

Minutes of Meeting

The Friends of Landport Bottom

Monday 14th August 2017 at 7.30 pm St. Mary's Church, Highdown Road, Lewes

Apologies for absence: none had been received.

There were 14 attendees: Councillors: Susan Murray & Roger Murray; Stephen Watson; David Marsh; Jason Winter; Rob Elvery; Alice Bennett-Leyh; Brian Courage; Thyone Outram; Imogen Makepeace; Vicki Trenhaile; Jancis Ham; Jackie Bishop; Jenny Keen.

The meeting was chaired by Councillor Susan Murray, who invited all those present to introduce themselves.

Action points arising from the previous Minutes:

Bonfire clear-up: (see below regarding discussions with Jason Winter – Lewes Borough Bonfire Society)

Fireworks/vandalism at Halloween: following the problem of fireworks being discharged at Halloween and also incidents of vandalism, Nina Murden was going to contact the School Liaison PC, WPC Ross. Nina was not present at the meeting therefore the action is still outstanding? (**Action: NM**)

Gate 14 Replacement: Sheep / No Sheep sign: Thyrone Outram reported that the wooden sheep sign on Gate 14 is split down the middle and needs repairing. Brian Courage volunteered to look at the sign. (**Action: BC**)

Height barriers in the twitten: these have not been installed yet, but Jackie Bishop confirmed that the small plastic sign that was broken had been replaced. (This matter is addressed further in **Issue and concerns**)

Skylark posters: Thyrone confirmed that the skylark signs had been put up on the main/pond field gates, to advise dog walkers about the birds' breeding season.

Post-Bonfire Clear-up:

Jason Winter introduced the plans for this year's Borough Bonfire Celebration. He confirmed that Borough had three weekends to access the site: the first to prepare the field; the second for bonfire night; the third to complete clear-up of the site. Stephen Watson suggested that some of the Friends could help Borough with the clear-up; Jason thought this was a good idea. Thyone Outram said that the task was big, especially on the morning after the celebrations and it was important that the smaller pieces of debris were also collected. She said that the council could provide hand-held litter pickers to help the process. Jason confirmed that a vacuum cleaner would be used alongside the hand-picking of litter. Stephen will send an email to the Friends asking for help with the clear-up. (**Action SW**)

Jason said that this afternoon, prior to the meeting he and several Borough colleagues had held a site meeting in the bonfire field. They had left their cars parked on the motor road, and upon returning 20 minutes later, found notices stuck to their windscreens advising

them not to park there. David Marsh, a long-time resident of the racecourse development, asked that in future the society contacts the race course to seek permission to park on the motor road. Jackie Bishop mentioned the bollards that had previously been placed illegally at the bottom of the motor road, and subsequently had to be removed. Rob Elvery said that it had been impossible over many years to communicate with the racecourse residents. At Roger Murray's request, David provided his contact details to Stephen. With regard to the motor road, Stephen suggested that a definitive map would help to resolve the argument about who owned the bottom of the road where it joins the Nevill Road. Susan Murray said that she would ask the town clerk if he has such a map. *(Note: Susan has since confirmed that this is the case and that she will bring a copy of the map to the next Friends meeting).* **(Action SM)**

With regard to the Borough firework display, Jackie Bishop said that the fall-out extended beyond Landport Bottom, particularly onto the road and the path alongside Wallands School. Susan Murray said that the council should include the path in their post bonfire night clean-up. David Marsh asked if the skip used by Borough for the clean-up could be put into the field, as it had previously been left on the road. Jason confirmed that the skip was parked in the field last year, *not* on the road.

Stephen said that plastic debris from fireworks was a problem, in particular the black sleeves and the wire. He asked whether fireworks with less plastic could be used. Jason confirmed that the plastic and foil packaging is always removed before the fireworks are fired. He added that Borough did not use wire. Jenny Keen mentioned that after the clean-up of the site and surrounding areas had been completed, she had collected a significant quantity of hard cardboard firework casing also wire and string, from an area of the main/pond field where sheep were grazing. It was agreed that wind direction on the night of the bonfire would affect the direction/distance of firework fall-out.

Jason provided his email address to the meeting: j.j.winter@biinternet.com

Woodkids:

Alice Bennett-Leyh spoke about developing a strip of woodland near the Chalk Pit, where small groups of children could learn about nature and wildlife. There are currently lots of fallen trees and barbed wire in the area, but clearance has been taking place with permission from the landowner. Any other litter found e.g. cans, bottles, has also been removed. Alice had spoken with Natural England regarding SSSI's, and had been told that no additional permission would be needed to progress the project.

Rob Elvery felt that teenagers would still continue leaving litter there, but Alice said that the area would be checked on a monthly basis, and that any litter found would be taken away. She confirmed that the Woodkids sessions would begin in September, and that these could be booked through Wallands School. Roger questioned the need for CBT checks, and Tyrone asked whether children would be travelling to the site after school. Alice said that currently sessions will be held on a Saturday and that parents will drop their children off. It is possible that the sessions might be extended later on to include after school activities.

Ranger's report and discussion:

Maintenance – fence repairs:

- Fence post replacement will take place over the next few months.

- Cutting overhanging vegetation on Firlie Crescent has been added to the path cutting rota. This takes place three times a year; the final cut will be at the end of August.

