

Meeting of Friends of Landport Bottom
Tuesday 11th March 2025 – 7.30 pm. Meeting held via Zoom.

Present: Stephen Watson; Vicki Trenhaile; Jennie Smith; Christine Cohen-Parks; Jenny Keen.

Apologies: Lesley Healey; Rob Elvery; Katherine Van Howe

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

2. Action points from previous meeting:

i. Bench in Small Field:

As neither David Salter nor Cllr Makepeace were present the matter remains unresolved.

Outstanding action: Cllr. Makepeace

ii. State of the footpath along the eastern boundary of the Pond Field: Stephen said that he had contacted Lewes District Ranger Brian Courage, who confirmed that the path would be mown, and it had now been mown.

iii. Poor state of gate 17:

The condition of Gate 17, located in the south east area of the Pond Field, was in need of repair. Stephen was not sure if this work had been carried out. He had previously informed Brian Courage of the problem. Christine said she would check the gate and inform Stephen.

Action: Christine Cohen-Parks¹

iv. Pony grazing on Landport Bottom:

Jennie S. the LB Chalk Life Ranger, confirmed that they are waiting to hear from John Hobden, the owner of the ponies regarding a date when they can come to LB. It is planned that they will commence grazing in the Small Field as it is a good place to begin and will allow the public to get used to the presence of the ponies. Once settled they will be moved to a cordoned off area of the Pond Field. Stephen said there had been concern expressed regarding their interaction with horses. Jennie confirmed that these are Welsh and Shetland ponies, they are not completely wild and are used to interacting with other livestock. Jenny K asked about a possible presence of Ragwort in the field, something which is poisonous to ponies/horses, but Jennie S confirmed that this would not be a problem. Christine asked if the ponies would be alright around dogs. Jennie S said that if dogs got too close the ponies might defend themselves. There will need to be a lot of communication and priming with the public, and after then it is the dog owners' responsibility.

3. Lewes Town Council's draft Landport Bottom Management Strategy and Action Plan 2025-2035.

Stephen and Jenny K. had attended a meeting that morning where the subject of the Management Strategy and Action Plan were discussed. The following were present at the meeting: Cllr Matthew Bird, Cllr Edwina Livsey, LDC Ranger Brian Courage, Milham's contractors, and members of the Borough Bonfire Society. Cllr Bird had gone through the draft plan which highlighted the unofficial designation of LB as a nature reserve. Stephen

¹ Christine has confirmed that Gate 17 has been fixed

said that the strategic plan did not include any mention of dividing the Pond Field or the addition of more scrub areas, something which the FOLB had discussed in the past. Jennie S said that the plan was a draft which was open to comments and suggestions; these should be made officially. The report is currently in a pre-consultation phase which includes stakeholders e.g. FOLB. It will later be open to public consultation.

The strategic plan has proposed that LB become a non-designated nature reserve. Christine asked what the advantage was of calling the land a nature reserve and the difference if it were to have designated status. Jennie S. said that being a nature reserve would give the area a greater level of respect. However, with designated status there could be more constraints and less flexibility for the land and its use. Currently, LB is used in a lot of different ways.

4. Motorbikes on Landport Bottom:

Stephen had received a complaint from resident Katherine Van Howe who had seen quad bikes being ridden on LB. Vicki confirmed that she too had seen the bikes and that they had caused damage to the ground. Jennie S. said there had been a problem previously on the Railway Land with youths and anti-social behaviour. The police had been contacted at the time, and they advised that such incidents should always be reported. Jennie will find the phone number for the particular police section which deals with this and advise the FOLB. She commented that if for example sky larks were in the field, it would be illegal to disturb nesting birds through anti-social behaviour. **Action: Jennie Smith**

5. Issues and concerns:

Drones flying over Landport Bottom:

Sarah Flynn, FOLB had emailed Stephen regarding the presence of drones flying over the land. She wondered whether it was possible for LTC to pass a by-law to restrict them. Was the land owner's permission required? Could LTC help or advise? Jennie S. said that as the land belonged to LTC it was a valid point to address. Jenny K will investigate the rules and regulations. **Action: Jenny Keen**

Closing of the footpath to the Chalk Pit:

Christine challenged the recent decision to close the footpath on LB which leads to the Chalk Pit. Stephen said that he understood 130 trees along the path were suffering from ash dieback and could be unsafe. Jennie S. said that the path is now a liability due to the unpredictability and possible danger of falling trees. Christine disputed the number of trees involved and said that she would like to walk along the path with the tree officer and identify which trees were a potential problem. She commented that the path gives an alternative walk for people when there are sheep in the Tumuli Field. The Chalk Pit can be accessed via a different route but this is more difficult and less attractive. Jennie S said there is a backlash when trees are felled but that these trees cannot be insured because of the ash dieback. Vickie said that the areas of Offham Road where ash trees were felled in recent years had recovered well. Stephen commented that dead trees left standing along the path could

attract various wildlife even if the path was not accessible. He will contact Brian Courage, and ask when the tree officer is free to meet with Christine. **Action: Stephen Watson.²**

6. Wildlife updates:

Reptile surveys:

Jenny K. had previously been in discussion with Jennie S. regarding re-starting reptile surveys on LB. As a result, she had made maps of the three fields and identified possible locations to lay new refugia. As proposed by Jennie S, 'Lizard playgrounds' made from rocks and logs will also be introduced in certain areas. It is anticipated that the survey will involve more people than previously e.g. possibly students from Plumpton College. Jennie S. said that the reptiles might generate more interest than, for example a flower survey

On Saturday 15th March Jenny K will join a group of LB volunteers to begin preparing suitable areas and laying the survey mats. Jenny S will provide a roll of roofing felt to make the mats. Jenny K confirmed that Vicki had also obtained some heavier felt offcuts from a local roofer. Jenny S said we could use a mixture of different types of mats, e.g. felt, corrugated tin, etc. On Friday 21st March Thyone Outram, former LDC Ranger and secretary of the Amphibian and Reptile group, will meet volunteers on LB to speak about surveying reptiles.

Downland Guardians:

Jennie S said that we needed the Downland Guardians to start reporting back what wildlife and plant life they had seen on LB. She wants to site display boards near the entrances to LB and the Firle gate. She would like to commission the same artist who designed boards for the Railway Land. Jennie confirmed that a trainee is currently being recruited who could be involved with the new boards. Vickie suggested that people often see things but keep it to themselves. So perhaps an email address could be displayed on the boards where people could report their sightings. She felt that children in particular would be interested in identifying things.

Bat survey:

Jenny S. said that Tim Greeves, Southdowns Ranger, will be coming along to carry out bat surveys. Currently the date is unknown.

Wildflower survey:

Jenny S. will contact Lesley Healey regarding carrying out wildflower surveys.

History walk:

A history walk around LB will also be arranged.

7. Celebrations:

² Stephen has contacted Brian Courage regarding visiting the woodland path with the Tree Officer. Brian replied: "We don't have a tree officer, the decision was made by councillors based on a report from our contracted arboriculturalist and a follow up meeting with a qualified tree surgeon. I'll ask if I can share the report from both, but it is in accordance with latest practice to leave and monitor trees with adb. Given that 2 trees have failed in recent times along the path already, we cannot accept the risks of keeping it open. "

Jenny S. confirmed that it is not currently possible to organise the previously suggested 'Love My Bottom' event. However, smaller things will be arranged.

8. Protection:

Nothing raised.

10. Next meeting:

Tuesday 8th July 2025.