

Fairfield Association
Flora, Fauna and Orchard Management Group [FFOG]
Minutes of the Meeting held on Thursday 3rd May 2018 at 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:** Tony Finn, Oliver Fulton

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

3. **Matters arising from Minutes:**

3.1. **Fencing off top part of Lucy Brook (item 4):** A fence has now been installed to close off this gap where the cattle had access to the brook. **Ian** was asked to consider using green barbed wire when current stocks are depleted (as at Freeman's Pool).

3.2. **Advice on leaks in Willow Pond & West Field scrape (4):** It is currently proving impossible to seek advice from the RSPB. Approaching the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust at Martin Mere or Lancashire Wildlife Trust (a walk at Warton Crag on 23rd May might prove a good opportunity) was suggested (**Sue**). See also 4.3.

3.3. **Advice on treatment of West Field rush (5):** As 3.2.

3.4. **Barn owl introduction (6.3):** Having been deferred because of bad weather, no more has been heard. Unfortunately it now seems unlikely to happen.

3.5. **Annual COSHH review (9.1):** In progress. Whilst storage and handling procedures for using pesticides remain unchanged, the paperwork needs to be updated to accommodate a different use (on tree stumps) and add extra personnel (**Ian**). **Ian** noted that herbicide had not actually been used in the reserve fields for the last two years. A 'no smoking' sign will be installed on the shed (**Ian**).

3.6. **Maintenance of the Long Pads path (9.1):** As last year, it has been agreed with Lancashire County Council that the FA will keep the path clear with the council making a cut at the end of the season. **Sue** will re-contact the council about the precise timing of their cut – FFOG pointed out that it would be better for it to take place before a start is made on the widening work, now scheduled for late August/early September. She will also liaise with LGGs over trimming the vegetation in preparation for their fun run.

4. **Management:**

4.1. **Arable update:** The Arable Farmer has been spreading slurry and it is anticipated that muck spreading, ploughing and drilling will follow in quick succession [*now done*]. **Ian** and Mick have staked the margins to identify the ploughing limits. These will then be moved to mark out areas to be harrowed, but not drilled, to renovate some of the margins. The margins will then be resown where necessary, by members of the FA [*since advertised for 6th May*]. There should be enough of the traditional wildflower mix available to sow into gaps in the northern margin, particularly as the delay in creating the Flora path means that the southern margin cannot be restored until 2019, and will need a fresh batch. Wildflowers are again to be sown into the crop area. Last year's

sowing in a strip close to the Long Pads path drew complementary comments. Another area visible to the public will be chosen this year (**Mick**).

- 4.2. Grazing matters:** Dave has submitted a claim form to NE for last year. In the comments section he has stated that haymaking had failed to take place and that the changes to the cattle stocking arrangements had still not been formally incorporated into the FA's Agreement.

No further progress has been made regarding solar power for the nose pump, which has now been knocked over by the cattle and is no longer working! As a temporary solution, there should be adequate water in the scrape after rain for the cattle to go in to West Field. For the longer term, an old-fashioned hand pump is now being considered. A jig would be needed to mount it on the water trough. The FA could fill the trough at the start of the season if the Graziers are prepared to top it up thereafter. **Ian** (with Ken) will now investigate feasibility, toughness and cost, and speak to the Graziers.

The Graziers are planning to treat the poached land in the LGGs Field by harrowing. The FA has declined extending this to the reserve fields for the time being. Grass growth in the poached areas of the reserve and the effects of the Graziers' interventions will be monitored (see also 8).

- 4.3. Wetland management:** Graham observed that Willow Pond (Lower Sowerholme), the Flora Ponds and West Field scrape attract very few birds, bar the odd heron. He is considering what could be tried to improve this. In the case of Willow Pond, it is continuing to leak and now very muddy. It needs to dry out before anything can be done. The Flora Ponds are possibly too close to traffic. However, the meeting felt that creating a willow screen would be visually inappropriate here. The scrape is in a natural dip, and leaving this area of West Field to develop a more extensive cover of rush might be beneficial.

Graham will use spare willow cuttings to create a boundary against intrusive brambles on the north (Lucy Brook) side of Upper Sowerholme (and possibly on the south side of US too). There is scope for more willow wigwams for children at the north end of the Orchard, but this will be deferred until next year. Willow wigwams may also be constructed in other 'secret places' in the Orchard, subject to consideration of neighbouring houses. (**Graham**).

