

Friends of Landport Bottom Agenda

Monday 8th March, 7.30pm using Zoom

Attending: Stephen Watson, Jenny Keen, Vicki Trenhaile, Ginny Russell, Matt Bird, Sarah Flynn, Rob Elvery, David Salter, Brian Courage, Rob Handy, James Oliver

Apologies: Councillor Ruth O'Keeffe, Andy Frost (LDC)

Lewes Old Racecourse – James Oliver

The meeting began with a presentation by James Oliver, new owner of the Lewes Old Racecourse. He has owned one of the three yards since 2015 and has just bought a second. He is not a trainer and is subletting the yard to a private livery. The third yard remains with a trainer. His intention is to restore the racecourse buildings: he has already uncovered the old Totaliser building. He wishes to create better access and improve the relationship between pedestrians and riders. He would like to have a cafe and a small campsite. He also plans to put in better fencing along with safety measures which include crossing points and better signage.

Rob Elvery asked who has left the Racecourse – James said it was Suzy Smith. Sarah Flynn asked what horse activities would be remaining on site. James is renting one yard with 12 stables to a horse owner who will sublet to private livery owners.

James Oliver's Facebook Page is the 'The Old Racecourse' not to be confused with 'Lewes Old Racecourse' page which is not his.

Rob Handy asked about antagonism between local residents and people on the racecourse and asked what ideas James had to improve that. James said there is Article 4 Directive 1993 regarding the putting up of fences and the maintaining of any fences in the interest of public safety, which has not been reviewed although it should have been. Traffic has increased since then. The Directive deters landowners from putting up fencing, which may be good but there are places where fencing is needed for public safety or to protect a hedge line. He is debating this legally with the South Downs National Park. He wants a more defined site with better sign posting. and to maintain the bridleway from the prison to Black Cap. This is very heavily used by horses and people and needs to be surfaced properly.

James said he would welcome a call from anyone who is interested, and left the meeting.

1. Minutes from last meeting were approved

2. Action points and issues from last meeting

i. Hawkenbury Way path. The first 20-30 yards is still a problem. Rob Elvery described the site which is gradually getting worse and worse. Though ok when dry it is appalling in wet weather and this has resulted in accidents. The ownership of the land is uncertain although it is believed to belong to Iford Estates. It is not a designated right of way but ESCC has been maintaining the first 30 metres. Matt Bird has raised it with Andy Frost of LDC who says it is not their responsibility. Sarah Flynn suggested we should approach SDNP. It was decided that Brian Courage and Rob Elvery would meet and take the problem to SDNP and get the job done.

ii. Persistent puddle by Gate 15 (Pond Field) during wet weather. This has now been resolved.

iii. Changing Chalk (action Stephen Watson)

Thyone had asked Stephen to draft a letter in support of a bid to get a Community Ranger to manage the chalk grassland under Changing Chalk project, which Stephen agreed to do if she forwarded information and contact details, however this had not happened.

3. Council Reorganisation

Due to council reorganisation there is no ranger to give us a report. Kim Dawson and Thyone Outram have left.

Matt Bird said biodiversity is a priority for the District Council and they are putting £600,000 into rewilding initiatives. looking into a green consultancy. They have no ecologist since Kim left and desperately need one. There will be someone looking after those roles but not yet clear how it will be configured.

Brian Courage, Town Ranger can look after issues such as broken fences, but has no ecological expertise. Plumpton has been approached to possibly replace Thyone and Kim if LDC are not able to.

The movement of sheep from one field to another will be up to the shepherd, Charlotte. Advance notice of sheep movements would be appreciated. Brian is going to talk to the shepherd. Ideally a week's notice of sheep movements should be given but not always possible. Stephen Watson asked that the sheep placements should make ecological sense with regard to flowering times of orchids in the Pond field for instance.

There was discussion about the notices regarding keeping dogs on leads in sheep fields. This is disregarded by some people who when challenged say their dogs are safe with sheep. This is not helpful as they are setting a bad example to other dog owners, especially the increasing number of new dog owners using Landport Bottom. There is a new notice in the Pond Field saying dogs must be on the lead at all times. Matt Bird said he didn't want more attacks on sheep and that difficult decisions will need to be made unless people change their behaviour. He does not want us to lose the sheep as this would be a bad outcome for all sorts of reasons.

Sarah Flynn said that the changing nature of the racecourse means that there will now be more private riders at different times of the day and uncontrolled dogs can be a danger to horses and to themselves.

4. The skylarks are singing and will soon be nesting. The signs asking people to keep themselves and their dogs to paths will be in place from April to July. It is believed that the signs are put up by Nina Murden. Brian will talk to Nina about it.

Celebrations, Events and Promotions

A theatre company ('The Company' - the same that put on a site-specific walking play called Montfort's March in 2014) is planning to make videos of incidents of the Battle of Lewes. There will be QR codes for people to access the videos at appropriate places.

Next meeting: Monday 12th July 2021, 7.30pm