

**Countryside
Alliance**



A return to shooting

a phased approach to shooting as lockdown
restrictions are eased



Introduction

The outbreak of COVID-19 has disrupted the nation and it is in all our interests that we can return to normal activities as soon as it is safe to do so. Shooting plays a crucial role in the environmental, economic and social well-being of the countryside and this document explains how a phased return of shooting activity can secure the benefits it brings.

For those who usually filled their days with countryside activities, the Countryside Alliance put together guidance on how those activities needed to change in accordance with Government guidance. Our COVID-19 Hub explains the importance of staying at home to help protect the NHS and save lives. It includes guidance and Government issued advice on shooting, shoots, and shooting businesses during the Coronavirus Pandemic.

The Countryside Alliance fully supports the Government and its effort to slow the spread and minimise the effect of COVID-19. However, as the Government now comes to consider how the country

will exit lockdown, we are proposing that, in a phased manner, shooting could be one of the first activities to be resumed as restrictions are eased. Shooting is an activity that can be conducted in isolation and is a key part of many conservation and pest control management plans. It will be detrimental to our biodiversity and wildlife across the country if restrictions remain in place longer than necessary. It is also an activity that has well documented physical and mental health benefits, and critically, it is the lynch pin of many rural economies which have been hit especially hard by COVID-19.

Over 600,000 people in the UK shoot live quarry, clay pigeon or targets, and it represents a massive private investment in the economies of numerous rural communities. This document sets out the path to a return to shooting. Any return, which must adhere to Government guidance and ensure the safety of participants, will have very significant conservation, economic and social benefits across the countryside.



The Rt Hon George Eustice MP
Secretary of State
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Seacole Building
2 Marsham Street
London, SW1P 4DF

4 May 2020

Dear Secretary of State,

The Alliance is fully supportive of the Government's efforts to slow the spread, and minimise the effect, of COVID-19. Throughout the crisis we have advised our members and supporters in accordance with the Government's guidance, and we will continue to do so.

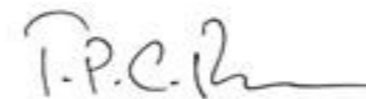
Rural communities across the country have risen to meet these challenging times, but like all communities the economic impact of the lockdown has been severe. I understand that the Government is now considering how the current restrictions might be modified so that we can emerge from lock down safely and in a phased way. We believe shooting should be among the first activities allowed to recommence at the earliest opportunity, subject of course to the necessary conditions to ensure social distancing. Given the nature of shooting sports, and the way in which shooting activities are conducted, it is clear that they can take place with the necessary social distancing, and would not jeopardise the Government's efforts in tackling this pandemic.

As I know you are well aware, shooting is hugely important to the rural economy, supporting the equivalent of 74,000 full time jobs and providing £2 billion to the UK economy. It also plays a vital role in the management and conservation of the environment. In addition, it brings great benefit in terms of health and mental well-being, both of which have been significantly impacted by the lockdown.

I know the Government is keen to get the economy back on its feet as soon as is possible, and enabling shooting to take place would be an enormous boost to the rural part of the economy, and provide a degree of much needed certainty for the shooting industry, and the jobs and businesses it supports, especially as shoots are now facing hard decisions ahead of the next shooting season. The Alliance has therefore put together the attached document which sets out the path to a safe return to shooting.

I would very much welcome the opportunity to work with you and other ministers to find a way forward for UK shooting and hope that the proposals we are suggesting might form the basis of official Government advice as part of the next phase of lockdown, and the gradual move towards a return to more normal times.

Yours sincerely



Tim Bonner
Chief Executive

Copied to:

The Rt Hon Oliver Dowden MP, Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport
The Rt Hon Alok Sharma MP, Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy
The Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office

Phase I

activities for immediate consideration

Phase I expands on what is already permitted under COVID-19 restrictions, and what the Countryside Alliance believes could be conducted safely when lockdown restrictions are eased.

