

Meeting of Friends of Landport Bottom
Monday 13th July 2020 – 7.30 pm. Meeting held via Zoom.

Present: Stephen Watson; Thyone Outram; Sarah Flynn; Vicki Trenhaile; Rob Elvery; Kim and Nina Murden; Valerie Raynor; Rob Handy; Jenny Keen.

Apologies: Janis Ham; Matt Bird.

1. Minutes from the last meeting:

The Minutes were agreed.

2. Action points from previous meeting:

i. Rob Elvery had submitted a plan to Cllr. Rob Handy to improve the path off Hawkenbury Way, as the repair is the responsibility of the LDC. Tessa Gane said she would speak with Matt Bird regarding a solution.

Tessa Gane was not present at tonight's meeting, but Stephen had received an email from Matt saying that he has asked Andy Frost of the LDC for a possible solution, and will get back to us. Rob E. said that the Hawkenbury Way path would need 12-15 tonnes (a truckload), of stones to make a repair. **Action: Await response from Andy Frost**

ii. Look into the problem of a persistent puddle by Gate 15 (Pond field), during wet weather.

Rob E. said that due to the dry weather the problem had currently gone away, but that it would return come the winter when an inch of rain can collect. He suggested that one barrow load of stones would be sufficient to fill the hollow by Gate 15.

Thyone confirmed that this could be actioned.

iii. Find out if there is a forward plan for the movement of sheep.

Thyone said that the plan was to move the sheep off the Pond field, May, June and July, and try to graze the Tumuli field quite hard this year. There is no plan to move the sheep again before the end of July. Stephen commented that it would be good if the orchids had a chance to seed in the Pond field before the sheep returned. There is no plan for which field will be used over the winter for grazing, but the idea would be to try and graze all 3 x fields. Whilst there are no exact dates or numbers there are certain principles, i.e. to graze as hard as possible through the winter so by the beginning of spring the grass is very short and the chalk grassland plants have a better chance of flowering.

iv. Bonfire – the shepherd to be informed of David Marsh's concerns about sheep being frightened by fireworks. Action: Thyone Outram, carried over from 11.11.19.

David was not present at the meeting, but Stephen believed he may have thought the sheep should be removed before Bonfire. However, due to Covid-19 it is uncertain whether Bonfire will even go ahead this year. **Action: Thyone will speak with the shepherd.**

3. Additional Issues:

i. Issues arising from Covid-19.

Nina and Kym said that the general movement on Landport Bottom has been very busy during lock-down, and a lot of people seemed unaware of the etiquette of walking on the

paths. Someone (anonymous) had put up unofficial notices about the nesting skylarks in the Pond field, which had prompted some walkers to ask about moving around the fields. This was very positive because it raised people's awareness and was a good thing for the community. Stephen said that people speaking to walkers regarding the presence of skylarks, had been very helpful, and educational. Jenny said she had informed a lot of people as to why the skylark field notices were there, and also told them about the Friends of LB. suggesting they could find out more information on the website. Stephen said that the website could be changed to a Facebook group; he will look into this. **Action: Stephen**

ii. Skylarks / Wild flowers:

Rob E. said that now the grass has grown longer, the paths are better defined. He noted that the initial amount of people using LB had now reduced. He felt it had been a particularly good year for the skylarks, and had personally noticed a greater diversity of wild flowers. The Pond field in particular had indicated species that were not previously noted.

Thyone asked if skylarks had been spotted elsewhere e.g. the Tumuli field. Nina and Kym confirmed that they had been seen in the Tumuli field, but were not so prevalent. They noted that the skylarks in the Pond field are pushing over to the southern end of the field, but have not yet reached the area where the orchids are. Rob E. said how lovely the orchids were looking. He had also noticed a patch of Yellowwort, near the orchids.

Nina said that Michael Blencowe had visited LB and noted the presence of Small Blue butterflies; these are quite rare. The Small Blue likes Kidney Vetch, which Stephen commented had done well this year. Rob E. said that Lady's Bedstraw was also prolific. Kym had seen St. John's Wort all over the Pond field together with Eyebright. In previous years it had only been seen in the two other LB fields. Stephen said in the past there had been Sussex Rampion in the west end of the Pond field, on the border with the Racecourse. Kim and Nina said it had been sighted near to the Chalk Pit, but not on LB. Vicki had spotted one Pyramidal Orchid in the Pond field, on the path leading to the allotments.

Rob H. said he has just begun using a new App to identify wild flowers, it is called SEEK. It uses good software and has been really useful. He will let people know about this.

