



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

The Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London
SW1A 2AA

2 March 2021

Dear Prime Minister,

RE: Urgent help for the weddings industry.

We are writing on behalf of the UK Weddings Taskforce to raise the urgent situation facing the weddings industry and to ask for your intervention.

Firstly, thank you for setting out a clear roadmap last week, which has given people across the country an ability to plan. However, much to all our concern, the £14.7bn weddings sector is on the verge of collapse, due to the unique challenges posed by pandemic restrictions.

The industry-appointed UK Weddings Taskforce formed with the support of Minister Scully, and with the objective of ensuring the sector remains viable to the end of the pandemic. However, despite the submission of a credible, safe and informed plan for the re-starting of weddings by the Taskforce as restrictions are eased, sector recommendations were largely ignored in Monday's roadmap.

Although there is a finish line in sight for the resumption of weddings (June 21 at the earliest) the hurdles to get there are insurmountable for many businesses, threatening 400,000 jobs in 60,000 businesses, as well as refunds for couples, and tax receipts for the Treasury.

The sector is now in Quarter 6 of low-season or closed business. And when lockdown is eased from April 12 (at the earliest) weddings will be permitted for 15 guests only, rising to 30 in mid-May. These numbers are the same as they were last summer, despite the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy being made aware by the UK Weddings Taskforce that only 50 or more guests is commercially viable across the sector. Whilst indoor events from May 17 are permitted with 1,000 people, or 50% capacity, wedding venues will only be able to host up to 30 guests for those five weeks, keeping the industry at a reduced capacity and commercially unviable for a key part of the season.

Wedding venues want to work with the Government and demonstrate they are safe. The Taskforce believe Covid-19 compliance is easier to manage than in other hospitality settings with attendees known in advance who have vested interests in the wellbeing of each other. Every wedding is safely and meticulously planned with the completion of a 'Covid Risk Assessment', including adherence to social distancing measures, capacity limits, cleaning and hygiene. All event attendance is readily available for NHS Test and Trace. And yet, having worked tirelessly for thousands of hours to make their case, the Government appears content to allow the sector to collapse - despite it being in the enviable position of retaining guaranteed businesses if it can get to Step 4. Indeed with the backlog, there are over 500,000 weddings to service in the first 12 months of reopening, worth £25 billion.

With a cash-flow crisis, no access to many of the support measures wider hospitality has benefited from (such as the 5% VAT rate and business rates relief), and with many staff unable to be furloughed due to the demands of multiple cancellations, postponements, and maintaining venues infrastructure, the sector urgently needs assistance. Over three-quarters of wedding businesses have reported losses to the Weddings Taskforce of between 76% – 100% with many now on the verge of collapse. This will cause further delays to weddings and a disaster in refunds for the majority of couples, as well as job losses too.

That's why we are proposing:

1. A cash grant of £880 million to be accessed as soon as possible
2. A temporary VAT reduction to 5% and business rates exemption available to other sectors be extended to all wedding businesses and until April 2022
3. Parity with other events permitted at 50% capacity in Step 3
4. That wedding businesses are recognised as LSRG (closed) until numbers of 50+ are permitted
5. That weddings are included in Step 2 testing piloting testing schemes.

In a normal year the value of weddings outrank other industries such as live sports and the arts without requiring the assistance of grants and the public purse. We appreciate the lengths the Government has gone to support businesses and people in very difficult circumstances, however we would ask for one final push to ensure wedding businesses survive to June 21.

We are grateful for your attention on this matter and would appreciate a meeting with you to discuss what urgent additional measures of support can be provided.

Yours sincerely,

Neil Parish MP
Rt Hon. Andrew Mitchell MP
Sir Roger Gale MP
Rt Hon. Caroline Nokes MP
Ed Timpson CBE MP
Rt Hon. Ben Bradshaw MP
Rt Hon. Karen Bradley MP
Rt Hon. Dame Diana Johnson MP
Rt Hon. John Spellar MP
Sir Peter Bottomley MP
Julian Knight MP
Rt Hon. Esther McVey MP
Sir Bob Neil MP
Sir Jeffrey Donaldson MP
Sarah Olney MP
Steve Brine MP
Andrew Selous MP
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Christine Jardine MP
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Paul Girvan MP
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