HOUSE OF COMMONS

Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee

Oral evidence: The future of UK music festivals, HC 886

Tuesday 2 February 2021

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Watch the meeting

Members present: Julian Knight (Chair); Kevin Brennan; Steve Brine; Alex Davies-Jones; Clive Efford; Julie Elliott; Damian Green; John Nicolson; Mrs Heather Wheeler.

Questions 81 - 181

Witnesses

I: Matthew Phillip, Chief Executive, Notting Hill Carnival; and Rowan Cannon, Director, Wild Rumpus.

II: Duncan Bell, #WeMakeEvents; and Tre Stead, Tour Manager.

III: Dr Andrew Smith, Reader, Architecture and Cities, University of Westminster.

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Matthew Phillip and Rowan Cannon.

Q81 **Chair:** This is the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee and a hearing into festivals and the future of music festivals post pandemic. We have three sets of witnesses today. Our first witnesses will be Matthew Phillip, CEO of the Notting Hill Carnival, and Rowan Cannon, the director of Wild Rumpus. Before I welcome our witnesses, I want to turn to members to see if there are any interests to declare.

Alex Davies-Jones: I am a member of the Musicians' Union.

Kevin Brennan: I am also a member of the Musicians' Union and received support from them at the last general election. I am also a member of PRS for Music and the Ivors Academy.

Chair: Thank you very much. There are no other interests to declare, so I am going to welcome our witnesses, Matthew Phillip, the CEO of Notting Hill Carnival, and Rowan Cannon, director at Wild Rumpus. Good morning, Matthew, and good morning, Rowan. Thank you for joining us.

Rowan Cannon: Good morning.

Matthew Phillip: Good morning, Chair.

Q82 **Chair:** Mr Phillip, my first question is to you. I was just reading the other day in the *Telegraph*, I believe, that social distancing could have to stay in place for the whole of 2021. If that happens, what does it mean for your industry?

Matthew Phillip: For the carnival weekend specifically, it would pose a very big problem. It would be very difficult to hold carnival in its traditional format on the streets with social distancing in place. It would be devastating for a second year in a row.

Q83 **Chair:** Would it mean cancellation?

Matthew Phillip: Yes.

Q84 **Chair:** When do you need to know whether or not those are going to be the parameters of your carnival? What date do you need to know by?

Matthew Phillip: Carnival is and always has been a very resilient organisation and we will continue to plan for multiple scenarios. Obviously, the sooner the better, but people need to—*[Inaudible]*—as to what things would be in place in August. Obviously, none of us has a crystal ball so we do not know what is going to happen. We just have to wait and see. I do not think there is a cut-off point. We will continue to plan, as we have been, and wait and see.

Q85 **Chair:** If you need to cancel later on in the year, say May or June time, surely that would impose some substantial costs on you, wouldn't it?

Matthew Phillip: Not really, no. We are not a ticketed event where we take income and would have to refund it. Carnival is made up of literally hundreds of smaller communities that put on carnivals, so it is those artists and DJs; not just them, the supply chain that supports all of that.

Q86 **Chair:** Surely they could have some sort of cost implications, your partners in this. If, for example, they are having to put together things like a float and so on, or look at particular types of equipment that they need and maybe even security, that is a cost, though, isn't it?

Matthew Phillip: Yes, it is a cost but it would not be put in place as early as now. Those things come along later, and I do not think anybody has been pressured by suppliers or supply chains to give deposits for events or for booking things or anything like that.

Q87 **Chair:** Just to be clear, if there is social distancing still in place at the time of the carnival in August, it will not take place? Basically, it will be cancelled as a result.

Matthew Phillip: I would say it would not take place in its traditional format. We would always hope to do something. Carnival means too much to too many people for us to simply ignore it, so we will always try to find a way of celebrating carnival for its artistry and what it means to the community.

Q88 **Chair:** Thank you for that. Could you talk us through how your events have been affected in the past year and what this has meant specifically for your work with local communities?

Matthew Phillip: Carnival is not just the two days at the end of the August bank holiday. It is a year-round activity. You have bands launching their activities, showcasing musicians, and DJs and sound systems would be performing at different events, not just around the UK but internationally. There has been very little, as we all know; nothing has been happening. Some people have been trying to keep going and do things in a digital space, but that has become very crowded very quickly. It is difficult to do something in that space and stand out.

Q89 **Chair:** Is there a worry about social exclusion in the digital space? Obviously, by definition, you need the digital equipment to be able to enjoy a digital event. If you do not have that equipment or access to it, you cannot take part.

Matthew Phillip: Definitely, and those especially in more rural areas or people who have a lower income and do not have access to quality broadband really need things like carnival and events to come back so they can have some social interaction and meet people. It is very much needed.

Q90 **Chair:** Rowan, do you have any thoughts on what we have just been discussing?

Rowan Cannon: Starting off with the idea of whether festivals can go ahead in a socially distanced world, having watched the previous session of this Committee, there were a couple of parts of the narrative that worried me. One is the idea that the festival sector is somehow binary, that either there is a summer of no festivals or there is carte blanche and festivals of up to 80,000 people can go ahead. It is just needing to recognise the huge diversity of festivals in the UK. There are 980 festivals, and they range from tiny to enormous. Although it is difficult, there needs to be some kind of recognition of that diversity and that different decision making could be in place for different scales of festivals.

The idea that festivals cannot go ahead and be socially distanced is also inaccurate. Again, it very much depends on the style of your festival. We put on two weekend camping festivals in the summer, Just So Festival in August, Timber Festival in July. They both have a capacity of around 5,000 and both have vast sites of about 100 acres. We can absolutely adapt our programming, put infrastructure in place and change the way we do things to enable something to happen with social distancing in place. Absolutely, I am confident that our festivals could be safer than Sainsbury's. It is a very diverse spectrum of events and I would like, if possible, the recommendations from this Committee to reflect that diversity and not just be thinking about 80,000 20-year-olds in a field.

Q91 **Chair:** Yes, we are cognisant of that, the 975 festivals. Some are very small, but they have a huge impact locally, of course. I presume that the cancellation of any of these events has had a quite major impact on the local economies of those areas in 2020.

Matthew, is that what you have sensed? Is the loss of carnival a major impact not just on the social cohesion of an area and the mental and environmental wellbeing but also on the businesses that obviously look to this event, this mass drawing in of people, as their second Christmas, so to speak, a major part of the year?

Matthew Phillip: Absolutely. There was a survey done by the GLA. It is almost 20 years out, but it is the only one that we have. It estimated that the Notting Hill Carnival generated about £94 million for the UK economy. Like you say, it has left a big hole not just in the local community of Notting Hill and Ladbroke Grove but wider. Many of the businesses I know in this area would take a big chunk of their yearly income over that month leading up to the August bank holiday weekend, and that has completely gone.

Q92 **Steve Brine:** Good morning, Matthew and Rowan. Thank you for joining us. I am interested in exploring suppliers and the chain that facilitates your festivals, as I have with some other parts of this inquiry. Matthew, the suppliers that you use for the festival—and there will be lots from practical through to performance—what are you hearing from them and what are your concerns about their ability to make your event happen in the future?

Matthew Phillip: To be honest, we have not really been hearing directly from them. I have been hearing from people who have been contacting us saying they have bought up this company and this one has gone out, so I think the suppliers may look quite different when we come to booking infrastructure and so on for the event. I do not think they are all still going to be there. I know some generator companies that have gone by the by and are not there anymore. They have been bought up by other companies. The whole industry is in limbo, as we know. Nobody knows what is going to happen, so they do not have any bookings. They are quite willing to take on potential provisional bookings, but with no certainty we do not know that those companies will be there in a few months' time.

Q93 **Steve Brine:** Obviously, for some of those companies and the people they employ they are individual tragedies, but thinking purely selfishly from your organisation, do you have confidence that there will be others to fill their gap if they are not around?

Matthew Phillip: Yes, I think so.

Q94 **Steve Brine:** On the certainty point, Matthew, last week the Government finally accepted the premise that once we have vaccinated the most vulnerable groups there is a door to be opened around reopening schools. This is welcome. That is the whole point, of course, of locking down, to protect the NHS, save lives and so on. Would you like to see more certainty from the Government on the success of the vaccination programme moving in lockstep with the success of reopening schools, yes, but also of society for organisations like yourselves, because you have to make decisions now? Given that the Government have some certainty and confidence around the rollout of the programme, do you think it is fair that you should receive some certainty from them?

Matthew Phillip: We get daily updates of who has been vaccinated and how it is going, but I have not heard anything that says, "Okay, when we get to this point there is going to be a level of comfort, safety and confidence in opening up and allowing things to happen." I am not sure—

Q95 **Steve Brine:** Would it be fair for you to expect to hear that? Otherwise you hear these numbers every day of how many people have been vaccinated, which is good for them, but what do we get out of it?

Matthew Phillip: Yes, absolutely, I think we need to know at what point, at what percentage of the population having been vaccinated. What are the stepping stones? What does X percentage mean, and how is it going to affect things opening back up? We do not have that information.

Q96 **Steve Brine:** Rowan, turning to you with regards to your concerns or otherwise about staffing and servicing your event in the future, what are you hearing about the supplier chain that allows your events to happen?

Rowan Cannon: One of the things about this industry, particularly the small festival community, is that 2020 has ridden out on a huge amount

of goodwill and generosity across the whole supply chain. I am thinking of the point at which we cancelled in 2020. We cancelled and cried, and we regrouped and got in touch with all of our suppliers, contractors and freelancers. Generally, the mood has been, "Let's keep this going however we can." We had 80% of our audiences rolled over. The whole programme was rolled over. All of our contractors are honouring their contracts from the previous year. We were not asked to pay a single deposit, in fact, that was not then going to be rolled over to the year after.

We are keeping it going this year, I would say, in terms of the freelance body of people. I heard a lot in the previous Committee about people retraining and moving out of the sector. What we have heard is very much that people are similarly trying to hold on with the hope of things coming back in 2021. Most of the freelancers we are talking to are not necessarily looking to retrain and move to a different sector but are currently delivering parcels for Amazon or working in Tesco because they are hoping that last year was an anomaly and that we will be able to get back in some sense in 2021.

The fear is that that goodwill is not sustainable year on year. There are certainly bigger businesses, tent companies that we work with, that are already starting to say they cannot go on year on year. I think that will start to filter down to the more independent freelancers and independent performers and artists. The longer it goes on and the less hope there is for a regeneration of the festival sector, the more the knees are going to be taken out from underneath it.

Q97 **Steve Brine:** Your Timber event sounds great. For my colleagues and those watching, it is branded as being for nature lovers, daydreamers and big thinkers. That obviously encompasses most of the House of Commons. Does the situation that you find yourself in create an opportunity for you in how you do things with local suppliers, or are you going to tell me that it is based on local suppliers anyway? Presumably, it is Leicestershire, is it?

Rowan Cannon: It is in Leicestershire. It is in partnership with the National Forest, so it is a beautiful part of this huge, bold regeneration project, which is building a forest around those communities in Staffordshire, Leicestershire and Derbyshire. Yes, we very much rely on local suppliers. In terms of opportunity, 2020 enabled us to do some things differently. We all had to adapt. We put on and created some beautiful projects. We did a project called "Sounds of the Forest" where we invited people internationally to go out and record a minute's sound from a forest. That has had a huge amount of press coverage. There were 1,000 sounds from forests, some of which have now been destroyed by the California wildfires. It is this amazing archive of sound and it has had millions of listens. That is a really beautiful thing that wouldn't have happened had Timber Festival taken place in 2020.

However, what has been lost and what could be lost is so much more personal and intimate for the people who live and work in that place. The culmination and the showcase of local community projects of youth artwork, of the volunteer programme, although work happens year round and brilliant, valuable work happens year round and artist development happens year round, not having that moment of celebration, showcase and coming together is a huge loss that is not replaced by the brilliant year-round work that can happen.

Q98 **Steve Brine:** Tell me about the pipeline of talent. You say that artist development work goes on all year round for your events. What sort of artist would you have at your festivals, and what have they lost from what happened last year? How many of them are having to take the incredibly painful decision to decide they cannot follow their dream?

Rowan Cannon: I would say there are two different pipelines. There are artists and performers, which goes across the spectrum. Obviously, there are musicians but also circus performers, street performers, comedians and dance artists. One of the things that festivals do is provide an incredible showcasing opportunity for those artists at the grassroots that is hard to gain in other places, because people are either coming to a free event or buying a ticket where you can stumble across anything. It gives these artists a chance to perform in a way that they would not otherwise.

