

Fairfield Association
Flora, Fauna and Orchard Management Group [FFOG]
Minutes of the Meeting held on Thursday 7th July 2016 7.00 pm
at Whitegates, Sunnyside Close

Present: Dave Brookes, Glenys Ferguson (Mins), Ian Fraser, Oliver Fulton, Helen Hicks, Sue Nieduszynska (Chair), Ian Procter, Hilary Short, Mick Short, Chris Workman

1. **Apologies:** David Elliott, Tony Finn
2. **Minutes of last meeting:** Approved
3. **Matters arising from Minutes:**
 - 3.1. **Dog Warden (May item 3.2):** The Dog Warden has visited and posted several notices about dog mess.
 - 3.2. **Dock control (3.5):** To prevent infestation in areas such as the Paddock, the advice received by Oliver is that it is essential to stop the dock seeding. Depending on ground conditions, it may be feasible to dig or pull out. Even if some root remains, the plant will be weakened. Volunteers are now steadily removing seed heads and tackling the Paddock is scheduled for the coming Saturday session. Flora Field will also be prioritised in this session to protect the arable crop. Docks in boundaries will generally be left for wildlife purposes.
 - 3.3. **Ragwort disposal & supervised herbicide spraying (7.1, 7.2):** Ian has an email stating that he has permission to dispose of ragwort bags at the tip. His contact at Myerscough College has confirmed that – as a qualified herbicide sprayer – he can supervise someone who is unqualified. However, adopting such an approach was not recommended because of the potential issue of responsibility in the case of a problem. Given also that there has been little need to spray this year, it was agreed to stick to using trained personnel.
 - 3.4. **Bioblitz (8.1): Chris** has arrangements in hand for this event in conjunction with North Lancashire Wildlife Group. See item 8.3.
 - 3.5. **Postcode Lottery Project (9.3):** Hilary and Sue have met representatives of *Beyond the Castle* to discuss the delivery of the training element. There will be four ½ day sessions relating to meadows, including one in the FA's Hay Meadow. **Tony** is keen to be involved in the delivery of the schools element (plug planting) and will liaise directly with *Beyond the Castle*. Item transferred to FA meeting (**Hilary**).
4. **Rush cutting and weed wiping:** At the last meeting the decision was taken to pursue the option of controlling the rush by cutting and weed wiping. Mick was thanked for the considerable work he has done exploring the practicalities of this. FFOG agreed:
 - a) To contract the work to Dinsdale Moorland Specialists. **Mick** will request a quote for approval by the FA (**Hilary**).
 - b) To cut the rushes in Big Meadow as soon as possible (**Mick** to check for any constraints on start date). Access via the LGGS field.

- c) The Hay Meadow marsh will not be tackled the same time because of potential vehicle damage to the wildflowers and grass crop before haymaking. And also as an experiment to compare with the results in Big Meadow.
- d) The rush will be cut as finely as possible and dumped in smallish 'compost piles' (within the marsh area). Natural England has given permission for this approach.
- e) The contractor will be asked to put zig-zag cuts through the middle, where necessary, to produce more variation in rush height across the site.
- f) The contractor will be asked to weed wipe as soon as the new growth is tall enough. (Waiting for adequate growth is important to avoid damage to other vegetation.) If it does not grow fast enough for this year, weed wipe will be deferred to next Spring, after the snipe have gone.
- g) The rush will be monitored to see whether the process needs to be repeated next year. (**Glenys** for Arrangements calendar.)
- h) **Sue** will take professional advice on the use of agrochemicals and apply for permission from Natural England for the glyphosate use.
- i) **Mick** will co-ordinate as necessary with the FA's Natural England Adviser and invite him over later in the year to help monitor progress and consider other matters, such as why some parts of the marsh appear resistant to rush and liming (latter for future FFOG Agenda – **Glenys**).
- j) **Mick** and **Ian F.** have offered to support the contractor as sidesman. (More helpers welcome - please contact Mick.)
- k) **Ian** will check whether the branches at the Cromwell Road end of the Fauna footpath need further cutting to enable easy access by the contractor (and also the haymaking equipment).
- l) Ponies will not be brought on site this winter. Among other reasons (see May FFOG 4.1), this would complicate assessment of the worth of the rush cutting/weed wiping approach.

