



Towcester: proved deals can be done, says sports minister Gerry Sutcliffe

Sutcliffe congratulates Towcester on pitch deal

By Howard Wright 5.37PM 27 OCT 2009

SPORTS MINISTER [Gerry Sutcliffe](#) welcomed on Tuesday the long-term deal on pitch positions thrashed out between Towcester and its on-course bookmakers.

However, he warned Britain's other 59 operating tracks that time is running out for them to organise similar arrangements.

As revealed in Tuesday's *Racing Post*, a dispute that has rumbled along since March 2007 has ended at [Towcester](#) with a deal that gives security to the list positions of on-course bookmakers for the lifetime of the racecourse, in exchange for a set fee per meeting and commission on the sale or transfer of pitch positions.

Sutcliffe said: "I congratulate the racecourse and the [Federation of Racecourse Bookmakers](#) in securing a deal that clearly meets the needs, and secures the future of, both parties.

"I see it as an example of the partnership that the government is looking for between the racing and betting industries, and it demonstrates that, with goodwill and perseverance, deals can be done that benefit everyone.



Gerry Sutcliffe: also issued warning

PICTURE: Getty Images

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

“However, there are 59 other racecourses in the UK where there is no certainty. This must be remedied, and I hope this agreement is the start of a flurry of activity.”

Sutcliffe has said all along that his preferred option was for racecourses and bookmakers to resolve the differences, notably over the tenure of list positions, between themselves.

However, he pointed out that while the [Department for Culture, Media and Sport](#) remained willing to facilitate discussions, all options remained under review, including a legislative solution.

He revealed that talks involving his department, the [Racecourse Association](#) – of which Towcester is not a member – and the bookmakers are due to take place next month. “And as far as I’m concerned, that’s the final meeting,” he added.

Representatives of the FRB, an umbrella organisation, expressed their delight at the Towcester breakthrough.

Keith Johnson, from the [National Association of Bookmakers](#), said: “This shows what can be done when people negotiate in good faith. The commercial arrangements with other course will vary, but there’s no reason why all the other issues – tenure, commission on sales, new betting areas and disputes resolution – should not apply with every racecourse.

“Bookmakers betting at Towcester can now make plans for the future with certainty.”

Robin Grossmith, for the [Rails Bookmakers Association](#), added: “The Towcester arrangement gives bookmakers everything in principle they’ve been looking, and it also suits the racecourse. In fact, it’s a win-win situation.”

Barry Johnson, who has No.1 picks in the ring and on the rails at Towcester, said: “The agreement is fair to both parties, and it’s good for our customers. It certainly gives me, as a businessman and father, considerable peace of mind.”