

Meeting of Friends of Landport Bottom
Monday 14th March 2022 – 7.30 pm. Meeting held via Zoom.

Present: Stephen Watson; Councillor Matthew Bird; Vicki Trenhaile; Rob Elvery; David Salter; Jonathan Vernon; Jenny Keen.

Apologies: Councillor Ruth O’Keeffe; Brian Courage.

1. Minutes from the last meeting:

Rob E. stated that the previous Minutes were ‘factually incorrect’. He referred to: ‘*point 5. Sheep worrying by dogs / dogs not on leads around the sheep*’. In paragraph three, the first two sentences state: ‘*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*’. Rob E. said that he had not agreed.

2. Action points from previous meeting:

- i. ***The Hawkenbury Way path:*** Matt B. confirmed that there had been no progress regarding Southern Water or Iford Estate taking responsibility to maintain the path. The matter would be discussed at the Landport Bottom Management Committee meeting on 22nd March. This meeting would be the first held for at least a year. Rob E. commented that the path had become easier to use of late due to horses no longer riding along it, also there had been less rainfall, and he had filled up the worst of the holes with chalk. He noted that the area was now more wooded with an increased population of birds, e.g. yellow hammers, linnets and whitethroats. **(Action: Matt B.)**
- ii. ***The Old Racecourse:*** Sarah Neels had been trying to organise a meeting between local residents and the racecourse to discuss all ongoing issues: This is an outstanding action since the last FOLB meeting, and as Sarah was not present the action remains outstanding. **(Action: Sarah N.)**
- iii. ***Boundary Change Commission:*** The new date for submission of boundary changes is 4th April. Stephen has provided the Friends with a link to follow.

- iv. ***Jill's Pond – liner / fence repairs:*** There has been a previous conversation between Brian Courage and a contractor regarding the relining of the pond, and repairs to the surrounding broken fencing. Permission to carry out the work is required from the South Downs National Park. Rob E. and David S. re-iterated that the pond liner is certainly no longer watertight. David S. commented that the best time to reline the pond would be in the Autumn, and that this work needed to be completed before the fence repairs were carried out. Matt B. confirmed that all this would be discussed at the Landport Bottom Management Committee meeting. **(Action: Matt B.)**
- v. ***Proposal for a bench in the Small Field:*** Following his application to the Town Clerk about a bench being installed in the Small Field, David S. read the letter of reply that he'd received. It stated that the matter had been discussed and agreed, but that the bench would not be a wooden structure but a gabion, (a wire cage filled with soil and stones), with the top seating area turfed. The meeting agreed that a wooden bench would be a more desirable option. Stephen W. will draft a letter to the Town Clerk for discussion at the forthcoming Landport Bottom Management Committee meeting. **(Action: Stephen W.)**
- vi. ***Sheep worrying by dogs / dogs not on leads around the sheep:*** Christine Cohen-Parks had sent an email to Stephen W. which he read to the meeting:

Hello everyone, you may know me, or not. I was one of the original instigators of the Friends of Landport Bottom having fought hard for the second tranche of trees on the path through the woods to the right of the Landport Bottom field to be saved.

I want to speak about the present proposals for change in signs and possible wiring off of parts of the pond field. There will always be different interests, those of walkers, horse riders, dog walkers, farmers for their sheep, nesting birds and so forth. On the whole we manage remarkably well without 'policing' to all get along, and that is how it should be. Sometimes there are hiccups, but these are rare. I have walked these fields for twenty years virtually every day, with my two dogs and now single dog. In that time there have been a few rare occasions when the sheep have been chased but this is a really rare occurrence. True with the onset of Covid and a sudden increase in dog owners, some without dog-training, for a time there may have been a VERY occasional incident. In the short-term. But this is so not the norm. Dog owners with frisky or disobedient dogs or dogs who are

sheep chasers keep their dogs on the lead. Others of us with elderly dogs who do not chase or dogs who never have, do so at their discretion or when near the sheep. The field is very large and often only a small part is occupied by sheep. Dog owners keep to a code and frequently get information from others about where the sheep are. For the most part this works.

