



**All Party Parliamentary Group for Events
Events Industry Leaders Briefing
10th February 2021**

SESSION NOTES

APPG Chair: Rt Hon Theresa Villiers MP (TV)

The Chair opened the meeting by welcoming attendees to the session and thanked them for their attendance. The Chair then welcomed those representatives from across the industry who were providing evidence today on behalf of specific industry sectors and thanked them for their attendance.

Robert Wright, APPG Official Secretariat and Senior Advisor (RW)

RW then introduced and thanked those giving evidence at today's session;

- London & Partners: Tracy Halliwell MBE, Director of Tourism, Conventions and Major Events
- ICC Wales and The Celtic Manor Resort: Ian Edwards, CEO
- VisitScotland: Neil Brownlee, Head of Business Events
- Festivals Edinburgh: Julia Armour, Director
- IBTM & WTM Events: Claude Blanc, Portfolio Director
- Reed Exhibitions: Kerry Prince, Brand Director
- De Vere Hotels: Alan Corlett, Chief Commercial Officer
- Whittlebury Park: Charles Sargeant, Managing Director

TV then updated attendees on the progress of the APPG and its support of the Business Visits and Events Partnership's (BVEP) submission to the Treasury ahead of the budget announcement on 3rd March 2021 and a series of recommendations submitted to the Covid Recovery Commission.

TV also confirmed that she is pressing the Prime Minister for a plan for reopening the events industry along with refreshed guidance for businesses.

The Chair then invited the industry leaders for their comments:

Key points of note were:

Ian Edwards, CEO, ICC Wales and The Celtic Manor Resort

A roadmap to recovery is essential for our industry. In terms of local sentiment, we are not in a great place. Business leaders are expecting a very slow recovery. We are expecting that it will take until at least mid/end of 2022 to get back to pre-Covid occupancy and financial levels. It is understood that around 65% of events that will run in the next two years will not make a profit, which is devastating for our industry. It would be good to understand if the Government has plans for funding, support and incentives for our sector.

The announcement of the G7 Summit in Cornwall in June is a fantastic step for the industry. It would be a great opportunity for the Government to use this as a case study for recognition of the industry and to showcase its trust in the industry that events can take place in managed and controlled environments. It would be useful to have a Government backed marketing campaign that highlights to our clients and prospects that the UK is open and safe for events and for delegates to travel for events.

The industry has been unable to operate properly for almost a year and during that time we have seen many of our talented colleagues sadly lose their jobs. I am very concerned about the skills gap the industry will face after its reopening, it would be good to understand how the Government can help our sector as we move forward.

As business events take such a long time to plan, it really is crucial to have that roadmap that covers not only England but all nations that make up the United Kingdom.

TV thanked Ian for his comments and commented that the message is coming across very clearly that the industry needs a clear plan and timeline for reopening.

Tracy Halliwell MBE, Director of Tourism, Conventions and Major Events, London & Partners

I concur with all of Ian's points. There needs to be a substantial reopening plan in place for the events sector, which can be rolled out across all four nations.

From a London perspective, we are underspending heavily compared to a lot of other destinations when it comes to promotion. Many of our competitors may feel that London will bounce back after the pandemic but, the truth is that any business lost for London means a loss for the entire UK. If business is lost for London it will go to another Tier 1 city, whether that is in the UK, Europe or elsewhere.

Aside from the pandemic we also have to navigate our way around Brexit. There are now a number of cost implications for international businesses looking to bring their events to the UK. To continue attract events to the UK, we will require support from the Government whether that is the removal of air passenger duties or a similar initiative.

We are also seeing a lot of UK meeting planners struggling in the current climate, with many on furlough or out of work due to the pandemic. There needs to be some support from Government to help out these crucial job roles as we look to reopen our industry.

TV thanked Tracy for her comments.

Alan Corlett, Chief Commercial Officer, De Vere Hotels

Our key business for De Vere Hotels is events, but we do leisure at a number of our properties, which is a key part of our income.

There are some properties in our portfolio, which may not reopen in 2021, as there simply isn't enough business to support the running of the hotels. We need hard cash support from the Government, including the easing of VAT, to cover the cost of keeping these properties running.

We have had some staff out of our business for almost a year now and we need to know how we can reeducate them and bring them up to speed to be able to bring them back to the frontline once we reopen. We need some clarity from the Government on how businesses will be supported through this period and whether we can begin retraining staff whilst they are furloughed.

Another issue with some businesses, especially in the hotel sector, is the end of lease moratorium support. After months of reduced payments and payment holiday's the industry needs support and solid legislation to ensure that there will not be any issues with landlords as the industry starts to reopen. We want to ensure that the industry can get back up and running without huge issues.

TV thanked Alan for his comments and said she understood the importance of support for the hotel sector as it begins its reopening.

Kerry Prince, Brand Director, Reed Exhibitions

As an organiser of some of the largest exhibition shows in the events industry we need a clear understanding of roadmap to reopening so we can make a clear decision for our upcoming events.