The lack of festivals in 2020 has meant that they have lost not only their showcasing opportunities but also the opportunity to create new work. So much of the creation of new work is on an annual cycle. The funding for new work is on an annual cycle. Performances might get Arts Council funding or other funding streams where they will develop work and showcase it one year. All us festival programmers will go to other festivals and see that work and then programme it for the year after, so there is a gap already created. It has also been hard for people to develop work because it has been hard to find the spaces to do that.

We work from four acres of woodland in the Cheshire countryside and, luckily, we were able to open our doors in 2020 at a point when lots of places could not. We offered free performance rehearsal and development space in an outdoor socially distanced way to 30 to 40 different artists, because they could not go and rehearse in a theatre space or in lots of those traditional spaces.

Artists are one side of things, but then there are the freelance production and site management, all those supporting roles that keep the festival industry ticking over. Not only are they struggling because they have had their income wiped out for the year, but I don't see where the new people are going to come from. The kids that come up and become our production managers, site managers, runners and site assistants are kids who often, even when they cannot afford it, spend a summer volunteering at festivals. They will be in their wellies, they will work their socks off and they will get that vital on-the-ground experience. Not only has that not happened this year, but most of those people do not have

the headspace or the chance to be creative with what they might want to do, because most of them are just trying to keep the wolf from the door. My main worry is about that volunteer sector moving, the people who are going to keep this industry going in the future.

Q99 **Steve Brine:** You move us on neatly to volunteering. Matthew, how do you continue to engage with your volunteers? Obviously, they are not losing out financially from not being at the festival, and you are not paying them, but they are gaining all sorts of life experience that many of them then take into professional careers. Do you have a volunteer database where you manage to stay in contact and give them some hope?

Matthew Phillip: Most of the volunteers around Notting Hill Carnival come from the smaller communities. Notting Hill Carnival is slightly different from other events in that there are over 100 mini-events that make up the Notting Hill Carnival, and each of those have their own communities. Many of them are based in community centres around London, and they do year-round activities. We have the bands, we are in direct contact with them, and they are in contact with their broader base. Like I say, we have been trying to do things online to keep people engaged and informed, but that space has become very crowded at the moment.

Q100 **John Nicolson:** Good morning to both of you. Matthew, this all sounds very gloomy. Each of our sessions is very gloomy. Has anything been lost that cannot be recovered?

Matthew Phillip: I don't think so. When we are able to come back, there is very much going to be a new energy. People want to express themselves, they want to perform their music, they want to show their artistry, and many people are just planning. People need people. We are not meant to be isolated from each other; we need to congregate and be. That has been lost, and only time will tell the long-term effects of that.

Q101 **John Nicolson:** I lived in Notting Hill for many years, All Saints Road and then up at the Gate, and I cannot imagine what Notting Hill would be like without the Notting Hill Festival. You struck a chord when you talked about the important support that local businesses get, especially little start-up businesses.

I was very struck by how often I would walk around Notting Hill at the time of the festival and there would be people just standing on street corners playing their music. Who knows how many of them got spotted just standing and spontaneously playing stuff, with all the promoters wandering around and listening? It must be an incredible showcase, a spontaneous, unscripted showcase, for countless small acts.

Matthew Phillip: That is what makes Notting Hill Carnival so unique. It is not scripted by one or two people; it grows organically. Every carnival, every year is slightly different. Like you say, we have 38 official sound systems, 70-plus costume bands with smaller bands within them, 14

steel bands, and literally hundreds and thousands of individuals expressing themselves, whether that is through the fashion that they are wearing or individual musicians or small groups of musicians just turning up and starting to perform on a corner.

Q102 **John Nicolson:** As a Glasgow lad who had grown up on a diet of chips, boiled potatoes and fried fish, I certainly ate food that I had never eaten before when I moved to Notting Hill in the 1980s.

Obviously, we are MPs and the point of this is to see how we can inform debate and legislation and how we can take action that will help people. That is the name of the game for us. What is it that you would like us to take away from these hearings? Specifically, what practical things do you think we can do as parliamentarians to help?

Matthew Phillip: One of the things that attracts the visitors, which leads to the income the carnival helps to generate, is the spectacle that people see. Funding has stopped for the artists who create the costumes year in and year out. We are actively seeking funds and asking people to help encourage organisations to support those developing artists with their work so that, when we do return, there is something visually pleasing and amazing that people can see. That is what makes Notting Hill Carnival unique.

It is very resilient, and people find different ways of adapting, but at this time people do not have a lot of money and we need to find ways of supporting them to help develop those creative practices. On the bank holiday weekend, the eyes of the world are on Notting Hill Carnival and we need to make sure that, when that happens again, people like what they see and they are seeing something very spectacular that helps to represent London.

Q103 **John Nicolson:** Rowan, we were talking about young acts. If I can pass on the same question, what do you think we can do as parliamentarians to help? Lots of folk we are hearing from at these parliamentary hearings are saying that, while some of the older acts have a bit of financial muscle behind them, the people who are maybe suffering the most are the young acts who might not be able to survive this. What can we do to help?

Rowan Cannon: There are a couple of things. First of all, going back to your first question to Matthew about it feeling quite gloomy and where the hope is, we are in the arts and Matthew has just described beautifully what that brings to Notting Hill for that weekend. We are a creative, bold and brave sector, and I have no doubt that in five or 10 years there will be a thriving festival sector in the UK, whatever happens over the next two to three years.

My worry, as you said, is about what we will have lost along the way. Lots of that will be young talent, young artists. There is a massive risk to representation and diversity. The people who, at a time of difficulty and austerity, are able to start new festivals and sustain a career in the arts

are going to be the people who currently have the time, the resource, the headspace and the privilege to do so; people who are not in crisis management and who are not trying to keep the wolf from the door. There is a risk that, by not keeping this sector afloat and keeping the ecology and the symbiosis afloat, it is going to have a massive detrimental impact on the diversity in the sector.

The best way to support those young artists is to keep the sector afloat in lots of ways that have been talked about. To keep festivals going, for us organising small festivals to put the infrastructure in place potentially for something socially distanced to happen later this summer, the extension of the 5% rate of VAT for ticket sales would have a massive impact. It would enable us to have that slightly increased budget to deal with the infrastructure in terms of toilets, cleanliness and that kind of thing.

As I said earlier, it is recognising the diversity of the festival sector and looking at where and when those decisions are made. Obviously, we would all love a roadmap to when we might know whether we will go ahead or not, but also what is the basis on which those decisions are going to be made? Are they going to be made at a local level? Is it talking to licensing, talking to our safety advisory group, or is it going to be a blanket national decision? Understanding that landscape is what we are wrestling with constantly.

Q104 **John Nicolson:** We have talked about visas quite a few times in the course of this inquiry, and what we discovered is that the UK Government have imposed visa requirements for bands. They say it was the European Union; the European Union said it was them. I am inclined to believe that it was the UK, given the answers we have had from Ministers. What kind of effect is that having, or is likely to have, on you in the long term? It is reciprocal, isn't it? If we do not allow bands to come here without paying expensive visas, they will not allow us to send our bands over there without buying multiple expensive visas for every country that they visit. Have you thought about the implications of that? I am sure you have.

Rowan Cannon: Yes, it is musicians, but it is also across the spectrum of artists. It is street performance, it is everything that brings the colour to our streets at every event over the summer.

John Nicolson: All the support that bands need as well.

Rowan Cannon: Yes, absolutely.

John Nicolson: It is not just the artists; it is the people they travel with.

Rowan Cannon: For sure, and every circus show and everything that you see out on the streets at the Edinburgh Fringe. They are plying their trade so that they can get European trading. This year artists are suffering the double whammy of no festival sector, so no work in the UK, and Brexit, where there is such huge uncertainty about permits to work abroad. It is incredibly difficult. Also, on top of that, it is not just people; it is the freight, it is moving their sets, their stages, their instruments and

their gear. The uncertainty around it is the biggest difficulty. That is certainly something we would be asking the Government to look at, streamlining a simple visa process so that bands, musicians, artists and performers can understand what the future looks like, what that landscape looks like, and whether it is financially viable for them even to consider touring their work abroad.

Q105 **John Nicolson:** Before I hand back to the Chair, because I have used the word "gloomy" a couple of times, let me point to something that is uplifting and happy. I do a talk radio show every Sunday on talkRADIO and I interviewed a terrific band on Sunday called Deco. I don't know if you have heard of them but they have done this fabulous mash-up—it has gone viral—of "Smalltown Boy" by Bronski Beat and "Wonderwall" by Oasis. If you have not seen it, google it because it is absolutely brilliant. The band is called Deco. Both Oasis and Jimmy Somerville have been in touch with them to say how much they love their work.

What the guy from Deco said to me, the lead singer, was that if it had not been for the lock-in he would never have done this mash-up. He was playing a different kind of music. He loves 1980s music, but he had the time to do this mash-up that has attracted all this attention. He has found it to be a very good, creative time for him and the rest of his band. That is great. He said he is speaking to record companies, which is great, although as we know you have to be careful what deals you strike with record companies. We have discovered that here on the Committee. What the band is now desperate to do is exploit their new fame and to get out there and perform. This is their moment. It will be so frustrating if their moment passed without them being able to go out and play before the crowds who are now hungry for their music. There is hope there, isn't there? That is a rhetorical question, but I am happy for Rowan to say there is hope to give us some.

Chair: Rowan, is there hope?

Rowan Cannon: Yes, there absolutely is hope. As John just said, the creativity that has come out of lockdown, for all of our foolish recklessness we are in the arts for a reason, because we want to bring imagination and creativity and hope. It is being brought, and it is being brought at a community level and at every level through society. Without those showcases, lots of incredible, imaginative, beautiful things have happened in 2020. It will be great if we can now amplify them by taking them out to the streets and the fields. Let's all go and look at them, even if it is at a distance. I would prefer to stand and watch an incredible show two metres apart, if we need to, in 2021, as long as we get to see it live.

Q106 **Chair:** Just to clarify on visas, we have written to the Minister to get some explanation on what discussions there have been with the EU. Obviously, the Minister stated at the Despatch Box that effectively this was an EU failure, but it would be interesting to get the information for when she appears before us in the upcoming weeks.

Rowan, you spoke about a roadmap, the idea that it would not matter if it

was two metres distanced provided we get something going. Would you prefer some certainty, even if it is fairly strict, around what you have to do, an early indication that you can go ahead provided you take these particular safeguards?

Rowan Cannon: From our perspective, absolutely. That is what would be useful. In 2020 we obviously could not go ahead with our events, as much due to our reeling from the situation as opposed to necessarily the practicalities of being able to step back and think about what they might look like. There are hundreds of small festivals that could do something if we are allowed to do something. What we are all terrified about is a blanket, "Okay, nothing over this amount of people can go ahead. Large gatherings cannot happen."

We all work very closely with our local licensing authorities, with our safety advisory groups, and to have parameters within which we could be having those conversations now—we are all, to some degree, reinventing the wheel right now. We are talking to other festivals, and we are all talking about how we could do our layouts and what those stages could look like if people do have to be two metres apart. How can we talk to our traders, our food vendors, about doing takeaway food? Are plastic wipe-down portaloos better than wooden compost toilets because they are easier to clean? All these issues are all that we are talking about at the moment, and we are talking and planning on the assumption that we might be able to do something. To have parameters in place, and to have some kind of timeline for those decisions, would make our lives possible.

Q107 **Damian Green:** Good morning to you both. We are talking about certainty but we do not know, you do not know and, to be honest, the Government do not know yet what will be allowable in the late summer this year. We all hope for the best, but I suppose it is sensible at this stage to think what could happen.

Matthew, last year you did a brilliant job of producing an online carnival, which kept as much of the good things about carnival as possible. If the worst comes to the worst and you cannot do anything physical this summer, anything remotely normal that we would all recognise as carnival, do you fear that someone else will just say, "Don't care, we are going out on the streets and we are going to have carnival"? Do you get those reverberations around the place?

Matthew Phillip: That will very much depend on what the regulations are at the time. We worked very hard in 2020 to discourage people from taking to the streets of Notting Hill during that period, especially because we had no infrastructure in place. Come August, if large gatherings cannot happen but small independent venues can open and licensed premises are open as normal, it is likely to be very different from last August. There is a risk that we could end up with something that is not managed if we do not put something in place. It very much depends on what the general regulations are, I think.

