

**Fairfield Association**  
**Flora, Fauna and Orchard Management Group [FFOG]**  
**Minutes of the Meeting held on Thursday 4th May 2017 at 7.30 pm**  
**at Whitegates, Sunnyside Close**

**Present:** Graham Brandwood, David Elliott, Glenys Ferguson (Mins), Ian Fraser, Oliver Fulton, Sue Nieduszynska (Chair), Ian Procter, Hilary Short, Mick Short, Chris Workman

1. **Apologies:** Dave Brookes, Tony Finn
2. **Minutes of last meetings:** Approved.
3. **Matters arising from Minutes:**
  - 3.1. **Response from Natural England Adviser: a) Gorse (3.4)** Ben Hibbins is in favour of planting this, although payment would need adjusting if it takes land out of an NE option. Agreed to plant in Pony Wood adjacent to the path hedge and, subject to inspection, introduce in the flat fallow area of Flora Field by the Howsons Gate (to avoid short-tailed voles along the Aldcliffe Road banking). Task for December/January (**Ian**) **b) Purple rampion-fumitory (3.6):** Will be planted in the wildflower plot by the Fauna stones (outside Agreement). Two plants that have survived the winter in a local resident's garden will be transplanted soon, to be followed by any new seedlings that appear (**Ian**).
  - 3.2. **Repairs to 'Gleesons' path (6.2):** A soakaway has been constructed beside the short stretch of the Pads path running from its southern bend to the bridge over Lucy Brook. Not enough rain to date to test its efficiency. Longer term the path surface may be raised and cambered and more rock added (job for Autumn - **Mick**).
  - 3.3. **School Pond hedge laying confirmation (3.3):** Earlier verbal permission from the Graziers has yet to be confirmed.
4. **Rush control:** Four approaches (aimed at reducing both the spread of rush and its density to make the marshes more attractive for waders) were employed in 2016:
  - cutting followed by weed wiping in Big Meadow
  - weed wiping of previously-cut rush in School Pond and Hay Meadow
  - liming around marsh edges in Big Meadow and Hay Meadow
  - scything rides in Hay Meadow

The jury is still out on the effectiveness of any one approach. Further monitoring is needed to establish whether the cattle are starting to control the new growth, whether the newly establishing areas of rush at the edge of Big Meadow have been curbed and whether new growth is simply being encouraged (e.g. by cutting/scything only or as regeneration from piles of cut rush).

For 2017, it was agreed to use scything as the method of control, extending the work in the Hay Meadow plus tackling the Big Meadow marsh and along the edge of the Fauna footpath. The FA currently has 5 people with scything experience and 5 attending a training course in June. They will need to be supported by other Volunteers to clear the cut rush. Ian suggested that this could be a task for the Wednesday morning Volunteer group from July, subject to ragwort commitments & timing of haymaking. **Sue** will check with NE about leaving piles of

(unchipped) cut rush in the marshes. **Ian** will liaise with Paul Ferguson and report to July FFOG with more definite plans.

5. **Forest craft and activity sessions:** Graham is planning to offer some outdoor sessions this summer. Some sessions may only be open to children if they are accompanied by a responsible adult who has signed a disclaimer. More details and dates for July FFOG (**Graham**).

6. **Management:**

6.1. **Improvement of the Long Pads path and creation of the Flora path:** No news expected until July.

6.2. **Resurfacing of footpaths:** No news expected until July.

6.3. **Local Nature Reserve designation:** Oliver has again been helping Ann Wood (Lancaster City Council) to move this forward. Ann has given him a date of 22 May. If matters are not finalised by then, the FA will intervene more strongly (**Hilary**).

6.4. **Arable update:** Drilling the wheat crop, scattering the bird seed margin and wildflower seeds in the crop area (to be visible from Aldcliffe Road and the Long Pads path) took place on 4th May. The three decoy lapwing were promptly installed, and it was gratifying to note that at least two pairs were immediately showing an interest. (For next winter, the possibility of decoy curlew and/or geese in West Field to be explored – **Graham**)

Sue noted that the Arable Farmer finds the field neither too stoney nor too wet and was very pleased with last year's crop.

