



# Waregem and Horses



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## 1. Foreword

The “Waregem and Horses” brochure is intended to help you get to know our town. It is a town where horses play a very important role.

Let yourself be carried on horseback on an enjoyable ride through the equine history of Waregem.

The Bloso sports centre is the first stop on your trip, where you can find out how horse sports are brought to the general public.

We haven’t forgotten the social and therapeutic aspects of horse sports either. Both are intended to let the less fortunate people around us experience the pleasure and “wellness” of horse riding.

It goes without saying that our “horse parade”, the “*Waregem Koerse*” Races, are worth a closer look. Don’t forget to stop here on the Tuesday after the last Sunday in August !

And we don’t let national borders stop us, either. Waregem has to think and act internationally.

Proof of this is the General Protocol with regard to the Declaration of Intent, to set up a network of European towns to promote equine culture and heritage.

This protocol was initially signed by the towns of Jerez de la Frontera (Spain) and Waregem (Belgium). Since then, the towns of Pardubice (Czech Republic) and Golega (Portugal) have joined the network.

This has led to European bonds being forged between ambitious towns which all fly the banner of horses high.

## 2. Waregem, horse town

### 2.1. From village to city

Waregem is situated in the southeast of the province of West Flanders, on the border with East Flanders.

The name Waregem – from Waro-Inga-heim – was first recorded in the year 826, and is said to mean “the dwelling of the Waro clan.” The name and settlement are doubtless older and date from the Frankish period.

Until the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Waregem was a typical rural community with small-scale farming and cottage industries. The arrival of the railway from Ghent to Kortrijk in 1842 and then the E17 motorway surely contributed to the town’s considerable growth from a farming community into an industrial centre of worldwide renown. Waregem sets the pace for the surrounding communities in terms of culture as well as sport and recreation. The “Golden River” played an important role in the region in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, contributing to the flax and textile industries. Besides its flourishing textiles sector, Waregem’s Grand Steeplechase played its part in the development of the community from a village into a town.

A fusion on 1 April 1977 joined the main town of Waregem with Beveren-Leie, Desselgem and Sint-Eloois-Vijve.

On 23 June 1999, the Belgian Federal Parliament granted Waregem city status. This means that Waregem has officially been allowed to call itself a “city” since 1 January 2000.



## **2.2 History of a horse town**

The history of Waregem, from a rural community to a city, is entwined with the history of horses.

It is said that the horse is man's most noble conquest. However our city is living proof that horses have also conquered Waregem.

The beauty, elegance and strength of horses have led to the dominant role of horses in Waregem's history since 1847.

Prosperous citizens of the surrounding towns decided that the Waregem area would be an ideal place to organise hunting parties on foot and horseback.

In 1847, it was decided to organise races in the centre of the village.

The cobbles were dug up from the streets and on Monday 30 August 1847, the first race was held before a wildly enthusiastic local population.

The 'Waregem Koerse' Races were born.

Felix De Ruyck, a philanthropist and the then inhabitant of Casier Castle, and Jules Storme, a then member of the local council, were the founders of this event. Both were fervent horse lovers, who realised their dream of organising a horse race for the entertainment of the entire population.

In 1855, Felix De Ruyck was given permission to organise the races on the meadows and sowing land located by the Holstraat, just opposite the old Potegem Castle. They made a real steeplechase of it, with a jump over the Gaverbeek brook at its climax.

With the influence of Marc Lejeune, an industrialist from Northern France, the race grew into an unmissable event for anyone who was anyone at the time.

The great stables at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century moved to Waregem to take part in the Grand Steeplechase of Flanders. Horses belonging to Napoleon III, the Duke of Hamilton, Lord Derby, Lord Aylsebury, King Edward VII and King George V all came to Waregem.

As well as the Grand Steeplechase of Flanders, trotting races began to enjoy huge popularity. Horse sports in Waregem grew into a real show.

The modernisation, creation or renovation of the equine infrastructure of Waregem is an ongoing process, allowing the love between the people of Waregem and their horses to continue for decades to come.



The world-famous “Waregem Koerse” Races attract huge crowds to Waregem each year. It is a high point in the town’s calendar and that of the surrounding area, both near by and far away. The event always takes place on the first Tuesday after the last Sunday in August. The famous “Grand Steeplechase of Flanders”, with its spectacular jump over the Gaverbeek brook, is a sporting sensation. The “Waregem Koerse” races are part of a seven-day programme of festivities.

Where does the name Steeplechase come from?

A “steeple” is a type of church tower, and a chase is a hunt. In England, horse races were once held where the starting point was the church tower, and the race was run across all kinds of natural obstacles to the next church tower. These races were called chases.

Races between church towers were abandoned in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in favour of racecourses with similar natural obstacles. An example of such a natural obstacle at the Waregem hippodrome is of course the Gaverbeek brook, the most eye-catching feature of the “Waregem Koerse” Races. This wide jump makes great demands of both horse and jockey. They need to be sure of a good approach to this 7-metre wide jump in order to keep their competitive position in the race.