Q108 **Damian Green:** If the general regulations allowed small-scale gatherings, maybe outdoor but with specific social-distancing requirements, and presumably some kind of entry requirements as well, you think that might be a halfway house that could work?

Matthew Phillip: It could work, but it is not a controlled environment like most festivals where you can control the numbers. It happens on public streets and it will be very difficult to control numbers. Whereas last year the bars were open but were not able to have music playing, for instance—the event hosts almost 2 million people—if you have five, six or 10 premises and they have loud music playing it could potentially pose some risks for us.

Q109 **Damian Green:** That is very interesting. It seems quite likely there will be some relaxation. We do not yet know whether there will be enough relaxation to allow the carnival to go ahead as normal. It sounds from what you are saying that, if we have a more relaxed but not completely relaxed outside environment, it could almost be more dangerous because it will be the August bank holiday weekend, a couple of million people will, out of habit, head to Notting Hill and there will not be anything there to control them.

Matthew Phillip: Exactly. We want to look after them. We put a lot of toilets in through our partnership with the council. Basic things like that won't be in place, so it will be very difficult.

Q110 **Damian Green:** This may be an impossible question to answer, but when do you need to know by? What is the latest date before you say, "Look, nothing is happening again this year. We will try to organise something online"?

Matthew Phillip: I don't think there is a specific date. Carnival is very resilient and we will adapt, but last year we made the announcement in May and it enabled us to pivot our position and go down the direction that we went. We cannot commit to any specific date of when we need to know. We will always try, where possible, to facilitate carnival. The next three months are going to be very key in seeing what is happening. We need some clear guidance to say this is what we are doing. I do not feel the need to know every day how many people have been vaccinated, but I would like to know what that means at the end of it. How many people are we expecting to vaccinate before things are relaxed and there is a level of confidence?

Q111 **Damian Green:** We are due to get that later this month, aren't we? A related question is that we have talked a lot, inevitably, about the community and carnival's relations with the community. When you talk about that, are you talking about literally the community in and around Notting Hill or do you mean the wider community that sees carnival—well, it is obviously an international event, let alone a national event—as a London-wide event? Which community is most involved?

Matthew Phillip: The carnival is an international event, and when I say "the community," I mean the community of London. Most people who come to Notting Hill Carnival are from London. I think we have about 20% international visitors, so most people are from London. When I say "the community," I mean the carnival community. It involves the bands, the sound systems and also the community that comes, because each one of those sound systems, they are communities of hundreds of people in their own right and they are dotted all over London.

Q112 **Damian Green:** As a final thought, there is a big difference between your type of event and the events Rowan does. Specifically on urban-based festivals, what big lessons do you think other urban-based festivals could learn from carnival?

Matthew Phillip: I would not be so presumptuous as to say we could teach other people how to do it. We are a very different event from most other events. We are a not-for-profit organisation, so it is not about generating money. We are very much focused on the arts of carnival and what it can do for communities in a broader sense.

Mrs Heather Wheeler: I should have said that, as I look out of my window on to the National Forest, the Select Committee are all very welcome to come up whenever Timber gets started again, and it would be great to have a site visit up here. You are very welcome to come and visit the heart of the National Forest.

Chair: Thank you for that tourist advert, Heather.

On that bombshell, we are going to conclude our first panel. Rowan Cannon and Matthew Phillip, thank you for your evidence today. It has been greatly appreciated.

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Duncan Bell and Tre Stead.

Chair: This is the second panel of today's hearing on the future of festivals. We welcome Duncan Bell from #WeMakeEvents and Tre Stead, a tour manager. Good morning to you both. Thank you for joining us.

Q113 **Mrs Heather Wheeler:** Tre, in a typical year how much of your work is based at festivals? What do festival appearances mean for the artists that you manage? Then the juxtaposition is what else do they do, from a financial point of view, when they are not doing festivals?

Tre Stead: Basically, I had a quick look at all the stats and, across the board between the acts and the supply chain, somewhere between a third and a half of your income is from festivals. For example, in a festival-heavy year, we had 39 festivals and 76 standalone shows that I attended; 13 of those were UK festivals. The way it works is that the festival is essentially a linchpin that the rest of the touring ecosystem works around. You will often get festivals bookending a tour, so in the summer it is very common, especially for overseas artists, to make the

most of their time by starting at a festival. They will end at a festival, and they will use the month or so in between to visit the smaller towns and cities around the UK or Europe. The amount of money you make from the fees is so much more than a show. Obviously, that is what props up the tour.

Q114 **Mrs Heather Wheeler:** Between 30% and 50%, depending on your artists. It is very interesting, I do not think I have heard the idea that you would bookend it. That sounds almost like a career path. You are launching yourself and then you are having a slowdown at the end, a warm down at the end. That sounds lovely.

Could you talk through how, in effect, the cancellation of all these events has affected your livelihood and the career of some of the artists that you look after?

Tre Stead: I mainly work with one artist, I am lucky like that. We have talked and basically, as with everybody in the industry, we have had to put everything on ice for a moment. I know the supply chain and a lot of the freelancers have gone off and done other jobs, as have I. I am at my new job now.

The real issue is the lifetime of their career and how that is set out. You have established artists who may well be en route with an album cycle, the release dates of which are set many months before. If they were due to have an album out at the start or middle of 2020, their label has put all their money into that happening, all the exposure, into festival appearances, to get them and their material out to a lot of new people.

At the other end of the spectrum, as the others were saying in the last session, new artists have been put on pause. They were probably ready to start the best year of their lives, when they were going to tour and get out to those new audiences. Festivals are the best way of exposing an artist, big or small, to a new audience, and you can only go so long playing to people who know your music. Radio play, press, all that sort of stuff is great as well, but getting out there on the live circuit and exposing yourself to a load of people who have come to see—"I will see what that band is about, I have heard of them." That is how you get a new audience in, and that is how you further your career.

Mrs Heather Wheeler: That is very interesting. Thank you so much.

Q115 **Kevin Brennan:** Duncan, just to start with, is there a real problem with people potentially leaving the industry as a result of the shock of Covid over the last year or so, or do you think it will eventually sort itself out?

Duncan Bell: Thank you, good morning. I think there is a problem. There is a big issue with the support system and mechanism that has been put in place, because so many of the industry are freelance. We represent the freelancers and the businesses of the live events supply chain. They are devastated by the loss of this, and it is not just festivals; the whole event sector impacts them in the same way.

Freelancers have been forced to go and find work elsewhere, for obvious reasons, and we are hearing significant issues about the loss of those staff to other industries. In a recent survey we did of over 2,800 people, something in the region of 30% of freelancers said they had to leave the industry. Nearly 20% of those said they hope to come back but they are very unsure whether they are able to at this stage because of the lack of certainty. Whatever plans people have put in place to find alternative employment gives them some short-term security.

Before they can make the step back into their normal job in this industry, they need the same certainty that the events will happen and that the work will be there for them. If everything is cancelled, and if there is not the support or the insurance in place, then they have lost the security of their temporary job and they cannot go back to it. They cannot dip in and out.

Q116 **Kevin Brennan:** There is no doubt, Duncan, that freelancers have had a very tough time of it, particularly those who have not qualified for any help at all from Government schemes and the so-called excluded who have been treated badly and missed out.

It is a structural fact, is it not, of the festival industry that it is going to rely on a lot of freelancers and contractors, or is there any way that the industry itself could be organised in such a way as to provide a bit more employment stability to those who work in it on a career basis?

Duncan Bell: The structure as it stands is very freelance-oriented, as you say, but the requirement is to look at the bigger picture of that structure. There is an ecosystem around the events industry that is well structured and works very well in the sense of the skill transfer for somebody who is a sound engineer for the festival season, as they will be working on corporate events, exhibitions and conferences out of festival season or will be on other artists' touring dates for the rest of the year around that. It is very hard to see how one integrates people into festivals alone on a more structured basis when their skills cross over between different areas of what is a very broad and diverse sector.

Q117 **Kevin Brennan:** Essentially, it is almost an inevitable nature of the business that you are going to rely on a lot of freelancers and contractors rather than there being employees who can get that greater level of stability from their employment. Is that what you are saying?

Duncan Bell: Very much so. I would go further and say that the industry is very proud of the freelance structure that exists, because it works seamlessly between cross-sector disciplines. Movement from one part of the live event sector to another works pretty seamlessly, and the gaps fill themselves. So, corporate work in one season, festivals in another gels together very well.

Q118 **Kevin Brennan:** You have been involved a long time in this work, Duncan. I believe you come from a sound engineer background and then branched out into what you do now, including the wider campaigning

work as well. If you were scanning and trying to look beyond Covid at how the whole festival industry is likely to develop—this Committee is trying to consider this on a longer-term basis and its impact on the economy and culture in the UK—bearing in mind how it has developed and assuming we will get past Covid at some point, what do you see in a decade's time?

Duncan Bell: It is very difficult to predict that far ahead, but it is a fantastically strong industry. It is resilient and, as a nation, we are world renowned for it. I think we will survive through this difficult process, provided there is ongoing support, which we can talk about in more detail another time.

Q119 **Kevin Brennan:** If I were to put the question in a more challenging way— and then I will come on to Tre—can the festival industry go on having such a terrible record on diversity and having such a dreadful impact on the environment, and not just doing offsetting on a gesture basis but seriously addressing the issues of diversity, both in terms of women being presented on stage at festivals and working behind the scenes, and also doing something about the dreadful environmental impact that the festival sector has? I ask that in a challenging way, not in a way that says I don't love festivals like the rest of the people on this Committee.

Duncan Bell: From my point of view, there is a great deal of diversity in our industry already. I speak in terms of those who work in it and those who present these events, perhaps more so than those who appear on stage. Certainly, the cross-section of engineers come from an incredibly broad base that I feel is diverse. There are many businesses and many people in festivals, by the very nature of their cultural structure, who are also very committed to making them more eco-friendly for the future.

Q120 **Kevin Brennan:** Tre, do you agree with that?

Tre Stead: Yes, I completely agree with Duncan. We all know that the last few years have seen a real change in attitude towards sustainability, diversity and all those sorts of things. I do a lot of talks for women in the music industry, and in the last five or 10 years I have been doing that the number of young women I see wanting to get into the industry is increasing year on year, and that is fantastic to see. That is just from my small world.

What concerns me is something Rowan brought up in the last session. She said that new starters coming into the industry will struggle and not have the opportunity to learn and to experience by volunteering at festivals. The thing about festivals is you can get a lot of things done in a very small space in terms of networking, exposure, communication, meeting peers, all that sort of stuff. New starters are missing out on that, as well as established freelancers, because all our networking is done in a field, and I worry that the longer this goes on and the longer big events

like festivals do not happen, in a few years we will have a deficit of new people coming into the industry.

Q121 **Kevin Brennan:** As a matter of interest, what percentage of tour managers are women?

Tre Stead: Goodness me, I could not tell you that. I can find out for you.

Q122 **Kevin Brennan:** In your experience, because I am sure there is a little camaraderie between you all and entertaining stories about how to deal with the artists you take on tour, are there a lot of women involved in tour management?

Tre Stead: There are quite a lot. I could not say 50:50 at the minute, but it is hard to tell from my own perspective because we all tend to gravitate towards each other. I have a lot of friends who are tour managers who are women, and this goes throughout the industry. People use each other for information and they communicate. Networking is a really big thing. That is how the work is done, and that is how you meet people.

Q123 **Kevin Brennan:** Do you think the aim to have at least 50% of acts on stage at festivals having at least one woman in the line-up, if it is a band, is a desirable and achievable goal?

Tre Stead: I think it is desirable. It is being looked at at the minute. It is all about the acts that are out there and young women feeling they can start a band and put their music out there without getting pushback. I think the industry is changing a lot to make a lot more women feel they can do that, and the knock-on effect within a few years is that there are more and more great female artists who can headline festivals.

Q124 **Kevin Brennan:** When you start planning for festival appearances—you said you tend to do tour management for one particular act, but if we could ask you more generally—would it be practical you, if events are not given sufficient time to go ahead, in terms of planning those appearances? How quick and flexible can acts be in being able to play at festivals?

