



events industry forum

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MAKING OUTDOOR EVENT GATHERINGS HAPPEN AGAIN

The Events Industry Forum, which brings together 26 trade and representative organisations from across the outdoor events industry, is keen to kick start public events as soon as it is considered safe to do so. We believe this will need to be on a phased basis as some events will be more flexible to social distancing than others.

Any reduction in the need for social distancing would greatly help in making it feasible to restart events as this will be a key factor in deciding the viability of many.

Indeed, the future of many of those organising and supplying this £39 billion industry will depend on the recovery of the sector sooner rather than later as many have found they fall outside the core Government support schemes and do not have the resources to get through the coming months.

We also believe that the public will be keen to see much loved events return to the calendar.

Despite the contribution that outdoor events make to the UK economy, there is a widespread view across the industry that they are too often ignored by Government in favour of conference, exhibitions and meetings which are seen as providing more tangible benefits. It has been suggested that it would be helpful if there was a DCMS lead covering this sector who might then have a better grasp of this complex industry and the contribution it makes.

The following is a brief guide to how we see the sector emerging. As the outdoor sector is already well structured and organised around a risk assessment approach, and many are supported by Safety Advisory Groups (SAGs) or professional Health & Safety advisors, we suggest that events should be asked to put forward details of the measures they are taking and agree these with the appropriate services, such as police and medical advisors .

Public Spectacles/Displays

There are many outdoor events which take place in the open air where it would be relatively easy with good management and public co-operation to provide entertainment without the risks of crowding as there would be sufficient space for people to social distance. Such events might include air displays, fireworks and music in the park type events etc.

Events would need to be risk assessed to ensure that the space available was suitable for the scale of audience and provision made for providing a safe infrastructure such as toilet cleaning, hand sanitizer points etc. Access and egress from sites would need to be managed and organisers might consider insisting that those attending wore masks, although there is confusing evidence over their value. Signage encouraging social distancing could be used to remind people and some gentle security/marshalling used to encourage people to keep apart.

Consideration might also be given to temperature checks and providing potential isolation areas at some events. On-going cleaning of facilities such as toilets would be needed.

For some events, such as air displays, in areas where the space is available, they could be converted to drive-ins with cars parked at allocated distances. Ticketing could be by car or by occupants.

At such events, services such as catering, which are a key source of income for many, might be restricted to foods that can be sold by vendors strolling through the crowd but wearing suitable protection, thus avoiding queues and people moving around the site. Many event caterers are now starting to offer pre-ordering or click and collect services. Some organisers might prefer to encourage consumers to pre-order foods, such as a hamper, which they collect on arrival rather than saying they can bring their own picnics in order to preserve revenues. Caterers also tend to generate less wastage than the public.

The use of technology could address some issues at events. For example, the use of bar code access and stiles rather than people at gates would help to reduce the contact points between staff and attendees.

How can this happen: Although there may be a few events still planned for July and August that could take place (e.g. firework displays, regattas etc.), assuming they can be made economically viable, any new events on any scale are likely to need at least a couple of months of planning and organisation as a minimum and depending on the scale. The loss of concessions would pose a problem financially for many of the family-type events, so some underwriting is likely to be needed by Government. There is, however, an opportunity now to rescue a few key events this August and September that could be managed and made to work, which would be a good starting point for getting something going.

Use of Public Parks

Although not strictly outdoor events, the creation of restaurants in open spaces, where there is plenty of space for social distancing, could be a first step towards getting life back to some normality and providing local restaurant businesses with an option for trading again.

Such activity would require the provision of some facilities on site and the co-operation/support of local authorities in permitting this without too much red tape.

Local authorities could also consider introducing some entertainment into parks, such as bandstand music, and encouraging the public to bring picnics etc.

How can this happen: The use of public spaces to get some small activity started again would be relatively straightforward if local authorities were prepared to support this.

Festivals and Outdoor Concerts

The biggest obstacle to resuming festivals and major outdoor concerts is social distancing and the economic impact this has. It would also be extremely difficult to avoid crowding around stages where key artists were performing as well as during entry and egress, even if the site space was sufficient for social distancing.

With the costs of infrastructure and artists fees, these events operate on extremely tight margins which means that it would not be feasible for most festivals to reduce capacity to allow for social distancing and still deliver a viable event.

It is also questionable whether the levels of security/marshalling that would be needed would be acceptable to the audiences, assuming that the numbers of SIA approved staff were even available.

Entry and egress from such events would pose particular problems as it would be almost impossible to manage a staggered entry approach for an event with 20,000 plus attending. There is equally concern that in the event of an emergency evacuation would be extremely challenging with social distancing measures in place.

One exception might be outdoor Classical music events, which are often held in the grounds of stately homes where there is space for social distancing and where attendees generally bring their own food and drink.

How can this happen: It is extremely difficult to see how festivals and concerts can return until social distancing is lifted as the economics and management issues are too great to make this viable or safe. Furthermore, it takes months rather than weeks to organise these events and, with a few exceptions, most outdoor festivals/concerts have already been abandoned for 2020. However, for organisers to begin investing in events to 2021, they need to have assurances now that it will be feasible to operate by then.

