



End of Grant Report



Our Sanctuary.

Mane Chance Sanctuary is a horse sanctuary, but we are not a typical animal sanctuary. We rescue and rehabilitate horses from abuse, neglect and abandonment and then work with them to support members of our community. The welfare of our animals is of the highest importance - our care revolves around the horse-human connection and the benefits that both the humans and the horses receive from this contact.

We currently have 38 horses living at Mane Chance, all rescued from situations of neglect, abandonment and abuse. Our equine team work tirelessly to bring the horses back to health, both physically and emotionally – with patience, kindness, gentleness and most importantly time, they are able to regain the trust and confidence of the animals and create a wonderfully strong relationship. Our horses live out in our fields and tracks in herds of up to 10 animals, allowing them to form natural relationships with each other and to experience the safety and security of a group. The hierarchy of the herds is fascinating to watch as new horses who are gaining strength and confidence jostle for status establishing their position within the herd – exactly as they would in the wild, only then for it to settle again once they have all agreed who is who! We also do not ride our horses at Mane Chance – instead, we work ‘on the ground’ with them – grooming, walking, rehabilitating, playing and even lying with them - this in turn creates a respectful, non-dominant connection which helps so much with the work we do in the community. We run support sessions for underprivileged people, young and old, including those living with mental health issues, disability or are non-attending or excluded from school. Children who struggle in mainstream schools often thrive in alternative surroundings and our farm offers an opportunity for them to learn and achieve away from their everyday struggles. We also work with local charities and groups, including those supporting people living with dementia, early onset dementia, epilepsy, terminal illness, neurodisability, sight loss and hearing impairment. We are proud to have welcomed those recovering from stroke, those who have been bereaved, young carers, Ukrainian families living in Surrey, those living with domestic abuse and also companionship groups, supporting those who have lost partners and who are at risk of isolation – a larger than usual number of people due to the recent pandemic. Each of our horses brings their own personality to our Sanctuary and gives back the love and kindness that we bestow upon them – and more! We are so privileged to have them and to be able to give them the care that they deserve – reminding them that whatever may have happened in their past, they are safe now – and not all humans are the same! At the same time, our community work has no boundaries – our site is accessible to all and our welcome is warm.

Mane Chance.

For horses. For people. For better lives.

Our Project:

We offer our horses the safety and security of a home for life, choosing not to rehome them after rehabilitation. Not only does this mean that we can accept those that need long-term specialist care or lengthy rehabilitation (as there is no timescale to prepare them for moving on), but it also allows us to create stable herds that form relationships with both each other and our teams – perfect for creating the optimum environment for our community work.

Our ethos of horse care follows the five domains model, considering emotional welfare as a priority in addition to the animal's physical health. Our methods of daily care as well as the choices we make regarding site developments are shaped by this approach and we consider the mental health of our horses with everything we do.

