

# EPSOM RDA ANNUAL REVIEW 2019/20





## OVERVIEW

Epsom Riding for the Disabled Association (Epsom RDA) is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO). Our aim is to provide disabled people with the opportunity to ride to benefit their health and well-being in the Surrey and South East area.

Epsom RDA is entirely volunteer run and managed.

We hold riding sessions every day of the week including weekends. The majority are held in the mornings, but we also have Monday and Wednesday evening sessions, and a Saturday afternoon session.

Each session is unique in the types of riders they support. They adapt their coaching to be most effective for the individual challenges their riders face. The main objective of the riding sessions is to ensure the riders enjoy themselves and from that enjoyment gain the physical, emotional, social, and educational benefits that horse riding provides.

The medical benefits of riding are well recognised. It helps exercise and strengthen muscles, mobilises joints, and helps riders develop their balance, independence, and sensory perception. Another important element is the value our riders place on being part of the Epsom RDA community and the friendships they develop. This helps them socially and emotionally. As does the building a bond with their favourite pony.

## CHAIR INTRODUCTION

To borrow a football saying, 2019/20 has been a year of two halves.

Early in the year we held our hugely successful 50th Birthday Celebration. Thanks to everyone involved in what was a fabulous day. In November we held the Annual Prize giving in the Duchess Stand at Epsom Downs Racecourse. It is always pleasing to see all the riders who have achieved awards through the year gathered together and share in the pleasure that receiving their awards in front of their families, friends and peers brings. Alongside this our new Trustee Team were settling in and preparing the strategy for Epsom RDA over the next five years. Three new horse shelters were installed funded by the Nork Park Music Festival and erected in part by volunteers from KP Snacks. In addition, we acquired two new ponies, Taffy and Hugo. And of course, I must mention the new gate at the entrance which not only provides an impressive entrance but is more secure. Overall, the year was going well.

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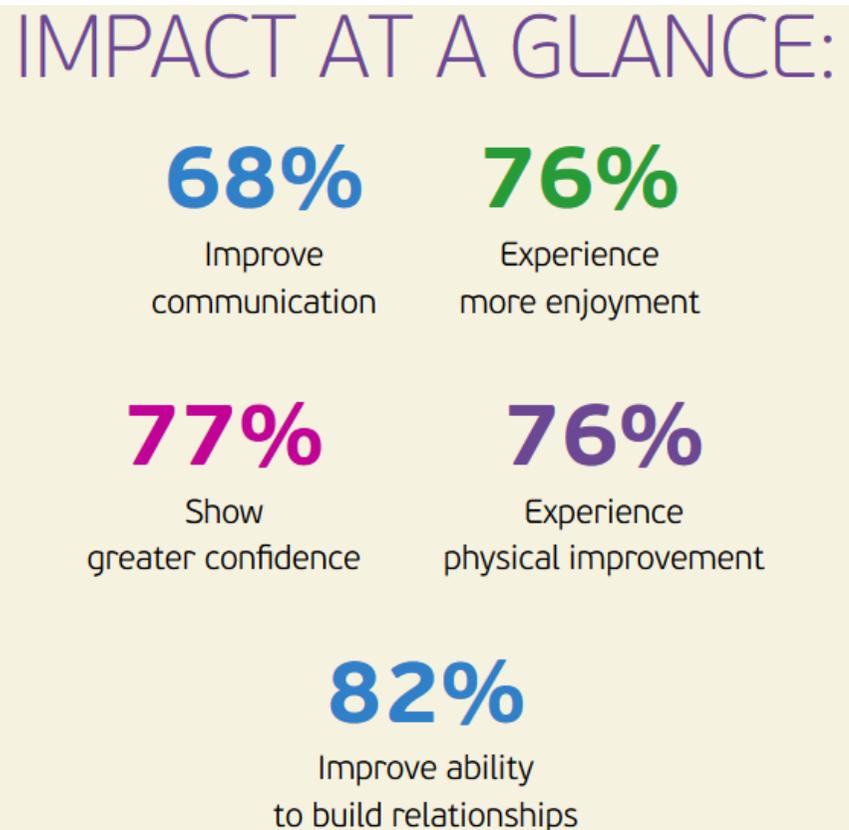
*Overall, the year was going well.*