Agricultural/County Shows and other exhibition-style outdoor events

There are some outdoor events that operate rather like indoor exhibitions which could relatively easily manage social distancing, although they might need to adjust their programmes to avoid activities that might lead to crowding, such as arena events and cooking demonstrations.

County/Agricultural shows are a good example where there tend to be relatively wide walkways between exhibits which would allow for social distancing and exhibitors would relatively easily be able to manage with this, although they might need larger stands to allow staff to distance themselves.

Much of this is already in place for agricultural events via the industry code of practice and hand washing arrangements required to meet the DEFRA Animal Gathering Orders and Access to Farm rules. There are also smaller trade events run by the same organisations which could possibly be managed on a pre-purchase ticket basis.

Social distancing for these events would need to be carefully managed, possibly by the number of people per square metre/acre. This could be done using a similar system to the existing Temporary Event Notice which uses a grid basis to divide up a showground.

The Showman's Show in October is another example of an event that could continue with a careful management.

As with other events, organisers would need to risk assess their programmes with a view to managing Coronavirus and consideration would need to be given to the provision of sanitization points, disinfecting of toilets etc. Again, there would need to be trust in the public observing the rules, which could be reinforced with regular signage and some marshalling. Consideration might also be given to asking all visitors to wear masks which, in itself, might help to remind people of the need for caution.

Smaller show operating in larger spaces would be in a better position to create social distancing layouts than those larger events with more infrastructure, buildings and larger attendances.

There are also many opportunities to use technology to help ensure distancing and safety. For example, self-authentication of tickets, selling time slots and even temperature screening.

This type of event should be considered no greater risk than customers visiting a retail shop and probably less so given the wide open spaces.

How can this happen: Unfortunately, many of the summer events have already been cancelled because of the uncertainty but it might be possible, given the go-ahead soon, for some events in the late summer or early Autumn to be held.

Touring Circuses

As most of the larger circuses have flexible seating and it would be entirely possible to reconfigure this for individuals and groups as they enter the Big Top.

The public movement around the site, and the use of amenities, would be risk assessed and could be managed, as could public access and egress, to social distancing.

As with other events, secondary spend and catering facilities could be accommodated through technology and forward purchase options.

The performance area can also be configured in such a way to ensure it is social distancing compliant.

Circuses, unlike theatres and other fixed venues, generally only sell their tickets up to 14 days in advance and can react quickly if given the green light to open. Currently there are many foreign artistes isolating in the UK as tours were halted and they have been unable to return home. The industry believes most touring circuses would be able to be up and running with 4 - 6 weeks notice.

Participation Events

It may be possible for some participation events, such as cycling and running, to take place with social distancing. It has been estimated that in the case of running a 10 metre gap between runners would be needed and in the case of cycling 20 metres. This would require staggered start times and management numbers of participants.

Although larger road race events are traditionally more financially viable, it might be more viable and manageable to kick start a revival with smaller events.

Community and Charity Events

These take many forms but some could be brought back relatively quickly with social distancing. A concern here would be the traditional reliance on volunteers, many of which are traditionally from at risk groups. Without these volunteers many of these events are likely to become unviable with a negative effect on charity finances.

Conclusions:

- There is scope for some sectors of the outdoor event industry to return with social distancing in place and these could be operating within a couple of months;
- There are key benefits to be gained in terms of bringing revenue to areas and boosting public morale as highlighted in the research carried out by Bournemouth University for EIF in 2019;
- With a few exceptions, it will take at least two months from being given the go-ahead to get some events going and, for many, recovery will take considerably longer;
- A major issue will be the viability of organising many events if audiences and revenue earning facilities need to be curtailed;
- Events will need to undertake a detailed review of emergency plans to assess the new risks from COVID-19;
- The use of volunteers will need to be reviewed as for some events these are likely to be in vulnerable age groups;
- For some types of event, such as music festivals, it is unlikely that they can restart while social distancing continues;
- A strong economic case can be made for getting outdoor events up and running again in terms of the jobs they provide and the £34 billion GVA contribution they make;
- In order to start planning the return of outdoor events, the industry needs to have clear guidance on the timeline for relaxing the lock down and clear guidance on the on-going rules it will need to comply with;

- Event businesses will need financial support during the return as most do not have the resources to underwrite the costs, particularly given the uncertainties of the initial consumer response to events restarting.

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Member Organisations

Association of Festival Organisers

Association of Independent Festivals

Association of Show and Agricultural Organisations

Association of Stage Pyrotechnics

British Air Display Association

British Pyrotechnic Association

Business Visits and Events Partnership

Chartered Institute for the Management of Sport and Physical Activity

Event Hire Association

Event Supplier and Services Association

Institution of Occupational Safety & Health

Local Authority Event Organisers' Group

Made Up Textiles Association

National Association of Outdoor Events

National Caterers' Association

National Police Chief's Council

National Traction Engine Trust

Outdoor Arts UK

Production Services Association

Portable Sanitation Europe

Professional Lighting & Sound Association

Rugby Football Union

The Concert Promoters Association

The Event Services Association

The National Centre for Resilience Learning and Development (EPC)

The UK Crowd Management Association