

Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP
Prime Minister
House of Commons
Westminster
SW1A 0AA

Date: 1 June 2020

Ref:

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Dear Prime Minister

As Leader of Dorset Council, I am writing to you to express my serious concern about the disproportionate and negative impact the Guidance states to “travel to outdoor open space irrespective of distance” is having on areas like Dorset which are popular with visitors. Dorset is within a single day’s travelling distance for visitors from London and the Midlands.

Over the past weekend we have seen some extremely disappointing behaviour from visitors to Dorset’s beaches. The incidents at Durdle Door on Saturday 30 May placed a huge strain on our emergency services. There have also been issues in other popular destinations across the county with excessive numbers of visitors not being able to observe social distancing. We’ve seen littering, people urinating and defecating in public, people camping overnight and people having dangerous campfires and BBQs – despite extensive warnings against this from all local agencies. Council employees have been abused by members of the public as they tried to manage the traffic.

I am acutely aware of how worried and upset many Dorset residents feel about the current situation, particularly when so many of them have complied fully with lockdown guidance, particularly, when the Dorset Council area had one of the lowest COVID19 infection rates in the country.

My overriding priority throughout the COVID19 outbreak has been the safety and wellbeing of Dorset residents, and all decision making has been based on this. We at Dorset Council have done everything we can within the limited powers we have, to prepare for and respond to the situation. For several weeks now we’ve been sending out a strong message that potential visitors should ‘think twice’ about coming to Dorset.

However, since you announced on Sunday 10 May that lockdown was to be gradually eased and that people can “travel to outdoor open space irrespective of distance” and “you can sit on a beach”, both we and Dorset Police have had very limited powers of enforcement. For example, since the recent guidance came into effect, the Police have no longer been able to challenge road users as to whether their journeys are essential. In other words, we have limited ability to deal with the large visitor numbers and issues like the lack of social distancing and the negative impact on local communities.

Ahead of this announcement there was no communication with local councils about how we might manage this influx, including the need for car parking, public toilets and most importantly for beaches, the provision of Lifeguards. I understand that concern was being raised by Ministers last week about the lack of Lifeguards – surely this is a conversation that should have happened before your announcement?

All our public services are very stretched due to weeks of responding to the COVID19 outbreak and other major incidents such as the wildfire at Wareham Forest. My plea to the government is to review the travel advice currently in place and instead ask people to “stay local”. I am concerned that we will see a second wave of infection here in Dorset as a result of the high number of visitors to the area over recent days. I’m asking the government to act now to save the lives of Dorset residents. Please help us to help them by issuing a revised guidance telling people to stay local for the time being.

We stand ready and waiting to work with the government but in order to do so, you need to engage far more closely with the local government sector to deliver the results we need for the country at this time.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S Flower', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Cllr Spencer Flower
Leader

cc: Richard Drax MP
Michael Tomlinson MP
Simon Hoare MP
Chris Loder MP
Sir Christopher Chope MP