

Fairfield Association
Flora, Fauna and Orchard Management Group [FFOG]
Minutes of the Meeting held on Thursday 3rd November 2016 7.30 pm
at Whitegates, Sunnyside Close

Present: Graham Brandwood, Dave Brookes, Glenys Ferguson (Mins), Ian Fraser, Sue Nieduszynska (Chair), Ian Procter, Hilary Short, Mick Short, Chris Workman

1. **Apologies:** David Elliott, Tony Finn, Oliver Fulton
2. **Minutes of last meeting:** Approved
3. **Matters arising from Minutes:**
 - 3.1. **Purple ramping-fumitory:** An FA Supporter has reported wildflower growing in his garden. Seed collection is difficult, so he will provide seedlings next spring. **Ian** will enquire about the location/conditions in which it is currently thriving, to help identify a suitable site on the reserve. **Ian** will also notify Graeme Skelcher.
4. **Hay Wrapping and Storage:** The problems raised at the last meeting (FFOG 8 Sept item 6.6) appear to have been resolved. The Graziers have indicated that they can handle larger bales (approx. 1m cube), so there should be no difficulty finding a Contractor with suitable equipment. The issue of storage will be discussed with the Graziers around May (**Glenys** for Arrangements Calendar). It was recognised that the expense of constructing a hay store to reduce the use of plastic wrap cannot be justified.
5. **Management of the LGGs hedge:** Laying this hedge is a key element of the hedging programme proposed for this winter (FFOG 8 Sept item 8.2). It divides the Fauna reserve from the Grammar School land. This is tenanted by the Graziers and the meeting recognised the need to take account of their views. FFOG confirmed that the hedge should meet NE's requirements and reserve objectives in terms of height and attractiveness to wildlife. The height and current thickness of the hedge render trimming beyond the capabilities of volunteers. Flailing would be expensive and unattractive. Moreover these two approaches would reduce growth points at the base of the hedge, causing it to 'lollipop' over time. It was agreed that laying remains the best way of achieving the desired result, and the vigour of this hedge will mean it 'recovers' swiftly from this management. **Sue** will seek the support of the Graziers.
6. **Tree stump treatment:** Sycamore and elder can adversely affect a hedge. Where they have been taken out, the approach adopted to prevent the stumps regenerating has been to cover with black plastic. This has had limited success. *Beyond the Castle* use *Ecoplugs*, which have also been given the seal of approval by the FA's tree surgeon. These use glyphosate but have the advantage that it is not in liquid form and is inserted directly into the heart of the stump. It was agreed that this herbicide treatment was warranted and acceptable. **Ian** was authorised to purchase 100 plugs.
7. **Management:**
 - 7.1. **Improvement of the Long Pads path and creation of the Flora path:** Money is in now place from *Green Path* for two noticeboards, and a bid is in to *Awards for All* to fund benches. However, although it met the criteria, the FA's application to the – oversubscribed – *Walney Island Fund* was unsuccessful. This leaves the construction of the path currently unfunded. Consequently the work will have to be delayed until

next winter. (Whilst it is possible to start planting hedges along existing fence lines around Pony Wood, this would be unwise. It would remove a potential element of match funding from any future grant application.)

Hilary will investigate other sources of funding (e.g. *LEF*, *University Wind Turbine Fund*). There is also the option of making another application to *Walney*.

Agreement with the Canal and River Trust relating to the road crossing has yet to be achieved, and this is proving more complex than expected (**Dave**).