The signs up now saying 'keep dogs under close control' treats us like responsible adults which for the very large part as dog owners we are.

In the same way, walkers in the field are country lovers and do keep off the long grass where birds are nesting in the spring. These things are common sense. For those walking there for the first time the signs alert people to be careful.

I am absolutely against carving the field up or changing the signs as has been suggested. Policing and threats of fines are not in the spirit of what we have always enjoyed, and not in the spirit of what I believe Lewes has always intended for these fields. What has been so special about them is the community of people with different needs and requirements, all who love the magnificent natural environment, and at this tough time of all times, come up onto the Downs, with our cantering horses, our dogs (on or off the lead as suitable), our friends, in freedom, without policing, interacting and conscious of others' needs, and return to our daily lives with our lungs full of fresh air and a better sense of well-being.

Don't let this be interfered with lightly. Let us set up a study of how many (if any) sheep are killed in these fields in the next five years. Let us keep alert to how the nesting birds do. Let us bring the best of each of us into interacting with nature responsibly by taking personal responsibility and by being treated like people capable of doing so.

For the betterment of all. Let these lovely fields, such a gift to so many, continue as they are. Without increased Draconian regulations not in the spirit of the democracy and harmony of balancing multiple needs through good sense and courtesy. And most of all...by paying attention to the countryside we are gifted with, living here in Lewes.

*Best to all,
Christine Cohen Park*

Rob E. stated his agreement with the content of the email.

Jonathan V. said there had been at least four different types of signs on Landport Bottom giving conflicting messages about dogs being kept on leads around the sheep. He had visited at least twenty other sites where conflicting signage was also in place. He noted that the Pond Field on Landport Bottom is huge and the sheep can be anywhere in that area. Rob E. said there were currently only 62 sheep in the Pond Field and he knew where they would be. He didn't feel comfortable having a sign saying dogs should on a lead. He felt that the current wooden signs, and the SDNP Take the Lead signs were good and well placed. Jonathan V. said there would be no policing of the field as there was no one to do it. He added that one solution would be to partition the field in some way, to separate the sheep from the dog walkers. Rob E. said that whilst he would like to see the sheep in a compartment of the field, there would be no money to make this happen.

Regarding the overall issue of whether dogs should be kept on leads, Rob E. stated, 'I totally disagree with what Jonathan Vernon is proposing and so do most of the people that I know'. In conclusion, the discussion resulted in disagreement. However, both Rob E. and Jonathan V. were happy with the "TAKE THE LEAD" signs provided by the South Downs National Park Authority. A consultation is needed and Matt B. will take this matter back to the Landport Bottom Management Committee meeting on 22nd March. **(Action: Matt B.)**

vii. ***New rangers:*** Matt B. confirmed that the new rangers are Lydia Dowell and Rebecca Fuller. He has asked that one of them attends the Landport Bottom Management Committee meeting; he awaits a response.

3. **Breaking up the Pond Field into paddocks:** Stephen W. said that the south end of the field has a lot of orchids which can be destroyed by grazing sheep, whereas at the north end the grass is quite rank and suitable for grazing. Matt B. said he would like to do a feasibility study, but the South Downs rangers are not in agreement with planting hedgerows as this would not be compatible with the chalk grassland. However, from the point of view of: soil carbons, biodiversity, climate, there are good reasons to look at it. There is a budget for ecological surveys and planting could be part of it

4. **Issues and concerns:**

None.

5. **Wildlife updates / surveys:**

Nothing to report.

6. **Celebrations:**

Nothing to report.

7. **Protection / threats:**

Nothing to report.

8. **Date of next meeting currently: Monday 11th July 2022. However, the date could be brought forward depending on the outcomes of the Landport Bottom Management Committee meeting on 22nd March 2022.**