#### **Waregem street names related to horses:**

*Galopstraat* (Gallop Street) – *Gareelstraat* (Harness Street) – *Koetsierstraat* (Coachman Street) – *Ruitersdreef* (Riders’ Drive) – *Zadelstraat* (Saddle Street) – *Paardeput* (Horse Pit)

The **corridors in the new social security buildings** also refer to horses:

*Grote Steeplestraat* (Grand Steeple Street) - *Hoefslag* (Hoofprint) - *Amazonelaan* (Amazon Avenue) – *Ruiterlaan* (Riders’ Avenue) - *Renbaanweg* (Racetrack Way) – *Tilburywegel* - *Tiercélaan* - *De Kouter* (The Meadow) - *De Schuur* (The Stables) - *De Paddock* - *De Roskam* (Curry Comb) - *De Smesse* (The Forge).

The **Bridle House** is the city services’ depot.

### 3. Horse and rider: infrastructure in Waregem

#### 3.1. *The Gaverbeek hippodrome*

The Gaverbeek hippodrome, first used in 1858, has gone through dramatic changes of appearance through the years.

It now covers 17 hectares, with its main entrance in the Holstraat, a stone's throw away from the centre of Waregem.

The terrain has grown into a multi-purpose horse sports ground, and as such it has contributed to the development of the different disciplines practiced in Waregem.

Many other sports also get the opportunity to use the Gaverbeek hippodrome, such as athletics clubs. The National Championships and the Ten Country Cross Championship, the Zewieties mountain bike event, the National Sheepdog Championship, finch competitions and the petanque championship for the disabled are all held here.

Numerous events such as the Children's City and the Balloon Event also find that the Gaverbeek hippodrome is an ideal location.

The presence of a hippodrome and a riding sports centre have given Waregem a reputation as the birthplace of horse sports in Belgium. Every weekend, from the beginning of May until September, trotting races are held here.



### **3.1.1. Different disciplines**

#### **Eventing**

Eventing (previously called Military) is an Olympic discipline in three parts, to be carried out in the same combination.

- 1. Dressage:** the horse is tested for obedience, elegance and flair.
- 2. Cross country:** the horse is tested for stamina, obedience and agility. It has to complete the course of fixed obstacles and natural water jumps, gates, fences and hedges.
- 3. Jumping** over classic obstacles. The horse is tested for the care it takes with each jump. The final result is determined by putting together the scores of each of the three parts.

#### **Trotting**

This includes ridden events (on the back of the horse) as well as the more usual spans, where the driver sits in the sulky. The horses race and have to stay on the drive. They can easily reach speeds of around 48 km/hour.

The handicap is a matter of distance, which means that the better horses have to run further (in metres). These horses are specially bred for this event.

#### **Gallop**

“Gallops on the flat” are run over different distances. The jockey rides a thoroughbred. All the horses leave the starting box at the same time, when it springs open as the race starts. The handicap is in weight here. The best horses carry pieces of lead in the saddle cloth, plus the weight of the jockey of course. Over short distances, horses can reach speeds of up to 60 km/hour!

#### **Driving**

This originates in the use of a horse and cart for transport and work. The sport is practiced with a span of one, two or four horses.

The team are test for their agility (dressage test on a 50 x 100 m track) and cone driving abilities. Balls are placed on the cones and if the horse or the wheels touch the cone, the ball falls on the ground, incurring penalty points. The marathon is the most spectacular discipline. This is a natural course with fixed obstacles and water passages. The marathon demands the utmost in courage and obedience from the horses, and skill from the driver and his team.

#### **Steeplechase**

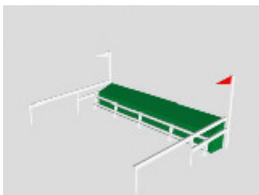
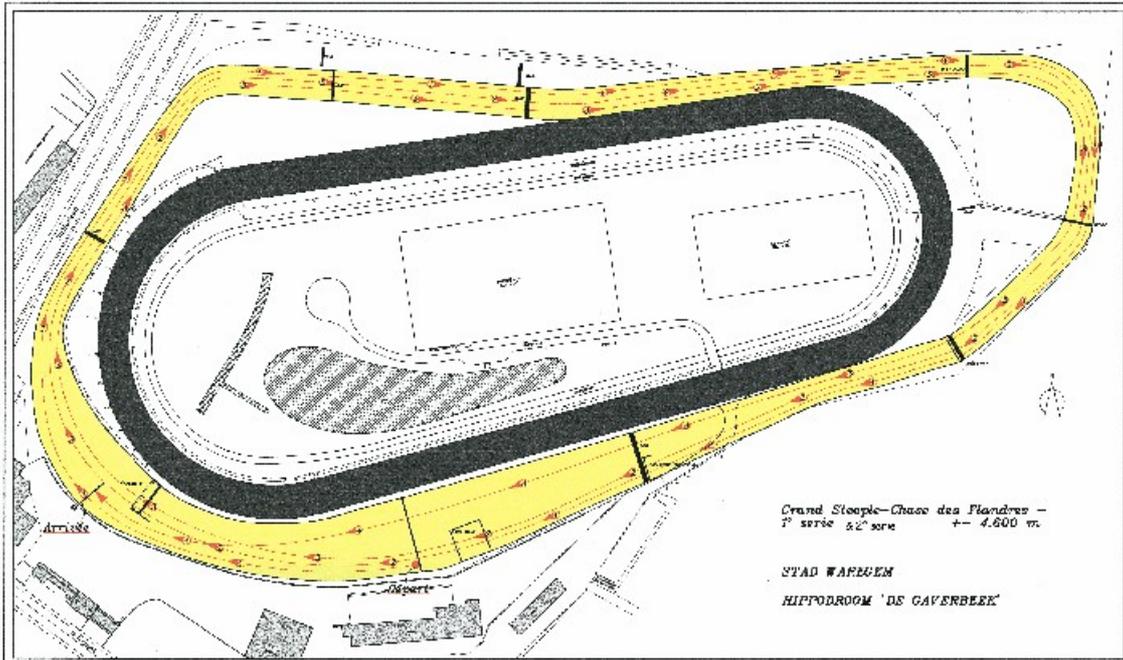
Race with obstacles (see the ‘Waregem Koerse’ Races) over fences and possibly hedges and brooks as well.

