*Answers for the Rider Working Groups from Janet*

The primary change I would like to make is in outreach. As long as I can remember, eventing has been one of very few sports with full gender equality. I would now like to see it take its place as a sport leading the way in diversity. I would like young people from all backgrounds to be able to join in with our wonderful sport and enjoy its many benefits. I was brought up in inner city Liverpool’s Toxteth, not a horsey place at all. When I was able to discover eventing and the eventing community it made a huge difference to my life.

The main result I hope would come from this would be to help underpriviliged young people in the way I was helped. It wouldn’t do the image of the sport much harm either.

The second change I would make would be to develop the sport’s media presence. I think we want a broad range of influencers and advocates for our sport. I would like to see interviews and blogs contributed by all BE competitors, not just the elite. With so many platforms available everybody can have a chance to shine.

Again, for me, this change is all about developing and broadening the profile of the sport.

My third wish would be to have a thorough review of the scheduling and calendar of events. Over the last couple of years scheduling has been very difficult because of lockdown. However BE reacted well, and was one of the few sports to keep offering competition to members. We need to build on this to make sure that traditional venues feel supported to keep offering competition.

Of course the benefit would be more competition, and that is a primary goal for BE.

Personally I welcome the arrival of new unaffiliated competitions like the Cotswold Cup. I have always believed that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. The response is for BE to do it better, and to do it differently. Differentiation is the key to the BE offering. My partner and I were lucky enough to compete in the Bicton long form 3 Day Event last month. It was a wonderful adventure. Last year we also competed at Barbury alongside competitors who went on to win Olympic medals, and that was a great privilege. So BE needs to concentrate on doing the things that only BE can do, and do them better.

As you will have noticed from my comments so far. I am concerned about the perception of the sport of eventing by the general public. Our sport is one of the most successful, and certainly the most gender equal, of all the Olympic sports in which Team GB competes. Yet at the Olympics the coverage it received from the BBC was only grudging, and only because our success was unignorable. The perception remains though, that the sport is not sufficiently “woke”. Too many people see the sport as too posh, toffs on expensive horses. It is an expensive sport. But so is tennis. I remain concerned that BE does not measure the sport in the wider spectrum of performance sports.

The progressive rank of competitors who are neither elite nor grassroots has much to offer to show the world the inclusivity of our sport. I would like to see more prizes aimed at this area, especially in recognition of producers, breeders and work riders. I compete in field trials with my spaniels and prizes include those for breeders and those chosen by fellow competitors.

The Rider Working Groups have put forward some excellent ideas so far, from which I personally have benefitted. I would love their input on how to bring riders and volunteers from different backgrounds into the sport. How can we get a wider range of people involved? Should we look at placements? Or perhaps offer experience days to non-members?

Overall, our sport is on a high at present. Now it is up to us to convert this into a lasting success story. British cycling rose to popularity on the backs of Bradley Wiggins, Mark Cavendish and Chris Frome, and is now one of the most fashionable and inclusive of participation sports in the UK. Wouldn’t it be wonderful if British Eventing could go along that path, at least as far as the next hedge.