Tre Stead: As the two speakers said in the last session, this industry is super-flexible. We are an industry of problem solvers. We will try to make anything work. The nature of what we do is that things change at the last minute, and we just have to deal with that and make sure the gig happens. The show must go on.

In real terms, for example, I have been with an established act for a few years. We will book our tour bus for Glastonbury the year before, because there is huge infrastructure in the UK but there are a lot of bands trying to do a lot of things in the summer months normally. Yes, we try to book ahead where we know we will need stuff. Everybody is flexible and passionate enough to try to make it work, however short a time span we have, but as Duncan said, it is hard to get freelancers, crew

particularly, who are now doing something else. The main thing for me is getting them on board and making sure they are able and willing to come back.

Q125 **Damian Green:** If I could move on to the nuts and bolts, the practicalities, when do contractors supplying festival equipment get paid? Will people who are not getting any income yet have to pay people before the festivals are set up, or is it afterwards? How does the system work?

Duncan Bell: Like many businesses, there is a range of answers to that question, but in many cases there will be some payments at the point of placing an order. At the planning stage of putting your festival together, which in an ordinary year would be over the course of the next couple of months, those orders will go out to get the equipment and crew booked, where there may be a deposit paid. But the majority of the funds will not be paid until the event has gone ahead. The same is true for the crew and all the technicians.

I think we will see an issue with events during the course of this year, depending on what events can go ahead, particularly with freelancers but also suppliers wanting more payment up front to give them security, because there is such a fear that events may be cancelled or moved at the last minute, yet the work has been done, the equipment has been committed, the assets have been paid for or leased or whatever they are, so commitments have been made and the same is true with people. It goes to my point about booking freelancers. If people know there is certainty that they can stop delivering for supermarkets for three months because there is work over the summer, they need to know they will get paid for that. That in itself will trigger problems with people's cash flow that is already stretched beyond difficulty. It throws up a very particular problem for this year, I think, and there is normally a lot of trust if there are issues.

It is one of the reasons why the insurance discussion is such an important topic for us, because if the insurance is in place and the event does not go ahead, some of the discussions around insurance have requested it should also feed down through the supply chain so that it covers the engineers and technicians as well, so they have that certainty. Otherwise, there is a real fear that people will not be able to commit because they cannot take the financial risk.

Q126 **Damian Green:** How far have we got? You bring up, quite rightly, the insurance scheme that many people have discussed as a way of partly preventing those who have fallen through the net from falling through it. How far advanced are the discussions on this?

Duncan Bell: Conversations have been going on for some time and various different schemes have been put forward, some in the Pan Re expression in the way that terrorism with Pool Re and Flood Re mechanisms have worked before. Others are more similar to the film industry. I do not know exactly which ones are first in the chain at the

moment or how far that has got. I am aware there was a reluctance because there was uncertainty as to whether it was required at this stage, or whether it was required further down the road. The urgent requirement of the insurance and the urgent benefit of the insurance is to bring certainty to be able to plan and book equipment, people, et cetera, which makes it the first link in the chain, not the last.

That may be nuanced in terms of when it becomes applicable, so we do not necessarily need insurance to be in place from tomorrow, but if we get to the urgently required roadmap that says events might start in June, then when they start in June with whatever caveats are required we need to know that insurance is in place so that, if in the middle of June an event is cancelled, it can then be triggered and the payment would then make sure it goes down through the supply chain.

Q127 **Damian Green:** I am struck by the need for certainty looking at some of the written evidence we have had. I noticed the Tenterden Folk Festival, a classic, small-scale, very successful festival that takes place in my constituency, makes the point that it is not just musicians and even back-up crew. It is hugely important for the local economy in terms of stallholders, pubs, restaurants, hotels and so on, and I suspect all those will be in a position where they would like to think that, if you set something up, there is an insurance scheme behind it.

Other witnesses have suggested that the end of March feels like a drop-dead date for insurance if you want to do a festival in June or July. Does that feel realistic to you?

Tre Stead: I am not a festival organiser, so it is hard for me to give you dates from that side of things, but for a band who are booked to play at festivals there are a lot of start-up costs that need to be looked at and cannot necessarily be written off and need some kind of insurance, such as booking transport, booking hotels, securing crew and rehearsals, things like that. There are a lot of costs that need to be done beforehand.

Q128 **Damian Green:** Moving on to that and some of the stuff you have already done, Tre, there have been lots of discussions about how and whether you can make big events like festivals, or even small festivals, Covid-safe, and pilots are clearly one way of testing that out. You are involved with Frank Turner, who held a socially distanced pilot last year. What did you learn from that?

Tre Stead: I was not involved in that pilot because we were trying to meet social-distancing rules, but having spoken to all my team who were there, the real takeaway from it was there is the hunger for live events. It is there from the audience side, the crew side and the venue side, and we are really fortunate to be in an industry where people enjoy their job on a daily basis. There is a passion for events to restart and I realise, speaking to a lot of people, that with the pilot shows—talking about a roadmap for how we restart the industry—and all these things, as I say,

we are an industry of problem solvers. Everyone has ideas and everyone wants the Government to work with us to try to get back on the road.

Q129 **Damian Green:** What should we be recommending that the Government do? If you say the industry is aching to do it and you have problem-solving skills, that is what you do, what do the Government need to do now or over the next two months or so to allow you even to do pilots?

Tre Stead: Let us have the conversation, basically. Open up the channels of communication, because we can be given scenarios and we can tell you what works and what would not work, and you could tell us what we cannot do and what can be done, and that way we can start working on the nuances of getting things happening in a way that is safe and secure for the public, safe for touring bands that are moving around, and just following the guidelines that keep everybody safe.

Duncan Bell: As Tre says, there are a number of things and, unfortunately, it is hard to design one particular thing. I think working with Government to create the roadmap, in the way the Government have rolled out a roadmap for vaccination or will come up with a plan to open schools. We need the clarity and the engagement. It is not necessarily about a definitive date that says it will be on this date, because we understand that cannot necessarily be said. It is about a plan. It is about what the picture could look like.

How do we think a safe event happens? What does the insurance scheme allow that to do if it comes into place? How does rapid testing fit into that process to do the pilots and to move towards safe events? The other thing that is a big factor in what the roadmap looks like is the reassurance that the support mechanisms in place, many of which have been very successful and very generous, for those who are less fortunate in the process are supported throughout until we are at a point where we reopen.

One point that is missed in many conversations is that, unlike certain sectors, we have not been forced to close legally and, therefore, many of the support systems are not triggered to look after our sector, but we are effectively unable to work because social-distancing events have not worked for all sorts of different reasons. That is where the support is lacking, and those who have been kept going until this point, if we cannot commit to that and continue to commit to, even if events can happen on some level, to maintain that support all the way through, then all the support money paid so far has gone for nothing.

Those businesses and freelancers will not come back because they do not have the certainty. The businesses will go bust. Many businesses in our sector have been operating on 5% to 6% income over the last 10 or 11 months. While furlough might help those businesses, we do not get the business rates relief that other businesses get because we are not closed, et cetera.

Q130 **Damian Green:** That is really interesting. On the point that some people have been getting support and it would all be wasted if the whole industry cannot go ahead, if the support is withdrawn too soon, do you have any estimate as to how much support money has gone in that would all go down the drain—as well as the huge personal problems for people—if the support mechanisms were withdrawn prematurely?

Duncan Bell: I do not have that for you. We can certainly look into it and come back to you. In terms of the impact of this ongoing process, it is huge in terms of the uncertainty for people and the mental health issues around that, particularly for individuals, for freelancers who do not know whether events will happen, when they will happen and, therefore, when they can come back to them. That is on the back of an additionally difficult time because the Brexit visa situation compounds it for our sector.

Q131 **Damian Green:** I have one last question. It sounds like both of you are saying that there are not talks along these lines going on with the Department. If that is true, I am slightly surprised and alarmed by that. Is that the case?

Duncan Bell: I think there are discussions happening around the insurance topic, which is good to know. As far as I am aware, for the supply chain I represent, there is not sufficient engagement to say, "What does this roadmap look like and how can we help?" In some cases we have offered, whether it is in terms of working on pilot events or putting a fully rapid-tested event blueprint together, because that is what the industry does. The industry is good at managing people, moving people around, making venues and sites safe, and we absolutely request that engagement from Government to have those conversations.

Q132 **Alex Davies-Jones:** Thank you both for giving evidence this afternoon. Duncan, is it fair to say that companies in the festival supply chain, the individuals who work there, have fallen through the gaps of Government support offered to businesses and cultural organisations?

Duncan Bell: It is true to say that many have. I cannot say everybody does, because there are many people out there who have received support. The self-employed scheme has helped many people, but whether it has helped sufficiently because the percentages in the early stages were lower and there are gaps where there was no support at all. The current level of 80% is clearly supportive of that but, overall, ExcludedUK represents something like 3 million people. That is clearly not just our sector; that is the whole breadth of it, and it will cover a lot of hospitality. Hospitality and events are often muddled up or joined together.

Yes, it is certainly true to say there are many people in our sector who have suffered because they have had little or no support, and business is the same. Because we are not forced to close, furlough works brilliantly

for looking after employees but that is only part of the story. That is only part of the picture; business rates, rent, leasing agreements for assets.

The local authority grant schemes that have been left to local authority discretion are helpful, but they are small numbers and not everybody qualifies for them and not every local authority includes all of the events sector in doing so. One of the reasons for that, and one of our biggest frustrations, is that when you look at the artist, the theatre venue or the headline side of things, people understand that. The Government understand that and the public understand that. We represent the hidden bit that very few people understand. We are invisible. In many cases, certainly in theatre more than others, we go out of our way to make ourselves invisible and that makes it a big problem for how we are seen now because we are not seen as how that goes.

We go to the theatre and take for granted the fact that it happens magically. It is the same with a festival. People are not aware of the thousands of people involved over a period of time, and in many cases with a lot of the festivals it is a year-round process. You start on next year's one the moment the previous year's one closes.

Q133 **Alex Davies-Jones:** On that point, as you said, it takes at least a year's lead-in to get these festivals up and running, to get them planned and to get the supply chain in place. How long do you anticipate it is going to take to rebuild the capacity of events and the supply chains to pre-pandemic levels, and is there anything the Government can do to help with this?

Duncan Bell: The Government can listen and engage with these conversations about this roadmap and about the plans so we can all work towards something. At the moment nobody can plan anything at all. A business does not know whether it is forecasting 6% turnover for another year or whether, if events happen at a certain level this year after a certain date that is the Government's best estimate or roadmap for doing so, they at least have the opportunity to say, "How do we operate and how do we continue on 40% revenue?" rather than 6% revenue.

That starts to build a picture beyond that as to how they get back up to full speed. The same applies to individuals, whether or not they are coming back into the industry. It is fair to say the industry has been resilient through this process, even without adequate support in some areas, but that cannot carry on. For most people that point is absolutely imminent where businesses and freelancers just cannot continue without support. That is why I made the point earlier that, if we do not make the commitment now, irrespective of actual restrictions, lockdowns or tier systems or whatever it might be, to support those people until the industry is fully able to operate, a lot of that support has gone for nothing.

Tre Stead: I echo Duncan's sentiment that, from the freelancers' point of view, everybody spent the first year with goodwill and using reserves. A

second year could be the nail in the coffin for a lot of people's businesses because that is when you start selling off assets and that sort of thing. Everybody I know who is a freelancer in the industry has worked, they have gone and found other work.

I have been working at the Nightingale in Manchester for the last 10 months. People are working on test and trace or at the test centres. People are finding work because we want to work, and people like being busy, but being able to do that for a year or even two is one thing. It is a different thing to plan a career, and we are increasingly finding a drop off of people who are going to have to decide about a temporary job that is doing them a service while touring is on pause but is not necessarily something we want to do long term.

Everybody is doing stuff at the minute that means they are able to jump back into touring, but being promised three weeks of tour is not enough if you do not have a plan for the long term. The problem we had in 2020 was the constant reopening and closing of bars and venues. That is not secure enough. We cannot keep doing that. It is having some kind of idea; if it is a slow start, that is fine, as long as it is a start.

Q134 **Alex Davies-Jones:** Do you have concerns about the future of young people coming into the industry as a result of this, that they are now seeing it as not a stable profession, something that is not going to benefit them long term, and they may go into a different profession? Is that a concern of yours?

