

# Lockdown risks ruining economy, say senior Tories

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Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown, treasurer of the 1922 Committee, urged the government to begin easing the restrictions within two to three weeks



Senior Tory MPs warned the government yesterday that its “safety-first” approach to coronavirus was putting tens of thousands of businesses at risk of going under.

Growing numbers of Conservative backbenchers are becoming nervous that the impact of the lockdown on the economy could be devastating.

Boris Johnson has made it clear that it will not be lifted unless several conditions are met, including a steady drop in the number of deaths and infections. His priority is to avoid a second wave of the pandemic.

The government’s warnings have not been enough to quell increasing disquiet in the party. The MPs who run the 1922 Committee of Tory backbenchers held a private meeting at which they unanimously expressed deep concern.

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown, the committee treasurer, urged the government to begin a “gradual, step-by-step” process of easing the restrictions within two to three weeks.

“That inevitably will mean that there will be, at each time, more coronavirus cases. And we just have to accept that,” he said. “If we keep the lockdown going, it will be much more difficult for the economy to recover.

“The nation is quite divided on this and it’s up to the government, I think, to exercise leadership. Unless we do something fairly soon the economy is going to take a real hit.”

Sir Charles Walker, vice-chairman of the committee, said: “There has got to be an economy to go back to. All MPs right now are dealing with dozens, if not hundreds, of local businesses that are fearing for their future.

“Building capacity within the NHS, reducing infection rates has to be the precursor to lifting the economic lockdown. If we don’t do this many good and strong businesses will not open their doors again. The consequences for millions of people will be potentially devastating.”