A United Utilities manhole was damaged during the ploughing, causing a significant leak. At the time of the meeting, UU was in the process of resolving the problem. Marking the manhole's position in future years will be added to the Arrangements Calendar (**Glenys**).

6.5. **Grazing matters:** Ben Hibbins (NE Adviser) met Mick, Sue and Glenys on 3rd May. The visit included a walk along the Pads path as far as West Field. Ben was relaxed about the current herd size for the HK10 management option. He thought that the grass was in good condition (as were the animals, grazing in the Paddock), that the sward height and variability was good. He has proposed an alternative means of measuring herd size for HK10 based on livestock units (LU), which will avoid the need to define 'followers'. He has replaced his original idea (email 6 April) for the breeding season with an LU for the fields as a whole. He suggests a stocking density based on livestock units appropriate for a reserve with a target of attracting over-wintering waders, rather than the lower stocking density appropriate for ground nesting birds. His proposals appear to allow for more winter grazing than the current Stocking Calendar. But there are still anxieties about pressure on winter facilities and FFOG members expressed concern that the current 20 animals are too many for overwintering. Ben will do some sample calculations to illustrate the working of the LU measurement. It was agreed that **Glenys, Sue** and **Mick** will examine Ben's figures and report to FFOG with recommendations (with the aim of decision well in advance of July FFOG).

Whilst the new formula is put into place, Ben will ensure that the FA is covered as regards the present overstocking in relation to the current NE Agreement. Written confirmation of this is awaited.

Although Ben welcomed the longer grass in West Field as providing a variety of habitat, the cattle need to be grazing it down soon if a cut is to be avoided. But the scrape is drying out and the nose pump is still dependent on person-power to fill the trough. **Ian** to resume investigations into an alternative means of powering it.

To provide information for a discussion with the Graziers, Dave and Oliver have explored further how to improve watering and feeding conditions for the cattle over winter. Graham has also had some ideas – such as locating the ring feeder in the LGGs field and moving it to different positions – which will be circulated after the meeting [done 5th May]. (See also 9.1).

- 6.6. Tree Surgeon's progress:** Some work in the Orchard has been completed, including further surgery to the old sycamore. A priority job is to reduce the weight of branches at the top of the ash tree by the stump circle. This has been delayed because a mechanical lift is required to gain access. Meanwhile Andy Lee has started on the next tree survey, which will have a wider scope (see FFOG Sept 2016 item 4).
- 6.7. Ponds and ditches:** **Sue** is emailing Ben a photograph of the channel in Upper Sowerholme as there was not enough time for him to inspect it on 3rd May. He did, however, provide some preliminary advice, confirming the need for the area to be wet, with good depth in the channel (100mm in the NE prescriptions) and open water. The reeds growing in the channel can be replanted elsewhere. Ben stressed that work on ponds and ditches should be a winter task to avoid disturbing breeding invertebrates. The feasibility of dredging the Upper Sowerholme channel will be explored at September FFOG.
- Ben also suggested that it would be a good idea to drag vegetation back away from the edges of ponds to leave muddy areas for insects to develop and birds to predate (**Ian**).
- 6.8. Hedge management proposals:** **Ian** has been developing an overall strategy with detailed plans for each hedge. The draft has been circulated to members of the Hedge Working Party. He is incorporating the many useful comments he has received into revised documents that include proposals which will be circulated for discussion at the July FFOG meeting (**Ian**).
- 6.9. Rural Payments Agency adjustments:** Dave has finally managed to gain access to the RPA's online service. Mapping changes have now been made to separate Pony Wood and extension into a new land parcel, and to create a new land parcel in Big Meadow to incorporate the footpath and Fauna stones area. There are issues with the footpath along the Hay Meadow that still need to be resolved (**Dave**) but he is fairly confident he will be able to report that mapping is up to date on this year's claim form.
- 6.10. Towneley wall:** The edge of the north wall adjacent to the top of the Towneley Close footpath has been vandalised. Repair will require the skills of a stonemason. The first step is to establish ownership (**Sue** to provide **Hilary** with contact information for the County Rights of Way Officer). **Ian** will arrange for the loose stones to be moved to a secure location.

