

Meeting of Friends of Landport Bottom

Monday 8th July 2024 – 7.30 pm. Meeting held via Zoom.

Present: Rob Elvery; Sarah Flynn; Lesley Healey; David Salter; Chantal Smitheman; Vicki Trenhaile; Stephen Watson

Apologies: Nicky Blackwell, Jenny Keen, Jennie Smith

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

2. Action points from previous meeting

i Bench in Small Field

Two new benches have appeared, one in the pond field and one in the tumuli field. The design and placement of the benches met with general approval. David Salter still wanted to pursue the idea of a bench in the small field and had sent a petition to Cllr Imogen Makepeace to be presented at the next meeting of the relevant Council committee.

ii Creating shade for butterflies

As actioned at the last meeting, Lesley had contacted LTC about shade. Matthew Bird had replied that he was keen to see more shade introduced across the pond field in particular; possibly in hedgerow form. This will be raised in a new management plan, due next year. Stephen commented that nature was working on this, as there were a large number of hawthorns appearing in the field. Rob said that there was more bramble. Lesley said there had been some conservation work shortly after our last meeting, to remove brambles while leaving hawthorns in anticipation that they would be more welcome. Stephen felt that a clump or island of hawthorns might be better than bushes dotted randomly around. Lesley said that this would be part of the new management plan; a hedge across the pond field had been raised as a possibility.

3. State of the footpath along the eastern boundary of the pond field (raised by Rob Elvery)

Rob said the path was completely impassable with waist high grass, bramble and hedge growth in places. About ten days ago an attempt was made to mow starting from the motor road via the allotment boundary. The attempt seemed to have been abandoned, presumably because the hedges obstructed the machine. In previous years it has been mowed all the way to Gate 17 but this year only about 20% of the length has been cut. **Action:** Stephen to inform LTC (Brian Courage) of the issue.

4. Electric fence around orchids in the pond field.

Rob said that the fence had done a good job at protecting orchids, as those growing outside the fence had disappeared, presumably munched. However if there were sheep in the narrow passage created by the fence they could panic when dog walkers came through. This was exacerbated by the fact that the alternative path was overgrown (see 3 above).

Stephen said Brian Courage would like to know how long it would need to stay in place to allow the orchids to seed. Lesley thought it would be about another month. Stephen said he would try to monitor some of the plants to determine when they have ripe seed.

5. Poor state of gate 17 (raised by Rob Elvery)

Rob said that gate 17 (kissing gate south east corner of pond field) was in a poor state of repair. Two of the posts had rotted so it was possible to push the gate wide open allowing sheep to escape. Rob had verbally alerted the shepherd some weeks ago.

6. A chance to share and communicate any other information concerning the area

Stephen invited Chantal to speak about Hamsey Riding school. She explained that they gave riding lessons mainly to children at their school and allowed them when ready to ride out ('hack'). Usually one hack a day some of which Chantal takes out. Two to four riders Wednesday to Sunday in the pond field. Wednesday, Thursday and Saturday there is a one hour hack including two canters, from the southern gate to the dew pond and then from the allotments up to the north west gate. On Fridays the hack is 90 minutes and goes along the top of the pond field past the racing stables down towards the valley to the north west and then back through the sheep field or along the bridle path from the stables back to the Gallops. Sunday is two hours, up to Blackcap and return. On Saturdays there may be larger numbers of children on ponies with adult riders. There are also liveries at Hamsey, she does not know where they go. The pond field is good for riding all year round as it is well drained and not too slippery even after heavy rain. Of course they are not the only people riding horses on Landport Bottom. Chantal is conscious that horses can seem intimidating as they are big animals and can move at speed. They try to be respectful and find most people are kind and considerate, putting dogs on leads as horses go past. They are careful of sheep especially young ones which can be unpredictable.

Stephen said that people sometimes worry if horses are close to them. Chantal commented that the electric fence had corralled them making it harder to keep a good distance, They try to avoid long grass due to skylarks which means they stay on the paths more than usual at this time of year.

Rob said horses were much less of a problem than 20 years ago when there were a lot of racehorses.

Chantal said she was conscious of damage to grass when the going is soft, but the pond field it was usually firm, even down near the allotments. Vicky pointed out that a small pond sometimes formed there but it usually disappears quickly.

7. Wildlife updates:

Stephen said that in addition to the pyramidal orchids, fragrant orchids in the pond field seemed to be increasing in number. There were also pyramidal orchids in the small field. Lesley said they were always there. Rob commented that the small field had a very diverse flora. David Salter said the grass was unusually high. Rob thought that could be due to excessive rainfall this year. It made it difficult to see where the sheep and especially lambs were sometimes.

Stephen said he thought butterfly numbers were down although there were some marbled whites around and he had also seen an Emperor dragonfly laying eggs in the pond. Rob had seen a corn bunting about two months ago.

Stephen asked if there seemed to be more rabbits about. There is a lot of wild thyme in very short grass near in tumuli field (near the stile to the chalk pit), which may be due to rabbit grazing. Rob said rabbits were doing a good job of grazing along the edge of the pond field near the motor road; he had seen 30 or 40 there early in the morning. Sarah Flynn suggested that foxes

were not eating rabbits because so many people feed them with chicken, vegetables and all sorts. Stephen said this might attract rats.

David had seen far fewer swallows, swifts and house martins. Rob agreed and said insect numbers were really down.

8. Celebrations

Lesley said that at some point the “Love Your Landport Bottom” festival would be re-arranged, having been cancelled due to bad weather, but she did not have a date.

9. Any identified threats not already discussed

David S was concerned that Jill’s Pond may already have a leak despite having been re-lined last year, as it is not full. Rob said that the old fence posts that had been left in the pond with sharp ends might have been thrown about by children which could have punctured the liner, not at the bottom but at the side. The level seemed to have stabilized. Stephen suggested waiting until the winter when there would be more rain and less evaporation. Chantal asked if it could have been attacked by rodents which she had known chew through lead pipes; David and Rob thought not as it would be a butyl liner covered with soil. Pete the Pond had said it should last for 100 years without physical damage.

10. Date of next meeting: Monday 11th November 2024