

Fairfield Association
Flora, Fauna and Orchard Management Group [FFOG]
Minutes of the Meeting held on Thursday 8th September 2016 7.30 pm
at Whitegates, Sunnyside Close

Present: Dave Brookes, Glenys Ferguson (Mins), Tony Finn, Sue Nieduszynska (Chair), Ian Procter, Hilary Short, Mick Short

1. **Apologies:** David Elliott, Oliver Fulton, Helen Hicks, Chris Workman

2. **Minutes of last meeting:** Approved

3. **Matters arising from Minutes:**

3.1. Ragwort in the Allotments (July item 7.1): Dave has been in contact with the Secretary. He considers ragwort on the allotments to be a much smaller problem now. Allotment holders are alert to the issues and taking their own actions.

Mick and Hilary recently attended a public consultation meeting held by Network Rail and raised the poor control of ragwort along the railway lines. A verbal promise was given that ragwort between Brook Street and the railway station would be sprayed.

Ian noted that the ragwort infestation on the reserve has been very significantly less this year, to such an extent that there has been no use of glyphosate in Big Meadow (although some limited spraying with Citronella). He is, however, concerned about a future potential problem in the margins of the LGGS Field, where ragwort appears to be returning despite spraying. He will discuss how to tackle this with the graziers at the start of the next ragwort season (**Glenys** for Arrangements Calendar).

3.2. Flailing of West Field hedges (8.1): The neighbouring farmer is amenable to the idea of his contractor flailing the north hedge (alongside Lucy Brook). will contact him to clarify the cost of the work which is expected to be done during October.

3.3. Alternatives to nose pump (5.5): Ian has met on site with an FA supporter who has the technical expertise to confirm that a solar-powered pump is a feasible method of filling the water trough in West Field. He will provide an indication of cost. Security will also need to be considered. To be added to Agenda when there is enough information available for a decision (**Ian**).

3.4. Visit by Natural England Adviser (4i): Ben Hibbins is keen to visit and hopes to find time before the end of the month.

3.5. Rats in the Orchard (5.9): There have been further sightings in early August and Environmental Health has been re-contacted by an FA Supporter. **Mick** will follow this up with the 'Rat Man'. There is no evidence that they are nesting around the shed.

3.6. Maintenance of the Long Pads path (May 3.4): Sue has yet to receive a reply to her email to Lancashire County Council about the second cut. Meeting Members confirmed their willingness to continue with the present arrangement.

4. **Tree Survey:** The results of Andy Lee's latest survey (and a sketch map showing the location of the numbered trees) was circulated. Some of the remedial work recommended (such as removing ivy, felling a small tree, keeping the canopy in check by the Cromwell

Road gate) will be undertaken by Volunteers (**Ian**). It was agreed that no further work is currently required on the oak in the Hay Meadow (no. 616). His other recommendations were accepted. In addition, **Ian** will ask the tree surgeon to:

- look at the branch on Beech no. 532 which is overhanging a neighbouring garden
- fell the dead elm in Little Wood in anticipation of opening the wood up for public access
- crown lift any trees in Little Wood that would overhang the proposed Flora path
- apply for permission to carry out work on those trees within the conservation area and in Little Wood (which is subject to a tree protection order)

Ian to notify the Tree Surgeon that future surveys should also cover:

- that part of the Orchard to the south of the Oak Circle
- Pony Wood
- the Play Area
- Aldcliffe Road Triangle

5. **Rush cutting, weed wiping and liming:** About 30% of the rushes were cut in Big Meadow on 22nd and 23rd July by Dinsdales. The cuttings were put into compost heaps. No cuts were made into the central area in the end. Small clumps in the mainly grass areas around the edges of the field were also cut. Some rush missed by the Contractor was dealt with by scything. Rushes around the perimeter of School Pond could not be cut because the ground was too wet to support the machinery.

The new growth has now reached the required height, so Sue has emailed Dinsdales to ask for Big Meadow to be weed wiped. Those rushes around School Pond and the Hay Meadow, which were cut two years ago, will also be weed wiped (there were no objections to this proposal at the July FFOG). Ben Hibbins has confirmed that a derogation is not required. The work is expected to be done mid-late September. Volunteers will rake out the dead rush (**Ian** for October session).

