

Email correspondence from Thornton Greyhound Stadium

Email from Paul Brignal, Thornton Stadium owner and director, to the Rural Affairs, Islands and Natural Environment Committee, 3 June 2022

Firstly greyhound racing at Thornton Stadium bears little resemblance to GBGB racing in England, and is at the moment just a hobby sport in the same way as whippet racing, terrier racing, afghan hound and saluki racing, dog agility racing, sled dog racing and many more activities involving our pets. Whilst any of the events mentioned may lead to an injury, greyhounds also get injured running around on golf courses and playing fields, as do many pet dogs which is why there are vet surgeries in every town in Scotland.

So at the moment there is no vet in attendance at Thornton Stadium as the cost would be totally prohibitive. The trainers, myself and my racing assistant would withdraw any dog that was lame before it raced. You are somewhat misguided if you think a GBGB track vet gives greyhounds a thorough inspection before it runs, they are merely trotted up in front of the vet, and if they look ok they are passed to race. Our trainers usually only have 2 or 3 greyhounds which they walk, massage and groom regularly, and they are intimately familiar with their greyhounds and genuinely know if their dog is fit enough to race. GBGB trainers may have up to 100 greyhounds in their kennels. In the event of a serious injury, which is a rare event bearing in mind that only about 50 greyhound run round our track per week, there are two vets within 10 minutes drive of the stadium. The injury and mortality figures quoted by the petitioners bear no resemblance to greyhound racing at Thornton Stadium, and although they think that the Stadium is a bit run down, I can assure you that the racing surface at Thornton Stadium is as safe as any GBGB track and because we run mainly handicap racing like whippets, the greyhounds are less likely to bump into each other. Our trainers would not race their greyhounds that they have paid a lot of money for, and treat better than most pets if they thought that they were going to get injured, and if there was any increased risk due to weather conditions or technical problems the racing would be cancelled.

In the event of any greyhound being injured, which ends its racing career, whilst it is enjoying running around Thornton Greyhound Track, and they really do love racing, it will be re-homed at one of the centres in Scotland. It will then go on to find a pet home and greyhounds from Thornton Stadium with their one to one owner care, make very good pets. It is now very rare that a racing greyhound is put to sleep.

With regard to random testing, the reason that the GBGB randomly test for banned substances is to ensure the integrity of the betting industry, as millions of pounds is wagered on dogs at their tracks. At Thornton Stadium a person would bet between £20 and £100 on a greyhound. We can not afford to submit samples for mass spectrometry testing, and feel there is no reason to do so. The petitioners have led you to believe that drugs are widely used in greyhound racing, but most of the GBGB testing failures are for over the counter remedies which contain traces of banned substances, contamination through the food chain and environment, or insufficient time allowed for medication to clear the greyhounds system, which are of no risk to

the greyhound's health. You will need to talk to the GBGB if you want a full breakdown of which dog failed a test and for what reason. In my opinion Gill Docherty has totally misled the committee with her interpretation of the random testing data published. If pet dogs were subjected to the same test they would fail if they had drunk tea, eaten bread with poppy seeds in it, eaten pet food produced from knackers meat where the animal had received medication, had any medicine prescribed by the vet or used over the counter creams containing anti inflammatories, or if they lived in a house with drug users in it.

Whilst greyhound racing at Thornton Stadium is at the moment purely a hobby sport, there is the opportunity to join the GBGB, and with internet gambling throughout the world, turn it into a multi million pound business employing many people. However with the submission of this petition in 2019 it has become very difficult for me to finance bringing the stadium up to the standard required by the GBGB. For this reason I would be grateful if you could come to a speedy decision on what you intend to do about this petition. It is profoundly unfair that a small group of self opinionated people can misrepresent the figures issued by the GBGB, to get greyhound racing banned in Scotland. In Ireland where the government have taken a positive approach to managing and promoting greyhound racing, the sport generates around 130 million Euros and 4,000 full and part time jobs to the Irish economy every year, and with world-wide media and betting opportunities in the future this could increase. There is no reason why this could not happen in Scotland if a newly formed Scottish Greyhound Racing Board were to be established. There are still 3 tracks capable of greyhound racing in Scotland, Shawfield in Glasgow, Armadale in Livingston and Thornton in Fife and for very small investment from the Scottish Government, the return to the Scottish economy and jobs would be huge. I have not got time to elaborate on this but should you wish to pursue this option, I would be available as a consultant.

