

DIGSWELL PLACE GROUP RIDING FOR DISABLED CIO

KNOWN AS DIGSWELL PLACE RDA
Charity Number: 1163233

Trustees' Annual Report

From 1st September 2024 to 31st August 2025



Another record year for sessions delivered

This year the Digswell Place team **delivered a record 2,144** equine therapy sessions from our purpose-built Yard.

A fantastic achievement, 2,144 life changing experiences delivered for participants through the special bond between horse and human. It's thanks to the extraordinary Digswell Place community that this is possible; 132 volunteers, a wonderful equine team, dedicated Yard team and all underpinned by strong support from our local community.

Thank you to everyone involved in Digswell Place for making this possible and for helping to enrich so many lives through horses in such a special place.

Sue Clarke Chair Trustees Digswell Place Group RDA

1. Objectives & Activities

Purpose - What we do

The purposes of the charity are set out in the RDA Member Group Constitution:

The objects for which the CIO is established are to promote the objects of the Riding for the Disabled Association incorporating Carriage Driving a charity registered under charity number 244108 ("RDA") by providing disabled people with the opportunity to ride to benefit their health and well-being in the Welwyn, Hatfield, Stevenage, Hertford, St. Albans and surrounding area.

Digswell Place RDA is a member group of RDA UK.

Our Activities

Operating from purpose-built volunteer led facilities, provided exclusively for charitable purposes; we offer outdoor riding and equine based therapeutic activities for children and adults with disabilities. Where there is capacity and with consideration to our Equine Welfare Policy, we support any adult or child with a mental or physical disability who may benefit. Participants can be referred by medical professionals, educational bodies or apply direct. Applicants are assessed in line with RDA UK practices and policies, to ensure that it is safe and beneficial for them to participate.

Ridden and non ridden activities offered

In addition to riding therapy, non ridden activities are offered for those who may not want to ride, or who are outside our safety criteria for ridden activities. Demand for these services grew post Covid and continue to be relevant for future development.

Every therapeutic activity delivers tailored benefits for individual participant needs:

Therapeutic Riding	Horse care	Tea with a Pony
Physio and physiological benefits through the movement of the horse and acquiring a new skill.	Quality time with horses grooming, leading and learning horse care and equine welfare knowledge.	A safe and supportive activity for people with disabilities or long-term conditions, such as dementia.
Aids mobility, core strength and balance	Promotes physical and emotional wellbeing	Multi -sensory
Improves general fitness and health	Skills development	Good for memory, alertness & engagement
Opportunities to progress and compete		Intergenerational for participants, families & carers

All underpinned by additional benefits:

Learning opportunities	Social development skills	Outdoor exercise
Challenges & encourages achievement.	Confidence building through learning new skills.	Two outdoor schools surrounded by fields and trees.
Achievements recognised through RDA accredited awards.	Combating anxiety through connecting with horses & ponies.	Hacks in local woods give access to nature for those whose mobility may make such activities challenging.
Lessons include fun learning activities alongside equestrian skills.	Interaction with other participants, carers, volunteers and coaches.	Safe walkway for non ridden activities.
	Involvement in fundraising & Digswell Community activities.	

We provide up to 100 therapeutic sessions per week in two outdoor arenas or in the adjacent woods. Sessions are run by 13 RDA UK Accredited volunteer coaches and 132 volunteer helpers, all trained to RDA UK standards. Attendees come from local specialist schools, children supported in attending from mainstream schools & colleges together with private adult attendees.

Our equines are at the heart of what we do

Our specially trained horses and ponies are loved by all at Digswell Place, and every care is taken to ensure their health and wellbeing:

- Allocated pony carers (minders) look after each horse on a one-to-one basis and exercise and school them outside their activities with participants
- Our 17-acre site offers plenty of grazing and turn out exercise and local bridle paths provide off site hacking
- RDA UK is a signatory to The Charter for The Horse and activities are carried out in compliance with RDA UK Equine welfare policies
- The Royal Veterinary College provides on call service whenever needed and specialist equine masseurs, farriers, dentists and saddlers attend the Yard
- Specialist tack is available, if needed, to improve rider and horse comfort
- All Coaches and volunteers complete RDA UK accredited equine knowledge and welfare training
- Riders and horses are matched according to prescribed safety and comfort limits for rider weight, height, and temperament
- Participant sessions last for a half an hour on weekdays during term time only to ensure rest and recreation time for the horses
- Our Yard Manager along with a paid Equine Manager and Deputy provide professional experienced support to the volunteer teams.