5. Management:

- 5.1. Improvement of the Long Pads path and creation of the Flora path:** Hilary confirmed that the planning permission covers the improvement works on the Long Pads path as well as the creation of the path around Pony Wood and Flora Field.

Hilary is writing a bid for funding from the Walney Island Fund. The deadline for the first round of submissions is 27th July. A successful application would enable planting to start this winter. Delaying until the next round in six month's time would postpone work until winter 2017. However, the application risks rejection unless two matters are resolved: a) County Highways Department must approve the proposed arrangements for crossing Aldcliffe Road from Flora Field to the canal and b) an acceptable price needs to be agreed with the Canal and River Trust for making an access point onto the canal. **Dave** is dealing with both bodies. He will press for at least an informal go-ahead before the end July deadline.

- 5.2. Resurfacing of footpaths:** Hilary will provide Dave with a scale drawing of the Orchard to enable measurements to be made.
- 5.3. Local Nature Reserve designation:** No developments. Oliver will contact Natural England and ask them to approach Lancaster City Council about the paperwork delay. (NE Advisers visited the reserve as part of the designation process a year ago.)
- 5.4. Arable update:** The barley crop appears very healthy and some of the wildflowers sown are starting to appear within it on the Haverbreaks side. Graeme Skelcher's survey report (see item 6.5) is expected to confirm the lack of success of the floristically enhanced margin – not only are few wildflowers establishing, but it also contains the wrong types of grass. This will be raised with the FA's NE Adviser when he visits (see item 4) (Mick). This margin will be cut by the arable farmer when he harvests the crop after 31st July (Mick to remind, see item 8.1).
- 5.5. Grazing matters:** A trough has been bought and installed in West Field. It is filled by nose pump from Lucy Brook, which is quite time consuming for the graziers. Ian offered to investigate whether there is a more efficient method (solar pump?). (For a future FFOG, Glenys.) The grass in West Field shows some evidence of cattle grazing. About 20% of the field, around the scrape and the nose pump, is quite short. But the rest of the sward is close to or above parameters. And given the cattle dung now in the field it cannot be cut for feed. Mick and Ian will keep encouraging the graziers to bring the cattle into this field. Mick will also raise the issue of herd size again with the FA's NE Adviser. It seems clear to the meeting that the herd is too small to cope with the volume of grass on the reserve in the summer months. A group of teenage girls have been reported being very loud, entering West Field and throwing stones at the cattle. Hilary has contacted the PSCO.
- 5.6. Gates between Hay and Carr House Meadows:** The wider gates have been successfully installed.
- 5.7. Fields Access Policy Review:** It was agreed that the existing policy documents dated 28 July 2015 did not need to be updated. The list of people currently with fields access permission was also approved. It was noted that the pony-minders had only been given temporary permission to enter the fields over the winter. A key has been found in the fields (Glenys to notify those on the list).
- 5.8. Orchard sycamore, fallen ash branch, tree survey:** The tree surgeon has removed further branches from the big sycamore. The latest reserve inspection (item 6.1) notes that it is continuing to deteriorate. This inspection also flags a dying ornamental cherry and two silver birches unhealthy and leaning (all just to the south of the oak circle). Ian to mention to tree surgeon.

A large branch fell from an ash tree in the vicinity of the stump circle on 1st July. The tree surgeon was notified and promptly arrived to access the situation. His conclusion is that it was not caused by an inherent weakness in the tree. Rather it was due to unusual weather conditions: intense rain showers accompanied by strong gusts of wind when the tree was in full leaf had overwhelmed the maximum strength of the branch joint which snapped. He noted "Any large tree in a public place has some risk attached under conditions such as these and anybody using a public place in these conditions needs to be careful." Tony (schools) and Ian (Volunteers) will amend their risk

assessments accordingly. A repeat tree survey of the reserve is on the tree surgeon's list of summer jobs.