Many organisers are looking to move to 'safe havens' where it is clear there is little to no impact on their events. This could be a fantastic opportunity for the UK to position itself as a safe haven, but we need a clear understanding of what roadmap looks like before we can begin promoting the UK as a potential destination.

In my role I am on the phone to many SME's on a daily basis, many of them mention how vital and helpful tradeshow are to their businesses. Sadly, I am also hearing many stories of how the pandemic is crippling many of these small businesses.

In order to protect UK event organisers and small businesses it would be good to have clarity from the Government on what evidence they need and want from industry to show that the UK is safe to host these events. It would also be good to understand what they need the UK to look like in terms of infection rates or vaccinations in order to allow the industry to resume business.

TV thanked Kerry for her comments and said she understood how events play a pivotal role in economic recovery not only due to the income they bring in but also the business taking place between businesses.

Charles Sargeant, Managing Director, Whittlebury Park

I completely echo all sentiments regarding economic support.

Just to give you an insight into the monthly costs we have at Whittlebury Park, despite having our doors firmly closed throughout the pandemic. We are a family run business and have a staff quote of 400. Which means we are responsible for supporting 400 families on a monthly basis.

The importance of having an insight into when the Government is likely to reopen the hotel sector is vital. If I know my hotel is going to be closed for another three months, I can look at ways of making cost savings. Until then we are in a state of limbo.

We know that this year and next will be very hard years for the sector. Businesses will be feeling the effects of Covid for years, for Whittlebury Park we could feel this for the next six to seven years before we start to make a profit again.

In 2020, we were closed for 200 days in 2020 and we will be for a significant portion of 2021 as well. As we know many businesses, not just in our sector, are looking to banks for support for loans and payment holidays. It would be fantastic to see the Government liaising with banks on behalf of businesses to work out a support plan. This could be interest only payments on civils loans for the next few years until business picks up to pre-covid levels.

TV thanked Charles for his comments and said it was a very grim reminder of how the industry is with the overheads businesses have throughout these trying times.

Neil Brownlee, Head of Business Events, VisitScotland

Of course, we have a lot in common, we are going through a global pandemic after all.

I sit on the Scottish Events Evidence Advisory Group and the common question amongst all of those involved is when will we get a go date or a not earlier than date? The roadmap for Scotland does not include any appetite for pilot events but it does include information from officials and scientific advisors.

The business events sector needs guidance on how they can operate in a post-covid world and what restrictions will be in place as it begins its recovery. Hotels and venues have had the 'know how' and know what is expected of them to be able to operate.

There are many things we do know, for example that no international business will come into the UK until as least Q3/4 2021 and into 2022.

My biggest concern is that the rest of the world has had a year to focus on how they want to sell themselves that the UK is missing out. Selling and pitching for 2023/24 up to 2028/29 needs to begin in March 2021. We have to come out of this pandemic stronger than business events.

TV thanked Neil for his contributions and understood how crucially helpful having a 'go date' or a 'not before date' will be for the industry. She mentioned that it could be possible for Government to provide this, however certainty on international travel is an issue.

Julia Armour, Director, Festivals Edinburgh

I agree with all of my industry colleagues on their points and evidence.

The UK is going to be our market for a long time to come due to the lack of international travel. We have also been navigating our way through some of the difficulties that Brexit has brought to the table. We have been having discussions with suppliers with regards to their right of mobility

throughout the UK and this is something we need further clarity on from the Government.

We already have some fantastic events in the diary for this year including COP26 in Glasgow and also the G7 Summit in Cornwall. We as an industry shouldn't come out of this trying to survive, we should be coming out of this as a world-class sector.

TV thanked Julia for her contributions and said the caliber of the sector cannot be underestimated. She agreed that COP26 and the G7 Summit were great symbols of events starting to get back up and running.

Claude Blanc, Portfolio Director, IBTM and WTM Events

At Reed Exhibitions we are very keen to run our tradeshow as quickly as possible. To do this we require guidance around capacity limits, what is currently available is extremely unhelpful.

We need a clear understanding from the Government as to what conditions need to be met for us to be able to run events again. For example, at what level does the R Rate need to be or what proportion of the country has to be vaccinated?

Having clarity on this will certainly help us be able to start our plans.

TV thanked Claude for his contributions and said she understood the importance of having clear and concise guidelines from the Government to ensure businesses can begin their planning.

Andy Slaughter MP for Hammersmith asked contributors where the APPG should go from here and what should be put forward for discussion with Government.

The contributors agreed that pressure should be put on the Chancellor to extend financial support not just the events industry but for other industries too.

Organisations have huge overheads that they need to pay in order to keep their business afloat but the government needs to provide further support and a 'not before' or 'go' date for the industry.

Contributors confirmed they would be happy to provide evidence and information to put forward to Government so they can fully understand the predicament the sector is in.

After a short discussion, the Chair once again thanked everyone for their attendance and contributions, at which point the meeting was formally closed.

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Additional information about the work of the APPG for Events can be found on the official APPG website <https://appgevents.inparliament.uk> and via Twitter @appgevents
For questions or further information, please contact; appg@daviestanner.com