This works on the same principle as gallops on the flat, but the horses start behind elastic instead of in starting boxes. The distances are usually longer than the flat races and the horses do not usually run as fast. The horse needs to combine speed and jumping ability.

### 3.1.2. The highlight: Waregem's Grand Steeplechase

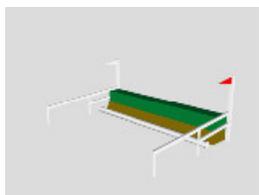
Obstacle races and trotting races are organised at the 'Waregem Koerse' Races, but the highlight is the "Grand Steeplechase of Flanders". The best horses and jockeys race over obstacles including the Irish Hedge, the Open Ditch, the Breton Wall and, last but not least, the Gaverbeek brook, for € 100 000 in prizes. For the eight races held on that day, there is a total of € 250 000 in prize money.

This top event includes various features : the steeplechase - trotting – hurdles – attractions ...



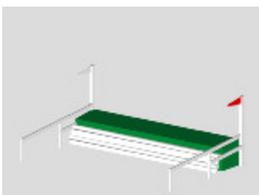
#### **The Fence: (jumped 3 times)**

This is a classic obstacle, 1.3 m high and 1.3m wide. It is usually the easiest obstacle on the course. But it is situated on a bend and is the first jump taken. The jockey needs to ensure that he has a good position as soon as he starts the race, and that his horse is in balance.



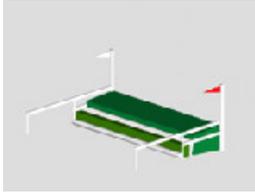
#### **The Breton Wall : (jumped 3 times)**

This is the first difficulty on the course. It is 3m wide and 1.5 m high. The underside of the obstacle is an earthen wall with an 80cm fence on top of it. This wall is straight after the first bend.



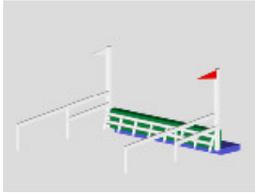
#### **Living Fence : (jumped 3 times)**

The first two times, this obstacle gives the horses no problem, at 2m wide and 1.4m high. The third time, however, it is the focus point for the jockeys to start the long final sprint. A good jump greatly increases their chances of success.



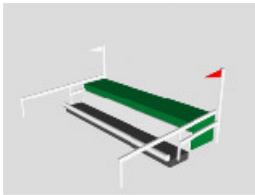
### **The Oxer : (jumped 3 times)**

This is an English-style obstacle, 3.5m wide and 1.4m high. It is an invitation to the horses to jump, but the landing is lower than the takeoff. This makes it very important to support the horse well.



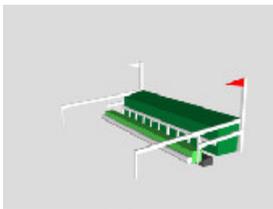
### **The Brook : (jumped 3 times)**

The little brook is not difficult to jump in itself, with a fence 1m high and 3.5m wide, but because it is on a bend, horses sometimes misjudge it.



### **The Open Ditch : (jumped 3 times)**

A spectacular jump composed of a canal and a fence, with a combined width of 4.5m and a height of 1.5m. The third time round, this is the last focal point for the course. Making a perfect jump in a good position here means the horse can go into the final 350 metres with a head start on the competition.



### **The Rail Ditch and Fence : (jumped twice)**

The biggest fence on the course is a tree trunk, a small fence, a ditch and a large fence, 1.7m high and 4.5m wide. This is a serious test, just before the famous Irish Hedge.



### **The Irish Hedge : (jumped twice)**

A spectacular obstacle with approach and exit jumps of 1.3m that break the horses' rhythm. Crossing the hedge well means a nice position to approach the Gaverbeek Brook. This is a very important part of the course.



### **The Gaverbeek Brook : (jumped twice)**

This is the climax of the Grand Steeplechase. At 7.5m, it is the widest brook in the world. Always spectacular for the public, it strikes awe into the hearts of horse and jockey.

### **The Fence : (jumped once)**

The last obstacle on the course is 1.2m high and 1m wide. From here onwards, it is a ride to glory.

### 3.2. *Bloso sports centre “De Gaverbeek”*

The Bloso sports centre in the Veldloopstraat is linked to the hippodrome and the two overlap each other. The centre has two covered riding tracks, a training centre for Eventing (Military), a paddock, an open-air track with fixed obstacles, stalls for 200 horses, meadows and full residential accommodation for 50 people. Numerous sport camps and courses are also run there, and the doors are open for casual riders.



