

Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee.

Royal Welsh Agricultural Society submission

- the immediate problems caused by the pandemic on the RWAS

The COVID 19 restrictions on large events, mass gatherings and social distancing resulted in the early cancellation of the Royal Welsh Smallholding and Countryside Festival, shortly followed by the cancellation of the main Royal Welsh Show, Royal Welsh Grassland Event and all other events hosted on the showground, (organised by outside organisations). Together with a reduction in Membership fees which would have been paid during Show week, this has resulted in a £4.6 million reduction in income.

The impact is not confined to the Society, as we contribute over £40 million to the economy of Wales, which will simply not happen this year. This impact is most keenly felt within the tourism, leisure and hospitality sectors who benefit greatly from events, particularly in rural Mid Wales.

There is also a significant human impact as the Royal Welsh Show and other events provide the opportunity for the rural community to come together, benefiting mental health and the wellness agenda.

- any medium and long term implications of the pandemic

The ban on mass gatherings and lack of any clear thought as to when events such as the Royal Welsh can re-start is causing concern. For the event sector this crisis could extend well into 2021. This puts the Royal Welsh Winter Fair at risk which would create an additional £500k loss of income to the Society and further losses to the wider community and agricultural sector.

There is a need for the current package of support including the Job Retention Scheme to be extended to support sectors such as the Arts, Culture and Events until income re-starts. The impending funding gap will present significant challenges and undoubtedly lead to redundancies and possibly the failure of some organisations and events.

The wider impact on behaviour and finance is yet to be fully understood, but we are alive to the potential for visitors to lack confidence in coming together in large numbers and that companies may decide to re-purpose their funds away from sponsorship and entertainment, further compounding the shorter term impact. There is a need for clear guidance, supported by a marketing strategy to deal with these issues.

- any ways you have identified to address some of the issues / problems

The Society has taken advantage of the Government support where available and 80% of the staff is currently furloughed.

Despite the cancellation of the show, we have created a virtual event which will take place over the four days in July. The platform on the Society's website and Social Media will educate the general public about food and farming, share knowledge within the industry, entertain and share nostalgic memories of the show. We are delighted that the Virtual Show will be opened by HRH The Prince of Wales.

Whilst this event will fill a virtual gap, it will never replace the Show and will not create any significant income replacement.

Like many organisations we have embraced the new virtual way of working, which is something which will continue for some post the pandemic.

We continue to support the work of Visit Wales and Events Wales to assist in the shaping of government thinking and formulation of guidance.