

Chairman's Report

Brook Cottage Farm RDA – Sept 2023-Sept 24

Some sad news

We are sad to report that Sarah Baker, one of our valued Trustees and a dear friend, sadly died on 21st September 24. She was a founding member of our group and helped us set up RDA at Brook Cottage Farm. She was an exceptional person, very driven and inspired to continue operating her group, Herts/Essex Borders, despite her own health concerns. Everyone will miss her.

Coaches' Reviews

The three riding coaches were reviewed in May 24 and are up to date for three years. The assessor was very positive about us, and extremely encouraging. Our driving coaches are also all up to date.

Paperwork and Best Practise

2 Trustees are constantly working on keeping DBS documents and other paperwork of volunteers and participants up to date. Risk Assessments for the venue and sessions, along with First Aid and Safeguarding documentation also have to be checked and updated regularly and sent out to schools if necessary. Documents are stored in a locked filing cabinet and only accessed by the relevant people.

Volunteers

Our number of volunteers is ever increasing. Six new people came to us from Bamber's Green and a couple more from the publicity due to the Ballinger Equine event. This is really good news, as, even if some people are away on holiday or unwell, we usually do have enough people. Sessions run really smoothly when there are good numbers of helpers.

The coaches encourage all volunteers to undertake online training courses and send them information about face-to-face training as well.

Riding

In September 23 term started up again, and sessions were full up with 28 riders. Riding sessions have continued to run all year on Thursday mornings during term-time, with new riders constantly being taken on. A few riders have recently stopped due to changing schools etc, and we are in the midst of taking on 6 new riders at the start of this term.

All riders received their first Endurance (1K) certificates. Most have received their Proficiency 1 and/or 2. New riders will start working on their Proficiency 1 this term. Riders who have been with us for a while are now working towards Proficiency 3.

In sessions, riders also work towards performance of a full dressage test, taken in the spring and summer terms.

Carriage Driving

Carriage driving sessions have operated all year on Friday mornings and at weekends. The Driving Team attended the Royal Windsor Horse Show for the second time last May. The weather was terrible, but we managed to enjoy the day with two participants, coming first in the Fancy Dress carriage section, again! More recently, we have been preparing an adult driver for the Virtual Championships, for which you do a dressage course on video and send it in by October 6th. We recently took a gentleman in a wheelchair out in the carriage and it is good that this is something that we can offer. Our wheelchair carriage is on loan to us from another group.

In July two of our carriages were serviced by Revolution Carriages in Great Bardfield. £250 per carriage but money well spent on keeping the carriages safe and running smoothly.

Tea with a Pony

We only started this in January 23, but over the last year we have had several visits from individuals and several from Care Homes: Laystone Care Home and St Elizabeth's. Laystone brought four or five participants each time, some in wheelchairs and some suffering from Dementia. They enjoyed spending time with the ponies, and having tea and cake. Tea with a Pony is an area we could continue to expand in, as the sessions have been very well received. We now have a specific Tea with a Pony fundraising leaflet and GoFundMe.

Merger with Bamber's Green

We are still pushing for a resolution on this. We have taken on 5 riders from Bamber's Green, 2 carriage drivers and around 6 volunteers. We held an EGM a few months ago to complete all the paperwork for the official merger. With any luck, Headquarters' paperwork should be through soon and the merger will be complete.

The Sensory Track

We have finished three fifths of the track, with just 200m left to go. Riders have enjoyed many adventures up the track already. Every third week we take all riders for a ride out. So it is in use...we just have to go up, turn round and come back down the same way.

As soon as we have enough funds (keeping enough set by for running costs) we will go ahead with the last section in order to have the whole rectangular loop. In the meantime, a little house has been put up and decorated as the Three Bears House and a gardener has been sought to keep the weeds down. A gazebo (funded by East Herts County Council Community Fund) is due to go up shortly. In other news, the little pond now has a big fat frog in it.

Fundraising

In April we held our annual Big Pelham Pony Plod, a sponsored ride which again raised almost £2000. One of our volunteers wanted to pay for a shield to give to the best fundraiser, and it has been awarded to a child who raised over £700 sponsorship.

In June 23 (this was mentioned in last year's report) we were awarded £5000 from Stansted Airport Community Fund, which was used to excavate and prepare the ground for the 100m of track across the top of the field.

In March 24 we were awarded £1900 from East Herts to purchase a gazebo. It has been ordered, and will be put up soon at the top of the track, for decoration at Christmas, Easter, Summer rides etc.

We are being awarded £500 from the 'Tesco Stronger Starts Fund' towards sensory plants for the track, which will be bought in October 24 for autumn planting.

We raised around £250 with The Shetland Pony Experience, run over the month of August 24. This went well, was popular and it was not necessary to take out any extra insurance as RDA covers it (similarly to an event such as a fundraising fête with access to ponies.) It could be run year-round on weekends as a continual fundraiser.

Fundraisers to come:

The Panto, 'Trotty Trotty Bang Bang' - 29th and 30th November 2024, 5pm and 7.30. Tickets are £9 and £7 this year. There are 15 people in the cast. Rehearsals

have begun already. We will need to recruit volunteers for the bar, and for backstage help/chairs etc during the days just before. The revised timing of this (end Nov) is an experiment: we will see if people are keen for a panto a couple of weeks earlier than usual.