#### 3.2.1 *Infrastructure*

##### Indoor

- Arena (61 x 25 m) with raised seating (150 seats)
- Covered paddock (52 x 23 m)
- Multi-purpose rooms

##### Outdoor

- All-weather riding track (50 x 80 m)
- Track with 10 cross country obstacles
- Running lane : all-weather galloping track

##### Inside the running lane

- Grass track



## 4. Horse clubs in Waregem

### 4.1. Bloso sports centre “De Gaverbeek”

Veldloopstraat 11

8790 Waregem

Tel.: +32 (0)56 60 14 44

[www.blosogaverbeek.be](http://www.blosogaverbeek.be)

Tel.: +32 (0)56 60 69 79

[www.eventing.be](http://www.eventing.be)

Fax: +32 (0)56 60 93 36

[www.bloso.be](http://www.bloso.be)

e-mail: [waregem@bloso.be](mailto:waregem@bloso.be)

Centre manager: Mr Tom Ryckewaert

When the Flemish government decided to make riding open to all in 1973, it was an obvious decision to create a riding school in Waregem. The Bloso sports centre “De Gaverbeek” (Gaver brook) was developed into a well-equipped riding sports centre in Flanders. Provisions were made for everything, both for horses and riders, to ensure optimal surroundings for riding.

A joint venture was set up between three partners: the city of Waregem, the Gaverbeek Riding Club vzw and the Bloso sports centre

- *The city of Waregem provided the land*
- *The Gaverbeek Riding Club is responsible for:*
  - *running the boxes for privately owned horses*
  - *providing and caring for the riding school's horses*
  - *running the club*
  - *looking after the horses at weekends*
- *The Bloso sports centre (Flemish government) is responsible for :*
  - *providing staff*
  - *looking after the horses during the week*
  - *its own Bloso activities*

Through the years, the “Gaverbeek” Bloso sports centre has proved its value as a riding school for many riders. Thanks to good training, young people and adults have the chance to take their first steps as riders. The riding centre has become known across Europe by organising various international riding events.

What is more, Waregem's Bloso sports centre has been open to disabled children and adults for years. It is the first centre with staff trained for disabled sports.

#### 4.1.1. Sporting facilities

Indoors and outdoors: horse and pony riding, dressage, jumping, eventing.

#### 4.1.2. Activities

- Sports camps, organised by Bloso and others
- Sports lessons (every day of the week, except in the school holidays)
- Schools : sports classes, school sports days and organisations within the Flemish School Sports Foundation
- Training courses and work experience with Belgian and foreign sports federations and clubs
- Top Sport clinics
- Sports weekends for clubs and organisations
- Company sports days
- Training courses by the Flemish Trainers School
- Important riding gatherings and events
- Training for disabled people (with Somival vzw)



#### 4.1.3. Accommodation facilities

The Bloso sports centre “Gaverbeek” has facilities for spending the night in 2 dormitories with 20 beds each, and 4 rooms for 2 people each.

The bathrooms are shared. Theory lessons are taught in 2 classrooms. Meals can be prepared to meet any requirements, and are served in the kitchen-dining building.

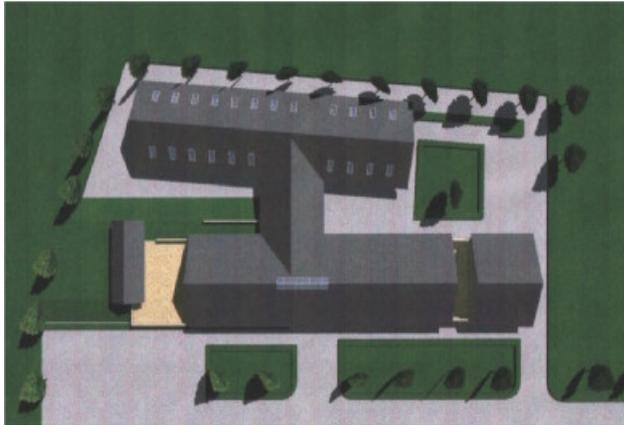


The centre is bursting at the seams, and is due for extension and renovation. The development of a multi-purpose, multi-functional equine centre is required.

The building of a new sports hotel was begun in 2004.

It will offer sleeping accommodation for 80 people.

Moreover, the centre will have a restaurant, meeting rooms, classrooms and an auditorium for all the clubs involved in horse sports. The intention is to give the centre a unique place in Europe and to stimulate all aspects of riding sports.



Planning for the new sports hotel

#### **4.1.4. Special features of the centre**

- Situated in the back garden of the Waregem hippodrome, the Mecca of riding sports
- Specific riding sports centre for beginners and advanced courses in horse and pony riding
- Training, top sports courses and clinics for dressage, jumping and eventing
- Excellent tracks
- Stabling for 200 horses
- Training track for eventing with various cross country obstacles (including a water jump)
- Drained outdoor competition grounds on grass.

#### **4.2. Royal Waregem Race Club vzw**

Felix Verhaeghestraat 5 [www.waregemkoerse.be](http://www.waregemkoerse.be)

8790 Waregem

Tel. : +32 (0)56 60 27 40 - +32 (0)56 60 21 92

Fax : +32 (0)56 60 96 55

E-mail : [waregemkoerse@tijd.com](mailto:waregemkoerse@tijd.com)

Contact person : Mr Jozef Van den Broecke

This club is the most famous and oldest equine organisation in Waregem. The Royal Waregem Race Club organises the “Waregem Koerse” Races each year. The first Tuesday after the last Sunday in August is traditionally the day of the “Waregem Koerse” Races. Since 1847, this gathering has been one of the most important sporting events in Belgium, attracting crowds of 35 000 to the Gaverbeek hippodrome. This important equine event is an ideal mixture of sport, recreation, meetings and networking.