PEST CONTROL FOR CONSERVATION, HEALTH AND SAFETY, OR CROP PROTECTION PURPOSES

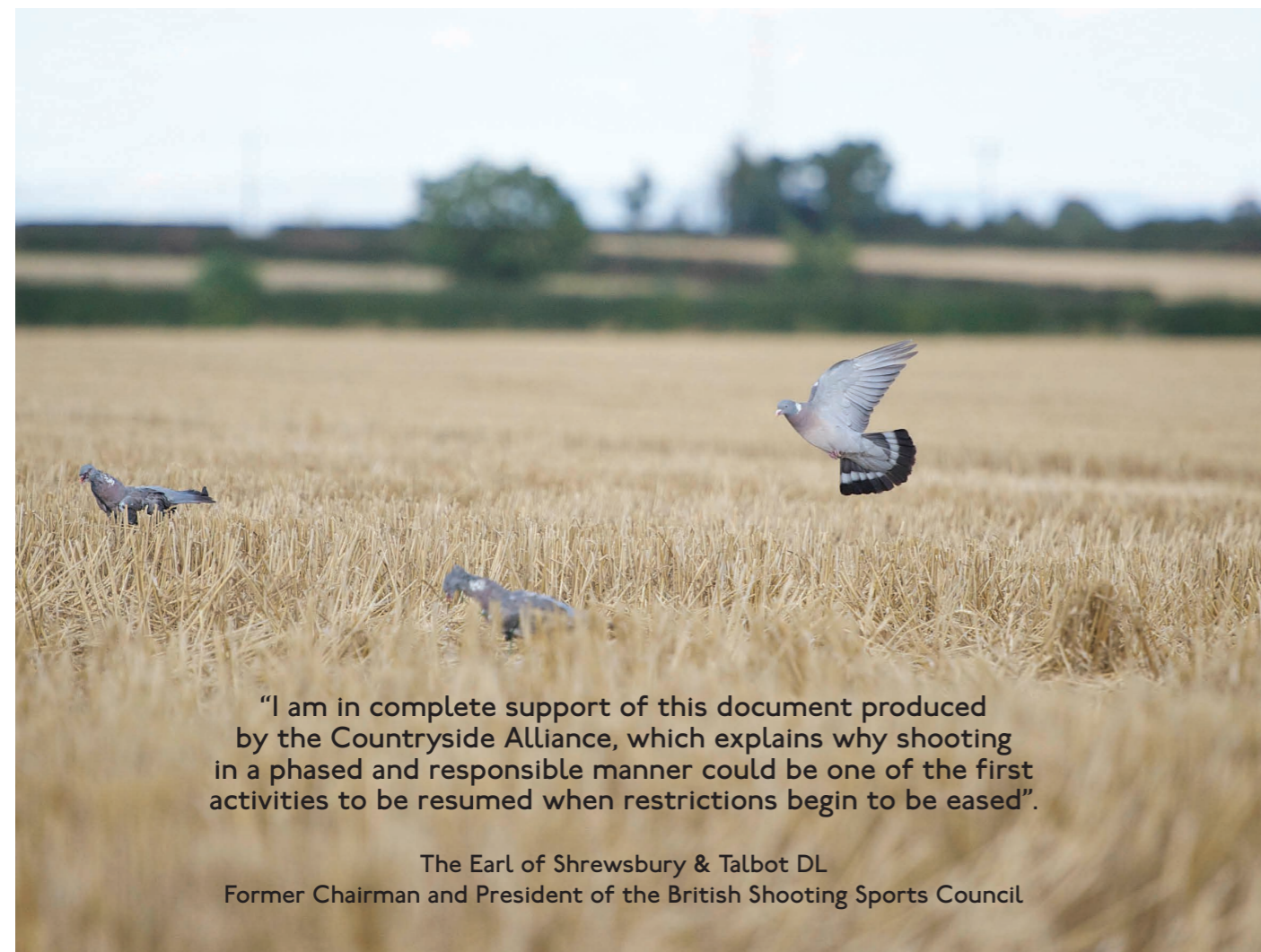
Essential pest control for conservation, health and safety, or crop protection purposes is already permitted under current COVID-19 guidelines. This needs to be extended to those other forms of conservation management and crop protection, which it was possible to delay by a number of weeks, but if delayed much longer will have a serious effect on wildlife and biodiversity.

