

Fairfield Association
Flora, Fauna and Orchard Management Group [FFOG]
Minutes of the Meeting held on Thursday 2nd May 2019 at 7.30 pm
at Whitegates, Sunnyside Close

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

1. **Apologies:** Dave Brookes, David Elliott
2. **Minutes of last meeting:** Approved.
3. **Matters arising from Minutes:**
 - 3.1. **Elm coppicing in Little Wood (3.2):** Various opinions have been gathered. Awaiting views of Forestry Commission expert (see 8). (**Ian**)
 - 3.2. **Wych elm permission for Pony Wood (3.2):** Sue's email to the FA's Natural England Adviser had gone into his junk folder. Being sent again (**Sue**).
 - 3.3. **Garden waste in Upper Sowerholme (5.1):** Mick and Hilary have dealt with this.
 - 3.4. **Annual COSHH review (7.1):** Done and signed. Ian pointed out that herbicide had not been used in the reserve fields for the past two years, but it was wise to keep the option open.
 - 3.5. **Shed lock replacement (6.1):** Ian stressed the need for a prompt solution. **Hilary** will find a locksmith. A replacement may have to be purchased. [Now resolved at cost of £50.]
 - 3.6. **Maintenance of Long Pads path (7.1):** Sue has emailed Lancashire County Council about continuing the current arrangement. She has also been in contact with LGGS about their supper run, so far without response. Ian agreed that Volunteers could undertake the preparations for the run this year, particularly as the Long Pads path has been widened. **Sue** to recontact LGGS and ask for the date. [Agreement from LGGS received. Date of run 20th June.]
4. **Management:**
 - 4.1. **Arable update:** Flora Field has now been ploughed (25th April), harrowed and drilled (2nd May). This year's crop will be wheat, and no herbicide will be used. The farmer's original choice of maize is not allowed under the NE Agreement. He had already bought the seed before this was realised so the FA has agreed to compensate him. Ian raised concerns about soil quality as a result of limited crop rotation. **Sue** will discuss this with the farmer when the contract is renewed for next year.

Volunteers will sow wildflower seeds and the bird seed margin on Saturday 4th May. **Ian** will appeal for helpers. Questions on the composition of the bird friendly mix have not elicited any helpful advice. So the same mix as usual has been sourced. The dominance of the fodder raddish may reduce slightly with the location of part of the margin changing. But, even if this does not happen, fodder radish is not really a problem: it has many desirable characteristics.

Dave and Mick have remeasured to take account of the new path and **Dave** is reporting the results to the Rural Payments Agency.

- 4.2. Grazing matters:** No report on the formal change to the NE Agreement stocking calendar.

A winter stocking density for the HK10 fields of 0.30 LU/ha was achieved (maximum permitted by NE under the changed prescription is 0.5). Stocking density is now subject to the breeding season prescriptions. This should also be readily achievable. Herd size stands at 17 animals, including the herd bull and five calves to date. Because of the young calves, people permitted access have been told to keep out until further notice if there are cattle present in a field.

- 4.3. Wetland management:** The ponds are suffering from the dry spring and have become 'scummy'. Although liked by the birds, the new scrape in West Field does not look so attractive now. **Graham** will try to clear grass that is deeply rooted in Alder Pond.

Graham is trying to enhance the spread of the phragmites reeds in Upper Sowerholme with seed and rhizomes. Patches have been marked out for monitoring. The reeds are already re-invading the scythed path.

- 4.4. Woodland and hedges:** The Tree Surgeon has made no further progress with the outstanding work in the Orchard. **Ian** will nudge him about this. Pony Wood has recently been re-surveyed (see 8). **Ian** asks when he visits about the state of the two ash trees on the Fauna path. In the circumstances, it was agreed to postpone the commissioning of a full tree survey until March. (To be amended on the Calendar to an annual action at this time – **Glenys**.)

Ian circulated a paper flagging up hedging proposals that are for discussion in July. Decisions need to be made then so that a bid can be submitted to the Woodland Trust for saplings this autumn. **Meeting members** were asked to read and reflect, and send their comments to **Glenys** to be collated for the next meeting. **Ian** was asked to try and increase the clarity of his proposals map. [Redrawn map has been circulated.] **Mick** asked that the July meeting also consider the hedging proposals in terms of creating the optimum habitat (**Glenys** for Agenda).