Habitat Management:

Grazing:

- Sheep were kept off all fields from May to August. They have now returned to the Tumuli field and will remain there for approximately another 3 weeks, then move to the pond field.
- The Southdown ewes will return later in the autumn.
- As previously, we are trying to always leave one of the larger fields free of sheep for dog-walkers.

Cutting:

- Hay cut has not been possible so areas of the pond and tumuli fields are particularly full of thistle, which needs to be cut before flowering.
- A partial cut was done to address the thistle growth; this will be repeated in September.
- Ragwort in pond field and other areas has been pulled by hand.
- Tumuli and some rougher areas are to be cut later in August.

Pond vegetation clearance and hawthorn:

- Some of the vegetation in and around the pond needs clearing.
- Hawthorn scrub is starting to spread in the pond field.
- The South Downs Volunteer Ranger Service is scheduled to work with us Sunday 24th and Wednesday 27th September. If any of the Friends are available, they will be welcome to join us.

Wildlife

- Orchid count over 4000 – previous best count 1500.

Events

- The Beauties of the Downs walk took place in July in sunshine, there were many butterflies: marbled whites, gatekeepers, meadow browns, ringlets, common blues, red admiral, whites and unexpectedly large numbers of small/Essex skippers.

Survey

- A Great Crested Newt pond survey with the Friends took place in May. The pond was heavily vegetated and no GCN's were seen – only smooth newts.
- Skylarks and Meadow pipits were recorded by Nina Murden on Landport Bottom.

Other

- On 22nd August, Stephanie Miles of Kew Gardens (Wakehurst) will be collecting Black Knapweed and Red Clover for the Butterfly Bank project in Brighton, where chalk banks are being seeded with local chalk grassland wildflowers.
- Jasmine Owen, Assistant Ranger is leaving, and a replacement is anticipated.

Responses to Ranger's Report:

Yellow Ragwort: David Marsh said that a good job had been done in removing Ragwort on the north verge between the motor road and the footpath; he asked whether this would also be carried out on the south side of the verge near the allotments. Thyone will look into this. **(Action: TO)** Jenny Keen said that there was a lot of Ragwort growing along the edge of the main/pond field, running south from the Firlie Crescent entrance. Jancis Ham asked if she could remove any Ragwort found growing. Thyone confirmed that this would be fine but that it should be put into a bag and thrown away. It should not be left on the ground to dry and seed.

Round-headed Rampion: Stephen Watson reported that he had found three plants in the Pond Field.

Grass cutting: Stephen asked if the grass cut that had been carried out in the main/pond field, could have been delayed because of the presence of butterflies and skylarks. Thyone said that this had taken place at the optimum time for cutting and could only have been delayed by a week.

Issues and concerns:

Gate needing repair: Rob Elvery said that the gate at the top of the main field closes very loosely and he had on occasion found it open. When sheep are moved back into the field they could potentially escape onto the motor road.

Height barriers in twitten: Following on from the Action Point regarding the barriers, David Marsh said that the people who ride along the twitten need to be identified as to which stables they come from. He continued that the current sign notifying non-access to the twitten should be better positioned as it is not clear. Susan Murray said that an official letter should be sent to the County Highways Dept. regarding the situation. She suggested that the Nevill Residents Association could write to the County Highways. Jackie Bishop will put this forward to the Association. **(Action JB)** Brian Courage asked David if he could re-iterate the twitten problem to the racecourse riders. **(Action DM)**

Wildlife updates:

Jenny Keen said that she was not carrying out reptile surveys this year, on the advice of Thyone.

Nina Murden was not present at the meeting to give any further information regarding the skylark / meadow pipit surveys.

Celebrations:

A planned moth evening had to be cancelled.

Protection:

Stephen Watson invited David Marsh to speak about the footpath diversion. David said that the landowner diverted the public bridleway with council consultation. The route the public have been using differs from the bridleway to the north. An application has been put in regarding the bridleway diversion. He commented that these issues are nothing to do with the motor road. Rob Elvery said that there had been a lot of misleading information regarding the diversion. David said that there was still much to be resolved, and that a lot of false information existed. Jackie Bishop said that no-one wanted a cinder path along the bridleway, and that the work that had already taken place, e.g. removing trees, disturbing bird nests, was against the law.

Rob said that there had been historical problems with the racecourse landowner. David responded that to his knowledge this person had put in an application before the work related to the bridleway had started. He confirmed that Lewes Town Partnership had issued tourist information indicating a footpath which crossed the racecourse land, thereby encouraging access onto private land. Brian Courage suggested that a sign could be put at the top of the motor road to indicate to walkers that the footpath is not a right of way. David referred to the sign at the bottom of the motor road which indicates that it is a private road he believes that the sign is not large enough. He added that cyclists should be using the bridleway to the right of the motor road, and not the road itself.

Rob mentioned the footpath to the left of the motor road, which he said was a designated footpath, indicated on maps by a green dotted line. Vehicles had on occasion been seen driving along the footpath. Imogen Makepeace referred to a stretch of the footpath which approaches the organic allotments. She said that it should be kept in a state of good repair as it was difficult, especially for disabled people, to access the area. Imogen said that she will contact the Town Clerk, Steve Brigden regarding the repair/access issues. **(Action IM)** David asked that the allotment owners keep the fencing adjacent to their plots clear of vegetation. He confirmed that the hawthorn trees in this location would be cut back, and Stephen Watson asked that the wildlife should be considered when this work is undertaken.

The next Friend of Landport Bottom meeting: will be held on Monday 13th November 2017.

The meeting ended at 9 pm.