In principle, due to the time of year, this primarily concerns:

- ◆ Deer stalking
- ◆ Rabbit control
- ◆ Pigeon control

These are naturally self-isolating activities, successfully undertaken alone. The impact of deer on our native flora and fauna has been repeatedly well documented, including by the Government's own department, the Forestry Commission, and deer management in British woodlands has been severely limited by COVID-19. Early Spring is the most important time for achieving adequate herd management, as foliage does not yet provide manifold cover, and the new growth increases deer movement.

Equally, many crops can withstand light grazing from rabbits and pigeons in the short term, but as the lockdown continues, their cumulative effects increase significantly. Pigeons, in particular, can cause severe crop damage, with a sizeable knock on effect on the economy: "a 2014 estimate of woodpigeon damage to the overall UK oilseed rape crop was approximately £2 million for a 'low impact' year (2% of national crop severely damaged) and approximately £5 million for a 'high impact' year (5% of national crop severely damaged)". Former Defra Minister, Rt Hon Thérèse Coffey MP, 1 May 2019 - PQ 249799



"I am in complete support of this document produced by the Countryside Alliance, which explains why shooting in a phased and responsible manner could be one of the first activities to be resumed when restrictions begin to be eased".

The Earl of Shrewsbury & Talbot DL
Former Chairman and President of the British Shooting Sports Council



"Clay shooting is in essence a solitary sport. Only one person can occupy the firing point at a time, and for safety reasons spectators or those waiting their turn stand well back. In some disciplines a button is pressed to launch the target while in others it is voice activated so physical contact with equipment is minimal. No section of the community is better vetted by the police or more responsible in the conduct of their sport, so it is hard to see any negatives in freeing up clay target shooting, only the benefits that come from a small return to normality."

Peter Wilson MBE

It is important to note that all the above activities provide participants with good exercise, and spending prolonged periods outdoors has been shown to improve mental health. We believe expanded pest control activities should be among the first movements to be made allowable as we exit lockdown, and should be covered by the following principles in the first instance:

- ◆ They must be undertaken alone, or within household groups only.
- ◆ The same restrictions that govern essential travel should be adhered to.
- ◆ Suitable plans for carcass management must be made prior to any outing, to avoid the need for contact with game processors.

CLAY TARGET SHOOTING AND TARGET RIFLE SHOOTING

Clay target shooting and target rifle shooting should be re-instated. Clay shooting is a major industry, providing 3.9 million cumulative gun days to participants per year, and supports thousands of jobs both at clay grounds and across the industry. It takes place on open and self-contained grounds that are

invariably remote, where maintaining social distancing would be simple. Target rifle shooting, whether indoors or outdoors, could also easily conform to social distancing regulations. Both disciplines are undertaken with safety as a paramount concern, and participants are invariably well disciplined and used to conforming to stringent regulation.

Jonathan Djanogly MP, Chairman of the British Shooting Sports Council, of which the Countryside Alliance is a member, has written to lay out further arguments for the relaxation of lockdown regulations on clay target and target rifle shooting that are compatible with slowing the spread of COVID-19. They would provide manifold economic and well-being benefits.

THESE ACTIVITIES SHOULD BE GOVERNED BY THE FOLLOWING PRINCIPLES IN THE FIRST INSTANCE:

- ◆ Social distancing must be maintained at all times.
- ◆ The same restrictions that govern essential travel should be adhered to.
- ◆ Equipment must not be shared.
- ◆ Payment should be organised in advance and made online where possible.

Phase 2

for consideration in the near future

Phase 2 is a natural extension of Phase 1, allowing activities that can be organised with social distancing in place. Stopping the spread of COVID-19 must be the primary concern, but if safe to do so shooting should be allowed to commence in mid-August. However, if it is unable to return to normal practice because of Covid-19, we believe that shooting can still return in some form if the following guidance and restrictions are put in place, and in doing so help generate economic benefits. This will be extremely important for numerous

rural communities, for which shooting is a major contributor to the local economy and provides a significant number of jobs.

GAME SHOOTING

Game shooting takes place outdoors, and the activity requires a considerable distance between participants. Should restrictions be eased, it would therefore be easy and natural to implement social distancing measures to allow game shooting to

“With the current uncertainty surrounding Covid-19, it is too early to know what the impact is going to be for shoots this year, but everyone is hoping that, by the autumn, shooting will be possible. This is very important for those in so many of our rural communities, both in the uplands and elsewhere, who are employed either directly or in numerous related industries. For them, it really is the main economic driver, particularly during the quieter winter months when other sources of income dry up”.

