

Sompting Community in the Countryside - Round Table

Aims of the participating organizations:

- To mutually inform one another's action programs in Sompting's countryside
 - To mutually support action programs in Sompting's countryside which increase the community's health wellbeing and education, including by experience and enhancement of the parish's natural and heritage resources.
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Meeting via Zoom 30th March 2021 at 09:30am

DRAFT

Present: Mike Tristram (SE), Liane Webb & Keith Colin (SSx), Peter King & Linda Kerrison (OART/EPIC), Lisa Leach (Breathing Spaces), Craig Ifield (A&W), Connie Shirley (WAS)

Apologies: Christy Toms (MM), Craig Daters(SDNPA), Pat Locke & Emma Crowter (SBL). Also Jess Allerton (CW) unable to attend.

1. Report from Sompting Parish Council – Cathy Glynn-Davies:

- a. **Sompting in Bloom:** SPC have accessed a pot of money from the Adur Local Committee and will be using to support the Sompting in Bloom initiative. This will involve increasing floral displays in public places. Some of the money may be spent on wildflower and rewilding, and possible planting of trees in communal spaces. It was noted Test Road had been a subject for tree planting instigated by the late George Barton.
 - i. KC: **Test Road** entrance to community farm site may be suitable for planting although we should hold fire on anything permanent until plans for foot and cycle path development have been firmed up. Possibly in the meantime **movable planters** might be considered.
- b. **Millfield** present a particular challenge as one of the poorest areas in Sompting and Sompting Parish Council are happy to work alongside other community groups in an imaginative way to tackle challenges.
 - i. KC: Sustainable Sussex hope to promote engagement with Millfield residents via the Community Farm.
 - ii. MT: SCIC mission would encourage any new grounds facilities in Millfield area to include natural areas eg if a play area then designed with nature in mind.
 - iii. Adur Homes: could engage to do more for Millfield.

Actions who?
- c. **Halewick Lane: Public Access to the Downs.**
 - i. An opportunity exists to improve the area. A&W are giving consideration to improvements.
 - ii. The construction of a Battery Storage Facility has been approved but requests by SPC for an infrastructure levy (CIL contribution) have had a

negative response. It was suggested that a Battery Storage facility has risk attached and some sort of levy to compensate the people of Sompting would be appropriate.

- iii. SBL: have been giving consideration to **Interpretation Boards**.

2. Malthouse Meadow – Steve Willeter (apols Christy Toms):

- a. **Progress:** MM project shepherd Leighton Clay has his first lamb, named 'Forget-me-not'. Born in Binsted to a Malthouse Meadows flock ewe named 'EPIC'. Progress has been made on planting of fruit and nut trees. Coppicing has taken place (unfortunately some of the wood has been stolen).
- b. **Plans:** Wildflower seeding will commence shortly. Next step – create a pond. Much used by dog walkers and there are problems with mess. This has improved recently. There are four additional fruit trees going in. Relying on W&A to support with watering of new trees.
- c. **Interpretation:** board is being finalised.
- d. **Organization:** In the process of setting up '**Friends of Malthouse Meadow**'. We have Christy Toms on board helping to co-ordinate this. Currently organising the format, constitution, finances and funding.

MT asked: Could a broader 'Friends of Sompting Meadows' name help to incorporate work at Beggars Bush chalk grassland meadow, which was the originally targeted SPC/SE 'Community in the Countryside' collaboration site, in the scope of the project? SW commented that Malthouse Meadow is more Sompting Village focussed but open to ideas of some extension activity, Craigl commented that being a 'Friends of Malthouse Meadow' organization does not preclude some involvement in other sites such as Beggars Bush from A&W pov. Leighton (MM project shepherd) is expecting to seasonally graze his animals at Beggars Bush. However MM project expects to have more than enough work for its volunteers at MM at this stage.

CGD asked whether an umbrella organization role was needed to cover BB meadow and possibly other sites and if so what it should be.

MT noted that the EPIC project volunteers group, working under the umbrella of OART in partnership with SE and SSx, does have aspirations to work not only on the original EPIC site, but also on other areas.

