

# Written evidence submitted by the Association of Independent Showmen

## Summary

**1.1.0** The aim of this submission is to address why we as a prominent, though accepting, are not the dominant UK based “travelling Showman” association in the UK, firmly believe it is critical to develop a responsible, balanced and proactive approach to the current economic and cultural crisis facing UK “travelling Showmen” – funfairs, circuses and those ‘Showmen’ who travel to outdoor events to perform - as a result of Coronavirus. This belief being in order to protect, and sustain our membership base and all “travelling Showmen’s” potential to serve the UK economy and its overall long-term positive and historic contribution to the cultural and traditional fabric of this country.

**1.1.1** More specifically, we advocate that the UK Treasury assumes an active leadership position through clear guidance, communications, and where necessary fiscal measures, that builds upon the positive approaches taken so far in the raft of measures and financial aid to static businesses in this current unprecedented situation we all face. In so doing it will directly promote the UK as a nation that does not let anyone suffer, or go unheard/un-noticed in the difficult months ahead.

**1.1.2** The UK being the first pioneer’s of modern day funfairs, and the inventor’s of Circus, “travelling Showmen” have been an invisible enigma, a travelling community that are estimated to be around 25 to 30,000 people in the UK. A large portion of these ‘Showmen’ travel during the early spring and summer seasons, which starts two weeks before Easter and finishes traditionally just after Bonfire night. The majority of these people and their families have been doing this for over one hundred and thirty five years; if not longer. Over that time they have become an accepted part of the yearly calendar of many peoples’ lives a transformative potential of open hearted, innocent fun and entertainment. It is our concern that if there is no specific financial support for this unique peripatetic industry, it will cause the almost extinction of these much loved “travelling Showmen”, and the UK will lose “an unwritten portion of the story of these people who are bound to the life of this nation by the ties of culture, tradition, trade and pleasure.”<sup>1</sup>

**1.1.3** We believe this is of strategic and critical importance when looking holistically at the stated aims of the Treasury and government policy in fighting this pandemic and telling the nation no business will suffer as a result of Coronavirus and the challenges and difficulties this presents.

**1.1.4** Furthermore, we believe that the provision by “travelling Showmen” indirectly impacts the UK economy’s ability to both contribute to, and generate a highly motivated general workforce, simple entertainment and deliver revenue to the Treasury. But equally important if not supported we will fail to protect a community of people that offer an alternative to the extractive and often anti-social business model of platform monopolies such as Facebook, on-line gaming, Google and Netflix.

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<sup>1</sup> Memoirs of Bartholomew Fair, by Morley, Henry ISBN 13: 9781333483692

## **Introduction**

**1.1.6 The Association of Independent Showmen is a UK-wide trade association set up by independent “travelling Showmen” twenty seven years ago whose primary objective was, and is, to promote and support the maintenance of the fairground and circus community, advise that community and help that community prosper.**

**Our membership base is 1,320 with an average active yearly membership, as membership renewal is not mandatory, of 390/440 members. We have a growing online social media presence where our current ‘reach’ is 4,500 travelling showmen and an ‘Average engagement on reach’ of 16 – 25%. We regularly consult with the other travelling showmen associations – Showmen’s Guild of Great Britain (SGGB), Association of Circus Proprietors (ACP), Amusement Catering Equipment Society (ACES) and The Society of Independent Roundabout Proprietors (SIRPS) on industry wide issues and are an accepted, integral part of this traditional and cultural “travelling Showmen” community.**

**1.1.7 We aim to respond to the following question framed in the Treasury Committee’s call for evidence on the Government’s Coronavirus financial package, 19<sup>th</sup> March, 2020:**

- The Committee is seeking a range of views from stakeholders on whether the Government's response to the Coronavirus is sufficient, and to suggest areas where more support is needed.

**1.1.8 This document is structured to address this question in the following sections**

1. Understanding the significance and measures adopted in response to the Coronavirus by the UK Government when viewed as being in the ‘business of travelling showman’
2. The impact these measures and the Coronavirus bill has on being in the ‘business of a travelling showman’
3. How you are able to measure these impacts in an economic context of being in the ‘business of a travelling showman’
4. The areas where support is needed for specific “travelling Showmen”
  - (i) Travelling Funfairs
  - (ii) Travelling Circuses
  - (iii) Shared “fixed” costs and concerns across the industry
5. Legacy of Coronavirus: if no support is found for “travelling Showmen”
  - (i) What will be left behind
6. Suggestions for support to “travelling Showmen”
7. Future value if support is given

# 1. Understanding the significance and measures adopted in response to the Coronavirus by the UK Government when viewed as, being in the 'business of travelling showman'

Quote from the SPI-M-O: Consensus view on public gatherings<sup>2</sup>:

**1.1.9** The impact of stopping all leisure activities, including public gatherings such as at bars and restaurant, would be expected to have a much larger effect on the population-level spread of the epidemic. Smaller gatherings happen more frequently than larger ones so the cumulative effect is larger.