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The second half of the year proved more challenging. A wet Winter led to some significant flooding in various parts of the site. A difficult time for our volunteers trudging through the mud in the sodden fields. However, with a new hard surface path now laid alongside the Cottage fields and Mud Slabs installed in front of some of the shelters we should be better prepared for future wet weather. A major blow was the loss of two of our longest serving and most loved ponies, Milton and Thor. Then as we were recovering from these challenges along came Covid-19. We were fortunate to be able to stage our annual in-house championships in early March before the year ended with the suspension of our activities in mid-March.

Our 50th year has turned out to be both a celebration and a real test for our volunteers, Group Coaches, Session Leaders and Trustees. I would like to thank them all for their hard work and dedication throughout this rollercoaster of a year. The resilience and adaptability of everyone at Epsom RDA has shone through.

**Ray Lee (Chair)**





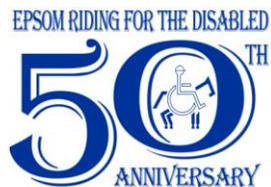
## RIDERS

During the year we provided over 3,000 rides for over 300 disabled adults and children. Our riders have a range of physical and learning disabilities and come to us from special needs schools, hospitals, other charities, and day centres as well as individual riders.

A Group Coach will set a target for their riders to work towards during the year. These can range from holding the reins, learning to trot, progressing to riding without the aid of a leader, or competing in Regional or National competitions. Our Annual Prizegiving is where the riders have their achievements in the year acknowledged in front of their families, friends, and peers. The sense of achievement from reaching their individual goal improves the riders' self-esteem, particularly when people important to them cheer them on.

In early March we held our annual in-house riding Championships, the Harold Newton, with some tremendous performances from our riders. A testament to our Group Coaches who work so hard with our riders to develop their riding skills. With the COVID19 lockdown being in place from mid-March our riders did not get the opportunity to go forward to compete at the RDA Regional or National stages. However, their Group Coaches look forward to continuing the good work when we return to riding.

Epsom RDA has a long waiting list of riders. Adults and children who miss out on the opportunity of riding with us and enjoy the benefits riding can bring to their health and well-being. Our plans include expanding the range of riding activities available for our existing riders and developing our facilities to give us the potential to be able to offer our services to a greater number of riders.



## VOLUNTEERS

We are entirely reliant on volunteers to deliver our services to our riders, maintain our grounds and buildings, and manage the charity. We are fortunate to have 250 volunteers. However, with a proportion of our 300 riders requiring three volunteers to lead and support them in each session together with a Group Coach, we have an intensive and continuing need for volunteers in each of our 14 riding sessions, not to mention the ongoing need for volunteers to maintain our grounds and property.

In July 2019, the Trustees together with other volunteers with key cross cutting roles met to consider the ambitions for the Group in the future. They looked at the gaps where new skills or extra resources would be needed to enable the essential business of running Sessions for our disabled riders seven days a week. Key areas of work considered included:

- volunteer recruitment, retention, and coordination
- training and development of our volunteers, including Group Coaches
- managing our volunteer database and administration of essential processes such as DBS checks

This work is set to continue into 2022/21 as we develop a volunteer strategy in support of the overarching aims and ambitions for the Group.

### Volunteer Training

Ensuring that our volunteers and Group Coaches are suitably skilled to deliver our services safely and effectively is a vital part of our operations. Our Training Committee provide a programme of in- house volunteer training focused on working with our ponies, and with our riders. This year, we made these available to other RDA Groups in the South East Region, alongside our own volunteers.



