

## Landport Bottom Management Committee, 7<sup>th</sup> December 2010.

### Report on horse riding on Landport Bottom.

#### Status and background:

- Landport Bottom occupies 44 Ha of predominantly open downland, occupying high ground to the west of Lewes.
- It is part of the South Downs National Park, currently within an Environmentally Sensitive Area scheme, and is partly a Site of Nature Conservation Interest.
- It is designated a Historic Battlefield for the Battle of Lewes in 1264.
- There is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (tumuli) in the north east of the site.

#### History

- Pre 1992 the land was owned by a local farmer and was farmed for arable crops.
- Landport Bottom was purchased by Lewes District and Town Councils jointly in 1992.
- In 1993 it was entered into the Environmentally Sensitive Area scheme, part of which involved ploughing, and seeding with native chalk grassland seed mix. This agreement was renewed for a further 10 years in 2003.
- From 1993 to the present day, the land has been managed as part of an arable reversion project, gradually restoring traditional chalk grassland downland landscape (funded by the ESA scheme).
- The main management tool is grazing with sheep, belonging to Plumpton Agricultural College. Grazing management is overseen by LDC Ranger. Infrastructure associated with the grazing scheme includes fences, gates and water troughs, which have mostly been in place since 1993.
- Landport Bottom will shortly be part of a Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) agri-environmental scheme (if the application is successful), which supersedes the ESA scheme, and has similar aims.

#### Administration:

- Day to day management is undertaken by Lewes District Council Community Ranger.
- Strategic management is undertaken by the Landport Bottom Management Committee; representing officers and elected members from the joint councils.
- The strategic management is planned through a 5 year site management plan first drafted in 2001/2 by "Grass Roots" consultancy, which is reviewed regularly. The last full review was in 2006, with

amendments as necessary discussed at Landport Bottom Management Committee.

- The Management Plan aims are partly based on the ESA Grassland Management Plan (see appendices).

#### Nature Conservation:

- Chalk Grassland is a Biodiversity Action Plan target habitat within the UK. Restoration of the chalk grassland flora and fauna is a key target of the ESA and HLS programme, supported by Natural England, Defra, the South Downs National Park Management Plan.
- One of the aims of the ESA scheme is to “Maintain the arable reversion grassland so that the sward continues to be colonised by unimproved and chalk grassland species enhancing its ecological value” (ESA agreement, 2003).
- Flora surveys were carried out in 2001 as part of the management planning, and again in 2006. Resulting chalk grassland diversity was found to be increasing in 2006, with the conclusion that current management successful in achieving its aims. **NB** chalk grassland restoration will take many decades, and is not a short term fix.
- Skylarks, adders, slow worms, and a variety of downland butterflies are key species on this site. There is a very rare water beetle in the dew pond. Skylarks are on the RSPB red list for endangered birds and have their own species based Biodiversity Action Plan.

#### Recreation:

- The land is managed for quiet informal recreation. Walkers enjoy open access via gates and stiles. Most days, particularly weekends, many walkers can be found using the site.
- Horse riding is permitted along statutory bridle ways, and along a permissive route shown in the attached plan.
- Dogs are required to be under control, especially in fields with sheep grazing.

#### Horse riding issues at Landport Bottom – a chronology

- The issues below relate to all equestrian users, and not to any one particular establishment.
- 1993-2008 – An ad hoc policy was in place in which horse riders would voluntarily agree to stick to what is now the permitted route. This was agreed through sporadic conversations with horse riders and equestrian establishments and LDC officers, the South Downs Conservation Board (now the South Downs Joint Committee) including animal wardens and later Rangers.
- Between 2002 and 2006 – sporadic conflicts between horse riders, walkers and dog owners occurred. The key point of these complaints

were associated with lack of clear understanding by all users of where horses were permitted to use the site.

- June 2004 – Defra complaint about ragwort in small field not exclusively a horse damage problem but problem increased by horse damage. The main problem in the small field at the time was that it was under grazed, but horse damage was none the less significant, and led to excessive ragwort problem. This raised awareness of need to monitor horse hoof damage to chalk grassland turf.
- 2006 – Site flora survey – conclusion that chalk grassland restoration going well – but need to monitor disturbance to turf especially from horses.
- In 2007 there were several near misses reported to the Ranger involving horses galloping close to the fence line adjacent to the housing estate and pedestrians.
- In late 2007, horses were regularly galloping on a path separated from the main field adjacent to the housing estate behind Firle Crescent.
- Equally there was some concern expressed by horse riders that dogs were occasionally not under control.
- Early 2008 – escalation of complaints and the emergence of a need to clarify the policy relating to horse riding.
- Ranger approached Landport Bottom Management Committee (LBMC) with these issues, on the 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2008. This was debated further at the meetings of the LBMC on 9<sup>th</sup> September 2008, 17<sup>th</sup> March 2009, 15 September 2009, 7<sup>th</sup> December 2009, 16<sup>th</sup> March 2010, and 7<sup>th</sup> Sept 2010.
- Signage illustrating permitted routes for horse riders were erected in Summer 2008.
- Amendments to the LB management Plan were debated and passed on the 16<sup>th</sup> March 2010, which formalised requirement for horses to use permitted routes only.