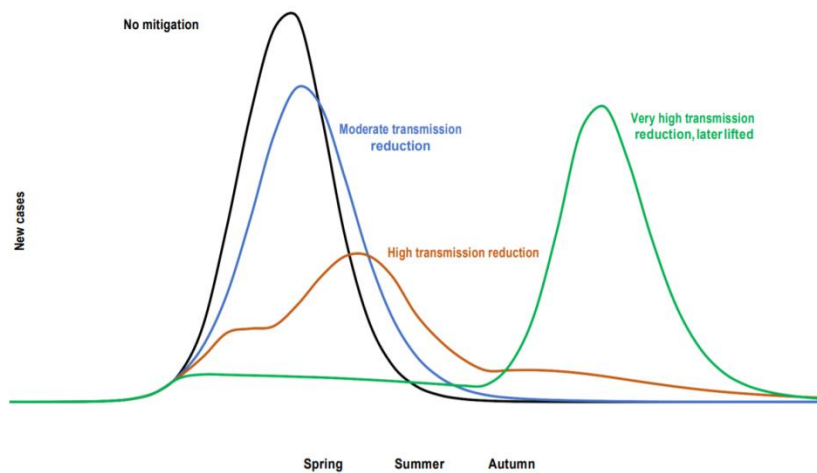
**1.1.10** The risk of infection to an individual from attending public gatherings depends on the length of time they spend in close proximity to other people. The key factor isn't the size of the event, but the number of people to whom you come into close contact; duration of those contacts; and how close these contacts are. In general, contacts tend to be less intimate and shorter at public gatherings than in other settings such as contacts with family members and coworkers.

Quote from: Potential impact of behavioural and social interventions on an epidemic of Covid-19 in the UK <sup>3</sup>— emphasis being on the graph and the time span it represents

Illustrative impact of behavioural and social interventions lasting several months on a reasonable worst-case epidemic (Figure 1)

## Key

The reasonable worst-case scenario, with no mitigating measures, would likely peak during April-May, with a high peak incidence.



Behavioural and social interventions which moderately reduce transmission are unlikely to greatly reduce the total number of cases but could reduce and slightly delay the peak. This scenario may also arise from behavioural changes without government intervention.

Behavioural and social interventions which further reduce transmission could delay and reduce the peak still further.

Very stringent behavioural and social interventions could have a similar scale of impact to Hong Kong and prevent a major epidemic. However, when lifted, a large epidemic would likely follow. Depending how long they were in place, this could peak in autumn.

Please note: The scale and timings of the epidemic curves in this diagram are illustrative only, but their patterns are robust.

<sup>2</sup> Source: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/873748/12-spi-m-o-consensus-view-on-public-gatherings.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/873748/12-spi-m-o-consensus-view-on-public-gatherings.pdf) - points 2, 3

<sup>3</sup> Source: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/873790/05-potential-impact-of-behavioural-social-interventions-on-an-epidemic-of-covid-19-in-uk.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/873790/05-potential-impact-of-behavioural-social-interventions-on-an-epidemic-of-covid-19-in-uk.pdf) – page 2

**1.1.11** What today as many are starting to refer as “unprecedented” through the effect of the Coronavirus outbreak is in reality, for those in the business of a travelling showman, bringing this unique way of life and “business to its knees”. The fundamental and very fabric of the business, as an economic casualty of this very understandable desire to save lives and flatten the peak of outbreaks over the coming months will transform the commerce and culture of this business to a shadow of what it has been if no specific support is given.

**1.1.12** The major significance, with regards to the already biggest subsidy of economic activity undertaken by the British government, is how those in the “business of a travelling showman” can be financed and supported within these current subsidies when by virtue of the basic business model of travelling from place to place they have no ‘fixed’ rate-able premises. How the value of this specific form of public entertainment and current help being offered would be generated and distributed across local authorities is unclear.

**1.1.13** For these business owners with no ‘fixed’ premises, but having ‘moveable’ premises to also become eligible to economic subsidy, which anyone who has a fixed ‘premises’ can participate in, it is our belief that “travelling Showmen” will need specific financial measures or “grants” that allow for relief of financial commitments and fixed payments that they have scheduled and agreed between intermediaries and local authorities in the preparation of their travelling season.

