



# CORONAVIRUS: THE CLUB'S RESPONSE

We speak to the Club's Director General Sabina Voysey for her account of how the Club has tackled the coronavirus crisis



## As the person in charge, what have the past few weeks been like?

As I write this, it's the last day of March. The past three weeks have been like nothing I've experienced before or could have ever imagined. They've been challenging, intense and emotional.

It's at times like this when you really need the support of a strong team and that's exactly what I have, for which I'm very thankful. Together, across the teams and departments, we have worked through the escalating crisis. In early March, we had no idea we would be where we are now - with our sites network closed, no overseas travel at all, and our headquarters at Greenfield House (pictured) closed for the foreseeable future.

We are currently operating with about 50 per cent of our Greenfields House staff, all of whom are working from home, and our Holiday Site Managers are caretaking empty sites. We're doing all we can to keep the organisation running through this strange 'lockdown' situation. Of course, we are all doing what we need to do, to ultimately save lives, but it's heartbreaking to have to batten down the hatches like this.

I certainly didn't expect an event like this in my first full year as Director General. There may be a slight slowing of pace from the intensity of the last three weeks, but it will be important to turn attention to the Club's recovery and the day we can welcome members back to our sites.

## When did coronavirus first come to your attention?

It had been on the national news for some time so was on our radar, but in the background. We issued our first communication to staff on 2 March. At that point the government guidance was minimal: individuals returning from specific countries affected by the virus should stay at home, avoid contact with other people and call the NHS if they had symptoms. We also stressed the need for good hygiene practices in the workplace. Overall, our message to staff was to take heed of the guidance but otherwise continue with 'business as usual'.

During the same week we had the first meeting of our Coronavirus Advisory Group, made up of team members from across the Club. The group worked with our business continuity plan and started to look at different scenarios and actions we may need to take. The early work done by this group proved invaluable, looking at critical roles, remote working, technology and how the Club could function if Greenfields House had to close.

## How did events unfold in the early weeks?

From the initial communication on 2 March, the first decision we took - on 6 March - was to cancel our UK Club Sites conference, taking place on 20 and 21 March.

This is a really important event for us, a chance to get all our Holiday Site Managers and staff from Greenfields House together to kick off the season.

Many of our managers would be returning to the UK from overseas for this conference. With the increasing warnings and focus on isolation periods, we felt that having all our key staff in one location wasn't a sensible thing to do. We didn't want to jeopardise being able to open our sites for the busy Easter period.

As the situation moved across the world and across Europe, the first major impact we saw was on our customers who were abroad, as Italy, Portugal and Spain especially started to impose stricter restrictions on travel. Over the weekend of 14 to 15 March, we were overwhelmed with the volume of calls that were coming in. Our phone lines weren't open on the Sunday but our teams were busy working in the background all weekend to get up-to-date information, to find out which travel routes people could take to return home. We liaised with ferry companies and contacted members stuck abroad.

We've worked tirelessly to help as many members as



### KEEP UPDATED ONLINE

Visit 'Coronavirus - What You Need to Know' online at the Club's website: [myccc.co.uk/helpandadvice/travelplanning/coronavirus](https://myccc.co.uk/helpandadvice/travelplanning/coronavirus)

**2 MARCH:** Club issues first communication to staff about the coronavirus outbreak

**6 MARCH:** Club cancels UK Club Sites network conference

**14 MARCH:** Club helped members overseas return home

**17 MARCH:** Club closes all Unit activity

**22 MARCH:** Club closes its site networks

**24 MARCH:** Club closes Greenfields House

**30 MARCH:** Club furloughs about 50% of Greenfields House staff



**WHERE'S MY OUT & ABOUT?**

Everyone with Paper Membership who has opted in to receive Out & About magazine alongside Camping & Caravanning will have noticed it's missing this month.

In line with the decision to close all Club Unit activity, we will return to publishing this monthly listing of Club Unit Meets and Temporary Holiday Sites as soon as this activity resumes.

we could with their travel. At the time of writing we're working to get some members from two Worldwide Motorhoming Holidays tours back from New Zealand.