Greyhounds love racing, in the same way that children love playing football and rugby where they may get injured, but no one suggests that a doctor has to be on the touch line, the money saved by not having a vet at a track could be used to save every dog that is unfortunate enough to get injured, and the fatality rate would be near to zero. The GBGB have spent millions of pounds paying vets to be at tracks, millions of pounds on rehoming and new welfare initiatives, to try to appease people like Gill Docherty but unfortunately they are so obsessed with there objective no one will ever satisfy their demands. Greyhound racing is their target today, if that is gone horse racing will be next.

In the event that Thornton Stadium can secure a media and betting contract, and join the GBGB, we will then have a vet on the premises, will do random testing, and will benefit from all the welfare initiatives that the GBGB have introduced. Once again I would reiterate that the sooner this petition is withdrawn, the sooner we will be able to move forward.

I also consent for you to submit Sandy Bingham's comments and any previous comments made by me to the committee, and if the committee requires any further information please let me know.

Supplementary correspondence from Thornton Greyhound Stadium

Email from Paul Brignal, Thornton Stadium owner and director, to the Rural Affairs, Islands and Natural Environment Committee, 19 June 2022

I also feel that I need to explain the GBGB integrity testing and GBGB injury statistics in more detail.

GBGB integrity testing is done by mass spectrometer analysing of random urine samples and costs approximately £60 per test. It detects the minutest traces of all the chemicals in the greyhounds urine. If you wanted to quantify the amount of any chemical in the greyhounds urine you would need to pay extra for another test and the cost to the GBGB would be prohibitive. Now if a test comes back positive a hearing will be arranged and the trainer will need time to prepare his defence. He can ask for a retest of the sample, arrange for a solicitor or barrister to put forward his defence and all this takes time, it is not the GBGB being obstructive as said by the petitioner.

Unfortunately the costs of all this mean that usually the trainer has to defend himself, and usually ends up getting fined and cautioned.

When I worked with a GBGB registered trainer at Walthamstow Stadium, the best greyhound stadium that the UK has ever had, we failed 2 tests on opiates. The petitioner would no doubt claim that we had given the greyhound heroin. In fact it was later proved that we had been feeding bread with poppy seeds in it from the local bakery, and that contains traces of opiates. Now there is a specific GBGB rule about not feeding poppy seeded bread to greyhounds. Unfortunately the rule book is so big with things like this that a lot of trainers still fall foul of the test.

The petitioner has claimed that every single test failure has been drugged and that is quite simply not the case.

In 2020 there were only 24 positive tests out of 6,288 tests.

Why is the petitioner claiming that greyhounds are more likely to be drugged at Thornton Stadium when she openly admits that there is no money to be made and people are only doing it for fun.

The GBGB records injury and fatality figures, so that they can make improvements to welfare, not for people like the petitioner to use as ammunition. The petitioner mentioned an incredibly rare injury broken spine several times, whereas the most common injury of a pulled muscle was not mentioned at all. There were constant references to the dangers of running around a greyhound track. I would argue that a young greyhound, not the retired couch potatoes that need two 20 minute walks a day, is more at risk of injury running around a field at 35 mph where there are trees, rabbit holes, barbed wire, or broken glass, than running around a well prepared sand surfaced greyhound track. The petitioners claim that there are more injuries at Thornton Stadium than a GBGB track, and that is just not true. They say there are no eyes on us. Thornton Stadium is open to the general public and in the 20 years that I have managed the track I am not aware of anyone reporting any welfare issues, and

the SSPCA and the Animal Welfare Commission have never had cause to even come to the track.

In my opinion SAGE should be made to pay compensation for the damage that they have done to us and Shawfield Stadium. They have openly claimed that they have driven down Shawfield Stadium's crowd from 3,000 in 2017 to about 100 before it closed, with their intimidation of racegoers. In my view these people are not nice at all, and they have the cheek to criticise greyhound owners and trainers.

Please can additional comments be added to original statement.

