

QUEUE MANAGEMENT AND SOCIAL DISTANCING

ADVICE NOTE



7 JUNE 2020

Reopening High Streets Safely Fund

Introduction

This Advice Note has been produced to provide support for businesses within the Lancaster District regarding the management of external queues during the era of social distancing.

The document is based on the Government's current guidance (7 June 2020). The current social distancing guidelines recommend that people remain 2 metres apart from anyone outside your household to help reduce the transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19). To ensure that the guidelines are adhered to, it is recommended that businesses instigate queue control measures outside their premises and manage the entry and exit of customers.

If the Government introduce significant changes to social distancing guidance, then the advice provided in this document will be reviewed where necessary.

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1. Assessing Queuing Capacity

The main consequence of the social distancing guidelines for our High Streets and retail centres is a limitation as to how many customers can be safely accommodated within stores at any one time. Before any business introduces external queue management arrangements, they should first assess and agree their own store's COVID-19 customer capacity.

In reaching a capacity calculation you should take into account the total net (customer) floorspace of the store and consider how many people can safely be accommodated with a 2m distance between each person. The capacity calculation should also be influenced by any the identification of any likely pinch-points, traditionally busy or high-demand areas, and your previous experience of customer behaviour (including dwell time).

Where there are areas within the store that could prove problematic in terms of customer separation, the introduction of an internal one-way system using floor markings and signage may minimise the number of incidents. Such systems should be reviewed regularly to ensure that any reasonable adjustments can be made.

Your capacity calculations will also be affected by the location of your entrance and exit points. In some unavoidable circumstances the entrance and exit points will be via the same door. Where this is the case, and where markings on the floor cannot separate entry and exit points, staff will need to manage the entry and exit of customers to ensure that social distancing guidelines are adhered to.

To help maintain an effective turnover of customers and thus reduce external queue lengths, businesses may wish to consider displaying signage requesting that:

- (i) Contactless payments are made, where possible;
- (ii) Customers collecting orders that are made online should try to visit outside peak hours to pick up their orders; and,
- (iii) Customers should, where possible, shop alone to assist with capacity management.

2. Queuing on a Pavement or in a Pedestrianised Area

If your business is located within a privately managed shopping centre, then you are advised to discuss queue control procedures with the Centre Management to determine the most effective way to control queue lengths and to avoid customer congestion. Such environments have a perfect opportunity to create one-way pedestrian routes. Where this is feasible, entrances and exits should be clearly marked.

For all businesses that are located on a pavement or in a pedestrianised area, no advertising boards (i.e. A-Boards or similar adverts) should be placed on the footway whilst the Government's social distancing guidelines are in force. A-Boards reduce the amount of external space available for customers and as the retail environment becomes progressively busier over the next few weeks, they will increasingly obstruct pedestrian flow.

Each business will need to predict their likely footfall during peak and off-peak trading hours to anticipate the amount of external queuing space that is necessary.

It is essential that individual businesses identify and take responsibility for managing their own queue zones. As a principle, stores should seek to provide queuing space that is contained along their own frontage (i.e. not in front of other shops or branches that are also open). Where businesses believe that this will be difficult to implement safely, they should in the first instance liaise with their adjoining business premises to work together to providing a solution. There may be opportunities to create shared queuing space. The Business Improvement District (BID) will also be able to provide advice. It is essential that separate queues do not overlap.

Alternatively (particularly in larger stores), it may be possible to reduce external queue lengths by extending the queuing system to within the store. This can be effective as part of a controlled one-way internal circuit and it will help to absorb customer capacity. It may also be beneficial for the business too, as customers queue alongside carefully selected products.

When identifying queue zones, it is good practice to adopt a 'Keep Left' principle for customers waiting to enter the store.

Once queuing areas have been agreed, the use of non-slip floor markings can be useful in illustrating the number of waiting points that are available in the queue. Before opening consider whether the guidance is clear; for example, does it require the customer to stand *on* the markings or *between* the markings?

Social distancing markers may also be effective in larger window displays along the width of the premises frontage.

Businesses will need to proactively monitor and manage their queue lengths. This means ensuring that there are sufficient numbers of suitably trained staff to control queue direction and queue capacity. Larger premises may wish to appoint a Queue Manager who would be responsible for customer flow throughout the store.