## 7. Monitoring:

**7.1. Maintenance and HLS habitat inspections:** In addition to points noted in his reports, Graham advised that there was a children's den in the north Orchard (no action for the time being) and lots of self-seeding in the Orchard to be cut out (**Ian**). It was agreed that the willow establishing around the Flora Ponds, by Aldcliffe Road and in the Hay Meadow marsh should be removed (**Ian**). Gaps in fences where the new calves have managed to get through have now been blocked. The missing padlock on the Howsons Gate has not been located. **Ian** to replace.

**7.2. Photographic monitoring:** The new photographer will take over fully from Chris in June.

**7.3. NLWG survey arrangements:** Chris confirmed that North Lancashire Wildlife Group have arranged a meeting for 9th June starting at 7pm to focus on mosses, lichens and invertebrates. This will be an open meeting. **Chris** to arrange for it to be publicised and complete a risk assessment. **Sue** and **Chris** have written a template risk assessment for monitoring events that are opened to the general public. This will be stored on Dropbox (**Sue**). Event leaders should have a mobile phone and take a portable first aid kit (**Sue** to acquire).

**7.4. Progress with bird, woodland and wildflower surveys:** Graeme Skelcher carried out the flora surveys of Pony Wood and the Hay Meadow on 20th April. Report awaited, but it is believed that the surveys were slightly too early so little was visible. Dan Haywood was excited by the findings of the first of his three visits to survey breeding birds on 29th April. He noted a Whinchat and 4 Wheatears in passage. Breeding interest included a singing Treecreeper and a pair of Grey Partridges. In the 'possible breeder' category were 3 singing Willow Warblers and a singing Sedge Warbler.

**7.5. Annual report on bees in Flora Field:** All six colonies that Keith Taylor took into winter have survived by autumn supplemental feeding. Since February he has been feeding the bees weekly. Three of the queens are now two years old and will require replacement. Keith's aim is to build colonies strong enough for replacement queen rearing and local pollination. The forage available did not produce any surplus honey last year as the floristic margins failed to naturally regenerate. The meeting hopes that the wildflower seeds recently scattered nearly within the arable crop will provide an extra source of pollen for the bees this year.

## 8. Volunteer activities:

**8.1. Volunteer activities:** Full reports for March and April are attached. The Ragwort Working Party has been temporarily suspended having run out of work! The 40 plus bags collected to date is a fraction of previous years. Most has come out of the LGGs Field, which the group has tackled to a) avoid seed contamination into the reserve and b) reduce the requirement for spraying. Pond clearing work will be deferred until after the summer (see 6.7) but repair to the bund in Alder Pond will still be evaluated at the next Volunteer session. An offer of local horse chestnut saplings has been received. NE has previously allowed this species in Pony Wood. **Ian** to accept, for winter planting.

**8.2. Annual review of John Muir Award:** The scheme, co-ordinated by Graham, has now been offered by the FA for two years. Over this period, 40 Volunteers have signed up. In addition, some Volunteers have been nominated for awards on the basis of their known contributions and achievements. Seven awards have been made at each of the Discovery, Explorer and Conserver levels. Two young Volunteers have moved up from Discovery to Explorer. Efforts to arrange for their awards to be presented in front of their classmates have so far been unsuccessful. **Graham** will talk to Dave about involving FOTT Volunteers in the scheme.

**8.3. Feedback on Volunteers Buffet:** Successful. Same place to be used again next year.

**9. Standing items:**

**9.1. Arrangements: Sue** will commission the later survey of the wildflower meadows for July (prior to haymaking). She will also consider costings and details for renovating the wildflower margin in Flora Field for July FFOG.