Tre Stead: That is 100% a massive concern of mine. You have two, maybe three, years of students who are studying to come into the music industry over the last two years who have spent all this money learning this to come out to an industry that does not exist anymore. That is a scary thought for thousands of people, let alone would you let your son or daughter go and study sound engineering right now, if they are planning to do it in a couple of years' time? Of course, you wouldn't. It is risky and, until there is something firm in place, I feel we will have a lull and there is not going to be the new freelance talent coming through.

The other side of it is with the experienced people dropping off and going into other careers. Who will be able to teach those new people once they come back on? We are losing the established talent who are the people who teach the kids coming in how to do this job well.

Alex Davies-Jones: That would be a crying shame.

Duncan Bell: I agree with Tre. I have a couple of aspects to mention. The younger freelancers who are just starting out, coming out of college, are a huge part of those who are excluded. If you have only just started freelancing and you do not have the right accounts, then you do not qualify. That will forcibly steer them elsewhere because they will have to go to other areas where they can find work. That means that education may go to nothing and they may not come back.

The other threat that concerns many freelancers right now is the Brexit situation. There is a fear that engineers, technicians and crew from the EU will come in because of their passport status, and we will see that impact on the whole supply chain. We will see the impact of UK companies being less favourable because tours will start, management will set up the tour rehearsals and start based on mainland Europe, and the UK will become a leg of the tour. But all the staff on that tour will have been sourced from the EU and, therefore, will only have one country in which to work out their visa and work permit, rather than British citizens having to do it the other way round and then get 27 sets of paperwork in place to do that. That impacts on freelancers, it impacts on the supply chain and it impacts potentially on where the equipment comes from for festival seasons, because that is the nature of the touring game and the way that the equipment moves. It is a very large ecosystem that is all interconnected.

Q135 **Alex Davies-Jones:** You have pre-empted me and answered my next question on the UK-EU trade deal and whether that will have an impact on musicians moving between them. Yes, it is all connected. Tre, what will it mean for you and the tours you manage now that UK hauliers can only make two cross-border movements in the EU before they have to return?

Tre Stead: It is a big problem. We have established relationships with companies in the UK. Those companies have been going for years. They know exactly what they are doing. They move a lot of equipment for a lot of bands round Europe, and right now they cannot function with the deal as it is. I have spoken to bus companies and I know that most bus and truck companies have a plan B at the minute that would involve moving to Europe, to EU destinations for their business, which is obviously not what we want at all. There is already enough uncertainty. Bus companies that I have spoken to know that their European counterparts have business pencilled in—obviously, no one in the world knows when live gigs are going to start happening again—for the future and UK companies don't. That is a fact.

Q136 **Alex Davies-Jones:** Duncan, your written evidence to us suggests that, if the UK business collapsed because of the pandemic, the sector will have to rely on EU-based suppliers. How will their ability to do this be affected by the new rules?

Duncan Bell: As I mentioned just now, it is obviously a two-way process and, therefore, there will be restrictions on that, but I think it comes down to the logistics. Planning an event from the UK to multiple EU member states is more difficult than setting up an event in Europe, where they can move freely around any EU member state and then just have to overcome the one hurdle of how you come in and out of the UK.

Q137 **Alex Davies-Jones:** Tre, how important were the EU-based suppliers to us in the UK pre-pandemic?

Tre Stead: They are important and they help when we need them, especially for something like festivals, for example, where there are a lot of acts trying to move independently within the UK. The first port of call is obviously trying to get logistics from the UK, because that makes life a lot easier for us. However, we will always use the backup of companies in the EU. Looking at it in the future, we are going to have to start looking at EU companies and, like Duncan says, move them into the UK to do the UK as a leg, instead of basing stuff out of the UK. The knock-on effect of that is that, if a major part of the touring infrastructure, like haulage and logistics, disappears, the UK won't be used because it would make sense just to do it from a different country.

Q138 **Alex Davies-Jones:** It is all very depressing, what you are telling us. We are going to be losing young people entering the profession because of Covid and because of Brexit. It is very stark.

Duncan Bell: Going back to transport and trucking, as things stand at the moment there is an extraordinary imbalance. Because of the way this has evolved over many years, and because the UK is such a big part of the European pre-Brexit overall picture, something like 80% of the specialist haulage trucks that move the equipment around Europe for touring events, festivals and everything else are UK based, so it is not as simple as saying that the work will go to EU businesses. It will not, because they don't exist to the same scale.

On a note of positivity, if the conversations can be reopened, I would encourage the Government to actively reopen those discussions rather than just suggesting that the offer is still on the table, because it is a major issue that faces us as a country, as a nation. There are solutions if the engagement takes place, because it does affect the EU as well, so it needs the resources that exist in the UK. I am sure that, through some businesses moving and setting up elsewhere, it will balance out over time, but I think there is a great opportunity to use the two-way side of it as a reason and a good lever to try to reopen those discussions.

I will just add one more thing about freelancers. A freelance lighting engineer said to me the other day that there are already companies seeking contractors that have EU passports only for international work. How am I supposed to remain competitive when my status as a UK citizen has been diminished? That is a fairly scary outlook if you are a freelancer in this industry.

Alex Davies-Jones: It is. Thank you both very much. No more questions from me, Chair. You have both been very insightful, if not a bit depressing, but thank you.

Q139 **John Nicolson:** Of course, some of us voted against the deal that has resulted in all this chaos, but not everybody is watching this as closely as we are and as the two of you are.

I wonder if we can go back to basics, as somebody once said, and if you could tell us exactly why it is that the requirement for multiple visas is so

bad for the industry. The former Culture Minister, Nigel Adams, said—and I quote—"It's absolutely essential that free movement for artists is protected post-2020." Could I ask you, Duncan, to spell this out for people who are perhaps watching and listening to this for the first time?

Duncan Bell: Fundamentally, it is about a barrier to entry or a barrier to the ability to do the events, because in the music industry, whether it is the artists, whether it is the bands, whether it is the supply chain, they all have slightly different issues with this, but the big-name bands, the big, high-level events will deal with it. They will probably have the resources to be able to say, "We have somebody in charge of visas. We will do the paperwork and it is going to cost us X% more to do it, but we can probably make it work."

Q140 **John Nicolson:** At the moment, or at least before Brexit, bands could travel with their roadies across the whole European Union and there was no impediment to their free movement, but because free movement has ended now, by definition, they cannot travel freely anymore. For most people that does not really matter, because they can apply for a visa when they go on holiday. It is a bit of a hassle, but they can do it. If your raison d'être is going from one country to another relatively quickly during the course of a tour, that is a bit of a nightmare.

Tre Stead: Yes, it is.

Duncan Bell: Yes, it is a nightmare. That is exactly the picture that we are looking at. It is now more difficult to do that. There are costs, logistics and difficulties that make it harder for musicians and artists to do that. On the people coming into the industry, people starting out, younger bands starting up and trying to deal with that, there are barriers to that as well, because in some cases getting those visas is based on profile and experience and situations like that, which they do not necessarily have, but building up that touring experience, building up that following by putting the tours out, is what gets you to the status of recognition that then perhaps makes it easier to get the visa, so there is a little bit of a catch-22 in that sense.

In terms of equipment and the supply chain, it is equally difficult because for many businesses in the UK—it varies between 40% and 60% of the supply chain businesses that are supplying the rigging equipment, the sound equipment, the lighting equipment, the video equipment—that work takes place in mainland Europe. The client may possibly be in the UK, but the work still takes place in Europe. That is becoming more difficult. Carnets are manageable, depending on how the exact details of the trucking situation work and the cabotage situation. There may be a solution, to some extent, with companies moving to the EU in order to do that work, but you still have issues with whether the carnet is specific to a trailer. That puts big time-planning restrictions on it, so all of it presents a barrier that makes it easier for people to plan these events from within the EU and make the UK one of the legs of the tour, rather

than the other way around, because then they have only one set of hurdles to overcome.

Q141 **John Nicolson:** Tre, you are a tour manager. It sounds a bit as if this is all about music prevention rather than music enabling.

Tre Stead: It is a real worry, to be honest. It is something that I think we have all been dreading. Now it is here, we are obviously going to try to deal with what we have and make it work, but it is making it practically quite difficult. I think most people, the way they look at it from the outside is that, "Oh, a band will have so many dates in Europe. That is going to be less than the 90 days out of 180, so that is fine," but the real problem is going to be for the freelancers, who may be working for multiple bands. If you have five dates in Europe, you may be out there for 10 days once you add in travel days, days off and that kind of thing, plus anything before. If the infrastructure has to move out to Europe because buses, trucks, all that starts out there, then the freelancer is going to be needed out in Europe for extra days to do rehearsals, to pack those trucks, to sort out the gear.

At the minute, it looks like everyone is going to have to have their own tally of how many days they have been in different countries. Obviously, if I am bringing together a group of people who will be doing different jobs outside of the tour that I am organising, I need to make sure they have enough days left to be able to complete our tour.

Q142 **John Nicolson:** This is an absurd level of bureaucracy, isn't it? I remember when I worked at the BBC and we made films in Europe. When I first started out at the BBC, the BBC would send a camera crew over with us, so you would go and make a film in Brussels and you would go with a cameraman, a soundman and sometimes a lighting man right at the beginning; they were mostly all men. When the market changed, they started to hire folk in Brussels because they were younger and they were cheaper. The more expensive folk with families, who needed a bit more payment, they did not send them abroad. Of course, that was without the visas, so I shudder to think what will happen if visa costs are added. Will the result be that, even if you can afford to tour—and I notice that the Musicians' Union says only the wealthiest and best-known artists will be able to afford all of this—you are not going to take UK crews with you, are you? You are going to hire local crews.

Tre Stead: Absolutely. It makes the UK crews look undesirable, of course it does, as we are seeing it happening already. Not only is there the cost, but there is a whole layer of admin. That side of it will be a lot to keep on top of. Like we say, for more established acts who have a crew behind them, tour managers and managers behind them, that is fine, that is what we are paid to do, we will deal with that. You are talking about new artists who do not necessarily have management, who do not necessarily know what they are doing when it comes to how to get visas to pass through different countries on a tour, and they are probably not even breaking even in the first place. They have probably done a job for a year

to save up money to go on that tour, and now you are adding a layer of bureaucracy, a layer of admin and a load of other costs. Why would you bother?

Q143 **John Nicolson:** What is the best thing about Brexit from your perspective in your industry?

Tre Stead: That is a very interesting question. I will tell you what I think is a good thing at the minute, that because the industry is on pause because of the pandemic, it has potentially given us a little extra time to figure out the nuances and finalise problems like this. We have time to do that now.

Q144 **John Nicolson:** Well done trying to find something. I don't think your heart was really in that answer, was it?

Finally, Duncan, given how glaringly obvious this is as a big downside for your industry, did UK Government Ministers approach you or people you know to talk about this and ask for your expertise?

Duncan Bell: No is the short answer, because, as I said earlier, we are invisible. I cannot speak for everybody, and I do not have detailed knowledge of exactly who the Government have spoken to or not. I am aware that conversations were perhaps taking place with the hauliers early on—I am probably going back a couple of years within the Brexit process—and similarly with musicians, but the invisible supply chain, the freelancers that we are talking about here, the supply companies that we are talking about here, I am sure they have not been consulted on this. Yet there are huge threats to freelancers, as we have talked about, as they will not pick up the work because they are not as attractive as their EU counterparts, which will mean further people looking to leave the industry and go elsewhere, and there will be further redundancies, further unemployment and further failures of businesses. It is a pretty gloomy view in the short term.

Going back to your positivity question, I did not vote for this situation, but I believe the UK can be a strong nation again. However, I think there is a difficult transition period ahead of us, not helped by Covid.

John Nicolson: As the Chair has already pointed out, the Committee has asked for the Minister to tell us and reveal to us what correspondence there was with the European Union on visas, so we anxiously await the publication of her correspondence.

Q145 **Julie Elliott:** Duncan and Tre, you have answered quite a lot of what I wanted to ask about carnets, the difficulties and what have you. You have outlined very clearly where the difficulties are. What do the Government need to change to make this better, bearing in mind that we are in this reality of a Brexit world?

Tre Stead: Basically, we need communication and some clarity and unity, such as a system in place that makes it easier for us to travel. Like I say, at the minute we have multiple countries that all have multiple visa

and work permit situations with different costings. I don't think anyone even has that written down if, say, we wanted to travel today.

Q146 **Julie Elliott:** I was going to say, are the Government communicating this clearly to you at the moment? It sounds from what you are saying that they are not.