- 7.2. Resurfacing of footpaths:** **Dave** has now made the measurements. It was agreed that the resurfacing should cover the main Orchard path and the rest of the Fauna footpath. The Towneley Close path, the 'lane' from Sunnyside to the Orchard crossroads, and the public footpath alongside Big Meadow would be excluded. Path sides are to be scraped back before the dust is applied. **Dave** will provide Trustees with an estimate of the cost for approval before going out to tender.
- 7.3. Local Nature Reserve designation:** Ann Wood at Lancaster City Council has now provided a very useful map. **Meeting Members** were asked to contact Oliver straight away if any amendments are required. Displaying public information notices on site is one of the next and final steps. **Oliver** will continue to liaise with Ann.
- 7.4. Arable update:** There is a lot more (desirable) broadleaf vegetation in the stubble this year, including the wildflowers deliberately sown last spring. **Sue** will confirm that the Arable Farmer is happy with this, and whether it will mean that greater use of herbicide is needed next year. The second cut of the floristically enhanced grass margin has yet to take place (**Sue** to chase). It has been agreed that the cuttings could be taken away by the farmer to avoid the need to bring in the large machine that can blow it into the stubble.
- 7.5. Grazing matters:** The FA's NE Adviser has yet to make his promised visit (**Mick** to re-contact Ben Hibbins). Without Ben's input, discussion of herd size and options for managing West Field has been put on hold. However, Mick reported that there is currently lots of grazing available on the reserve (changing climate conditions contributing to this), which is an argument for expanding herd size. The Graziers have been moving the cattle into West Field on a fairly regular basis, and the grass – although still over-length in places – is much better than in previous years. Since 9th October, the herd has been split. Two adults and one follower have been in the LGGS Field (outside the NE Agreement, although with access to School Pond). This leaves 6 adults in the main herd, compliant with the maximum 7. Unexpectedly, a calf was born on 31st October.
- 7.6. Flailing of West Field hedges:** The north hedge grows up from Lucy Brook making laying by Volunteers impractical. For the first time in several years, it was flailed by the neighbouring farmer on 27th October (see Volunteer activities below for that date). A lighter treatment was also given to the west hedge. To be repeated in future years (**Glenys** for Arrangements Calendar).
- 7.7. Tree Surgeon's progress:** Ian has asked Andy Lee to carry out the work agreed at the last meeting and to extend his coverage in future (see FFOG 8 Sept item 4). **Ian** will monitor his progress and report to FFOG as appropriate. He has already had a discussion with Andy about the work in Little Wood. The horse chestnut tree in Pony

Wood is in poor condition. It will definitely need to be felled when the Flora path is installed. In the meantime, anyone one visiting the wood in windy weather should be alert (**Glenys** to notify Tony in respect of school visits and people on the Fields Access List).

7.8. Rush control: The rushes in Big Meadow that were cut earlier in the year have now been weed wiped (apart from an area close to the Fauna footpath where the machine got stuck). Those rushes cut two years ago in the Hay Meadow and School Pond were also treated. The impact of this treatment is starting to show, but there is no dead rush to be raked out yet. NE has given permission for liming in Big Meadow. This will now be carried out by a more local contractor (the Arable Farmer) reducing the anticipated cost (FFOG 8 Sept Item 5). He should be receiving a delivery of 2 tonnes of lime pellets during the week beginning 7 November, with the work to be carried out soon after. If the tractor cannot access part of the marsh, this area will treated by hand by Volunteers. It is not expected that the lime will encroach on to the footpaths, but this will be monitored as the work is done.

The meeting approved Paul Ferguson's proposal to carry out some scything in the Hay Meadow marsh during the winter (with assistance from Oliver and Glenys). This experiment will help inform decisions on next year's rush control programme. For instance:

- it will establish the practicality of scything in a rough, wet area
- provide an indication of how much volunteers can achieve
- establish whether the cut rush can be dealt with effectively and easily
- create a cut area which can be monitored to see how it regrows, attracts snipe etc.

The meeting also approved Ian's suggestion that it would be a good experiment to scythe some of the mare's tail which is encroaching in the Hay Meadow. To take place when the grass is not growing (**Glenys** to approach Paul).

Another scything course is being offered next year. It would be useful to encourage more Volunteers to develop this skill (**Ian**).

7.9. Rural Payments Agency visit: On 19th October, someone from the RPA checked on the area of the arable margins, the presence/absence of walls and hedges and did some on the spot mapping of the Fauna footpath. An updated map will eventually appear and payments to the FA will be adjusted to take account of any discrepancies with the NE Agreement.

8. Monitoring:

8.1. Maintenance and HLS habitat inspections: Full reports available. The inspection on 24th October revealed a number of problems relating to the ponds. Anna's Pool was tackled by Oliver and Glenys, releasing the eel pipe from swamping vegetation. Initial indications are that this has reduced the rate of drain from the pool, raising the level of standing water. But it needs on-going monitoring (**Graham**). **Graham** will also investigate the possible leak in Lucy's Pool where water appears to be flowing past the pipe and the northern Flora Pond where the water level is again clearly lower than in

the southern pond. Graham warned that he has already dealt with the obvious source of leaks related to land drains, so the problem here may be difficult to solve.