Another new addition to our training programme in 2019/20 was training from Mental Health First Aid England, which we secured as part of their community investment programme. In January, volunteers, Group Coaches, and Trustees met for the Youth Mental Health Awareness course covering some of the common mental health issues affecting young people, and ways to support young people with a mental health issue and relate to their experiences.

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*I love volunteering at Epsom RDA because it's so much more than just volunteering to me. During my 7 years and counting at RDA I have met many wonderful riders and supporting them to not only achieve and exceed their goals but realise it really is what you can do that counts is so special..... Epsom RDA has given so many invaluable experiences and enabled me to build my confidence and achieve many of my own goals and it was the place I said yes to marrying my now fiancée, with a little help from RDA pony Milton*

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We were also delighted to host the RDA South East Regional Training Day for Countryside Challenge and Dressage in February. Approximately 30 coaches from Epsom RDA and other South East Groups spent the day learning about what judges are looking for in each of these disciplines. This made use of our new in-house designed and built Countryside Challenge obstacles. It was a super opportunity for some of our riders and ponies to show off their capabilities as they demonstrated each exercise.

## HORSES AND PONIES

As at 31 March 2020 Epsom RDA had a herd of 14 horses and ponies ranging in age from 14 to 26 years old and in size from 14hh to 15.3hh. The current herd profile is ageing so a priority is to source some younger horses as part of our future succession planning. This includes a focus on adding smaller ponies and another larger horse capable of carrying riders at the top end of our weight limit.

It is an on-going challenge to find suitable horses and ponies. To give the best riding experience that our riders deserve our horses need to be able to provide a balanced ride and withstand the physical demands of the work they are asked to do, and most importantly of all have the calm temperament required.

Those horses who join our equine team are given a fantastic environment with a team of volunteers caring for them on a daily basis. We supplement their care with a schooling and hacking programme to enhance the ponies' fitness and put them in the best possible position to do their job. We also engage several equine professionals to assist us in this including vets, farrier, chiropractor, and dentist.

During 2018/19 the ageing nature of the herd meant we were unable to take riders out to compete at the RDA Regional and National Championships. A training programme had been planned for Spring 2019/20 to prepare our newer and younger ponies for travelling and competing off site with the aim of giving our riders the opportunity of again participating in RDA competitions. Unfortunately, the arrival of Covid 19 with the cancellation of equine events for much of the season side lined the programme for this year. The Groups' priority is for a return to riding for our riders but once this is achieved our aim is to relaunch the pony training programme in 2021.

## FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS 2018/19

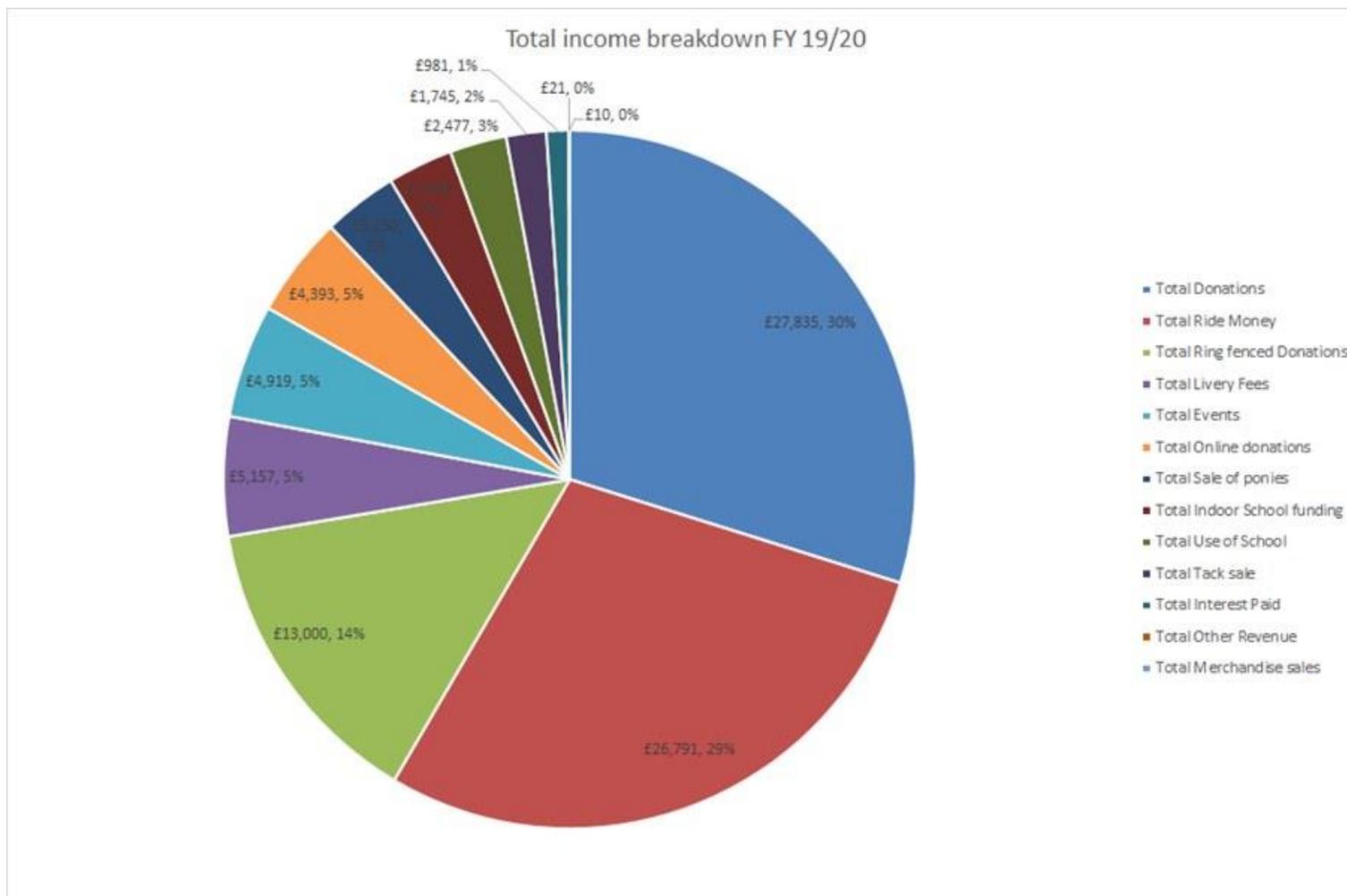
Full details of our income and expenditure are contained in our Annual Report and Accounts 2018/19. However, the graphs below show our income and expenditure broken down into our major income and expenditure areas.

