

## Bookies on a winner with racecourse deal



Towcester racecourse is leading the field with its agreement over bookies' list positions

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**Bookmakers at Towcester Racecourse have been given a financial lifeline following the signing of a groundbreaking agreement, which could now be rolled out across every other track in the country.**

Dozens of bookies have signed the agreement which enables them to continue to use their 'list positions' for the lifetime of the racecourse.

List positions – the spots where each bookmaker can stand and trade in the racecourse betting rings – have come under scrutiny following plans to scrap the arrangements from 2012.

A number of independent book-makers have previously paid in excess of £1million for prime spots across the UK in the knowledge they would be an investment for the future, only to see them be rendered virtually worthless by the controversial proposals.

But Towcester has now gone out on a limb by promising to honour the original agreement, safeguarding bookmakers' futures at the county track.

Kevin Ackerman, general manager of Towcester Racecourse, said: "We are the first course to sign this ground-breaking agreement and we hope others will follow.

"There is a commercial benefit to us but also we feel bookies are an important fabric to the race day experience. They are an integral part of going racing, and it is up to us to recognise that."

Towcester currently has 26 bookmakers working at the track on race days.

Independent bookie Barry Johnson paid in the region of £50,000 at auction for his prime list position at Towcester and said he was delighted at the agreement.

He added: "Hopefully this will be a catalyst for other courses to fall into line.

"We were devastated when the initial bombshell was delivered that we would lose our list positions but this is great news.

"It is beneficial to both Towcester and the bookies but the main beneficiary is the punter, as this will ensure a vibrant and lively betting ring. I'm over the moon."

The Towcester agreement also includes revised commercial terms between the racecourse and the bookmakers, but other British tracks are still at the discussion stage in what has been a contentious issue.

Gerry Sutcliffe MP, the Minister for Sport, said: "I am pleased that Towcester has reached a deal but there are 60 other racecourses in the United Kingdom and this must be remedied as far as I am concerned."