

# Meeting of Friends of Landport Bottom

**Monday 11<sup>th</sup> March 2024 – 7.30 pm. Meeting held via Zoom.**

**Present:** Stephen Watson; David Salter; Vicki Trenhaile; Rob Elvery; Cllr Nicky Blackwell; Sarah Flynn; Lesley Healey; Vicki Trenhaile

**Apologies:** Jenny Keen, Jennie Smith, Sofia Dimoglou, Imogen Makepiece

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

**2. Action points from previous meeting**

**i. Hawkenbury Way access track:**

Nicky Blackwell said that Cllr Matthew Bird had asked the Farm Manager at Iford Estates if they would allow the path to become a public right of way. Their answer was a firm negative. She accepted this was dispiriting but unsurprising.

Rob Elvery confirmed that the track is very muddy after the wettest February on record. It had been an unobstructed open footpath for more than 30 years so it would qualify to become a public footpath, but the procedures to achieve that would take many years.

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

Rob Elvery said nothing has happened since the last meeting. There are still about 12 lumps of wood floating in it. The pond is very full with some natural regrowth; it is beginning to rewild itself. Stephen hoped that plants like yellow iris and cowslips that were previously present would come back eventually. Vicki asked if the contractor had been paid to replant the pond; if he had then he should be required to do so. Action: Lesley Healey to email Brian Courage.

See endnote<sup>i</sup>

**iii Status of Landport Bottom management on Lewes Town Councillor**

Nicky Blackwell apologised that as LTC's Chair of Personnel her information on Landport Bottom was second-hand and she is not on the relevant committee. Matthew Bird had told her that there had recently been a meeting about the Landport Bottom Management Plan and a report of that will be brought before the Buildings and Amenity Committee meeting which she understood to be on the 28<sup>th</sup> of March in Lewes Town Hall. The meeting was shown on LTC's public website but currently not on the internal one, so it would be worth double-checking that it was happening on that date.

Members of the public are warmly welcomed to attend those meetings. Lesley said you had to ask in advance if you wanted to speak at the beginning of the meeting. Any point thus raised would not be considered in that meeting, but could be considered later and discussed in a future meeting. Members of the public could not ask questions in the meeting or challenge incorrect facts, but could contact their councillors afterwards.

Buildings and Amenities Committee page:

<https://lewes-tc.gov.uk/your-council/committees/buildings-and-amenities-committee/>

#### **iv Bench in Small Field**

Stephen said that Jennie Smith had provided a link to the Changing Chalk funding page:

<https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/sussex/changing-chalk-community-grants-scheme>

The page said that the application window for grants for projects and activities is currently closed but the next round of funding applications will open in Spring 2024 and details will be posted there. To apply it would be necessary to have a bank account, which would mean becoming a Constituted Group with a written constitution and at minimum a Chairman and Treasurer.

Nicky said it would be possible to apply to the Town Council as an individual for a bench if it would come in at under £2,000. There was no guarantee it would be granted but you could apply. She advised talking to Brian Courage first. The decision would be made by the Buildings and Amenities Committee, but it was permissible to lobby the councillors on that committee. Other possible sources of funding included the Chalk Cliff Trust and the Sussex Community Foundation.

David Salter said he thought it had previously been agreed to put benches in the Tumuli field and the Pond field, by the Landport Bottom Management Committee. Stephen who had attended a meeting in 2022 said he thought that positive things had been said about having a bench, but approval may not have been minuted. See endnote<sup>ii</sup>

Nicky said that given that the administration had changed, the quickest route would be to check with Brian and then go in person to the Buildings and Amenity Committee meeting on the 28<sup>th</sup> of March. David said that he did not think there was any legal reason why a bench could not be installed. Lesley pointed out that if the bench it might need to be maintained and that would fall on the Town Council budget. David said that a bench would be very beneficial in providing accessibility for older people. Nicky reiterated that the best way would be to go in person to the meeting on 28<sup>th</sup> March, but check with the Town Clerk first to ensure it was possible to speak. Once it has been raised as a point it will be minuted and back in the system.

Lesley asked if the Landport Bottom Management Plan that will be brought before the meeting could be shared before the meeting. Nicky did not know if that was possible, but the Town Clerk should be able to answer the question.

Stephen asked if this was a new Management Plan or the existing one which runs until 2025.

Nicky said she understood that it had been revised. Stephen asked if there had been any ecological input on that, and if so from who? Nicky advised attending the meeting. Action: Lesley said she would email LTC to ask for the agenda and a copy of the Management Plan.

