



**HUNTING ADVISORY GROUP  
REPORT TO THE COUNTRYSIDE  
ALLIANCE AND THE HUNTING  
ASSOCIATIONS**



SAM BUTLER  
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## **Hunting Advisory Group**

### **Report to the Countryside Alliance and to the Hunting Associations**

**November 2019**

#### **1. Introduction**

The Hunting Advisory Group was set up as a sub-committee of the Countryside Alliance (CA) and in association with Hunting Associations (HAs) consisting of four members appointed by each organisation and working to set Terms of Reference. A total of eight and an appointed chairman to:

- a) Review aspects of hunting that impact on the work of the Countryside Alliance.
- b) Review areas of Countryside Alliance strategy relating to hunting.

#### **1.1 Members**

Sam Butler (Chairman), Karen Silcock, Andrew Ogg, Paul Dunn, Guy Portwin, George Bowyer, George Winn Darley, James Hall, Annabel Roycroft. In attendance Polly Portwin.

#### **1.2 Terms of Reference (Attached)**

These are dated November 2018 as agreed between the Countryside Alliance board and the Hunting Associations, as amended. The agreed amendment ensured that the Group may make recommendations to the Board and, to the Hunting Associations directly rather than through the Board. And under accountability the Group will report any findings and recommendations to the Board and, to the Hunting Associations rather than to the Board only.

For Hunting Associations read Council of Hunting Associations and/or Hunting Associations.

As an Addendum the Group also agreed that in respect of the role of HAG that the fundamental purpose of the Group is to support the work of both the MFHA/CHA and the CA in order for them both to implement agreed measures to meet their objective to ensure the future of hunting. And under the "definition of the terms" these might read to "the work of the Countryside Alliance in relation to hunting is as laid out in the memorandum of understanding between the CA and the CHA."

The scope agreed by HAG for its first review under its terms of reference was to review the 'minimum criteria' concept, previously discussed and agreed by the MFHA and Countryside Alliance board and make recommendations to secure actual delivery over prescribed timescale. The MFHA committee agreed that the minimum criteria for the registration of hunts should be adopted. This concept was presented to its AGM.

This paper delivers the HAG recommendations on this scope. In addition, at section 3, it suggests additional matters which its members believe would usefully be part of a further review into other matters relating to its terms of reference to be incorporated in the second phase i.e. the review of areas of CA strategy relating to hunting.

### **1.3 Meetings**

Hunting Advisory Group (HAG) has met on 4 occasions with agreed notes or minutes. The dates were as follows:

- 7th January 2019 - a conference call joined by George Bowyer, Paul Dunn, Andrew Ogg, Guy Portwin, Karen Silcock (acting chairman), Tim Bonner, Simon Hart and Polly Portwin. Agreed to ask Sam Butler to become Chairman, subject to approval by Benjy Mancroft on behalf of the Hunting Associations: this was agreed. Three places remained to be filled on the Group by representatives of the Hunting Associations.
- 11 February 2019 (awaiting appointment of James Hall, Annabel Roycroft and George Winn Darley). In attendance Tim Bonner. Reference made to the strategy for Hunting 2020 and Restructuring Hunting documents as the basis for ongoing debate.
- 19th March 2019 with new members of the Group in attendance, the terms of reference, with the addendums, were understood and agreed. Endorsed the advisory Group's first recommendation which was to review the "minimum criteria", concept, previously discussed and agreed at the MFHA AGM, MFHA committee and CA board, and make recommendations to secure actual delivery over a prescribed time scale. The Group also discussed the influence of social media and the impact of saboteurs on the overall image of hunting. Benjy Mancroft(BM) and Matthew Higgs (MH) attended part.
- 16th April 2019. The Group received contributions on the minimum criteria concept from Mark Hankinson, Liz Gorse, Richard Tyacke MFH and Daniel Cherriman. There was also a short debrief following the CA/HA meeting on 28th March to discuss saboteur activity attended by BM, SAH and TB.
- 14 May 2019. The agenda was to review the areas of CA strategy relating to hunting including the political and communication strategy in the context of the CA's strategy as it relates to hunting and the minimum criteria concept and recommendations as to the minimum criteria. Simon Hart and Tim Bonner invited and attended in part.