Tre Stead: I have not heard anything clear at the minute. I am hoping that is because it is still fluid and we will get some resolution. Like we say, it is not relevant right now because no one can go anywhere, so why would you put the admin in? Yes, I think the whole thing is adding a layer of friction to a very difficult year.

Q147 **Julie Elliott:** Duncan, what do you think the Government need to do to make this situation work?

Duncan Bell: The difficulty we face—and I recognise the difficulties in it—is that the nature of doing a deal at such a late stage of the Brexit process meant it was impossible for any previous discussions to be constructive, because it was very hard to plan. You did not know what the picture was going to look like because you did not know what the deal was going to be. I think it has potentially caught the Government out because it is such a large-scale issue, and it clearly was not adequately reflected in the agreement.

I think urgency in engaging with the industry to address it, and urgency in engaging with the EU to bring it back on to the table, is the primary issue, so that we feel we are being listened to and we are being recognised. In the early stages of January, there was an enormous amount of noise that, as Tre just alluded to, made it almost impossible to work out what any of it really meant. We are in a fact-finding process at the moment of trying to clarify that. Certainly, as an organisation, we are trying to quietly gather the information so that we have clarity of that picture before we really try to engage with the Government to say, "This is what we are faced with. This is what we now need to do."

Being perhaps naive in the world that we live in, the shoot-for-the-stars outcome is an EU-wide agreement on movement of people and supply chain equipment that works. I am not necessarily suggesting that it suddenly goes back to freedom of movement across the board, because I recognise that is part of the process of leaving and part of the Government's aims in their manifesto, but to try to achieve some reciprocal broad-based scheme that benefits us all, because it has been an integrated continent for many, many years now. There is probably darkness and blindness on both sides of the equation about how much it will affect us all. It is not just about the UK saying, "We have left and we now don't like the picture we are looking at." I think the same will be true of many people in Europe as well. We have to try to move forward in that sense, in terms of the discussions that need to take place.

Q148 **Julie Elliott:** I agree on dealing with the reality of where we are. It is

perhaps not where some of us wanted to be, but the reality is this is where we are. You clearly have many contacts on mainland Europe. Do you think they are worried in the same way as the people on this side are about how difficult it is at the moment to try to work out how you are going to operate, or do you think the problems are mainly on this side?

Duncan Bell: I think there are more problems on this side because we are an island that has served the whole continent over a period of time and now we are potentially only an island, whereas if you are the rental company counterpart in Germany, France or Spain, you still have all the 27 member states at your disposal to do your business, so you are losing the UK as a part of it. But I suspect the UK business for those EU companies is not as great a proportion to them as ours is the other way around, so I think that problem is bigger.

The problem that they are facing, which I guess is perhaps a little "be careful of what you wish for" is that the cabotage situation impacts their transport industry equally to ours because of the number of drops allowed, which is not a new thing. It is not something that has suddenly come out of Brexit alone, but it is now being enforced in a different way is what we understand, in order that individual states can protect their own economies and their own businesses, so a German trucking company is not losing out to a cheaper eastern European counterpart.

Q149 **Julie Elliott:** Finally, have Government made any contact with yourselves or the organisations you work with post the beginning of this year to see if the deal is working for you? Has there been any communication?

Duncan Bell: Not directly, no. We certainly approached them. We have written and we are flagging the issues, but at the moment we have not had the engagement.

Julie Elliott: They are not coming back?

Duncan Bell: That is partly because we are all fact-finding, and it is very noisy and new.

Tre Stead: Personally, no. I am close with the Music Venue Trust and I know it is trying to keep on top of stuff. It likes to get in there and get the information, but I think even it is struggling to find out what the facts are at the minute. Personally, I am having to do another job. I have retrained in a different career for the moment, so there is only so much brain power I can dedicate to it now.

Q150 **Julie Elliott:** The Government really need to get in touch with people and talk through what the issues are to get them sorted. That is what I am taking from you both. Thank you very much.

Duncan Bell: There also needs to be a recognition of the breadth of people this affects, because it is difficult when the Government engage with one particular part of a sector. It is all so interconnected, a lot of

those freelancers and supply chain businesses, whether it is a theatre show, a rock and roll show, a corporate event or a sporting event. All of the interaction between the EU and the UK, for the same reasons we talked about very early on in this session about the crossover of those skills, between festivals in the summer, corporate in the winter and so on, means that it applies to all of those. It is a very, very broad umbrella that needs to be identified.

Julie Elliott: The evidence we have heard today is showing that it is a very complicated jigsaw.

Duncan Bell: Absolutely.

Q151 **Clive Efford:** Thank you, Duncan and Tre, for giving evidence today. Duncan, you said in answer to an earlier question that the Government were caught out, but I did not quite follow what you were referring to. We were talking about the visa system and the negotiations, I believe, but what did you mean?

Duncan Bell: I think what I meant is that, to me, the nature of trying to negotiate a deal at the 11th hour without quite knowing what certain bits of it look like makes it hard to identify what the problems are going to be until you hit that deadline. Not knowing precisely what the impact on the industry would be at that late stage meant there was no time to adapt to it before suddenly we are in January and we are having to work under a new regime. I think that is what I meant, if that makes sense.

Q152 **Clive Efford:** Yes. It just struck me as an extraordinary situation for your industry to be in, because you are part of the events industry, which is such an enormous contributor to the economy, about £70 billion turnover, of which the festivals industry is a small part, but none the less a significant one. It is an extraordinary situation for the Government to be in, that such a significant industry has largely been overlooked in the negotiations. Would you agree with that?

Duncan Bell: Absolutely I would agree with that, yes. It feeds into the invisibility of the sector and the lack of direct connection with the sector. The Department, I think, sees culture at a certain level and sees the value of it and engages at a certain level, but I don't think there is a detailed enough understanding of exactly how integrated it all is across the whole of the nation and how complex it is in the ways that we have talked about today.

Q153 **Clive Efford:** Has the industry had a fresh look at what is going to happen in 2021 in light of the new variant of the virus and what we are hearing today about the South African variant? Does that put a different complexion on 2021 as we look to the future, and does it mean the Government should now be talking to you about how we preserve the industry for 2022? Largely the season for the summer of 2021 is going to be lost.

Tre Stead: The key thing is that we are going to have to start looking at pilot and test events, and just how that will work with things like the new variant, because we never know if there are going to be more and more variants. Everyone has been talking about how to get on our feet and get back some kind of normality. The thing that needs to be done is starting those conversations now.

I feel like the pilot events that happened in 2020 were fantastic and everyone gained a lot of information from them, but they happened so close to venues reopening anyway that there was only so much that could be used from it, whereas if we could start looking at models now, how testing affects it, how vaccines will affect it, lateral flow testing to get people into venues and that kind of thing, we can look at lots of different scenarios early on so they can take effect later.

Q154 **Clive Efford:** Duncan, do you think we need to be looking at a situation where we are preserving the industry so that it is ready to recover when that opportunity comes? Should we be writing off the opportunity for pilot events this year, for instance?

Duncan Bell: I 100% agree with you that it is a grave concern and that we need to be thinking about it. I cannot speak for the Government in terms of what will or will not be possible. We can ask that we are engaged in those discussions and making those plans, and we are willing to do so. If the Government advice from the scientists and so on means that it is viable in September, if it is the tail end of the season to be starting to look at some of those events, whether they are pilots, whether they are open events, there is a lot of learning still to be had in terms of what that looks like, what the rapid testing might look like. Because if we all accept that the vaccine programme is a great success, as fantastic as that is, it is a moving programme. If the virus continues to move around us in the way that it does, we are living with the virus for a period of time. It is not going to disappear. We have to adapt and we have to find new ways of working out what the future looks like at some point. We can't be on hold forever.

That is where the engagement with the industry now, to look at the testing, to look at how to manage things, what is viable and what isn't, is absolutely critical. I personally think we should not lose the opportunity this year to establish some of that in some form in order to gain the learning and the input from that process.

Q155 **Clive Efford:** Should we be making sure we plan for the worst-case scenario so that we can preserve the industry, so that we do not lose so much of it that it is not there to recover when the opportunity arises?

Duncan Bell: Yes, there are definitely factors in there that we need to be aware of. Whether one plans for an event because that is what we want to happen, as opposed to it being the absolute worst-case scenario, is a different way of looking at it. Yes, we have to be very aware that people leaving the industry, businesses going bust, will mean that losing 2021 to

any significant level will hugely impact the future of the sector beyond that. We absolutely need the tools and the support to be extended and expanded to make it absolutely fit for purpose in order to make sure that we come out of it and we do exist. That is made even harder with the Brexit stuff we have already talked about.

Q156 **Clive Efford:** According to DCMS figures we have seen, £22 million was paid to festivals and organisations in the supply chain from the Culture Recovery Fund, and 51 festivals out of 81 that applied were successful. Has that money reached the level of the industry where it needs to be?

Tre Stead: I can talk from the side of the small limited companies, which were part of the excluded, and they have been struggling this year and last year.

I heard from people that the Culture Recovery Fund is a fantastic resource, and it has gone out to a lot of people and done a lot of good. The smallest amount you can apply for is currently £25,000. There are a lot of companies that do not need that much and, therefore, cannot justify applying. Is it possible to talk about whether there is scope for a pot that can be for smaller grants? You can feed a lot more people with that amount of money if they apply for slightly smaller amounts. They are looking at trying to get rent, overheads, that sort of thing, paid while they mothball their businesses so that they will be ready to come back in the future.

Q157 **Clive Efford:** Are you saying that there is an argument for smaller parcels of money to be made available that would provide the opportunity for some of the smaller businesses in the supply chain to access that fund?

Tre Stead: Absolutely. I have spoken to friends of mine, colleagues, who are attempting to apply for the second Culture Recovery Fund at £25,000, although realistically they can probably survive on £5,000 or £6,000. They have to push for the minimum amount, which is very high and may cut them out of the picture completely. I think there is a big opportunity there for a lot more people to benefit from smaller grants.

Q158 **Clive Efford:** We are also told that there is about £10 million-worth of ticket sales money that is held by the industry. Should the Government take some sort of measure to protect the consumers who will miss out if companies are allowed to go bust?

Tre Stead: Oh, that is difficult.

Clive Efford: If that is not one for you, could Duncan comment?

Duncan Bell: I am not sure it is the expertise of either of us in the areas we reflect, because it is to do with ticket agencies, who holds the money and at what point it transfers from the agency to the supply chain or the artist. That is a fairly complex issue that is definitely not my area of expertise. Anything that threatens—

Clive Efford: That is fine. Honestly, your answer is fine. If it is not your area of expertise, I will leave it there.

Duncan Bell: Can I say one more thing about what we were talking about there?

Chair: Yes.

Duncan Bell: The CRF should be applauded in many respects. It is a sizeable amount of money. However, it seems a little one size fits all in the way it is operated. Over the last nine to 10 months we saw that the early round, the early discussions and announcements, made a lot of people in the industry feel that it was aimed at the cultural fabric of the nation rather than the supply chain.

Q159 **Chair:** Yes, we understand. That is the reason why there were 81 applications rather than 975. It is a bit of a failing of the Culture Recovery Fund that basically people have perceived it is there for the very big institutions and the fabric of those institutions. Of course, individual businesses can avail themselves of the local authority grants and support that have been available, particularly at the start of the pandemic. I know several smaller businesses within supply chains have availed themselves of that in my constituency, but undoubtedly there is a falling between stools here.

I want to follow up on one thing before we conclude this panel, Duncan. You talked about whether we will see any festivals this year and whether we should aim to get some festivals under way. If anything, in the very worst-case scenario, it is learnings, if you like. What have you made of what Germany has done with the insurance? It is interesting that they have backed their insurance for their festival season from 1 July but, oddly enough, they are now vaccinating at a snail's pace, whereas we are vaccinating at a much quicker rate. You would say it is more likely that we would be able to host festivals in the second part of this year, but we do not have the insurance. Germany may not be able to do so, but it already has the insurance in place.

Duncan Bell: Yes, it is a frustration that we are aware of. Other European countries have also put insurance in place. There are other countries that are more engaged in testing events in order to have that learning. There was an event in Barcelona at the beginning of the year. I cannot remember the number of people who attended, but there was a control group of people and an event group with no social distancing, with testing, in order to prove the viability of these things, and that is exactly the sort of engagement that we are looking for, that we are keen to do. We have the resources within the industry, currently, looking for ways to help, wanting to get back to work.