Ian will offer the nature reserve to the Woodland Trust as a test site for environmentally more acceptable alternatives to the currently used non-recyclable plastic sapling guards.

- 4.5. Lancashire Meadow Group:** The moth trapping event will take place during the late evening on 28th June and early morning on the 29th. Sue and **Ian** have met with the Organiser to discuss the detailed arrangements. The event is aimed at people who are not experts. **Sue** will arrange for it to be publicised.

Ian has discovered that the FA's moth trap has been stored inappropriately and is not working. Although it is not needed for this event, **Chris** (co-ordinating with **Ian**) will investigate and seek to resolve the problem.

- 4.6. MP visit:** Some of the Trustees took Cat Smith and her aide on a tour of the reserve on 26th April. Helpful to increase her awareness of the FA and the nature reserve, but no specific outcomes.

4.7. **Addition to Fields Access List:** William Walton was approved.

5. **Monitoring:**

5.1. **Maintenance and HLS habitat inspections:** Graham's reports circulated. Several matters raised elsewhere in meeting. The latch on the Pony Wood gate is playing up. One of the Volunteers believes he can fix it. If this proves unsuccessful then **Ian** will ask **Hilary** to contact the Contractor about a replacement.

5.2. **Progress with surveys:** The breeding birds and Pony Wood flora surveys have been put on hold because of the current closure of Pony Wood (see 8). Lack of access is also starting to delay Volunteer work. It was agreed that **Hilary** should contact the Tree Surgeon to determine how long it is likely to be before the remedial work can be done, and whether certain people can be permitted full or constrained access in the interim. She will also raise the matter of the trees classified as C3, i.e. in poor condition but not listed for felling because they are away from paths and valuable for wildlife. Response to be passed to **Ian** before the Saturday Volunteer session on 11th May.

6. **Volunteer activities:**

6.1. **Volunteer activities:** Full reports for March and April are attached. Ian's appointment of a 14 year old as an Associate Volunteer was approved. His parents have given their consent. Detailed instructions have been provided and the task set was considered appropriate. **Ian** was asked to ensure that he carries a mobile phone and a whistle.

Proposals for the Saturday Volunteer session were approved. Ian noted that the broken posts being replaced were all ones adjacent to paths. Removal of plastic spirals has been completed as best possible, and another job will be added in its place. If permission is granted (see 5.2) then nettles developing around the newly planted saplings by the Flora path can be tackled. High visibility vests would be worn to indicate to observers that the path is still not open to the public.

An offer of two trees has been turned down as unsuitable for either the Orchard or the playground. **Ian** will inform the donor, suggesting instead that they be offered to people on the FA's email circulation list.

6.2. **Working with Volunteers with dementia:** To be removed as a standing item from future agendas (**Glenys**). There are now two Volunteers working with Mick. **Hilary** noted that she is writing a policy on vulnerable adults, which will make reference to people with dementia. The draft will be shared with **Ian**.

6.3. **Review of John Muir Award scheme:** **Graham** continues to run this, with more awards and upgrades announced at the Volunteers Buffet in February. These are well received and remain a good means of acknowledging people's work on the reserve. However the number of young people qualifying for an award continues to be disappointing. The meeting agreed that affiliation to the John Muir Trust was desirable and that its newsletters, circulated by Graham, provided interesting reading.

6.4. **Development of scything skills:** During the discussion of rush management (March 2019, item 8) it was agreed to increase the FA's pool of trained scythers. A paper has now been written detailing the intended approach. The focus will be on offering training to members of the Wednesday Working Group. An initial group of no more than three

will be given an in-house session during a WWG slot. It is also hoped to send one or two (different) people on a professional one day course. **Oliver** will enquire whether there are any free courses on offer. Hilary (as chair of FA) has agreed that up to £200 can be spent on fees and travel expenses. If professional training cannot be arranged this year or there is enough interest to warrant sending further people on such a course next year than a grant application will be considered. **Ian** and **Glenys** to implement.

7. Standing items:

7.1. Arrangements:

Sue will commission the second survey of wildflowers in Hay & Carr House Meadows for July, prior to haymaking. She will also contact the usual Contractor to carry out the haymaking from 15th July. Subject to any comments at the meeting with the Graziers (see 9) it was agreed that last year's bale size was appropriate, cheaper and acceptable to the Graziers. **Sue** will mention the problem of two rotten bales to the Contractor.

