

## FRIENDS OF LANDPORT BOTTOM

### Minutes of the Meeting

Monday September 8<sup>th</sup> 2014. St Mary's Church Hall

Chair: Ruth O Keefe

### APOLGIES FOR ABSENCE.

Brian Beck, and Jennifer Keen.

### ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Richard Rawson wanted to know more of any plans to put cattle on the area.

Sarah Flynn wanted clarity on the ownership of the bottom of the motor road, and the main road.

Rob Elvery wanted to know who owned the land by Hawkenbury Way.

Steve Watson would like to discuss the possibility of having guest speakers at the meetings, and also wanted to ask about a possible post Bonfire litter pick.

Alison Suddell, wanted to know how we are to know when meetings are to happen.

Christine wanted to know the history of the penalty notices that have appeared on the field for dog owners who do not clear up their dog's mess.

### MINUTES OF LAST MEETING.

The minutes were read out for those who did not attend the last meeting.

The path across the motor road is the responsibility of the ESCC. The ranger is to write to them regarding the 'rut'

The mending of the gates is or has happened.

Phone numbers on the gates will be overhauled as part of a signage and interpretation board renovations. The Friends website details will be incorporated into these.

### MATTERS ARISING

The maintenance funds for the field come from two sources, firstly Lewes District Council give £5,000 p.a and then there a funds of £7,000 from the Higher Level Stewardship Grant which is quite specific in what it can be spent on. This year for example it was used for flailing amongst other things. It is given every April, so in theory each February and March it can be decided how £200 or £300 should be spent of these funds, by the Friends of L.B.

**Flailing:** Plumpton have introduced innovative flailing this year, however to remove Hawthorn completely, would require volunteers to do this by hand. A suggestion to use rollers was put forward, but Dan said this was not advisable as it would compact the soil. Hawthorn continues to be a problem for the sheep and they do get foot injuries.

### **Mission statement.**

All 6 parts of the mission statement were read out and all approved.

Access was mentioned – can we help reserve and enhance public access. It was also asked if we can register as community access land.

Clarification was sought by several attendees as to what exactly the area of Landport Bottom comprise. Dan Fagan said he had brought along a map for perusal after the meeting.

### **RANGERS REPORT**

There has been the first grass cutting, which was done by a contractor, at £700 per day, the main area at the back was mowed, (west of the Highdown end of the main field). All the cut stuff was then removed, this amounting two 10 ton loads. This is part of the plan to restore natural grassland.

The tumuli field: the sheep will be out of here soon, and the flaying will happen here, any hawthorn cut in the process will have to be left on site, as it is too expensive to get it removed.

Next year there is a plan to 'Combine' the bottom of the field, collect the seed, (in August), which will be taken away to be washed, cleaned and dried. A tractor will scarify the area removing the first layer and enabling the area to then be re-seeded. The money for this is coming out of the Higher Level Stewardship fund. A question was asked, 'Do we add more seed'. Dan said no, just the seed that had been collected would be used. The reason for the scarification is to remove nutrients at the top layer of the soil (wild flower meadows require poor soil to flourish). There was a concern that this might make the grass look like soil, but Dan said that it would look more like 'mulchy grass'. When the field was initially seeded it was done so with a grass mix, with native wildflower meadow seed collected from Devon.

A question was asked as to why certain areas were mowed and not others. Dan said that this is to target those areas where thistles grow.

Dan Fagan confirmed that at no time would pesticides be used on the fields. With regard to the removal of seed, scarification and re-seeding, this is being conducted as an experiment, and if it does not work, it will not be repeated.

## **Signage**

Phone numbers are out of date and will be changed. The dog fouling signs, which initially stated a fine, were then removed when it was realised that this land is designated as agricultural land and therefore it was not legally enforceable. Instead some polite notices were affixed to gates asking dog owners to kindly pick up their dog's mess. It was agreed that consideration and emphasis needed to be put on appealing to dog owner's better natures.

Christine felt that the notices had been imposed upon us, and asked if Dan could forewarn the group on signs, which Dan said he would.

Dan reported that the first lot of signs were ripped down by persons unknown. He also said that the signs now up were temporary until specially made signs could be made.

There has been a request for the public to keep to the correct paths and not walk along or up the motor road by the Racecourse owners. This being cited as a health and safety issue.