A few days later, Dinsdales will follow this with liming (Big Meadow only, covering the cut and weed wiped areas within both marsh and pasture – **Sue** to arrange with Dinsdales), applying 2 tons of lime pellets using a quad and spinner. This is a very light application: the Contractor's suggested application rate is 1tonne per ha, which is lower than advised by Chris. The Contractor's view is that – even with a very acidic soil – lime would improve the growth of grass (and presumably herbs). It does not harm the rush but gives a head-start to the grass. It would need to be repeated every 2 or 3 years. This liming would take a day with 2 operatives and cost around £600-£700. **Sue** will check that Natural England has no objection.

Greater use of scything has been suggested by Oliver as another way of controlling the rush – possibly better suited to more awkward areas such as School Pond and for cutting swathes into the marshes but also perhaps able to tackle larger areas, particularly if an experienced scyther is hired. The issue of regrowth would have to be considered. So, as weed wiping was agreed at the last meeting, the decision is to continue with that for this year. Scything and the effectiveness of this year's treatments will be discussed at the FFOG meeting in May 2017, to decide next season's approach (**Glenys** for Agenda).

6. Management:

- 6.1. Improvement of the Long Pads path and creation of the Flora path:** A bid for to the Walney Island Fund has now been submitted. The County Highways Department has approved the proposed arrangements for crossing Aldcliffe Road from Flora Field to the canal, which will include bollards. The price to be charged by the Canal and River Trust for making an access point onto the canal is still to be resolved (**Dave**). The planning conditions relating to trees need to be discharged as the next step (**Hilary** to contact the Landscape Architect, after **Dave** has provided an example relating to the Aldcliffe Road Triangle.)
- 6.2. Resurfacing of footpaths:** **Dave** has received the scale drawing but has yet to take the measurements.
- 6.3. Local Nature Reserve designation:** Ann Wood at Lancaster City Council has now read Oliver's document and provided a map that is not fully appropriate. Oliver has annotated this and returned it for amendment. Ann has also expressed an interest in the status of the Concessionary Path Agreement and will hopefully manage to pursue this with Lancashire County Council.
- 6.4. Arable update:** The barley crop was harvested on 5th August. At the same time, the arable farmer did the first cut of the floristically enhanced margin, blowing the cuttings into the stubble. **Sue/Mick** will ask him to do the second cut when he judges the grass has stopped growing (probably end September or start of October). The wildflowers sown within the crop did germinate (photos on the wildlife blog on the FA website), but were not very visible from a distance. **Sue/Mick** will consult with the arable farmer: if he is happy to continue with this, then should more be sown? (depends in part on whether the arable farmer will be applying herbicide, adversely affecting self-seeding) and should it be nearer to the new path for greater visibility?
- 6.5. Grazing matters:** Herd size flexibility and advice on managing the grass in West Field will be key matters raised with Ben Hibbins when he visits (see item 3.4). Options for West Field will then be discussed at the November meeting (**Glenys** for Agenda). Mick has received some clarification about poaching from Ben. Bare ground covering up to 5% of a field is acceptable, and even more than this as long as it is not in one specific area. Divots provide good bird nesting sites.
- 6.6. Haymaking:** Hay and Carr House Meadows were cut on 14th August by a Contractor for Capernwray. The dried crop was then baled and wrapped on 16th, the Contractor being supported by an impressive turnout of volunteers (see Ian's report for 16th August below). Wrapping and baling in parallel rather than sequentially speeded the work, although the much earlier finish also reflected a reduced crop (at 126 bales, around two thirds that of the previous two years). Part of the explanation for this is the impact of the yellow rattle. A lower yield is a traditional indicator of a successful wildflower meadow! But the reduced winter feed is a concern.

The machine used to wrap the small bales had been hired from last year's contractor. It is understood that this is to be sold, so a new arrangement needs to be in place for next year (although the intention is to hire the same Contractor to do the work). **Ian** will approach the graziers to establish whether they can handle anything larger than the current size of bale. If so, he will ask the Contractor whether he has access to a wrapping machine that works to that size. **Ian** will explore other options as necessary, including purchasing the current small wrapper.

