

Gerry Sutcliffe MP, Minister for Sport, 27 October 2009
at the announcement of the agreement between Towcester racecourse and its bookmakers

Well Lord Hesketh, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, it is indeed a great pleasure to be with you this afternoon and it's a pleasure to celebrate the announcement of the agreement between Towcester Racecourse and the bookmakers for the tenure of list positions.

And I certainly agree with Lord Hesketh in that Towcester is an innovative course and has done great things in terms of the sport of racing which I do believe offers the best product across the wide ranges of courses that we've got. And it is that sport that meets all social classes which I also think is vitally important as well.

And that's why at the outset of my role as Minister for Sport I've said to the sport to try and resolve all the issues internally. Yes, in Government we have a role to play but it shouldn't be left to Government to resolve all of these issues; it should in fact be the sport itself that deals with the issues that they face, which are many and varied, and this is just one.

But what we are seeing here today is the example of the partnership that the Government has been asking for between racing and the betting industries.

And of course I congratulate the racecourse and the FRB in securing a deal which clearly meets the needs and secures the future of both parties. Having met with Towcester right at the start and congratulations to Chris for being involved, I took a deep interest in the discussions that were taking place.

And clearly I am now delighted to see that they have been successful and the terms are now set out in stone.

And of course, this is an important development in the overall dispute. It demonstrates to me that with goodwill and perseverance, that deals can be done for the benefit of everyone.

It's also clear that the issue is a multi-dimensional one; it's not simply a question of 'how long'. All the boxes need to be ticked before agreements can be reached, and I am pleased that now one racecourse has got to this stage.

But as Barry as said, there are 60 other racecourses in the United Kingdom and there is no certainty. And this must be remedied as far as I am concerned.

It's good to see my friends from the House of Commons here and the House of Lords, because it is a matter that has had a great deal of attention in both Houses, and I want to see that an equitable solution is to be reached.

So I remain committed to this. My department and I are facilitating discussions, and I believe it is right that we do so. In addition to this, all the options remain under review, including the legislative option.

Now, it's an important step forward today but we mustn't be complacent, and there is still as Barry says a long way to go.

So I hope this agreement is the start of a flurry of activity and perhaps the other racecourses and bookmakers will want to get on with the job as quickly as possible.

We have a meeting scheduled I think it's on the 18th November, which will be in my view the final meeting as far as I'm concerned, because I think enough time has elapsed for agreements to be reached and if agreements aren't reached we shall have to consider the action that we take.

I would like to thank all involved in this initial agreement for the hard work and dedication that it's taken to get so far and I look forward to the conclusion of this one issue that's facing racing in the very near future.

Thank you very much.