Ian will mention to the Tree Surgeon the Inspectors' suspicion that some trees are now suffering from ash dieback. There are cases locally, but nothing can be done.

The bramble patch in Upper Sowerholme appears to be extending. **Graham** will try to locate his string to confirm. It would be very difficult to tackle this, and it is probably self-limiting when it hits the wetter part of the field. It also provides a good wildlife wilderness. It was confirmed that the nettle patches at the east of Lower Sowerholme should continue to be left to provide cover for partridges.

Ian (plus Ken) has already acted on several of problems: removing offensive graffiti, repairing the fence at the cattle crossing, and blocking an unofficial entry into Lower Sowerholme.

8.2. Photographic monitoring: Chris has been continuing to take the regular series of photographs, but has yet to upload them to the FA website. A replacement photographer is still being sought. **Hilary** will follow up on the aerial photographs for the website.

9. Volunteer activities:

9.1. Volunteer activities: Ian's full reports for September and October are attached. Ian noted that one of the two FA chain saws broke at the Hedge Working Party session on 2nd November. Repair is not justified. But it is an essential piece of equipment for hedging work, so the meeting gave approval to purchase a – better quality – replacement. It was also agreed that this could be funded in part by using a £200 grant (which requires £100 match funding) recently awarded for tools purchase by Lancaster Green Spaces. The shears etc which Ian intended to buy with this grant are not needed until spring, giving time for **Hilary** to pursue an alternative source of funding. Dave suggested that nail polish remover is more effective than sanding as a way of tackling graffiti. The tasks proposed for the November session were approved. Removing sucker saplings from the hedge along the Fauna path will be added to the list. They will be dug out in the hope that they can be reused elsewhere (**Ian**).

9.2. Green Spaces Tree Training participation: Four FA members attended this very useful course: *Principles and Practices of Woodland Management: An Introduction for Community Volunteers* at Williamson Park in September – October 2016. It was taught by two experienced foresters and included four modules on:

- Tree identification, physiology and tree health
- Woodland ecology
- Woodland management plans
- Coppicing and thinning

Each module included a classroom based session and then a practical outdoor phase using the resources of the Park. The FA participants gained practical information and a greater appreciation of the ecology of woodlands and approaches to their management. Handouts for each session are available from Ian P. In particular, the

course has prompted the participants to propose that the FA develops a *Woodland Management Plan*. This would providing a structured framework for the management of the FA's wooded spaces over a period of some 20 years. and also be helpful for public consultations and grant applications. It will extend beyond the life of the current NE Agreement but need to be consistent with its prescriptions in the period to 2021. It was agreed that **Ian P.** should convene a group comprising the other course participants (Ian F., Ian N. and Oliver) and Graham to begin work on a plan, drawing on a Forestry Commission pro forma.

9.3. First Aiders: The appeal for extra First Aiders at the October session attracted one Volunteer. Ian F. is now booked on a Cumbria first aid course in Staveley next week, along with Keith Taylor who is renewing his certification. It has also been recognised that the FA should have more than the three people who are currently DBS cleared. **Mick** and **Dave** have agreed to be certified. It is unclear what is the life of a DBS certificate. Four FA members undertook chain saw training in November 2013. After 5 years, refresher training is recommended. **Glenys** to keep lists of first aiders etc and when renewals are due with the Arrangements Calendar.

9.4. Volunteers Buffet: A provisional booking has been made for the Storey Institute on Thursday 9th February 2017. **Sue** will request a sample vegetarian menu at the price of £10 per head.

10. Standing items:

10.1. Arrangements:

Mick will remind the Graziers of the change in cattle access from 1 December. Cattle allowed in Hay & Carr House Meadows (brief periods). Out of other fields (including School Pond) unless specifically permitted by FFOG.

Sue will contact the Arable Farmer and establish (in writing) agreement, herbicide regime & timings for coming year.

The annual review of Cycling & Dogs policies will be on the January Agenda (**all**) as will the annual financial spreadsheet (**Dave**).

10.2. Financial control:

Item 6 – Purchase of 100 Ecoplugs approx.£84 (**Ian**)

Item 7.2 – Resurfacing of footpaths to be paid out of FA funds. Cost currently unknown. (**Dave**)

Item 7.6 – Bill for flailing not yet received. Expected to be of the order of £50. (**Ian**)

Item 7.8 – Purchase of lime £64 Liming cost expected to be lower than the previous quote of around £600-700 excluding VAT. (**Sue**)

Item 9.1 – Purchase of replacement chain saw approx. £500. Partly to be funded from Lancaster Green Spaces grant (**Ian**).