5.9. Rats in the Orchard: Following public concerns, Mick has contacted Environmental Health who sent out someone to deal with the problem. There has been no feedback directly from the 'Rat Man' but a questionnaire about the process has been received. Anyone with evidence about the success of the intervention was asked to contact Mick.

5.10. Phragmites planting: The arable farmer has provided a tractor-load of plants which appear to be establishing successfully in Upper Sowerholme and by the Flora Ponds.

6. Monitoring:

6.1. Maintenance and HLS habitat inspections: Full reports available, some items covered elsewhere. The nose pump has been added to the maintenance checks. The eel pipe in Anna's Pool appears to be dry in the central section. Graham to be asked if this a problem. There has been at least one illegal campfire in Pony Wood since the last meeting. The adjacent habitat pile is now virtually depleted. Three other habitat piles remain to provide tempting campfire material. Chris considers that their demise is not a problem for wildlife who will view individual scattered logs as effective habitat.

6.2. Replacement/additional photographer monitor: Chris has taken the last two sets of photos himself but has not yet uploaded them to the website. There has been no response to the advert for a replacement photographer, but the search continues. An aerial map of the nature reserve is now available. Hilary will send it to the FA's webmaster so that it can be used to identify points from which the photos are taken.

6.3. Bird monitoring: Sue circulated a list of species, with their locations, reported during May and June. The highlight is the confirmation from Dan Haywood that a pair of lapwings has breed successfully on the reserve.

6.4. Butterfly monitoring: Christine Bennett has been in contact with Chris. She is willing to continue her current monitoring but adopting a 'regular' survey is not practical. It was agreed that her informal approach, supplemented by observations from others, was acceptable. Sue will continue to compile a record of sightings.

6.5. Progress with this year's surveys: Dan Haywood's breeding bird survey visits have been completed and his report is anticipated. Graeme Skelcher (accompanied by some FA members) carried out his annual survey of the wildflower meadows and arable margins on 5th July. He was very pleased with the meadows' development. Report expected soon (see also item 5.4).

6.6. Orchard monitoring: Glenys and Keith Taylor carried out the annual survey of the health of the fruit trees on 16th May. There has been a significant improvement over the last twelve months. No trees have been removed. Of the 96 trees, the number classified as thriving has increased by 7 to 58, with the number in poor condition declining to 10. There are slight concerns about some of the prunus/cherries in the oak circle, but it may simply be a poor season for these earlier flowerers. The four new fruit trees planted in February 2016 (with the approval of NE) are establishing well.

Throughout the Orchard, trees are starting to reap the benefits of increased light as a result of winter hedging and tree management work plus the regular mowing of the grass and curbing of competing vegetation during the summer. Last year's report

identified three groups of trees struggling amongst other vegetation. FFOG (23 July 2015 item 3.3) took the decision to try to save these trees by making their surroundings more conducive to healthy growth. It is too recent for this work to have had much impact, but the signs are encouraging.

7. Volunteer activities:

7.1. Volunteer activities: Ian's full reports for May and June are attached. Although only part way through the ragwort season, Ian is optimistic about its control. Significantly lower levels of infestation are being found. For instance, at this time last year 10 bags were taken out from Upper Sowerholme (a notable improvement on previous years). This year only one bag! As a consequence, there has been much less need to resort to spraying – only for a cluster south of Alder Pond treated with citronella, and the margins around the LGS field. (The grass growing in the resurfaced Orchard paths has also been sprayed.) The Wednesday morning Ragwort Working Party (essentially a continuation of the winter Hedge WP) has proved very successful. In contrast the Tuesday evening session has attracted so little volunteer interest that it has been suspended. The Weds RWP attendees will move on to other jobs once the ragwort task is finished. **Dave** will email the Allotment Association about their ragwort.

7.2. Greenspaces tree training participation: Four people have expressed an interest.

8. Standing items:

8.1. Arrangements:

Mick will arrange for the arable farmer to do the first and second mowings of the floristically enhanced margin (allowed after 15th July and 31st August respectively). Whether to over-sow parts of this margin with an NE specified mix will be decided in the light of Graeme Skelcher's report at the next FFOG meeting - deadline for such intervention is 30th September (**Glenys** for Agenda). He will also elicit the views of the arable farmer on the wildflower sowing within the crop (for arable update at next FFOG).