## **2. The impact these measures and the Coronavirus bill has on being in the ‘business of a travelling showman’**

**2.1.0** Approaching the situation that the whole country now faces, taking into consideration the statement by Public Health England (PHE) and that of the UK government, “that the public should avoid non essential contact” the industry as a whole identified the potential risk in continuing operations through asking the question, “will this business heighten the risk of infection if open?” The answer was yes. The industry wide thoughts from the various associations are - not to travel.

**2.1.1** Specifically with restrictions relating to “DIRECTIONS RELATING TO EVENTS, GATHERINGS AND PREMISES”, according to Schedule 21 of the Coronavirus Bill released, 19th March, 2020<sup>4</sup>.

Schedule 21

Interpretation

1 (1) In this Schedule—

“premises” includes any place and, in particular, includes—

(a) any vehicle, train, vessel or aircraft,

(b) any tent or movable structure,

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<sup>4</sup> Source: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/cbill/58-01/0122/20122.pdf> - page 253

**2.1.2** This means that the for “travelling Showmen” they will not be able to operate as a result of the measures to suppress the peak of UK infections, estimated to be 12 – 15,000 events over the next twelve months with the majority being during the summer. These include anything from village fetes to small, medium and large fairs/circuses and Showmen based outdoor events. While we understand that these numbers are tiny in comparison to other industry sectors, the impact these measures have on the “travelling Showmen’s” businesses will be devastating.

**2.1.3** It is estimated that this will directly affect 24 – 30,000 people in the business, as well as affect the ancillary services that provide support, goods and services to the industry. This includes casual work for building up the fairs and circuses, staff, stock for catering and kiosks, prizes for stalls, posters and advertising, diesel, fencing, security, portable toilets, and onsite maintenance and testing.

### **3. How you are able to measure these impacts in an economic context of being in the ‘business of a travelling showman’**

**3.1.0** As with any cash-based industry where the key customer-facing business process is convincing members of your target market to buy the product or service it is very hard to prove in terms of projected future income - loss that will be incurred.

**3.1.1** We advocate for greater nuance in definitions used, especially when that informs regulatory approaches to financial business assistance which must reflect both intended and actual utility and function expressed both by the Chancellor and Prime Minister of the UK.

**3.1.2** Whilst we believe that there has to be a measurable definition and approach (e.g. eligibility criteria, membership of a recognised trade association of “travelling Showmen”) the cover of a potential grant should be only for standing payments (“Fixed Costs”) that all showmen will have to cover whilst not open and must include rent for yards, testing of equipment, vehicle road tax and insurance, public liability insurance for equipment and employee liability insurance, as well as loans to cover any finance payments. Without this help “travelling Showmen” will not be able to return to their business once the crisis is over.

**3.1.3** However, the focus on our submission is the treatment of the current financial package of the government being created around businesses that have a fixed permanent address and ‘premises’, and how in the unique and specific situation of this element of the countries cultural heritage and tradition – provided by “travelling Showmen” businesses, we draw your attention to the fact that the businesses that “travelling Showmen” operate have no fixed and rate-able ‘premises’.

**3.1.4** Hence why, we believe an expanded term of “premises” in line with the interpretation of the legislation to be enacted regarding gatherings and public events in the Coronavirus Bill is more appropriate and is something we have been greatly encouraged to see referenced in relation to “any tent or moveable structure” within this Bill.

## **4. The areas where support is needed for specific “travelling Showmen”**

### **(i) Travelling Funfairs**

**4.1.0** As referred to above, there is a broad spectrum of “fixed costs” that all travelling showmen face, but there are specific aspects to funfairs that are different to those of circuses. It is our view that it is not therefore possible to take a one size fits all approach in the understanding of potential support and assistance for travelling showmen, but to approach this as one of assessment of grants for “fixed costs”. Example: inspection of amusement devices is where all rides and amusement devices have to be tested on a yearly basis in order for them to be operated safely and enjoyed by the general public. These tests occur at various points in the year where the devices are ‘built up’ out on the grounds. With no areas to build up and be tested in the yards, as the season moves into summer, this will mean that they cannot be tested under the current non-essential contact guidance.

