

Statement and appeal from the National Emergency Services Museum (NESM)

Following the updated government advice regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, we have taken the decision to close the museum to visitors from tomorrow, Thursday 19 March for the foreseeable future. This includes cancelling all planned school visits, outreach bookings and internal events, including our Everyday Superheroes weekend that was due to take place over Easter.

While our doors are closed to the public our staff will still be working hard to clean and refresh aspects of the museum, prepare new exhibitions and continue to care for our collection. However the welfare of our team is a priority during this time so staff and volunteers who are in high-risk groups have been asked to stay at home and everyone is being given the opportunity to work from home where possible.

We know that the current situation is very challenging for many organisations and small businesses. Many independent, self-funded museums such as ourselves who rely almost entirely on visitors to keep running will risk closing permanently during this time. We are not alone in facing these issues.

However this closure has come at a particularly difficult time for NESM. Sadly we went public with the news earlier this week that we have been the victim of theft and vandalism four times in as many weeks.

We have been targeted twice in two weeks by thieves who broke into our outdoor exhibition area, stealing equipment and damaging vehicles that will cost us thousands of pounds to repair or replace. The most recent incident occurred on the night of Saturday, 14 March. It is unclear if the same people are responsible for both attacks but CCTV of the offences was captured by NESM and is currently being investigated by South Yorkshire Police.

Just last week a car crashed into the front of the museum after being involved in an incident on West Bar roundabout, causing damage to doors and to a number of exhibits. A window on the front of our building was also broken in an act of vandalism last month. This all follows on from an incident at the end of last year when one of the museum's Council-owned off-site storage units was targeted and damage done to around 20 vehicles.

This series of incidents is absolutely unprecedented for us and has devastated our small team of dedicated staff and volunteers, leaving us all deeply upset.

Dealing with all these incidents and this closure places a huge financial pressure on us. Of course, we have plans in place to manage the next few months so that we can be ready to open again as soon as we can. But we know it will be a huge challenge especially as we don't know when we might reopen. That's why we're appealing to our friends, supporters and visitors to help us over the coming months if they possibly can.

We have set up a fundraising page for donations at <https://www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/nesmuseum>. If you were planning to visit the museum over the coming months and are able to donate your entry fee, this would be a huge help. We appreciate that the coronavirus pandemic is causing financial worries for many people so even the smallest donation would be very welcome.

Please keep an eye on our website and social media channels for updates during this closure. Many, many thanks.