Email from Sandra Bingham, Thornton Stadium co-owner, to the Rural Affairs, Islands and Natural Environment Committee, 19 June 2022

The committee admitted knowing nothing about the sport of greyhound racing and are looking at this from 'scratch' but only listening and appearing to believe all from sage was very frustrating for us. The what I consider to be mis-leading and over-exaggerated mentions of the greyhounds breaking their spine, which in which my view sage liked to use to shock members of the committee, made the impression that this was the usual injury caused by racing around a track, unfortunately this has happened at racing tracks, but it is extremely rare, arguably if the greyhound wasn't racing it wouldn't happen. Greyhounds and pet dogs more often break their spines by running around a field/garden or more usually traffic accidents or running head-on into patio doors. Greyhounds are naturally capable of running at speeds up to 35 mph and young greyhounds enjoy doing so, if they cannot run at a safely prepared track, the chances of them injuring themselves by running into patio doors could be fairly high, but obviously that is the worst scenario, wouldn't wish to ban 'pet' greyhound ownership or patio doors.

Previous correspondence from Thornton Greyhound Stadium

Email from Sandra Bingham, Thornton Stadium co-owner, to the Rural Affairs, Islands and Natural Environment Committee, 27 April 2022

We would welcome any visit from SSPCA and police, even though they are probably busy concentrating on the cruel people out there who deliberately intend to hurt and kill dogs, the disgraceful increase of dog fighting.

We never, ever wish our greyhounds to get injured on the track, and most of our money and time is spent maintaining the running surface and ensuring the track is safe so they don't get injured. It is on the say so of a fanatical loud few that we 'abuse' our greyhounds, just because in their eyes they think there is an inherent risk of shocking, grim and catastrophic danger to greyhounds during their racing career.

Sage say they can talk for days on why greyhound racing should be banned, we can

also talk for days on why it should be allowed to continue. Unfortunately it is difficult to debate with people who have become extremely narrow- minded, well-rehearsed and obsessed with their personal views and assumptions of a subject they think they know all about, and choose only to highlight what they think they know that would be shocking to people who know nothing about greyhound racing.

Every town has a veterinary surgery, this isn't just for greyhounds, they are there because numerous pets are involved in accidents every day, will sage demand the banning of pet ownership. Maybe sage will want to ban cars, one of the biggest 'killers' of animals. The world is not perfect and sadly there are many pet dogs cruelly neglected, I hope sage doesn't look at every labrador owner and assume that person is abusing their dog.

Regarding sage's comments on babies in prams and groups of men on stag parties, cannot see why this should lead to the banning of greyhound racing.

A woman I know said she thought greyhound racing was cruel, she's never been greyhound racing, but she is happy to raise hundreds of pheasant chicks to be released and shot. Sometimes it is difficult to reason with people, I appreciate we all have different opinions but unfortunately it is usually the ones that shout the loudest that get heard.

P.S.

Can I also repeat a paragraph from Paul Brignal, as sage seems to sprinting away with a piece of mistakenly said information:

"I would also like to add that unfortunately in a BBC interview I mistakenly said 9 times out of 10 a greyhound runs round Thornton Stadium without getting injured, whereas I meant to say 99 times out of a 100, but under the stress of the situation I mucked up and Gill Docherty has jumped on this mistake with a vengeance."

Email from Sandra Bingham, Thornton Stadium co-owner, to the Rural Affairs, Islands and Natural Environment Committee, 22 April 2022

Please find my comments after listening to most of the committee meeting.

The drug incident was reported at Shawfield, and has incorrectly been assumed by sage and used as a shock tactic to put people off greyhound racing by implying, just because we do not test, that it occurs at Thornton, without any anecdotal evidence. There is no gain to our greyhound owners to 'dope' their dogs, they wouldn't risk harming them or deliberately affecting their ability to race safely. Unfortunately Scotland has over 60% of people taking drugs, the drug testing at GBGB tracks on greyhounds with mass spectrometers is very sensitive, therefore if the owner, trainer or kennel hand have had any contact with any drug, this could then accidentally be transferred to a greyhound and it would show up in the test. Minute traces of caffeine, from chocolate or a cup of tea could also show up. Would be interesting to test the millions of pet dogs in Scotland too.

