

RESEARCH SUMMARY · APRIL 2026

The Value of the UK *Outdoor Events Sector*

Economic value · Employment · Social impact · What to do about it

Commissioned by The Purple Guide · Delivered by The Power of Events · April 2026

A Sector Larger Than It Knows

£25bn+

Annual direct
economic value

200m+

Attendance occasions
annually

£50bn

Potential total impact
with multiplier

No. 1

Component of UK's
£61.6bn events industry

592

Music festivals
active in UK (2025)

23.5m

Music tourists at
live events (2024)

7 million

People attend agri-
cultural shows yearly

20,900+

Volunteers mapped
across 537 events

"The sector is larger than it knows, more valuable than it can currently prove, and under more pressure than government and stakeholders appreciate."

Why Your Event Is Worth More Than You Think

ECONOMIC MULTIPLIER

ORGANISER INCOME

£1

Every £1 in ticket sales, grants or sponsorship...



LOCAL ECONOMIC ACTIVITY

£1.50-

£2.80+

...triggers this much in visitor, supplier and staff spending

Rural & destination events

Multiplier often exceeds 3x — visitors travel specifically for the event and spend heavily on accommodation, food and transport

Free community events

14:1 ratio typical (Leicester Diwali: £3.5m economic value from £250k organiser cost). No ticket income ≠ no economic impact

Why this matters

Total UK outdoor events impact could be £50bn when the full multiplier is applied to the £25bn+ base figure

The People Behind the Sector

100,000s

FTE jobs across the whole sector
(direct + indirect)

5,850

FTE supported by Edinburgh
Festivals in Edinburgh alone

5,285

FTE jobs from UCI Cycling World
Championships across Scotland

1,100+

Jobs created by Glastonbury 2023

VOLUNTEER VALUE

20,900+

Volunteers mapped across
537 events in this research

10,000+

Glastonbury volunteers alone
(240,000 hours)

£12.21/hr

National Living Wage — the
benchmark for volunteer valuation

£36,630

Value of 150 volunteers × 20 hrs
— a real, citable number

⚠ Volunteering crisis: Every focus group raised burnout, recruitment failure and loss of succession. ONS data confirms a long-term decline in formal volunteering hours. Key volunteers stepping down take 20 years of knowledge with them.

What the Sector Is Telling Us

Four recurring pressures from 4 focus groups with 100+ industry professionals

The Cost Crisis

72 festival closures in 2024 — double 2023

Insurance, security, medical and compliance costs rising steeply. Production budgets up 40%+ since 2021. Portable toilet hire for a 5–10k event: £28k → £54k (2021–2024). The £100k–£500k turnover band has been hit hardest.

Volunteering Crisis

ONS: formal volunteering hours in long-term decline

Burnout, recruitment failure and loss of succession cited by every focus group. Women lost at the point of starting families. Younger volunteers not materialising in sufficient numbers. Knowledge loss is irreversible.

Inconsistent Interpretation of Regulation

SAG process under review

Rules designed for fixed major venues applied inconsistently to small ungated community events. Martyn's Law (2025) creates uncertainty for outdoor gatherings. Safety is the sector's #1 priority — the complaint is proportionality, not safety itself.

Government Undervaluation

£25bn+ sector with no official SIC/SOC classification

"First to close, last to reopen." Government priorities focus on revenue, compliance and employment statistics — not community, arts, heritage or wellbeing. The sector does not feel treated as a serious industry.

Beyond the Economics

What event managers say matters most and what government consistently undervalues



Community Cohesion

Cited as essential across all 4 focus groups. Events described as community infrastructure — the mechanism through which neighbourhoods build shared identity, civic pride and resilience through harder times.



Mental Health & Wellbeing

Documented links to reduced social isolation and improved mood. Events are a low-cost, high-reach public wellbeing mechanism — no GP referral required. Hijinx Unity Festival: £4.84 social return per £1 invested.



Placemaking & Regeneration

Animates underused spaces, protects green spaces, drives town centre footfall. A car park becomes a food festival; a redundant industrial site becomes a music venue. Value no permanent infrastructure can replicate.



Heritage & Cultural Identity

From 200-year-old rural traditions to Leicester's Diwali and UK Mela — irreplaceable if lost. The UK's global reputation as a world-class events nation is a form of soft power. Open at Royal Portrush: £191m destination marketing value.

What Event Managers Should Do

Six practical steps from this research

1 Lead with your multiplier

Your economic impact is 2–3× your organiser income. Use the free eventIMPACTS calculator. That is the number for council, sponsor and funder conversations.

2 Separate visitor & supply chain arguments

Visitor spend is the argument for local authorities and tourism bodies. Supply chain spend is for economic development officers and procurement teams.

3 Free events are not invisible

Survey your visitors. Where from, how long staying, how much spending — that IS your broader economic impact. Derry Halloween: £3m from zero ticket income.

4 Count and value your volunteers

Volunteers × Hours × £12.21 = real, citable value. Include it in every funding case. 200 volunteers × 30 hrs = £73,260.

5 Make the community case explicitly

Economic arguments reach officers. Community, wellbeing and mental health arguments reach the councillors who decide your road closure, licence and grant.

6 Build your evidence before you need it

The sector's biggest vulnerability: only arguing its case when threatened. Document impact annually in advance — not only when the event is at risk.