

**Barry Johnson, 27 October 2009**  
**at the announcement of the agreement between Towcester racecourse and its bookmakers**

My Lords, ladies and gentlemen, I can honestly say that in my previous life as sales and marketing director in business, that I have had to make quite a number of presentations, but I have never been preceded by a Lord and followed by a Government Minister before, so I can assure you that even at my advanced age this is a new experience.

I have always felt that there is a great spirit of partnership between Towcester racecourse and the bookmakers, and that continuing partnership is in no small way due to the strong leadership and philosophy of the Board of Towcester Racecourse.

So I would like to first give my thanks first of all to Lord Hesketh, whose commitment to the Towcester accord has meant that we can be here today. And we are under no illusions that if he wasn't brought into it, we wouldn't be here.

As I mentioned, my thanks go to the whole of the Towcester Board, and I would like to make particular mention of Rhyddian Morgan-Jones, who I know has taken a very keen interest in the agreement.

Towcester is also fortunate to have Kevin Ackerman as the General Manager. Kevin in fairness has been tireless in a quest to comprise an agreement that has been fair to both parties. And we really do think this is a win-win situation.

I couldn't let the occasion go by without making a final thank you to Chris Palmer, the former Chief Executive of Towcester, who initiated the contract discussions with me – quite some time ago now Chris – and whose understanding of the realities of the betting ring was a vital component in the formulation of an agreement that has left both sides as winners.

When I'm talking about the realities of the betting ring, what we've got on a racecourse today is a low margin highly competitive environment, and we're actually offering – and despite what you might read occasionally in adverse headlines – there is no question that a racecourse offering today is the best that it's ever been to the customers. Make no mistake about that.

Towcester has always demonstrated an innovative approach. This is exemplified by the racecourse's "free admission" offer, which commenced a number of years ago. Lord Hesketh and his management team backed a winner that day – with a crowd of over 8,000 welcoming the new initiative – and they have backed a winner again today with their deal with the bookmakers. I am delighted that Towcester is once again, and this is my final racing pun, first past the post with a formalised agreement with its bookmakers.

For the life of the racecourse, and throughout the racecourse in new and existing betting areas, Towcester's bookmakers can be assured of how their betting pitches will be allocated and on what terms. Changes will be agreed between the racecourse and its bookmakers, or – and it's a very unlikely scenario – referred to an independent body for dispute resolution. But we know that's not going to happen. This agreement gives me – both as a businessman and as a father – considerable peace of mind.

I believe that the terms of this agreement will also contribute to Towcester's financial success, as well as guarantee a loyal bookmaker presence. So in the end, perhaps the biggest beneficiary of the agreement is the customer, who will find along with their complimentary admission a vibrant and competitive betting ring in a first class racecourse.

I hope that in years to come, we will say that Towcester led the way, because there remains much to do. Bookmakers at Towcester can enjoy a secure future. But those same people own list positions at other racecourses, and many more bookmakers do not have positions at Towcester. It is clear and morally unarguable that all list positions and all bookmakers must be protected: our cheer today will be our resolve tomorrow.

And that brings me to the final thanks, and that's to our special guest, the Minister for Sport. The Minister has spent a good deal of time on this matter during our discussions, and he has been involved with the Racecourse Association and ourselves. His influential guidance, his active involvement, and above all, his desire and determination to see a resolution, remain absolutely critical to us.

So it's my great honour and pleasure therefore, to introduce to you the Minister for Sport, Gerry Sutcliffe MP.