### **3. Creating shade for butterflies (requested by Lesley Healey)**

Lesley said that Landport Bottom is a very open, shade-free space and there was recent evidence that butterflies are adversely affected by extreme heat. In 40 degree heat butterflies were only found in shaded areas and were really struggling with the heat. The same was true of sheep which seek shade under trees in hot weather. We should consider climate change and how we mitigate the space for wildlife that needs shade. She would like to see hawthorn encouraged to grow. Up until now the conservation volunteers had mainly levered these out of the ground to preserve the open grassland, but she suggested a shade band across the field. Stephen suggested islands of scrub.

Rob said that the previous Ranger, Thyone Outram, had intended to leave some of the large hawthorns, but since she had left they had been cut down by an unsupervised volunteer group and were now regrowing with multiple stems.

Lesley said that the plan should include islands or corridors of shade. It would enhance the whole space if properly planned. Stephen said no planting would be needed if natural regeneration was allowed.

Vicky asked if the large field could be divided up with a hedge. Rob agreed saying the field was 70 acres and there were insufficient sheep. There had been a maximum of 110 this winter, 60 the winter before, where 200-300 would be needed, Lesley said there had been 200 pre-Covid. Sheep prefer to eat soft material which is why the field is getting coarser with more bramble. Lesley said that ponies would be ideal. Ron said fences were not suitable for ponies and many posts were rotten at the base. He estimated there were about 1400 posts around the large (pond) field base on a perimeter of 3 ½ kilometres and posts every 2.5 metres. A third of them were past their lifetime. Lesley said 80 posts had been replaced by the South Downs Volunteers.

Lesley asked if everyone was in principle agreed that there should be more shade on Landport Bottom. There was no disagreement. In her email she will say the Friends of Landport Bottom agree that there was a lack of shade and that while we don't want the whole area to scrub over, we think there should be a managed process to increase shade. This was agreed. Action: Lesley H.

Stephen said that splitting the pond field would allow the north end to be grazed while allowing orchids to bloom at the south end, as if sheep graze between March and July they would eat the orchids. Rob agreed but said it would be difficult to establish a hedge, but if a fence was there a hedge might eventually develop. Lesley said that she thought sheep would not eat orchids. Stephen said that when sheep grazed the field in spring a few years ago, there were no orchids.

#### **4. Concern about trees choked by vines (requested by Sofia Dimoglou)**

Sofia was worried about trees along the edge of the path by the motor road being overwhelmed by wild clematis (old man's beard). Volunteers had told her that it was a native species and the trees should survive. Rob said it was not like the Russian vine in the south east corner that had been cut back in the last two years and would smother small trees. Old man's beard was not such a serious problem. Lesley agreed that it should be left alone.

#### **5. Horses churning up the grass (requested by Sofia Dimoglou)**

Stephen declared an interest in that his son had riding lessons with Hamsey Riding School last year and took part in a 'hack' around the pond field. Sarah F said that the damage shown in the photos looked minor and the grass would recover. Rob said that in the past there had been serious horse churning but there were now fewer horses and not enough to cause a major problem.

#### **6. Any other issues or concerns**

Rob mentioned that the sheep were covered in agrimony burs. Agrimony appeared about 15 years ago and was now rampant over the whole field having been spread by sheep. Dogs also spread these seeds. Stephen said that he did not see agrimony as a problem. Lesley agreed it was a valuable wild flower.

#### **7. Wildlife updates: none**

#### **8. Celebrations: none**

#### **9. Any identified threats not already discussed: none**

#### **10. Date of next meeting: Monday 8th July 2024**

- i After this meeting Lesley Healey contacted Brian Courage and established that Pete had removed the plants from Jill's Pond and replaced them immediately after relining. There is a plan to undertake some surveys to ensure that the pond is recovering well, and pick up any issues. He isn't prepared to remove the posts as he doesn't consider they are causing a problem, and in any case he doesn't have the resources (money or necessary equipment, like waders or a vehicle) to do it. He will only arrange for them to be removed if there is an ecological reason for that.

Brian asked for queries / comments about Landport Bottom to come through him, as he has overall responsibility for the land.

- ii Historical minutes of the Landport Bottom Management Committee can be found here:

<https://lewes-tc.gov.uk/your-council/committees/landport-bottom-management-committee/>

Subsequent to this FoLB meeting Brian Courage and Matthew Bird have confirmed that two benches have been agreed with locations at the top (north) side of the tumuli field and south end of the pond field on the top (west) side, and that installation will happen soon, as the ground becomes firmer.

The page for LTC's Buildings and Amenities Committee is here

<https://lewes-tc.gov.uk/your-council/committees/buildings-and-amenities-committee/>

At the time of writing no future meetings appear on this page (so no March 28<sup>th</sup> 2024 confirmation or agenda is available)

The link for the Landport Bottom Management Plan 2020-2025 is:

<https://lewes-tc.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Landport-Bottom-Mang-Plan-uploaded-to-website-May-2022.pdf>