**Ian** will co-ordinate with **Graham** to arrange for him to renew his first aid certificate on a Staveley course.

**Ian** will book the contractor for haymaking after 15th July. He will establish whether the contractor can still produce small bales [affirmative response received after the meeting]. (But note, any change to the winter feeding system (6.5) may have implications for the appropriate size of bale.) **Graham** will check the Hay Meadow to ensure there are no points where cattle can readily access Upper Sowerholme.

**Glenys** will prepare the annual review of fields access for July FFOG.

**9.2. Financial control:**

An updated spreadsheet from Dave was circulated.

**David** is submitting a bill of £68 for work on the mower.

*Item 4* – Dinsdales have finally sent in an invoice for the rush control work £1620 including VAT. (**Mick**)

*Item 6.6* – Two days work to date by the Tree Surgeon of the order of £700. The hire of a lift will be an unexpected additional cost. (**Ian**)

**9.3. Organised events for notification to FA:** NLWG survey (item 7.3) .

**10. AOB:** None

**11. Date/place of next meetings:** Thursday 6th July, Thursday 7th September at 7.30pm  
Venue: Whitegates Sunnyside Close.

## **Ian Procter's Report on Volunteer Activities:**

1<sup>st</sup> March 2017

The Hedge Working Party (HWP) attracted 9 volunteers on another decent morning, just a couple of showers to freshen us up.

- Further work was done on the high growth in the west hedge of West Field although the volunteers again found the extending hedge trimmer to be under-powered and too heavy.
- Work continued on trimming back the Pads footpath / Big Meadow hedge.
- One volunteer worked in Upper Sowerholme cutting back the invasive bramble and clearing the channel / pond.
- We resumed work on the Pads / Flora Field hedge to clear back bramble, ensuring, as far as possible, that the runners into the grass margin were pulled out. We must keep an eye on these margins for bramble invasion this summer.

5<sup>th</sup> March 2017

Two volunteers put up 11 nest boxes in Pony Wood (4, replacing tit boxes with woodpecker damage), Little Wood (3 new ones), the Orchard (2, replacing damaged / missing) and alongside Lucy Brook (2, set low to attract tree sparrows as per Dan Haywood's advice).

7<sup>th</sup> March 2017

A further sorting out of our stock of barbed wire with another load of scrap wire to the tip.

8<sup>th</sup> March 2017

Ten volunteers turned out for HWP on a warm and dry morning.

- Gaps in the Paddock hedge alongside the track were filled with brash to prevent any dogs getting into the field.
- Barbed wire was used to stop illicit entry to the School Pond area where vandals have twice damaged the willow living fence.
- The Pads footpath / Big Meadow hedge to the south of the Orchard was trimmed back and bramble removed to finish off the Associate Volunteers' work for the winter.
- The trimming of the Pads footpath / Orchard hedge was continued from the southern end.

11<sup>th</sup> March 2017

The Saturday volunteer session attracted a more respectable number of volunteers (15) on a dull but dry and warm morning.

- The Orchard dogwood was coppiced on its two yearly cycle and the cuttings carted to the back of the Orchard.
- Further invasive bramble was dug and cut out from various sections of the Orchard.
- Brash from the fruit tree pruning was pushed back.
- The first of the ragwort which had the audacity to grow in the Orchard was dug out.
- A stock fence was erected in the School Pond area to prevent the cattle getting in amongst the extension to the living willow fence.
- The tips of the hedge alongside School Pond were trimmed off to encourage thicker growth.
- Signs advertising tree surgeon's work from 20<sup>th</sup> March were posted through the Orchard.
- During the refreshment break John Muir Awards were presented to three volunteers.

### 15<sup>th</sup> March 2017

The last HWP of the winter season attracted 7 volunteers who agreed the Site Specific Risk Assessment for brash burning.

