

Cross-Party Group for Horseracing – Meeting Minutes - Tuesday 6th June 2023 – 12-1pm

Venue: Conference Room A, Ty Hywel.

Members: Llyr Gruffydd MS (Plaid Cymru – Chair), Alun Davies MS (Labour), James Evans MS (Conservative), Peter Fox MS (Conservative), Joel James MS (Conservative)

Senedd Staff: Mike Bryan (Samuel Kurtz MS Researcher), Griff (Llyr Gruffydd MS Researcher)

External: Jack Barton (British Horseracing Authority – Secretariat), Beverley Thomas (Representative of Welsh Point-to-Point racing and Racehorse Owner)

Apologies: Samuel Kurtz MS (Conservative)

Meeting start time: 12:05pm

With Llyr delayed coming from a Plaid Cymru party meeting, Jack Barton initially Chaired the discussion, thanking the members for attending and then handing over to Beverley Thomas to discuss Welsh Point-to-Point racing.

Beverley Thomas – An Update on Welsh Point-to-Point racing – further information attached.

During her update, Beverley covered:

- The impact of Covid-19 with around 50% of participants moving on from Pointing.
- That some farmers have stopped hosting Points due to changes in land use – for example, one sight is soon to become a solar farm - and therefore the calendar has reduced in size as a result.
- Welsh Points as important social events for the rural community, especially those events that take place on bank holidays which tend to be very well attended.
- How most horses in Welsh Points are owned by community syndicates which are a good way of creating interest in horseracing.
- That, apart from a grant from the Levy Board for fence building, Point-to-Points receive no funding from the wider racing industry and therefore self-funding is vital for the overall financial viability.
- Point-to-Point racing, and the Pony racing meets associated with it, have brought key sources of young Welsh talent to the professional jockey ranks of British racing. Multiple prominent Welsh trainers who now have full licences also started out pointing.

Q&A

Peter asked whether horses that race in Point-to-Point racing would've raced under rules in British racing first. Beverley confirmed that this was the case, with a large percentage of the current horse population having raced under those rules. Jack stressed the importance of Point-to-Point racing in providing thoroughbreds another career, especially given the Horse Welfare strategy.

Alun noted the closure of some Point tracks, Brecon and Ceredigion, which he had previously visited and asked Beverley how the group Point-to-Point racing as politicians? Several actions were identified from the following discussion including:

- That the Group look at debates around the Sustainable Farming Scheme legislation and raise Point-to-Point racing within the context of them being a social good that comes from farmland
- The BHA work up a joint approach with Point-to-Point Racing to Sport Wales

- The same joint approach would go to the National Farmers Union (NFU) in order to make them aware of the challenges faced in Wales by the Point-to-Point community. Llyr was to share contact details for the NFU.
- Beverley was to also invite Minister Bowden to a Point-to-Point race meeting.

Peter asked what more can be done to encourage landowners to host Point-to-Point racing? Beverley noted issues with insurance and medical cover as some of the biggest reasons why farmers are put off from hosting Points but they could be better incentivised if more industry funding was available.

James asked whether there was scope for Point-to-Point racing to be included within the Welsh Horseracing brand once it was up and running? Jack answered that he did not want to speak for those that are working on the brand but that he understands there could potentially be some involvement and join up.

Jack Barton – Updates from the BHA

Jack provided updates on the Gambling Act Review for which a white paper has been released since the Group last met and that, as part of that, the Horserace Betting Levy, racing's statutory funding was being reviewed.

There was also an update provided to the group on protests on racecourses given the Animal Rising protests at the Derby the previous weekend, as well as a positive visit from Welsh Government Animal Welfare officials to Ffos Las in order to demonstrate the regulatory measures in place to promote equine welfare on British racecourses.

An update was provided on British racing's industry strategy and potential changes to the 2024 Fixture List, including more quality fixtures on Sundays and the concept of Premierisation, a move to declutter racing on a Saturday afternoon and allow our betting racing to breathe.

Lastly, Jack signposted some important Welsh successes during the Spring, with the Christian Williams trained Kitty's Light winning the Scottish Grand National at Ayr and the bet365 Gold Cup at Sandown on the last day of the Jumps season.

Q&A

Llyr asked Jack to draft a letter on behalf of the CPG congratulating Christian Williams on his successes.

James asked whether Betfred's assumption as title sponsor of the Derby was an issue for racing and raised concerns over a betting brand sponsoring such a prestigious race. Jack confirmed this was a commercial decision taken by The Jockey Club and the BHA did not have any involvement in the decision but did not that there is currently a very challenging gambling environment.

Multiple members felt that it would be wise for Welsh Racecourses to improve security and plan for potential protests at Welsh tracks. Jack noted that they (Animal Rising activists) seem to just be targeting the big days at present so likely the most pressing concern would be for Chepstow in the Autumn/Winter.

James noted that racing had done a good job in removing some of the risk associated challenges of the sport in recent times and improved the sport's reputation on Animal Welfare. He asked whether Jack would be happy to speak to colleagues from Shooting about some of the improvements made in racing. Jack said that was he happy for James to set up a discussion.

