

**Email to Mark Harper MP, Leader of the COVID Recovery Group – 13th February 2021**

I heard you speaking on the radio this morning and thought I would drop you a quick note. As you may recall, I represent the outdoor event industry across the UK which has largely been on its knees since the pandemic started. I believe you met Michael Hirst recently who probably gave you a picture of the state of the events industry generally.

My reason for writing is to draw your attention to something that seems to have been ignored in all the discussions with Government, which is the pent-up demand in the public for events – particularly among the younger generations.

This can be seen in the fact that any tickets going on sale for events this Autumn or even for 2022 are being sold faster than at any time. While this is good news for when we get the go-ahead to restart, it should also be a warning that if events continue to be prevented from happening – particularly music events – we are likely to see a mass of illegal concerts and raves taking place as the weather starts to improve in the Spring and through the summer.

Illegal events, which had largely ceased in this country due to the choice of events available, present a serious risk to public health not just from the virus but also drugs and alcohol abuse.

Our industry is respected around the world for the high standards it sets. The Purple Guide, which is published by the Events Industry Forum which I run and which is supported by the HSE, is recognised internationally as the ‘bible’ for running organised outdoor events.

As an industry we are capable of putting on safe outdoor events. Our industry is more disciplined than most in managing events by risk assessment but the continual restrictions and excessive cautions by Government make it impossible for most to take place. As a consequence, many in the industry have had to find other work or have ceased trading with the result that we are bleeding the very expertise we will need going forward.

This is highlighted by a survey from the Event Supplier & Services Association which reported that pre-COVID, the average company employed 25 people - by the end of 2020, this number has dropped to 9, with 95-100% of these staff on furlough and many of these are now facing redundancy.

A number of equipment companies have already collapsed and others have been selling off their stock to competitors in Europe in order to survive.

Without these support businesses – most of which have had no financial support via grants etc. since the start of the pandemic – the event industry cannot function. While the venues and culture sector have had support via the Cultural Recovery Fund, those in the event sector have had nothing and the Treasury seems to be completely blind to understanding that supply chains are more important than the front line in many industries, including ours.

If we are to avoid a mass of illegal events this summer, with all the consequences they bring for people of all ages and for the public services, we urgently need the Government to recognise that a planned return to events this Spring is essential not only for the UK economy – outdoor events generate over £30 billion to the Revenue in Gross Value Added – but for the wellbeing of the public.

It is far safer to allow professionally managed and COVID-safe outdoor events than to allow a free for all that report suggest are likely to happen en masse this summer.

We would greatly appreciate your help in bringing this to the attention of those in Government who are in a position to help.

Kind regards

Jim Winship