The programme of the “Waregem Koerse” Races 2004 was as follows:

|                   |  | PRIZES<br>in euros | DISTANCE       |                     |
|-------------------|--|--------------------|----------------|---------------------|
| 14.30 p.m.        | Rallye Prize Waregem   | 5 750              | 2 350 m        | Trot                |
| 15.00 p.m.        | Duke André du Monceau<br>Prize de Bergendal                                    | 28 000             | 4 400 m        | Steeple Chase       |
| 15.15 p.m.        | Jean-François Pignon   |                    |                | Attraction          |
| 15.45 p.m.        | Felix De Ruyck Prize   | 17 500             | 3 400 m        | Hurdles             |
| 16.00 p.m.        | Jean-François Pignon   |                    |                | Attraction          |
| <b>16.30 p.m.</b> | <b>ING GRAND<br/>STEEPLECHASE OF<br/>FLANDERS</b>                              | <b>100 000</b>     | <b>4 600 m</b> | <b>Steeplechase</b> |
| 16.55 p.m.        | Royal brass band St.Cecilia-<br>Nokere and prize giving for<br>the hats trophy |                    |                |                     |
| 17.25 p.m.        | Jacques du Roy de Blicquy<br>Prize   | 39 000             | 4 600 m        | Steeplechase        |
| 17.55 p.m.        | Jean Bouckaert Prize   | 17 250             | 1 800 m        | Trot                |
| 18.05 p.m.        | Jean-François Pignon   |                    |                |                     |
| 18.30 p.m.        | Grand Prize of the City of<br>Waregem  | 28 750             | 2 350 m        | Trot                |
| 19.00 p.m.        | Jules Storme Prize   | 14 375             | 2 350 m        | Trot                |

The Royal Waregem Race Club is responsible for both the organisation of the sporting aspect and the sponsoring, public relations and promotion. “Waregem Koerse” Races enjoy extensive media attention in the national and foreign press. The event is announced by a large-scale media campaign, with the full co-operation and consultation of the city.

The media approach to this top meeting leads to wide awareness and a prominent image.

The Guest Village & Guest Tents are meeting places for numerous VIPs. There is plenty for the ordinary visitor too. They can enjoy the event on the central space and around the track. The many facilities allow visitors to immerse themselves in a pleasant, vibrant atmosphere.

For the fourth time, the “Waregem Koerse” Races Hat Trophy has been organised in co-operation with Willy Naessens. “Waregem Koerse” Races is slowly gaining the allure of a continental Ascot.

Representatives of Willy Naessens (an industrialist & horse lover), Laurent Perrier (champagne), the mayor of Waregem and the Royal Waregem Race Club pick the candidates with the most beautiful hat each year. The winning candidates receive lovely prizes donated by various sponsors. Several of these prizes are donated to charity.



### 4.3. The Gaverbeek Riding Club vzw

Veldloopstraat 10                      [www.blosogaverbeek.be](http://www.blosogaverbeek.be)  
8790 Waregem  
Tel. : +32 (0)56 60 14 44  
Tel. : +32 (0)56 60 69 79  
Fax: +32 (0)56 60 93 36  
E-mail : [waregem@blosob.be](mailto:waregem@blosob.be)  
Contact person : Mr Tom Ryckewaert

The Gaverbeek Riding Club was born in September 1973, and has been an important partner in the running of the Bloso equine centre right from the start. The riding club makes its horses available to the Bloso sports centre for its activities, and accommodates a large number of privately owned horses. Furthermore, riding lessons at all levels are programmed. Recreational riders are certainly not forgotten, with a magnificent bridle path provided for them.

What is more, the Gaverbeek runs all kinds of events, such as dressage competitions, show jumping, eventing, driving, the Festival of Saint Hubert (hunting festival) etc. It also ensures that life in the organisation is fun.

In 1980, the Gaverbeek organisation came up with a daughter organisation, namely the international **Military**. A few enthusiastic members of the club took the initiative to set up a cross country course, originally at the Hof ter Waelhem in Wortegem and now at the Domein Hemsrode in Anzegem. The **dressage** and **jumping** are held on the race track, and the horses and riders are put up at the Bloso sports centre. The large-scale **cross country** is gradually becoming an event that attracts top world participants. For the more than 20 000 spectators, a great show is guaranteed, with a magnificent walk through nature as well.

In the meantime, the name Military has been changed to **Eventing**.

Waregem's Eventing has become a real family occasion.



#### **4.4. Waregem Racing and Riding Club vzw**

*Ruitersdreef 42*

*8790 Waregem*

*Tel. : +32 (0)56 60 19 25 - 60 13 69*

*Fax : +32 (0)56 61 31 72*

*Contact person : Mr Willy Meheus*

This society was founded in 1962, and organises trotting races. The drives at the hippodrome are one of Waregem's most important attractions. These races are always held from May to September, on Friday evenings, Sundays and holidays. There are about 30 meetings each summer.

