

Hope despite 'devastating' blow of losing Belton

Organisers have spoken to potential replacement venues

By ELEANOR JONES

THE organisers of Belton Horse Trials have already been contacted by potential replacement venues after the "devastating" cancellation of the event.

Property owner the National Trust is pulling the plug on the international fixture, which had run for 40 years. Stuart Buntine, of organisers Bede Events, said the decision was "out of the blue" — but the event will run at another venue next year.

"In business we are used to collaboration, openness and consultation if there is an issue. I'm sorry to say that the National Trust did none of that when making its decision," he said.

"But we remain committed to safeguarding the future of the [event] and have already been approached by a significant number of potential venues, which is very encouraging.

Belton was started in 1980 by David Brownlow, prior to the trust's ownership. It has since remained at Belton House but will continue at a new venue in 2020."

Mr Buntine told *H&H* the trust's decision was "devastating for the sport", as Belton has always gone ahead when bad weather has hit other competitions, acting as a "winging post" for Badminton.

Jonty Evans, who won the CIC3* (now CCI4*-S) Grantham Cup at Belton in 2018, said the trust's decision was "terrible".

"I can't think of an adjective to describe it sufficiently," he told *H&H*. "Belton has been an

institution for so many people.

"Its loss will really be felt and I don't envy Stuart Buntine trying to find somewhere to replace it."

The National Trust said the announcement came after a "valued partnership" with Bede and that the event's growth is "unfortunately at odds with the conservation management of the Grade I-listed parkland; preventing risks to the historic earthworks and buried archaeology through compaction and erosion, to the parkland wildlife, and veteran trees and their root systems."

"We recognise the significance

of the horse trials and their place in Belton's recent history, and have not come to this decision lightly," said Ian Cooper, general manager of Belton House. "The core purpose of the National Trust is to protect this historic place for future generations, and we must honour that commitment."

Jude Matthews, interim CEO of British Eventing (BE), said it was "very disappointing".

"I'd like to thank Stuart and Anna Buntine for all they have done at Belton; its success and growth is testament to their work," she said, adding that BE intends to re-tender for the fixture shortly, and that ground and weatherproofing will be key, as it is such a key event in the calendar.



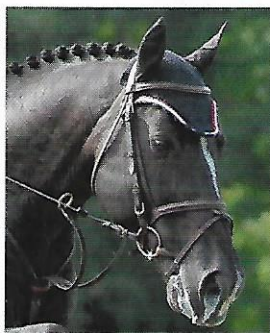
Jonty Evans and Cooley Rorkes Drift won Belton's 2018 Grantham Cup

HORSES IN THE NEWS



MOUNT ST JOHN FREESTYLE

Charlotte Dujardin's world team and individual bronze medal-winning ride will return to FEI competition at Bolesworth (12-16 June). It will be the first show for the 10-year-old mare since Tryon.



BILLY CONGO

William Funnell's 18-year-old European team gold medal-winning stallion is to focus on breeding duties. Pippa Funnell, who produced the horse, retook the reins in 2018 and finished second in the Queen Elizabeth II Cup.



ALICANTE VALLEY

The 14-year-old, owned by Jennifer Whittaker, scored his first FEI wins abroad at Saumur CDI2* on his overseas debut, with British rider Jess Dunn. The pair topped the inter I and inter I freestyle classes.

Campaign to get hunting's voice heard

"IT'S our turn to speak" is the title of a new campaign aimed at getting hunting's voice heard.

This is Hunting UK (TiHUK) wants supporters to try to counteract the often misguided views spread by those who are against the sport.

James Barclay of the group told *H&H* the countryside, and hunting in particular, are "very much in the spotlight".

"We want to turn that tide and meet it head-on," he said, adding that hunting plays a central role in countryside communities, but that

it is being "targeted" by antis.

"It's time for us to stand up and be counted against verbal or otherwise attacks, and ensure the message is put across."

Mr Barclay urged supporters to speak to unconvinced people, while the group will share positive information on its social media.

TiHUK is also running a competition, for photographs of hunts and hounds interacting with the public. The best will win £150 and a copy of *The Hunting Year*, by former *H&H* editor Michael Clayton. In a separate

competition, the hunt that has the most inspirational idea for allowing the public to meet its hounds will win £500.

Countryside Alliance head of hunting Polly Portwin said: "The hunting community recognises the impact of social media, but it's important we lead the agenda rather than following that of the animal rights lobbyists." EJ

● Email pictures to tihukmedia@gmail.com and details of ideas to joanna51@btpopenworld.com by 30 September.