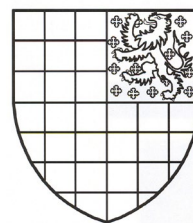


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**LEWES  
TOWN  
COUNCIL**

## **MINUTES**

of the **Landport Bottom Management Committee** held on **Wednesday 26th February 2020**, in the **Council Chamber, Town Hall, Lewes** at **7:00pm**.

**PRESENT** Cllrs Burrows; Handy; Sains and Vernon

**In attendance:** S Brigden (*Town Clerk [TC]*) B Courage (*LTC Town Ranger*) and Ms Thyone Outram (*Lewes District Council Specialist Advisor - Downland and Nature Reserves*).

**LBMC2019/09** **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:** Apologies had been received from Cllr Bird, who had a medical appointment, and Cllr Henman who was working abroad. No message had been received from Cllr O'Keeffe.

**LBMC2019/10** **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST:** Cllr Handy noted that he lived adjacent to Landport Bottom.

**LBMC2019/11** **QUESTIONS:** There were none.

**LBMC2019/12** **MINUTES: it was resolved that**

**LBMC2019/12.1** The Minutes of the meeting held on 4<sup>th</sup> December 2019 are received and signed as an accurate record.

**LBMC2019/13** **REMIT of the COMMITTEE:**

The Chairman briefly rehearsed the remit of the Committee, which is:

- a. To conserve and enhance Landport Bottom as an important feature of the local landscape
- b. To increase biodiversity by appropriate habitat management
- c. To protect and conserve the Scheduled Ancient Monuments; Registered Battlefield site, and other important historical features.
- d. To promote quiet, informal enjoyment of Landport Bottom by the general public.
- e. To involve the local community in the development and management of the site
- f. To increase the understanding and awareness of the importance of the site, amongst local people and visitors.
- g. To manage the site with the Health and Safety of the visitors, staff and volunteers as a high priority.
- h. To manage stock with the highest welfare standards.
- i. To maintain current fixed assets to high standards.

**LBMC2019/14** **HIGHER-LEVEL STEWARDSHIP SCHEME RENEWAL:**

1 The meeting welcomed Ms Outram, Lewes District Council's (LDC) Specialist Advisor - Downland and Nature Reserves, who was contracted to manage the land on the Town Council's behalf. Ms Outram gave a short but extremely informative visual presentation on the nature of chalk downland and its importance and rarity globally. Members were interested to note that the UK holds 5% of the world's chalk grassland and that, although the South Downs appeared to be a large area only 4% of that was in fact classified as 'Lowland Calcareous Grassland' – the greater portion being farmed too intensively; to the detriment of the natural-occurring species and habitats that were so important.

2 The presentation demonstrated the variety of species and varieties of flora and fauna that had evolved to require this specialized environment; and emphasized the fragility of the ecosystems. Whilst the grazing (by sheep) of the land often appeared

to observers to be ‘farming’ it was described as extremely low-intensity and carefully managed to optimum benefit of the landscape.

3 Since the initial reversion of the land in 1992, which had previously been used for arable crops, it had benefitted from successive environmental support programmes funded by European grants. Currently the land was part of an ‘estate’ entered into the Higher-Level Stewardship Scheme (HLS) and comprising LDC’s nature reserves and specialized land-holdings. Due to the importance of Chalk Downland and the land area represented by Landport Bottom, it validated a high proportion of the total grant payable. Whilst this grant was actually ‘pooled’ and used across all the sites in the estate, it was nonetheless a beneficial scheme as it also offered expert advice services and other ancillary advantages.

4 The present 5-year scheme Agreement expired in April 2021, and the government Department for Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) was already trialling a new (“post-Brexit”) Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELM); expected to be in place sometime after 2022. This would follow the evolving Environment Bill, delayed by the national elections and ‘Brexit’, and was anticipated to match the needs of Landport Bottom extremely well. With this in view DEFRA had offered HLS scheme members with agreements expiring in 2019 and 2020 the option to ‘roll-over’ for an additional year or more. It was extremely likely that this opportunity would be offered for the current Agreement, but the decisions had hitherto not been announced until within one year of expiry. An offer was unlikely, therefore, before May or June (or later). Lewes District Council’s preferred option would be to apply to roll over the HLS agreement until 2022 (when/if offered). This would involve continuing the current arrangement between LTC and LDC until April 2022 – by which time there should be more clarity on what the new ELM grants scheme would involve and detail of availability/eligibility. This was recommended by Ms Outram, and supported by the Town Clerk, who had been closely-connected with these issues since original purchase of the land in 1992.