In trotting, the idea is that the driver sits in the sulky behind the horse for coach races or on the horse's back for riding races, and makes the horse trot as fast as possible without letting it break into a gallop. If the horse starts to gallop, it is disqualified.



#### **Prizes : Great classics**

*Three-year-olds trophy*

*Stayers criterion*

*Speed criterion*

*Four-year-olds criterion*

*Charly Mills Grand Prize*

*Grand Industry Prize*

*Belgian Derby*

*third Sunday in May*

*Whit Sunday*

*second Sunday in June*

*third Sunday in June*

*first Sunday in July*

*15 August*

*third Sunday in September*

## 5. Disabled participation in horse sports

### 5.1. Carriage tour for disabled people

The City of Waregem takes care of disabled people.

Each year, it organises a carriage tour for disabled people.

Horses often play a central part in both social and cultural life in Waregem. This is true on this special day as well.

The carriage tour is held on the Sunday before the last Sunday in August. Disabled residents of Waregem have the chance to ride in the carriage all day. According to tradition, a varied route is marked out with police supervision. Everyone is spoilt with sandwiches, drinks and fruit.

Besides the many activities set up or supported by Waregem itself, with the aim of contributing to the social integration of this target group, Waregem also has a sports club for recreational and competition-level sports for disabled people.

Every week there are recreational swimming times, and there are regular opportunities to try out other sports such as carbine shooting, table tennis, petanque, boccia, aqua-gym, horse riding etc.



In the world of competitions, Somival vzw is active in wheelchair hockey, boccia and athletics.

### 5.2. Paralympic Dressage

Horse riding is a popular activity offered by the Bloso sports centre. Both lessons and recreational, accompanied riding are available.

The paralympic sport of dressage does not pass by unnoticed wither. In 2003, the world dressage championships for disabled riders were held in the *Zilveren Spoor* in Moorsele. This was an event organised by the Quadrille, a sports club in the Waregem area. The opening of these world championships took place in the hippodrome during the 'Waregem Koerse' Races. For more than 150 riders from 35 countries, it was an unforgettable experience. The participating countries and riders were introduced to the 35 000 spectators in a carriage parade.



Governor Breyne from the Province of West Flanders welcomed the participants to the world championships and declared them open. It goes without saying that the mayor, Yolande Dhondt, did not miss the event either.



Waregem has already been the international meeting point for the paralympic sport for dressage several times, to arrange promotion, education and training sessions. Riders such as the Dutchman Joop Stokkel, José Letartre from France and Bettina Eistel from Germany, have all taken part in this type of paralympic competition.



(disabled limbs)



(motor disability)



(disabled limbs)

## 6. Culture & tourism

### 6.1. Ode to Horses

On 24 August 1997, the “Waregem Koerse” Races celebrated their 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The “Ode to Horses” was a folkloric horse parade of 59 groups and floats, including 7 musical societies, various show or dance groups, wagons, coaches, horses and actors, with a total of 1 500 participants and 5 000 horses parading through the centre of Waregem.



In 2007, we will be celebrating 160 years of the “Waregem Koerse” Races, and we are sure to come up with suitable festivities, hand in hand with a parade, an exhibition and much more ...

## 6.2. Adoption of the Flemish Horse

The Flemish Horse association, based in Waregem, aims to preserve the Flemish Horse breed as part of our living heritage.

Waregem is aware of the value of the Flemish Horse in the context of its own historic and folkloric tradition. This is why Waregem adopted the Flemish Horse on the occasion of the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the “Waregem Koerse” Races, and it supports the work and aims of the association.

The Flemish Horse was *the* horse breed par excellence across the Western world for many centuries. Many of the later breeds of large horses were created by crossing with Flemish Horses. Through the centuries, this horse has fulfilled different roles. Its strength and sturdy



build meant that it was not only a carthorse, but also a battle animal. It is first recorded around the sixth century A.D. The breed developed naturally and gradually.



In the year 807, for example, Charlemagne sent Flemish Horses to the Caliph of Baghdad as a gift.

Flemish Horses spread across Europe for the first time on a large scale during the crusades. From the twelfth to the nineteenth century, they were as highly sought-after an export product as Flemish textiles.

It is worthy of note for Waregem that the very first ‘Waregem Koerse’ Races, on Monday 30 August 1847, were ridden on our very own Flemish Horses.

In historical terms, the survival of Flemish Horse has been threatened several times. Only the Belgian attempt to eliminate them came close to succeeding, when in 1888 they were scrapped from the book of pedigrees in favour of the Belgian Carthorse ... which was intended as a symbol of the Belgian State.

Our Flemish Horses were systematically disadvantaged and repressed. Fortunately, the qualities of the Flemish Horses led to their export en masse to America and Canada. "Belgians", as they call these Flemish Horses, were increasingly recognised by American and Canadian breeders. In particular, the Amish community valued this breed's exceptional characteristics. They can be used for many purposes, and this is bound to be the case in the future as well.

At the beginning of the 1990s, Flanders cherished the hope of seeing the Flemish Horse restored to glory. After more than a century in exile, Roger Talpe from Komen took a daring and historically unparalleled initiative in 1993. For the first time, a Belgian stallion was brought home to Flanders. With this act, he laid the foundations for the Flemish Horse pedigree.