For the longer term, the possibility of building a dry haystore was mooted. As well as reducing the demand for plastic wrap, this could also double as a wet weather classroom for educational visits. **Ian** will provide Sue and Hilary with details of what would be required. **Hilary** will enquire with Sam Edge. and **Sue** will ask the arable farmer for advice (he is believed to have a similar type of store).

6.7. Local Green Space application: Dave confirmed that Lancaster City Council has yet to make any decisions..

6.8. Apple tree donation: An FA Supporter has a spare 12 foot Royal George apple tree. Moving a tree of this size would be a difficult undertaking. It is also out of scale with the rest of the apple orchard and there is no suitable space. **Ian** to decline the offer.

7. Monitoring:

7.1. Maintenance and HLS habitat inspections: Full reports available. The inspection on 22 August, only partial due to the adverse weather, revealed three notable problems caused by the recent heavy rain and wind: overflowing bund in Alder Pond; possibly the same in Anna's Pool where the eel pipe appears to be acting as the main drain and wind damage to a number of the fast growing saplings in the Pony Wood extension. **Ian** has already improved the staking on about half the affected trees, and assessed the problems with the pools. Further work on all three will be undertaken later (**Ian**).

7.2. Photographic monitoring: No report.

7.3. Breeding Birds survey report: Dan Haywood is keen to attend FFOG to discuss his findings. Dan to be invited to a Special FFOG meeting in February (**Sue**).

7.4. Meadows and Margins survey Discussion of Graeme Skelcher's report will also be deferred until February, and **Sue** will ask him if he would like to attend the meeting. **Ian** has been in email discussion with Graeme about the possibility of establishing Purple Rampion-Fumitory on the reserve. There are records of this wildflower in the Lancaster area in the 1980s, but it appears to have died out. Graeme's researches to date have been unable to locate a source of any seed.

7.5. Notable wildlife sightings: Sue's list of recent sightings was circulated. Discussion deferred.

7.6. Bioblitz feedback: Provisional results from the event held on 4th August in conjunction with North Lancashire Wildlife Group were circulated. Discussion deferred until the Special FFOG meeting in February. A request to add Rob Zlock, NLWG's fly expert, to the FA's Fields Access List was approved (**Glenys**)

7.7. Moth Breakfast proposal: Tony's idea is to set up a moth trap overnight in a garden adjacent to the Orchard, for inspection early the following morning, accompanied by refreshments. It is too late for this year, so will be postponed to summer 2017. **Tony** will refine his ideas with Chris, and take them to the FA Meeting in May 2017.

8. Volunteer activities:

8.1. Volunteer activities: **Ian's** full reports for July and August are attached. There was a medical emergency during the August session. First aid procedures were put in place,

an ambulance took the volunteer to hospital and he is now fit and well. (The incident is described more fully below: August 13th.)

Having reflected on the handling of the incident, Ian proposed a number of suggestions for refining the FA's emergency procedures, which were developed slightly in discussion. It was agreed that:

- a) the policy of carrying whistles when working in dispersed groups will be followed more rigorously
- b) dissemination of information amongst First Aiders will be improved. At the October Volunteer session, **Ian** will ensure all First Aiders know, for instance, that the first aid boxes contain post codes for points of emergency access, the locations of the Emergency Contacts book and the file containing completed *Medical Condition* forms. On an annual basis, the first aid equipment will be reviewed and updated by the Volunteer Organiser, who will remind First Aiders of what there is and where it can be found (**Glenys** for Arrangements Calendar).
- c) steps will be taken to ensure the rapid availability of a First Aider and equipment:
 - i) a First Aider will be designated as **Duty** First Aider for a volunteer session. Everyone is told this, and the person wears a high visibility vest
 - ii) the First Aid box, the defibrillator and the Health and Safety file will be kept in a clearly identified wheelbarrow throughout the session
 - iii) the Duty First Aider will keep this wheelbarrow near to where he/she is working (which should be a fairly central location)
 - iv) all wheelbarrows will contain a laminated sheet listing emergency postcodes and – subject to permission – the mobile phone numbers of First Aiders/other key contacts

Whilst health and safety is the responsibility of the school, **Tony** will also tighten up on his procedures for educational visits (for instance, making sure he is aware of the identity of the group's First Aider).