Conclusion: The Beggars Bush site's ongoing management can be evolved collaboratively after the SDNPA's makeover of the site has been permitted and completed.

3. National Park Report:

- a. In CraigD's absence, MT gave an update on plans for Beggars Bush area. The southern car park will be abolished, and the northern car park slightly enlarged. The flowery grassland area is to be increased and some tree planting, and a southward link to the footpath network using land provided by the Estate. Enhancing the site's manageability for the chalk grassland flowers will make it a more valuable link between the chalk-flowers habitats on Lychpole Hill SSSI and Steepdown Hill SNCI. There is a c£25k project grant allocation which remains secure but Craig is awaiting time opportunity to re-submit the SDNPA planning application with more and revised details.
- b. An aim is to get the community of Sompting more involved with Beggars Bush and the National Park part of their parish. **This could be via a combination of EPIC, MM**

and other volunteer groups, though probably preferable for one eventually to take main 'ownership' so as to assist the Estate and SPC by coordinating work on the site.

4. Epic Project: Peter King

- a. **Progress:** Planning Permission for volunteer facilities in Test Road site has been obtained. Application for funding for these facilities to support EPIC legacy volunteering has gone in. Linda Kerrison reported that although 2000 volunteers have been involved at some point in the project, most volunteer activities were halted by Covid19 crisis, and staff put on furlough. However, EPIC volunteering is now entering a more active summer phase as lockdown relaxes, restarting on 7th April. Limiting numbers in accordance with guidelines. There are several hundred local-area people likely to remain actively interested in volunteering and a core of about 30 River Ranger volunteers who will have continuing support from OART, the Estate and Sustainable Sussex.

Much planting has taken place (LK and AW) hedgerows and standard trees. Ponds are amazing across the whole site. A Willow hide has been planted and is growing well. Maintenance: machinery is being used to finish the hard infrastructure. There will be events galore in the summer; EPIC project continues until the end of the year. The footpath is expected to open to the public in July or August.

- b. **Interpretation** boards have been designed. Sculptures/chairs/benches in place by end of April.
- c. **Access** will be advertised but kept low key to avoid destroying the site with large numbers of visitors. Access may be an issue if publicised too much as there are no car park facilities. Pedestrian/bus/cycle access to be encouraged. There is potential to join up the Epic/MM sites so that they can all be accessed in a sustainable way.
- d. **Trees** LK reported there are a couple of hundred potentially surplus trees available for planting including some Flowering Cherry, Willow and Alder. CGD/SW: Would like 3 Cherries for Malthouse Meadow. KC/MT: Sustainable Sussex would be happy to take these to plant along the eastern edge bank of the Community Farm site soon before it is fenced. **Action LK**

5. Sustainable Sussex: Keith Colin and Liane Webb.

- a. **Farm preparation**
 - Sheep are on the brink of lambing and advice has been obtained from a number of sources concerning how to manage this. Livestreaming of lambing may take place. Strip grazing is working well for the sheep and the environment. Sheep are really friendly now and will be great for welcoming visitors, especially 'Chummy' who can be hugged.
 - Heritage fruit trees have been planted in the strip-grazed sheep paddocks. These will provide shade to the flock in the summer months.
 - Eggs are available: these can be purchased or donated where needed. This provides an opportunity to engage with the community. Mutton is also available for purchase. At the Marepond Lane site (opposite Marquis), the new Glasshouse is coming into production enabling larger amounts of vegetable produce which can be sold or supplied to foodbank organisations, alongside the chilli growing.
- b. **Nature trail preparation**

LK and AW have supported with planting round pond.

- c. **Digital:** The site has been mapped out on Google Earth to enable a virtual tour. Visitors will be able to request cuttings from trees which are part of the British National Collection. Website is being overhauled.
- d. **Volunteers:** Covid19 has prevented widespread use of volunteers. There have been occasional visits. 1 regular volunteer. Confidence is increasing re Occupational Health but 1:1 is desirable until safety on site can be assured. Potentially mixed groups will then be welcome. Shared volunteer facilities are underway and more volunteers will gradually be welcomed. Specifying an off grid power system to support work on site has been a challenge.
- e. **Mindfulness:** LW is still providing weekly zoom support. Has completed a further International qualification and will be setting up a website. Walk and Talk sessions for mental health will be started, with other options including 1:1 mindful gardening. There will be a link up with social prescribing from Ball Tree.

