

Fairfield Association
Flora, Fauna and Orchard Management Group [FFOG]
Minutes of the Meeting held on Thursday 10th January 2019 at 7.30 pm at Whitegates,
Sunnyside Close

Present: Graham Brandwood, Dave Brookes, Tony Finn, Oliver Fulton, Sue Nieduszynska (Chair), Ian Procter, Hilary Short (Mins), Mick Short

1. **Apologies** David Elliot, Glenys Ferguson, Ian Fraser, Chris Workman.

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

3. **Matters arising from Minutes:**

1. **3.4.** Replacement dog signs were approved and thanks to Julia recorded.
2. **1.9** The hedge between Martin Ayrton's gate and the concrete walk requires one more session to complete it. The FA has replaced some fence posts. Ian will let Martin know and ask him to take this into account when he compiles his bill for flailing our hedge.

4. **Management**

4.1. RPA/NE transfer letter does mean that we still retain our adviser (clarified by Dave). Mick reported the advice from Richard Storton and others that we should seek an extension to our NE agreement, closer to the time when the current agreement expires.

4.2. Arable update:

The cuttings have been cleared.

Sue reported that Ian Ward has signed a contract for next year. This includes a permit to use herbicide if required and Sue has asked him to let us know if herbicide is used and if so what the herbicide is.

There has been some slippage in the width of the northern margin which needs to be made good.

The bird-friendly margin has been churned up by the contractors and will need to be restored. There was some discussion of the fact that it seems to be dominated by fodder radish and the possibility that more a more diverse margin might attract different birds. Mick asked if we should supplement the margin by scattering seeds in the winter. It was agreed that we should ask Dan Haywood for advice on this.

4.3. Grazing matters: Formal change in NE Agreement – still no response from NE.

Clearing and regravelling of the cattle crossing is in the hands of Frank Huddleston.

The water trough from the Gun Range is still in Carr House Meadow. **Hilary** will pursue the matter.

The herd size is now 12 (Phoebe has gone to market). So far, the herd has largely been in the Grammar School field and used School Pond for water.

4.4. Duck-nesting platforms: The Triangle volunteers are not interested in building platforms using the excess plastic from Triangle projects. Graham prefers barley straw constructions. Ian may have a go at using the plastic to make duck-nesting platforms.

4.5. Tree surgeon's progress: Nothing has been heard from Andy Lee since the work on the big ash tree. **Ian** will get in touch with Andy.

4.6. Lancashire Meadow Group: Summary of the work to date can be found in Sue's paper. Sue reported that Claire Cornish was particularly knowledgeable and helpful.

5. Monitoring:

5.1. Maintenance and HLS habitat inspections: key points. The tarpaulin has been removed from Lucy's Pool and the mare's tail seems to have gone – possibly temporarily. The south (original gate) on School Pond needs to be closed (**Hilary**). There is a smell of decaying bog around School Pond which probably results from last summer's drought and the emergence of different vegetation, now submerged. This will be monitored. The latch on the pedestrian gate into Pony Wood is not working properly. (**Hilary**). Sue requested that hedges in sensitive positions, e.g. where they provide screening should if possible be trimmed at the end of the winter

5.2. Progress with surveys: Graeme Skelcher appears to be using original rather than later NE targets. This means that we are further from reaching our targets than his report suggests. Sue will check. It was agreed that Graeme should include more formal recording of grasses in his survey. (**Sue**)

Bumblebees: Oliver reported spectacular numbers of red-tailed bumble bees in the knapweed in the Flora Field bee-friendly margin. He said that his surveys were done rather late in the year and earlier surveys would have provided better results.

Butterflies: Survey held. Sue said that she would check the meaning of the phrase: Reduced number of counts where I saw butterflies this year ... (**Sue**)

Bird Surveys will be circulated in March when the winter survey is in.

6 Volunteer activities:

6.1. Volunteer activities: Full reports for November and December are attached. Ian particularly noted that the hedge between Lower Sowerholme and Flora Field is doing well.

6.2 Chain Saw course: Following advice given on the chain-sawing course, it was agreed that Ian should buy additional large wound dressings to go in the first-aid box.

It was also agreed that that felling trees at shoulder height should be left to Andy Lee and that volunteers should fell trees at ground level.

It was agreed to ask Andy Lee whether or not we need permission from Maxine Knagg to coppice the elms in Little Wood (**Ian**) and that we need to ask Ben whether or not we can plant Wych Elms in the extension to Pony Wood. (**Sue**)

6.3 Working with volunteers with dementia. Mick reported that the last induction session had been cancelled because of low numbers. He will organise another session for February. He estimated that 25 – 30 people have become Dementia Friends.