8.2. Winter Hedging Programme: The Hedge Working Party will resume its work on Wednesday mornings from 26th October. The first task is to finish the hedge between the Long Pads footpath and the Flora Field. This should take two to three weeks plus a session rather later, when the wood has dried, to burn the brash on the stubble. (**Sue** to check that the new arable farmer is happy with this arrangement.) This will be followed by laying the hedge between the Fauna path and the LGGs field from the Ash Tree dogleg to the gate into Carr House Meadow. It has considerable growth but this is all at the top of the hedge: low, dense growth will be encouraged by the laying. It was agreed to ignore the lower section of the hedge which acts as a screen for School Pond. The work will be done primarily from within the field. This is easier for the right-handed majority, safer as away from the path and easier from the viewpoint of collecting brash in the field. As a first step, **Ian** will consult with the graziers about this. If this is acceptable, he will write to the LGGs Chair of Governors outlining the work that will go ahead unless the school has objections.

8.3. Greenspaces tree training participation: Ian F. has already attended Part 1; Ian N. and Ian P. are booked in for the Part 1 session on September 10th. They will be joined by Oliver for Parts 2 & 3..

9. Standing items:

9.1. Arrangements:

Glenys will arrange the monthly winter flush counts, starting in early October. **Ian** will co-ordinate with Graham and arrange for vegetation to be dragged out of ponds and ditches as necessary (to be finished by 31st January). He will also be alert for falling temperatures to remove the nose pump in West Field before it freezes.

9.2. Financial control:

Item 5 – Liming cost quoted at around £600-700. All Dinsdale's estimates exclude VAT.

Item 6.6 – Haymaking. Invoice submitted by Ian for £1050. This is significantly more than last year, but better reflects the market price for such work.

9.3. Organised events for notification to FA: None.

10. AOB: Apple Day: Tony reminded the meeting of the FA's decision that Apple Day will be held every other year, alternating with Fun Day. The next Apple Day will therefore be in Autumn 2017 (event to be arranged through an FA Meeting - **Hilary**).

11. Date/place of next meetings: Thursday 3rd November, Thursday 5th January 2017, 7.30pm Venue: Whitegates Sunnyside Close.

Ian Procter's Report on Volunteer Activities:

30th June 2016

Inducted Associate Volunteer to tasks of Orchard tidying and Fauna path trimming. 12 bags, mainly dock, to tip.

5th July 2016

The monthly inspection had alerted us to a roll of fence wire in the West Field. A mystery where this had come from but it was of very poor quality and a danger for the cattle so it was removed to the tip.

6th July 2016

The Ragwort Working Party (RWP) attracted 5 volunteers plus Dave's two boys. As such we achieved a great deal doing another sweep through the Hay and Carr House Meadows and an initial foray into Upper Sowerholme. Note that the equivalent visit last year yielded 10 bags whilst we did not fill a single one this year. We will keep an eye on this area for flowering heads. We also cut off dock heads in Carr House Meadow. 12 bags of ragwort and dock to the tip.

9th July 2016

On a wet and miserable morning 13 brave souls turned out for the Saturday volunteering session.

- We removed the flowering heads of dock in the wildflower margin of Flora Field to prevent further seeding.
- Similarly dock flowering heads were removed from the Paddock and Orchard.
- Encroaching bramble was cut back and / or dug out of the grass margin alongside the Fauna path.
- The hedge was cut back around the benches on the Fauna path.
- The fruit trees were thinned of multiple fruits as recommended by Keith.

10th July 2016

14 bags, mostly dock, to the tip.

11th July 2016

Overhanging branches at the Cromwell Road entrance to the Fauna path were cleared in preparation for machinery for rush cutting and hay making.