In certain circumstances, some businesses may need to place signage indicating "Do not join the queue" when capacity is reached. In some scenarios it may also be prudent to use temporary barriers to prevent queuing beyond the frontage of the store.

We would advocate that staff who are deployed to monitor queue lengths should also collect hourly data to compile a picture of emerging trends regarding peak times and customer behaviour. This can help inform any future changes that may be necessary to queue management procedures.

3. Queuing in the Highway

There are premises within the district which immediately adjoin highways. Some of these are busy traffic routes.

It is never acceptable to queue in the highway where there may be danger posed by passing vehicles. Businesses will need to ensure that sufficient space is provided so that pedestrians do not have to queue (or walk) in the highway.

Lancashire County Council, in their role as Local Transport and Highway Authority are seeking to deliver a range of temporary interventions throughout Lancashire to assist with social distancing, particularly in locations where there is currently very little pavement space to maintain 2m distance between people. This may involve the removal of on-street car parking or the reallocation of roadspace to create additional pedestrian widths.

4. Technology during the Era of Social Distancing

Larger stores, particularly those that trade in goods that can be easily collected, may be able to use a virtual queuing system to manage queuing space.

Virtual queuing systems allow customers to log in remotely and wait away from the store until they receive notification that their order is ready. It creates a more pleasant waiting environment and allows customers to visit other stores whilst they wait. For the business, it may also have benefits in terms of improved management of workload and employee scheduling.

Virtual systems vary in terms of their content. Some systems will provide data regarding current waiting times and store capacity, whilst others will incorporate an opportunity to interact or chat with customers and the ability to signpost in-store offers.

Where a virtual system is not necessary or practical, stores can still use technology to enhance the queuing experience for their customers. Quick Response (QR) codes remain popular with customers who have smartphones and can help with expanding brand awareness and increasing the volume of traffic to your website. For larger stores, the QR code could also provide an in-store map showing any changes to the layout that have been introduced to accommodate social distancing guidelines.

5. Checklist – Managing the Queue

1. Calculate the internal capacity of the premises.
2. Decide whether internal alterations are needed to accommodate the queue inside the store, removing pinch points where possible and identifying any likely areas of conflict. Determine whether a one-way system would be beneficial in aiding customer movement and ensure that reasonable adjustments are made for those customers who have accessibility requirements. If your store has the luxury of space to accommodate segregated entrances and exit routes, then introduce this.
3. Remove street clutter outside the store including all A-Boards to keep entrances clear.
4. Identify the size and direction of the external queuing area and where necessary talk to neighbouring stores and the BID to work together. As a starting point, work on the principle that the length of the queue should not exceed the frontage of the premises, unless you have reached an agreement with the adjacent store and your queue can be safely accommodated without blocking other rights of way.
5. Once the external area is agreed, ensure signage is visible and is displayed in appropriate locations. Signage may include non-slip markers on the footway, and signs in the window display. Ensure that there is signage at the end of the queue, indicating that customers should not join the queue until there is capacity.
6. Staff should be confident and proactive in ensuring effective queue flow and managing capacity and should monitor trends and customer behaviours.
7. Always maintain an emergency access.
8. Finally, if appropriate to the size of your store and the predicted footfall, then consider introducing a Virtual Queuing System.

6. Review Measures

This guidance has been created with the best information available at this time. It will be reviewed and modified in accordance with emerging good practice and local practical experience of implementing these suggested measures.

Over the next few weeks and months, the BID and the relevant authorities will monitor how people are interacting with the social distancing guidelines and where necessary they will make alterations.

In doing so it would be productive if business owners can highlight any issues and consider what steps could be taken to positively address them.

7. Other Resources

Whilst this Advice Note solely focuses on the issue of external queue management, there is other guidance that businesses may find useful.

To find out more about how to make your workplace COVID-secure, visit: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19>

For retail and branch-specific guidance for working safely, visit: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/shops-and-branches>

To find out more about business support, including for those who are self-employed, visit: <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus/business-support>

And finally, for a comprehensive overview of national advice regarding Coronavirus, visit: <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>