Owners are more than capable of checking their dogs over to ensure they are fit and

healthy to race, they know their dogs better than anyone else, they wouldn't risk an injured dog by racing it. If a dog on the card to run has an injury, kennel cough, unwell, comes in season, the owners just tell us and it simple doesn't run. If a greyhound has pulled a muscle, either racing or running around a paddock, they will be rested, like any person who has tweaked a muscle while jogging. Most owners have ultra sound machines to aid the recovery of their dog, and the owner will know when the dog is ready to race again.

The daily routine of the racing dogs is rigorous in keeping them fit, healthy and able to race, the dog and owner getting fit together. Regular walking, trotting, massaging, grooming, correct amount of food, vitamins and supplements and rest etc. A racing greyhound can have more attention given to them than a non-racing dog, a retired racing greyhound may be happy with it's two 20 minute walks (as recommended by greyhound rehoming kennels) and 23 hours asleep on the couch but they've had their fun when racing, they deserve retirement. A two year old greyhound would not just want two 20 minute walks, but would naturally need to stretch out and run.

The whole reason a person runs a greyhound is not just the 17 seconds it is at full speed around a track, but many hours in the day, the preparation of this four-legged athlete to be at it's best to possibly win the 17 second race. The greyhound also wants to win the race, get to the hare first, it's in their nature. We all loved to run as fast as we can when young, the excitement of beating everyone else, greyhounds also love stretching out and running fast, it is why they do it, it is why they also do it without the aid of a jockey.

Numbers of people going greyhound racing diminishing, is obviously happening due to a small group of people standing outside tracks displaying horrible imagery and outrageous statements about what they say happens to greyhounds, these are not correct statements and are there just to shock and bully people in believing their totally exaggerated claims. If people stood outside a fish mongers and showed pictures of dolphins tied up with fishing line exposing bloody throats, shouting out huge numbers of dolphins that died, do you think this would put people off buying their fish that day?

Should there be a law against people deliberately misleading the public.

Why have these people been allowed to display their imagery and fictional facts, historically there has been bad things happening in racing (horses too), but the industry has learnt from this and now follow regulations, for the health and well-being of racing greyhounds, the SSPCA and police are there to control this. We do not race 'behind closed doors', we are open to the public, we do not want harm coming to the dogs, we love racing them and they love to race too.

Sage keep over-exaggerating injuries to greyhounds, especially with the continuous mention of a greyhound breaking its spine, which would be obviously extremely upsetting, it may happen but is very, very rare. It is mentioned to people who don't know anything about greyhound racing, to create an instant dislike to it, which would obviously do to me if I didn't know differently. This method by sage is used to shock the unknowing public and has damaged the greyhound industry, this fake and over-exaggerated use of one-in-a-million incidences would disrupt any sport or business.

Sage again talking nonsense when implying all racing greyhounds are nervous and sad, then miraculously become happy when they 'rescue' them, another method of misleading the unknown. Like any dog changing owners they may be wary. Plenty of dogs spend a majority of their time in kennels or sheds (as sage like to say), dog breeders (all types) can keep them in outside kennels, many pet dogs are kept in outside kennels, dogs do adapt to their surroundings. They can be more comfortable away from hot, centrally heated homes, but again some may like lazing around on their couches. Dogs are very hardy, admittedly greyhounds do need to be coated more often than other breeds.

Unfortunately there may be injuries, when a greyhound is seen by a vet and they are unable to race again, they are retired and rehomed, either by the owner or by a rehoming kennel, such as Give A Greyhound A Home (GAGAH). Luckily there are many people who wish to rehome retired racers, whether it is because they believe they are giving it a better life, it's up them to think that, but we are very grateful to these people. We've had greyhound owners retire their dogs early because GAGAH had homes waiting for dogs.

We are the only greyhound track racing in Scotland, with up to 100 dogs at a time on our racing strength, the number of dogs available to race, only 48 dogs racing a week, we race once a week now, even if one of our dogs races at another track, which would have to be a GBGB track, it would still only be twice a week, which is perfectly safe for a greyhound to do, whippets have been known and are capable of racing twice a day.