Jonathan Kennedy, Founding Director CKD



“Deer management through stalking is critical to maintaining the biodiversity of our woodland and wildlife habitats. It is also an important activity for reducing the impacts of damage to agricultural crops. If restrictions remain in place, we could see serious consequences on not only important eco systems and crops, but the businesses that rely on the income from commercial deer stalking”.

Chris Rogers, Deer Manager, East Anglia.

take place. Shooting provides £2 billion to the UK economy each year, and supports the equivalent of 74,000 full time jobs. This money is invariably spent in some of our most isolated areas during the Autumn and Winter months, when the income from tourism has stopped. This income will be especially important this year due to the restrictions on travel throughout the Spring and early Summer which has had a considerable impact on tourism revenue. It is considered good exercise and contributes to improved mental well-being.

THIS ACTIVITY SHOULD BE GOVERNED BY THE FOLLOWING PRINCIPLES IN THE FIRST INSTANCE:

- ◆ Social distancing must be maintained at all times. Careful consideration should therefore be given to meeting, briefing, transport and the provision of food and refreshments.
- ◆ Equipment should not be shared during the day.

WILDFOWLING

Wildfowling is an inherently solitary activity and social distancing is the norm. If restrictions are eased, then it should be possible for wildfowling to safely resume. There are more than 140 wildfowling clubs and more than 9,000 dedicated wildfowlers. Each year they contribute to the maintenance and conservation of wetland habitats, both in terms of considerable funding and through physical work parties.

THIS ACTIVITY SHOULD BE GOVERNED BY THE FOLLOWING PRINCIPLE IN THE FIRST INSTANCE:

- ◆ Social distancing must be maintained, with wildfowlers operating alone or within household groups only.

PRIVATELY GUIDED SHOOTING

Privately guided deer stalking and other forms of guided shooting should re-commence. There are 2,500 professionally qualified deer stalkers in the UK, who rely on guiding clients for their livelihoods.

Additionally, the deer that are culled make a vital contribution to preserving woodland biodiversity, and produce a significant amount of venison, a product that is worth over £170 million to the UK economy each year. Due to the nature of the activity, this takes place outdoors and social distancing is easy to implement.

THESE ACTIVITIES SHOULD BE GOVERNED BY THE FOLLOWING PRINCIPLES IN THE FIRST INSTANCE:

- ◆ Social distancing must be maintained in accordance with Government guidelines.
- ◆ Vehicles must not be shared.
- ◆ Equipment should not be shared.
- ◆ Suitable plans for carcass management must be made prior to any outing, to avoid contact with game processors.

Phase 3

normal activity resumed

When the Government determines it is safe to do so, normal activity in all these areas should resume. Until it is safe to do so, the implementation of phases 1 and 2

provide an opportunity for the numerous economic, environmental and social benefits of shooting to continue, albeit in a truncated manner.

“Restrictions on shooting will have a severe impact in the Exmoor area. Shooting contributes more than £30million to the local economy.

This is larger than all agricultural subsidies.

The area is largely upland, where agriculture provides subsistence returns, and livelihoods are consequently dependent on income derived from other sources, of which shooting is a very major component.”

Christopher Beatson-Hird, Greater Exmoor Shoot Association.



Conclusion

The aim of the above proposals is to demonstrate that when it is safe to do so, and lockdown restrictions are eased, shooting should be amongst the first activities to resume. Until those restrictions start to ease, we should remember that this is a national effort, and the guidelines must not be contravened.

WHEN THE GOVERNMENT DO ADJUST LOCKDOWN CONDITIONS THEN:

- 1) Essential pest control such as rabbit, deer, and pigeon must be undertaken alone, or within household groups only.
- 2) The same restrictions that govern essential travel should be adhered to.

3) Suitable plans for carcass management must be made prior to any outing, to avoid the need for contact with game processors.

4) When restrictions are relaxed to allow game shooting, shoots must be able to demonstrate they can comply with social distancing measures, and operate within Government guidelines.

5) Equipment should not be shared, and where applicable, payment should be organised in advance and made online where possible.

