

## **Friends of Landport Bottom Meeting Monday 12th July 7.30pm on Zoom**

**Present:** Stephen Watson, Heather Hill, Serena Thirkell, Sarah Neels, Brian Courage, Kathryn van Howe, Rob Elvery, Philip Dover, Matthew Bird, Jenny Keen, Vicki Trenhaile, Sarah O’Kane

**Apologies:** Ruth O’Keeffe, Jonathan Vernon, Cllr Rob Handy

### **Minutes from last meeting and matters arising**

The minutes were passed. Matters arising: Brian Courage said that the two action points were either done or in the process of being done. The matter of the muddy path at Hawkenbury Way is still waiting for a resolution. At the heart of the problem is the dispute over responsibility for its maintenance. It is owned by Iford Farms who are not interested and neither are SDNP. Southern Water is responsible for most of the damage when its truck goes over it but this is once a week. It is possible that the Town Council will take this up, but they are reluctant to spend money if it will be undone again in 12-18 months by Southern Water vehicles. According Rob Elvery, an engineer, it would require 1000 – 1500kgs of stone to create a firm surface; it has taken 15-20 years to deteriorate and if and durable stone like MOT type 1 (not crushed chalk) was used he thought it should last 5-10 years.

### **The Old Racecourse – impact of developments**

Stephen Watson made clear that FOLB is concerned with what is going on at the Racecourse insofar as it affects Landport Bottom.

An anonymous flyer has been posted and spread about protesting the planned “Behind the Woods” festival to be held on Saturday 24th July and over-development at the racecourse, to which James Oliver, organiser of the festival, had replied on his Facebook page (The Old Racecourse).

Sarah Neels explained that a residents association has been formed by the residents at the racecourse who are behind the flyer. Philip Dover, a member of the group, spoke about its aims and concerns. He said they do not want to be confrontational. James Oliver, the owner of some of the property, has been eyeing up property and land over the last four years. He created paddocks and gates to close off his part of the Racecourse but has been asked by the SDNP to remove them and he has removed most, reluctantly.

Commercial ventures have been proposed by Mr Oliver and his partner which include plans for a bar, campsite and weddings which are away from the designated equestrian purposes.

James Oliver’s purchased of Susy Smith’s old stables which he has gutted and changed the use to storage and, in the resident's belief, for substantial commercial activity. He has sought but not yet received permission for change of use. This led to the formation of the Residents Association which seeks to try to retain the integrity of this iconic site used for equestrian purposes, to preserve its wildlife and natural beauty and to make it accessible. They believe there are signs of significant commercial intent which will change the nature of the area.

Of great concern to the residents is the event that is planned for 24th July which will involve bands, food and drink and hundreds of people tramping across to the woods over Landport Bottom. They fear the potential harm to the environment is considerable. The people will not be able to use the Motor Road, which is only for residents and guests and there might be a significant parking problem at the bottom of the motor road.

Rob Elvery asked if James Oliver was building a new access road from Spital Road on to an all weather track to the Racecourse, as sawdust had been replaced with stone.

Sarah Neels was concerned about the impact of events. She has found a lot of broken glass on Landport Bottom. She has been talking to Licensing regarding the TEN (Temporary Event Notification) under which this bar is operating. Only Environmental Health and the Police are involved with granting TENs and SDNP are not involved.

A TEN is issued for events up to 499 people for 7 days at a time. 15 TENs can be issued a year to a maximum of 21 days a year. The bar has been operational for more than 21 days already.

Several people expressed concerns regarding the noise that will be generated and the behaviour of inebriated persons who could leave gates open causing danger to sheep, and disrupt skylarks that nest on the ground and other wildlife.

Matthew Bird, a Town Councillor has a meeting with the licensing officers and will highlight the knock-on environmental aspects and the need to enforce the TEN. It seems 800 tickets have been given away free when there is a 499 limit to people attending. It would be good to have a whole estate plan on which people could take an informed position. If anyone had evidence of incidents with dates and times they can email him and he will take it up with the licencing officers.

Philip Dover, a resident of the racecourse, was concerned that emergency vehicles would not be able to reach the event as there is no road access to the event location behind the woods. It was difficult to get details from the organisers.

Sarah Neel warned that the sheep who could be frightened. This could lead to Plumpton College considering whether sheep should be kept on Landport Bottom. They are vital to preserving chalk grassland.

Residents are keeping records of what is going on and they are being asked to email details to Matthew Bird who will take it up with officers

#### **4. Implications of proposed changes to the electoral boundary**

There are proposed changes which will place most of Landport Bottom in the East Grinstead and Uckfield constituency. This is clearly pointless as it is a diversion over land nobody lives on. It will split Landport Bottom, which has been devolved to Lewes Town Council, in two. It also cuts through gardens of properties on Highdown Road that back on to Landport Bottom. One of the implications is that our MP, Maria Caulfield, will not be able to lobby against development.

The proposed change is to have Landport Bottom included in the Lewes constituency as it is now and reverse this senseless move. Councillor Matthew Bird said that discussions were taking place in the Town Council at the moment. Sarah Neels suggested that pressure should be applied from Friends of Landport Bottom. An email is to be written which will circulate among members and residents. Also a petition is going to be drawn up and circulated. There is a deadline of August 2nd.

#### **5 Update on the Council's reorganisation and recruitment of a ranger**

Brian Courage has been told that interviews have taken place for replacements of the rangers, posts held previously by Thyone Outram and Kim Dawson. Offers have been made to two ecologists and if taken up these people should be in their posts in September. Matthew Birds said the idea is to have a green consultancy.

#### **6. Opportunity to share information concerning the area.**

Pyramidal orchids have spread in the Pond field and are now also in the Small Field, and there has also been an increase of fragrant orchids. There is a lot of kidney vetch which is the food plant of the scarce small blue butterfly, which has been present in good numbers this year.

The path that runs between the estate and Landport Bottom should have been cut 2-3 months ago. The grass is now waist high and the path is impassable. It hasn't been cut at all this year. Brian Courage agreed it should have been cut. LTC contact LDC who contract a strimming company but it has been delayed. Matthew Bird said this was due to a shortage of staff at the contractors and they have a backlog including recreation areas in the town. He will back up Brian Courage in following this up.

The Town Council pay a contractor to strim the allotment path.

Sarah Neels said the SDNP have a new project aiming to raise £100m to re-nature the South Downs. There is information on their website. It might be possible to submit a bid for projects on Landport Bottom under this scheme. She will circulate information.

Some of the skylark notices have been torn down. Nina and Kym Murden are to be contacted about replacing them.

In the Pond Field hawthorn is spreading and if left, the field will eventually turn to scrub. Brian Courage said that a team of conservation volunteers (The Conservation Volunteers, TCV based in Hastings) will be tackling the hawthorn over 4-5 days in September. If anybody want to assist they would need to join their organisation. Brian Courage will email details. There was a discussion about whether it would be good to leave a few patches of scrub. Brighton CV no longer operate in this area.

Brian Courage will repair the fence around the pond, but need to apply for a 'Section 4' permission.

Matthew Bird said the Landport Bottom Committee on the Town Council had not met for a while and will be meeting at a date to be confirmed and updating the management plan. They need to engaged with the SDNP. The Town Clerk wants the different views about landscape reflected in the Landport Bottom management strategies. The council meetings are open to the public.

#### **7 Wildlife (Volunteer surveys and updates from volunteers & members of the group)**

There are no surveys taking place at present. Sarah Neels said that surveys were worthwhile and it would be good to surveyt the impact of increased use during the Covid pandemic. .

**10. Date of the next meeting** Monday 8th November 2021