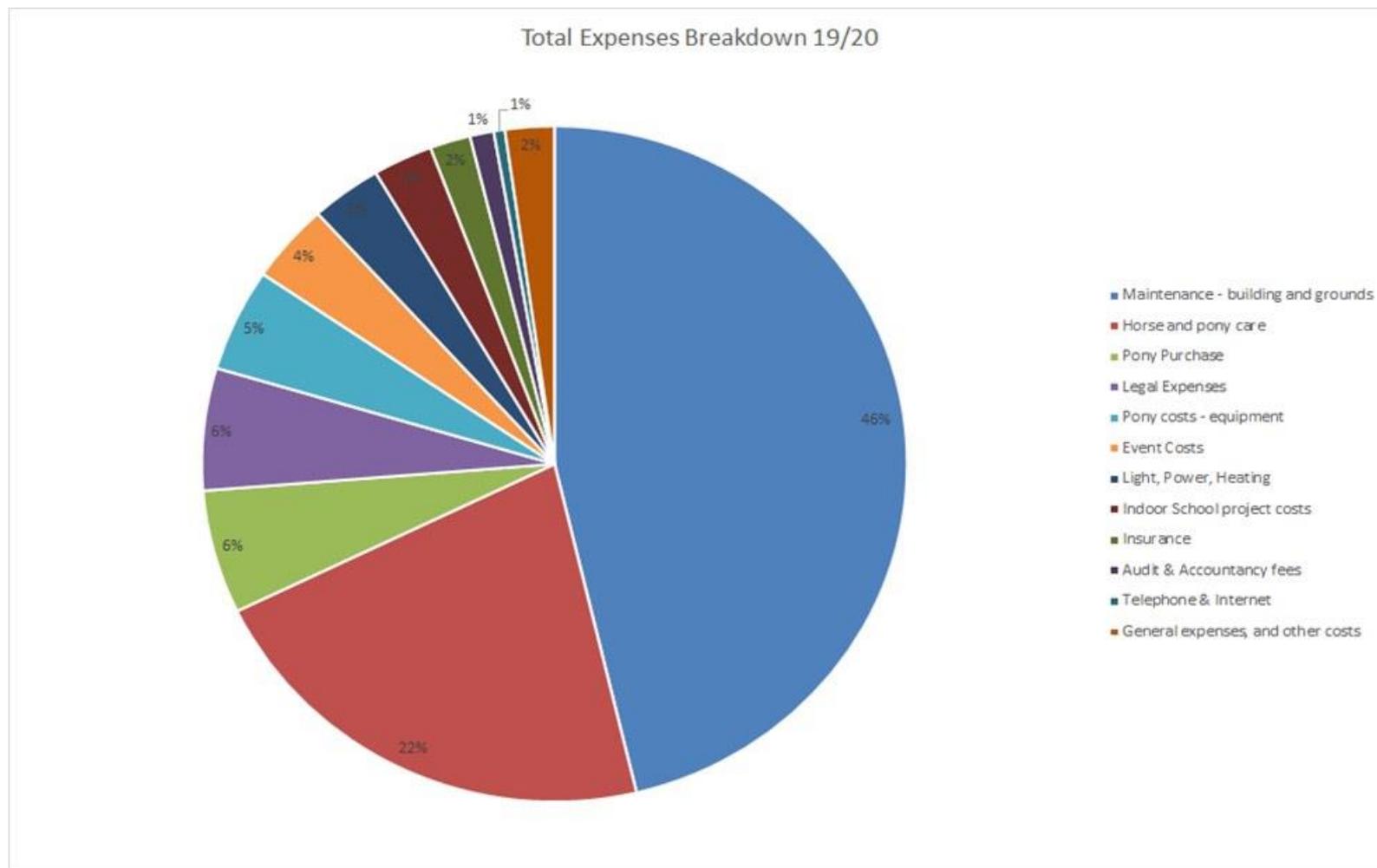
The first shows how we are funded. In 2019/20 we had donations of c.£45,000. This is our main source of income and we are grateful for all donations big and small. We received some ring-fenced funds including money from the Fiona Strong Memorial fund which was used to purchase one of the new ponies to join our team, Hugo, and from a local festival, Music in Nork Park, which was used to purchase new field shelters. Our next largest source of income is donations for rides. In 2019/20 this brought in an income of c.£25,000.

Our major area of expenditure is the cost for looking after our ponies at c.£35,000 in 2019/20. After pony care the next biggest expense is maintaining of our 16 acres of grounds and buildings.

This means our rides cost around £15 per ride to supply, however in order to keep our services accessible for riders our suggested minimum donation is £5 per half hour ride. This compares to a rate of an average of £35 for a half hour riding lesson with commercial riding stables in the local area. The remaining costs are largely met from our fundraising efforts.

As required by the Charity Commission we have £50,000 in reserves to ensure running costs can be met. Due to prudent financial planning we have c.£70,000 in our current accounts which will ensure we are able to meet the immediate challenges the COVID 19 crisis brings.