There is a tricky balance. Nobody wants to say, "Let's not bother with festivals this year. We are happy just taking the money from the Government." There is not a single person in our industry for whom that is true. Nobody wants to be taking support. Everybody wants to get back

to work and do what they want to do, and that also applies to the people who are leaving. There are people who have gone, skilled engineers who have gone into the IT world, because their skills are transferable, but that is not where they want to work. They will earn more money, potentially, but they will still hopefully come back when they have the certainty because they love the industry. The passion and creativity that the UK is known for globally is at risk as a consequence of the overall failures. It is about employment and businesses, but it is also about the nation as a whole and our overall creative industries.

Chair: Thank you, Duncan. Trade not aid, I think, is your message there.

Duncan and Tre, thank you very much for your evidence today.

Examination of Witness

Witness: Dr Andrew Smith.

Q160 **Chair:** This is the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee and our hearing into the future of festivals post pandemic.

We have heard from two panels today. We are now moving on to our third panel. Our third panel is a single witness, Dr Andrew Smith, reader in architecture and cities at the University of Westminster. We have strayed into the afternoon, Dr Smith, so good afternoon.

Dr Smith: Good afternoon. Thanks for inviting me to contribute.

Chair: Thank you. Our first question will come from Clive Efford.

Q161 **Clive Efford:** Dr Smith, how many local authorities generate income from hiring out open spaces for festivals?

Dr Smith: I cannot give you an exact figure, but it is a very common way, now, of earning income. It is one of the most obvious ways of generating commercial revenue from an open space. Obviously, that does not just include music festivals; it includes a range of events. Music festivals are interesting because they are among the most lucrative uses. Some of the larger festivals are some of the most lucrative ways of generating a considerable amount of money from these types of amenities. I could try to get back to you with an overall figure, but I would say almost every local authority makes some revenue from hiring out their spaces.

Q162 **Clive Efford:** What proportion of income do you think that generates for parks?

Dr Smith: It depends. It is relatively a small proportion of the local authorities' overall budgets, but for some individual parks it is almost all of their income. There are examples of parks in London that are entirely funded by the music festivals they host. That is a relatively recent phenomenon but, as local authority park budgets have diminished,

obviously there has been an incentive for those authorities to seek income. One of the most obvious sources is to go to festival organisers and offer spaces for hire. It is a very varied picture. Some park authorities generate a very small proportion of their income from festivals and events, but there are also some that get almost their entire commercial income from this source.

Q163 **Clive Efford:** Will this be a growing problem, if it is a problem at all? Is this something we are going to see an increase in following on from 10 years of austerity and now Covid, that local authorities looking to generate income will be doing more of this?

Dr Smith: It was happening more, and obviously we have had the Covid pause and that has highlighted the fact that now there are big holes in some budgets where a large amount of revenue was coming in from festivals and events.

Post Covid-19, there are two possible scenarios. The first is maybe fewer festivals because local people have begun to appreciate their urban green spaces more and maybe it will become more difficult to justify large-scale festivals. Probably the more likely scenario is that local authorities will be even more desperate to generate commercial revenue, will be even more cash strapped, and there will be a lot of pent-up demand for festivals, so there is also a scenario whereby we have an increase in the number of festivals being staged in these parks and open spaces.

Q164 **Clive Efford:** I want to get to where you are coming from on that. Is that a good thing or a bad thing? Should we be doing it at all? Or is it being done too much?

Dr Smith: It depends where you stand on what you think public amenities and public spaces are for. Some festivals, a few festivals, a few events, have always happened in parks and green spaces, but for me there is a problem when we start exploiting public spaces for their commercial opportunities. I have some problems with the overexploitation of these spaces, but I think most people would argue that having some festivals and events in large parks, for example, is appropriate and is something that has happened for a considerable amount of time. It is not necessarily a new thing. The problem lies more with the scale of activity, the size of the events, the frequency with which events are staged.

Q165 **Clive Efford:** Is there an optimum? If we have a larger group of people going to a public open space than would normally go there, and they are paying to go there to be entertained, that is a good use, although it may inconvenience some people who use that park regularly. That is acceptable, isn't it?

Dr Smith: Yes, that is one argument that it is good to get different sorts of people using these spaces, but that is sometimes difficult to justify because, if these spaces are in great demand for everyday use, excluding people who are either unwilling or unable to pay entry fees is a problem.

There are important questions about what we think parks are for and who they are for. If you still believe in universal accessibility and trying to make these spaces as open and as accessible as possible, we have to be careful about overprogramming them with ticketed events.

There are some music festivals, remember, that are free and have relatively open access, so they can be fantastic ways of bringing different people into parks. Remember, in London we had some amazing events in the 1970s and 1980s, the Rock Against Racism event, amazing free music festivals that had an incredibly powerful social role. The danger now is that there is incentive to stage the most lucrative festivals, the more commercially oriented festivals, and they are not only impinging on people's use of the spaces, they are pushing out free festivals and free events, because obviously there is a limited number of events that we can justify staging. If a council or a park authority is short of income, they are going to prioritise the events that generate the most income, and free festivals and free events that do not generate much income tend to get squeezed out of those spaces.

Q166 **Clive Efford:** Should the income from these commercial festivals be ring-fenced for parks and open spaces, or should they go into the general coffers of the local authority?

Dr Smith: Again, there is a varied picture. My own opinion is that it should be reserved to help fund and maintain parks and open spaces. There are three different options. Basically, it either goes into the budget more generally—some recent legal cases have suggested that the money should not only be spent on parks and open spaces, but on the very park that the money was earned in. There is the Finsbury Park legal case where they challenged the use of the park for Wireless. For that particular music festival and other large music festivals, there was a stipulation, as far as I am aware, and a recommendation that wherever possible money earned in a park should be spent on that park. That is a more complicated situation, because there is only so much money one individual park needs. Finsbury Park, for example, generated I think £1.3 million from music festivals. Haringey generated that amount of money in 2018-19, but that is probably more money than is needed to maintain that park on an annual basis. There is a danger then that you have a profit-making element. Then we are cross-subsidising either other parks or other parts of the local authority.

Q167 **Clive Efford:** If you are a cash-strapped local authority that does not get enough Government grant, for instance, to run care homes, is there a moral argument that that money should be used for the priorities of that local authority? After all, the people making those decisions are democratically elected. What on earth does it have to do with a judge how that local authority spends the money?

Dr Smith: I totally agree, and the local authorities have my sympathy. They have obviously been underfunded and really struggling for years now, even before Covid. I agree that is a really difficult problem. But

there are other issues in that, if you adopt that principle, there is then an in-built incentive to overexploit your parks and green spaces, whereas if the money has to be spent on an individual park it dulls the incentive to exploit the commercial potential of the space.

Yes, a lot of people have said that to me. A lot of local authorities I have spoken to have said, "We do not hypothecate revenue in that way, and we do think there is a moral obligation to make sure our frontline services are funded properly, or funded wherever possible." But I think there is increasing recognition, and this pandemic has really highlighted it, that maybe parks and green spaces should be seen as frontline services. We are told about the importance of health and mental health, and we are constantly being reminded that we need to get outside and we need to live healthier lifestyles. Parks are fundamental to that.

In terms of preventive medicine, social prescribing and other priorities within even frontline services, parks should be at the forefront of that. I realise that DCMS, in some ways, is not the Department to take the lead on that—it is probably the responsibility of the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government—but because of DCMS's involvement in activities, sports and other cultural activities, even their previous involvement with the Royal Parks, being an executive agency linked to DCMS, I think there is still a role for DCMS to play in terms of pushing the case of parks and saying that they not only need to be funded properly, but they need to be considered as fundamental local authority services and not discretionary services.

Q168 **Clive Efford:** I will put one last point to you. I agree with you that you should not overexploit open spaces, and that would not be fair on the people who live nearby and all the rest of it. But if a council is exploiting an open space to the degree that it really does upset the local community, as democratically elected local people, are they not more likely to be in tune with that than somebody coming from outside trying to dictate to them what they should and should not do?

Dr Smith: Are you asking whether the existing democratic process is sufficient to take their views into consideration?

Clive Efford: I suppose I am, yes.

Dr Smith: Yes. It has happened. There are cases where councillors have lost their seat on the basis of controversial event proposals. It does work to a certain extent. Obviously, the political makeup of some parts of the country means that it is very hard to imagine a different political party leading that particular borough council or that council, so it becomes more difficult to say that local people can have a say there. There is a real problem in that some of these festivals in the past, although they may be appropriate and justified, the way in which they have engaged with local people has not been sufficient, and local people have not been taken into consideration and their views have not been taken into consideration when decisions have been made to stage events and the

way in which those events are staged. Again, there is a role there for local community groups, local friends groups and other park-user groups to have a much greater role in that process. The current potential for the democratic system to allow for that is a bit limited.

Clive Efford: There is a whole new topic of questions there, but the Chair will not let me go down that avenue right now with the time constraints. Thank you for your answers.

Q169 **Chair:** In terms of the Royal Parks, do you think it would be worthwhile bringing them back in-house?

Dr Smith: That is interesting. One of the reasons they have become increasingly at arm's length from Government is because they were almost asked to generate more of their own income. The reason they have become divorced from the Government structure—they were an executive agency, and now I think they have been set up as a charitable trust—is because, effectively, they have been told to generate more of their income. I think they should be brought back in, but that would obviously require them to be given a more generous grant and be allowed to undertake—

Q170 **Chair:** I think it could be done without effectively stopping them making their commercial decisions, as such, and also getting money in. There may be some disquiet over some of the decision making at times at Royal Parks. I will give you an example. At Richmond Park you had kids on bikes being asked their age before they were allowed in, the closure of the park to cyclists during the pandemic, and that sort of thing. Quite arbitrary, and no feeling of accountability or democracy involved in that respect.

Dr Smith: Yes, it has always been a slightly strange agency. Weirdly enough, in the festival sector—which obviously they have a particularly significant role in because of British Summer Time and the things they do in Hyde Park, which generates a very substantial proportion of their income, that and Winter Wonderland are very significant events for their budgets—I think they have done some quite good things. They have managed to develop a much better relationship, for example, with the local residents who live around Hyde Park and have come to various agreements, and those events are much less contested than they were previously. They published a major events policy in 2015 that helped set out what was permissible and how they were going to use the eight parks differently, and which ones events were suitable for, and how many music festivals or how many large-scale events they were prepared to allow in each of the spaces. That type of thing is quite helpful because at least everyone is clear about what they are doing and why they are doing it. Whether you agree with it or not is a separate question, but at least they have set out, "This is what we are doing. This is why we need the money. This is why we are staging the event, and this is effectively what we think is permissible and appropriate for the spaces."

That should probably be adopted by a larger number of park authorities and local authorities. There are some that have good event policies, but there are others that are staging events without a clear policy on the maximum amount of time and space events are allowed to occupy, for example. At a minimum we need those policies in place. Other people, myself included, think there needs to be a bit more regulation to prevent the overexploitation of parks and open spaces and to say that there should be a maximum amount of time and maximum amount of park space that these festivals can take up.

Chair: Yes, and random park closures and fun runs going on all the time.

Dr Smith: Yes, exactly. Because it is not just about music festivals. They are coming on top of another set of events that happen. In some ways it is not necessarily music festivals that are always the problem; it is music festivals plus other incursions and other events that are being organised as well. It is just that the music festivals are often the most contentious because they are the largest events. They often involve 12-foot fences and quite oppressive security apparatus, they are quite noisy and they sometimes involve some antisocial behaviour, some wider issues. They are particularly prone to being the events that cause the most local upset.

Q171 **Kevin Brennan:** I agree with a lot of what you say about the importance of parks. Many years ago when I was on the leisure and amenities committee of Cardiff City Council and proposed cuts were made to parks, I always resisted them on the basis that this was socialism in the open air, which not all of my colleagues on the Committee may agree with. Ultimately, these are resources that are available to everyone, free at the point of use, for the public good, and they are good for public health, and so on. Is it not the case that we are going to see not just a post-Covid surge in the desire to gather together, but we are going to see in years to come potentially a bigger demand for urban festivals because of the massive environmental impact of everybody driving in vehicles with their huge emissions to rural festivals? There is at least a model for urban festivals that you can get there by public transport, and so on.

