

Meeting of Friends of Landport Bottom
Monday 8th November 2021 – 7.30 pm. Meeting held via Zoom.

Present: Stephen Watson; Vicki Trenhaile; Rob Elvery; Cllr Matthew Bird;
Cllr Jonathan Vernon; Sarah Flynn; David Salter; Chris Bowen; Jenny Keen

Apologies: Cllr. Ruth O’Keeffe; Brian Courage; Lydia - Ranger

1. Minutes from the last meeting: The Minutes were agreed.

2. Action points from previous meeting:

i. The Hawkenbury Way path: Rob E. gave an update about the current state of the path. He reported that the situation was worsening, and the first part has become treacherous. In addition brambles are now overgrowing the path. Southern Water were still managing to drive up there to carry out maintenance at the reservoir. When it is no longer possible to drive Rob said they would park their vehicle and walk. As in the previous Minutes, Rob stated that in his opinion a couple of cubic metres of stone could be used to create a firm surface. A site meeting had been held between Southern Water, Brian Courage, Rob Elvery and Mr Robinson the landowner. Brian had asked Southern Water to do something about the situation but nothing had taken place. Matthew B. will speak with Andy Frost and Brian Courage of the Lewes District Council. **Action: Matthew B.**

ii. The Old Racecourse – issues: Regarding the planned festival on 24th July, Matthew B. confirmed there had been a number of meetings with the licensing officer prior to this happening. However on the day there were far less people than expected present, and the issues of noise, litter, etc. were not a problem. Sarah Neels had been trying to organise a meeting between local residents and the racecourse to discuss all ongoing issues. The bar which operated during the summer will not be opening through the winter.

Action: Await a response from Sarah N. confirming the meeting date.

iii. Boundary Change Commission - Regarding the proposed changes to the electoral boundary, Stephen W. had put in a submission on behalf of the FOLB. He awaits an outcome. No petition opposing the changes had been raised as far as he knew.

3. Jill’s Pond, fence repairs:

David S. suggested that there was a significant leak in Jill’s pond as it hadn’t filled up properly for about three years. The higher depth of water provided a habitat for great crested and smooth newts. He felt that possibly the roots of the willow tree had gone through the pond’s plastic lining. Rob E. noted that 190mm of rain had fallen in October, double the month’s average, however there was still only 3-4 inches of water in the pond. It was also noted that the vegetation in and around the pond needed cutting / clearing.

Matthew B. confirmed that he’d had a meeting with Brian C. at the pond a while back to discuss the possibility of a leak, and the need for some pond clearance. It is not known whether volunteers could be involved with the work, but this would be the right time of year to carry out pond clearance. In addition he and Brian had discussed the state of the fencing around the pond. Brian had spoken to a couple of contractors regarding these matters and one had visited the pond about three weeks ago.

Jenny K. expressed concern as to the possible dangers afforded by the broken fencing around the pond. Matthew B. confirmed that unfortunately planning permission to undertake any repairs had to be sought from the South Downs National Park. He also said that from a Lewes Town Council

point of view they needed to have a Landport Bottom Management meeting as soon as possible, something which was long overdue. There is a new Town Clerk who is currently very busy, but who will arrange a meeting in due course. Jill's Pond was one of the items which needs to be discussed at the meeting. *Action: Matthew B. to speak with Brian C. re: the pond contractor.*

4. Possibility of installing a bench at the top of Offham Hill:

David S. proposed that a bench be installed at the top of the Top (Small) Field, where walkers could rest. He had been looking at various possible options, e.g. using recycled materials. Matthew B. said that there had been a previous application for a bench which wasn't approved. However, he suggested that David submit an application to the Town Clerk at LTC. David asked the meeting how many people were in favour of a bench, and the response was a unanimous 'yes'. Jonathon V. commented that Councillor Wendy Maples and he were passionate about benches, and he felt that such an application would receive a positive response. *Action: David S.*

5. Sheep worrying by dogs / dogs not on leads around the sheep:

Jenny K. asked whether fines could be imposed by the South Downs National Park for people who did not keep their dogs on a lead around sheep. She said that the small SDNP signs attached to the Landport Bottom gates stated, 'Keep your dog on a lead around livestock'. Sarah F. searched the www and noted that in Wales a fine of up to £1,000 was indicated for walking dogs off the lead. Matthew B. had met with the SDNP and said that fines here were not an option. LB is LTC land and the sheep are there to help with the grazing. He added that it might help if the shepherdess gave more notice about when the sheep were moving fields.

Jonathan V. said that when walking his own dog he had frequently witnessed people entering LB via the Firlle Crescent gate, and immediately letting their dogs off the lead into the field of sheep. He said that the public who use LB frequently just ignore the gate signs. He suggested that dogs should be kept on leads even when there were no sheep in the field, but Rob E. objected strongly to this.

Jonathan had photographed all the gates into LB and noted that there were 5 different signs attached to each relating to controlling dogs around sheep. This gave no clear message to the public. Everyone present agreed that the different signs were confusing, and that these needed to be clearer and consistent. Whilst the current wooden signs on the gates indicated that dogs should be kept 'under close control', people did not seem to want to follow this advice. Jonathan therefore proposed that they should be changed to read: 'Dogs must be on a lead when there are sheep in the field'. He also wondered whether an area could be fenced off in the Pond Field for the sheep.

Matthew B. said he had asked for a meeting with the SDNP, LDC, LTC and Plumpton College. He had spoken to the Town Clerk who will organise a meeting in due course. He confirmed that there had been an agreement for new signs regarding dogs being kept on leads, and he was not sure why this had not yet happened. *Action: Matthew B. will speak with Brian Courage.*

6. Scrub cutting:

A group of volunteers had cut down the hawthorn scrub in the Pond Field, and dumped it at the edge of the field and outside the perimeter wire fence. As there had been no ecologist ranger present the work went ahead unsupervised. Rob E. noted that all the hawthorn had just been sliced off at the base, despite some of it being established growth. The result of cutting at the base would be multi-stemmed scrub instead of trees. When Thyone Outram had organised this previously, bushes were uprooted selectively using a special tool. He added that skylarks had used these as outposts. It seems there is no plan to remove the cut scrub.

7. Recruitment of a Ranger:

Vicki T. said that she had met the two new Rangers, and suggested that it would be good if a time could be arranged for them to meet people on LB. Stephen W. asked Matthew B. to confirm the names of the new Rangers. *Jenny K. has emailed Matthew B. for the names.* **Action: Matthew B.**

8. Issues and concerns:

Lots of debris clearance had taken place in the Tumuli Field after the recent Borough firework celebrations. Rob E. said the initial clear up had been followed by a further effort, and that today the area appeared to be in good order. It was noted that if the field was not properly cleared B.B.S. would lose its deposit for use of the site.

9. Wildlife updates / surveys:

Nothing to report.

10. Celebrations:

Nothing to report.

11. Protection / treats:

Nothing to report.

12. Date of next meeting:

Monday 14th March 2022 – venue dependent upon the Covid-19 situation.