#### Rationale for permitted route policy:

- Delineation of a clearly prescribed permissive route for horse riding, with signage providing clear guidance to all site users.
- Zonation of the land into areas which accommodate different recreational activities safely.
- Route chosen to coincide with historical use by majority of equestrian establishments, which link and complement existing bridleway network.
- Route follows high ground, where clear visibility in all directions is afforded, and topography is fairly flat.
- Practical management response to balancing conflicting recreational issues, whilst continuing to accommodate the majority of needs.
- Prevent horses getting into any potential collisions with pedestrians.
- Meeting obligations of the ESA scheme with regard to Chalk grassland restoration.
- Restriction of ecological damage by horse hoof damage to area of least ecological sensitivity. The permissive route has many years of turf

damage by horses, and can be considered a concessionary area within the chalk grassland restoration project.

- Prevent further damage to sensitive edge habitats and the interior of the fields.

#### Consultation of the permitted route policy.

- Meeting with LDC Ranger, ESCC rights of way, South Downs Joint Committee (SDJC) and National Trust (NT) on 29<sup>th</sup> April 2008 sought a joint approach to tackling an increased erosion problem from horse riding on the downs.
- Following this meeting a letter was sent to all local equestrian establishments discussing the policy of permitted access route for horses.
- Meeting with LDC Ranger, ESCC, National Trust, SDJC, and Mrs Goldstein 15<sup>th</sup> Dec 2009.
- 14<sup>th</sup> Jan 2010 – letter sent to all equestrian establishments in the area re-iterating the permitted route policy.
- Meeting at Landport Bottom 15<sup>th</sup> Jan 2010 – with Mrs Goldstein to discuss existing bridle way improvements, and look at her concerns regarding the permitted route.
- 22<sup>nd</sup> Feb meeting with Gerry Enright to discuss the race horse community use of Landport Bottom.
- 29<sup>th</sup> Jan 2010 – letter received from Gerry Enright and Roger Hoad agreeing to permitted route policy.
- 22<sup>nd</sup> Feb 2010 Meeting with Steve Brigden, Sue Goldstein & Dan Ross + Lucy Duffield – discussing the permitted route.
- 4<sup>th</sup> March 2010 – meeting with Mrs Goldstein on site – discuss gates etc

#### Other LDC actions:

- Regular patrols on Landport Bottom by LDC staff including Animal Wardens, Parks Wardens and Community Ranger. During these patrols, site inspections are carried out, dog walkers are spoken to if dogs are seen off leads and chasing sheep or horses, and maintenance is carried out.
- Daily patrols by Plumpton College shepherd – issues are reported to LDC Rangers, including dog worrying of sheep etc.

#### Summary:

Horse riding on Landport Bottom has two main potential risks that are considered a problem by the LDC Ranger: collision with pedestrians and ecological damage to turf.

There are other issues including worrying by dogs which complicate this picture.

The permissive route is considered a reasonable and pragmatic option in reducing the above risks, whilst continuing to accommodate all site users.

Dog walkers continue to pose sporadic problems to both horse riders and the sheep, and as such clear signage has been installed. These signs could be updated to warn of potential for worrying horses.

#### Recommendations to the Committee:

- That further and wider consultation takes place investigating the wider impacts of horse riding at Landport Bottom. Consultation should involve Natural England, Defra, British Horse Society, local Equestrian users, English Heritage, East Sussex County Council rights of way team, National Park Authority, local residents, and any other organisation deemed suitable by the Committee. Further consultation is required to ensure that any perceived or actual risks to the public and the land caused by the riding of horses are properly and fully assessed (ii) that any restrictions which are imposed are reasonable, necessary and justified and (iii) that the impact of any restrictions on the business of local riding schools that have been using Landport Bottom is proportionate when set against the needs of other users and the damage (potential or otherwise) to the land.
- That the Committee continue to endorse the existing restrictions on an interim basis pending the outcome of this consultation. A further report will then be made to the Committee with any recommendations or amendments to the current policy on horse riding and/or the Management Plan.

#### Supporting documents:

1. South Downs ESA Grassland Management Plan, Aug 22<sup>nd</sup> 2003
2. Letter to equestrian establishments 5<sup>th</sup> Feb 2008
3. Letter to Hamsey Riding School 14<sup>th</sup> Sept 09
4. Hand drawn suggested horse riding route drawn by Sue Goldstein
5. Photograph of on site signage showing permitted routes
6. Letter from Hamsey Riding school 30<sup>th</sup> Sept 09
7. Letter to Hamsey Riding school 15<sup>th</sup> Oct 09
8. Letter from Norman Baker 16<sup>th</sup> Oct 09
9. Letter to Hamsey Riding School 26<sup>th</sup> Oct 09
10. Letter to Norman Baker 26<sup>th</sup> Oct 09
11. Letter to Hamsey Riding School 5<sup>th</sup> Nov 09
12. Letter to Norman Baker 5<sup>th</sup> Nov 09
13. Letter to Hamsey riding school 14<sup>th</sup> Dec 2009
14. Letter to Norman Baker 14<sup>th</sup> Dec 2009
15. Letter to equestrian establishments 14<sup>th</sup> Jan 2010
16. Letter from G.P Enright 29<sup>th</sup> Jan 2010
17. Letter from LDC Legal Services to Hamsey Riding School 1<sup>st</sup> Oct 2010

18. Letter from LDC Legal Services to Hamsey Riding School 25<sup>th</sup> Oct 2010
19. Letter to LDC Legal Services from Hamsey Riding School 27<sup>th</sup> Oct 2010
20. letter to LDC Legal Services from Hamsey Riding School 7<sup>th</sup> Nov 2010
21. Letter from Carl Manklow 24<sup>th</sup> Nov 2010
22. Email from Mr Beck 27<sup>th</sup> Nov 2010
23. Press articles and letters (Sussex Express).