6. Breathing Spaces: Lisa Leach (Claire Hunt apols)

- a. **Volunteers and actions:** Will be working with groups of 4 only. Actions at the moment on the Sompting site at Dankton barnyard (upper Dankton Lane close to the Southern Water pumping station) include removing brambles, clearing scrap wood and materials, planting hedges donated by Craig Daters the SDNP ranger, enhancing the site's pond with input from Sophie SDNP ranger. BS is working with Food Pioneers 'Bees and Seeds' (pollinators) project to introduce a wild bee nesting site (tree hive). A series of evening wildflower walk-and-talk events are planned through the summer (May 22nd, June 21st, August 21st and September 17th).
- b. **Information/Interpretation** A board is being developed as species are recorded. Help with design was requested: **Epic will share their artwork and printer arrangements with Lisa, and also with CathGD for MM, to give ideas.**
- c. **Facilities:** **funding for a canvas sail type shelter is coming from SDNP** and this will be erected in May.
- d. **Fly tipping:** has been observed in upper Dankton Lane. This will be reported.

7. Adur&Worthing: Craig Ifield:

- a. **Progress / Volunteers:** Following Government guidelines coming out of lockdown is beginning to reopen volunteer activity. Some volunteers are allowed to work on their own and still be covered by A&W PLInsurance.
- b. **Funding** In April rangers will have a new budget and will be able to support projects more financially.
- c. **Conservation** 4K Ash trees are being planted to combat Ash dieback. **(?Is this right?)** Mulch will be provided to key sites as soon as it becomes available.

8. Worthing Archaeological Society - Connie Shirley:

- a. **Report writing** continues including one for EPIC on flints.
- b. **Interpretation** **Working with Epic to finish the EPIC path's archaeology Board(s).**
- c. **Activity** Work will resume exploring the Malthouse Site further this summer, with a main dig in July. If someone comes to site and waves they will be shown around.

9. Sompting Estate – Mike Tristram:

In addition to items on Estate land above:

- a. The part of the public footpath from Lyons Farm to Lambleys Lane, where it crosses Sompting Estate farmland, has been widened by the Estate, with grant support from SDNPA, to enable social distancing for walkers and more space on the walk for experience of nature. The Estate has planted a new native species hedge along the north side of the widened footpath. **The path from Lyons farm linking to this urgently requires improvement.** Craig Ifield will liaise with Craig Daters to identify the landowner and to take action to improve this section in regard to litter, social distancing and general appearance as a gateway for A&W people in to their NP countryside.
- b. **St Mary's Sompting** – This will be reopening for services on 15th August. This will start a week of events to make people aware and involve the community in the church's reopening and future. St Mary's is now part of a combined parish with St Peter's Sompting and St Michael's, Lancing.
- c. **A new enterprise** called 'Fins and Forks' is being launched at Titch Hill Farmhouse (aka Steepdown House). It will link food, nature, land and water in a joined-up experience. Guests will fish in chalk streams or the sea, then cook and enjoy eating their catch at a former stable attached to the farm house.

10. Any Other Business:

There was brief discussion of **a range of countryside access points and sustainable local transport:**

MT: Cycle route planned via Decoy Farm (from East Worthing). The Estate is willing to make land along the wooden pylons route available for this purpose and Persimmon is aware there will be a need to link in to their West Sompting development's perimeter cycle route. The Estate plans to make it wide enough that the path will include footpath enabling a circular walk including the EPIC footpath.

PK: Epic path plan is to support gradual growth in *local* awareness and use of the site rather than promote its opening more widely, so as to preserve the tranquillity and safety of the site and to avoid carparking issues.

CGD: SPC would love to see West St pedestrianised and a Pegasus crossing for the A27 to promote links with north Sompting. SPC are working on a number of levels to reduce traffic activity. KC&LW: It would be good to have evidence of effects of traffic. CGD: a survey was commissioned by SPC.

Date of next meeting: TBA around the end of September