

COUNTRYSIDE ALLIANCE BRIEFING NOTE: FUTURE OF BRITISH HORSERACING

Westminster Hall, Lincoln Jopp MP

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- The annual economic impact of horseracing has been estimated at £4.1 billion in direct, indirect and associated spending, much of which benefits rural areas, with over 20,000 people directly employed by racecourses.
- The Horserace Betting Levy Board, which funds the grassroots sport, does not receive direct support from the government, but instead from a levy on bets that in 2024-25 produced a revenue of £109 million.
- The British Horseracing Authority has expressed deep concern over the proposed introduction of financial risk assessments for some gambling customers. Its survey of racing fans found that 52% of respondents said they would either stop betting on the sport or bet significantly less, and 40% would consider using black market betting providers, if the checks were introduced.
- In recent years, racing has come under assault from forceful protests by animal rights extremists. The Countryside Alliance is concerned about the impact of increasingly militant protests by animal rights extremists on the sector, as on others. The illegal disruption of lawful activity must not be tolerated.
- Pending reforms to gambling legislation, including the introduction of affordability checks, must be implemented in a way that avoids having a disproportionate impact to negligible benefit.

Impacts of racing

- In evidence submitted in 2020 to an inquiry into the impact of Covid-19 on DCMS sectors, the British Horseracing Authority (BHA) – the governing and regulatory body for thoroughbred horseracing in Great Britain – characterised racing as *“the UK’s second largest sport behind football in respect of attendances, employment and revenues generated annually.”*
- It estimated the annual economic impact of the sport as raising £4.1 billion in direct, indirect and associated spending for the British economy.
- Much of that spending, it pointed out, benefits rural areas. It calculated that *“over 20,000 [are] people directly employed across our 59 licensed racecourses, hundreds of training yards and thousands of breeding operations”*.
- The BHA also pointed to the sporting, social and cultural significance of the sport. 5.62 million people attended race meetings across 1,500 events in England, Scotland and

Wales, and the sport is the only one with two national events – The Derby and the Grand National – scheduled as Group A protected events for broadcast.¹

Existing support

- Racing as a grassroots sport receives funding through the Horserace Betting Levy Board. The Board does not receive direct grant-in aid support from the government or National Lottery funding, but instead is funded through the horserace betting levy on profits from leviable bets.
- In 2024-25, the levy generated an income for the Board of £109 million. For 2026 it budgeted a contribution of £77.13 million in prize money, which includes \$4.11 million in new initiatives requested by the sport: increasing prize money for Flat and Jump Developmental Races, and targeting prize money at upper levels to aid the retention of high-quality horses in Britain.
- The levy income of £109 million was the highest figure yielded since the horserace betting levy was reviewed in 2017.²
- At the 2017 review, the levy was extended to cover overseas bookmakers in respect of bets placed on British racing, and set at a fixed rate of 10% of profits on leviable bets.³
- Like other sports, racing received additional help from the government in surviving and recovering from the Covid-19 pandemic. In November 2021, then-DCMS Minister Chris Philp MP reported that *“racecourses are accessing £21 million from the sport survival package. They have also had £28 million in cash-flow and hardship funding, in addition to which the Horserace Betting Levy Board provided £97 million in 2019-20 to support the sport.”*⁴

Affordability checks

- In 2020 the then-government launched a review of the Gambling Act 2005, which resulted in the publication in April 2023 of a white paper on reforms to the law on high-stakes betting. Proposals included reforms to online gambling, with the aim of introducing background checks on customers making losses starting at £125 in a month or £500 in a year.⁵
- The white paper estimated that the loss to the horserace betting levy of £5-8 million a year, with additional potential losses to the industry in advertising and sponsorship revenue owing to reductions in bookmakers' income.
- The BHA welcomed the white paper but raised concerns about the possibility of unintended consequences and expressed the intention to engage closely with associated consultations. Specifically, it opposed the introduction of *“sweeping blanket checks on*

¹ DCMS Committee, [Written evidence submitted by the British Horseracing Authority](#)

² Horserace Betting Levy Board, [HBLB Increases Prize Money Contribution by £4.4m in 2026 With New Targeted Initiatives](#), 06.08.26

³ House of Lords Library, [Horseracing industry: Government support and recent developments](#), 06.09.23

⁴ HC Deb, 18.11.21, [c712](#)

⁵ DCMS, [Policy paper](#), 27.04.23

affordability” and insisted that any new measures must be “*proportionate and targeted at individuals and their specific circumstances*”.⁶