At the July FFOG a decision will be made on adjusting the level of the sluice in Alder Pond for the summer months.

- 4.4. Paddock trees & tree surgeon's progress:** The tree surgeon has been emailed about the Paddock Trees (March item 6.4) without response and there has been no further progress with the works scheduled following the last survey. A new survey, usually commissioned at this time of year, will therefore be put on hold. **Ian** will resume his efforts to make contact.

5. Monitoring:

- 5.1. Maintenance and HLS habitat inspections:** Graham's reports circulated. **Sue** will ask the Graziers to close the gates into School Pond to allow the area to recover [*Graziers have now been contacted*]. A new path is developing at the north of the Orchard, encouraging more traffic through what has been considered a 'wilderness' area. It may well close when the vegetation grows up again. It may help deter campers. Its

development and impact will be monitored (**Graham**). The fastening post for the gate between Big and Hay Meadows is used by the cattle for scratching and so is frequently being knocked over. **Ian/Graham** will investigate the feasibility of fastening the gate back against the fence instead. The meeting confirmed that the state of the stock fence between LGGs Field and the Allotments was a matter for the Graziers.

- 5.2. Wildlife sightings 2017-18:** Dan Haywood's winter bird survey was circulated. Of particular interest, it noted the presence of skylark and a sighting of grey partridge and tree sparrow, plus brown hare in three different places on the February visit. Whilst it did not add much in comparison with the FA's own sightings, it was agreed that a winter survey should be commissioned again: it provides independent evidence, taps into a source of expertise and this was only the first one.

Sue circulated a spreadsheet in which she had collated bird and other wildlife sightings over the past two years. In the accompanying commentary she noted that Little Owls had nested and raised young in the hedge to the west of West Field and the neighbouring "sheep field" (later seen in Pony Wood, last recorded sighting Feb. 2018). There was no evidence of successful breeding by lapwing last year, although a pair displayed over the arable field. Grey partridge: at least one breeding pair. Stock Dove: 2 nests in Pony Wood. Tree sparrows: no nesting (although in April this year a pair were exploring a nest box in the Orchard). Winter visitors included common snipe, jack snipe, woodcock, flocks of redwing, fieldfare and linnets. Overall snipe numbers were slightly down last year, too much standing water adversely affecting feeding and a September wind direction unfavourable to migration suggested as contributory factors. It was pointed out that the flush count total covers both jack and common snipe. Of the 351 snipe counted in 2017-18, 27 were identified as jacks. **Sue** will link this year's wildlife findings to the success indicators in the FA's NE Agreement and circulate revised documents.

There has been an encouraging email from Oliver about his bumblebee monitoring, which was undertaken as part of a wider project (Yorkshire Dales and Bowland Fells). The project report calculated that the median number of bumblebees per 1000m linear transect was 50 for Ancient (unimproved) hay meadows, 60 for Restored hay meadows and 9 for Improved (i.e. wrecked) hay meadows. Oliver estimates that the number recorded in Hay Meadow and Carr House Meadow over his three visits was at least 49/1000m.

- 5.3. Progress with surveys:** Graeme Skelcher will be carrying out a survey of the flora in Pony Wood on 9th May. Sue has already commissioned him for the later (prior to haymaking) survey of the wildflowers in Hay and Carr House Meadows. Dan Haywood made the first of his three visits for the breeding bird survey at the end of April.

6. Volunteer activities:

- 6.1. Volunteer activities:** Full reports for March and April are attached. Ian drew attention to the success of the special planting Saturday session in Pony Wood on 3rd March. This attracted 18 Volunteers, including several new faces, as well as 8 members of the local Rotary Club. The latter planted their donation saplings for the eastern extension to Pony Wood whilst the FA focused on forming the hedge up the fence line from the gates. Over 700 saplings planted in total. However, Ian warned that there are another 2500 to be planted as part of the Flora path project, 700 of which are in stock!

Ian produced a revised list of tasks for the 12th May session, which will include making a start on ragwort whilst the grass is still relatively low in the wildflower meadows and stopping vegetation choking new saplings along the Pads path. Tasks approved.

Vegetation in the Old Damson Copse will be controlled more vigorously this year as the new plantings of gorse etc are tended (**Ians F & P**). There may be a chance to test the capabilities of a power scythe here.

Ian will be meeting with people from the charity Global Link on 9th May. It is hoped that at least two of their clients, who have a farming background, will soon be volunteering on the reserve.