The father of the line is "Duke Nortfork". Duke was born on 12 April 1990, at the stables of Georges Cornelis, a Fleming from Berlaar who had emigrated to Canada. Inspired by Roger Talpe's praiseworthy initiative, breeders soon decided to import Belgian mares. Today there are already about 130 thoroughbred Flemish Horses in Belgium, the Netherlands and France.

At international and national events, the Flemish Horses are proud ambassadors for their adopted city.

Waregem is constantly aware of the need to honour and maintain its heritage. Together with its suburbs Desselgem, Beveren-Leie and Sint-Eloois-Vijve, Waregem has the meadows by the Gaverbeek brook and the Lys river ploughed by Flemish horses. This is **the** symbol of pure-blooded and stubborn Flanders, the pride of our forefathers.



*Just like cathedrals or fortified castles, great horses  
are historical monuments.*

*It is not only their impressive stature that the horses  
have in common with these buildings.*

*Just like monuments, large horses have lost their  
original use although, like monuments,  
they were 'built' by our forefathers to meet specific  
needs : war, farming, transport, and later industry.*

*Does this mean they are condemned ?*

*Are large horses monuments at risk ?*

*If they are, then we must do all we can to save them:  
they are part of our heritage.*

*author : Jean Louis Gouraud*

### 6.3. *Riding route and driving route*

The **cross country bridle path** (16 km) and the **Bouvelo driving route** (38 km) are two circular routes through the varied countryside between Waregem and Oudenaarde. Rugged hilltops, rolling meadows and unique panoramic views across the Schelde valley surprise us on our journey. The routes take us past castle grounds and historic farmyards. The driving route also passes the idyllic village of Moregem.

After a break of many years, the local council decided to revive the traditional **Festival of Saint Hubert**. The council mainly invited riders, coach drivers and hunters to this celebration, but also all the inhabitants, accompanied by their pet(s). After a communion service, all the people and animals receive a blessing in the marketplace. On this festival day, there are a good 100 horses and about 20 coaches to be seen in the centre of Waregem. The Festival of Saint Hubert is organised by the local council with the co-operation of the Bloso sports centre, the Gaverbeek Club and the Saint Hubert Club of West Flanders



### 6.4. *Art in the street*

#### 6.4.1. *Bronze statue (Jan Desmarets)*



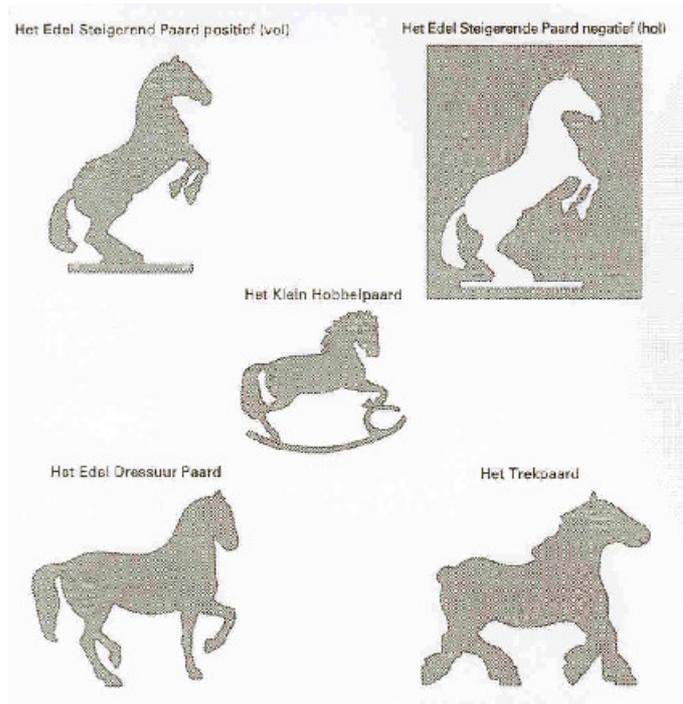
In 2003 the service club 'Fifty One' donated a bronze statue to the city of Waregem. It is entitled the "*Waregem Koerse Races*" and was placed in the centre of the marketplace.

The bronze sculpture, by Jan Desmarets (of Wervik) is the perfect advertisement for the horse town of Waregem. It combines the galloping and rearing movements of two horses in a single sculpture. In this way, it suggests dynamism and progress.

#### 6.4.2. Horse Parade

At the “Waregem Koerse” Races festivities in 2005, Waregem will participate in the **Horse Parade**.

This initiative, intended to bring a shine to the 175 years of Belgium celebrations, is the follow-up to the successful ‘Art on Cows’ project in Brussels last summer, featuring 250 art-bearing bovines. There will be several varieties of art horse to be seen : the carthorse, the rearing horse, the little hobbyhorse and the dressage horse. These animals start off as blank fibreglass horses, that will be decorated by various artists chosen by the sponsor patron who will pay for them. Not only does the ‘Horse Parade Belgium 2005’ promise to be a large, fun event ; its proceeds will be sent to five charities or public schemes.



## **7. International**

### **7.1. Competitions and events**

The city of Waregem regularly plays host to all sorts of European events and international competitions, such as :

- The World Driving Championships
- The European Championships of the Military World Cup
- Driving World Cup for three-star riders
- Welsh Belgium 2005
- International Amateur Drivers Championship
- 'Waregem Koerse' Races
- Paralympic Dressage
- ...