We are very lucky to have numerous charities in Scotland that rehome ex racers, GAGAH, greyhound rescue fife, Rehoming Retired Greyhounds Edinburgh, Dumfriesshire & Cumbria Greyhound Rescue, Dumyat Kennels - Greyhound Recue, Scottish Borders Greyhound Rehoming Centre, Scottish Greyhound Sanctuary, Greyhound Awareness League, Greyhound Trust, plus many other kennels which rehome other dogs too. Therefore we are pleased to know that there are many, many places for our rehomed racers to get their deserved retirement homes.

At Thornton people race their greyhounds as a hobby, they enjoy the atmosphere, they want their dogs to come off the track safely, it's no less safe than whippet racing, dog sledge racing, dog agility (which is done by someone in the middle of track), letting pet dogs enjoy themselves on the beach. Accidents can happen anywhere and anytime, admittedly if greyhound racing didn't exist there would be no injuries, but why should we not do our hobby, when there are many, many other activities detrimental to the health and well being of dogs. Listening to the often irrational comments from a small group of people should not fuel the obsession of banning things.

If greyhound racing is banned in Scotland, what about other dog activities, whippet/afghan/saluki racing (all been done at Thornton and elsewhere), dog sledge racing, dog agility, and probably some even I don't know about because they are not my hobby. Will the numerous greyhounds that are trained in Scotland and then raced In England be allowed to continue.

Demonstrators have already said to me, when I have challenged them, that they

demonstrate against us because it is easy and they know where we are. Even if we managed to join the GBGB, greyhounds are still racing around the track, there would be even more as we'd have to race several days a week. As Scotland's last greyhound track, Thornton Greyhound Stadium is the only easy target left for sage to demonstrate against and use to fuel their campaign. Should we be the scapegoat for an industry thriving in the rest of the UK and a feather in the hat for sage.

Please note these are my comments, Paul Brignal will also be commenting and offering you more information in defence of our business.

Email from Paul Brignal, Thornton Stadium owner and director, to the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee, 19 April 2022

With regard to your decision to refer this petition to the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee and the way that it was discussed at the meeting.

Firstly I will introduce myself as one of the owners of Thornton Greyhound Stadium and I am surprised that myself and Mr William King at Shawfield Stadium were not contacted so that we could have attended or at least sent a written statement in support of greyhound racing. Mr Mark Ruskell was obviously present to represent the views of the petitioner Gill Docherty, and was so biased in his view that in my opinion he misled the committee. Should he be allowed to continue to be a member of ECCLR Committee, and is he the right person to represent his constituents in the Scottish Parliament.

He claimed that his pet greyhound had been raced with an already broken leg, and I can assure you that that would never happen at any greyhound track in the UK. However with regard to the unfortunate possibility that his greyhound did break a leg whilst racing, which incidentally greyhounds love to do, in the same way that children love to play football and rugby and they too can break a leg whilst doing this, his leg was fixed and he continues to live a very happy life with Mr Ruskell. I am sure if Mr Ruskell brought him in for the committee to see the greyhound would have had no ill effects from his injury. Maybe you could explain to me why this indicates greyhound racing is cruel.

He claims his dog is very lucky and he maybe a very good pet owner, and in general all retired greyhound owners are assessed by the re-homing centres that do an excellent job for our track and all the UK tracks, when a greyhound is retired from the sport that they love doing, either due to age or injury. Many pet dogs of other breeds have far less happy lives.

I would question whether Mr Ruskell's personal opinions, figures and heresay should be taken into account, he says "greyhounds allowed to run this year in temperatures over 30 degrees at Shawfield Stadium", where did he get that figure from, I doubt it was that hot in Glasgow at 7.30pm at night. He is sensationalising his biased opinions: "Dogs fed cocaine and race in 30 degrees heat", "what's happening in Fife

is pretty horrific at the moment from what I hear”, “almost underground greyhound racing at the moment at an unregulated track in Fife”.

Thornton Greyhound Stadium is fully licensed and regulated by Fife Council, racing once a week and is open to the public, and most people who attend have a very enjoyable evening. Unfortunately Mr Ruskell is correct in his observation that the sport is in decline, and one of the reasons for this is the constant unfair vilification of the sport by a small well organised group of opinionated people. It is well known that Thornton's all sand surface is one of the safest running surfaces in the UK. We also allow the facility to be used for occasional afghan racing, whippet and lurcher racing, and the centre of the track is used throughout the summer for dog agility. Would Mr Ruskell kindly explain what is horrific about that.

