

Minutes of Meeting

The Friends of Landport Bottom

Monday 9th February 2016 at 7.30 pm St. Mary's Church, Highdown Road, Lewes

Apologies for absence:

Kym Murden; Stephen Watson.

Introduction:

There were 15 attendees, and the meeting was chaired by Councillor Susan Murray.

Additions to the last meeting's Minutes requested by Nina Murden:

Repairs to footpaths: regarding complaints about the mud, Landport Bottom is not a municipal park, but an area of the South Downs National Park that we have access to. Some users actually like mud e.g. off road cyclist, and some children. Also, it might be better to wear appropriate footwear when walking there in autumn and winter.

Skylark population: skylarks nest in the main field but the population has dropped massively, as highlighted at previous Friends' meetings by Brian Beck, a life-time resident. The practice of putting Skylark advisory notices on gates had been used in the past and it was suggested this could be done again. *(Nina later contacted Dan F. offering to be the Skylark notice monitor; notices have since been installed on gate).*

Garden cuttings / footpath repair: all owners of houses backing onto Landport Bottom are expressly forbidden to put garden cuttings etc. onto the land. However, a house holder whose property backed onto LB told the meeting that she had a felled Leylandii tree she wished to dispose of. She later scattered the twigs of the tree onto the pathway at the bottom, southerly edge of LB. *(Note, due to the muddy state of the path, this was done in an effort to make it easier and safer to pass along; it was a temporary measure. The path in question is not part of Landport Bottom so permission to scatter the twigs should have been sought from Farmer Robinson).*

Action points arising from the previous Minutes:

Cars using the footpath along the motor road: Susan confirmed that she had checked the status of the footpath with Lewes Town Council and found that it is part of the land owned by the old racecourse. Therefore the owners are within their rights to drive along the path.

Ranger's Report:

- **Interpretation boards:** these have now been installed.
- **Maintenance:** has been carried out with several fence post replaced.
- **Sheep:** they have been moved between fields, half have undergone sheering with the rest to follow shortly. The numbers of sheep returning to Landport Bottom will be reduced.

- **Skylark posters:** have been attached to the gates in the main field, notifying the presence of nesting Skylarks. Jackie B. commented that it was the sheep that destroy the nests of Skylarks. Nina M. said that the sheep were not a problem. Dan then quoted a photographic study which showed that when sheep were in the vicinity of a Skylark, the bird remained on the nest. However, when the birds saw the silhouette of a dog, they left the nest. Dan said that there were currently Meadow Pipits and Corn Buntings nesting too, but that they were not Red Listed like the Skylarks. Jackie B. asked whether dogs should be kept on leads. Dan said no, although constant disturbance in the longer grass will cause problems for the Skylarks. Nina M. said that when the sheep are grazing in the main field, this does displace dog walkers. Dan added that the situation becomes worse at weekends with additional visitors and dogs in the field. Nina M. commented that following her Skylark survey last year, it appears that the birds have returned to the same nesting spot. Roger M. said that there had been sheep all over the Downs and alongside the Skylarks, for many years. Susan said that the sheep were important particularly for managing the eco-system. A comment was made that the grass becomes very coarse when not grazed by the sheep.
- **Wild flowers:** Dan passed around some lovely photos of wildflowers that he had taken that day. He noted that Milkwort was especially prevalent in the chalk pit. Also that there was a lot of Milkwort and Wild Strawberry growing in the Pond Field; this was something he had not seen in previous years.
- **Great crested newts:** following the Great Crested Newt survey last year, Dan recently visited Jill's Pond with an ecology specialist. They found over thirty Great Crested Newts and took photos and samples of them. Dan passed around a splendid photo of one of these newts. Apparently the newts have `fragmented` and Dan said that the population is fragile. He added that there were also smooth newts present in the pond.
- **“Jewels of the Downs”, Landport Bottom walk:** Dan said that he has organised a walk for Saturday 18th June, 10.30 - 12.30 pm - to meet at the bottom of the Motor Road. Other events can be found on the LDC website under the Ranger's Walks section.

