



Lewes District Council

www.lewes.gov.uk

Landport Bottom Management Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the **Landport Bottom Management Committee** held in the **Council Chamber, Lewes Town Hall, High Street, Lewes** on **Tuesday, 24 January 2012** at 11.00am

Present:

Councillor S Murray (Lewes Town Council) (Chair)
Councillors J F Daly and M Turner (Lewes Town Council)
Councillors M A Cutress, P Gander, A T Jones and C R O'Keeffe (Lewes District Council)

Officers Present:

Mr S Brigden, Town Clerk (Lewes Town Council)
Ms Z Downton, Committee Officer (Lewes District Council)
Mr A Frost, Parks and Cemeteries Manager (Lewes District Council)
Mr D Ross, Community Ranger (Lewes District Council)

In Attendance:

Councillor R Murray (Lewes Town Council)

Five members of the public attended the meeting, three of whom addressed the Committee:

Mr B Beck
Mr R Elvery
Mrs S Goldstein

Minutes

8 Welcome

The Chair welcomed the Committee members, officers and members of the public present. The Chair explained that those members of the public who wished to address the Committee on items on the agenda would be given the

[Page 1 of 6](#)

Action

opportunity at the appropriate juncture in the proceedings.

9 Recommendations of Landport Bottom Management Committee – 7 June 2011

The recommendations of those members of the Landport Bottom Management Committee who were present at the meeting held on 7 June 2011, as set out in Minutes 1 to 7, were agreed.

10 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 7 June 2011 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

11 Apologies for Absence/Declaration of Substitute Councillors

Councillor A T Jones declared that he was substituting for Councillor D Edmunds who had sent an apology for absence.

12 Report of the Community Ranger

The Committee considered Report No 22/12 which presented to councillors a summary of the findings from the year-long consultation exercise regarding recreational activities at the Landport Bottom site, land that was jointly owned by Lewes District and Lewes Town Councils.

The Landport Bottom Recreation Consultation had been ordered by the Landport Bottom Management Committee following a public meeting on 7 December 2010. The Committee agreed the details of the consultation process at its meeting on 18 January 2011 and the consultation period formally ended on 31 December 2011.

The consultation sought to investigate the impact of recreational activities at the Landport Bottom site, both in terms of physical impact on flora and the turf, and cultural impact on people and user groups.

The consultation process consisted of a botanical survey and ecological impact assessment, fixed point photography on site to monitor the condition of the turf, consultation with special interest groups, professional organisations and civic groups, consultation with the general public and users of the site and on-site consultation events, the details of which were set out under Section 2 of the Report.

The Community Ranger highlighted the key findings from the consultation exercise, as follows:

- Thorough consultation over one calendar year found less evidence than expected of significant ecological damage, or significant health and safety issues arising from mixed recreational use of the Landport Bottom site.

- Generally, the chalk grassland restoration process was proving successful. Evidence of that was the confirmation that flora diversity was increasing (compared to results of a survey undertaken in 2006), with new chalk grassland species identified on site. However, there was likely to be over-grazing during early Summer and therefore the grazing regime would need altering to facilitate improved flora diversity.
- Horse riding, cycling and vehicular use (farm vehicles) were resulting in poaching, ie. damage to the turf, funneling (the squeeze effect of damage in confined areas) and erosion in several areas such as gates, access tracks and high use areas.
- Horse riding was found to have less overall ecological impact than anticipated on the site, although erosion was identified that was directly attributed to horses.
- Dog walking had considerable impact in terms of fouling in specific locations, such as near to the Tumuli entrance.
- The fixed point photography showed that there was minor poaching (damage to turf) throughout all of the fields, mainly confined to field margins, but that there was little lasting damage throughout the season.
- There were just under 250 responses to the online public SurveyMonkey questionnaire. Of those responses, 66% thought Landport Bottom was well managed, 43% thought management could be improved and 25% offered their services for voluntary work to help manage the site.
- Suggestions as to why restrictions were needed included erosion of the ground by horses, the high speed of horses being dangerous, dogs causing nuisance by chasing stock and horses, and dog waste.
- Suggestions for improving management included reduced grazing pressure, greater Ranger patrols, control of dog waste, better signage and community engagement, and improved gates.