5 There followed a brief discussion regarding possible alternative options, and a question about potential for tree-planting. It was accepted that trees were damaging to an evolving Lowland Calcareous Grassland ecosystem and would essentially destroy it. Also, it was noted that there were likely to be many hectares of conventional farmland available in the future where tree-planting would be more appropriate, especially if farming practices changed to reduce meat production.

6 Members concluded that they would recommend extension of the present HLS Agreement, when/if the option was offered, pending announcements regarding the anticipated Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELM).

#### **LBMC2019/15**

##### **HIRE of LAND:**

The Committee had sought assurance that the prevailing land use Agreement for hire of the land to *eg* local Bonfire Societies, was sufficiently robust in terms related to restoration of the landscape following events. Example Agreement forms, currently used by Lewes District Council as the Town Council’s contracted Agent, were considered and it was acknowledged that the relevant clauses were appropriate.

Some discussion followed on the actual experience in recent years, of both Ms Outram and Mr Courage when dealing with post-event activities by regular hirers. A minor extension to one descriptive paragraph was suggested and accepted, but both officers confirmed that they were confident of proper consideration by hirers, and simply noted that it was important to them to know that the Committee was supportive of their role in such day-to-day matters.

#### **LBMC2019/16**

##### **HISTORIC SIGN:**

A request had been received from Lewes Racecourse History Group regarding location of an historic commemorative sign somewhere on the Council’s land at Landport Bottom. The sign had been made by local blacksmith Ben Autie and

erected for the 50th anniversary of the closure of the Lewes Racecourse. A photograph had been provided depicting its inaugural ceremony. The two men who had unveiled it were the jockeys who were first and second placed in the last race in 1964. The sign was later removed to safe storage as someone had unilaterally cut it down and re-erected it on another part of the race hill. The Group hoped that the Council would assist in agreeing a permanent place where it could be seen and appreciated as originally intended.

Members were happy to agree this request, and some locations were suggested for discussion with the Lewes Racecourse History Group.

**LBMC2019/17**

**REALIGNMENT of FENCING TO DEWPOND (“Jill’s Pond”):**

Ms Outram outlined proposals for extending outward the fencing surrounding Jill’s Pond. This area housed an important colony of protected Great Crested Newts, and a larger area of protected ground was desirable. The enclosed zone provided a breeding pond, nesting habitat and foraging ground. There were considerations regarding planning consent as the area had been originally protected by an ‘Article 4 direction’ under planning statutes, which required special permissions. The current status of this Direction following designation of the South Downs National Park Authority was not clear. TC would investigate this, as it also has bearing on other matters which would need to be addressed by the Committee in the foreseeable future. Members were supportive of the extension to the fenced area proposed, in-principle.

**LBMC2019/18**

**CONCLUSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- 1 The Committee **recommends** that Council should agree to an extension of the Higher-Level Stewardship Agreement (HLS) Agreement expiring in April 2021, when/if the option is offered, pending future replacement by the anticipated Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELM).
- 2 The current Agreement for use of the land for events *eg* bonfire, is accepted for continued use subject to minor rewording and reformatting as a Town Council document, as discussed.
- 3 The siting of an historic wrought-iron commemorative sign, by Lewes Racecourse History Group, at a mutually-acceptable location within Landport Bottom is agreed (at the Group’s expense).
- 4 Proposed extension outward of the fencing enclosing Jill’s Pond, to provide a larger habitat for the important colony of protected Great Crested Newts, is agreed subject to Planning considerations.

**LBMC2019/19**

There being no further business, the Chairman thanked everyone for their attendance and declared the meeting closed.

*The meeting closed at 8:15pm*

Signed ..... date .....