Oliver will be starting his bumblebee recording. (Sue has already approached Christine Bennett regarding other types of bees.)

Prior to haymaking, **Ian** will arrange for the Hay Meadow to be checked for any points where the cattle could gain undesirable access to Upper Sowerholme.

The next meeting will review the fields access policy and consider steps to deter mass fruit picking (alongside the Orchard Monitoring report). The discussion of digger work in the ponds and Upper Sowerholme signalled in the meeting in November 2018 will be deferred as **Ian** and **Graham** confirmed that Volunteers could manage the job again this year. However, it will be increasingly difficult, and with the current NE Agreement coming to an end it would be best to arrange the work whilst this funding source is still available so it will be discussed in May 2020. (**Glenys** for Agendas)

7.2. Financial control:

Invoice for £41 in relation to willow domes and duck houses (**Graham**)

£152 spent on loppers. Funding from Furness Building Society grant (**Ian, Hilary**)

approx. £250 spent on seeds for the arable margins (**Mick**)

7.3. Organised events for notification to FA:

- Moth Trapping 28th/29th June (see 4.5).
- **Chris** confirmed that the NLWG annual field visit will take place on 31st July.
- A 'walk and talk' site visit is being arranged for members of the *Green Forum*, an occasional meeting of representatives of Green and Friends of... groups in Lancaster and Morecambe. This is proposed for the evening of 1st August. **Ian** is co-ordinating. Sue, Dave and Oliver have offered their support, and a few others will be recruited.

- ## 8. Pony Wood and other tree matters:
- During high winds, a beech tree fell across the (unopened) Flora path on 16th March. This was promptly dealt with by the Tree Surgeon, and an updated survey of the state of the trees in the whole of the wood has now been

carried out. His report has been circulated and the recommendations accepted. It identifies three trees that should also be felled as soon as possible. An application to the Tree Protection Officer has been submitted. Meanwhile plans to open the Flora path have been delayed until further notice and the area closed to Volunteers and people on the fields access list. (See also 5.2.)

Several weeks before the meeting, Ian had circulated a report on a workshop attended by him and Oliver on *Ash Dieback*. He informed members that this disease has been positively identified on the reserve by the Tree Surgeon, with the case being reported to the Forestry Commission. The general expert view is that a serious infestation in a tree in an 'important' position requires action; other instances just have to be accepted as the disease works its way through over the next 15 or so years.

At the workshop, Ian and Oliver were introduced to the Forestry Commission's Lancashire Officer. He has offered to visit the reserve. **Ian** will arrange a site visit and meeting with members of the Woodland Management Group.

9. Preparations for meeting with the Graziers: Hilary will be arranging the annual review with the Graziers during June. FFOG identified the following issues to be raised:

- the hedge between the Fauna path and the LGGS Field
- winter watering and School Pond (FFOG Nov 2018 item 4.3; March 2019 item 8)
- future of herd bull
- plans for herd size into winter
- location of hay bales (FFOG Sept 2018 item 4.2)

10. AOB:

10.1. Local Nature Reserve designation: Hilary reported that the problem relating to the incorporation of the Orchard has been resolved allowing the agreement with Natural England to be signed (25th April). LGGS is prepared to sign up too, designating School Pond as part of the reserve. The final stages of the process (NE declaring and publishing) are eagerly anticipated!

10.2. Signage for the Flora path: Ian offered to adapt some 'dogs on leads' signs lurking in the shed. Julia's painted signs were thought to be acceptable for dogs, but only two (one at each end). However strongly worded, official signs were considered necessary to deter cycling.

10.3. Aspirational cycle path: Hilary has been in touch with Lancaster City Council about the designating of the Long Pads as an aspirational cycle path. This has no legal status, but is likely to continue to show on the Council's plans. No more action can be taken at the moment.

11. Date/place of next meetings: Thursday 4th July, Thursday 5th September, at 7.30pm. Venue: Whitegates Sunnyside Close.

Ian Procter's Report on Volunteer Activities:

6th March 2019

Ten volunteers attended the Wednesday Work Group (WWG). We were fortunate the forecast heavy showers held off until we had just finished.