The Community Ranger summarised the following conclusions from the consultation, as follows:

- Recreational activities on the land at Landport Bottom were, on the whole, having less long-term impact than at first thought on the flora, although seasonal conditions would result in increased poaching and turf damage.
- Health and safety issues appeared not to be significantly compromised by open access to horse riding, cycling and walking

with or without dogs.

- A review of signage would need to be carried out to incorporate new messages regarding recreation activities and to alert the public to the presence of different user groups on the site.
- The grazing regime would need to be amended to prevent overgrazing.
- Better community engagement, interpretation and education events were to be considered to help integrate the site into the community, including more effective communication with Plumpton College (the graziers).

The Community Ranger explained that his presentation and Report did not contain all of the vast quantities of evidence compiled during the consultation process. However, access to the full results of the public questionnaire, for example, was available upon request.

The Appendix to the Report set out the consultation contact list, sample questionnaire, press cuttings and newspaper advertisements and a copy of the on-site poster and signage used to publicise the consultation event.

On behalf of the Committee, the Chair thanked the Community Ranger for presenting the findings and conclusions arising from the consultation exercise.

Members of the public raised the issue of the erosion of the ground around certain access points connecting to land outside the periphery of Landport Bottom, specifically at the south end of the site near Hawkenbury Way. It was felt that the cause for the erosion was mainly by race horses which was affecting access for other users such as walkers and horse riding school customers.

The Community Ranger responded that there were limitations in managing land connecting to the site. He offered to liaise with the South Downs National Park, neighbouring landowners and race horse riders to discuss potential solutions, such as installing kissing gates, bearing in mind that there were 17 access points on the site currently.

The Committee thanked members of the public for their comments but explained that the land being discussed was outside the remit of the Committee. However, it was acknowledged that access to the site was an important and ongoing issue and, in terms of the public's enjoyment of the site, those access issues raised should be followed up.

Discussion moved to findings from the botanical survey which suggested that the site was establishing a rich diversity of flora. A member of the public present expressed disagreement with this finding and questioned whether the Councils were trying to create a grassland or chalk downland habitat. The Community Ranger advised that, in partnership with Natural England and in

accordance with the Management Plan for the site, the intention was to create a chalk grassland, short-grazed turf habitat, which the survey had concluded was successfully being restored (with the proviso for an adjustment to the current grazing regime).

The Committee felt that there was a balance to be achieved between recreational use and conservation, noting however that the land at Landport Bottom was a managed, grazed site where recreational use was encouraged.

In response to concerns expressed by members of the public at the meeting regarding dog fouling on the site, lack of notices on the dog waste bins and irregularity of the emptying of those bins, the Community Ranger advised that he would seek to rectify those issues. The Community Ranger explained that, as the site was classed as agricultural land by DEFRA (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs), prosecuting dog owners who did not clean up after their dogs was not an option. An educational approach was taken in policing the matter. He acknowledged that signage relating to dog fouling should be improved.

The Committee suggested that the Community Ranger continue to liaise and consult with the public as part of the monitoring and review process over the coming year.

On behalf of the Committee, the Chair thanked all those who attended and contributed to the meeting and advised members of the public present that they were welcome to contact either Lewes District or Lewes Town Councils with any matters relating to the Landport Bottom site.

Resolved:

- 12.1** That the relaxation of restrictions for horse riding, cycling and other non-vehicular recreational pursuits on the Landport Bottom site, be agreed;
- 12.2** That the Landport Bottom Management Committee be authorised to reserve the option to reinstate any restriction on the Landport Bottom site, should it be deemed necessary due to health and safety, or ecological issues which may arise;
- 12.3** That the Community Ranger be requested to continue appropriate monitoring and consultation regarding the Landport Bottom site, as part of the review of the new policy in one year's time; and
- 12.4** That the Community Ranger be requested to liaise with neighbouring land owners to the Landport Bottom site to discuss and resolve access issues;
- 12.5** That the contents of Report No 22/12 be noted.

Community
Ranger

Community
Ranger

13 Date of Next Meeting and Site Visit

Resolved:

- 13.1** That the next scheduled meeting of the Landport Bottom Management Committee be held on Tuesday, 19 June 2012 commencing at 11.00am, venue to be confirmed. The meeting will be preceded by the annual site visit to the land with members of the Committee meeting at the bottom of the Motor Roads at 9.30am.

All to
note/CO

The meeting ended at 12.10pm

S Murray
Chair