Dr Smith: That is right. I think there is some research that suggests that 80% of CO_2 emissions from festivals are from the travel-related element. That is a big problem. For urban festivals people usually use public transport, and that makes them more sustainable in that respect. Urban festivals have become much more popular over the past five to 10 years; there has been a huge rise in the number of festivals happening in city centres. Remember, it sounds like a win-win in some ways, but I do not think it necessarily is, because there are still environmental issues with festivals that happen in urban parks. Not just the obvious damage to turf and the problems you can get with the physical impacts of the events, but we are obviously trying to think about biodiversity and wildlife in urban parks, and urban places should not be seen as merely urban. To some extent we can think about them as hosting a wider variety of environments.

Parks are obviously at the forefront of that, and attempts to try to encourage wildlife and other flora and fauna in urban spaces and parks is essential to that. There are environmental impacts from urban festivals as well. Obviously, the negative social effects are much more pronounced in urban settings because you have tens of thousands of people sometimes living in very close proximity to these spaces. These spaces were not designed as event venues, but they are increasingly being utilised as such.

Q172 **Kevin Brennan:** Yes. I want to ask you about that. I noticed in the briefing that you said AEG does quite a good job in relation to Victoria Park in east London. The first time I came across Victoria Park in east London was in 1978 when I attended the Rock Against Racism gig with about 100,000 people. If anyone looks it up on YouTube and sees the scenes of The Clash playing with Jimmy Pursey on stage, somewhere in that seething mass of 100,000, out towards the right, there is an orange banner and I am somewhere near that in the crowd. That was obviously a very chaotic, anarchic and typical 1970s event. What have they done to make you think they perhaps have some of this right for holding festivals in parks?

Dr Smith: In simple terms, I think they have done two things. First, they have genuinely consulted and spent a lot of time and effort talking to local people to work out a way of staging big festivals in that park that does not antagonise local people. There will always be some people who live in that area who do not like those festivals, but they seem to have put in the time and effort and genuinely committed to a consultation and a collaborative process, which is dealt with in a much more tokenistic way by other companies and other festivals.

The second thing they have done, which has now been copied across other large festivals, is changed the scheduling of the festivals in Victoria Park so that they are hosted on two consecutive weekends with a community event in between. Basically, they consolidated the entire festival programme into a 10-day period. That obviously reduces the assembly and de-rig time because it takes sometimes two weeks to set up an event or it takes a week to take it down. Therefore, if you do it in the way they have done it in Victoria Park, you effectively remove one of those three-week disruption periods because you have one assembly period and one de-rig for two weekend-long festivals. The plans were for Finsbury Park to adopt the same model in 2020, which never happened. Brockwell Park is planning more events in London this summer. It has also decided to adopt this sort of intensive period where there is going to be a lot of disruption, but at least it is confined to a limited period of time. Those two things have been quite excellent.

Q173 **Kevin Brennan:** The principle here for urban festivals held in parks is that they should be held in consultation with local people. Local people should get a benefit out of it of some kind directly, either through investment in the park, reduced-price access to the events or other

things of that kind. They should be limited in scope in the way in which they are spread throughout the year, perhaps consolidating and having community festivals as part of it. Is it your suggestion that all of that could perhaps be captured, if not in regulation necessarily, in advice and guidance on holding festivals, which could be something useful that this Committee might recommend?

Dr Smith: Definitely. I did something similar for Parks for London, which is the London-wide body that represents all of London's parks. We wrote some recommendations for those, and they were disseminated to London local authorities and park managers. To some extent they have been taken up by several of those authorities. I would be happy to submit some of those recommendations.

Q174 **Steve Brine:** Getting back to 2019, back in the days of fun.

Dr Smith: Heady days.

Steve Brine: British Summer Time, Hyde Park, which was a big event in central London. Who could forget seeing Celine Dion live? I still count it as a big moment for me. Presumably, British Summer Time was not a free event, these events cost quite a lot of money. Are they just the preserve of the upper middle classes who can afford to spend £70 on a ticket when the truth is that, more so than ever post Covid—let's not pretend that this was not an issue before—some people are not able to spend £70 a week on food let alone a ticket to see "My Heart Will Go On" live?

Dr Smith: I totally agree. They are often very expensive events. But there are a wide range of festivals now, so like some of the other contributors to these sessions have been saying, it is not just about those big, iconic events. Even with large-scale festivals in London, you have ones that are catering more for people invested in grime and rap, and you have dance music festivals. It is not just about the middle-of-the-road festivals that cater for the middle classes.

I agree that they are very expensive. For some people—even people who maybe have lower incomes—this can be an annual pilgrimage and they will save up. Some of the people I have talked to have said that, although it is a lot of money, some people are prepared to pay it. I agree, a lot of my writing has been about how exclusive these events are, and that is what makes them harder to justify, the fact that it is £100 for a weekend ticket or £70 to £80 for a day ticket. It does make them exclusive, and obviously that contrasts with the ethos of the park settings as the stage, which are meant to be free and as accessible as possible.

Q175 **Steve Brine:** There are other costs once you are in there, of course. You probably cannot take too much in with you. Then, of course, there are the environmental costs. We all know that festivals are not the green vehicles that some believe them to be. Quite the opposite; they have an environmental impact, don't they, on the ground on which you walk but also on what is left behind?

Dr Smith: Yes, and obviously there are not the same problems with urban festivals, with things like camping and people leaving tents and other things behind. The environmental effects are linked to the social effects. We have seen some festivals leaving huge amounts of damage to turf, which render those spaces inaccessible or with limited accessibility for quite a long period of time. There have been some events where you have had a festival in August and, because it was wet or because of extreme weather conditions, you have completely hammered the park and it has not been fully accessible again until October of that year.

We did a survey last year with friends of London parks groups, and there were several examples where park amenities were rendered less accessible for six to seven months following an event simply because of all the damage that was done. That links to the fact that it is an environmental problem. It is not good for the park, but it then has a knock-on effect in terms of the accessibility of the park space and has a social effect, too.

Steve Brine: I should add that Stevie Wonder was there also.

Dr Smith: You have retained your credibility, or you have regained it.

Steve Brine: I have none with my fellow Committee members.

Q176 **Chair:** I can confirm that fact. What evidence do you have that commercial festivals are pushing out smaller community-based events?

Dr Smith: There are fewer free music festivals than there used to be. They are increasingly rare and, therefore, you are looking for explanations for that. Music festivals have not become less popular; they have become more popular. You would imagine having free ones would be an even more common occurrence, but it has not been. There are examples. You have some spaces. I have been looking a lot at Gunnersbury Park in west London that used to host things like the London Mela and other free events, but because again they have been reconstituted as a community interest company with ambitious income targets, those events have been substituted with a commercial music festival. Lovebox and Gunnersville, another music festival, are now in that park.

It is hard to make a fully robust case, but there is plenty of anecdotal evidence that those events are—

Q177 **Chair:** Is it possible that, post Covid, we will see a return of those smaller events? Obviously, it is very likely that, at least in the first tranche of events that we see, they will have quite restricted numbers. You may find that more community-based smaller events may be ones that can go ahead rather than large ones.

Dr Smith: Yes, we have just taken on a PhD student who is looking at that very issue, this idea of thinking about different, more informal occasions, and less commercially oriented ones. Maybe they might be

allowed to flourish, certainly in the immediate period when lockdown eases, if not in the longer term.

This is an interesting issue, and the involvement people have in organising these events is important. What is a shame sometimes about the larger festivals, including the music festivals, is that there is very little local involvement in putting them on, planning them and organising, performing at them and participating in any sort of way. Those other events have a significant role in terms of being that much more involved. Rather than just putting on entertainment, the process of involvement in those events is very important.

Chair: Like the fun fair, they arrive, they decamp and they go elsewhere.

Dr Smith: Yes. To be fair, there are examples. New York's Central Park is the obvious example, but the other example is where the commercial events are used to cross-subsidise free events. That is something that it would be great to see more of. We do need some big set-piece events, but we could use that income to provide funds for the smaller events that would be of more benefit to a wider set of people locally. That does happen in some examples. I can think of examples where there is a free festival that is effectively paid for by the proceeds of the paid-for events that happen.

Q178 **Chair:** In your experience, in normal times, who has the power in negotiation? Is it the festival organisers or is it the park authorities? What impact do you think that has?

Dr Smith: Obviously, we have seen a consolidation of the sector to some extent. We have seen the rise of some quite large companies that have hoovered up some of the boutique independent festivals, most notably Live Nation. You have Superstruct, all sorts of companies. Those companies do have a lot of bargaining power. I sometimes worry that these are global entertainment companies negotiating contracts with either local authorities or park authorities, and you are thinking, "We know where the bargaining power is going to lie there." There are numerous possible venues that they could go to, and obviously only a limited number of these mega companies. There is a worry about that, and about how well set up some of these local authorities are to get a good deal.

The problem, and one thing we have not talked about so far, is the transparency of this income. We do not know how much money is being paid for the hire of the space or how much the local authority or the park authority is being paid to allow the festival to be staged. If we knew that in a little more detail, we would be able to assess whether or not we thought we were getting a good deal. At the moment, the power does tend to lie especially with the large festival companies, which now control about 30% of music festivals of over 5,000 people in the UK. That is quite a big chunk of the market.

Q179 **Chair:** They have the buying power and the expertise, where perhaps it is lacking in either local authorities or park authorities, and what have you, when it comes to genuinely pricing something so that it benefits the community.

Dr Smith: Yes. When I have talked to people in the industry, they have said local authorities seem to be much better about saying, "Look, this is what you get for your money." There is a danger that they get a bit manipulated and the festival company ends up dictating what parts of the park they can use and how much of the park they can use, whereas local authorities could be a little bit clearer and say, "Hang on, our large event space is this space. These are the dimensions. This is what you have to do." If they had a little more confidence or were a little more assertive, maybe they could get a better deal for them and their communities. Obviously, the problem with that is the festival company can just turn round and say, "No, thanks very much. We will try somewhere else. We will go to another authority or go to another space."

Q180 **Chair:**. I have to say that watching the Red Hot Chilli Peppers in Hyde Park is a particularly unique experience, probably less so if I were to watch them somewhere else. There is a certain ambience to it.

Dr Smith: I said in the evidence that one thing we could consider much more is whether parks are always the most appropriate settings. Could we not have a more imaginative and broader range of venues used for urban festivals? In Germany and other places they tend to use a much greater variety of spaces. I think I mentioned Field Day, which decided after a lot of opposition to its staging in Brockwell Park to up sticks and move to a brownfield site, a set of industrial warehouses in north London, and that seemed to work well.

We do not have to use parks. It is the most obvious thing to do because there is a link to the rural festivals that became famous in the 1970s—like Isle of Wight and Glastonbury—but we do not have to ape those festivals. Urban festivals could be on brownfield sites. That would cause fewer issues because those spaces are not normally publicly accessible, but they would be accessible for the festival. They would not be taking up—

Q181 **Chair:** Just finally on that point, how could it be encouraged to use brownfield sites? Is there any way in which Government could take action or put forward legislation that would enable local authorities to make that more attractive? It is almost the holy grail to a certain extent, the use of brownfield sites. Whenever we talk about housing, "Do not build on our green belt, whatever you do. Use brownfield first," and so on.

Dr Smith: During the period of austerity especially, there was a lot of interest in this idea of "meanwhile use," using a brownfield site in the period between development, while it was not being used. Festivals are a good temporary use. There is a site down on the Greenwich peninsula that was used for a festival for a while and has now subsequently been

developed, but there was a period where it could be used for these types of things.

It would be about planning restrictions and making it a little easier, but the problem is that local authorities are very resistant because they would be losing the income, effectively. At the moment they are receiving the hire fees and, therefore, they would be reluctant to give those up. If we were going to use privately owned sites, the private owners of those sites would presumably be the ones that would receive the hire fee. You would solve the problem of the rows over the use of public space, but you would obviously lose the commercial income opportunity.

I think most local authorities are thinking about how they do this better, rather than completely changing tack. They are saying, "Could we not manage these events better and soften the impact of things like egress and entry, those sorts of problems?" Because you have 40,000 people in an urban park, a relatively small, confined space, that is what the problems often result from. It is not necessarily the event itself; it is people coming out of the event. There are little pinch points that could probably be smoothed out that might help deal with the problem in the short term.

Chair: Thank you very much for your evidence today, Dr Andrew Smith. It is greatly appreciated. That concludes our session.