



Responsible Re-homing

Equine charities receive a large number of calls every month from horse owners seeking alternative homes for their animals. There are over one million horses and donkeys in the UK and the charitable sector has limited space available and must prioritise welfare and rescue cases. Welfare organisations simply do not have the resources to take in all the horses whose owners can no longer afford to care for them. However, the Donkey Sanctuary will always provide a permanent home for any donkey or mule certified fit to travel.

This information sheet is one of two aimed at helping owners in difficult circumstances. The first, 'Cutting Costs without Compromising on Welfare', aims to help owners plan for the future and reduce costs without compromising their horses' welfare. This accompanying document outlines the most responsible options available if you find that having a horse is an expense you can definitely no longer afford. The term horse is used to cover all domestic equine species, including horses, ponies, donkeys, hinnies and mules.

Thinking about Re-homing

If you are starting to struggle financially and have exhausted cost cutting possibilities, the sooner you look into the re-homing options the better the chances of securing a positive outcome for you and your horse. If possible and appropriate, keep your horse in work so that potential owners/keepers can see his fitness level and working potential.

Selling

If your horse is fit and healthy this may be the most straightforward option. There are many responsible people looking to buy a horse, but it is essential to be honest about your horse's health, temperament and needs in order to get the best home. Once you have sold your horse you will have no control over what happens to it in the future.

Most people are looking to take on a straightforward healthy horse. Owners of elderly horses or those with severe behavioural problems or a recurrent health or lameness problem should think very carefully before selling their horse as these animals may be at an increased risk of receiving sub-standard care or being passed on. In these cases veterinary advice should be sought.

Always word adverts carefully; avoid using phrases such as 'reduced for quick sale' or 'free to a good home' even if you are not concerned about financial recompense, as this is unlikely to attract genuine buyers.

In order to secure a good home for your horse, it is advisable to:

- Make sure the person visits your horse in his current home and rides him a few times (if applicable) to ensure they are compatible and that the rider can handle the horse. Discuss the personality and needs of your horse
- Try to find out as much as possible about their level of horse knowledge and previous experience
- Ask for references, perhaps from their veterinary surgeon, farrier or livery yard manager. Follow up the references with a phone call
- Visit the home beforehand and check its suitability.

Loaning Prior to Transferring Ownership

Many people find it useful to arrange a trial period of loan before agreeing to sign over ownership of the horse. This provides a period where both parties can assess whether the decision is right for everyone involved. It is advisable to have a signed contract for the trial period.

Loaning

This can work well if it is carefully arranged. It is important to remember that although another person will be caring for your horse, as the owner, you retain a legal responsibility for the welfare of your horse.



There are inevitably risks involved in asking another person to take on the time and expense of caring for your horse, but those risks can be reduced with careful planning at the outset.

In addition to the practical re-homing steps advised under the selling section above, it is also advisable to;

- Look for a local home, as it will be easier to keep in touch with your horse and the borrower.
- Always put a written loan agreement in place to define exactly what is expected of each party, including regular visits, but understand that a borrower will have their own routine and ways of doing things. The agreement should be signed by both parties and a copy kept by each.
- Ensure you have a contingency plan should the loan home wish to return your horse. This could happen at any time and you must be prepared to take your horse back or secure another home. If this is not possible, you may need to arrange and pay for the horse to be put down.

Companion Homes

In some cases it may be possible to find a suitable home for a non-ridden horse as a companion. But fewer people are willing to take on the expense of a horse they cannot ride. People who are looking for a companion generally seek a horse that is straightforward and requires minimal management and expense. You also need to consider whether this is the right thing for your horse. Older horses may find a new home unsettling and stressful and this may not be the kindest option for them. The general tips for loaning outlined above should still be applied.

Commercial Retirement Homes

These are generally full livery yards, which cater specifically for elderly or retired horses. It can be an expensive option depending upon how the horses are managed. Make sure you research and visit any establishment before placing your horse in their care. It is advisable to have a formal agreement signed by both parties that outlines how the arrangement will work.

Equine Charities

Most charities are unable to take horses from private owners due to the high number of rescue and neglect cases. Each charity has its own criteria for accepting horses and most would expect you to sign ownership over to the organisation. These charities have very few spaces but are more than happy to discuss the options available to you in more detail. If you are fortunate enough to be offered a place with an equine charity it is important to research and visit the organisation that has made the offer before accepting. Find out whether the organisation is a registered charity, or is a member of the National Equine Welfare Council and ask to visit and be shown around.

Euthanasia

For some owners, re-homing isn't a responsible or realistic option for their horse. In these cases, having the horse put down may be the kindest thing to do if you can no longer meet his needs yourself.

Many people may feel guilty even considering this option. However it is one of the most responsible decisions an owner can make when they cannot safeguard their animal's future welfare by any other means and it is certainly not the worst possible outcome for the horse. It is always better to have a horse put down in familiar soundings rather than to re-home unwisely. Speaking to your veterinary surgeon may help with this decision.

It is your duty as the owner to look carefully into all available re-homing options should you become unable to care for your horse yourself. Every owner, by accepting and dealing with re-homing responsibly, can make a real difference to the overall standards of welfare in the UK. This may reduce the cycle of neglect seen regularly by equine welfare charities.

This leaflet has been produced by the member organisations of the National Equine Welfare Council.

For further advice, please contact the NEWC office on 01926 866655 or e-mail info@newc.co.uk for details of your local NEWC member.