### **1.4 Strategy for Hunting 2020 (SFH 20)**

The Strategy for Hunting 2020 (agreed by the CA Board and discussed in October 2017 and February 2018 by the MFHA committee) would form the basis for ongoing debate and reference in the second part of its review. The objective is "to ensure the future of hunting". The actions are divided into four, namely: i) Minimise bad PR; ii) Make hunting under current conditions safe and attractive; iii) Maintain the campaign for a change in the law; iv) Promote positive image of hunting.

### **1.5 Restructuring Hunting- minimum criteria for MFHA hunts**

The Group noted that at the MFHA committee of 19th October 2017 there was clear support, and agreement, for the reform of the infrastructure of hunts through a process of applying minimum criteria which hunts that wish to be registered with the MFHA must meet. It was reported that there was an appetite for change, that was very evident and that some minimum criteria to qualify for registration be adopted (MFHA Committee April 2018).

The Group has endorsed the following 5 elements in relation to the minimum criteria:

- a) Kennels and staffing
- b) Sufficient huntable country
- c) Financial viability
- d) Leadership
- e) Ability to carry out legal hunting

The Group was also forwarded - and took note of - the MFHA Chairman's further comments on 22nd February 2019 on this paper.

### **1.6 Timeframe and consultation**

The Group expressed concerns regarding delivery of its initial recommendations ahead of the MFHA AGM in May 2019 where changes will need to be ratified for implementation in 2020/21 Season. There was a suggestion made by the Board to this effect. The Group agreed that it could not complete its review by then but would make observations in an Interim Report (submitted to the HAs and CA in April 2019) to assist the work of the HAs and the CA. The MFHA Chairman has confirmed that to adopt changes it would not be necessary to do so at an AGM.

### **1.7 Reference Documents**

These include as circulated to the Group:

- The Memorandum of Understanding between the CA and the HAs. It is understood this is substantially agreed (5th March 2019)
- Competences required within the Mastership
- Kennels annual Assessment form
- Suggested agreement for use between Masters of Fox Hounds and incorporated hunts February 2016
- Suggested agreement for use between Masters of Fox Hounds and Hunt Committees (February 2016)
- The MFHA disciplinary procedures (draft? 2018)
- Training progression and course content (working draft 16/1/19)
- Council of Hunting Associations code of practice for welfare of hounds in hunt kennels
- Code of conduct for lawful hunting when following the Warwickshire hunt
- The Hunting Office notes on trail hunting 14 December 2017 and August 2018
- MFHA employment documentation briefing note to Masters on employment law 2012 and Michael McNally (Warners) advice about hunt staff stepping up to become Masters and the legal paperwork requirement
- Hunting and Social Media in 2019 plus the email sent to one master in each hunt and hunt secretaries from Polly Portwin concerning the better use of social media for the benefit of hunting 17th January 2018, and Hunting Office social media policy
- Paper subsequent to HAG meeting – 19th March 2019 to identify the present threats to the future of hunting and categorize levels of risk, with suggested immediate action plan.
- CA briefing note – Wildlife Crime WHD 20/03/19
- CA meeting notes 28 March 2019 to discuss strategy to deal with increased saboteur action and hunt saboteurs in the field

**Note** - reference has been made to the progress of the British Game Alliance and it's assured record, Greyhound Board of Great Britain and to the National Game Keepers Organisation.

## **1.8 Current contributors' notes 16th April 2019**

**Mark Hankinson**, Hunt Support Officer for the Hunting Associations. Role includes field inspections (lawful hunting activities) and now kennel inspections. Inspect, give guidance, ask questions and report to masters/hunts director of the Hunting Office. Increase resource?

**Liz Gorse**, veterinary surgeon. Started advising 10 years ago. Seminars on hound welfare now focusing on younger less experienced staff being promoted more quickly and practical advice to young vets. Consideration of modern public's perception of kennel and hound management, housing, regulations for dog breeding and kennelling, discipline, retirement policy, flesh storage and trading standards. Arguments for in house hunting vet?

