

# Minutes of Meeting

## Friends of Landport Bottom

**Monday 7<sup>th</sup> July 7.30 pm. St. Mary's Church, Highdown Road, Lewes.**

Christine Park and Stephen Watson welcomed everyone to the meeting, which included a number of new attendees. The Community Ranger Dan Fagan and Councillor Roger Murray were also present. This was the group's third meeting since it was formed.

The Friends of Landport Bottom is seen as providing a forum for those using the land, to voice their ideas. These can then be communicated to the Lewes District Council, and the Community Ranger. The Friends group was set up at the recommendation of the council. This followed a situation in 2013 when works involving tree cutting and fence realignment had been carried out with more planned. The objections raised by local people at the time were subsequently passed to the Lewes District Council management committee resulting in further work being abandoned

Dan spoke of other independent groups who liaise with Sussex Wildlife and the Lewes District Council, and he was asked to provide contact details of these including web links. It was considered that it could be useful to learn more about other groups and how they operate.

Christine proposed that a set of aims and objectives be agreed for the current meeting. Various topics were suggested by group members and these formed the following agenda.

### **Access Paths:**

When crossing through the gate at the top of the large field, the path giving access to the old motor road is dangerously rutted, uneven and overgrown. Dan will write to the local authority regarding its maintenance.

### **Responsibility of the rangers / repairs:**

A number of access gates need repairing and should be checked regularly. It was suggested that when Dan is carrying out his surveys, he could perhaps note any problems. There is a form on the Friends website which can be used to report faulty gates. The phone number which currently appears on the gates is incorrect; a new system will come into operation in August.

### **Thistle management:**

The increase in thistle growth was highlighted with the suggestion that this was harmful to children playing in the area. Dan confirmed that the current breed of grazing sheep does not eat the thistles although there are other species that will. The reason thistles are not being cut back is because they are especially good for producing nectar. The situation is being monitored.

**Cutting back bushes:**

There was a rumour that the hawthorn bushes in the middle of the far field were to be cut down. Their presence is important as they afford shade for the sheep during hot weather. Dan confirmed that this was definitely *not* true!

**The group's small representation:**

A first time attendee to the meeting was concerned that the current group, numbering 20 plus people, was only a small representation of the overall users of the site, and that any decisions could not be made based on the opinions of so few. It was agreed that meetings should be open to all users of the land, and interested parties, not just local residents. Everyone was free to attend the meetings and on this occasion details had been displayed on Landport Bottom access gates. Future advertising in the Sussex Express, Viva Lewes, Lewes News, etc. could be considered. New attendees to the meeting were given details of the Friends website.

**Finance:**

The subject of a budget for Landport Bottom was raised, Dan confirmed that this is made up as follows: A Core sum of £5,000 per annum from Lewes District Council, for maintenance e.g. fence posts; a High Level Stewardship subsidy lump sum for e.g. fence lines; Nature Improvement (NIA) funding for e.g. restoration of Jill's Pond; a Single Payment Scheme, claimed by Plumpton for sheep grazing; and Interpretation funding. It was suggested that at the next meeting the subject of how the Friends would like to see the money spent, could be discussed.

**What is the power / role of the `Friends`?:**

It was agreed that the group needed to define a mission statement and various wording was discussed e.g. to *celebrate, protect, help, support, collaborate, inform, communicate, manage, be given prior notice*, etc. would form part of this. Christine and Stephen will come up with a statement which will be posted on the website and discussed at the next meeting.

**Cattle grazing:**

Coppicing the ground is causing injury to sheep resulting in large vet bills. The grazing of the land by cattle or ponies could help this and would not impact on the usage of fields. This has been tried successfully elsewhere i.e. sheep graze well with ponies/cattle. However, the social needs of Landport Bottom were highlighted, for example with children playing, flying kites etc. and a concern was expressed that the presence of cattle might be dangerous.

**The relationship between cyclists; dog walkers, horses, walkers etc:**

This topic was not discussed at the meeting.

*In addition, the following topics were discussed:*

**Landport Bottom Management Committee meeting:**

Dan talked about the Landport Bottom Management Committee meeting which he had attended on 17<sup>th</sup> June; Stephen was also present and has posted a summary of the meeting on the Friends website. The next Management Meeting will be held on 13<sup>th</sup> January 2015, and it is important that some of the Friends attend. This can be discussed further at the next group meeting.

**Problems relating to sheep:**

The subject of contacting Plumpton College regarding problems with the sheep was raised. Dan cautioned that the shepherd should only be contacted in an emergency. Telephone numbers, and guidelines as to *what is* and *what is not* an emergency, will be put on the Friends website. It was suggested that the Plumpton College telephone numbers should also be shown on the interpretation boards situated on Landport Bottom.

**Camping:**

Dan confirmed that *no* camping is allowed on Landport Bottom, this is against the law and the council should be contacted if it occurs.

**Boundaries:**

There was discussion regarding the exact boundaries of Landport Bottom, Stephen confirmed that a map on the Friends website clearly shows these. A further query arose regarding the area around Jill's Pond, as a letter from the Lewes District Council Planning department, indicated that this particular piece of land had a different name. Dan confirmed that it was nevertheless part of Landport Bottom.

**Friends of Landport Bottom website:**

Regarding the Friends website, it was thought inappropriate to display information posters on gates, in a Downs location. However, the details could be shown on the two notice boards at either end of the site's access. This suggestion was voted on, and agreed by the group.

**Any other business:**

Dan asked that these meetings should not be used as a complaints forum but should be a collaborative group for giving practical help and support.

The next meeting of the Friends of Landport Bottom, will be held on Monday 8<sup>th</sup> September, 7.30 pm, at St. Mary's Church, Highdown Road, Lewes. It was suggested that it would be useful to have an agenda for the next meeting, prior to the event.