With regard to the overgrown nature of the path that runs parallel to the motor road, a public access path, complaints were made by Lewes District Council, Lewes Town Council and the ESCC to the Racecourse owners to clear the path. This has been done, but it was noted that at one time this path was almost 2/3rds the width of the motor road itself, now much reduced in width because of vegetation.

There is or will be a sign to denote which is the correct path up onto the fields. It was asked whether anyone actually takes notice of notices anyhow, and how effective are they? Mr Roberts asked for clarification regarding cyclists. It was confirmed that cyclists must go up the footpath and **not** up or down the motor road.

The gate half way up across the motor road, is subject to an ongoing legal issue, with the racecourse owners. There was a general consultation with the Racecourse in 2012, but this did not result in greater cooperation.

It was suggested that we could ask a representative of the racecourse to come along. Nina Murden also commented on how many people do walk along the gallops at the top of the main field— even though this is private land, and suggested that we should inform those people as and when we see them, and also suggested that it would be helpful to have a map on the information boards denoting clearly what is and what is not public land. Dan said that this could happen when the information

boards were re-done. It was also confirmed that the Facebook page and website for Friends of Landport Bottom could also be incorporated into the new signage.

## **Livestock**

The Sheep have been tugged. Ram(s) have been with them in the tumuli field, and the Ewes have been taken off to Plumpton to see if they are pregnant. Lambs will be early this year, probably February, they will then come back to Landport Bottom in March.

With regard to cattle, this will not be appropriate for several reasons, there are fencing issues, existing fencing not being strong enough, and it is thought that the cattle would not be appropriate for a recreational site such as this.

The existing Southdown sheep have been pushed hard on the grazing, this appears to have some success.

There were a couple of volunteer tasks, one on Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> September, and the other on the 9<sup>th</sup> October. These will be the restoration of Jill's pond – where we have the rare leaf hopper and the great crested newt. There will also be cutting down of scrub. Waders would be provided and it would be under the guidance of the Southdown ranger. Volunteers are needed from 10 – 3 p.m. [NB since then a Volunteer Task has been arranged for October 30th)

The gate is locked to Jill's pond to stop people and dogs going into the area. The Greater Crested Newts benefit from long grass around the pond, there is also a rare insect - the pond leaf hopper, any disturbance by dogs would put the wildlife at risk. There is also the issue of children's safety. Christine expressed sadness that this gate had to be locked.

There was a call for volunteering at the weekends, perhaps a volunteering group could get up and running for this? Dan has said that anyone in this group could apply for a grant, under the Nature Improvement Area Project.

It was asked whether we could have a notice board to advertise the rare insects, but this was not thought a good idea as it could inadvertently put such things at risk.

Four bat boxes have been bought, two are hibernation boxes, they are about the size of a chair, and two summer roosts, one is to put over pond, and 1 over by the Ouse, they are going up this winter.

Volunteers are needed to clear ash saplings.

Fencing: Over 200 posts need replacing.

Tumuli field, this needs strimming.

Kate Humble and Raymond blanc visited the site recently for a nature/cooking/.wild food programme, and looked at the wild carrot – in abundance in the main field.

The Downland run is to take place on the 5<sup>th</sup> October.

In the Tumuli field, on the right hand side there are ash saplings, however St John's wort used to be in abundance in this area, and it is thought undesirable to have ash saplings taking over this area.

**Ash Dieback:** there are reports of ash die back in Alfriston forest. Advice is to take photos and take leaves. Ash dieback causes huge black scars which are a definite sign and the ash will die in the second year.

However, ash suffer from 100 or so diseases, it is advised to look at the Forestry Commission's website which has an excellent guide to identification and contacts.

**Ownership of the area to the bottom of Motor Road.** It was asked what the official boundary is. Some dog walkers who have parked at the lower end of this road, adjacent to the main road have had stickers put on their windows. The Ranger has agreed to find out.

**Ownership of land around Hawkenbury way .**

John Webber of the local residents association knows about this and will be contacted. Racehorses use it, it can get difficult to walk along. Dan said that this was surveyed as part of the nature conservation area. It is an NI area, (what is NI???) and Dan will be contacting the owners regarding use of by horses.

**Guest speakers:**

It was thought that this might be appropriate but as a separate vent.

**Bonfire Litter Pick:**

Vigilance was required over the weeks after Bonfire as sharp plastic pieces have been found in previous years and this is not good for wildlife or sheep.

The Tumuli field has not been ploughed and it was remarked by some present that harebells used to be there, along with bird's foot trefoil. The absence of harebells might be a problem due to the current grazing regime.