6.4 Volunteer Buffet 19.30 – 21.30, February 7th. Book through Sue or Ian. Pay on the night (£10 per person).

7. Standing items:

7.1 Arrangements

Bird seed mix for the margins. Ordering this has been postponed until after the path has been completed.

7.2 Financial Control

Revised annual financial spreadsheet and Ian's report on the tools and materials fund presented (see papers).

7.3 Events for notification to FA: Birdwalk, January 26th, 9.00 am. Meet at the end of Sunnyside Lane. Dan Haywood will lead the walk.

Items for Discussion

8. Flora Path hedge-planting (see Ian's email which was circulated). It was agreed to contact the Woodland Trust in the hope that they will be able to supply hedging plants for use along the Pony Wood path this spring. If not, it was agreed that we would have to buy the plants from a retail supplier.

It was agreed that decisions relating to notices on the Pony Wood Path (prohibiting cycling and dogs-off-lead), should go to the FA meeting.

9. Reedbed Management in Upper Sowerholme

Graham's paper was well received. Following the visit of Richard Storton, it was agreed open water should be maintained by the use of a digger every 5 – 6 years.

Collecting and planting rhizome fragments in spring and collecting some panicles, to store over winter, chop up and rake into a marked area in spring, were both thought to be excellent ideas.

It was also agreed that narrower and varying footpaths were a good idea.

Sue, Ian N, Mick, Ian P and Dave will make a site visit to assess the practicalities of Graham's suggested viewing area/platform. The group will meet on Friday 25th January at 2pm at George Howson's gate.

AOB:

10.1. Visit by our MP

Cat Smith will visit on April 26th at 2.30 pm.

There will be no Special FFOG meeting in February, discussion of survey results being incorporated into a normal meeting instead.

11. Date/place of next meetings: Thursday 7th March at 7.30pm. Venue: Whitegates Sunnyside Close.

Ian Procter's Report on Volunteer Activities:

31st October 2018

Eight volunteers formed the Wednesday Work Group (WWG) on a cold but dry morning.

- Our main task was to support Andy Lee who had brought a large 'cherry picker' lift to deadwood and thin the large ash in the Orchard stump circle. This involved:
 - Helping to manoeuvre the machine in the tight confines of the Orchard.
 - Acting as safety marshals on the five paths which converge at this point.
- The group split into two with four acting as marshals whilst four did other work (below), alternating to maintain interest and warmth.

- Meanwhile we cleared the fallen branches in the Paddock and added them to the dead hedge section along the path.
- We continued to cut back the Fauna footpath / School Fields hedge to the fence, especially protruding bramble.
- We began to clear the fallen hawthorn just inside the School Fields which was resting on the fence. More work needed requiring a chain saw.

In the afternoon, five volunteers returned to continue the safety marshal work and to keep warm by trimming the Pads / Big Meadow hedge.

7th November 2018

The weather forecast was for heavy rain but eight volunteers turned out for the WWG and were rewarded by a dry, warm and pleasant morning.

- We completed the clearance of Lucy Pool leaving clear water through the Upper Sowerholme drainage area. NOTE: Volunteers noted that the 'waterproof' glove arrangements we have used, viz, 'disposable vet's gauntlets' and tougher plastic gloves, did not give full protection from the water. We ought to get full length waterproof gauntlets for next year.
- All gate areas along the Fauna path were checked for grass obstruction and cut back so that the gate swings clearly.
- Hedges were trimmed:
 - Along the Fauna path as it borders with School Pond
 - Under the ash tree at the dog leg of the Fauna path
 - The hedge between the Hay Meadow and Big Meadow.

NOTE: the more inaccessible sections were reached by the extended trimming machine using the harness purchased last year. This proved its worth in taking the weight from the arms and shoulders of the machine operator.

- Keith began his winter pruning of the apple trees.
- Logs left over from Andy Lee's work on the ash were cut up, bagged and distributed to volunteers.
- Leaves were cleared from the track down from Sunnyside Lane and around the shed area.
- A review of first aid resources was conducted

10th November 2018

Eleven volunteers attended the monthly Saturday session on a dry if chilly morning. Thanks to Keith for using his truck to get the heavy tools we required up to the beehive area.

- The broken fence at the bottom of Sowerholme Lane was repaired with new posts and wire put in.
- The top wires of the fence between Lower Sowerholme and Flora Field had been damaged and broken, probably by the cows. We re-threaded the wire and re-tightened it. LITTLE BIT MORE TO FINISH OFF, NEEDS A SHORT STRAND OF WIRE.
- The edges of the two Flora Ponds were scythed back.
- Continuing the scything of undesirables on the Flora Field beetle banks.
- Trimming back the hedge between Lower Sowerholme and Flora Field.