Mick will investigate whether there is any spare bird friendly mix left over, and – if so – arrange for it to be scattered into the arable stubble. He will ask the graziers to bring the cattle into Hay and Carr House Meadows following haymaking.

Ian will press on with arranging the contractor to cut Hay and Carr House Meadows as soon after 15th July as the weather permits and contact the neighbouring farmer about flailing the north (and west?) hedges of West Field.

8.2. Financial control:

Item 3.5 – The FA's involvement in the Postcode Lottery Project will attract about £500 of funding for the schools element, and of the order of £1000 for the other elements. Magnitude of outgoings not yet established.

Item 4 – Daily cost for weedwiping £600. Plus transport. Estimated overall cost for rush cutting and weed wiping of the order of £2000 to £3000.

Item 5.9 – £32 for rat control reclaimed by Mick.

Ian has submitted an invoice for £223.20 for repairs to the mower.

- 8.3. Organised events:** Tony has advised that there will be three school visits this month (July 13, 15, 19).

The Bioblitz will be a daytime event (from midday?) on Thursday 4th August, with Sunday 7th as fallback in case of weather problems. **Note this is a change from the information given at the meeting.**

9. AOB: None

- 10. Date/place of next meetings:** Start time will revert to **7.30pm** from the next meeting, which has been moved back to Thursday **8th** September. Subsequent meeting Thursday 3rd November. Venue: Whitegates Sunnyside Close.

Ian Procter's Report on Volunteer Activities:

4th May 2016

Only two volunteers attended the first meeting of the Ragwort Working Party (RWP). Disappointing but perhaps the publicity has been rather too low key. Anyhow, we made an initial sweep through the Paddock and a fair section of the Hay Meadow. 3 bags of ragwort.

6th May 2014

Two volunteers repaired the fence on the east side of West Field. A post had broken and two were used to effect the repair with the fence being re-stapled.

11th May 2014

Five volunteers formed the RWP and made good progress in the Hay and Carr House Meadows. 9 bags collected. 12 bags taken to tip.

Early May 2016

Two volunteers used excess gravel left from last year's path resurfacing to top dress part of the Pads footpath near Lucy Brook which has been forming large puddles.

14th May 2016

On a beautiful spring morning the Saturday volunteer session attracted 11 volunteers with 3 more forming an engineering subgroup to replace the climbing board in the Playground. The rest:

- Forked, weeded, raked and re-seeded the wildflower plot behind the Fauna Stones.
- Retrieved 7 alder saplings removed from the Big meadow swamp area and relocated them in the wet hedgeline alongside the Fauna path boardwalk.
- Strimmed and cleared the area around the log segments in the Orchard in preparation for schoolchildren investigating the 'mini-beast' beneath
- Cut back and dug out bramble intruding over the stock fence into the Paddock.
- Dug out ragwort in the Paddock.
- Mowed along the edges of the Fauna path

A woodpecker was working away all morning above the Orchard and after our break a song thrush cleared up cake crumbs underneath our table.

18th May 2016

Three volunteers formed the RWP and continued work removing ragwort, along with thistle and dock from the Hay Meadow and Carr House Meadow. It seems almost impossible to remove dock without the long tap root breaking. We decided to remove it from the main area of hay meadow but to keep control of it by deflowering later in the summer.

25th May 2016

The summer evening volunteer session unfortunately attracted only 2 volunteers.

- The damaged barbed fence near the gates between Big Meadow and LGGs Field repaired.
- Self seeded saplings in the Hay Meadow marsh were removed / cut back. More to do here.
- Bramble and nettle encroaching beyond the stock fence in the Paddock was removed.

Thanks to Ken Capewell for running this session.

Reed planting: here is Mick's report (30th May 2016).

A week or so ago I drove out to Ian Ward's farm and dug out 9 clumps of reeds from the edge of his reed-bed and Sue and I planted them along the bank of the 'stream' running through Upper Sowerholme. Total volunteer effort: about 3 hours of my time and one of Sue's.