We are a volunteer led organisation

Without our 132 volunteers we could not achieve our charitable aims, their commitment enables us to operate at the level we do. Volunteer helpers prepare the horses and ponies, lead the ponies, sidewalk and Coach. As well as ensuring the day-to-day needs of their allocated ponies are met, minders contribute a small amount to the upkeep of their pony and volunteer in session/fundraising roles. Members of the Management Committee and Trustees are also helpers, coaches, participants and pony carers. The volunteer maintenance team keeps the Yard safe and serviceable by maintaining fencing, paddock & facilities.

As an inclusive organisation, our RDA UK insurance covers volunteers up to age 90. Whether directly involved with horses and participants or with tea making, fundraising and ground activities there's plenty of opportunities for volunteers to develop and continue their time with the Group.

Powered by strong community support

Many volunteers have been involved since our early years and happily share their experience with new and younger volunteers. Strong links between our volunteers and the local community support us in fundraising and profile-raising activities.

Involvement benefits volunteers too

Learning new skills Equine skills not a prerequisite to joining	• Learn or improve equine skills • RDA UK accredited training provided • Access to specialist training to support participants • Progression opportunities within the Group and across RDA nationally
Socialising Intergenerational across participants & other volunteers	• Meeting new people • Combating social isolation • Working as part of a team • Helping at & attending fundraising events
Outdoor exercise Reaching those who may not otherwise access exercise facilities	• Interacting with horses • Preparing ponies and clearing stables • Walking in the woods or the arena with participants • Maintaining the Yard and fields

All new volunteers undergo an application process, reference and DBS checks in line with RDA UK Safeguarding Policies. In addition to our own volunteers, when able, we welcome placement students, and host working parties to assist with larger maintenance & facilities projects.

Supporting the core volunteer base we have; a freelance advanced Coach, a full time employed Equine Manager and 2 part time Grooms. These paid roles are critical to the charity in ensuring continuity in delivering its charitable aims and public benefit.

Every session provided is subsidised by our own fundraising

The true cost of providing a session is not passed on to our participants. We aim to be an affordable, inclusive and accessible organisation. The cost of each session provided is around £43, participants are asked to contribute 27% of that cost at £14 per session, this was raised to £15 in January 2025 to reflect rising costs. The balance is funded by our own fundraising. Bursaries are available to offset all or part of a rider's contribution so that financial hardship is not a barrier to benefiting from our activities. One bursary was awarded in accordance with our Bursary Policy during the financial year.

We confirm that the trustees of Digswell Place RDA have complied with their duty to have due regard to the guidance on public benefit published by the Commission in exercising their powers or duties.

2. Achievements, performance and impact

Continued growth in sessions delivered year on year

A record 2,144 therapeutic sessions delivered

- Exceeding previous last year's previous high of 2,123
- Continued demand for our services with a waiting list at year end

Participant impact in numbers: *Source RDA UK 2025*

- ✓ 82% improve ability to build relationships
- ✓ 77% show greater confidence
- ✓ 76% experience physical improvement
- ✓ 76% experience more enjoyment
- ✓ 68% improved communication

And in their own words:

A recent heartfelt thank you note: "...I wanted to tell you just how incredibly grateful I am for all that you have done for me..... you welcomed me with open arms. You saw past my difficulties and helped me to recognise my strengths instead. Every one of you has been SO kind, compassionate & accommodating of me at all times and I am so thankful for you and the wonderful work of the Charity."

From a new rider: "I only started recently but I have been made to feel v welcome and part of a very friendly group. It can be a bit intimidating to be expected to perform tasks that are new but everyone is supportive and kind."

And a rider who started riding with us 9 years ago aged 2: "It's so much fun to trot, go into the woods and have lessons in the big sand arena"

And in smiles!



Achievements - Continually extending outreach and profile:

Improving wider community communications; introduction of regular newsletters for both participants and volunteers and a special summer thank-you tea to recognise the contribution of our volunteers

Continued social media growth; keeping our community of volunteers, participants and supporters engaged with regular updates and news Insta and Facebook. **1,545** people now follow our Facebook page, up from 1400 last year. Instagram introduced with 629 followers

Biannual Open days; a chance for all in our community, including local residents, parents, carers, volunteers and their families to visit the Yard, watch ridden demonstrations, take part in family activities and learn more about the Group.