- Our two carpenters worked on the duck nesting platforms (mark II) using the timber donated by the Triangle. They are not quite finished but hopefully will withstand the attentions of the cattle when in place.
- We finished off trimming and interweaving the willow screen between the Fauna path and School Pond.
- The Flora Field beetle banks were marked with stakes and the posts around the manhole covers checked. They need hazard tape flags put on them.
- The hedge between the Long Pads and Lower Sowerholme was trimmed and de-brambled. This is the last section of our hedges to be attended to this winter. Just before the bird nesting season!
- The plastic spirals and canes stored in Oliver's cellar since last year were retrieved to the shed ready for Saturday's planting.

9th March 2019

The March Saturday volunteer session was devoted to hedge planting. A heavy downpour of rain at 8.30 sent shivers of apprehension through the Volunteer Organiser. Would the people come on such a wild morning? They came! Altogether 30 people for our morning and afternoon sessions plus two cake makers who stood in after Tony had to go away at short notice. And the weather improved and people enjoyed a bracing but sunny day.

In March 2018 we had started planting the Pony Wood hedge but could only complete work away from the planned contractor-built path. With the completion of the path and its associated fencing we can continue with the hedge and the volunteers planted around 1000 saplings. These included hawthorn (c. 50%), hazel (20%) blackthorn (10%), crab apple (10%), dog rose (7%), bird cherry (2%) and holly (1%). All but the holly was supplied by the Woodlands Trust at a very reasonable price under their moreHEDGES scheme. So, just about 500 more to go! Hopefully at the next WWG. And we should not forget the litter picking and repair work for some of last year's saplings done by one of our young volunteers.

13th March 2019

After the weekend's deluge came Storm Gareth but fortunately its rain passed during the night and 11 volunteers braved the bracing (!) winds. Some had hoped for the Volunteer Organiser's early morning text cancelling the session but ALL were pleased as punch and glad they came when we completed the planting of the remaining 450 saplings forming the Pony Wood hedge. All tidied up and back to the shed.

20th March 2019

Nine volunteers formed the WWG on a misty but dry morning.

- The two newly made duck nesting platforms were installed on School and Alder ponds.
- The new saplings affected by the fallen **beech** were checked and replanted where necessary.
- The new Pony Wood hedge saplings were checked and restored after the high winds of the last week.
- The saplings planted in March 2018 as the first part of the Pony Wood hedge were checked, weeded, straightened and where necessary, replaced. The number of replacements needed after last summer's drought was surprisingly small.
- The remaining saplings left over from the recent Woodlands Trust batch were planted in and around Pony Wood.
- Ten wych elm were planted in Little Wood and in and around Pony Wood.
- Hazard tape was wrapped around the posts marking the Flora Field beetle banks and the posts marking the manhole covers.
- The saplings supplied by the Woodlands Trust in 2018 but heeled in in the Orchard were lifted, sorted and re-heeled for next week.



22nd March 2019

As agreed in a FFOG email stream three volunteers collected and planted a Dirleton Red apple tree in the Orchard.

27th March 2019

Nine volunteers formed the WWG on a pleasant Spring morning.

- Broken fence posts were replaced:
 - In Big Meadow at the big ash tree corner of the Fauna path
 - Adjacent to Alder Pond
 - In the south eastern corner of West Field
- Barbed wire was placed on an exposed stretch of fence at the southern apex of Little Wood to reduce the temptation to campers.
- Around 200 of the saplings heeled in a year ago were planted out to gap up:
 - The hedge between the Pads footpath and the Paddock
 - The hedge between the Pads footpath and Big Meadow south of the Orchard
 - The hedge between the Long Pads footpath and Flora Field
 - The hedge between the Long Pads footpath and Ayrton's field south of the concrete wall
- Old and now redundant plastic sapling protectors were removed from the Big Meadow hedge between the Orchard and Lucy Brook.

Associate volunteers in March:

- Rubbish from packing of hedge saplings taken to tip
- Duck nesting platforms finished off.
- Marked out Flora Field margins
- Marked out the new Pony Wood hedge line
- Collected the new grass mower from McGaffagins
- Old plastic protectors taken to tip.
- Maintenance work in the playground
- Clearing around the base of the newish saplings in the Old Damson Copse
- Clearing grass from the path around the stump circle

3rd April 2019

Despite a wet start 7 volunteers formed the Wednesday Work Group (WWG) on an improving morning.

