

Written evidence submitted by Aviation Heritage -UK

Revised Submission to DCMS on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic countermeasures on aviation museums in the UK.

Aviation Heritage – UK is the representative industry body for the aviation museum sector in the UK|.

Thirty-four museum members of Aviation Heritage – UK responded to a request for information on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic countermeasures to aviation museums.

All museums are reporting an almost complete collapse in revenues due to the absence of visitors.

All museums have minimised their unavoidable overheads by furloughing almost all employees and cutting any expenditure deemed not essential.

Essential overheads include insurance, security and site monitoring, utilities, especially those required to maintain temperature and humidity levels for museum assets and regular monthly payments for banking, accounting etc.

Museums have found that 100% rates relief can be obtained by contacting their local authority, and a few of them list rents as being a major immediate concern..

The majority of the well-established smaller museums – most of which are entirely volunteer-run, with no paid staff – have saved sufficient reserves to enable them to weather the loss of visitor revenue but with the consequence that conservation and maintenance activities will be suspended for the foreseeable future.

Larger well-established museums with significant overheads, such as Brooklands Museum, are in a very difficult position as the result of their larger irreducible overheads even after having furloughed most of their paid staff. Their difficulties will be substantially worsened if the furlough scheme expires before they are able to fully re-open, but even after re-opening they envisage redundancies because of reduced visitor numbers and revenues. Brooklands is applying for a significant loan under the government's Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme (CBILS), without which they will be in a critical position by August.

Two relatively recently-opened museums are in severe difficulties, as they either have significant debt or no reserves. Without help, Stow Maries Great War Aerodrome could run out of cash in early 2021. Aerospace Bristol has also furloughed 80% of its staff and applied for emergency funding under CBILS in the hope of being able re-open at the beginning of August, but expects to need further funding to survive during what is likely be a slow recovery period running into 2021.

There are two common and serious concerns shared by all museums:

- The level of public confidence for attending events and museums may well take a long time to recover, so once they are able to re-open, visitor numbers should be expected to be low and increase only slowly.
- All museums rely heavily on volunteers, these volunteers coming predominantly from the vulnerable “at risk” older age groups. There are concerns that volunteers may be reluctant to return to museums.

The assistance to aviation museums requested from the government is:

- Make the CBILS loans 100% government backed for museums, whose non-profit business models tend to reinvest everything in delivering public benefits.
- Making the payback period on the CBILS loans longer: 10 or 15 years, rather than 6.
- Change the Gift Aid on admissions scheme back to how it was originally, so that Gift Aid could be claimed on any admission without the requirement to give away an annual pass, or to ask for a 10% additional donation.
- Flexibility from the National Lottery Heritage Fund to extend the limit of support beyond £50,000, or to allow additional tranches.
- Extending the current coronavirus job retention scheme for the museum sector, to allow furloughed staff to continue to work as volunteers in not-for-profit or non-commercial types of activity.
- There are two funds for which aviation museums are eligible, the Small Business Grants Fund and the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grant Fund, which offer grants of £10,000 and £25,000 but conditional on the rateable value of business premise being below £51,000. However aircraft museums by the nature of their exhibits often occupy very large premises. The rateable value of these premises can be over the £51,000 threshold but which is made affordable because of the mandatory 80% charity discount, sometimes raised to 100% depending on the local authority. Charities occupying large premises should be declared exempt from the £51,000 rateable value threshold for grants.

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