Mr Ruskell made reference to drugs in the sport of greyhound racing and there are random tests done at GBGB tracks to reduce cheating and to ensure animal welfare. With internet betting there is the potential for someone to cheat to obtain large sums of money as there is in all sport, this is not really a factor at Thornton as any betting is on a small scale, however if you wish to I would be happy to allow the SSPCA to carry out random testing at the track, to ascertain if harmful drugs are administered to any greyhound running at our track, and you would be then able to prosecute under the 2006 Act, if you could prove that this was harmful to the greyhound. During the testing procedure, which is done by mass spectrometer the smallest traces are found for example many trainers feeding poppy seed bread in their dogs food, failed drug tests as did greyhounds fed with meat containing steroids, even drinking tea which contains caffeine will get a positive test. Should a greyhound trainer have used cocaine for their own personal use, it could easily result in the greyhound failing a drug test, if the greyhounds live in their home, as many of the permit trainers dogs do. The evidence shows that overwhelmingly the use of drugs in greyhound racing is extremely rare and the sensationalist remarks made by Mr Ruskell were unacceptable and in my opinion misleading, and you could have easily acquired the exact figures from the GBGB, as to how many tests they take, and how many failures they have.

With regard to prosecutions for any drug test failures, you have to bear in mind that GBGB criteria for failing a drug test is for traces of drugs not harmful quantities, and subsequent analysis of the sample would need to be carried out to ascertain if the level of drug was harmful to the greyhound. I am sure that the GBGB would be open to the SSPCA paying for that analysis on request, and if the result warranted bringing a prosecution under the 2006 Act. The results of all failed drug tests are published by the GBGB, and the SSPCA or the Police can view them and act if they wish.

Brian Whittle, himself said he has never been greyhound racing, but knows “the dogs love to run”, he refers to horse racing being a much bigger sport and more in the public eye and implies because of this the rules are stricter, that is not the case as point to point racing is the horse racing equivalent of a non GBGB greyhound track, and harness racing throughout Scotland has it's own rules as well.

Greyhounds love racing and their owners get considerable enjoyment from them winning races, similar to that if their child was to win the school sports day. They do

not have a saddle, jockey with a whip, or bridle to make them run, they do it because they enjoy it. If as a pup they choose not to chase the mechanical lure, they will just become a pet a bit sooner. Unfortunately some dogs do get injured during races, as many pet dogs do running around, or getting hit by cars, but increasingly nearly all get to retire to a pet home without any long lasting effects from their injury. Instead of seeking to ban greyhound racing it should be promoted as a great way to socialise and improve your fitness and wellbeing, as caring for your greyhound is a healthy and enjoyable activity for both dog and owner.

I suggest you reconvene to re-assess this petition and close it forthwith.

Email from Sandra Bingham, Thornton Stadium co-owner, to the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee, 19 April 2022

Greyhounds love and want to chase

.....love and want to run fast

.....are not forced to race

Race tracks are a safe surface to allow greyhounds to run

Bitches are definitely not raced during their season or pregnancy

Other activities that humans use animals for their entertainment:

Horse racing - bridles, jockeys

Trotting - racing with carriages

Numerous horse related sports - polo, eventing....

Numerous other dog activities - agility, sledge racing, farming....

Grouse/bird shooting

Deer stalking

Angling (largest sport)

Sea fishing - lobsters

Pigeon racing

Pet ownership, caged birds and caged pets

Random animal breeding, dogs especially

Services animals - police, army, care....

.....where would the banning obsession go next?

Unfair campaign to ban one animal sport amongst many

Greyhound tracks are seen as an easy target, especially compared to horse racing

Fake and real stories can be generated for all animal related activities...

...3-legged greyhound - lost it's leg while racing - no it actually lost it's leg due to cancer

Many more animals/pets injured elsewhere - roads, accidents, neglect, cruelty

Greyhound racing is a heritage sport in Scotland

Should we listen to soapbox bullies

Should we accept social media generated petitions

We love our sport - bet365 makes millions from it!

Get fit and race a greyhound

Most racing greyhounds are treated better than some children