Achievements - Net fundraising holding steady

Along with our regular established events the hugely successful annual ball, Dogs & Daffs at Hatfield House and grants, legacy gifts and one-off donations from supporters, additional fundraising came from:

- The Swimathon arranged by St Albans Rotary Club
- Welwyn Hatfield Festival
- Continued support from Canaccord Genuity Wealth Management as their Charity of the Year over a 2-year period
- Continuing with new events trialled last year: the barn dance and quiz night
- Reintroduction of the Race Night event
- Introduced a GoFundMe campaign
- A Hertfordshire Community Foundation Grant

Sponsor a Pony

Recognising that our core fundraising was heavily reliant on a few large physical events, Sponsor a Pony was launched in 2023 to generate regular donation income. Whilst initial results were positive an alternative regular giving programme may be effective; this will be reviewed in 2025/2026.

3. Financial Review

This year, as in prior years, we have financed all expenditure from available cash funds, continuing our underlying principle which is to ensure we do not pass on any debt to future years.

We have used the Charity Commission's template Receipts and Payments statement and Statement of Assets and Liabilities to record the charity's receipts and payments for the year ended 31 August 2025 together with comparable figures for the previous year. These have been independently examined, are included in this report and should be read in conjunction with this review

Overall performance

Despite 2024/2025 being a challenging year for us (having had to replace 2 more equines), our reserves have only decreased by 1K.

Principal Sources of Funding

Overall, the Group saw a 21K increase in total income (net of fundraising costs), which was largely due to Canaccord Genuity Wealth Management continuing to sponsor us as their Charity of the Year.

Net income from our core activities has increased by 3K this year which is extremely encouraging. Minder income remained constant with the previous year.

Our locally held fundraising events and activities have been bolstered by reinstating old favourites and finding new ones. Our team of volunteers are very enthusiastic and encourage the local Community to support our events.

Statement of assets and liabilities

As at 31 August 2025 we had cash reserves of £164K which is only a decrease of 1K on the previous year. Considering we had to replace 2 more equines in this financial year, this is very encouraging.

Policy notes

Reserves Policy

This year trustees have again reviewed the appropriateness of the Reserves Policy adopted in May 2018 and decided that, in the light of the current operating and funding environment, the Group would not reduce the overall level of reserves required for sustainability.

Free Reserves

Our present agreed formula for a level of designated reserves is 1.7 times the budgeted operating shortfall.

With budgeted operating expenses and overheads totalling £186.5K and controllable income of £75.8K the budgeted draw down at 31 August 2026 would be £110.7K multiplied by 1.7 gives us designated reserves of £188K. This, therefore, leaves us with no free reserves. This is based on information available at the point at which the budget is approved.

Assets and Liabilities

In 1996 the freehold of the land was purchased by RDA UK with Lottery Sports Funding. The land is leased to Digswell Place RDA at a peppercorn rent. This lease was extended for 2 years in July 2025. The stables and classroom are insured at cost plus RICS inflation. They will have little realisable value and in the event that the charity ceases to be viable they will pass to RDA UK under the terms of the group membership agreement.

4. Structure, Governance and Management

Structure

Digswell Place RDA is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation registered with the Charity Commission for England and Wales. The CIO was entered on the Charity Commission Register of Charities on 20 August 2015 with the Registered Charity number 1163233.

The merger of Digswell Place Group Riding for the Disabled 1074341 was registered on 12 November 2015 with a transfer date of 11 November 2015.

The charity is a member group of RDA UK. All member groups are governed by a Membership Agreement with RDA UK. Digswell Place Group Riding for the Disabled Association CIO's purpose is set out in the RDA UK member group's constitution. The Group is part of the Herts RDA Group and the RDA Eastern Region.

Governance & management

Digswell Place RDA CIO is governed by a Board of Trustees. The original Board of Trustees all stood for election in December 2016 at the inaugural AGM, as required by the CIO constitution. Additional trustees are sought from those actively involved in promoting the objectives of the Group. All trustees are required to have an enhanced DBS check where appropriate.

As at 31 August 2025 there were 7 trustees; minuted meetings are held at least 4 times p.a. or more often if needed. No person or body external to the charity is entitled to appoint any of the trustees. Two Trustees retired at the 2024 AGM, 2 new Trustees were elected and another new Trustee was appointed by Trustees in March 2025.

