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**ALL MEMBERS MEMORANDUM NO: 59/20**

### **NON-ESSENTIAL CONSTRUCTION SITES**

The article below is from the Construction Manager Magazine and identifies some of the confusing messages that are being given by the government, however it goes on to say that “a further announcement is expected later today”.

**Official advice on whether or not construction sites can continue to operate amid the coronavirus lockdown is expected to shift, with most non-essential sites expected to close unless it is critical to safety that they remain open.**

While the current official advice is that sites can remain open provided guidance from Public Health England on worker safety and social distancing, the Chartered Institute of Builders (CIOB) has advised its members to make preparations to close sites.

In a statement, the CIOB said: "The Construction Leadership Council has advised UK government that the construction industry will come to work today, to prepare to shut down works safely, whilst awaiting further information and clarity. The CIOB urges its members and the wider the industry to ensure site security, stability of partially constructed structures and the maintenance of systems that would be unsafe to stop."

A further announcement is expected later today.

The news follows an address to the nation by prime minister Boris Johnson, effectively locking down large parts of the country, including a ban on public gatherings of more than two people. People are allowed to exercise outside only once a day, travel to and from work where “absolutely necessary”, shop for essential items, and to fulfil any medical or care needs.

However, there has been confusion as to how the measures apply to construction sites.

Some firms, including builders merchants Jewson, Travis Perkins and Buildbase, have already taken the decision to close all of their branches. Meanwhile ISG, which operates in several different countries and is grappling

with shifting advice in each, has announced its decision to close sites temporarily unless they can pass a risk test.

Immediately following Johnson's address last night, housing secretary Robert Jenrick appeared to suggest that sites could remain open if workers were unable to undertake their work from home and provided Public Health England Guidance on social distancing was followed.

### **Gove suggests some sites must close**

But Cabinet Office minister Michael Gove cast some doubt on whether Jenrick's advice applied to all sites, when interviewed on ITV's Good Morning Britain today. Gove said: "In other countries it is the case that construction work and other manufacturing is continuing, so we are in with what those other countries are doing."

Gove added that builders should still turn up to construction sites if they are out in the open or if a private property is vacant and essential work needs to be done, but that builders should not be undertaking works at close quarters in occupied homes would not be appropriate.

Meanwhile, the Mayor of London Sadiq Khan indicated to the BBC last night that construction work should stop unless it was essential. He said: "I have expressed my concern to the prime minister directly and at COBRA that the definition of key workers that is too wide can lead to too many people not following the advice to stay at home."

Asked if he wanted to see construction workers excluded from the list of key workers and a pause in building works, Khan said: "In my view, the only construction workers that should be working are those that we need for safety. These are extraordinary circumstances. Of course it is really important to recognise this is an economic and social emergency but it is more important to recognise that this is a public health emergency."

And Scottish first minister Nicola Sturgeon also said prior to Johnson's announcement that she thought construction sites should sites in Scotland should shut, warning: "This is about saving lives."

Build UK's current advice on protecting the workforce on sites that are still open can be found [here](#).

**Peter Walker**  
**Director of Health, Safety & Training**