

Meeting commenced 1750

In attendance

Members: Chris Stephens MP (in the Chair); Lord Taylor of Warwick; Gavin Newlands MP

Organisational Associate Members: Ian Miles (Kent Phoenix); Rob Rooksby (BAFA); Soaad Stott (Populous); Jason Henry, Firoz Bhatti (London Blitz); Clive Dobbin (Solent Seahawks); Neal Hickey (Level Playing Field)

Individual Associate Members (all, no affiliation): Josh Selous; Carl Dalby; Roger Smithies; Graham Lancaster; Martin Jefkins; Andrew Phillips

Secretariat: Jack Baker

Other: Alistair Kirkwood, David Tossell (NFL UK); Jordan Ayres (Office of Peter Bone MP); Daniel Stow; Katie Taylor; Kelsey Taylor; Lady Laura Taylor

Welcome

The Chair welcomed all in attendance to the meeting, particularly guest speaker Alistair Kirkwood from NFL UK, and new Member Lisa Cameron MP.

Apologies

Members: Peter Bone MP; Catherine West MP; Alex Norris MP

Organisational Associate Members: Calvin Tarlton (London Rebels); Owain Davies, Ruth Hopkins, Tony Taylor (Level Playing Field); Nichole McCulloch (BAFA)

Individual Associate Members: Ian Barnsby; Luke Boorer

Minutes of the previous

Matters arising

- The Group would look into the sale of Wembley Stadium in greater detail, including a suggestion that a percentage of any sale be provided for the development of American football.
- The Group would look to organise a future presentation from Populous, the architects who designed Tottenham Hotspur's new stadium, which would hold NFL games for the first time in 2019.

Correspondence

- The Chair wrote to Jacksonville Jaguars' Senior Vice President for International Development, Hussain Naqi, thanking him for addressing the Group, and exploring how the Group and the Jaguars could work together more closely.
- The Chair wrote to NFL UK Managing Director Alistair Kirkwood, inviting him to address the Group.
- The Group received an email from Lisa Cameron MP, requesting to join and noting the EK Pirates in her constituency.

Delivered by:



- The Group received an email from an associate member, with questions for the NFL on plans to help develop clubs outside of the M25, and also to express disappointment at the NFL Gamepass Europe during the 2017/18 season, which allegedly didn't work for the first five regular season games for thousands of users.

Group Activity Report

Parliamentary

At Business Questions, Group Chair Peter Bone MP raised the announcement of four NFL London games in 2019, including two at Wembley and two at Tottenham Hotspur's new ground, and asked for a statement from the Government on the development of American football in this country. The Leader of the House responded with her delight at the announcement.

Lord Taylor of Warwick tabled two written parliamentary questions on American football in the House of Lords, to ask the Government what progress they had made in establishing a NFL franchise in the UK, and what plans they have to encourage the development of American football. On behalf of the Government, Lord Ashton of Hyde responded that while a decision on establishing a franchise in the UK is a matter for the NFL, the Government is very supportive of their ambition to do so, and also referenced the success of the 2018 London games as an indication of the strong appetite for American football in the UK. Lord Ashton also noted that Sport England has invested over £10million into projects where American football has been a beneficiary, on its own or as part of a multi-sport project, since 2004.

In a House of Lords debate on the role of British Foreign, Defence and International Development policy, Lord Taylor of Warwick referenced the 2019 NFL London games and how these help to strengthen diplomatic ties.

Public

The Group issued press releases on:

- The presentation by Jacksonville Jaguars;
- The Chair's question at Business Questions;
- The forthcoming presentation from NFL UK

The Secretariat reminded the meeting that the Group had a twitter account, @ParliamentAFG.

Presentation: Alistair Kirkwood, NFL UK Managing Director

The Chair welcomed Alistair Kirkwood, NFL UK Managing Director.

Kirkwood opened by emphasising the importance of 2019 for NFL UK. 29 of 32 NFL teams had come over to the UK, and the organisation was still in the process of confirming those who would travel in 2019. The year would also see the first two games played at Tottenham Hotspur's new stadium. Kirkwood hoped that an announcement would be made by the middle of April at the latest.

Media coverage was discussed, and Kirkwood highlighted that viewing numbers were close to 30% up year-on-year. BBC figures were also up, and the NFL Show had the second highest viewership of under-35s of any BBC programme.

From a grassroots perspective, the NFL was now in nine different cities with its flag football programme. A major new initiative was to be announced in March.

On player participation it was highlighted that there were nine British players in the NFL currently, demonstrating that British players can compete at the highest level, even if the pathway needed some work.

The likelihood of a team being relocated to London was discussed, and Kirkwood explained that whilst NFL UK would welcome a decision to relocate, this was ultimately a decision for clubs. NFL UK's role remained focused on putting on games to an exceptionally high level.

Opening to questions, challenges around bringing a franchise to the UK were discussed. Conversations with government were raised, though Kirkwood noted that these had all been hypothetical.

There was further discussion of NFL UK's flag football programme. The programme had been launched two years ago, and grown since then. Collaboration with BAFA was also discussed, including around the School Games.

Future broadcast coverage was raised, and Kirkwood again noted that a lot of recent growth was on catch-up and BBC iPlayer. The NFL's current deal with the BBC expired at the end of the year, and conversations were ongoing, as with Sky, who showed approximately 120 hours a week across various channels.

On the potential impact of Brexit, Kirkwood thought that this presented challenges around economic uncertainty, but also opportunities with the potential for the UK to become more outward looking and engage other markets.

The aims of NFL UK were discussed, specifically around growing the popularity of the game. On participation, Kirkwood highlighted the need to create realistic player pathways.

The impact of social media was raised as enriching the fan experience and a way of getting people into the game.

Challenges around the timing of the NFL London Games were raised, in ensuring the best possible international audience and fan experience.

There was a discussion around the NFL Show on the BBC.

The Major League Baseball games that were coming to London in June 2019 were raised, and Kirkwood noted that he did not see these as competition.

The Chair closed by thanking Kirkwood for taking the time to address meeting, and hoped that the Group and NFL UK could work together more closely moving forward.

Meeting closed at 1837.