## FUNDRAISING

Following the Trustee strategy meeting in February 2020 we undertook to review our fundraising strategy to examine how we can further diversify our income streams including exploring the opportunities to increase the funding available to us through grant making bodies and trust funds. This is a piece of work which will require further research in the year ahead as we consider the impact COVID19 will have on our traditional fundraising activities.

During the early part of 2019/20 we organized and hosted a series of Tack Sales. A new fundraising activity which proved to be popular and successful in terms of both raising funds and strengthening our connections with the local equine community. We are looking at ways of being able to expand on these as circumstances allow going into 2021/22.

Our existing fundraising events were heavily impacted in the latter half of 2019/20 by the COVID 19 pandemic with the cancellation of the events such as the Open dressage. We revitalised our on-line fundraising activities including the Easy Fundraising portal to take advantage of the increase volume of on-line shopping in the latter half of 2019/20. This approach is showing signs of success. We are also planning to launch a Sponsor a Pony scheme.

We have benefitted from donations made by supporters, both individuals and organisations, both new and continuing supporters, and these are a vital part of our fundraising income. This year their generosity has enable us to purchase a new pony, install new shelters, buy new tack and equipment for our ponies as well as meet our daily running costs. We are grateful for their support.



## EVENTS

Our 50th Anniversary was the centre piece of the events programme in 2019/20.

We held our 50th Anniversary Birthday Party for our volunteers, riders, and their families and friends in September. It was a wonderful opportunity to gather our community, both past and present, to celebrate the progress Epsom RDA has made in its' first 50 years. It was also an opportunity to look at the future plans for our site to ensure Epsom RDA continues to offer our riders the best possible facilities.

Our Annual Prizegiving was revamped this year, being held in the prestigious venue of the Duchess Stand at Epsom Downs Racecourse in November 2019. It was a fitting venue in which to celebrate the achievements of our riders in our 50th year.

The 50th Anniversary Horse Show held in June was a chance to open our facilities to the local equine community who have supported us so well over the years. It was a tremendous day with a strong turnout of both stalwart supporters and first-time visitors. It was especially rewarding to see our riders and horses competing alongside our visitors.

2020 will forever be remembered as the year that could have been and in common with many equine organisations our events planned for Spring 2020 and beyond were cancelled.

Future live events will need to be re-designed to create a safe and sustainable model. We are working with new and existing associates and organisations, to identify how the Epsom RDA can run events that commercially support the Group with a review of how we can best use and fully utilise our facilities in a suitable manner that enhances, promotes, and raises much needed funds. Whilst 2020 is the year that could have been, we are hopeful that 2021 will become a year that has new and exciting opportunities for events and that we can also re-establish and once again host our much-loved events.



## COMMUNICATIONS

Our aim is for communications across our Group to be effective, informative, and transparent; engaging and inspiring our audiences to generate support for the Group

Our approach to internal communications has developed through 2019/20 to make use of a wider range of tools and approaches including

- adopting the use of WhatsApp to communicate day to day operational information
- the introduction of SharePoint to support collaborative working
- use of MS Teams to support virtual meetings

Development of our internal communications will continue to ensure we keep our riders, parents/carers and institutions informed of the Groups' activities.

Our social media channels are fundamental to supporting the delivery of our fundraising and volunteer recruitment strategies. They have become well established and supported by volunteers, riders, parents/carers, and the wider community. Work continues to develop these further, for example our website is in the process of a re-design to bring it up to date to ensure it is compatible with all devices, accessible, and simple to navigate with key information to the forefront. Our thanks to Rosebery Housing Association for their support during the initial redesign and build of the new site.

During 2019/20 we have invested more resource in increasing our media coverage with the aim to further raise our profile with our local communities. Progress has started to be made in this area with increased coverage in the local and regional media outlets. We will continue to look for further opportunities to generate media interest in the achievements of the Group and our plans for the future.



