

Minutes of a Meeting of the **Landport Bottom Management Committee** held on **Tuesday 12 April 2022 at 6.00pm** in the **Council Chamber, Lewes, Town Hall**

Present: Councillor M Bird (Chair), Councillor Dr W Maples, Councillor R O’Keeffe (from 6:16pm), Councillor S Sains, Councillor J Vernon

In attendance: Town Clerk, Town Ranger, Customer Services Officer

1. Election of chair

Councillor Matthew Bird was elected as chair of the Committee for the year 2022 to 2023.

2. Apologies for absence

There were apologies from Councillor Handy who was away.

3. Members’ declarations of interest

Councillors Bird and O’Keeffe both declared an interest as Councillors for Lewes District Council.

4. Question time

The Chalk Life Ranger from the Railway Land Wildlife Trust was present in the public gallery. There was one member of the public present, who asked two questions. The first question was regarding the gabion seat proposal and its suitability for the site. This item was to be discussed on the agenda. The second question was when the sheep would be moved from the Pond Field as there was concern for the orchids which were due to flower shortly. It was confirmed that the sheep had already been moved.

5. Minutes

It was resolved that:

The Minutes of the meeting held on 7 October 2020 were received and signed as an accurate record.

6. Chair’s announcements

There were none.

7. Introduction to Plumpton Farm Manager

Apologies were received from the farm manager, Ian Salmon, who was unable to attend due to illness. An email report from the farm manger was read out by the Town Ranger. An issue arising from this report as to whether cows could be used to graze the site was debated by the committee. The discussion considered the need to graze the land, the implications with regards to carbon and biodiversity as well as risks to the cattle and visitors to

Landport Bottom. There were other methods of grazing and managing the site, including the potential for scything.

The committee resolved that:

The Town Ranger explore other options and report back to the committee.

8. Higher Level Stewardship Agreement and Cluster Group

- 8.1 There was an oral report from the Town Clerk who informed the committee that the HLS agreement has been extended to 2023 and would then be reviewed.
- 8.2 Lewes District Council (LDC) signed up to membership of the Eastern South Downs Cluster Group. As Landport Bottom is under the HLS agreement held by LDC, membership of the cluster group is based on this. The group is set up to encourage collaboration and communication between farmer and landowners in the area, with the objectives mainly surrounding the Countryside Stewardship goals of the area. It is hoped the LDC advisor will provide more details once they have attended meetings with the cluster group and will feed back to the Town Council.

9. Ranger requirements

- 9.1 The committee received a report, LBMC001, previously circulated, detailing the need to procure ranger services for Landport Bottom following changes to the service previously purchased from LDC.
- 9.2 It was suggested the requirements be expanded to include the environment audits that had been budgeted for from the Vision work in 2019, as well as engagement and the renaturing agenda. It was noted that ecology remained with the LDC Specialist Advisor under the HLS agreement.
- 9.3 The committee discussed the idea of implementing volunteer site representatives, similar to those being introduced at the Town Council's allotment sites and suggested the ranger service requirements be expanded to include working with volunteer site representatives to promote considerate use of Landport Bottom by everyone.
- 9.4 The Chalk Life Ranger from the Railway Land Wildlife Trust explained that community and volunteer engagement and habitat management were a part of their role and an element of that included Landport Bottom. Clarification was needed as to the extent of this.
- 9.5 The committee agreed that Landport Bottom required the dedicated focus of its own ranger services, which would be overseen by the Town Ranger and would ensure strong links with other organisations such as the Railway Land Wildlife Trust and the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA). Such services may in the future be expanded to other Town Council sites.
- 9.6 **The committee resolved that:**
 - 1. The specification for ranger services be updated as set out in minute reference 9.2 and 9.3 above and approved.
 - 2. The Town Clerk be delegated authority to procure ranger services in accordance with the agreed specification.
 - 3. The Town Clerk and Town Ranger develop a volunteer site representative role for the committee to consider.

10. Site Management Plan

- 10.1 The committee discussed options for benches at Landport Bottom at length. There was a desire for any seating to fit into the landscape. Any bench needed to be of a natural form as the basis of the management plan is for a natural site and it must be in accordance with any agreements such as the HLS. The discussion also noted that benches can create a need for rubbish disposal.
- 10.2 **The committee resolved that:**
the Town Ranger would explore options including more 'invisible' man-made structures, working with the Chalk Life Ranger and the Monday Group.
- 10.3 There was a discussion about the consistency of signage for the entrances to the site, particularly those around sheep grazing, the control of dogs and ground nesting birds.
- 10.4 There was a discussion about the management of dogs particularly around livestock and wildlife. Unfortunately, there had been fatal sheep attacks.
- 10.5 The countryside code approach of "dogs under close control and in sight" was discussed, as was the SDNPA campaign called "take the lead".
- 10.6 **The committee resolved that:**
1. The signage would state "dogs under close control" when there is no livestock grazing and the flip side would state "livestock in field, dogs on lead".
 2. The contact details on signs would be updated to be Lewes Town Council only and would give the telephone number and website.
 3. The temporary "Skylarks" signs be erected during nesting season including the ones used in the ground.
- 10.7 It was noted that the site is not clearly identified as belonging to the Town Council and would benefit from new and improved information notice boards at strategic entrances. There was a suggestion that interpretation boards could have 'inserts' and examples of this were shown to the committee.
- 10.8 **The committee resolved that:**
Signage options be explored and brought back to the committee including interpretation boards with inserts.
- 10.9 The Town Ranger updated the committee on the partnership project with the SDNPA and LDC to renew the interpretation boards to include the Battle of Lewes walking trail QR codes. Some amendments were suggested and the Town Ranger would see if these changes could be made as the boards were about to be produced.
- 10.10 Item 6.4 in the Management Plan headed Resources (page 30 of the Agenda) should be updated by the Town Clerk.
- 10.11 A suggestion about planting hedging was put forward and discussed. The need for natural regeneration was emphasised.
The committee resolved that:
the Town Ranger and Chalk Ranger visit the site, seek views and expertise, along with the surveys that need to be undertaken and report their findings to this committee.
- 10.12 A question concerning adding more dog bins was raised. Emptying dog bins was the responsibility of LDC. However, there may be a reduction of bins elsewhere which could allow for additional bins at Landport Bottom.
The committee resolved that:

The Site Management Plan fixed assets section be updated to allow up to three more dog bins with scope for an additional three bins.

11. Jill's Dew Pond

11.1 The committee received a report, LBMC002, previously circulated, detailing the results of an inspection of the pond and the expert advice provided in relation to the work needed.

11.2 The committee resolved that:

1. the work required is undertaken to the pond, with an estimate of £18,000 for the pond and fencing, to be funded from the Open Spaces budget of £56,510 and any potential grants.
2. Opportunities to involve volunteers, Friends of Landport Bottom and provide engagement activities for this work should be explored.

The meeting closed at 8.30pm

Chair