



October 2023

Dear Constituent,

Thank you for contacting me about dog fighting. I would like to assure you that my ministerial colleagues and I are completely opposed to dog fighting and tough penalties apply to those involved in this abhorrent activity.

Under the Animal Welfare Act 2006, it is an offence to be involved in, or promote, an animal fight. In 2021, the Government passed the Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Act, which increased the sentences available to courts for the most serious cases of animal cruelty. The maximum penalty for this offence is now five years' imprisonment, or an unlimited fine, or both.

Further, under current sentencing guidelines, the use of technology to publicise or promote cruelty' is listed as an aggravating factor for animal cruelty offences under the Animal Welfare Act 2006. Section 127(1) of the Communications Act 2003 also makes it an offence to send material over a public electronic communications network which is grossly offensive, indecent, obscene or menacing.

In addition, the Government has directly listed Section 4(1) of the Animal Welfare Act 2006, which relates to the unnecessary suffering of animals, in Schedule 7 of the Online Safety Bill which has completed parliamentary passage. I am informed that adding the offence of unnecessary suffering in this way should force social media companies to tackle instances where their services are being used as part of the process of animal torture.

I have noted my constituents' views in relation to public awareness campaigns on this issue. I know that the Government has worked with the Pet Advertising Advisory Group to promote responsible advertising of pet animals, and has endorsed the group's minimum standards for advertising, such as excluding adverts where there is a reasonable concern for the animal involved.

I will continue to monitor this issue very closely, however, if anyone has information relating to a dog fight that they believe is taking place, I urge them to report the matter to the police, who can investigate further.

Thank you again for taking the time to contact me.

Yours faithfully,

CHRIS HEATON-HARRIS MP
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR DAVENTRY