14th November 2018

Eight volunteers attended the WWG on a dry morning.

- After agreeing the Site Specific Risk Assessment (SSRA) for felling in the Orchard area, two dead trees were felled in the Orchard:
 - A silver birch in the 'wild' area. This is part of the Cannon Hill Conservation Area and permission to fell had been obtained from the Tree Protection Officer.

- A cherry at the edge of the soft fruit circle.
- Parts of the trunks of both trees were used as replacement stumps for seats in the Stump Circle which had deteriorated. Whilst this is not the ideal wood for this purpose they will see us on until oak stumps are available.
- Parts of the trunks of the two trees were cut as disks for Julia to experiment with replacement signage.
- The remaining brash was stacked to form habitat piles concealing remaining logs which may have been taken for firewood.
- The fallen hawthorn in the Grammar School field was cut back so that it did not weigh on the fence.
- Further work was done with Keith pruning the fruit trees.

21st November 2018

Nine volunteers turned out on a cold morning on which the rain blown on an easterly wind was neither forecast nor welcome. Fortunately it stopped before becoming a safety hazard.

- We completed the scything of 'undesirables' on the Flora Field beetle banks.
- After agreeing the appropriate SSRA we began laying the hedge between the end of the track down from the canal and the concrete wall, as recommended by Richard Storton.
- We ensured the fence was stockproof although some of this was on a temporary basis and some new posts will be required.

28th November 2018

Seven volunteers formed the WWG on a morning forecast for heavy rain and strong winds. The rain held off but we had the wind, thankfully warm.

- We continued the winter pruning of the Orchard fruit trees.
- We made a start to trimming the hedge between the Pads footpath and West Field, making good progress.

Associate volunteers in November

- Maintenance work in the playground.
- Trimming of the Pads / Big Meadow hedge.
- Leaf clearance along the track from Sunnyside Lane
- Cleared firework debris from around the Fauna Stones.
- Scything of undesirables on the Flora Field beetle banks.
- Safety marshalling for Robin's hedge flailing. Volunteer activities December 2018

3rd December 2018

In preparation for the arrival of the path contractor five volunteers from the Wednesday Work (WWG) pruned back overhanging branches down the track from Sunnyside Lane to the Orchard.

The brash was used to infill gaps in the track hedges.

5th December 2018

Heavy and continuous rain led to the cancellation of the WWG.

8th December 2018

Another wet morning was forecast but it held off until the last half hour allowing 13 volunteers to get on with:

- Continuing to trim the hedge between Lower Sowerholme and Flora Field.
- ‘De-brambling’ the Long Pads hedges
- Tidying the fallen willow in the Orchard and retrieving whips from it.
- Replacing three broken fence posts along the Fauna path with the consequent repair of the wire
- Finishing off trimming around the standard trees in the flailed Fauna hedge.
- Clearing up accumulated mud in the track between Sunnyside Lane and the Orchard

12th December 2018

Eleven volunteers formed the WWG, numbers swelled by the prospect of the Christmas Feast (below), on a dry and pleasant morning.

- The West Field hand pump was retrieved for the winter. It seems in good repair and has proved most successful.
- A broken fence post near Alder Pond was replaced.
- Hedge trimming
 - Finishing off between the Orchard and the Pads footpath.
 - Making a start between the Long Pads and Flora Field
- Meanwhile Graham was preparing the campfire in Pony Wood where we repaired for the WWG Christmas Feast. Everyone contributed but special thanks to
 - Julia for preparing and organising the sloe gin
 - Graham for the hot dogs and marshmallows done on the fire

19th December 2018

Six volunteers formed the WWG on a lovely sunny morning.

- Two volunteers acted as path marshals as the contractor completed the excavation of the Long Pads footpath
- A donated hazel was planted in Pony Wood to add to the understorey
- The plastic protectors in Pony Wood and the ‘Rotary extension’ were straightened or replaced.
- A disused but still serviceable bracing post was retrieved from Pony Wood for use on the new stile later in the winter
- The trimming of the hedge between Lower Sowerholme and Flora Field was completed. NOTE: this should be left alone for a couple of years with a view to laying in in 2021-22
- The fence between the Hay Meadow and Upper Sowerholme was replaced with willow rods to form a living fence
- The slightly damaged pear tree in the Orchard was trimmed back
- A mini channel was dug to drain into the sump near the Turner’s house

Associate Volunteers in December

- Pruned back overhanging branches down the track from Sunnyside Lane to the Orchard.
- Trim the hedge between Big Meadow and the Pads footpath
- Two volunteers acted as path marshals as the contractor excavated the Long Pads footpath.