

## **Meeting of Friends of Landport Bottom**

**Monday 13<sup>th</sup> November 2023 – 7.30 pm. Meeting held via Zoom.**

**Present:** Stephen Watson; David Salter; Jennie Smith; Vicki Trenhaile; Rob Elvery; Nicky Blackwell; Jenny Keen

**Apologies:** Councillor Matthew Bird; Lesley Healy

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

### **2. New Chalk Life Ranger - Introduction:**

Jennie Smith introduced herself to the meeting. She is the new Chalk Life Ranger and has taken over from Jenny Lindop. She had previously spoken with Council Ranger, Brian Courage and been given a copy of the Landport Bottom management plan. She confirmed that she does not have jurisdiction over anything, and doesn't own a vehicle. However, she does have access to some hand tools, also to a network of people, thereby enabling her to elicit help from certain individuals. Her role is to support volunteer groups, promote community engagement and encourage people to take care of the site.

### **3. Action points from previous meeting:**

#### **i. Hawkenbury Way access track:**

For the benefit of Jennie S, Stephen outlined the background history of the muddy Hawkenbury Way path. The most recent position was to see if the path could be made a Public Right of Way, and Stephen invited Rob to give additional background information about this. Rob said that the path had been in use for about 30 years and was a definite candidate to become a ROW. Whilst the path is owned by Iford Estate they do not want any responsibility to maintain it. He said that Southern Water had used the path over the years in order to access the nearby reservoir. They have a right of easement, but will not do anything to help maintain the path.

Rob and David then discussed the previous unofficial placing of chippings on the path and agreed that stone chippings were preferable to wood chippings, as the latter would wash away. David suggested that clearing the mud, then laying MOT type 1 chippings on a regular basis could help to maintain the path. Rob confirmed that he had previously tried to get permission to lay MOT chippings but had been told by Council Ranger, Brian Courage that if the work was carried out by volunteers it would constitute a health and safety issue. Nicky confirmed that factually this was correct.

At the previous meeting Matt Bird had said he would contact Ben Taylor, the farm manager of the Iford Estate regarding the access track becoming a Right of Way. As Matt could not attend this meeting Nicky Blackwell said she would relay any information back to him.

Jennie S. asked that if the path became a ROW would it then become the council's responsibility. Rob said that he hoped that would be the case.

*Action: Nicky B. for Matt Bird*

## **ii. Jill's Pond renovation work:**

Following the previous relining of the pond by Pete Birchall ("Pete The Pond"), Jenny Lindop was going to contact him to find out when he would return to complete the planting work. However, the action is still outstanding. At the previous meeting Rob noted that a quantity of old fence posts had been thrown into the pond, however it would seem that these have now sunk. The re-lined pond appears to have worked well so far. *Action: Jennie S. for Jenny L.*

## **iii. Benches:**

Sometime ago, David Salter had proposed the placing of a new bench in the Small Field. It was subsequently understood that in principle, this had been approved by the Landport Bottom Management Committee. However, since then there had been no further progress. Nicky B. confirmed that a major re-organisation and re-structure of the Management Committee was taking place. She said that whilst she was not on the committee, she would report back on the issue of the bench. *Action: Nicky B.*

The subject of memorial benches was briefly discussed and Nicky said that the quickest way to get a bench might be to erect our own. We would need firstly to speak to the Building and Amenities department, then make a proposal. Nicky said she was happy to facilitate this and would speak with Brian Courage. *Action: Nicky B.*

Jennie S. said that it was possible to apply for money from the Changing Chalk Grassland fund, which releases up to £5,000 for projects that chime with the ethos of chalk grassland restoration / engagement. Jennie will send us the link to this. *Action: Jennie S.*

Stephen read out an email from Christine Cohen-Parks asking how the proposal for a second bench by Jill's Pond was progressing. Nobody at the meeting could recall any discussions regarding another bench in this location. Stephen will respond to the email explaining that the Landport Bottom Management Committee no longer exists and now comes under Buildings and Amenities Committee. He will also add that the installation of another bench in the Pond field, is unlikely. *Action: Stephen W.*

David Salter said he would like to see multiple benches including another bench in the Pond Field and also in the Tumuli Field. It was two years since the council approved a Small Field bench.

Nicky Blackwell explained that the Town Council was undergoing a reorganisation. She is not on the Buildings and Amenities Committee but would be happy to relay information back to them and propose the formation of a Landport Bottom subcommittee, as it is the biggest area managed by LTC. *Action: Nicky B.*

Nicky continued that we should be realistic that LTC is heavily understaffed at present. A memorial bench could be a good route to go to get one quickly. Vickie asked how it would be funded, Nicky said she would find out if there were funds available. *Action: Nicky B.*

Jennie S said there was a possibility of a grant of up to £5000 from Changing Chalk for a community group that had a bank account. She will send a link. *Action: Jennie S.*

#### **4. Issues and concerns:**

None raised.

#### **5. Wildlife updates:**

Rob said that there were currently approximately 80 sheep in the Pond field, but that the number was too small to keep the land properly grazed. Ideally, 5 sheep per acre was needed to maintain grassland. The estimated acreage of the Landport Bottom fields is: Pond field 70 acres, Tumili field 28 acres, Small field 7 acres. The Tumili field offers better quality grazing for the sheep due to its size, and the type of grass. In summary, the Pond field is too big for the current number of sheep.

The subject of cows grazing on Landport Bottom was briefly discussed. It was felt that there would be significant objection to the presence of cows. A lot of people were thought to be terrified of them. Also, cattle would churn up access points to the fields, plus produce a lot of manure. Jennie S. said that cows were included in the management plan but that this was just standard. She explained that the use of digital collars on cows to trigger electric fences, was currently being trialled. She will seek a progress update. *Action: Jennie S.*

Jennie S. asked whether putting ponies on the land had been considered. Rob said that the current quality of the fencing around the fields was not good. Only about 10% of fence posts had been replaced recently. Whilst the fencing was adequate for sheep it would not be strong enough for cattle and ponies.

#### **6. Celebrations:**

None reported.

#### **7. Protection:**

Jenny K. asked about the ownership of the Horse Box bar which is situated on the old Racecourse land. Vickie confirmed that James Oliver was still the owner. Vicki said that the owners were looking for ways to use the old stables; a hostel for passing walkers had been suggested. Whilst the racecourse land is private, it adjoins Landport Bottom and therefore any activity that might impact LB is of interest to the Friends.

8. Date of next meeting: Monday 11th March 2024.