### **7.2. European Horse Network**

Waregem and horses are an important point of reference for our international reputation.

The aim of creating a European network of towns with "the horse" as their central theme led to the signing of a Declaration of Intent between Waregem and Jerez de la Frontera (Spain) on 30 August 2004, to set up a network of European towns to promote the culture and heritage of horses. Since then, Golega (Portugal) and Pardubice (Czech Republic) have also joined the network.

Please find the protocol enclosed.

### 7.3. Annex

#### **GENERAL PROTOCOL CONCERNING THE DECLARATION OF INTENT BETWEEN THE TOWNS OF WAREGEM (BELGIUM) AND JEREZ DE LA FRONTERA (SPAIN) TO SET UP A NETWORK OF EUROPEAN TOWNS FOR THE PROMOTION OF THE CULTURE AND HERITAGE OF HORSES**

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On the one hand, the town council of Waregem (Belgium), represented by Yolande Dhondt, in her capacity as mayor and chairperson, and on the other, by the town council of Jerez de la Frontera (Spain), represented by Maria José García-Pelayo Jurado, in her capacity as mayor and chairperson,

The two parties, on the basis of their respective tasks with the means made available to them by the authorised legislative bodies

Declare the following:

FIRST. The world of horses is an element of the cultural identity of the communities which have preserved the purity of breeds, the charm of popular equine events and support for professionals in this field, as well as developing sporting competitions and refining the methods of breaking in and training (taming and driving) in a world where this exceptional animal is taken as a point of reference.

SECOND. Europe has a rich diversity of cultural practices linked to horses, embracing a magnificent heritage that must be preserved and extended.

THIRD. Horses are an important point of reference in the revaluation of local products, the strengthening of the industrial sector through the increased specialisation of companies, the process of making it possible to use and preserve qualities of the landscape by developing infrastructures with tourist potential, the promotion of sport in general and the organisation of horse contests in particular. After all, horses are an element of communal identity that is shared by different groups of people, meaning that networks can be created to allow constructive exchanges between towns and regions.

FOURTH. The world of horses – which means the totality of economic and cultural activities related to horses : breeding, fodder production, animal health (veterinary medicine), breaking in and training (taming), riding centres, clubs, sporting events etc. – is an instrument for economic development in the sense that it allows the revaluation of certain areas, the promotion of tourist activities, the improvement of natural and urban landscapes and the creation of means of diversifying agricultural incomes.

FIFTH. Horses are one of the fundamental elements required to understand the culture of Jerez. The horse is the most typical and well-loved symbol of the town, in the sense that every year – since the time of King Alfonso X the Wise in the thirteenth century – the town has organised its 'Horse festival' or "Feria del Caballo." The Carthusian horse has a special meaning for the town, the origin of which goes back to the breeding of these horses by the Carthusian monks in Jerez de la Frontera in 1492.

SIXTH. In Belgium, too, there is a great tradition and knowledge of the world of horses, which has promoted the development of an extremely important industry focused on leisure, sport and competition. Waregem is an obvious exponent of this tradition, expressed particularly by the model centres aimed at horse competitions, the democratisation of horse riding and the possibilities offered for training (cf. the Bloso sports centre). Most of the equine sport disciplines are offered in Waregem, including trotting and galloping races, initiation and recreational courses, management training, events, dressage, jumping and driving. Moreover, Waregem has been godparent to the Flemish Horse as a specific breed since 1997.

SEVENTH. The existence of networks promotes the exchange of experience, the transfer of useful knowledge and a shared formulation, preparation and development of projects and training opportunities. This type of organisational structure promotes efficient co-operation links for the purposes of competition and development, and by means of common promotion, it allows organisations to develop that guarantee quality.

EIGHTH. Forming networks is an efficient way to strengthen international co-operation and to gain all the advantages this implies. However a certain amount of technological know-how and professional preparation are required, linked to both the new means of communication and to the main language used in this working environment.

NINTH. Jerez and Waregem have already shown sufficient evidence of their progressive, European character. For it is only by meeting people and joining forces to discover as many common interests as possible that we can obtain the greatest possible social, economic and cultural development, which will allow us to shape the Europe of the twenty-first century.

TENTH. In order to put their respective opportunities and goals into practice, both parties attach the greatest importance to the creation of this first public declaration of intent, which will set a process of mutual co-operation in motion.

Consequently, both parties have signed this Intention Protocol, reflected in the following conditions:

#### C O N D I T I O N S

1. The aim of the protocol is to sketch out the basic lines of co-operation between the two parties, for the implementation and development of a European Horse Network.
2. The two towns commit themselves to setting up a technical committee, composed of three representatives of each town, with the aim of fixing the common objectives of the network, stipulating the working context and drawing up the statutes, based on the present diagnostic or one which is worked out in the future, and thus to enable an association to be set up which represents and promotes their common interests.
3. The two towns, through their respective councils, are committed to providing all the necessary information and support – within the budgetary means provided for this purpose – which is requested by the technical committee to achieve its aims.
4. This agreement between the two towns can be joined by any towns interested in the aims of the association, as long as they fulfil all the conditions required in the statutes, in order for the network to become as wide as possible at European level.

As proof of their agreement, the two parties have signed this protocol in duplicate, at the place and on the date indicated below.

For the town council of Waregem

For the town council of Jerez