4. Rangers report and discussion:

Grazing

- Southdown sheep were introduced to Landport Bottom with young lambs almost exactly as lockdown got started. Landport Bottom provided a wonderful opportunity for Lewes people to get out and exercise in nature. This had increased the numbers of people including dog walkers, using the site. Some seemed new to Landport Bottom and were unaware of the rules around not disturbing the sheep.
- There were a lot of sheep worrying incidents with sheep and lambs being chased by dogs and sometimes by people too. There was one lamb death - the shepherd thought this was from stress since it was a large strong lamb with nothing obviously wrong with it. Stronger, more powerful notices were erected.
- The Southdown breed lambs were very popular with site users. They have now been weaned and replaced by tegs (non Southdown bred sheep in their second year).

- There was a second sheep death (a teg) due to a dog attack on 25/26 June.
- The sheep have grazed the Pond field and the Tumuli field over the spring and summer. The orchids have flowered in the Pond field. All fields look good and floristically diverse.

Infrastructure

- The moving of the fence to increase space for Great Crested Newts , did not happen due to lock-down. The aim is to get it done over the next 12 months.
- Fence repairs have taken place where needed during lock-down. The work was undertaken through contractors because no volunteers have been going out.

Special Events

- There have been no walks or wildlife events over the spring and summer so far, and none are planned

Changing Chalk project

- This is a large project with many partners (National Trust, National Park, Kew Gardens, Natural England, Butterfly Conservation, and more) looking at the Downland, with different partners approaching from different aspects, land management and grazing, archaeology and history, saving rare species etc. The project has passed its first hurdle and the detail is being fleshed out between now and the end of the year. If successful LDC/EBC will have a new Community Ranger to work with people on Downland sites. This will include Landport Bottom and hopefully will include working with the Friends, as well as some work on responsible dog ownership. If the final bid is successful, the 4 year post should be in place at the beginning of 2022. A consultant, Helen Mead is helping to put everything together, she could attend our next meeting? So, any ideas to do with nature to attract people to LB, e.g. an art project, Kym's work with herbs, etc., could be passed to Helen.

Surveys

- Hopefully we will be surveying chalk grassland vegetation with Steph Miles on Mon 20th July 10am. This requires some ID skills since social distancing will mean everyone not leaning over the same plant. We may each have to work on our own areas, but the Friends are very welcome if they would like to come and help. This is the final year of the DEFRA High Level Stewardship funding. As much of LB as possible needs to be surveyed, however the surveys are very specific, and there is a list of plants we are looking for. *(Note, post meeting the date of the survey has been changed to Tuesday 21st July at 0930)*

Lewes District Council Staff

- One of the two Specialist Advisor for Downland and Reserves (SADR), LDC Kim Dawson, has left and is not to be replaced.
- Thyone will have an increased work load and will have to scale back her work on each individual site including Landport Bottom.

5. Share and communicate issues or concerns:

Already covered elsewhere in the Minutes.

6. Wildlife updates – Surveys:

Jenny asked about other surveys on LB, i.e. reptiles. Thyone said she didn't know if there will be a reptile survey next year. It takes a bit of organisation and may need to wait until the new Community Ranger is in place, when it could become part of the Changing Chalk Project.

Rob E. asked if there would be a bird survey. He mentioned Kevin Murphy who is a regular walker on LB, who has an excellent knowledge and carries out surveys for the BTO. Thyone thought it would be excellent to get Kevin involved. Nina confirmed that she had not carried out a bird survey this year. Previously she had surveyed the skylarks, meadow pipits and corn buntings. She said that one person carrying out the survey isn't ideal, it is better to have other people involved and to sector off the field. Nina has apparently spoken about this to Kevin Murphy.

7. Celebrations – events or promotions:

This has been covered in the Ranger's Report re: the Changing Chalk Project.

8. Protection -identified threats:

Rob E. said he had read in the Sussex Express that race horse trainer Susie Smith, is leaving the Race Course and re-locating in West Sussex, therefore there will be no trainers or stables in situ. Kym mentioned that properties on the development were up for sale. Stephen said that regarding the history of the Race Course, there is a sign which could be placed on LB. Thyone said that the sign might be located at the top of the Pond Field, close to the gate accessing the Motor Road, although this was not definite. Rob E. said it was an old sign showing dates of when the Race Course was operational; apparently there is currently a dispute between the History Society and the Race Course regarding the sign's ownership

9. Any other business:

Kym asked when Nina should take down the skylark notices on the gates, and Thyone confirmed the end of July. It was noted that the additional notices in the Pond field whilst not official, had been effective. *Action: Nina & Kym*

Jenny referred to the latest issue of the Lewes News. On page 7 there is an article about skylarks. It is a factual and engaging piece written from the point of view of a skylark. This should appeal to anyone who has recently walked on LB.

Regarding next week's wild flower survey, Thyone will email further details to everyone who has expressed an interest.

10. Date of next meeting:

Monday 9th November 2020 – venue dependent upon the Covid-19 situation.