**Daniel Cherriman** professional huntsman (aged 33) and **Richard Tyacke**, 21 seasons as master huntsman.

Discussions included trail hunting, daily records sheets, educated trail layers, committed masters, hounds that will hunt to a trail and recognition of maintaining legal and as far as possible traditional, hunting while providing jumping and the social aspect. The country being hunted makes a difference when adopting recommended practice. Some are big open countries in contrast to smaller tighter ones. Objective assessment of hunt country by masters, organisers and huntsmen. The need to react as time changes and with public perception. Steer the right people in the right direction. The need more country available in the days hunting. Avoid hunting in the wrong areas. Huntsmen don't want accidents and adverse PR. Consider weather and daylight conditions. Accept that we might want to lose some hunts. Too many hunts and not enough good men/ women; in any event they require stewarding backup. Discussed paid and trained professional outfits to steward saboteurs (SIA trained) (Belvoir has paid stewards) Cheshire land owners want to see organisation, trail hunting and stewarding to combat saboteur activity and the influence of social media.

## **2. Review Minimum Criteria - Restructuring of hunts and areas of recommendation.**

The Group firstly undertook to review the "Minimum Criteria" concept and make recommendations to secure its actual delivery over a prescribed timescale. The members considered, with the input of contributors, a draft first review. The following are the ongoing recommendations.

### **2.1 Implementation**

It is the responsibility of each of the Hunting Associations to take any necessary governance steps to enable implementation of any changes.

The MFHA/AMHB should adopt the changes detailed below for mounted packs of fox hounds and harriers -

#### Phase 1 rules – for introduction on 1st May 2020

- Any hunt that does not comply with these rules must be advised that they will not be registered as a member of the MFHA/AMHB for the 2020/21 season

- Consideration of the minimum criteria should be a compulsory section included in each hunt's Annual Self-Assessment Form (please note suggested change of name of form from "Kennels annual self-assessment form").
- Rules are to be adhered to rather than being for guidance/advisory/good practice only.

#### Phase 2 rules – for introduction on 1st May 2021

- Phase 2 should include rules for foot packs developed with the relevant associations • Any hunt that does not comply with the rules must not be registered as a member of the MFHA/AMHB or other association for the 2021/22 season.

#### Recommendations and further guidance:

1. Hunts must be informed of the new rules by 1<sup>st</sup> October 2019 (although this is now out of date) and offered guidance and support to meet the new standards in order to prevent exclusion from the MFHA/AMHB from 1st May 2020 (or 2021 for Phase 2).
2. Create a comprehensive Self-Assessment Form to incorporate minimum criteria.

## **2.2 Kennels and hound and horse welfare**

### Phase 1

- In addition to meeting the standards already laid out in the Council of Hunting Associations Code of Practice for the Welfare of Hounds in Hunt Kennels, the following should be implemented:

i) Any member hunt kennel must be available to be inspected at any time with immediate notice;

ii) Any breach of the standards will incur a Correction Notice which must be adhered to within the required timescale. A failure to address issues raised in a Correction Notice will result in immediate suspension of the member hunt.

### Further recommendations for Phase 2:

1. The Hunting Office should seek advice to establish a recommended maximum density of hounds per m<sup>2</sup> of kennel space. Each member hunt kennels should then be allocated a maximum hound holding capacity with Correction Notices issued for any member hunt exceeding the maximum number of hounds.
2. Create a National Hound Database and once implemented, consider the introduction of a retirement and euthanasia process, similar to the Greyhound Board of Great Britain, whereby any drafting, death, rehoming or disposal of a hound from a member hunt's kennels is reported to the MFHA/AMHB within a set timeframe.
3. Seek veterinary and expert opinion in relation to hound and horse welfare regarding the level of supervision required over a 24hr period, either in person or by CCTV/other means.
4. Update the Council of Hunting Associations Code of Practice for the Welfare of Hounds in Hunt Kennels in relation to the points above and add welfare of horses.
5. Offer advice to hunt staff and masters about the importance of public perception and provide guidelines about taking hounds out to hound parades or Boxing Day meets with obvious injuries or what might be misconceived as animal welfare concerns.
6. Create guidelines for puppy walkers advising how to prepare the young hounds for their return to kennels, ensuring they have sufficient life experience which will assist the hunt staff and help to prevent future issues.