Matters arising:

- **Posts:** Jackie B. asked Dan about the 6 x posts that appeared recently on the lay-by at the entrance to the Motor Road. Dan said he had phoned ESCC who confirmed that a resident from the Race Course had put them there because he felt the cars were dangerous. The posts have since been removed. Jackie reported that she had seen the man who had installed the posts, drive his car dangerously along the Motor Road and clip a group of stationary cyclists, who were gathered on the Lewes District Council land. She had mentioned this to the local PCSO.
- **Horses using Highdown Road twitten:** Jackie said that horse riders are continuing to use the twitten; several other people confirmed that they had witnessed this happening.

Jackie said that the practice was dangerous and when challenged, riders had become verbally aggressive. *(Note that this matter was raised at the previous Friends meeting).*

Susan said that any such incident should be reported to the Police, because if they have a record of these they can build up a picture towards taking action. Rob M. said that the twitten is a public footpath and that horses are not allowed access. He cited a notice on Willey's Bridge which indicates 'no access to horses', he suggested that a similar sign could be installed at the twitten. Susan confirmed that the installation of a sign would be the responsibility of East Sussex County Council. She will contact Ruth O'Keeffe about this. (**Action SM**)

- **Damaged fence:** Nina reported a hole in the fence at the bottom edge of the main field, possibly large enough for a sheep to get through. She informed Dan that to aid identification, she will mark the location with a piece of white cloth.
- **Broken gate / lack of disability access:** Jackie reported a broken gate to the main field near to the allotments. She said that whilst the wood is rotten and needs renewing, the current style is not suitable for those requiring disabled access, therefore she suggested it should be replaced by either a kissing gate or farm gate. Rob volunteered to repair the guillotine-type dog gate, which forms part of the overall style. There was some agreement by others present, though Conor made the point that people with disabilities would be expecting access problems. It was further noted that the stile access onto Landport Bottom is particularly difficult for disabled people, although it is only about 100m further along to reach a farm gate. Dan confirmed that he could not replace the stile whilst it is still in good functional order, and added that there were a total of 18 entrances to Landport Bottom, meeting a variety of needs. (**Action RE**)
- **Jill's Pond:** Nina said that she had found the site of a recent fire near to the dew pond and that bottles had been thrown into the pond. She had cleared most of the litter but there was still a bottle in the pond which she could not access.
- **Thanks to Stephen:** Dan asked that an official minute be recorded to thank Stephen W. for the ongoing time and effort that he gives, he is always tweeting and updating the website with photos of wildlife, flora etc.
- **Surveys:** Dan asked that if people were interested in helping with surveys for reptiles, birds, or orchids, they should email him. If anyone has any current butterfly data they should send this to Dan, in particular he is interested to hear about sightings of the Green Hairstreak butterfly, which lays its eggs on gorse.
- **Notices at south end of the Pond Field:** Rob felt that the notices by the reservoir were not very effective. The ground there has been severely rutted and churned up by the horses. He asked why they are churning up a 10 metre wide path which has now become inaccessible to certain people. He said he knew of at least four people who felt 'excluded' as they were no longer able to walk on the muddy/rutted surface Rob suggested a polite notice be displayed asking horse riders to keep away from the fence. Dan will look into this. However, he made the point that Landport Bottom is a multi-use location e.g. for bike riders, horse riders, grazing sheep, a nature reserve etc. It is a precious space and the budget has to be spread between the various needs.
- **Children chasing sheep:** Jackie said she had seen children chasing after the sheep and had spoken to their parents. She asked if notices could be installed urging people to respect the sheep. Dan said that adding lots of notices on gates loses the impact. Nina suggested that wildlife walks, etc. might help to educate people.

- **The Next Friends of Landport Bottom Meeting:** will be Monday 8th August.

The meeting ended at 8.45 pm.