

Meeting of Friends of Landport Bottom

Tuesday 8th July 2025 – 7.30 pm. Meeting held via Zoom.

Present: Stephen Watson; Vicki Trenhaile; Sarah Flynn; Rob Elvery; Councillor Matt Bird; Councillor Edwina Livesey; Jenny Keen.

Apologies: Jennie Smith

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

2. Action points from previous meeting:

i. Bench in Small Field: outstanding action from previous meetings.

Neither David Salter nor Cllr Makepeace were present at the meeting. It was noted however, that since the original request by David for a bench to be sited in the Small Field, two new benches had been installed elsewhere, one in the Pond Field the other in the Tumuli Field. Matt said that David's previous request for the bench had been discussed at Buildings and Amenities meetings but that it was declined due to its close proximity to the race course bar. He added however, that currently there is no bar. He continued that the subject of benches was always under review and that it was included in the Landport Bottom Management Plan. Edwina asked whether everyone was happy not to have a bench in the Small Field. Stephen said that the small field some distance from the other benches and being the highest point was a good site for one. Rob said that there was a good view towards Mount Harry from the north side of the field. It was noted however, that any new future bench should be of the same design as the others.

ii. 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. This has now been fixed. No outstanding action.

iii. Motor bikes and quad bikes on Landport Bottom:

This was as an outstanding action which Matt was able to resolve. He said that the police were aware of the problem and that Operation Crackdown¹ was addressing the subject of anti-social behaviour. Instances could be logged online and photos attached. Alternatively, a phone call could be made to 101. Sarah said she had recently filmed a motor bike in her local lane and sent this to the police. Edwina said she would speak with the communications officer at LTC regarding making a poster. Matt added that Brian Courage, LTC Ranger was aware of the problem; it was a live topic on the WhatsApp groups. **Action: Edwina Livesey**

iv. Drones flying over Landport Bottom:

At the previous meeting Sarah had asked what the position was regarding drones flying over LB, and whether there were any by-laws in place. Jenny K. had since investigated this and found the following. If a drone is flying over LTC land and someone has concerns about its operation, they should first determine if it's a safety issue. If the drone appears to be flying dangerously or breaching aviation law, local police should be contacted on 101. If the concern relates to privacy or unauthorised surveillance, then LTC or the UK Civil Aviation Authority could be contacted.

¹ <https://operationcrackdown.org/> - a Sussex Police website for reporting ant-social driving and abandoned vehicles.

Regarding flying drones near animals, permission should be sought from the landowner. However, there are no byelaws specific to the Lewes district currently, regarding the use of drones. Edwina said that the situation should be monitored and if it becomes a problem in the next 6 months then action could be taken.

v. Closing the footpath to the Chalk Pit:

Christine Cohen-Parks had previously challenged the decision to close the footpath on LB which leads to the chalk pit. This was due to the potential danger which trees suffering from ash dieback had posed. Christine was not present at today's meeting. Matt confirmed that LTC does not have a tree officer but that there was one at Lewes District Council, and a lot of advice had been taken before the path was closed. Both liability and safety had needed to be considered when making the decision. Sarah asked if specific trees had come down or was the problem the potential danger from falling trees. Matt said that some trees had come down and whilst no-one had wanted to close the path, it was a judgement call by LTC. Edwina said that they could not fell over 100 ash trees and therefore had to consider the safety of people. She said that the closure was temporary whilst the situation was being monitored. There was no intention to close the path permanently. She pointed out that there was an alternative path which could be used. Rob said that a lack of use could cause the path to become overgrown. He pointed out that people coming the other way along the path were climbing over the gate. He noted that there didn't appear to be any signage indicating the path's closure from that direction. Matt said that he would take Rob's comment about the signage back to Brian Courage. **Action: Matt Bird**

3. Pony grazing on Landport Bottom – welfare concerns:

Various concerns regarding the welfare of the ponies have been expressed by local people. Sarah pointed out that she owned ponies and horses and that when it was hot they would seek shelter in stalls. She said the LB animals were not Exmoor ponies but ordinary ponies and she felt that they should have some shelter in hot weather. Matt said that the councillors shared the concerns regarding the welfare issues during the hot weather. He continued, that before the ponies came to LB a lot of discussion had taken place. He confirmed that the land had previously been under grazed and that the ponies' presence here was a trial. A lot of advice regarding their grazing had been taken. The ponies would do the job that the sheep were not able to do.

He added that the grazier in charge of the ponies takes their welfare very seriously, and that she was confident they were fine. They are checked daily. An equine vet had also visited and the ponies were found to be in good condition and coping well. In terms of welfare Matt said he was confident that the ponies were fine, but if the situation changed, they would be moved. He acknowledged that perhaps communication with the public had not been the best in the beginning but that LTC wanted to organise an open day / event to discuss the ponies, together with the Management Plan for Landport Bottom.

