

# Cluny and Boiler Shop join national call to save the UK music scene

More than 500 grassroots venues have called for Government support and a VAT reduction to help them ride out the coronavirus crisis



 The Bellrays at The Cluny

Venues including Newcastle's Cluny and the Boiler Shop have joined a national call for Government support to keep the UK music scene alive.

A total of 16 grassroots venues in the North East have signed an open letter to Ministers that calls for an immediate £50m financial support package and a reduction of VAT on future ticket sales.

Venues including Billy Bootleggers, the Boiler Shop, the Cluny and the Riverside in Newcastle have signed the letter, along with the Vault in Hexham and Sunderland's Peacock.

The companies argue that the multibillion-pound UK music industry relies on small venues to give future stars their first break, but that most of the activities that are central to their work - such as singing, dancing, and people being close to others - are impossible in the coronavirus lockdown.

The letter says: "Last year there were more than 175,000 events in our venues that gave people the experiences they love and the artists the opportunities they need. Since March 20 there have been no events.

"This is because our sector has complied with the Public Health guidance. We did the right thing. We closed to protect our communities. We engaged with the Government task force and we explored every option available to reopen safely and bring live music back.

"We understand that in order to protect the public, it should not be done until the health guidance changes and we also know that trying to do it is economic folly which would be financially ruinous; not just for us but for our entire sector."

A number of arts organisations have sounded warnings about the damage they have suffered during the coronavirus lockdown. Newcastle's Theatre Royal and the Tyneside Cinema have both announced major job losses as a result of the enforced closure.

Some cultural venues have been given the go-ahead to re-open from July 4 with measures in place to maintain social distancing, including cinemas, museums and art galleries.

But though theatres and concert halls will be allowed to open, they have been banned from having live performances, and venues where there is "close proximity" interaction - including nightclubs - must remain shut.

A DCMS spokesperson said: "We are doing all we can to support our grassroots music venues through substantial financial measures including loans and the extended Job Retention Scheme that thousands of individuals and organisations have accessed.

"We are working directly with representatives from the industry on detailed guidance to help its recovery and renewal."