6.2. Working with Volunteers with dementia: A second Volunteer with dementia, accompanied by a family member, will hopefully be joining soon. A third induction session, attended by six people, was led by Mick on 1st May. As agreed at the recent FA meeting, a working party has been set up to identify ways in which the nature reserve can be made more dementia-friendly.

7. Standing items:

7.1. Arrangements:

Chris will arrange for a Bioblitz session(s) involving NLWG in early summer.

Ian:

- will arrange a contractor for haymaking for after 15th July and agree bale size and storage arrangements with the Graziers
- check the Hay Meadow to ensure there are no points where the cattle can readily get into Upper Sowerholme
- arrange renewal of first aid certificate for Helen Hicks (expires August 2018).

7.2. Financial control:

Item 4.1 – Seeds for the floristically enhanced grass margin cost less than originally anticipated, about £520.

Item 5.2 – Winter bird survey £150. Charge for breeding bird survey will also be £150. Wildflower survey will be £600.

7.3. Organised events for notification to FA: Bioblitz being arranged see 7.1

8. Preparations for meeting with the Graziers: The second annual review meeting with the Graziers is due in June. Sue identified the purpose as to review the year and discuss future issues. The FA will be represented by the trustees **Dave, Hilary** and **Sue**. In response to Sue's call at the March FFOG for suggestions, analysis and comments, Graham and Glenys had submitted their thoughts in writing. This helped inform FFOG's discussion.

Since the June 2017 meeting with the Graziers, the FA has been working to revised, livestock unit based, NE requirements as regards Big Meadow, Lower Sowerholme and West Field (the HK10 Fields). The Graziers reduced the size of the herd in the autumn, but not to the extent that they had indicated. Never the less, compliance with NE's prescribed stocking density over the winter months was achieved (an average of 0.34LU/ha against NE's

maximum of 0.5LU/ha), and compliance with the breeding season prescription of no more than 1.2LU/ha over the period is also anticipated. The fact that the Graziers have been separating the cattle so that only part of the herd has been on the HK10 fields has helped achieve this.

Periods of exceptionally wet weather have caused problems for feeding and watering the cattle this year. With the FA's hay crop ruined, the Graziers have been forced to bring in more feed than usual. The resulting vehicle movements and the large size of the bales (making it difficult to move them) have led to damage to the ground in the Gun Range and Carr House Meadow. Towards the end of the winter, the Graziers moved the ring feeder higher into the LGGs Field which will have helped ameliorate the problem.

School Pond has been used more extensively as a water source to take the pressure off the trough in the bottom of the Gun Range. It has been a very wet winter and as a result there has been severe poaching as well as heavy cropping of the rush around the pond. The new rules for water quality produced by the Environment Agency were discussed, the issue being whether School Pond drains into Lucy Brook and hence causes contamination. It was pointed out that the FA does not own School Pond and so any closure of it must be in agreement with the Graziers.

From discussion of these issues, FFOG members flagged the following as amongst the matters that they would like to be raised with the Graziers:

- whether or not the Graziers would find it helpful to have two meetings (spring and autumn) rather than the current arrangement of one in June
- how to arrange that feeding whilst in the LGGs Fields generally takes place on the higher ground, regardless of weather conditions. (Should be easier if the FA's small haylage bales are available this year.)
- propose at least one new water trough (plus hard standing) to reduce use of School Pond and Gun Range trough, and whether it would help to have an alternative for young animals, given the incidence of liver fluke. (Possibility of taking water from Edenbreck through the Paddock to NW corner of LGGs Field – i.e. not far from Fauna stones – suggested.)
- establish the Graziers' plans for the size of the herd going into winter and 2019, and discuss how these fit with the NE Agreement in terms of numbers and habitat
- request permission to lay the hedge between the Fauna footpath and the LGGs Field (**Ian** to supply a briefing note.)

In further discussion, it was agreed that FFOG will consider whether to harrow in the Autumn (but before a cold spell halts grass growth) in order to improve ground conditions. Monitoring the effects of the anticipated harrowing of LGGs Field by the Graziers will help inform the decision - see 4.2. It was noted that the reserve has not in practice been short of grass for summer grazing. (**Glenys** for Sept FFOG.)

It was decided that the FA needs to reinforce the message that the cattle belong to and are the responsibility of the Graziers. Notices in the information boards will be refreshed to convey this distinction. Contact details for the Graziers will also be displayed at other points on the reserve in case of concerns or an emergency relating to the cattle (**Glenys**).

