

# APRIL AGM MEETING

## Alkham Valley Community Project

A talk by Josianne Murrel

Reported by Alan Lee

The Alkham Valley Community Project (AVCP) is run as an independent charity with the aim to make horse-riding accessible, and affordable, to young people who would otherwise be unable to participate in this amazing activity. It is an active member of the Riding for the Disabled Association (RDA) and promotes their aims to provide specialist sessions for people with physical or intellectual disability at a subsidised rate.

A full and varied range of disabilities are covered with the riders that participate. The age range is for all ages from 5 years old upwards. The coaches are all experienced and RDA approved.

The AVCP project has, over the last five years, enjoyed close links with a number of specialist schools within the Dover District area and provides sessions tailored to their students' needs. Not only do they focus on the physical benefits of riding in the countryside, but they also recognise and concentrate on the calming effects that being around, and riding, horses and ponies has.

They recognise that the local area has some of

the most deprived wards in the country and that the cost of riding could be out of reach for many families. With this in mind, they work in partnership with the national Holiday Activities and Food Scheme (HAF). This means that they can offer fully funded holiday clubs for children aged 8-16 who are eligible for benefits-related free school meals. In 2023 they were able to offer 360 individual holiday club spaces. At present, the plan, is to offer at least the same number of places for 2024. Through their own fundraising efforts, they also offer a limited number of subsidised sessions for riders in financial difficulty.

The book *War Horse* by Michael Morpurgo is studied by many primary schools as part of their curriculum. The AVCP have linked to these schools and developed what they call *War Horse* days to expand on the equine references in the book.

They also have an interactive riding simulator which is available to novice and advanced riders. This is an effective teaching tool that allows the riding instructor to remain close to the rider as the student is introduced to what it feels like for a horse to walk, trot and canter.



*A lesson inside the covered school*



*Riding Simulator*