

## Welsh CPG for Horseracing Meeting – 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2022

### Attendees

Members: Llyr Gruffydd MS (Chair, Plaid Cymru), Alun Davies MS (Labour), Gareth Davies MS (Conservative), James Evans MS (Conservative), Samuel Kurtz MS (Conservative), Sam Rowlands MS (Conservative – arrived at 12:25\*)

Senedd Support Staff: Kiera Marsall, Heleema Khan and Angela Owen Griffiths (Plaid Cymru)

From Racing: Jack Barton (Secretariat), Phil Bell (Executive Director of Chepstow and Ffos Las racecourses), John Flint (Racehorse Trainer), Alan Johns (Professional Jockey) and Tim Vaughan (Racehorse Trainer)

Apologies: Joel James MS (Conservative), Jack Sargeant MS (Labour)

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The meeting kicked off at 12:05 with Llyr opening by welcoming everyone to the meeting, and asked everyone present to give a short introduction.

Llyr then handed over to Tim and John for a discussion about their career as a racehorse trainer. Tim mentioned that he trained in Cowbridge and employed over 50 staff across his business (which he has diversified in recent years). John stated that he ran a family-orientated racehorse training business near Bridgend and has a 28-box yard. Their segment quickly got onto some of the key issues faced by trainers in Wales including:

1. Problems with gaining planning permission in order to expand and grow their business
2. Having to pay more business rates than yards of a similar size in England – i.e. their direct competition – something which was exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic as yards in England have not paid no or half rates for over 2 years now.
  - In response, a number of Members spoke about a lack of awareness of the issues faced by trainers during the height of the pandemic.
  - Phil noted the strong levels of support that racecourses had received in comparison, including a Welsh Government grant to cover lost revenues from the Welsh Grand National.
  - Jack confirmed that the BHA had raised issues with the business rates system for racehorse trainers to Deputy Minister Dawn Bowden at a previous meeting, where they had been encouraged to put together a proposal for how the Welsh Government can support trainers although workload had limited scope to action this work so far.
  - Members present agreed that, once a proposal was ready, they would review it and potentially offer their support.
3. The biggest point of discussion was issues with congestion on the M4 around Newport, with Tim & John reporting that they had to plan for staff to work longer hours – with economic consequences - due to the delays and also allow more time for their horses to get to where

they are racing. Tim also felt it was a barrier to racehorse ownership in Wales and therefore investment in the country. Members present had conflicting views as to whether this problem needed to be resolved.

- James asked Tim for an estimate of how much he thought it cost his business per year. Tim estimated around £40-50,000 but he would have to do the numbers to get a more accurate analysis of the costs.
- Alun was clear that he does not believe that widening the M4 around Newport would provide the 'silver bullet' required to solve some of the issues raised. He also raised environmental concerns around building the extra lanes required on the impact on air quality in the region.
- On this subject, Jack mentioned that the racing industry had recently commissioned work by independent consultants on, and that he would share a summary with the group's members.
- Llyr bought the debate on this subject to a close by noting the potential welfare impacts that delays can have to racehorses stuck in traffic.

Other areas covered included:

#### The creation of the Come Racing in Wales brand

- Phil updated the group on progress with the project. He is awaiting confirmation from Chester Racing Company (who owned Bangor-on-Dee) on making a financial contribution to the work.
- Phil mentioned that as part of the project, that an Economic Impact study would be commissioned to better understand the size and scale of the Welsh racing industry. All members agreed that this would be a positive move.
- Gareth asked Phil whether he felt there had been a reduction in racing 'anoracks' following the pandemic. Phil noted that there had been changing dynamics in terms of racegoers, and that who you get through the door is usually dependent on the theme and quality of the meeting they are hosting.
- Sam asked Phil whether the plan was to confirm Welsh trainers on the Come Racing in Wales website in order to promote them and their businesses. Phil confirmed that was his intention.
- It was agreed that it would be useful to sit down with the CPG and discuss the Come Racing in Wales brand - when it is at a more advanced stage - in order to get the Members view on our proposal.

#### Point to Point racing in Wales

- Llyr asked Alan to describe how he became a professional jockey. Alan stated that he started riding in point-to-point racing like many of the young riders in Wales. He talked about how it provides a positive schooling ground but how ultimately, he turned professional due to the greater rewards in the professional game. This was an opinion shared by Tim and John who also started training in point-to-points before taking out full training licences.
- There was some discussion about how point-to-point racing seemed to be on the decline in Wales, with poor field sizes and some venues no longer hosting point-to-points. Phil confirmed that the Welsh Government had asked to give some money to the point-to-point racing authority during 2021 and that he had recommended to his board that this continues in the coming years.

### Promotion of the industry within the Senedd

- Llyr spoke of potentially using parliamentary time in the Senedd to promote the industry and confirmed that he would be looking to host a members debate around National Racehorse Week.
- Alun suggested that we needed to look at how we could increase the groups visibility with other members of the Senedd.
- Jack mentioned that we could potentially offer the planned Q3 group yard visit out to all members of the Senedd in order to get some who wouldn't usually engage along.
- Llyr also touched upon an idea to potentially bring a racehorse to the Senedd, which has been discussed as part of National Racehorse Week planning. Tim mentioned he had already done this for a previous promotional campaign and could potentially do so again.

Llyr brought the meeting to a close at 1pm and thanked those present for their attendance.