### **(ii) Travelling Circuses**

**4.1.1** With travelling Circuses, as with the government shut down of the theatres, circuses are closed until further notice as they perform inside. Every single artiste and staff member will be laid off, and sent home. Most of the non-UK acts are making their way home except for those who have very little money and there is no flights home to their country of origin. The Prime Minister suggested that this outbreak might only last 12 weeks, but that’s still a long time to survive without income. Currently UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) are insistent that visas in these particular situations deny them access to state funds. While parallels can be drawn to theatres – ‘fixed’ premises, travelling circuses are ‘moveable’ premises, therefore do not fall within the current remit of already agreed measures of support.

### **(iii) Shared “fixed costs” and concerns for all “travelling Showmen”**

- rent for yards
- testing of equipment
- vehicle road tax and insurance
- public liability insurance for equipment and;
- employee liability insurance
- Loans to cover any finance payments

### **Concerns**

**4.1.2** The primary concern is with ‘Winter Quarters’, or yards, that a percentage of “travelling Showmen” use that are without planning permission, owing to an exemption granted under planning laws. However, the granting of this exemption is on the understanding that come the end of March, “travelling Showmen” ‘Turn out’ and starts to travel. With the current situation there is no reason to turn out, so “travelling Showmen” could fall foul financially of this exemption and planning law.

## **5. Legacy of Coronavirus: if no support is found for “travelling Showmen”**

### **What will be left behind?**

**5.1.0** Anyone, almost anywhere, can remember their first experience and amazement by a circus/funfair or outdoor performance. These “travelling Showmen” create something borderless, spanning across social demographics, and has meant that over time they have become an accepted part of the yearly calendar of many peoples’ lives, a transformative potential of open hearted, innocent fun and entertainment. It is our concern that if there is no specific financial support for this unique peripatetic industry, the legacy of Coronavirus will cause the almost extinction of these much loved “travelling Showmen”, and the UK will lose “an unwritten portion of the story of these people who are bound to the life of this nation by the ties of culture, tradition, trade and pleasure”<sup>5</sup>.

**5.1.1** We are of the opinion that financial assistance is necessary to protect the business of being a “travelling Showman”. A balanced approach to subsidy is necessary to minimise risks while continuing to enable the rich traditional cultural heritage to survive these unprecedented times.

## **6. Suggestions for support to those being in the ‘business of a travelling Showman’**

**6.1.0** Considering all the points that have been raised throughout this document we propose a series of recommendations for consideration by the committee. The objective of these is to protect the business of “travelling Showmen”, to maintain a customer-facing business for consumers whilst enabling the sustainable continuation of this traditional industry while unable to operate. This being for the benefit of its existing lessees (those that put on the fairs), its tenants (those that bring their stalls, or rides to the fair), Circus proprietors, circus acts and support staff, outdoor performers, and support new areas of economic activity and growth in this industry for the public to enjoy.

### **P.1 “travelling Showmen“- fixed costs assistance grant**

**6.1.1** We recommend working constructively with the industry, as a whole, to financially assist through the introduction of a “travelling Showman” – fixed costs assistance grant for an initial period of three months.

This being offered to aid in the managing of:

- (a) “fixed costs” for being in the “business of a travelling showman”
- (b) helping sustain the “travelling showman” industry, and;
- (c) to protect individual lessees, tenants, Circus proprietors and circus acts and outdoor performers who belong to recognised “travelling Showmen” trade associations.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid 1

**6.1.2** That owing to the existing “Perceived equity recommendation to policy makers who should be alert to unintended community tension”<sup>6</sup> - we suggest that if agreement on this proposal is found, the figure of the grant given be 80% of the total “fixed cost” value submitted. It is estimated, consultation with other “travelling Showman” associations would give a definite figure, that there would be around 4,500 – 7,000 lessees, tenants, Circus proprietors, circus acts and support staff with “fixed costs” ranging from £6,000 to £30,000 for a three month period.

**P.2 “Any tent or moveable structure” in the context of being in the business of a travelling Showman be classified as “premises” with regards eligibility for business interruption loans**

**6.1.3** Those business owners with no ‘fixed’ premises, but having ‘moveable’ premises to also become eligible to business interruption loans, which anyone who has a fixed ‘premises’ can participate in. It is our belief that “travelling Showmen” should have the opportunity to make use of this through a nuanced definition of “premises” for the purpose of this loan application.

## **7. Future value if support is given**

**7.1.0** All “travelling Showmen” state clearly -

“We are always part of national celebrations, so after this unprecedented situation people will want to come into the parks to take part in this celebration. We cannot allow the virus to kill off the “travelling Showmen’s” way of life.”

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<sup>6</sup> Source: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/874289/13-spi-b-insights-on-public-gatherings-1.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/874289/13-spi-b-insights-on-public-gatherings-1.pdf) - page 2