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Ken Gillespie
Chair
Construction Scotland

cc Construction Leadership Forum members

21 May 2020

Dear Ken

I want to thank you all for your time, energy and expertise in recent weeks as we have worked together - government with representative bodies, employers and trade unions from the construction sector - to prepare guidance that is evidence-based, fair and ethical, clear and realistic.

All that hard work is very evident to me as I have chaired meetings of the Construction Leadership Forum and the associated restart group. While I know the difficulties faced by many of your members, our focus remains on tackling the virus, protecting public health and saving lives.

However, the measured approach laid out in your draft restart plan, with the clear emphasis on the health and welfare of workers, provides a clear route map to a phased restart of construction works as and when the evidence allows. I commend in particular the progress on your draft *Construction Re-Start Model*. It adopts a slow and steady approach with clear review points which is consistent with the Scottish Government's "COVID-19 – A Framework for Decision Making".

I appreciate that there remains some drafting and development to take forward, and I have asked my officials to continue to work closely with you. That said, I recognise that the 6-step phased model developed by the sector matches the managed transition that the Government is working to deliver in coming weeks and months.

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I have therefore asked my officials to accelerate our joint work to update and enhance the *Coronavirus (COVID-19): construction sector guidance* published on 1 May by incorporating your phased approach:

- Phase 0: Planning
- Phase 1: Covid-19 Pre-start Site prep
- Phase 2: “Soft start” to site works (only where physical distancing can be maintained)
- Phase 3: Steady state operation (only where physical distancing can be maintained)
- Phase 4: Steady state operation (where physical distancing can be maintained and/or with PPE use)
- Phase 5: Increasing density/productivity with experience

I should stress that this letter does not signal an immediate change in Scotland’s lockdown policy, although the First Minister will of course be publishing our route-map later today. While currently non-essential construction should remain closed on a precautionary basis, I look forward to confirming a start date for your proposed Phase 0 and Phase 1.

In terms of your proposed Phase 0, I understand that work is progressing well on preparing site assessments for Covid-19 modifications and developing the necessary new procedures, building on the valuable experience gleaned from ongoing essential works such as Scotland's temporary coronavirus hospital, the NHS Louisa Jordan.

We also believe that, subject to positive outcome from the review on May 28th we are now ready to move to your Phase 1, the advance preparation of non-essential sites. The work in this stage will facilitate physical distancing and enhanced hygiene, including installing new or expanding existing site welfare and toilet facilities, “one way” systems and marking 2m distancing throughout the site.

Depending on the evidence emerging from this initial stage and subject to Health and Safety statutory requirements being satisfied, we can then look forward to commencing Phase 2 – Soft Start, with its phased return of a proportion of the workforce. I note your commitment that no element of non-essential works requiring the use of PPE above the standard industry use, will commence at this stage. We will also require you to consult with government for agreement before progressing to Phase 2, and in any case will not approve such a move until a minimum of 2 weeks after we publish updated advice, though we will keep this under review.

Progress beyond these stages will clearly depend on a range of factors, including the industry’s ability to demonstrate fully compliant working practices in place, the confidence of the workforce and its trade union representatives in those arrangements, and wider supporting health data.

I will of course continue to work with the industry and trade unions to support the construction sector as it moves forward towards building up the scale of operations. I must emphasise of course that if evidence at any stage suggests that construction activity is leading to an increase in infection rates we would have to consider tightening up restrictions again.

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For now, can I again commend the sector's commitment to the health and welfare of the workforce. We have made substantive progress, there is a great deal more to do, and I look forward to working with you, the Health & Safety Executive, trades unions and others.

Kind regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kevin Stewart', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

KEVIN STEWART

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