

COLNEY HEATH PARISH COUNCIL

✉ **Postal Address:** Highfield Park Visitor Centre, Hill End Lane AL4 0RA
☎ **Telephone:** (01727) 825 314
💻 **Website:** <https://colneyheathparishcouncil.gov.uk>
✉ **E-mail:** clerk@colneyheathparishcouncil.gov.uk



2025-26 Item 49

Abandoned Horse on The Warren, Colney Heath Common

1. Purpose of Report

To update Councillors on the recent case of an abandoned horse on The Warren and the actions taken under the Control of Horses Act 2015, and to set out lessons learned and recommendations for future cases.

2. Background

On 22 July 2025, a Gypsy Yanner stallion was first noted on The Warren. All gates had been unexpectedly padlocked and chained shut, due to its nature as a stallion the horse was keen to escape. To ensure safety, it was corralled into a smaller area on 29 July 2025.

On 5 August 2025, statutory notices under the Control of Horses Act 2015 were placed. The statutory 96-hour period expired at 5pm on 8 August 2025, after which responsibility defaulted to Colney Heath Parish Council.

On 8 August 2025, the Parish Council received a call from the alleged owner who claimed the horse was a service animal. The Police, Social Services, RSPCA, Equine Society, and Blue Cross became involved given the owner's mental health needs. However, it became clear that the owner had no facilities to move or care for the horse, and therefore welfare could not be maintained by the previous owner.

'Charlie' roaming free in The Warren 23/07/2025



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Charlie corralled as he wanted to jump fences 29/07/2025



3. Welfare Actions Taken

- The horse's welfare was monitored daily by the Common Ranger with additional forage support provided by neighbouring farmers.
- The horse was visited by an equine specialist to ensure its suitability to remain in the smaller enclosure until rehoming.
- Recognising the welfare risk, the Clerk with the assistance of Cllr James sought to arrange rehoming rather than boarding. Blue Cross advised that October 2025 was the earliest potential placement date, which was deemed too long to secure immediate welfare.
- The horse was discreetly advertised for rehoming (with no money changing hands) subject to following strict conditions:

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- Collection costs of the horse (as seen).
 - Registration and passport to be obtained within 30 days.
 - Payment of all veterinary fees for health checks, dentistry, gelding, and any medical needs.
 - Full acceptance of liability for the horse's ongoing welfare.
- Three expressions of interest were received. Paperwork was signed and the horse has now been rehomed and will be checked by a horse welfare specialist. The Parish Council will maintain contact with the new owners to ensure standards of care are met. He was collected 27/08/2025.

Ernie settling into his new home 28/08/2025



- An update was received on 02/09/2025 'Ernie's put on some weight which is good. The vet was out yesterday, he has a microchip so they are arranging a passport for him, he's had a full health check, first vaccination and his exam to be gelded. He will have his second vaccination before being gelded so mid October. The farrier is coming out tomorrow so get his feet on the mend as bless him they are awful. He's got his own little pen so he can have some grazing and get used to seeing the other horses before he joins them.'

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4. Considerations

- Engaging an equine bailiff was considered but discounted, as this often results in the destruction of the animal. Rehoming was therefore the most welfare-friendly and cost-effective option.
- This case demonstrates the risks posed to the Council by the Control of Horses Act 2015, where responsibility for abandoned horses can fall upon the Parish.

5. Recommendation

That Council notes the actions taken to safeguard the welfare of the abandoned horse and that Council continues to monitor the situation and maintains a watching brief on any further horse welfare issues arising on Colney Heath Common.

6. Lessons Learned

a) Legal Risks

- Under the Control of Horses Act 2015, once the statutory notice period expires, ownership and responsibility for abandoned horses defaults to the landowner in this case, the Parish Council.
- This places the Council in a position of direct legal responsibility for the animal's welfare, including liability for rehoming or, in extreme cases, veterinary intervention.
- Any future cases will require swift compliance with statutory procedures to protect the Council from challenge.

b) Financial Risks

- Costs associated with abandoned animals can be significant, covering forage, veterinary checks, transport, rehoming, and potential boarding fees.
- In this case, early rehoming helped to mitigate long-term expense, but reliance on charitable organisations such as Blue Cross may not always be possible.
- The Council should consider whether a contingency reserve should be identified for such incidents, as costs could otherwise fall unbudgeted on the parish precept.

c) Welfare Risks

- Welfare must remain the overriding consideration. Leaving the horse for extended periods could have compromised its health and safety, as well as the safety of residents and other Common users.
- Involvement of partner agencies (RSPCA, Police, Social Services, Blue Cross) was crucial to safeguarding welfare and ensuring transparency in decision-making.
- The risk of reputational damage to the Council exists if welfare is not promptly and visibly addressed.

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d) Operational Risks

- The process required significant input from the Clerk, Common Ranger, and external volunteers (neighbouring farmers providing forage). This level of resource commitment could stretch Council capacity if repeated.
- Security of the Common (e.g. gates, fencing) remains a vulnerability, with abandoned or escaped animals likely to reoccur unless preventative measures are considered.

7. Next Steps / Recommendations

a) Establish a Contingency Budget

- Council may wish to set aside a small contingency fund specifically for unexpected animal welfare incidents on parish-owned or managed land. This would help manage the financial risks identified and ensure rapid response in future cases.

b) Review Insurance and Legal Cover

- The Clerk should explore whether the Parish Council's insurance policies provide any scope for coverage of costs associated with abandoned animals, and whether additional cover may be appropriate.

c) Strengthen Relationships with Partner Agencies

- Continue to maintain close working relationships with the RSPCA, Police, Social Services, Blue Cross, and local farmers, so that coordinated action can be taken swiftly if similar incidents occur.
- Establishing a clear point of contact with each agency would ensure efficient communication during future incidents.

d) Common Security Review

- Review the adequacy of current fencing and gate arrangements at Colney Heath Common, including the location of gates and risk of animals being abandoned.
- Council may wish to consider whether minor adjustments or additional deterrents could reduce opportunities for abandonment.

Parish Clerk/RFO
03/09/2025