

Press Release

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Safety first for shoppers returning to town centres

Town centres in County Durham are preparing to welcome back shoppers as many more retailers reopen this month.

During the lockdown period, town centres have remained open to the public to provide essential goods and services.

From 15 June, in line with government guidance, more shops will begin to reopen and Durham County Council is working in partnership with retailers and landlords to make sure businesses, staff, residents and visitors are all able to shop confidently and safely.

The council has been carrying out assessments and planning so shops in the county's main towns can reopen safely with social distancing measures and reminders in place.

The council has plans in place for the safe use of town centres, such as visible social distancing posters and signage. People should also be aware that some parking areas and laybys in town centres will be suspended to allow paths to be widened. There will be an ongoing review of these plans which will be updated based on government guidance.

Risk assessments and safety measures will be in place, and all businesses are being encouraged to follow the government advice on working safely.

Visitors to the county's town centres are being reminded to follow government guidance which allows people to meet in groups of no more than six as long as they remain two metres apart.

If travelling on public transport, people are asked to wear a face covering. All visitors are reminded to wash their hands for a minimum of 20 seconds when they return home.

Business owners, workers and shoppers are reminded to follow government guidance and stay at home if they, or anyone else in their household, show coronavirus symptoms.

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It is hoped that the reopening of shops will positively benefit the county by getting people back to work while supporting the high street and the economy.

This month, the council has also launched a county-wide consultation for residents to give their views on a longer-term plan to improve space for people and ensure safe, physical distancing continues when people start to return to everyday activities.

Cllr Carl Marshall, Durham County Council's cabinet member for economic regeneration, said: "It has been a priority for us to support town centres in ensuring all visitors can shop safely when retail outlets begin to reopen from 15 June.

"Reopening town centres for businesses will be a welcome boost to the economy after the knock-on effects of the coronavirus outbreak, but it is also important that we can continue to social distance and protect ourselves and others while using our town centres.

"A number of risk assessments and safety measures have been put in place to ensure town centres and shopping areas can be used safely when more retailers reopen. We will be closely monitoring areas in the weeks that follow to make any necessary changes or additions which can assist with social distancing and allow visitors to shop confidently and safely.

"The health and safety of the public continues to be the highest priority. We are reminding residents to continue following social distancing and safety guidelines at all times to protect themselves, traders, retail staff, and other shoppers during this ongoing pandemic."

For more information about town centres reopening in County Durham, visit www.durham.gov.uk/reopeningtowncentres

The public consultation on ways to create better street space can be found at www.durham.gov.uk/consultation

ENDS

Note to Editors: Please find pictures attached of Bishop Auckland town centre and Cllr Carl Marshall