

**Fairfield Association**  
**Flora, Fauna and Orchard Management Group [FFOG]**  
**Minutes of Meeting**  
**Effective date of meeting: 10 May 2020**

**Participants:** Graham Brandwood, Dave Brookes, Steve Bullen, David Elliott, Glenys Ferguson (Mins), Tony Finn, Oliver Fulton, Clio Graham, Sue Nieduszynska (Chair), Ian Procter, Hilary Short, Mick Short, Peter Tilley, Chris Workman

**Note: Because of the coronavirus pandemic and government restrictions this meeting was held virtually, by email.**

1. **Apologies:** None

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

3. **Matters arising from Minutes:**

3.1. **Neighbour's hedge in Orchard (3.2):** This boundary is a matter for the Trustees. Although action has been slowed by the coronavirus outbreak, Hilary considers it is moving in the right direction. There has been support and advice from Ann Wood (the Estate Surveyor at Lancaster City Council) throughout.

3.2. **Re-location of dog waste bin (3.7):** The Dog Warden has referred the FA's request, noting that one will not be available before April. The Dog Warden is a frequent walker of the reserve and will monitor the poo bag situation. **(Dave)**

3.3. **Water Abstraction Licence (3.8):** MP Cat Smith has written to the Minister putting to her all the points of dissatisfaction with the process raised in the letter from Sue.

3.4. **COSHH review (7.1):** A slightly revised form has been approved by the relevant parties: Sue, Ian and Graham. The official copy will be signed at the next 'face-to face' FFOG meeting **(ian)**.

4. **Management:**

4.1. **Arable update:** The crop area and bird seed margin was ploughed on 16 April, with the new crop drilled the following day. Spring barley has been sown. After delaying until 29 April for some wet weather to be forecast, four volunteers (social distancing throughout) scattered 14kg of seed in the bird-friendly margin, 2 kg of cornfield annual flower seed, as usual, in the crop area. 2 kg of the wildflower mix was used on gaps in the relevant margins. A small amount of residual seed has since been spread by a Volunteer on various path verges. Butterfly-and-bee-friendly seed was put down in a patch created by the ploughman near the beehives and in the area next to Howson's gate. The only size available was 6kg bags. The Coronavirus pandemic has dashed hopes of distributing the excess seed locally, Instead donating to other local groups is being explored **(Mick)**. There will be a message in the Green Spaces newsletter. The *Friends of Greaves Park* have already expressed an interest for autumn sowing. Hilary wonders whether the FA should itself retain some seed for autumn sowing somewhere **(ian)**. [Post 'meeting' – The FA has been notified by the arable farmer that he giving up – to concentrate on maize (a crop not permitted by NE). He has arranged another farmer to take on the FA work and given assurances that nothing will change in practice as the same people will be working on the field – they are a group of farmers

who work together. **Sue** is making contact with the new farmer to discuss the FA's requirements.]

#### 4.2. Grazing matters:

- **Cattle monitoring:** The stocking density in the HK10 fields over the winter period was 0.4 LU/ha. In the end, comfortably compliant with NE's maximum of 0.5 LU/ha. There are now eight calves (two born at the start of May) bringing herd size to 26 animals. This translates to a livestock unit per hectare measure of 1.36. As agreed at FFOG (March 4.2), Sue contacted the Graziers about compliance with NE prescriptions for the breeding season. Several FFOG raised concerns about the current size and lack of clarity as to the Graziers' plans for the herd. This will be raised at the annual review meeting with them (see 7.1) (**Hilary**). Since 1 April, Hay and Carr House Meadows have been out of bounds until after haymaking.
- **Graziers' concern re hay bales:** The Graziers have reported that five of last year's bales proved unusable because of mould. They suggest this might have been caused by cutting hay from the more boggy parts of the field and/or haymaking when conditions are too damp. When Sue contacted the contractor about the same problem the previous year, he had no explanation. Graham argues that the cause lies elsewhere: poor storage arrangements are probably causing air to infiltrate through punctures in the plastic which keeps the environment anaerobic for storage. He suggests that the Graziers are advised to improve the storage area, ensuring that there is nothing which might damage the bales. **Sue** will discuss with the contractor about not cutting as close into the wet area and leaving to dry longer. Safe storage and handling to be raised with the Graziers at the review meeting and/or when discussing haymaking arrangements (**Sue, Hilary**). (see 7.1).
- **Arrangements for a West Field hay crop:** Dave emailed the FA's now former NE adviser (see 4.10) regarding a pre-emptive derogation to give the opportunity for taking a crop of hay from West Field. He has now been advised that he should raise the issue of derogations with the new NE regional contact (or go through the general RPA address). Given the current large size of the herd it was agreed not to pursue this,

#### 4.3. Woodland and hedges:

- **Tree Surgeon's progress:** Nothing to report (**Ian**)
- **Environment Agency tree planting offer;** Nothing more has been heard from the Environment Agency. **Peter** is happy to pursue this and will contact Hilary.
- **Specimen tree for Paddock:** Oliver has not been in direct contact with Weasdale Nurseries (see Mar 4.1), but has been doing some research. His preference is for a Wild Service Tree which Hilary supports as this was the second choice of the donor. He favours purchasing the larger size (2.4 to 3m, around £50) to make it a worthy specimen from the start. Oliver also considers it is now too late to contemplate 'spring' planting. Item 11 Proposal 1 makes a counter proposal of hornbeam. Combining responses on both these items, there was one objection to Wild Service Tree, but others considered it would be suitable as a specimen and thrive in the location. Decision: go ahead with Wild Service Tree as this is the donor's choice and there is no compelling reason to reject it. (**Hilary** to contact the donor, **Oliver** and **Ian** to identify source, consider fencing and co-planting for report to July FFOG).