12th July 2016

We strimmed the edges of the Fauna path and the area in the Orchard we are returning to grass. A small amount of graffiti was removed from the fence between the Fauna path and Hay Meadow.

13th July 2016

The RWP attracted 6 volunteers. The ragwort is pretty thin on the ground now so did a sweep of:

- The Paddock
- The southern two thirds of Big Meadow including two volunteers exploring the bog area. Suffice to say this realised only two bags, what a difference to previous years!
- Hay Meadow
- The Grammar School fields. The evidence of the previous spray was clear to see but some plants had been missed and were in flower (not seed). These were dug out.

16 bags, mainly ragwort but some dock, taken to the tip.

20th July 2016

The RWP was cancelled today because of thunderstorms and torrential rain.

21st July 2016

We are getting out ragwort where we spot it. One volunteer made another sweep of the Hay Meadow and extracted one bag, another got half a bag from Big Meadow.

22nd July 2016

Whilst assisting as sidesmen to the contractor cutting the rushes, two volunteers take 3 bags of ragwort out of Big Meadow.

27th July 2016

Six volunteers form the RWP and make a sweep of all our fields including the Grammar School fields but excluding West Field (no ragwort problem) and the hay meadows (this evening). We also

collect the flowering heads of dock in the paddock and cut back nettles overhanging the path toward the Orchard. Non-fruit bearing but down facing branches amongst the fruit trees are pruned to improve the mower's safety. 10 bags of dock and ragwort to the tip.

In the Wednesday evening session five volunteers:

- Constructed a fence across Lucy's Pool plugging a cow escape route between Hay Meadow and Upper Sowerholme.
- Weeded the wildflower plugs in the wet part of Hay meadow noting the first flower there, Greater Bird's Foot Trefoil.
- Dug out nearly two bags worth of ragwort and dock flower from the two hay meadows.

During July, Associate Volunteers

- Mowed the grass in the Orchard
- Cleared around the saplings in the Pads and Long Pads hedgerows
- Kept the Long Pads footpath clear of overhanging vegetation.
- Kept the Orchard grass paths and the Fauna path clear of overhanging vegetation.
- Ragworted.
- The Cromwell Road sub-group are resuscitated as a scything team specialising in thistles.

3rd August 2016

Five volunteers formed the Ragwort Working Party (RWP) although as there is little ragwort left our activities were:

- a) To clear overhanging vegetation from the Pads and Long Pads footpaths.
- b) To clear vegetation enveloping the new saplings we put in last winter along the Pads and Long pads footpaths.

We have now run out of ragwort! Something I never thought I would say and one never knows for next year but for now the RWP is suspended, to be recalled if the ragwort returns, a major job needs doing or we get to autumn and the hedging awaits.

8th August 2016

The Cromwell Road scything team cut back rushes the contractors had not been able to access in Big Meadow.

12th August 2016

A volunteer went through the hay meadows and School Pond digging out one bag of ragwort.

13th August 2016 The Saturday morning volunteer session.

We had a significant emergency at the volunteer session when a volunteer suffered a severe anaphylactic reaction to wasp stings. Volunteer first aiders were called, a passing member of the public phoned for an ambulance, a volunteer went to the nearest access point to guide the ambulance crew in. Our first aiders checked for airway and breathing difficulties, ensured he was in the recovery position and stayed with the person monitoring his pulse and talking to him until the ambulance crew arrived. We contacted the man's wife and she came to the scene in time to accompany him to the hospital. We contacted her later in the day to ensure that family support was in place. This incident shows the importance of carrying whistles when working in dispersed groups

and having the postcodes of points of access easily available in the first aid boxes. A fuller and later reflection on the implications of this incident will be presented to FFOG.

