

Chair report – AGM 30th October 2025

Firstly, thank you for coming today. Secondly but possibly more importantly a huge thank you to all our volunteers who've turned up as much as they can every week for our drivers to enjoy their mornings with the ponies. We've been joined by some newbie volunteers and pleasingly they have all had some experience with horses, if not with driving, but hopefully we're adding to their skill set.

It's certainly been a better year for getting most of our Thursdays in with only a couple of cancellations due to rain. Between Peter Gunner, our landlord, and Stuart the grass has been kept in good working order and not been a toll on the pony's stamina.

Moving onto Horse Welfare - as most of you know Diesel & Dexter are now in livery locally. Diesel being on a part time loan agreement with two teenagers who ride him regularly and generally make a huge fuss of him as we hope they are learning about caring for a pony, in a safe environment. Dexter who has had some major health issues this year and been successfully treated, is due to go to a new yard on loan this weekend, again locally, where he will be ridden by a husband and wife and live out on delicious grass with two mares – what's not to like! We will of course still actually own them and they will be collected every Thursday (or any other time we want them), for our drivers. Buttons is still happily living in Alfriston with Bella – thank you Bella for bringing him to us every week. Ollie, our newest recruit, was passed for driving earlier in the year and has proved a real character at Sue's yard but nonetheless a safe and comfortable drive for everyone. Mia and Karl have been absolute bricks bringing him every week, so big thanks to them and I know they have built up a good relationship with Ollie (including Karl who is more used to handling gundogs but has risen to the challenge of something a bit larger).

Talking of Mia and along with Di Lewis (new to us in the last couple of months) – both are very experienced horsewomen, having between them, competed at National level in their chosen driving activities, they will be being assessed as CDC's in the Spring when, hopefully, necessary paperwork has been completed. They both bring years of horsekeeping knowledge and Di, in particular as a retired chief inspector of police, must have the patience of a saint!

As you know, we have lost one of our veteran drivers in Brenda Longley and also Moira Macmillan who was both a CDC in her early years with us and then a willing volunteer even though her health was not always good.

Onto our “doings” over the past year.

1. The Christmas lunch last year was very successful and we are again at Wellshurst this year – menu and choices form are available today for you to complete. A big thank you to Jo Angear for her part in organising.
2. The New Year brought 2 training days for volunteers and coaches. More will be planned for 2026 as we need to keep abreast of any new directives coming out of RDA.

There will be a list in the clubhouse along with photos of the existing committee along with various volunteers who have taken on specific roles.

3. The Bluebell walk, organised by Jo Angear, at Bates Green Farm, was a success although because of date changes we didn't raise quite so much as in the past, but it was still substantial. Thank you's to everyone who helped and to Karen for running the tombola as usual.

Talking of Bates Green – the Bookbarn has been busy at times and thanks go to Sue Page and especially Charmian who keeps everything as clean and tidy as possible and pitches up on her own when she can. Also, in absence, a thank you to Michele who, along with Gregor who was one of our drivers, has moved away to Wales but still continues to sell books on our behalf through the Internet and also to retired CDC, Val Richardson who kindly helps get rid of bags of "culled" books for us and we are now in a much more manageable situation with the vast amount that was left when we took over.

4. We've had a visit to Kipling for a successful Fun Activities session. We pinched a couple of ideas for ourselves(!) including adding something to Annie that now makes trying out rein handling much more accessible – thanks to Hilary & Stuart for sorting that out and I was pleased to see it already being used at our last session.
5. Hilary has managed to keep the drivers on their toes with various activities over the year and both the cones and dressage competitions were a successful challenge for the drivers – results and presentations at the Christmas lunch.
6. We haven't, unfortunately managed a pleasure drive this year, for various reasons, but hopefully we can remedy that next year. And I wasn't able to locate the whereabouts of the BarBQ (now resolved!) so we didn't do that either. We did, however, have both a VE celebration and our 40th anniversary session, where we invited Kipling to come along. We had a lovely cake made by Sue Page's daughter, Lizzie, so thank you's to her. We've also been to the S/East regional Show and Le Trec style competition at Detling - thank goodness I had Rosi with me, as she was on home ground. I would have got lost without her directing me. I think we came to the conclusion that we may give it some careful thought as to whether we go there next year, as it's a really long way for us and therefore such an early start for our drivers.

7. Several of us attended the South East Regional Conference at Ardingly recently where Karen gave a very amusing talk and presentation with early pictures of the original group members. All 8 driving groups in the region were tasked with doing a visual presentation of their group which was interesting and helped give the riding groups of the RDA some insight into our activities. Thank you to Rosi, Karen and Hilary for helping me get the display board sorted out. There were presentations to Stuart (Volunteer of the year), Silver service awards to Jo Angear and poshumously Moira Macmillan, and a certificate to Karen (Over and Above). There was a talk from the Sunflower charity (as already mentioned) and a talk/discussion from Lee Heard from RDA HQ who covered questions amongst other things RDA policies with future amendments, impacts and services that will be coming on stream. Of course, the “elephant in the room” being the wearing of restraining belts and harnesses, which is still an ongoing issue which the RDA are trying to resolve, but it’s an agonisingly slow process. But we were told, categorically, that it was **not** the directive of the Insurance company for belts to be mandatory but the RDA themselves – we’ve all obviously got our proverbial knickers in a twist about it. The upshot being that providing a driver can brace themselves they are not required to wear the belt, unless either they or the CDC request it. We will be including this in our risk assessments for each driver. Unfortunately this does not help those who would be requiring something more substantial i.e. a harness and therefore our own Lorraine is still out in the wilderness, waiting to recommence.
8. Nearly finished! On a more upbeat note – we have some projects in the pipeline and some successful fundraising from Marion along with Stuart’s Mason’s group and the sale of our 3 redundant carriages means we are able to install a basin in the toilet, purchase 2 more belts, and 4 new pneumatic tyres for one of our carriages. Stuart managed to snaffle, from Bates Farm 2 redundant electric tea urns and along with fitting out the clubhouse with lighting, we also now have a heater. He has been trying to persuade Peter that the derelict building behind the loo could and should be demolished and we could then have, should funds allow, a container for our carriages.

Finally special thanks go to Liz Major for her field organising, Margaret (and Charmian) for our teas and coffees, Rosi for the newsletter, Bob (Angela’s hubby) for the accounts each month, and not forgetting the loading team. And of course to our lovely ponies who don’t complain especially when carrots are involved.

If I’ve forgotten anyone – sorry, but as Brucie would say “You’re all my favourites”.