

# Football fans' hopes of returning to stadiums given boost with pilots being arranged in England

Scottish football fans desperate to get back into stadiums were given a boost yesterday after Prime Minister Boris Johnson said that spectators could be able to return in England from October.

Pilots will take place from 26 July – 1 August at sporting events but any stadium reopenings would be subject to coronavirus guidelines.

“We will pilot larger gatherings in venues like sports stadiums with a view to a wider reopening in the autumn,” said Johnson on Friday. “From October, we intend to bring back audiences in stadiums.



“Again, these changes must be done in a Covid-secure way, subject to the successful outcome of pilots.”

The pilot projects will be held at: Two men's county cricket friendly matches – including Surrey v Middlesex at The Oval on 26-27 July; The World Snooker Championship at Sheffield's Crucible Theatre from 31 July and The Goodwood horse racing festival – known as Glorious Goodwood – on 1 August.

The Premiership starts in Scotland on 1<sup>st</sup> August with Hibs facing Kilmarnock behind closed doors at Easter Road and so

far there has been no indication as to when fans will be allowed into stadiums in Scotland but influential Celtic Chief Executive Peter Lawell has warned Scottish football must not be “left behind” and asked that pilot schemes also be allowed by the Scottish government.

“We have discussed the idea of ‘pilot’ games with the Scottish government and believe it provides a safe, sensible way forward,” said Parkhead chief executive Peter Lawwell.

“It is acknowledged that Scottish football has been exemplary in implementing all the safeguards required of it, first to get back into training and, from 1 August, to playing competitive SPFL matches.

“We are convinced that this should now be accompanied by a phased return of spectators which would be good, not only for the game of football but also for public health and morale in Scotland more generally.

“Alongside other sporting bodies, Celtic will continue to engage in constructive dialogue with the Scottish government and look forward to early progress.”

Celtic Park has a capacity of 60,000 which would allow a significant number of fans inside who would be able to comply with social distancing.

Hibs are due to travel to face the champions on Saturday 26 September.