- A protruding section of wire was made safe into the hedge along the culverted section of the Pads footpath.
- The last of the hedge saplings heeled in a year ago were rescued. We planted them as the beginnings of a new hedge alongside the old hawthorns between Lower Sowerholme and Flora Field. Most of these new saplings are hawthorn and as we want to increase species diversity we left spaces for other sapling species, hopefully next winter. We have saved about 300 of last year's saplings so that makes a total of around 1800 planted over the last month.
- A start was made removing plastic guards from the hedge between Lower Sowerholme and Flora Field.
- The north and south 'entrances' to the wild part of the Orchard were blocked with brash. Whilst we don't want to totally close off this area, especially to adventurous children, it has become too much of a walkway.
- The wooden boards which have been stored behind the shed for some years have become too wet to ever be usable. They were cut up into sections transportable to the tip and half were loaded onto the car.
- The brick work bench in the shed yard was rebuilt after someone had taken a number of our bricks.

10th April 2019

In Ian's absence Graham led the WWG including four other volunteers on a cold and windy morning.

- Six replacement fence posts were fixed on the Lower Sowerholme / Long Pads footpath stock fence.
- A start was made removing the now redundant plastic sapling guards in the hedge between Lower Sowerholme and the Flora Field. These were carted back to the shed.

13th April 2019

In Ian's absence Graham led a group of 12 volunteers on the Saturday session.

- The Orchard dog rose were pruned down and brash used to form habitat piles at the back of the Orchard.
- A start was made removing the now redundant plastic sapling guards from the hedge between the Pads footpath and Big Meadow.
- Phragmites rhizomes were dug out of the Upper Sowerholme wetland and replanted to thicken up the reeds.

17th April 2019

Nine volunteers formed the WWG on a warm and sunny morning

- The hand pump was reinstalled in West Field to provide a water supply should the 'lake' dry up.
- Keith brought along 10 red current and gooseberry plants to fill in gaps in the soft fruit circle. These were planted.
- He also brought along some purple-ramping fumitory to plant in the Fauna wildflower bed. Comparing this to the plant growing under the Stump Circle lime shows the latter not to be a fumitory. We think it is *Corydalis solida* or Bird in the Bush, which is quite rare in Lancashire, probably a garden escapee.
- A good start was made to the spring pruning of the fruit trees.
- Graham continued to dig out, prepare and plant phragmites rhizomes in Upper Sowerholme. A suitable size 'test bed' has now been planted and we will see how this goes before proceeding further.
- Phragmites seed were prepared for sowing.
- Now redundant plastic guards were removed from shrubs forming the Pads / Big Meadow hedge and carted back to the shed.

24th April 2019

Ten volunteers formed the WWG on a warm spring morning.

- Graham continued the work extending the reed bed in Upper Sowerholme, including sowing the reed seed we collected last autumn.
- The broken fence across the Brook crossing was assessed and measured up for repair.
- The new regime for mowing the Orchard grass was put into practice, the new, smaller mower following on from David's main cut and dealing with the more fiddly areas.
- We strimmed back the border beyond the apple trees alongside the Orchard / Pads footpath to stop encroachment onto the mown area. This was then mown.
- We started strimming around the base of the apple trees using a safe technique which Peter has shown us.
- The spring pruning of the fruit trees was completed.
- On Keith's advice we felled fruit tree number 69 which was riddled with canker and virtually dead. As this was in an isolated position to the south of the Towneley path and surrounded by taller (non-fruit) trees, perhaps it should not be replaced?
- Redundant plastic sapling protectors were removed, again sorting out those which are non-brittle and can be used again and those for the tip. Areas covered were:
 - The hedge between the Pads footpath and the Paddock.
 - The back of the Orchard alongside Orchard House garden.
 - The hedge between the Fauna path and School fields / School Pond. The hedge here is very mature and dense and only a proportion of the spirals could be accessed. We will just have to get them when we can.
- Remaining protectors alongside the Pads / Paddock hedge were straightened and strengthened.

Associate volunteers in April

- Transported the cut-up boards (April 3rd) to the tip.
- Transported bags of plastic spirals to the tip. (X2)
- Showed Will Watson around the Reserve to identify and catalogue the bat boxes. NOTE: Will will be bringing forward suggestion to encourage both bats on the Reserve and greater interest about them.
- Clearing grass from Orchard paths.
- Trimming around new saplings on the Pads footpath.
- Mowed the Orchard grass.