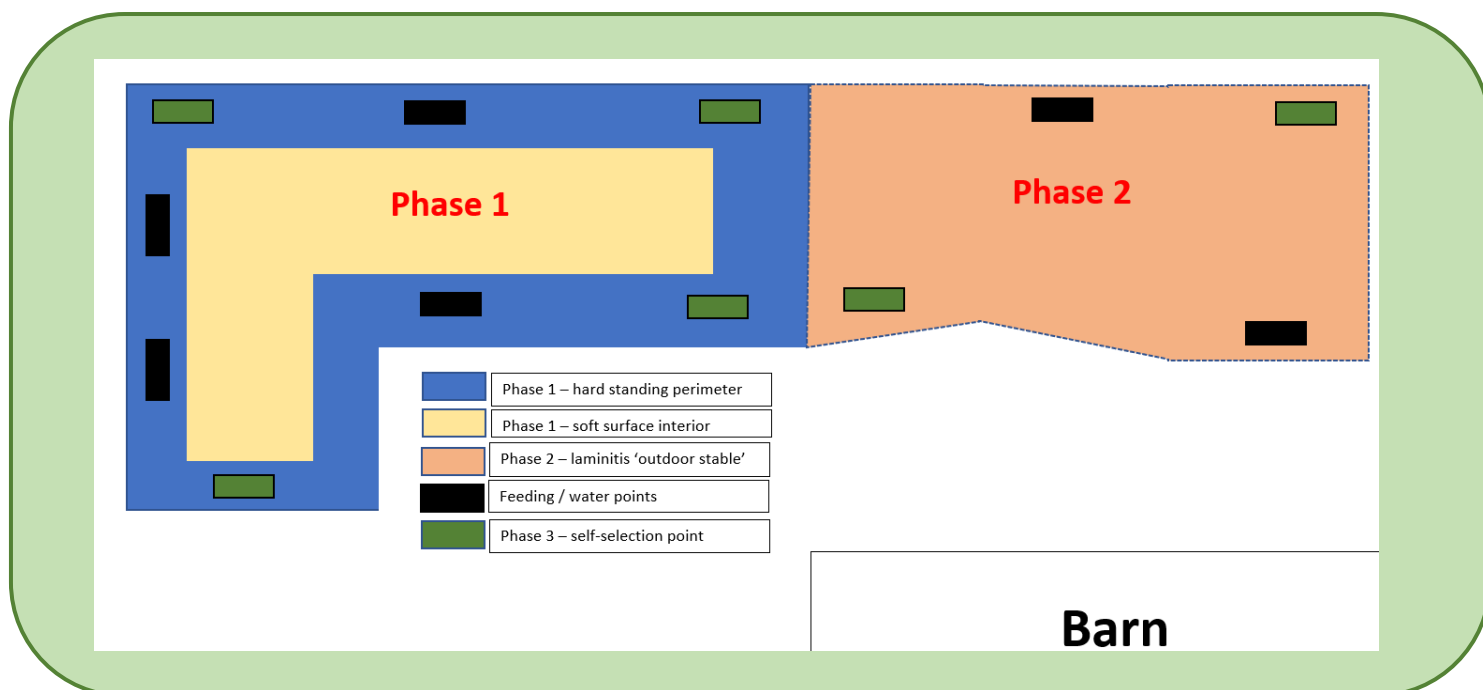
We provide as natural an environment as possible for them to recover from past traumas, form herd relationships and live a life of safety and peace. Whilst we do have stables on site for medical emergencies, our horses are not regularly brought in as we prefer to work with them out in the fields, close to their herds. This includes our rehabilitation methods, appointments with our professionals (vets, dentists, trimmers etc), and also our community work with those people who come to us for support.

Some of our horses have lifelong conditions and illnesses, all managed with high quality equine and veterinary care, combined with a controlled diet where appropriate - like similar establishments, we experience the pressures of laminitis, cushings and EMS, amongst others. By having horses that live out, it is a constant juggle - although supported by medication, natural supplements and our awareness of weather and grass conditions, there are inevitably times when horses require time off grass with controlled feeding to prevent any discomfort occurring – previously this involved resting in a stable or in one of our smaller laminitis paddocks but both options (although they always were placed there with another horse as companion) meant moving an animal away from the comfort and security of its herd and confining them much more than they (or we) would like.

Our project plan was to create a large track area without grass but with porous surfaces so that any horse 'on watch' could remain out living sociably within their group, rather than being separated from their herd and taken inside – by doing this, we could create the controlled environment of a stable but outdoors in the fresh air, with more space and more companionship!

An added advantage was that it would also give us a larger more accessible area for working with horses and members of our community all year round, particularly those in wheelchairs or with mobility difficulties, something that we sometimes struggle to achieve in the harshest of weather!

Our Plan:



We had already identified an area of the site for this new initiative, close to our existing Shetland herd grazing area (they have a number in their group that we knew would immediately benefit from this project) and easily accessible from all other fields and tracks on site.

Our design (see above, not to scale!) was very easy to create and finalise – the equine and site teams were able to align their desired criteria with practical solutions fairly quickly. But it wasn't all plain-sailing - whilst being a beautiful location for a Sanctuary, Mane Chance is nestled in the Surrey Hills, which does mean that we are situated on a slope and there are only

very small pockets of flat land. This was not ideal for a loose surface project, knowing that when we experienced heavy rain, our wonderful soft surface would simply wash down the hill – so we needed to factor in solutions for that too. We also engaged our vets with the design and proposal – their input was vital in ensuring that our plan was realistically going to achieve the desired effect and did not get side-tracked away from its core aims by over-cautious budgetary restraints or oversight.