Item 9.3 – Training for two first aiders totalling £220 (**Ian**)

10.3. Organised events for notification to FA: None.

11. AOB:

11.1. Walk and Talk for MA students: This will be held on 14th November, based at the Friends Meeting House. About 25 students are expected. **Mick** would appreciate a few more offers of help.

11.2. Queen's Award for Voluntary Service: Hilary reported that the FA has been nominated for this award. It will be some months before the outcome is known.

12. Date/place of next meetings: Thursday 12th January 2017, Special FFOG Thursday 2nd February 7.30pm Venue: Whitegates Sunnyside Close.

Ian Procter's Report on Volunteer Activities:

2nd September 2016

The mini Ragwort Working Party used the last of our stock of Citronella to treat Big Meadow hotspots. Then a session in Upper Sowerholme removing 2 bags. There are lots of reeds there.

5th September 2016

The break in the fence reported in the Maintenance Report of 22nd August was repaired. The wire may have been cut but just as likely is cow damage.

JKW checked at Howson's gate. One shoot, sprayed with domestic applicator.

Four bags of ragwort disposed of in domestic green bin.

10th September 2016

The monthly Saturday morning session was led by Mick as Ian participated in a course in Woodland Management. 15 volunteers attended.

- The Alder Pond bund was strengthened.
- The wildflower bed was weeded although needs more work
- Bramble was cut back and dug out along the Fauna path.
- Bramble was cut back and dug out along the hedge between Carr House Meadow and the Gunrange.
- Bramble and nettle was cleared from around the Orchard north end noticeboard and adjoining hedge.
- Work continued to lower the hedges to allow the vista from the Orchard benches.
- Work continued pruning the fruit trees.
- A start was made cutting back self seeding saplings in the Orchard.

12th September 2016

Four purple loosestrife transplanted from Big Meadow to the wet area of the Hay Meadow.

8th October 2016

On a pleasant autumn morning 15 volunteers attended the monthly Saturday session.

- The session commenced with an announcement of the new emergency procedures agreed at FFOG (our management group). An appeal was made for more people to train as First Aiders. One person came forward to join an existing First Aider whose certificate needs renewal.
- The nose pump was retrieved from the West Field.
- The 'Don't pick too early' signs were retrieved from the apple trees.
- Fruit tree pruning continued alongside training one of the volunteers.
- Further work was done weeding the wildflower bed.
- Bramble was removed from alongside the Fauna path. This has continued over the last few months and a real improvement has been made given that the bramble was beginning to invade the gravel path. It is now well pushed back to the fence.
- Suckers from the two *Populus tremulus* trees in the Orchard were cut back.
- Overhanging nettle and bramble alongside the Orchard grass paths was cut back.
- Ivy was cut out from tree number 522.
- The encroaching bushes around pear and cherry trees at the Orchard Middle entrance were identified for future work
- Overhanging vegetation around the Orchard north entrance was cut back and a start made to trimming the Pads footpath hedge.
- A big branch had come down from tree 526, the big sycamore near the stumps. Human agency suspected????). This was cut up and carted away.

21st October 2016

We sanded down three benches on the Fauna path to remove offensive graffiti. We also removed the graffiti on the field sides of two fences near the big ash tree reported by the monthly Reserve Inspection.

26th October 2016

The first meeting of the Hedge Working Party (HWP) for the winter season saw an excellent turnout of 11 volunteers on a warm and dry morning. We noted the updated first aid arrangements and agreed the Site Specific Risk Assessment (SSRA) before resuming work on the east hedge between the Long Pads footpath and the Flora field.

27th October 2016

The Volunteer Organiser met with Jack Ayrton, together with flail equipped tractor to give access to the West Field and advise on the trimming of the north hedge. As this has not been trimmed since we acquired the field it required quite a lot of work. Perhaps this is why Martin Ayrton seemed reluctant to quote a price? Jack did not know whether we would be charged nor how much. Jack did an excellent job and we really ought to flail this hedge each year as the local farmers do. As such I asked Jack to also do a one top trim of the west hedge of West Field. This will need further volunteer input.