## **2.3 Staff and employment**

### Phase 1

- Hunts are responsible for complying with relevant employment legislation in conjunction with training or “Continued Professional Development”.
- All member hunts must show that they have at least 1.5 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) staff in kennels. Voluntary staff may contribute towards the FTE figure, but they must be contracted and their work should be verifiable.
- Any staff member taking charge of a member hunt’s kennels (kennel huntsman, huntsman or Professional Master) must have passed an MFHA/AMHB panel assessment.
- Any employee of a member hunt who is also a Master must be contracted as a Professional Master under the terms of a MFHA/AMHB Professional Master’s contract (or similar contract), which details the role, responsibilities and requirements of the role, and the relationship between Professional Masters and other hunt officials.
- Any staff member or volunteer using the ‘terrier work’ exemption on behalf of a member hunt must have attended the terrier work training day and successfully been certified by the MFHA to conduct terrier work on behalf of that specific pack.

### Further recommendations for Phase 2:

1. Reminders should be sent to all member hunts regarding up to date employment legislation including the current terms of the national minimum wage, appropriate time off and holidays. Anyone receiving remuneration in any form from a member hunt is a member of its staff.
2. Hunts to consider careful appointment of suitable staff for suitable country.
3. In line with the current training programme, all staff employed in member hunt kennels must be certified by the MFHA/AMHB, with certificates issued for kennelmen/whippers-in, kennel huntsmen and huntsmen, subject to completion of the relevant training requirements.

## **2.4 Financial Viability**

### Phase 1

- On an annual basis hunts must make an assessment of whether in the next 12 months it has a realistic expectation of sufficient income to be able to pay its realistic estimate of all costs (including salary and welfare costs to meet minimum standards) as they fall due, and to provide finance for any necessary capital additions or replacements (e.g. vehicles, horses).
- Loan funding may be taken into account provided that the terms are sustainable e.g. that the loans are seasonal to cover cash flow fluctuations, or repayment and interest terms are such as can be met from normal operations. Sale of capital assets or cash from reserves may also be taken into account provided their use does not breach a hunt’s constitution, but it should be noted that continually drawing on sales of capital assets or reserves indicates that the hunt’s viability must rapidly be called into question.

### Further recommendations for Phase 2:

1. The Hunting Associations should provide advice to hunts to help them understand what they should be considering in order to either take corrective action or drive them to amalgamate.

## **2.5 Leadership**

### Phase 1

- Hunts are responsible for complying with relevant employment legislation in conjunction with training or “Continued Professional Development”.
- All Masters of member hunts must continue to sign a Master’s Contract which should confirm their responsibilities with their own hunt committee and send a copy to the Hunting Office.
- Professional Masters, that is Masters who are also employees of a member hunt, must have an employee’s contract as well as a Professional Master’s contract.
- Recommend a Code of Conduct & Behaviour for all hunt supporters and hunt followers.

## **2.6 Hunting Activity and Country**

### Phase 1

- Every hunt must be able to produce sufficient evidence of legal hunting activity whether under an exemption in Schedule 1 of the Hunting Act 2004, hunting an artificially-laid scent or other legal activities.
- Hunts should make an annual assessment of their country and their staff to ensure there is sufficient, huntable country for the number of days planned per week and that this does not compromise hound welfare.
- Each Master should assess conditions throughout every hunting day in relation to access to land, ground conditions and visibility to ensure that hunting does not take place in conditions considered to be unsafe or risks compromising the welfare of hounds and horses.
- All hunting activity should be carried out in a manner that respects wild, farm and domestic animals and property including land, trees, crops and watercourses.
- All reasonable steps should be taken to ensure that hunting is only carried out on land with the permission of the owner, tenant or occupier of the land in question.
- Every hunting activity should be carried out in a manner that respects any other lawful activity being carried on by any other person on the land or in the vicinity.
- No one should carry out any hunting activity that is likely to bring hunting into disrepute.