To ensure that the FA complies with the new *Water Rules for Farming*, FFOG will review the adequacy of the cattle crossing between Big Meadow and Lower Sowerholme at the next meeting (**Glenys**). (If hardcore is needed to refresh the edges, the work could be scheduled with the improvement of the Long Pads path.)

9. **AOB:** None.

10. **Date/place of next meetings:** Thursday 5th July, Thursday 6th Sept, at 7.30pm. Venue: Whitegates Sunnyside Close.

Ian Procter's Report on Volunteer Activities:

Beginning with the end of February!

28th February 2018

Just the three volunteers for the Wednesday Work Group (WWG) but nothing to do with the cold and snow showers! Nevertheless we had a productive morning:

- Debris in the North West corner of the Paddock was cleared and the children's sit upon logs neatly stacked on two pallets.
- The fallen elder along the track down from the shed was cleared out, cut up and carted to the dead hedge at the end of the track.
- We tested remaining trees along the track / Paddock boundary for any that might fall over. They all seem sound enough from our informal inspection. (Added two days later: another tree has fallen over with this vicious east wind catching the ivy around a hawthorn like a sail. So much for our informal inspection! Andy Lee has been asked to take a look.)
- A damson in the Orchard was cut back to create more light in the copse and leave a strong, healthy vertical stem.
- A peening log was retrieved from the Hicks' garden and barrowed to the shed. Thanks to Helen and Henry.
- The corrugated iron sheets used as a base for last week's bonfire were retrieved from Big Meadow and barrowed back to the shed.
- The new Henschman harness was tried out for the first time using both a hedge trimmer and the pole trimmer. Once we got the thing set up right it was very effective.
- Further work done trimming back the Orchard / Pads footpath hedge.

3rd March 2018

Eighteen volunteers turned out for the special planting Saturday session. After an event-threatening week of wintry weather the morning turned out to be perfect for planting.

- We were joined by 8 members of the local Rotary Club with their donation, via the Woodlands Trust, of saplings for the eastern extension to Pony Wood. This group put in 140 saplings.
- The Fairfield group put in 552 saplings to form the new hedge up the fence line from the gates into the woodland area.
- We also put in 25 field maple to replace dead saplings in the existing woodland and add to the diversity of Little Wood.
- In Little Wood we also planted 4 oaks and 2 beech donated by local residents.

- So, in total the morning saw 723 saplings planted. A superb effort.
- We also moved the Lancaster / Aldcliffe parish boundary stone to a better position.
- Thanks to Graham for providing the warming breaktime bonfire.



7th March 2018

Eleven volunteers attended the WWP on a dry spring like morning.

- The scything of the wildflower margin of Flora Field continued.
- The fallen hawthorn on the track between the shed and the Orchard was cut off, cut up and used as dead hedge between the track and the Paddock.
- We continued the application of glyphosate to the stumps of cut off elder in the hedges.
- Brash was cleared from Lower Sowerholme and used to fill a gap in the Pads / Flora field hedge
- Fencing posts were barrowed down to Lower Sowerholme.
- Fencing wire was retrieved from Little Wood for use in Lower Sowerholme.
- Surplus barbed wire was removed from the Lower Sowerholme / Lucy Brook boundary. The scrap was carted away to the shed, some was re-useable and stored.
- We made a start to re-instating the fence along Lower Sowerholme / Lucy Brook, replacing broken posts, re-stapling the wire and removing scrap wire.
- The gap between the Orchard and the Pads footpath was blocked by a hazel fence.

10th March 2018

The forecast was for continuous rain on our volunteer Saturday which perhaps restricted numbers to 8 but it turned out to be dry and remarkably warm.

- A further seven holly were planted in the Old Damson Copse.
- Invasive bramble behind the Fauna Stones was dug out and cut back and the area generally tidied to form a habitat pile.
- A channel was dug at the corner of the Fauna path by the Stones to form a drain into the field.
- The fastening post of the new gate in the Grammar School Field was moved to prevent the gate catching. Road test of the new auger showed it worked well.
- A start was made to trimming the Fauna path / Grammar School hedge around the board walk. More work needed.
- Bramble cut out of the Pads / Orchard hedge.
- Self seeded saplings and bramble cut out and dug out through the Orchard. Almost finished this.

14th March 2018

Nine volunteers formed the WWG on a dry, pleasant morning.