- Using the Lower Sowerholme brash burning site so as not to risk the cattle in West Field, we burnt the brash created by the trimming of the Pads / West Field hedge, carting the brash along the field and across the path.
- In amongst we cut more bramble from the Pads / Lower Sowerholme hedge.
- In the break we feasted on toasted marshmallows, fig rolls and ginger biscuits to mark the end of a very successful winter season.
- The fire was checked at 3pm.

### 16<sup>th</sup> March 2017

We returned the corrugated sheets used for brash burning to the shed area.

### 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2017

The tractor ruts in Carr House and Hay meadows were filled in.

### 24<sup>th</sup> March 2017

In lieu of attending the next volunteer session, a volunteer dug out a drainage sump on the Pads footpath near Lucy Brook to see whether we can solve the flooding there.

### 29<sup>th</sup> March 2017

Two volunteers undertook repairs to the fence between Lower Sowerholme and Anna's Pool / Upper Sowerholme where the cattle could get through. Further tractor rut filling in Big Meadow.

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#### Associate volunteers

- Trimming of the Pads / West Field hedge
- Trimming of the Pads / Big Meadow hedge
- Barley straw replaced in Alder Pond and Anna's Pool
- Mowing the Orchard

### 8<sup>th</sup> April 2017

A beautiful sunny morning saw 19 volunteers attend the monthly Saturday volunteering session.

- Sycamore saplings were cleared from the shed roof.
- Brambles were dug out of a section of the Upper Sowerholme marsh.
- Mud was brushed away from the boardwalk on the Fauna path
- All the padlocks were oiled and serviced.
- The nose pump was installed in the West Field.
- Pony Wood was inspected for signs of the recent camper and any damage done.
- Protruding stones were removed from the Orchard path to prevent a trip hazard. The holes were carefully filled in and compressed to preserve the path.
- A stump was re-instated in the stump circle.

- The base of the apple trees were carefully strimmed so as not to damage the bark.
- An area of the Orchard near the Stump Circle big sycamore was strimmed to prepare it for eventual mowing.
- Young saplings in the Pads / Big Meadow hedge were 'weeded' to stop them being overwhelmed.
- Invasive brambles were dug out of the southern end of the Orchard.
- Ragwort was dug out from the Orchard, around the shed area and from the Paddock.
- At the break John Muir certificates were presented to Gill Davies and George Manklow.

#### 12<sup>th</sup> April 2017

The first meeting this year of the Ragwort Working Party attracted five volunteers on a breezy morning on which the threatened rain kept away.

We completed a first sweep of both the Hay Meadow and Carr House Meadow. Although it is early days in the season the contrast with earlier years is really marked with very much reduced amounts of ragwort. There are also lots of other herbs coming in the fields.

#### 19<sup>th</sup> April 2017

Six volunteers attended the RWP on a cloudy but dry morning.

We completed a first sweep of Big Meadow. Who would have thought that we could have done that with 6 people? A few years ago it would have taken 10 times as much labour.

We also filled in further tractor ruts in Big Meadow.

In the afternoon 15 full bags of ragwort taken to tip.

#### 26<sup>th</sup> April 2017 Morning

Four volunteers formed the RWP led by Graham in Ian's absence.

Lots of ragwort dug out of the Grammar School fields. NOTE: we are tackling this for two reasons:

- To avoid contamination by seed into the Reserve fields
- To avoid the graziers spraying which is ineffective alongside the field edges where the ragwort is concentrated.

#### 26<sup>th</sup> April 2017 Evening

Four volunteers attended the first summer evening session led by Graham in Ian's absence.

- The hedging stakes marking out the beetle banks in Flora Field were retrieved after the field has been ploughed.
- The hazel withy fence at the bottom of the Towneley Close path was renewed and repaired.
- A start was made removing couch grass and algae from Alder Pond.

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#### Associate volunteers

- Mowing the Orchard
- Strimming the Orchard and playground
- Maintenance work in the playground
- Weeding around new saplings alongside the Pads footpath