



THE INSTITUTE OF CONSERVATION

The Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP  
Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government  
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government  
2 Marsham Street  
London SW1P 4DF

25 March 2020

Dear Secretary of State,

**Covid-19: 'Essential working' and construction sites**

I am writing on behalf of the [Institute of Conservation](#) (Icon) to ask you to provide clarity on advice given by the Prime Minister on 23 March 2020 regarding 'essential working' on construction sites.

Icon is a membership organisation and charity, which brings together those with a passion for conserving cultural heritage. We represent around 2,500 individuals and organisations comprising professional conservators, heritage scientists and many others with a commitment to ensuring the long-term survival of objects and collections, historic buildings and archaeology. A number of our members are employed as contractors, sub-contractors and freelancers on construction sites for example archaeologists, stonemasons and architectural conservators.

The current Government guidance, which requires people to stay home unless they are going outside for food, health reasons or 'essential work' has left the construction industry and the significant number of cultural heritage professionals that work within it confused. Further clarity is needed on whether construction-related activity is considered 'essential.'

We have received many concerned emails from the significant number of conservators and conservation companies currently working on construction sites, some of which have closed and some of which remain open. We are pleased to note that responsible clients, such as the project teams at Canterbury Cathedral and Lincoln Cathedrals, have already suspended sitework, even though this places their National Lottery Heritage Fund supported capital projects at substantial risk. However, other construction sites remain operational and our members who have continued to work have reported on the difficulties and impracticalities of maintaining social distancing and good hygiene within site compounds and especially when working on scaffolds.

A lack of clear guidance also makes fulfilling the conditions of insurance policies difficult to maintain and could create challenges with potential insurance claims. For example, due to the valuable cultural heritage assets on certain sites, conservators are usually obliged to visit a site at least every 30 days as a condition of their insurance. Clearly, with the current measures in

place this may not be possible, or even desirable, but at present it is a matter for the individual to judge.

We therefore urgently ask the Government to publish specific guidance on whether construction-related work is 'essential' and if heritage sector companies and conservation professionals should continue to work on site. We also seek clarity on issues of liability and support with regard to insurance obligations if sites with valuable assets are to close temporarily. Our sector colleagues at the Chartered Institute of Archaeologists (CIfA) share our concerns, and have written to you about these matters already.

In the meantime we will carry on advising our members to follow Government advice in relation to social distancing and safe working patterns but we look forward to receiving further guidance on 'essential working' as soon as possible. We seek your reassurance that the health and wellbeing of conservation professionals working within the construction industry is of primary importance and that you will act swiftly to safeguard their welfare at this difficult and worrying time.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sara Crofts". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Sara Crofts BArch (Hons) MSc IHBC FRSA  
Chief Executive