- Three volunteers continued the scything and clearing of the Flora Field wildflower margin.
- The remaining volunteers finished off the hedge trimming along:
 - The Orchard / Pads hedge
 - The Big Meadow / Pads hedge
 - The West Field / Pads hedge
All the above have been trimmed by associate volunteers but clear signs of bird nesting meant that the WWG had to finish off quickly
 - The Paddock south hedge
 - Fauna path / School pond (until the pole trimmer locking mechanism broke).

21st March 2018

Ten volunteers attended the WWG on a dry, springlike morning.

- Two volunteers continued the scything and clearing of the Flora Field wildflower margin.
- The remainder continued the work repairing the fence between Lower Sowerholme and Lucy Brook, replacing failed posts and re-stapling the wire fence.
- Scrap wire and rubbish returned to shed.

28th March 2018

Nine volunteers formed the WWG on another lovely spring morning marred only by a sharp hail shower, just at our break. Very inconsiderate.

- Three volunteers continued the scything of the Flora Field margin. This job is now complete. Note that the removal of a thick layer of flat grass should greatly improve the germination of wildflower plants in this area.
- A calf born the day before in Lower Sowerholme led to a change of plan and a shift to installing a barbed wire fence to keep the cattle out of Lucy Brook at the junction of the Fauna path and Cromwell Road.
- Once this was complete the cow and calf had moved into Big Meadow so we resumed the re-instatement of the fence in Lower Sowerholme adjoining Lucy Brook.
- More scrap and rubbish returned to shed.

Associate volunteers in March:

- Playground repairs
- Preparations for the Saturday planting.
- To the tip with rubbish from the planting Saturday.
- To the tip with scrap barbed wire and other rubbish.
- Hedge trimming along the Pads / Big Meadow boundary
- Repaired and replaced bird box O2
- Pole trimmer locking mechanism repair
- Cut peening log in Pony Wood and barrowed to shed
- De-brambling the Orchard hedge
- Repair of nose pump pipe
- Making safe of old iron fencing in Paddock south hedge
- Repaired owl box at the Towneley Close entrance
- Stump Circle path edgings cut back

4th April 2018

The Wednesday Work Group (WWG) had to be cancelled because persistent heavy rain made use of handtools unsafe.

11th April 2018

Ten volunteers formed the WWG on a fine morning.

- We started with a demonstration by Paul F of scythe blade peening.
- Missing tree numbers on the Orchard fruit trees were replaced.
- We experimented with digging out soft rush. Rather inconclusive, try again on Saturday in rather drier ground.
- We continued and almost concluded the reinstatement of the fence along the northern and eastern edges of Lower Sowerholme, replacing broken posts and restapling the wire.

14th April 2018

Thirteen volunteers participated in the Saturday morning volunteer session on an increasingly warm and sunny Spring morning.

- The nose pump was transported to the West Field, fitted onto its stand and the pipe fixed to the stream bed. Although it is in working order this is not an efficient way of filling the water trough. WE NEED TO EITHER PURSUE THE SOLAR PUMP IDEA MORE VIGOROUSLY OR INVEST IN A SIMPLE MECHANICAL, HAND PUMP.
- Brash created during winter pruning and trimming was cleared through the Orchard and consolidated into discrete habitat piles.
- The grass mown area of the Orchard was inspected and cleared of wood and stones ready for the first mowing.
- The border of the grass mown area was strimmed to clearly mark it off.
- Invasive bramble continued to be cleared from the Orchard.

- After the break we continued the peening of the scythe blades with quite a few people wanting to have a go!

Note that we did not weed invasive saplings from the shed roof as so far they are not there. Too early or has the net worked?

18th April 2018

Seven volunteers formed the WWG on what was supposed to be a hot day but which turned out to be warm at best.

- Consolidating the Orchard brash in to habitat piles was finished off.
- A last stretch of barbed wire in Lower Sowerholme was put in place.
- A broken fence rail alongside the Fauna path long boardwalk was repaired.
- Two broken fence posts in the Hay and Carr House meadows were replaced and the wire re-stapled.
- We continued to trial the digging out of new soft rush in the Hay Meadow. Small plants are removable and we are developing our tools and technique.
- The bramble in Upper Sowerholme was marked out for next week.

Associate Volunteers in April:

- Cleared bramble from the Orchard / Pads footpath hedge.
- Marked out the area to be ploughed in Flora Field
- The Orchard grass was mown