### Further recommendations for Phase 2

1. Provide further “trail-hunting seminars” with consideration given to the possibility of different elements of training depending on the country and wider issues such as saboteur/monitor attention.
2. Consider the creation of a dedicated MFHA/Hunting Office team to periodically assess packs through the assessment and amalgamation process. The team would work with packs to make an assessment of the hunt country with objective criteria and consideration given to suitability for trail-laying and other hunting activities, given increasing urbanisation and proximity to roads/railways.

## **2.7 Terrier Work**

### Phase 1

- Any terrier work must take place within the conditions of the exemption in the Hunting Act 2004 with the expressed written permission of the landowner or shoot manager.
- Terrier work must only be carried out by those licensed by the MFHA. The terrierman should be accompanied by one assistant only. Participation is limited to the terrier man and his assistant with sometimes the presence of the relevant landowner or gamekeeper.
- No other hunt followers should attempt to play a part in terrier work unless they are specifically asked to do so by the Master in charge or the licensed terrier man.

#### Further recommendations for Phase 2

1. Consider public perception with regard to terrier work and quad bikes in relation to hunting's image and any questions which may be raised regarding their safety.
2. Recommend that terrier men and quad bikes should only be present where there is a clear and argued role for their use.

### **2.8 Summary**

HAG recommends to the CA and to the HAs that the HAs develop and implement the Minimum Criteria Strategy as set out above. This is consistent with the way forward promoted by its Chairman in his three-part plan agreed by his committee and presented to its AGM i.e. the Restructuring of hunts (Minimum Criteria), the training programme (ongoing and being developed) and the new disciplinary process (which is in place).

This should be recommended to and also developed by the other Hunting Associations and supported by the CA.

The Hunting Associations and Countryside Alliance should collaborate over a shared hunting strategy and develop the functionality of the Memorandum of Understanding between them.

Further resources in terms of manpower, will be required to manage hunting's future and to deliver the plan. It is understood the Hunting Office has made three recent appointments.

The HA and the CA will need to ascertain resource needs based on agreed strategies and responsibilities.

### **3. Other matters and proposals for a second review**

During its discussions of matters concerning the terms of its first review, other issues were raised by the HAG members which are of concern to the hunting community. The main topics raised were combatting saboteur activity, countering adverse social media content, creating positive hunting PR and the importance of an agreed Strategy for Hunting between HA and CA.

The Group did not always agree on the prioritisation of these issues above in relation to the first review regarding Minimum Criteria.

The Group felt there had been a lack of clarity as to where the responsibility has lain for dealing with some issues; the CA or the HAs practice has not always reflected the terms of any MOU currently in place which it was felt had sometimes meant some matters had not been actioned upon.

It was noted that there were a number of new initiatives underway in support of the work already being done, as briefly outlined below:

- A trial use of paid SIA licensed personnel in support of Hunt stewards and evidence gatherers is underway in the North of England and it is hoped that lessons can be taken from this for wider benefit.
- A new database has been developed and introduced by CA (and is run by the CA in accordance with relevant law and regulation) to record evidence of saboteur activity for the purpose of providing evidence to authorities to support criminal prosecutions and lobbying statutory bodies to take action in relation to criminal and anti-social behaviour. There is also, ongoing work with sharing information with the relevant authorities, being conducted by CA.
- Social media has been used effectively to-date by hunting's opponents and less so by hunting in general. The CA and the HAs have liaised over the appointment of dedicated hunting social media representatives for each hunt but there has only been a limited response.
- Polly Portwin has a designated WhatsApp group for Mastership-approved social media administrators which is very active and successful in terms of mutual support, exchange of ideas and developing good practice.
- A relatively recent PR initiative during 2018/19 season has been the "Social Media & PR and incident management seminars" run by the CA. The two in Warwickshire/Oxfordshire and Yorkshire were well attended by hunts. Further local discussion groups for social media administrators had taken place where required, such as in Shropshire/Cheshire. Further dates will be provided as required.

