

Written evidence submitted by Towersey Festival

The future of UK music festivals - DCMS Call for Evidence

Towersey Festival, Claydon Estate, Buckinghamshire.

- **What is the economic and cultural contribution of the UK's festival industry?**

According to our Audience research in 2018, Towersey Festival contributes over £250'000 to the local economy. As the oldest independent festival in the UK Towersey is a world leader in presenting, supporting and nurturing Folk, Roots and Acoustic Music, Traditional Art and Culture.

This cultural contribution cannot be underestimated. It is a life affirming event for many who see Towersey festival as that necessary escape from the rigors of day-to-day life. Purist escapism! Festivals have a dramatic effect on people's well-being and should be prescribed on the NHS for the good they can be seen to do.

- **What has been the impact of cancellations on local economies and those who derive income from festivals during 2020?**

The festival employs 2 Full time staff and 4 part time throughout the year. In the period running up to the event, it employs anything up to 100 freelancers and contractors. It employs over 300 artists annually and has (adjusted for inflation) spent over £2'000'000 on artists fees. It works with over 20 independent contractors spending over £200'000 annually with these suppliers. These have all been lost in 2020 and 2021 is looking increasingly difficult.

We are now at the point of collapse without further support having only been able to access a tiny amount of Self-employed support and with no rate paying property that we work from, we have not benefited from the local authority support and we were inexplicably turned down for the Government's Cultural Recovery Fund.

- **What are the risks to festivals taking place in 2021 and beyond, and how can these be mitigated?**

The risks are that audiences do not feel safe and confident to come to large events., even if events are possible. We will need to see large scale events supported by Government happen in order to build confidence in the market.

There are also logistical risks around obstacles presented by SAG groups and health and safety legislation due to Covid 19, which make the planning of large-scale events impossible.

- **What measures are needed for audiences to attend festivals without social distancing, and how realistic are they?**

There needs to be confidence and that will only come from Vaccines, better instant testing and a reliable track and trace system. Audiences will need to feel totally safe and free from risk.

Insurance for events will be impossible without Government backing. No underwriters will cover the risk for events cancelling in 2021 while the risk of Covid hangs over us.

A unified policy that local Authorities can apply to SAG meetings and event management plans. One that helps event organisers and supports their efforts to get back to live events.

- **What has been the impact of the temporary VAT cut and Culture Recovery Fund on festivals and their supply chains, and what else can the Government do to secure their futures?**

The VAT cut will not have an impact on us if we cannot run an event or have to reduce audience numbers significantly. At the moment we have had no benefit from it due to lack of sales in this period. Most of our sales came as carried forward ticket sales from 2020.

What would make a HUGE difference is the ability to claim back the 15% difference in VAT on those sales! We have paid 20% in VAT on over half of our ticket sales for 2021. If we were able to claim that back and only pay 5% it would help.

- **How has the structure of the UK festivals market evolved over recent years, and what has this meant for consumers, artists and the wider industry? What further changes might be anticipated?**

It is a huge growth sector. As the oldest independent festival in the country we have seen this growth firsthand. Demand for outdoor events and for music in this country is enormous and we are world leaders in both music creation and event production. It is a vital part of our economy and must be protected.

The Covid crisis will no doubt dent audience attendances in the short term and that gap in income should be supported by government to secure the future of our events so that they can pay this back into the economy in future years.

Changes in Licensing laws have been both positive and negative. They have made it easier for some to get licenses without demonstrating the necessary experience to run large scale events. This reflects badly on the wider industry. A more uniform approach across all local authorities would help make the process a level playing field.

- **How can festivals be supported to reduce their environmental impact and tackle the dangers of illegal drug use.**

Illegal drug use is not an issue at Towersey Festival and a great many of our best Festivals. Drug use is a national, social problem. Deal with it a national level through education and social support and any small issues at events will be dealt with.

Environmentally, Towersey has led the way. As far back as the 1970's, Towersey was recycling and has continued to strive towards reducing its impact every year, now achieving over 80% recycling and repurposing annually.

All Festival could benefit from support to help make the transition to alternative and renewable fuels for temporary power. At the moment the costs of these new technologies make it prohibitive to transition to entirely carbon neutral events.

A ban on Polystyrene and single use plastic is commonplace at a lot of festivals but government could drive this by banning all single use plastics nationwide.

Joe Heap

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