6 million wheelie bins and collected around 17,000 tonnes of household waste for recycling or burning for energy recovery.

The collection of garden waste from homes is a non-statutory (optional) service. In Leeds if we were to make one garden waste collection from each home we would need to handle an extra 125,000 bins per week.

Homes are currently presenting about 22% more black bin waste by weight, and about 8% more green bin waste. To maintain the reliability of the black/green bin collections we are currently sending out around 70 crews a day; this includes several “back-up” vehicles/crews to help with the additional demand. We are achieving this despite having to operate with our own staff needing to self-isolate and protect themselves and families – with an absence rate peaking at 20%.

Government health and safety guidance is clear we should do all we can to keep refuse services delivered by existing staff/crews, to reduce the risk of transmission through new crew members. We have also had to work very hard to ensure we provide staff with the levels of PPE and operational support they need and deserve. So the decision to focus on delivering a reliable black/green bin service has also been about the safety and wellbeing of our staff, who are working tirelessly on the front line and at depots.

Within the above national and local context, the collection of garden waste is simply not essential. There are a number of options open to residents in the meantime. They include: simply doing less pruning/cutting of grass etc., leaving cut grass on the lawn (it is actually better for it), composting and creating piles of cuttings for insects etc, lots of tips and advice can be found at the [Zero Waste Leeds website](#), [Facebook page](#) and [Twitter account](#).

We will continue to review this position and as soon as we are able to safely resume the brown bin collections and at no risk to the reliability of the black/green collections, we will.

In the meantime thank you for your patience and support.

FAQ 2: WHEN WILL THE HOUSEHOLD WASTE AND RECYCLING SITES RE-OPEN?

In line with Council's across the country, the decision was taken to close all eight sites across Leeds with effect from 24th March. This decision was taken primarily because the restrictions announced by Government did not include being able to leave the home to travel for the non-essential purpose of disposing of household items or garden waste. The clear message for residents is still to Stay Home, Protect the NHS, Save Lives.

We have plans in place ready for when we can re-open, but we will only be able to re-open the sites once:

- (a) the Government restrictions allow for travel from the home for such purposes;
- (b) we believe the sites can be safely managed and operated, both inside and outside the sites, for customers, staff and nearby residents.

Clearly when we do re-open the sites there will be an unprecedented demand and there is likely to be significant queuing to the sites to manage. It is very likely some vehicles will be turned away at the end of queues. We need to make sure the management of queues and operations inside and outside the sites maintains social distancing and minimises the need for interactions between people.

In the meantime, where you can:

- ✓ reduce the amount of waste/unwanted items you produce by leaving the
- ✓ jobs that will create most waste for now;
- ✓ if having appliances replaced – use suppliers who will take you old item away for you;
- ✓ store items for disposal once the sites re-open;
- ✓ look for ideas for re-use of items and garden waste at [Zero Waste Leeds](#);
- ✓ the city has several hundred bottle banks still being emptied – these can be used as part of your daily exercise or on the way to do essential shopping.

Thank you for your help and patience.

FAQ 3: CAN I USE THE LITTER BINS?

During the lockdown period the only time anyone should be walking outside their home is for the four main reasons provided by Government. All these reasons require a degree of planning and there is no reason for any litter produced from those activities not to be taken home of and disposed of in either the black or green bins. Just think about what you take out with you, if you do anticipate having some minor litter from a snack or dog-poo to dispose of, take a bag or two with you and bring it home.

We calculate there is over 4,000 litter bins across the city. The emptying of litter bins cannot be called an essential activity and one that therefore unnecessarily uses front line/key worker staff for.

So why are some litter bins taped up/bagged over and some not?

When the lockdown was announced we immediately took the step to suspend emptying of litter bins. With over 4,000 bins, it was not practical nor a good use of limited resources to tape up every bin. We did try and do some though, mainly on high streets. This was a bit rough and ready and soon many of those taping ups came loose or were part removed by the public. We initially relied on people getting the message through

social media and press that litter bins should not be used. This had some success but many bins still got used – often people stuffing them full of dog-poo bags even when there was no bin liner in. At this challenging time we need to encourage everyone to take greater personal responsibility for their rubbish.

So, we have now added a sticker to every litter bin to make clear they should not be used and asking people to take their litter home with them. Unfortunately, we know not everyone will do this, and so we will ensure bins that become full and a potential nuisance for nearby residents are emptied.

Thank you for your help in taking your rubbish and dog-poo home with you for now.

FAQ 4: WHY AREN'T YOUR CREWS FOLLOWING SOCIAL DISTANCING RULES OR WEARING PPE?

Throughout the crisis we have been following Government guidance on work practices for the management of waste. This has mostly been through guidance issued by the [Waste Industry Safety and Health](#) (WISH) forum and Public Health England.