Since HAG last met, papers on the issues of saboteur activity and social media matters have been produced independently by the CA and the HAs with further joint discussions on the agenda. Developments in these areas will be welcomed by the HAG committee.

## **4. Countryside Alliance Strategy Relating to Hunting**

### **4.1 Introduction**

It is considered that this should form part of a future review which should be examined in greater detail with an opportunity for all parties to discuss and agree the overall strategy.

It has been suggested that an effective political and communication strategy can only really be fully implemented once the Hunting Associations have actioned a Minimum Criteria for Hunts and implementation for unviable hunts.

The CA explained why it believes it would be impossible to make political progress or improve the image of hunting with a large-scale PR campaign until fundamental problems within hunts and the hunting infrastructure were addressed; a cultural change. Furthermore, standards based on minimum criteria for registered packs in regard to employment levels, training and conditions were considered necessary. Ultimately this might result in fewer registered hunts but this was an inevitable outcome if standards were raised.

### **4.2 Strategy for Hunting 2020**

As referred to in the Introduction, the Strategy for Hunting paper was initially produced by the CA for agreement by all parties. Discussions regarding this document were included in the minutes of the MFHA committee meeting held in October 2017.

It had four action elements to it -

- Minimising bad PR
- Make hunting, under current conditions, safe and attractive.
- Maintain the campaign for a change in the law.
- Promote a positive image of hunting.

The overall objective was to ensure the future of hunting. The commentary, seemed sensible and obvious, following the 2017 General Election stating that there would likely be no movement on hunting legislation whilst there was a Conservative minority Government. The likelihood of a Labour Government and one with an aggressive animal rights agenda has increased.

It talks about the growing challenges of maintaining hunting activity in an even more densely populated countryside and the cost of meeting environmental regulations, employment legislation, the development of the Health and Safety culture and the reputational difficulties facing hunting. There has been a constant drip of low-level negative publicity and higher profile PR disasters. The advice is that hunting can choose to manage practical problems and political challenges whilst its reputation continues to decline or, it can attempt to tackle those underlying issues creating reputational challenges (politically and publicly).

The MFHA Chairman's Strategy for Hunting was subsequently discussed at the MFHA committee meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> February 2018.

### **4.3 In Westminster**

It was recognised by the Group that the work done by Simon Hart and other supporters briefed by the CA had been very effective in suppressing legislation and regulation which would have been damaging to hunting and to a country way of life generally. The Group felt that closer communications between the CA and the HAs on hunting political matters may be beneficial.

### **4.4 PR Strategy**

It is recognised that the CA handles hunting incidents well and minimises effectively as possible the adverse publicity. There was criticism that the proactive PR initiatives organised by the CA – such as the promotion of Boxing Day meets, completing e-lobbies to local councillors and/or MPs regarding hunting matters, the encouragement of the use of social media by all packs, support for Newcomers' Week and kennels open days etc - lacked sufficient public endorsement by the HAs and therefore meant individual hunts were unaware of the importance of engaging with these initiatives.

This should be examined further to establish greater understanding by the hunting community of what their involvement should be.

## **5. Summary**

Hunting will need to continue to meet its challenges and have the ability to adapt to what are often fast-moving issues.

There is much work still to do but equally from HAG's initial research there is a great deal to build on so long as there is a unified sense of purpose, communication and leadership.

HAG advises that the Memorandum of Understanding between the CA and the HAs should be agreed and adopted, with the subsequent development of an agreed strategy for hunting which is owned by all parts of hunting. This should be supported by an updated and agreed current CA Political and PR Strategy.

HAG is prepared to maintain its task and advise as per the Terms of Reference to support the work of both the HAs and the CA in order for them to secure a sustainable and stable future of hunting.

**Sam Butler**

**Chairman of the Hunting Advisory Group**

**November 2019**