The RDA UK document "the Essentials of Membership" sets out the standards and procedures by which the charity operates. In this way we ensure that at any time, all activity is guided and supervised by an appropriate person and the highest standards of safety and welfare are maintained. The charity is accountable to RDA UK and is required to submit returns annually.

A range of guidance produced by the RDA UK including the "Welcome pack for trustees" is supplied to each trustee. Relevant guidance and news releases from the Charity Commission are brought to the attention of Trustees with support and advice from RDA UK staff at national and regional levels and online.

5. Reference and Administrative Details

Charity name	Digswell Place Group Riding for the Disabled Association	
Other names charity is known by	Digswell Place RDA	
Registered charity number	1163233	
Charity's principal address	Digswell Place Stables	
	Rectory Road	
	Welwyn	
	AL8 7SU	

Names of the charity trustees who manage the charity

Trustee name	Office (if any)	Dates acted if not for whole year	Name of person (or body) entitled to appoint trustee (if any)
Sue Clarke	Chair Trustees & Trustee	Re-elected AGM 13/12/24 as Trustee & Chair	
Jennie Redford	Treasurer & Trustee	Re elected AGM 6/1/23 as Trustee & Treasurer	
Sarah Southern	Secretary & Trustee	Re elected AGM 13/12/24 as Trustee & Secretary	
Tom Gough	Trustee	Re Elected AGM 13/12/24	
Jo Clarke Bould	Trustee	Elected AGM 13/12/24	
Barbara Fitzsimon	Trustee	Elected AGM 13/12/24	
Katie Tamblin	Trustee	Appointed 1/3/25	Trustees
Bridget Johnston	Trustee & Secretary	Re elected AGM 15/12/23 Retired 13/12/24	
Carol Redgment	Trustee	Re elected AGM 6/1/23 Retired 13/12/24	

Declarations

The trustees declare that they have approved the trustees' report above.
Signed on behalf of the charity's trustees

Signature(s)	<i>S.Clarke</i>	<i>J.Redford</i>
Full name(s)	Susan Clarke	Jennie Redford
Position	Chair Trustees	Treasurer
Date	29/11/25	

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CHARITY COMMISSION
FOR ENGLAND AND WALES

Independent examiner's report on the accounts

Section A

Independent Examiner's Report

Report to the trustees

Charity Name

DIGSWELL PLACE GROUP RIDING FOR DISABLED CIO

On accounts for the year ended

31 August 2025

**Charity no
(if any)**

1163233

Set out on pages

10

(remember to include the page numbers of additional sheets)

I report to the trustees on my examination of the accounts of the above charity ("the Trust") for the year ended 31/08/2025.

Responsibilities and basis of report

As the charity's trustees, you are responsible for the preparation of the accounts in accordance with the requirements of the Charities Act 2011 ("the Act").

I report in respect of my examination of the Trust's accounts carried out under section 145 of the 2011 Act and in carrying out my examination, I have followed all the applicable Directions given by the Charity Commission under section 145(5)(b) of the Act.

Independent examiner's statement

[The charity's gross income exceeded £250,000 and I am qualified to undertake the examination by being a qualified member of [insert name of applicable listed body]]. *Delete [] if not applicable.*

I have completed my examination. I confirm that no material matters have come to my attention in connection with the examination (other than that disclosed below *) which gives me cause to believe that in, any material respect:

- the accounting records were not kept in accordance with section 130 of the Charities Act; or
- the accounts did not accord with the accounting records; or
- the accounts did not comply with the applicable requirements concerning the form and content of accounts set out in the Charities (Accounts and Reports) Regulations 2008 other than any requirement that the accounts give a 'true and fair' view which is not a matter considered as part of an independent examination.

I have no concerns and have come across no other matters in connection with the examination to which attention should be drawn in this report in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

** Please delete the words in the brackets if they do not apply.*

Signed: *A Bailey*

Date: 16/11/2025

Name: Alexandra Bailey

Relevant professional qualification(s) or body (if any):

ACCA

Address: 10 Densley Close

Welwyn Garden City

AL8 7JX

Section B

Disclosure

Only complete if the examiner needs to highlight material matters of concern (see CC32, Independent examination of charity accounts: directions and guidance for examiners).

Give here brief details of any items that the examiner wishes to disclose.