

THINK CAREFULLY ABOUT WHO YOU VOTE FOR IN NORTHERN IRELAND ON MAY 5

JOHN Blair MLA, South Antrim's Alliance Party candidate, is at it again in the run up to the election at Stormont on May 5. He has unveiled plans to re-introduce his ill-judged and prejudiced Bill to ban hunting wild mammals with dogs in Northern Ireland at the 'earliest opportunity'. Well, there's the gauntlet well and truly thrown down to the rural community; so, lets simply join up to show him how unelectable he really is in South Antrim.

BLAIR DOESN'T CARE:

- About the science of wildlife management
- About the cultural heritage of Ireland
- About cross community harmony
- About minorities
- About the rural economy and jobs
- About rural mental health

To recap briefly, he proposed a Bill on Boxing Day 2020, to ban hunting with dogs. His unworkable Bill was rejected at the second reading in December 2021. Sinn Fein voted en bloc 100 per cent, along with a fair proportion of DUP MLAs, to consign his proposal to the rubbish heap, where it belongs.

He was 'absolutely staggered' by Sinn Fein's position, which might give an indication of how far removed from the realities of politics in Ireland he really is. Coupled with a hugely supportive stance from the Ulster Farmers Union to reject his Bill, this joint position really did show a deep and true understanding of cross community harmony from these two parties, among others.

The Alliance Party supposedly champions cross community harmony and yet he understands so little of the matter of hunting and rural community life, that he is struggling against the best-ever demonstration of that harmony by sensible MLAs five months ago in Stormont. Every member of Northern Ireland's rural and hunting community knows full well that for years, hunting hounds has united community members who may hold differing political



John Blair plans to re-introduce his prejudiced Bill.

ideologies as those differences are put aside in the joining together around this essential and necessary wildlife management activity.

So, while effective politicians are working endlessly to address real issues in their Northern Irish constituencies, such as the economy, the NI Protocol, borders with the UK and EU, education, health services, a possible food crisis inbound in 18 months, John Blair is attempting to divert precious time away from that and talk about issues that he demonstrably has no clue about and more worryingly, refuses to engage with meaningfully.

Trotting out tired old lines about barbarity

While he keeps trotting out tired old lines about barbarity and feeling offended that Northern Ireland is the embarrassing neighbour, trailing behind the rest of the UK with its wildlife management policies, yet again, he is miles off the mark. Because he doesn't realise that he is going against the direction of travel more widely, where there is huge resentment against the bad law that is the *Hunting Act 2004* (that



The Veterinary Association for Wildlife Management call hunting with hounds both natural and humane.

miners'. The data shows that it has been disastrous for animal welfare. Daniel Greenberg, the Parliamentary Counsel who drafted the Bills for the *Act*, is on record as saying that he felt a huge sense of moral unease with it and that 'instead of an effective measure, therefore, the *Act* and Bills for it were largely an exercise in what it has now become fashionable to describe as "virtue signalling"... and that a moral judgement is being imposed on a minority – and I thought we didn't do that'.

So actually, Northern Ireland with its practical and sensible view on hunting with hounds as an essential tool in wildlife management, is ahead of the game and could be an exemplar to other countries, of how to balance a sound outcome.

Politicians are realising that without rural votes, they don't get elected

John Blair really has no mandate for this prejudiced assault on our rural way of life. His own survey prior to his last proposal was flawed and arguably misled MLAs by including signatories from across the world and not just Northern Ireland. Some offended citizen of Brazil trying to shape political outcomes in Northern Ireland? Quite naughty of Mr Blair really and he was found out. His subsequent survey of people residing in Northern Ireland was so embarrassingly poorly supported that he withdrew it, quite sensibly.

The Veterinary Association for Wildlife Management states: "Hunting by hounds is the natural and most humane method of controlling the population of all four quarry species, fox, deer, hare and mink, in the countryside." So, there's the science, from the professionals. Who might we think is worth listening to; an organisation of 560 veterinary surgeons or the Alliance Party candidate for South Antrim?

Which political parties would really support the heritage, traditions and economy of rural communities across Northern Ireland, as well as naturally the sensible management of our wildlife? You get to decide on May 5.



Tony Blair regrets anti-hunting legislation.

applies to England and Wales) and the *Protection of Wild Mammals (Scotland) Act 2002*.

A positive stream of consciousness is now entering politics around the real benefits of hunting to wildlife management strategy, the importance of our cultural heritage, community cohesion and the rural economy.

Politicians are realising that without rural votes, they don't get elected and so they are taking note of the science of wildlife management and the sentiment of rural voters. Rural votes matter and policies that affect rural communities need to take account of that.

Even Tony Blair, who pushed through anti-hunting legislation in 2004, in England and Wales by invoking the *Parliament Act*, now admits that it was his biggest political regret. It is simply 'bad law' and needs to be replaced.

MPs who voted for it have admitted it was 'revenge for the