Following this collaboration, we decided to split the project into phases – just to enable us to fundraise and make some changes relatively quickly – to attempt everything at once would mean lengthy application processes and delays in actually improving things for our horses.

In 2022, we started phase 1.....

The Build:

As with all projects, the key to the success of the build was preparation! The piece of land we had chosen was sloped (but not as much as some of the other areas we have!) and made up of chalk, which brought both positives and negatives.

- Firstly, we had to deal with the terrain – our aim was to have 5-6 inches depth of soft surfacing which would give great respite to sore feet and encourage maximum rest by being comfortable enough for the horses to lay or roll in. But we knew that we risked travelling surface water carrying loose grains down the slope and out of the field entirely during poor weather – plus even the horses could kick or push it out of the boundary! In order to combat this, we dug a shallow bowl into the chalk with a lip around it to contain the surface material a little more, preventing unwanted escape.
- To assist with what was already going to be reasonable drainage (due to it being chalk), we also dug some perforated pipe into the lower surface of the chalk bowl, running it out of the field to a natural soakaway. This meant that we could enhance the drainage properties of the whole area preventing puddles and further surface movement. Not to mention a drier surface is safer and more comfortable for our horses, staff and visitors too!
- Due to the natural slope of the land, the creation of the ‘bowl’ meant that the lip was higher at the top of the area than it was at the bottom. For safety, we built a fence along the top level to prevent any over-excited or non-concentrating horse or human from misjudging the edge of the ridge!
- Finally, around the circumference of the whole area, we laid planings (porous but harder wearing material) to ensure we had vehicle access around the space. The soft surface would not support our site vehicles (small tractor and gator) so it was important to maintain full access so that the daily routine was not compromised and that emergency access was possible, if required.



The Surface

In preparation, we had researched a number of different surfaces and whilst it was easy to get swept along by the vast range of enticing and luxurious possibilities on the market, we were not looking for professional equine school quality materials – our priority was deep comfort that could sustain the weather conditions as much as possible.

Through online research and discussions with both our vets and with a number of professionals in the field, we narrowed down our search criteria. However, high costs were concerning and we were worried that our first couple of choices were out of our price range. But then fortune came our way when one of the suppliers we had sought advice from notified us that he had been asked to clear a relatively new sand school (which had been sold for redevelopment) and would have second-hand materials available. A fine mixture of sand and rubber, this was a stable yet good quality option that fitted within our budget too! Plus there was enough to give a 5-6 inch depth across the whole area – we were thrilled.



The Results:

Despite it being only phase 1 of the project, the difference it has made to us is already immeasurable. Our Shetland herd have been the first group of our horses to experience the surface and they absolutely love it. We have one particular elderly Shetland who arrived with us with very unkempt hooves from years of neglect. Whilst our trimmers and our team have got them back on track, she is still a footsore-prone horse, also suffering from Cushings. She is also not particularly agile, again from years of neglect - for her to lie down takes a lot of effort and rarely do we see her completely rest for any length of time when the ground is hard. When we opened the new area, she was quick to realise that not only was the new surface comfortable to lie on, but the softness cushioned her awkward method of laying down and provided a much softer landing! She certainly led the way for the others and they joined her, basking in the late Winter sun that was now flooding the site.