The guidance for the delivery of essential services is different in some elements from that issued for public life. In general, the guidance is about reducing risk as much as is practically possible, but accepting that there may be some operational reasons for some variation.

The Council has been working very closely with staff, Trade Unions and Health & Safety advisors throughout the Covid-19 lockdown period to review and update procedures and safe working practices, to ensure WISH guidance is being followed in Leeds and to do more where possible. The main priorities have been to enable the highest standards of hygiene possible, as far as practical keep the same crew working together on the same route and to maximise the amount of time spent following social distancing protocols.

Every member of staff has access to anti-bacterial wipes, their own supply of anti-bacterial hand-sanitiser and a liquid soap dispenser on each wagon; as well as the usual PPE such as gloves. Every cabin is independently cleaned at the end of every day and is fitted with an in-cab dividing screen for the crew to use as they choose.

Public Health England currently states: “We do not recommend the use of facemasks as an effective means of preventing the spread of infection. Face masks play an important role in clinical settings, such as hospitals, but there’s very little evidence of benefit from their use outside of these settings”. Prolonged use of masks may also have problems. For example, wearers may be tempted to adjust the fit frequently risking hand to face contact, masks may become moist so trapping contaminants, germs and similar.

In line with that guidance our advice remains that staff do not use facemasks and for that reason we don’t currently supply them to staff.

FAQ 5: IS FLYTIPPING ON THE INCREASE IN LEEDS BECAUSE OF THE CHANGES?

No. In fact it has decreased. We record all reports and complaints relating to flytipping across the city and the figures as at 20/4/20 show:

Month	No. of flytips reported that month		%age change
	2019	2020	
March	841	718	15% reduction
April*	899	600	33% reduction
Total	1,740	1,318	24% reduction

(*April's figure for 2020 is based on xxx reports by 20/4/20, multiplied up to give a projected monthly total)

Residents can find useful tips and advice on how to manage and reduce their waste on the [Zero Waste Leeds website](#), and [Facebook page](#).

FAQ 6: CAN I HAVE A BONFIRE IN MY GARDEN?

We would ask that all bonfires are avoided wherever possible.

Whatever is being burnt it adds to the pollutants in the air and contributes towards carbon emissions. Smoke from bonfires can cause people with respiratory and other health conditions to suffer. Bonfires may also be a nuisance and an inconvenience to those who wish to sit in their gardens or dry washing. This is particularly relevant at the current time where people are likely to be spending more time at home and in their gardens due to the restrictions and self-isolations in place due to COVID-19. It may also be the case that some households may even be experiencing the symptoms of the virus and could be adversely affected by smoke.

If you do have a fire, it must only be dry, garden waste and must NOT be household waste that will give off illegal, noxious and harmful fumes/smoke. It must also not be creating smoke that blows over the highway/street, this would be illegal and you could face a fine.

You should not be having frequent fires either, even if garden waste. This could be seen as creating a nuisance for your neighbours, in which case you could be fined up to £5,000.

There are plenty of ways to reduce the amount of waste you are producing in the first place and avoid burning what waste you do have. Whether that be leaving your grass cuttings on the lawn, pruning and cutting hedges less for now, composting or creating nature piles of logs/twigs/hedge cuttings. Some tips and advice can be found on Zero Waste Leeds website and social media accounts.

Nuisance bonfires can be reported to the Council on the [LCC Website](#).

FAQ 7: WHY ARE YOU STILL MAINTAINING PARKS AND CUTTING GRASS?

The Council's approach to managing parks, open spaces and other green areas during the current situation has been informed by the guidance issued by Government, particularly with regard to staff attending work.

The Government has issued a list of roles it considers to be keyworkers and some of the staff employed by Parks and Countryside fit firmly on that list. For example they include those working in or supporting the delivery of Bereavement Services or essential safety related roles such as arboriculture. However the guidance on working is also clear that where work cannot be undertaken from home then colleagues can attend to undertake their duties so long as steps are taken to maintain social distancing.

Our public parks and green spaces have been highlighted during this crisis as providing important places for daily exercise as well as the benefits they bring to mental health and wellbeing. Whilst keeping parks open for the public to enjoy, we have closed play areas and sports courts that can encourage group activity along with car parks at our parks that can encourage travel beyond local areas.

Residents may question our wider continued grass cutting; however as people are being encouraged by the Government to exercise and take fresh air in open spaces in close proximity to their homes it is important these public areas are maintained, particularly for those living in sheltered accommodation. In addition drivers and pedestrians including those engaged in 'key' work need to be able to use roads in safety with full visibility that is not impacted by overgrown verges.

To ensure that all these sites are safe to use we are continuing to conduct maintenance and our working practices and those of our contractors have been amended to meet central Government advice as far as is practicable on distancing accompanied by rigorous hygiene measures. Our approach will of course be kept under constant review and adapted in light of future Government guidance or instruction.