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*This partnership has ensured that our pupils get the very best from all their sessions and the staff respond in a very kind, caring and appropriate way which has a huge and positive impact for everyone.*

*These benefits are:*

- *Calming effect on pupils –*
- *Physical development*
- *Learning to follow instruction from other adults*
- *Opportunities to be part of a wider community*
- *Increasing/developing a skill*
- *Listening and responding –*
- *PSHE development*

***Papillon House School***

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## GROUNDS AND PROPERTY

A more strategic approach has been developed for the maintenance of our site in 2019/20. This has involved the creation of a works schedule with high priority investments being agreed at Trustee meetings. Several improvements have been made to the grounds and buildings this year as a result of this process including investing in:

- A new path to ensure safe access to our paddocks, particularly during the wet winter weather,
- Mud slabs outside of field shelters which enable ponies to be brought in much more safely
- Two new field shelters
- Renovation of the muck heap
- New entrance gates

Our site is maintained by a highly skilled and dedicated team of volunteers. Priorities for the year ahead will be to continue to build and maintain a schedule of works which takes account of new challenges as a result of COVID19 as well the wetter, windier weather which is likely to be the norm. The team are augmented by the support of organisations who donate their skills and times to work on projects where we need extra hands. We are exploring how we can encourage more support from local and regional companies as part of their Corporate Social Responsibility commitment.

Our plans to expand the site via the new indoor school will also place new demands on our site. Recruitment and retention of highly skilled maintenance volunteers will be a key priority, as will close working across the Fundraising and Finance team to ensure that our site is equipped to deal with growth in terms of riders and the activities we are able to offer them



## FUTURE PLANS

Although it feels like a lifetime ago now, when getting together physically was the norm, the Trustees met in February to review our strategic plan. We started by reviewing the RDA UK Vision and Values (see graphic below) and considering how we make that a reality for the Epsom Group

We aspire over the next 5 years to improve the quality and flexibility of the riding experience, including broadening the range of disabled people who can participate. We are keen develop more services around pony interactions for non-riders, alongside a new hippotherapy service for those that would benefit from it.

We also want to continue to offer variety within our riding lessons, and enable those who wish to opportunities to compete, with a focus on the Countryside Challenge, Endurance riding, and Dressage. We recognise that this will mean investment in developing the capability of our herd, especially given the age of some of our stalwarts. We will also need to invest in the development of our site and in the Summer of 2019 we made a major step forward in achieving our vision for the future with the granting of planning permission for the building of new and bigger indoor school. We will now need to focus on raising funds to build a new car park and the new indoor school to:

St Ebba's Farm, Hook Road, Epsom KT19 8QW

[www.epsomrda.org.uk](http://www.epsomrda.org.uk)

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- Improve safety through separating vehicles, ponies and people
- Increase the accessibility of the site for disabled people
- Tackle our rider waiting list
- Contribute to our financial sustainability through increased ride income and other income potential.

As we end our 2019/20 year amid the COVID19 pandemic some of this may seem a distant aspiration, but the strategic plan has given us clear parameters to work within. For example, the work being done to arrange pony care visits for participants unable to ride whilst maintaining COVID 19 social distancing, will provide a strong basis for developing our non-riding services. We remain ambitious and excited about growing and developing Epsom RDA in the future.

Charity Number 1180061



## RDA UK VISION AND VALUES

Our Vision	To enrich the lives of all disabled people through horses.
Our Purpose	To ensure that all our participants get an excellent experience with RDA, according to their specific needs.
Our Values	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. RDA is a community of people who believe that it's what you can do that counts and who enable participants and volunteers to achieve their goals;</li><li>2. RDA values the input of all people who are involved –participants, volunteers and paid staff;</li><li>3. RDA ensures that development and achievement is recognised and celebrated across the organisation;</li><li>4. RDA aims to deliver an excellent service and experience for all participants and volunteers;</li><li>5. RDA recognises the central part that horses and ponies play in everything we do.</li></ol>