It was really the start of things to come. That weekend we set up our Senior Leadership Team WhatsApp group. The key throughout this time has been immediacy of communication and the ability to make decisions and act quickly. WhatsApp has pinged constantly day and night for the past three weeks but it has been invaluable.

**How did things change when events on a national scale began to move quickly?**

At the start of the week commencing 16 March, the government began daily updates. While there was focus on the outdoors, at the start of the week it was around the benefits of being in the open air. Attention turned to large social gatherings and protecting those most at risk.

Our next decision, on 17 March, was to close all Club Unit activity – that is, the activities of our Regions, District Associations and Special Interest Sections. Both the formal and informal aspects of Club Unit operation involve members gathering and social camping together, which felt like the wrong thing to do. At the same time we suspended all Club Committee meetings.

Internally, our Human Resources team identified those people in at risk categories and got them working from home for the next 12 weeks. By the end of the week as many people as possible from Greenfields House were working remotely. Operationally on our sites, this week saw a lot of changes – while we were still open for business, we introduced social distancing measures, including halving site occupancy to increase distance between pitches, contactless check-in and, to protect our staff, we closed facility blocks.

**When and why did you decide to close the campsite network?**

We kept our sites open for as long as we responsibly could, because we strongly believed that providing access to the great outdoors and enabling people to benefit from all it offers was the right thing to do.

We closely monitor social media and emails from our members and from 20 to 21 March there was a change in sentiment. As a responsible employer and operator we made the difficult, but right, decision to close the site network on 22 March. Many people were involved to update our websites and email members, and I'm grateful to them all. On 23 March the Prime Minister put the UK in effective lockdown.

**What's been the hardest thing?**

Our staff have been at the forefront of my mind. We've retained all our full time contracted staff both on sites and at Greenfields House. The hardest decision was standing down sites staff that were yet to start their summer season fixed contracts with us, many of whom have worked for us in previous years. With the Sites network closed, and no cash coming in, we simply couldn't afford to employ them.

As Director General I find myself torn – I have a duty of care to our all our staff but also to the Club as a whole and its future financial viability. Unfortunately, the government's Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme didn't apply to these workers. I'm heartened by some of the messages I've received from this group, many of whom are staying on our sites, waiting for the day when we can employ them and they can start welcoming visitors back.

On 30 March we decided to furlough about 50 per cent of our workforce under the government's Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, meaning we can claim back some of our wage costs. All staff on this scheme continue to receive full pay and support from the Club. I'm grateful for the support we've received from staff who understand why we don't need them to work right now and for the team that are still with us, working from home, ready for the next part of the challenge.

**How do you feel now?**

Exhausted, wondering if we've done the right things at the right time, but ultimately proud that we made clear decisions and implemented changes fast, and that our people have worked over and above expectations in a really difficult situation. The Club is lucky to have such a talented, dedicated workforce.

Not knowing what the future holds for us right now means we are still operating with uncertainty. We need to get the balance right between managing the immediate situation and being ready to act quickly when we get the go-ahead to reopen our site network.

**Will the Club survive the impact of the coronavirus?**

Through careful financial management the Club is in a good position, but we need our members now more than ever. Although our network is closed, as a club we're so much more than just campsites. As a small thank you we'll be extending memberships (see below).

I'm proud of our sites and the service and experiences we offer to our members. When people are ready to start thinking about the outdoors we want to be here, open and ready to welcome members back.

To make this happen we need the support of our members, to maintain and renew their membership. Together we can make sure the Club survives this unprecedented crisis.

**CLUB EXTENDS MEMBERSHIP**

As a thank you to its loyal members during these unprecedented times, when financial security is a pressing matter for many, the Club has taken the decision to extend its annual membership for existing and new members by the number of months its campsite network remains closed for.

The Club will be here for its members when they're ready to enjoy the great outdoors again.