

**23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020**

## **Call for evidence to the treasury Committee**

### **Setting out the industry of the circus.**

Giffords Circus is a member of the ACP. (Association of Circus Proprietors of Great Britain) it is the trade body that represent the interests of the Circus Industry and has been in existence since 1932 for Circuses large and small.

### **Traditional Circus today**

As a seasonal business, we open between April to late September and this can be determined by local economics, site availability, weather dynamics, School holiday periods and other unforeseen factors.

These factors can and usually change the opening for a 1 or 2-week period in well thought out schedules however with this COVID 19 pandemic we have a unique situation where the whole industry; firstly, through Government advice and then a Government ban on visiting places of entertainment including venues like theatres and tented structures has been forced to close until further notice.

### **The reality now**

There is no end date to this period of self-isolation and closure which for circuses nationwide means to return they not only need to factor in an opening date but factor in additional time to publicise their opening dates, apply and wait for new visas for International artistes and lay out additional expenditure on getting the show out on the road like travel and more or revised rehearsals for a belated start.

Many of these costs can only be attributed to the mobile nature of this entertainment and thus businesses in Bricks and Mortar will not incur these unique expenses.

### **Today**

Circuses nationwide including Giffords have gone back to their winter bases with artistes and staff trying to return to their place of residence if they have one and if they are able to with various travel bans and lockdowns making this difficult or impossible.

We have ongoing expenses like electric and water costs and rental costs if they are not the owners of their own winter bases. We have travel costs getting the vehicles and equipment back to base and again out to the first place of opening when an open date becomes viable.

We have huge expenditure invested in site rental fees and deposits with local Authorities and private site owners running into tens of thousands of pounds.

We have normal day to day living costs but with no prospect of any income and coming so soon after a winter of spending to get their show back on the road..

### **What Circus Directors need now.**

Nothing that the Chancellor and Business secretary have stated over the last week has specifically mentioned the Circus and its unique business model.

Circus Directors need help with finance after a winter of expenditure that has left very small or no financial reserves to cope with a period of no income.

We need Government instructions to Insurance Companies to freeze all insurance commitments until such time they are open again.

We need help to finance services from Utility Companies and a guarantee that the services won't be withdrawn for late payment.

We need access to interest free loans to bridge the gap until they are able to be open again, possibly three months, six months, or a year.

We need access to grants to support the Cultural Art in returning to entertain the Great British Public.

We need HMRC to give VAT holidays, this would need to be for a period now and after opening again

We need a freeze on all other HMRC commitments.

For those Circuses who are in Winter bases that are protected under the Showmens Caravan act and exempted until March each season from planning regulations need an understanding from local Government not to enforce fines or evictions if as likely shows are forced to remain.

Once Circuses are allowed to open again, to encourage people to attend; a reduction in VAT for all ticket sales is needed, in line with many other European Countries who encourage and understand the importance of Traditional Circus as Cultural Heritage

### **Furthermore**

Nothing has been put in place to help those International Circus artistes who are unable to travel back to their own country and as stated on their Visas have "no recourse to public funds"

They need flights back to their country of origin or they need to have access to public funds.

No provision for access to unemployment funding for lighting technicians, Choreographers or any other Self-employed contractor that the Circus uses to make the show element creative.

They also have commitments and these creative sectors too will face hardship.

## **Clarity from the Home Office and UKVI**

Circuses need clarity on how a circus artiste (if already here and goes home) will be able to return to this country if the visa finishes and will they be credited for the lost time due to the pandemic.? For artistes just about to come to the UK how will they do this if the vignette has expired? Will they get an extension of time or refund if they are unable to proceed with the contract?

## **Summing Up**

Circuses that have gone back to winter base or have not been able to start their tours number around 27 businesses and have at best estimate around 840 people directly involved on tour with additional background tour co-ordinators and planners at base taking this up further to around 1000 people.

Some of these will have been able to return home however for the directors and the people who are unable to leave, measures mentioned above are vital to avert these businesses folding, never to return.

Traditional Circus, as Cultural Heritage is a British invention and has innovated itself many times in its 250-year existence but it is facing its biggest challenge now and without Government support and assurances it will not survive.

History shows that traditional Circus business has been forgotten or ignored by politicians for years and this ignorance needs addressing to safeguard the Cultural Heritage of the Circus so that future generations are able to enjoy going to see a live Circus.

Giffords Circus would request as per the request of secretary of the ACP Association of Circus Proprietors of Great Britain that a meeting or make contact with us to address these needs is met with action from you now.

Yours sincerely  
Kelly Rumbelow  
Giffords Circus