Ian then offered to dig out by machine a trailer-load of reed clumps and deliver them to us for planting. Originally he was going to deliver them on Saturday morning so I put out a request for volunteers that morning. In the end, he suddenly came on Friday evening as something else had come up which he had to deal with on Saturday morning. He suggested we deliver the reeds across the fields to where they needed to be and I agreed as it would reduce considerably the size of the volunteer ask (no wheelbarrowing), so we went via Carr House and Wildflower meadows, dropping them off next to the Upper Sowerholme stile. We also took a couple of clumps (at Sue's suggestion) up to the scrapes in Flora Field. Total time for me: about 1.5 hours. We will pay £200 for the reed delivery when the bill comes (agreed by chair's action by Hilary and Sue).

Then, on Saturday morning, I had a total of 11 volunteers, including me, most of who came for 9.30, some for later and with some of the earlier attenders leaving earlier. We finished planting at both sites by about 12.30 (tea, coffee and M&S biscuits at 11 am!). A good effort all round. We still need to do a bit of tidying up but it may be best to leave things until after it next rains. There is a big muddy patch near the stile and also a few bunches of rush (the reeds and rushes were all mixed together, of course) which we need to dispose of before they 'dig in'. I'm hoping to do this later in the week, but it may slip to the next volunteer Saturday, dependent on other factors.

Associate Volunteers

- The Orchard grass was regularly mown

New Associate Volunteer

Name	Date began	Job(s)	Shed key	Tools	Fields access
Mark Reynolds	May 2016	None assigned at the moment	No		No

1st June 2016

The Ragwort Working Party (RWP) attracted four volunteers who continued work in the Paddock digging out not only ragwort but also nettles, bramble and thistle encroaching beyond the stock fence into the pasture. After sweeping the field we had time left to inspect the wild flower plugs put in at the end of April. We were pleased to find all of them thriving with one exception. We cut back encroaching grass and buttercups to give the plugs light. One of the plants we put in was ragged robin and lo and behold we found a ragged robin in flower. I suspect however, from its position and flowering, that it was not one of the plugs. So for it to be establishing independently is even better.

7th June 2016

First meeting of Ragwort Working Party II (RWP II) on the early Tuesday evening. Only one volunteer but others are promised for the future.

8th June 2016

RWP I attracts only 2 volunteers but good progress in made in the South East quadrant of Big Meadow.

Interim review:

It is far too early to be optimistic about the ragwort situation but as of now there has been far less ragwort in the Reserves than in previous years. We have swept the Hay and Carr House Meadows digging out ragwort. These will need at least one further sweep before hay making but we are on top. In previous years we have sprayed the Paddock. This year we have cleared it of ragwort (modest amounts) and encroaching bramble, nettle and thistle. We have now moved into Big Meadow. For the past four years this has been sprayed and the first phase of this has been completed by the first week of June. This year we have done no spraying (ironic that we are now properly trained!) because the amounts in the fields do not justify this method and we are keeping on top by digging out. So we will continue digging out for now. 11 bags of ragwort taken to tip.

9th June 2016

Two volunteers adjusted the nose trough stand so that the trough can stand proud and be used to fill the trough. The former board from the playground climbing frame used as a foundation. Everything moved down to the West Field and installed. Tested and the trough filled.

11th June 2016

Before reporting the Saturday session it should be noted that in the previous day or two, two of our volunteers had 'got ahead' with two jobs on the list namely:

- Finishing off the fencing work in the south west corner of West Field so that neighbouring sheep can't get into our hedge line.
- Pulling out self seeded saplings from the marsh between Hay Meadow and Cromwell Rd.

On the Saturday 19 volunteers assembled and braved one or two heavy downpours to tackle the following:

- Erecting a fence across a gap down the track from the Shed to the Orchard.
- Strimming around the Shed area and a part of the Orchard we are getting back from ivy and nettle to grass.

