

# Meeting of Friends of Landport Bottom

Monday 11<sup>th</sup> July – 7.30 pm. Meeting held via Zoom.

**Present:** Stephen Watson; Jenny Lindop; Vicki Trenhaile; Rob Elvery; Cllr Matthew Bird; Sarah Flynn;

**Apologies:** Jenny Keen, Jonathan Vernon, Brian Courage, Ruth O'Keeffe, David Salter

## 1. Introductions:

Jenny Lindop introduced herself. She has just started a new role as Chalk Life Ranger at the railway Land and comes up to Landport Bottom fairly regularly.

**2. Minutes from the last meeting:** The Minutes were agreed.

## 3. Action points from previous meeting:

- i. **Hawkenbury Way:** Rob said that at the moment the state of the track was quite good, the problem is in winter. He had a satisfactory meeting with Jenny Lindop before this meeting. If two or three tonne bags of MOT type 1 (crushed stone) can be put where it won't obstruct access, Rob and others will spread it out. MOT is better than chalk as it doesn't degrade.

Rob maintains the path by cutting brambles but only has a lightweight hedge trimmer. Jenny said bramble bashing could be added to schedule of volunteer tasks. Rob said it needed cutting back about two metres.

- ii. **Jills Pond:** Jenny said plans are underway to get it renovated. Brian Courage is getting quotes and is considering options. Matthew Bird said Lewes Town Council was getting advice from the Newt Partnership and South Downs National Park as to the best way forward. The intention was to start work in the autumn. A few issues were brought up in surveying.

Rob said it had been dry for the past few months. Goat willow had gone through liner. Stephen asked if broken glass had punctured it, Jenny said that didn't seem to be a problem though there is a bit of litter. Jenny confirmed the plan to remove the goat willows and put some "good" vegetation aside (bulrushes, sedge etc) to put back in after the pond is re-lined. There are some nice plants including gypsywort, a marginal aquatic plant.

Rob asked about increasing the fenced area, which Thyone Outram (previous Ranger) had considered doing. Matthew Bird said that Lewes Town Council had decided not to do this, but the fence will be repaired.

- iii. **Racecourse issues:** Mat Bird said the Old Racecourse still have licensing and Temporary Event Notices that they can use.
- iv. **Bench in small field:** Matthew Bird said the Landport Bottom Management Committee had agreed to install a bench, Different styles were being considered but it would likely be similar to the one by Jills Pond. Vicki asked if it could be a bit lower.

- v. **Dog policy:** Matthew Bird explained that the Landport Bottom Management Committee had decided to put in new robust wooden signs that would say “Dogs on lead when livestock are in the field”.

Rob stated that he objected to the inflexibility of the policy and he thought most people in the community did also. Nobody that he had consulted supported the policy. Matthew Bird said that was not the feedback that he had received. Rob said the Council had not consulted. Matthew Bird said it was the decision of the committee which had taken advice. Rob said the rule was authoritarian and could not be enforced; if there were a few sheep at the other end of the pond field, a lead was unnecessary; sheep worrying was often dogs that had escaped and had no owner present. Matthew Bird said it would not be enforced because the Council is not authoritarian; he had spoken to lots of people and they were very supportive. Many people are unhappy about dog attacks on sheep. The council relied on people being responsible and was giving a clear message to keep dogs on leads when sheep are in the field.

Rob asked where the sheep were, and said that grazing was ineffective because there aren't enough sheep; as a result the sheep eat only soft plants and don't get on to eating coarse grass. Jenny said Plumpton doesn't have enough sheep, other options are being considered. Matthew Bird said sheep had been removed from Pond Field because of orchids and the Tumuli field was overgrazed. Sheep are expected back into the Pond field in early September when orchids have seeded. Rob said the Tumuli field couldn't be overgrazed as there had been only 42 sheep there for five weeks. Jenny said it didn't look overgrazed. Matthew replied that there are a number of issues around sheep management that are being discussed and there has been poor communication with Plumpton.

Stephen suggested it might be interesting to see how grazing on Malling Down is managed. Matthew Bird said Sussex Wildlife Trust have more resources at their disposal.

### **3. Dog Ambassador Scheme**

Jenny said her job had been created with funding from the National Lottery to protect and restore chalk grassland. She was working with different communities including Newhaven and Landport Bottom with a practical conservation group. The Dog Ambassador scheme rolled on from a Heathlands Reunited scheme. Chalk grassland, like heathland, is a threatened habitat. Dogs are an issue; faeces can change the pH of soil and dogs can worry sheep and disturb ground nesting birds.

There is funding to recruit seven volunteer Dog ambassadors who would go out once a day and receive training in positive engagement techniques, chalk grassland ecology and dog behaviour. They will not be shouting at people or telling them what to do but celebrating chalk grassland as an incredible habitat and doing outreach about ground nesting birds and specific things to do with dogs on chalk grassland.

Vicki said it sounded great but asked how it would be organised. Jenny said a lanyard and a dog lead sleeve would identify ambassadors who would carry out their normal daily walk on Landport Bottom. She has created an induction pack. Dog ambassadors may keep an observation sheet or just engage with people on the walk. Stephen asked what would happen if the dog owner responded badly. Jenny said the volunteer would go through National Trust “Safe and sound” training to ensure safety. The role was to converse not enforce.

Sarah asked Dog Ambassadors would have a contact number that could be given to people. Jenny said they did. Sarah related how her daughter, when on horseback on the bridle path in the Tumuli field, had been shouted at by a dog owner who demanded her daughter move off the path because the dog chased horses.

Rob mentioned that the bridle path is impassable and Jenny said volunteers might cut it back on Saturday when there was a scheduled task. Vicki mentioned there was a tree down on the path to the chalkpits. Rob thought it wasn't in Landport Bottom but it blocks the path from Landport Bottom. Matthew Bird asked what species it was; nobody was sure. He would mention it to Brian Courage.

Matthew Bird said there was an arrangement with an ecologist at Lewes District Council as part of the Higher Level Stewardship scheme and that would continue until March 2023. They were considering what happens afterwards. He was working with Jenny but looking at another Lewes Town Council Ranger post to fill the gap between Jenny's work and Brian Courage's responsibilities.

Rob asked about yellow rattle. Jenny said there was a small amount at the bottom of the Pond Field. She suggested it might be possible to collect some seeds and sow it at the top of the field in autumn as a volunteer activity.

4. **Issues and concerns:** none mentioned
5. **Wildlife updates / surveys:** none mentioned
6. **Celebrations:** there was a discussion about the Changing Chalk launch event on 28th July
7. **Protections / threats:** none mentioned
8. **Date of next meeting:** November 14<sup>th</sup>, again using Zoom