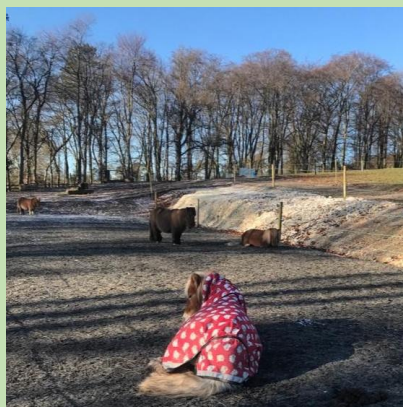
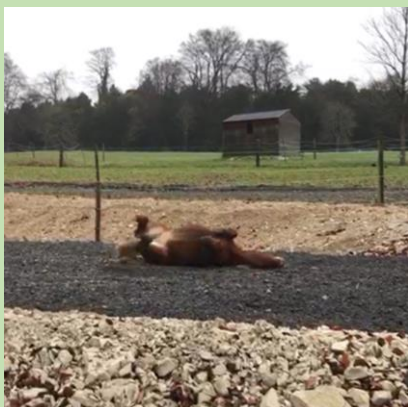
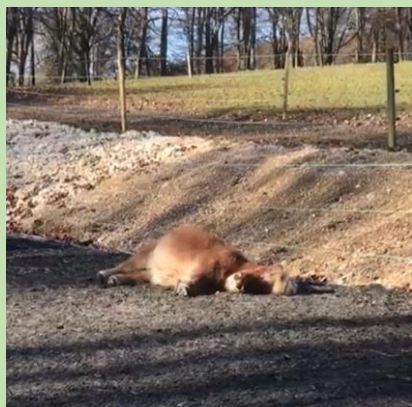
The impact of the smaller Shetlands is proving not to have any effect on the surface, and whilst we plan to regularly rake it to loosen any compacted particles, with this herd, it's not such an onerous job! We expect to have to do a little more when the larger horses are using the space, but with our treasured volunteer team, this is not going to impact hugely on our time management.

We have also experienced some very cold weather since this surface has been laid and it's freezing point is proving to be even lower than we had understood, which is an unexpected bonus – in fact, it has not frozen yet (fingers crossed as I type this) and so is providing very efficient respite from the cold, hard ground for those who need it.

Another surprise was quite how much fun the horses find it – the texture 'apparently' resembles a racetrack surface as they are often seen tearing round, playing with each other – it's a really lovely sight that we usually only expect to see in the summer when they are on our larger tracks!

So all in all, this has been a very successful and welcome addition to our Sanctuary – we are keen to constantly improve Mane Chance and offer our horses the best facilities that we can, (no less than they deserve when you consider the backgrounds they have come from) and notwithstanding our location, the weather and the usual challenges of running a site of course! But this really has given us more return than we were expecting – we had seen this project as creating a respite area that we would factor into our physical horse care methods initiated by the desire to keep our herds outside together, reducing the need to stable them. But what it has also turned out to be is an enrichment area – a place of fun, exercise, high quality rest and interaction – and despite there being no grass, we don't have any problem bringing the herd into it when we need to.

Our only problem now is introducing our Shetland herd to the notion of sharing the access when we wish to bring other horses into the area – they have rather adopted it as their own!



Next Steps:

We obviously have the next couple of phases to complete over the coming year, as originally planned. This includes the integration and connecting of this new area with our existing laminitis paddocks which will be upgraded slightly at the same time. Following that, we wish to create some self-selection areas of herbs and forage for the horses to access – we use a lot of this at the Sanctuary with very successful results – plus it's fun to do for both the humans and horses!

As expected, there have been a couple of tweaks to the original plan whilst completing phase 1. As mentioned before, the ridge at the top of the area was a little higher and steeper than we had anticipated due to the slope of the land. We have placed a fence (for safety) already, but it has created a strip in between that is a little unsightly, and more importantly a waste of space! We are going to plant the area with heathers and other hardy plants that will grow on chalk – not only to add to the forage options, but also to reinforce the bank a little and create some surface cover to prevent water pouring down in the inclement weather! Luckily the electric fence we have put up will allow the plants to mature and become hardy enough before the Shetlands and other horses will be able to reach them!

Lessons learnt:

The most important lesson we have learnt is to follow our instincts and make the unusual possible - welcoming input at every stage. Our equine team work so hard to maximise the emotional and physical health of our animals, this initiative was very much influenced by them and they have been involved at every step – giving even our trainee groom input and ownership of the project. By also working so collaboratively with our site contractor (who knows the land very well) and other professionals in the field (our vet and relevant suppliers), it has really elevated this project higher than we could have done alone.

Thanks:

This leads us to the most important part of this report - we would like to thank everyone at the Hilda Holmes Trust Fund and Horses4Health for donating to us, enabling us to fulfil our ambition of providing this space for our horses. Without their support, this simply would not have been possible – in the current economic climate, fundraising is hard as supporters are understandably under pressure from every angle and having to make difficult decisions. For us to have been able to secure funds for this project has allowed us to look a little more to the future of the charity, rather than solely concentrate on the here and now.

Thank you from all of the Mane Chance team!