- Cutting back and digging our bramble encroaching over the stock fence and into the Hay Meadow. A start was also made with similar invasion in Carr House Meadow but more to do there.
- The new wildflower plugs in the Hay Meadow were weeded once more and the too short sticks marking their presence replaced with longer ones.
- Sweet cicely and Common valerian plants, locally sourced, were added to the wet area wildflower collection.
- A marsh marigold was split and propagated. Unfortunately we could not find the other, quite big one, now that it has finished flowering.
- Whilst we were working in the hay meadows the obsessives amongst us (a growing band) dug out any ragwort which was spotted. Actually not a great deal. More encouragement on that front.
- Work was started to strength the Alder Pond bund by digging out turf and mud to increase the height. Very heavy and dirty work this. Commendations to the guys who tackled it.
- The trimming team cut back vegetation creeping up around all our benches, around the notice boards and nettles overhanging grass paths in the Orchard.
- Further work done pruning and thinning the apple and pear crop. Keith appealed to the volunteers to spend a few minutes whilst passing through the Orchard thinning bunches of apples and pears to just the strongest specimen.

14th June 2016

Ragwort II again has only one volunteer but steady progress down Big Meadow.

15th June 2016

Ragwort I has four volunteers and we complete another sizeable segment in the southern end of Big Meadow. There is one section here (framed by the Pads fence and the channel running down from Alder Pond) which had ragwort density similar to what we have had in the past. So this section was treated with citronella. This was because of the density, the need to use the citronella and as a further test of its effectiveness.

18th June 2016 and a few days after

Two volunteers scythed thistles in Lower Sowerholme as part of a plan to control them. We shall have to wait and see but certainly scything is much better than pulling / digging out.

A sizeable section of thistles near the bee hives is to be left to flower for the bees and butterflies.

21st June 2016

Again Ragwort II has only one volunteer. We shall suspend this to allow the lead volunteer more flexibility.

22nd June 2016

Three volunteers form Ragwort I. We complete the sweep of the south western quarter of Big Meadow and dig out ragwort up the Pads footpath. The citronella applied last week has done a good job. A further dose was applied to those specimens missed and one or two still showing vigour. Citronella was also applied to two 'hotspots' where there were lots of very small plants just starting. We recently identified a plant called *Monkeyflower* growing in the Hay Meadow bog. Today we found an example in Alder Pond.

24th June 2016

An inspection of the Reserves showed we are indeed on top of the ragwort problem at the moment. Work will continue in Big Meadow but there is no need to spray there. Next week we must move back into the Hay Meadow but it is quite manageable. In the wet areas of Big Meadow and Upper Sowerholme there is some ragwort but not enough to prompt action at the moment.

There is a problem around the edges of the Grammar School field where the boom last year clearly didn't reach. 15 bags of ragwort to the tip.

27th June 2016

After consultation with and permission from the graziers, one of our qualified herbicide sprayers sprayed the edges of the Grammar School field. A Site Environmental Assessment was prepared and is on file.

28th June 2016

The 10 'orienteeing locations' in the Orchard were prepared for School visits later in the week.

29th June 2016

Four members of Ragwort I met on a wet morning. The plan had been to remove further ragwort from the Hay Meadow but the rain meant we would do more harm than good in the Meadow. The alternative was removal of dock flowering heads from Pony Wood and the Flora beetle banks. To be more precise – there were big dock plants in the Wood Extension but not in Pony Wood. There was very little dock (and only one large ragwort) in the beetle banks. The intention had been to inspect the wildflower border as well but the Volunteer Organiser sensed the possibility of mutiny and the session was ended at 11am. Four very wet volunteers took 12 bags back to the shed.

By the Wednesday evening session the weather had turned lovely and four volunteers attended.

- We made up three barley straw bundles, barrowed them across and placed them in Anna's Pool to deter the algae there.
- Broken barbed wire in the Big Meadow stock fence near the Fauna big ash was repaired.
- A preliminary assessment of how the net to protect the shed roof from sycamore seeds was made. The sedum is in flower at the moment. We thought August was the best time to put the net in place.
- We weeded around the soft fruit bushes and tied up those that needed support.

Associate Volunteers

- Kept the grass mown in the Orchard
- Trimmed back encroaching vegetation around our new hedge saplings
- Trimmed back along the Long Pads footpath
- Kept the nettles down in the playground