The session attracted 17 volunteers on a disappointingly overcast and damp morning. This included 4 members of the playground engineering group who installed a replacement balancing beam. The rest of us:

- Cleared around the new hedge saplings along the Pads footpath clearing enveloping vegetation.
- Dug out ragwort from part of the Big Meadow. More to do.
- Noted that the shed roof is in good condition and the fixing of a protective net at the end of the month should be reasonably straightforward.
- Cut back vegetation around the shed especially underneath the fence bounding Fraser's garden.
- Posted our signs on the fruit trees asking people not to pick the fruit until ripe.
- Reinstated a post alongside one of the new apple trees.
- Cut back vegetation encroaching on the green paths in the Orchard.
- Cleared bindweed from around the broom shrubs.
- Checked and pruned the apple trees.
- Cut back the hedges in front of the Orchard benches to reinstate vistas across the Big Meadow.

NOTE: many of these jobs involved using shears. Some of these are now not fit for purpose and it is embarrassing when our volunteers are not properly equipped. I hope FFOG will support an application to the FA for £150 for 6 pairs of good quality shears.

16th August 2016

Haymaking day in the hay meadows, the crop having been mown on the 14th. This year we had a new contractor, Thomas Blades, although the man cutting the grass, Paul Blades, turns out to be the same man that ploughed the Flora Field in the spring. He works for Ian Ward and helps his father when available. A small world. Our call for volunteers prompted a good response and around 25 adults helped plus some children. With good organisation by the Blades family the rowing up, baling and wrapping was done concurrently so that the operation finished by 6.30pm, way ahead of our previous best times.

Issues arising:

1. The first issue is the future availability of a wrapping machine for small bales. The one used was hired from our previous contractor but we are told he is planning to sell it and it is uncertain whether Thomas Blades will be able to hire one locally. Issues to enquire about:
 - Would the graziers be happy with larger bales? Could they be stored away from the badly poached Gunrange?
 - If we have to stick with small bales:
 - Is a small bales wrapper available for hire locally? How much would it be (including the plastic wrap)?
 - Is Chris Wilkins wanting to sell the machine we have used? What would be a fair price? What are the servicing / maintenance implications?
 - Will Thomas Blades store the machine on his farm?

2. The hay harvest yielded 126 bales. This is well down on the last two years (221 and 200). We don't know why and speculation seems pointless. It seems a shame that potential hay in the West Field is going to waste when the cattle may be short of fodder over the winter. We really need a thorough discussion of the West Field.

23rd August 2016

The Ragwort Working Party was re-constituted on a one-off one-man basis for a tour of Big Meadow gathering one bag. There are two 'hotspots' of more intense growth so citronella was sprayed in these two areas. They are the usual suspects south of Alder Pond and west of the big ash tree at the Fauna path dogleg. More efficient and we need to use this expensive product. Whilst out:

- Four specimen of purple loosestrife, now in flower, were marked for splitting and propagation when they finish flowering.
- The combination lock on the West Field gate was oiled and the drain hole marked with a post in preparation for the flailing of the north hedge.
- The monthly inspectors had reported damage caused by recent heavy rain and wind:
 - Alder Pond bund. This is ok but leaking a little round the edge. For a future WP.
 - Anna's Pool bund. The eel pipe seems to be acting as the main drain. Future work needed but when the dense vegetation has died back later in the winter.
 - Pony Wood extension. The birch trees have grown rapidly this summer but some of them have been blown over by the wind and need support. As soon as possible.

27th August 2016

The Cromwell Road scything team gave the Lower Sowerholme thistles a second cut.

29th August 2016

The HLS inspection team had reported wind damage to some of the otherwise thriving birch saplings in the Pony Wood extension. This was assessed as needing rapid attention in case of another storm when the saplings were in full leaf. Two volunteers staked 12 of the saplings using fence posts we had taken out of excess fencing in the Flora Field. There are still a further 12 left. A close eye should be kept on the saplings in case of further damage.

31st August 2016

The last evening session of the summer attracted only three volunteers. However a lot done:

- We cleared saplings and weeds from the shed roof.
- This enabled us to position the netting to catch the sycamore seeds over the next few months.
- Nettles growing up around the Orchard noticeboards were cut back.
- We worked along the Pads footpath snipping overhanging nettles, brambles and thorn.
- Opposite the concrete wall a path had been made through the laid hedge. This was blocked with brash.

During August, Associate Volunteers

- Mowed the Orchard grass
- Kept the nettles in the playground area at bay.