- The government maintained that “*the impact on racing will be minimal in the context of its overall income*”, and the financial checks are being “*designed so that they are frictionless*” and will not affect the majority of bettors.⁷
- Financial vulnerability checks were subsequently introduced from 30 August 2024, overseen by the Gambling Commission. From that date licenced gambling operators have been required to investigate customers making net deposits (deposits minus withdrawals) of £500 or more within a 30-day period to determine whether they are at risk of problematic gaming. The threshold fell to £150 from 28 February 2025.⁸
- In August 2024 the Gambling Commission began a trial of the higher tier of affordability checks – termed financial risk assessments – which would aim to provide frictionless checks for those spending £1,000 on gambling within 24 hours or £2,000 within 90 days to ensure they could afford it.⁹
- The BHA said in April 2026 that betting operators working with the pilot checks reported that credit reference agencies they were relying on to check affordability have been obtaining vastly different results for the same customer and an insufficient level of data to profile customer risk. If the checks were implemented under those circumstances they would not be entirely ‘frictionless’ for punters as initially proposed, with some required to hand over personal financial documents such as payslips and bank statements.¹⁰
- The BHA had previously conducted a survey of racing fans which found that 52% of respondents said they would either bet significantly less on horse racing or stop betting on the sport at all, and 40% would consider using black market betting providers (which do not contribute to the Horserace Betting Levy), if the checks were introduced.¹¹
- The BHA therefore opposes financial risk assessments and co-ordinated an open letter to the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, Lisa Nandy MP, from over 400 people within racing and various cross-party MPs and peers urging her to instruct the Gambling Commission to stop the roll-out of the checks this spring.¹²
- The Gambling Commission subsequently announced, following its meeting on 21 May 2026, that it had been presented with an extensive evidence base in relation to the financial risk assessment pilot but had not yet fully completed its assessment of that evidence, and would communicate further in due course. This has in effect paused the roll-out of affordability checks for the time being.¹³

⁶ BHA PR, [27.04.23](#)

⁷ HC Deb, 15.06.23, [c417-418](#)

⁸ Experian, [What gaming operators need to know about basic financial vulnerability checks](#), 05.24

⁹ Racing Post, [Explainer: what is the latest on affordability checks and how might they fuel the black market?](#), 07.04.26

¹⁰ BHA, [Affordability checks, Levy review and Scottish and Welsh elections](#), 08.04.26

¹¹ BHA, [British horseracing faces exodus of bettors if intrusive affordability checks are introduced by Gambling Commission, survey finds](#), 16.10.23

¹² BHA, [Affordability checks, Levy review and Scottish and Welsh elections](#), 08.04.26

¹³ BHA, [Affordability checks, Gambling White Paper and the APPG for Gambling Reform’s latest report](#), 10.06.26

- Nevertheless the Gambling Commission has argued that the pilot showed that of the 3% of customers that would undergo an assessment, 97% would have a frictionless assessment process.¹⁴

Animal rights activism

- Racing has in recent years come under assault from forceful protests by animal rights extremists led by Animal Rising, formerly known as Animal Rebellion, emboldened by similar actions from the environmentally focused groups Extinction Rebellion and Just Stop Oil. These have included invading racecourses in illegal attempts to prevent races taking place.
- In 2024, both of racing's premier events, the Grand National and The Derby, were affected by such protests. Neither was successful in preventing the events from taking place although the start of the Grand National was briefly delayed. The group subsequently announced that it would not continue such protests this year.¹⁵
- These protest groups claim to be motivated by concern for the welfare of racehorses. The BHA, however, has said that it is committed to the welfare of racehorses and has invested over £40 million in veterinary research over the past 20 years to the benefit of all breeds.¹⁶

Other challenges

- Since the UK's departure from the EU, horseracing had experienced difficulties as a result of customs requirements on animals moving between countries. Thoroughbreds temporarily entering Great Britain were subject to a refundable financial guarantee equivalent to 20% of their value. In 2022, however, the Thoroughbred Industries Brexit Steering Group negotiated with HMRC a facilitation by which thoroughbreds under multiple owners would no longer require a financial guarantee.¹⁷
- The British Horse Council has reported that, under the previous government, new legislation was being developed on equine ID, and is campaigning for it to be digitised. This was expected to have positive impacts on welfare, disease surveillance, disease outbreak control, and theft and crime deterrents, and allow for smoother and more biosecure cross-border movements.¹⁸
- A national digital equine ID scheme had been planned, however in March 2025, Defra Minister Baroness Hayman of Ullock announced that while she accepted the importance of digital identification for traceability and that the matter was a key concern for the industry, the government *"had to pause work in this area, even though we recognise that it is critical, while we tackle the very real challenges that we're facing currently around public finances."*¹⁹

¹⁴ Gambling Commission, [Financial risk assessments pilot – update on post-pilot analysis](#), 16.04.26

¹⁵ The Guardian, [04.04.24](#)

¹⁶ BHA, [Horse Welfare is the priority in British Racing](#), 01.06.23

¹⁷ BHA PR, [16.08.22](#)

¹⁸ APPG for the Horse, Minutes, 22.02.23

¹⁹ The Scottish Farmer, [Equine ID scheme paused—industry left waiting](#), 27.03.25

Countryside Alliance position

- The Countryside Alliance supports the sport of racing on the basis of its economic and cultural contribution to rural communities and the UK as a whole.
- We remain concerned about the impact of increasingly militant protests by animal rights extremists on the sector, as on others. Protesters are free to take whatever views they wish and to express them in the public realm according to democratic norms, but the illegal disruption of lawful activity must not be tolerated.
- In reforming gambling legislation, especially with regard to the introduction of enhanced affordability checks, it is important for the government to listen to the sector and avoid disproportionately impacting horseracing to negligible benefit.

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