An Auction of Promises, run by a volunteer, planned for Spring 25, in the Barn, with Ploughman's supper. The type of 'Promises' we will be looking for are: fabulous home baked cakes, dinner cooked for two, a cream tea served in the garden, a holiday home for a few days, a carriage ride, a haircut/facial/massage/beauty treatment, a personalised book written specially for you....etc etc. The actor who plays our Pantomime Dame has agreed to be the auctioneer and this will be a fun and rewarding evening.

One of our coaches is doing the London Marathon 2025. She has asked if she is allowed to raise the £2000 she has to raise, specifically for our group. A Quiz Night will be organised at the Catherine Wheel Pub and possibly some other events to support her fundraising.

Trustees have continued to apply for several grants: amongst them the High Sheriff Awards, and the Sunday Times Charity Awards. One of our Trustees is making it easier to apply, by storing all the relevant information on a One-Drive. She has also created some eye-catching leaflets and other useful publicity and fundraising material with QR codes sending people straight to our GoFundMe.

Visits

In October 23, we had a visit from MP Sir Oliver and Stansted Airport Community Fund, when they handed over a large cheque for £5000, which was covered in the Bishops Stortford Independent.

In November 23 we had a visit from Stuart Lodge who gave us a cheque for £2000 for the track.

In February 24 we had a visit from four of the ladies from Golf World Stansted, who had a walk up the track and had coffee with us in the café. They have already given us several thousand pounds and have kindly said we will remain their *Charity of the Year* for another year.

In July 24, 3 trustees attended the Ballinger Equine event in Cottered Village Hall. A 15-minute talk about our group and the track was well received. We then

had a visit in August 24 from the Managing Director of Ballinger, when he handed over the proceeds (over £1000) from the Ballinger event raffle: this story also made the Bishops Stortford Independent. Several substantial donations and new volunteers came to us due to this event.

Training

Our Chairman attended the RDA AGM in February 24 at Liverpool Racecourse, with our Paralympian carriage driver who had been asked to speak on Diversity and Disability at the event.

In April, one of our coaches went to the Unicorn Centre in Gloucester for two days of Paralympian and RDA driving masterclasses.

In May, we held a **Volunteers' First-aid Course** here in the Barn at Brook Cottage Farm, which was very well attended.

Coaches and Trustees have completed several online learning modules and qualifications necessary or useful for the smooth running of the group. Volunteers are also encouraged to complete online modules relevant to their roles.

Conclusion:

Brook Cottage Farm RDA is an extremely busy and thriving group. Partly due to our merger with Bamber's Green RDA, we have been in the process of expansion. We are growing and attracting more volunteers, more riders and more attention, so we have to remain aware of the additional responsibilities this brings, keep striving to be the best we can be and encourage all our volunteers to follow training paths and become ever more interested in what we are doing as a group.

With the sad recent loss of our dedicated Trustee Sarah Baker, it is a time for reflection but also for renewed activity and determination to keep delivering the best sessions possible, which is what she would have wanted.

BROOK COTTAGE FARM RDA

Annual account 1.9.23 - 31.8.24

SUMMARY

opening balance		£ 2,716.41	opening balance		£ 2,716.41
	bank credit	£ 20,316.92			
	bank debit	£ 10,372.25	Activities and events	£ 6,438.28	
			Grants and awards	£ 12,712.00	
closing balance	bank	£ 12,661.08	General Donations	£ 2,046.11	
			non income credits	£ 559.21	£ 21,755.60
cash in hand		£ 938.58			
			Expenditure		-£ 10,872.35
Total		£ 13,599.66			£ 13,599.66

Income

Activities

Grand National	£	250.00
Quiz night	£	626.00
Halloween	£	201.60
Xmas market	£	260.00
Panto	£	1,400.25
Pony Plod	£	2,179.80
Shetland Experience	£	263.00
Ballinger event	£	1,150.00
May stall	£	107.63

Grants and awards

Herts EssexBorder	£	5,000.00
Stevenage Rotary	£	200.00
Stuart Lodge	£	2,000.00
Elsenham Ladies	£	2,000.00
NE LE SE Ltd	£	250.00
Peter's Metres	£	200.00
EHDC	£	1,912.00
Windsor Lions prize	£	150.00
Groundwork UK	£	500.00
Overland Trust	£	500.00

Non income credits

Paypal test	£	0.01
First Aid Course	£	540.00
Unpaid DBS dd	£	19.20

Donations £ 2,046.11 £ 21,755.60

Expenditure

Pony Hire	£	3,032.00
Track	£	5,616.00
Unpaid dd	£	19.20
DBS	£	118.80
First Aid course	£	684.00
HMRC	£	100.00
RDA assessment	£	25.00
RDA resources	£	155.87
Odd jobs	£	77.60
Windsor	£	24.00
Equipment	£	255.19
Gifts for riders	£	76.30
Sundries	£	15.49
Carriage maint	£	525.00
Mileage Windsor	£	113.40
Rosettes	£	34.50
		£ 10,872.35