

Meeting of Friends of Landport Bottom
Monday 9th March 2020 – 7.30 pm
St. Mary's Church Hall, Highdown Road, Lewes.

Present: Stephen Watson; Sarah Flynn; Vicki Trenhaile; Rob Elvery;
Brian Courage; Jonathan Vernon; Tessa Gane; Rob Handy; Jenny
Keen.

Apologies: Thyone Outram; Christine Cohen-Park; Ruth O'Keeffe

1. Minutes from the last meeting

The Minutes were agreed.

2. Action points from previous meeting:

The issues regarding:

- i. The steps and handrail in Firle Crescent have now been repaired. The work was paid for by the Lewes Town Council
- ii. The fallen tree on the path to the chalk pit has been removed
- iii. The ash dieback tree removal work is in progress
- iv. Bonfire – the shepherd to be informed of David Marsh's concerns regarding fireworks scaring the sheep. *Action: Thyone O.* Still outstanding.

3. Additional Issues

The path off Hawkenbury Way is the main access to the south end of Landport Bottom, and is used by many. Typically around 100 walkers a day, also horse riders, and occasional vehicles gaining access to Southern Water's reservoir. Rob E. said the first 30 metres of the path is council owned, and that it is in an appalling condition. It is a muddy hole with an awkward cross slope, difficult and dangerous to walkers. Rob has measured the area and put together a solution plan in which he suggests using crushed stone to infill the path; this would be the the cheapest and easiest way of making the path more stable. The path is not designated. He has submitted the plan to Cllr. Rob Handy; as the repair is the responsibility of the Lewes District Council. Tessa G. said she will speak with Matt Bird regarding the solution. *Action: Tessa G.*

4. Ranger's report and discussion: (In the absence of Thyone Outram, Ranger Brian Courage presented her report)

Grazing:

- * Sheep are currently in the tumuli field. They have spent most of the winter in the pond field.
- * Pregnant ewes have gone to Plumpton for lambing.
- * From 12th March onwards Southdown ewes with young lambs will also be in the tumuli field.
- * Lambs will be brought up in batches
- * Dogs must be kept on a lead in the field where there are lambs

Ash Dieback:

- * Extensive work has started at the A275 roadside. This will not involve cutting trees on Landport Bottom edge. No stumps have been killed off, will wait and see what returns after 2-3 years.
- * Works will be needed on some dying ash trees on Landport Bottom side, probably this autumn. This is unlikely to be as radical as the roadside work.

Jill's Pond fence:

- * There is the possibility to extend the space around the pond by moving the fence, this would increase space for Great Crested Newts. The change depends on getting planning permission in time, as volunteers are booked for early May.

Habitat works:

- * Pond field - some small scrub invading grassland has been pulled by volunteers. Not as much achieved as was hoped so will be returning Wed 11th March to remove Hawthorn. All Friends are welcome to join Kim and the group from 10am to 3pm.

Reptile Survey:

- * Apologies. This will have to be left until next year.. It would be good to get more people involved, and there is no capacity within the council to do that at the moment nor even to establish the survey this year.

Newt survey:

- * There will be a newt survey on Monday evening 20th April - all welcome.

Responsible dog ownership session:

- * The South Downs National Park van is coming for part of the morning from 9.30am on Tuesday 21st April.

District Council restructure - internal consultation currently in progress:

- * There is a proposal to cut the number of staff. This involves the loss of all 3 x Specialist Advisers for the Downland and Reserves over Eastbourne and Lewes Districts (includes ranger service work, since Ranger posts disappeared in last re-structure 2017). The creation of one Ecology/Biodiversity advisor is proposed
- * All other nature reserves' work to come under the remit of a parks and open spaces officers.

Additional points:**Higher Level Stewardship:**

Brian C. said the HLS scheme is due to finish in 2022, it was funded by DEFRA but post Brexit may receive less funding. Sarah F. asked about funding through the South Downs National Park?

Gate repairs:

Brian C. said that the Firlle Crescent gate 16 was due for repair, also gate 14 at the top of the Pond field by the allotments.

Vicki T. reported that the ground by gate 15 is very wet and there is a permanent puddle. Brian C. will look at this. *Action: Brian C.*

Rob E. said that one of the horizontal bars at gate 18 has become detached. Brian C confirmed that the gates will all be checked.

Rob also said that he had found some of the Sheep sign bolts on the ground where they had been removed; he had screwed them back.

Race course:

The race course owner wants to erect a cast-iron sign: 'Old Race Course', on Landport Bottom. He may need planning permission.

5. Issues and concerns:

Galloping horses:

At the last Friends meeting Rob E. had reported horses at full gallop on Landport Bottom. At this meeting Brian C. said that he would speak with Ray Goldstein - Hamsey riding stables, Lucy Postgate – Houndean farm, and James Oliver – Lewes old racecourse, and remind them all that galloping on Landport Bottom is not acceptable. *Action: Brian C (note, Brian has since spoken with all parties. He reports that they were very helpful and obliging and would speak with their riders).*

All weather road:

Rob E. said that the all weather road by the stables has been very beneficial to the Pond field as the number of racehorses using the field has been reduced.

6. Wildlife updates:

Skylark survey: in previous years these have been conducted by Nina and Kim Murden. They have not attended the Friends meetings for a while. Vicki T. suggested that they might like to continue with their own surveys and report back to the Friends.

Reptile survey: following on from Thyone's comments in her Ranger's Report, Vicki T. suggested that some volunteers could still go ahead and carry out surveys this year. Jenny K. said she had set up surveys in the past using roofing felt refugia. Rob E. said that he has some felt we can use. Vicki T. will also ask her neighbour who is a roofer. Sarah F. said she would like to be involved. Jenny K will look at previous survey records for locations and quantity of required refugia. Brian C. said that perhaps the council could help with the cost.

7. Celebrations:

Nothing identified.

8. Protection:

Nothing identified.

9. Any other business:

Landport Management Committee meeting on 4th December 2019:

At the meeting Councillor Rob Handy was elected as Chairman. The next meeting is scheduled for May and will be held in the Lewes Town Hall. Before the meeting there will be a walk around Landport Bottom. The Friends can attend the walk and/or meeting.

Movement of the sheep:

Vicki T. said that biodiversity is important when planning which field the sheep should be moved to. She asked whether there is a forward plan for their movement. Rob H. will follow this up. *Action: Rob H.*

10. Date of next meetings:

Monday 13th July and Monday 9th November 2020, at St.Mary's Church Hall, Highdown Road, Lewes.