LTC has an agreement with Natural England and the size of the area versus the number of ponies, is set. This is a pilot scheme and all comments are welcomed and taken onboard. Matt had spoken with Dan Ross, a former ranger of Landport Bottom who said there was a need to change the grazing around from time to time.

Rob said that from talking to local walkers it seemed that presence of the ponies on LB had been favourably received. However, Sarah said the ponies had been galloping across the field and that people had been feeding them. Edwina thanked the FOLB for keeping an eye on the ponies and relaying the information. She totally agreed that the ponies should not be fed and said that if they came across to the fence, they would receive an electric shock. This was therefore a concern for the welfare of the ponies. Vicki commented that someone had reported being bitten and chased by a pony. Sarah said that is partly because people are feeding them. Edwina commented that the ponies are not pets, they are grazing animals and a sign is needed explaining this. **Action: Edwina Livesey.**

There had been a recent meeting with the grazier and the main concern raised was that ponies needed a lot of water. Matt said there were only a few water troughs and that more would allow for wider movement of the ponies. A water bowser in situ would be ideal. Sarah asked whether the areas where the ponies drop their manure would cause the grass to grow more. Edwina did not think this was a problem as the ponies had a large area to graze. Stephen suggested that the local allotmenters could use the manure but he was concerned that it might contain worming medication. Edwina said they will check this. Allotmenters would be welcome to collect manure. **Action: Edwina Livesey**

Stephen said that Chantal Smitheman from Hamsey Riding School had emailed him saying that the presence of the ponies had caused a restriction to the riding route for their horses. Edwina said that the school should not be riding freely across Landport Bottom; they should be using the bridleways which she believed were currently clear. If, however they were closed then alternative, permissive route should be provided. Stephen said he thought the riding school had been using the same circuit around the pond field for many years, he didn't know if at some point they had checked it with the Council. Sarah said that her family had ridden around the top the fields for 80 years, not on a bridleway. Rob said the bridleway path was currently quite overgrown with waist high grass. Edwina will check the bridleways and also contact Brian Courage. **Action: Edwina Livesey**

Sarah asked whether the ponies would be moved for the winter. Matt was not sure because their presence is a trial. Edwina said that the ponies could stay out all year round as there was plenty of grass for them to eat. Stephen asked whether the ponies would stay for Bonfire. Sarah commented it wasn't just the noise from the fireworks that was concerning but also that the wind blowing in the wrong direction could cause embers to fall on the ponies. This was something she had personally experienced and it was very dangerous. Edwina acknowledged that a plan was needed.

4. Issues and concerns:

Rob said that the path running along the back of the Pond Field was impassable due to waist high grass. He said it had last been cut on 7th January when it was well overdue. Previously the path used to be cut at the end of May / June but it hadn't happened this year. Matt will take this back to Brian Courage. **Action: Matt Bird**

5. Wildlife updates on Landport Bottom:

Flowers:

Stephen confirmed that it had been a very good year for orchids. There had been an increase of Fragrant and Pyramidal orchids. Rob reported a decrease in the amount of Ragwort in the fields. He also commented that he records rain data and despite the low rainfall between February and July, the wildflowers were doing well. Agrimony was especially prolific.

Butterflies:

Stephen reported a lot of butterflies and moths at present e.g. Burnets; Marbled Whites, Common Blues, Skippers and others.

Reptiles:

Jenny K. said that all the refugia had now been placed in the Tumuli, Pond and Small fields. What3Words had been used to help locate the mats. Volunteers had been helping with cutting back the vegetation in order to site the mats. Unfortunately, some of the mats in the Tumuli field have been damaged, probably by the ponies. Previously, all refugia has been left in place throughout the winter but it might be removed this year. A student from Plumpton College has set up a detailed survey sheet and been checking and recording the findings. The recent data is very encouraging and an adder has been found under one of the mats. This was especially exciting as it is many years since an adder has been recorded in a survey.

Ongoing surveys:

Edwina said that they want more surveys in the Landport Bottom Management Plan. She had been talking with Plumpton College and the University of Sussex to get groups of students involved, with a view to monitoring everything over a 10 year period. She said that Rob keeping rainfall data is very helpful. Matt will talk to Rob about this. **Action: Matt Bird.**

6. Events / Celebrations:

Jenny K. said that there will be a pollinator walk around LB on Saturday 19th July. Jennie S. will be siting a moth trap in Jenny K's garden the night before. *(Update, unfortunately the moth survey could not go ahead due to the rain; this will be rescheduled)*

Edwina wants to organise an event on LB incorporating a couple of guided tours to talk partly about the ponies, but also to discuss the management plan with people. She asked if the FOLB would be interested in supporting the event in some way. She will notify the date later. **Action: Edwina Livesy.**

Edwina said that the Lewes Societies Fair will be held on Saturday 30th August if the FOLB would like a table.

7. Protection: Nothing raised.

8. Date of next meeting: Tuesday 11th November 2025 at 7.30 pm.