- 4.4. **Whiteboard for sightings: David** has purchased the whiteboard and – with **Ian** – will sort out the ‘housing’ when conditions permit.
- 4.5. **Long Pads path:** Ian has suggested ways of managing this by Volunteers during the coronavirus epidemic (item 11). However, it is not yet appropriate for these to be implemented. Consequently, **Sue** will approach Lancashire County Council about taking back more of the management of the Long Pads this year.

There have been a few requests for this narrow path to be one-way during the coronavirus problem. This is outside the FA's remit as it is a public right of way, and the measure would be impossible to enforce. Instead Sue has acquired official *Lancashire County Council Covid-19 advice notices* which are now posted.

- 4.6. **Opening of Flora path gates:** At the suggestion of a local resident, the gates were tied open on 22 March to remove the risk of coronavirus being spread through contact with their surfaces.
- 4.7. **Fingerpost by canal:** The sign pointing to the Pony Wood path has been damaged again, now to the extent that the arm has broken off completely and is in storage at Whitegates. This can probably be repaired by Volunteers (Peter can see a way of doing this), although Hilary has also been in touch with Woodscape. However, there is concern that it may simply happen again. So should it instead be protected by bollards (or a relocated dog waste bin – see 3.2) or relocated? (**Hilary** to re-contact Woodscape when appropriate, and investigate options and costs.)
- 4.8. **Bee hotels:** About 50 hotels are now in place around the nature reserve to provide additional nesting sites for solitary bees. These are numbered, of different sizes, placed at various heights and in a range of locations often in plain sight. They are encased in old sapling protectors, plastic that is spare and will not disintegrate. However a question was raised as to whether there was another material that would make the hotels blend in more with the natural environment. That eggs have been laid will be indicated by a sealed tube. The new bees will emerge next spring. Graham has sent a message via the FA email list encouraging people to report any evidence that they are being used. **Graham** intends to check the hotels for use in October/November. After this, a review of the success of the bee hotels (and duck nesting platforms) will be added to a FFOG Agenda (**Glenys**).
- 4.9. **RPA visit May 2019 ‘risk’ methodology and visit February 2019:** Dave has not investigated the basis for the RPA's visit in May 2019 (reported FFOG March item 4.7). However he considers it likely to have been prompted by his RLE1 form submission to remove land from the reserve for the Pony Wood footpath. Since the last FFOG meeting, he has also been notified (27 March) of a separate, earlier, inspection by the RPA on 2 February 2019. The judgement was satisfactory but there have been revisions to the FA's agreement to correct some “*minor discrepancies*”. Dave's conclusion is that these are corrections of the RPA's original measuring errors, as all but one relate to increasing lengths of boundary features (i.e. hedges). These help qualification for ELS, which is essential to be able to get HLS (and therefore a positive

change for the FA). The other correction reflects the new footpath: EF6 is an overwintered stubble area deduction. No action is required.

**4.10. Extension to NE Agreement:** Dave received an unexpected phone call about extending the FA's Agreement from Joseph Walker at Natural England's Regional Office on 20 April. Dave points out that the Official protocol for contact with NE is now just to email to the generic RPA address. The FA can use Joe as a shortcut on items already in discussion, but he is not our new contact/advisor (NE no longer have people assigned to specific agreements). Joe carried out a check up of the FA's management and the only request raised was that vegetation (i.e. rush) be cleared from scrapes where there is minimal clear water, and re-excavate if necessary (see item 10). He asked to be sent evidence of compliance. Sue has collected relevant documentation which **Dave** has submitted. In addition, Joe has been directed to the FA website, particularly the interactive photo survey. Joe is fairly confident that the FA will be granted a one year extension, with the prospect of this being rolled over for up to four years (although Sue thinks the maximum length will be until end March 2024). Official notification of an extension is expected towards the end of 2020. [Post 'meeting' – Joe has sent a long list of further comments/queries on the management of the reserve which are being worked through by **Dave** and **Sue**.]

## 5. Monitoring:

**5.1. Maintenance and HLS habitat inspections:** Graham's reports circulated. Like Graeme Skelcher, he also noted the expanding flora in Pond Wood (see 5.2).

All fields are currently extremely dry and West Field, Big Meadow and Lower Sowerholme all failed the 6in nail test (although not an HLS requirement at this time of year). Because of the drought, there is little new grass growth. All ponds and scrapes are currently holding little or no water.

Oliver shares Graham's concern about the large ash in NE corner of Little Wood, which is not specifically mentioned in the Tree Surgeon's survey of November 2019. However, Ian knows that the Tree Surgeon is aware and unconcerned. He shares Chris's view that this is the normal life of a tree and adds to the local diversity, so allow nature to take its course unless it is potentially dangerous.

## 5.2. Progress with surveys:

- **Butterflies:** Christine Bennett is currently unable to carry out her usual counts of the reserve's butterflies. A request has gone out to FFOG members and the FA email list for any sightings on the reserve to be reported to her (with details of date, location, species or colour, number and – if possible! – gender).
- **Pony Wood flora:** This survey was carried out by Graeme Skelcher on 22 April (without the usual accompaniment of FA members). The full results will not be submitted until he has completed all of this year's surveys. However, he notes that the bluebells are looking good, he managed to find primrose, ramsons, wood anemone and lords-and ladies, and the planted trees and shrubs are developing well. He was pleased to see the introduction of some ferns.

Unfortunately the Spanish bluebells have returned in Little Wood, clumps in the same general area as before. Ian suggests it is now too late to identify these. Someone should accompany Graeme next year and mark them (**Ian**).

He found the grass cover in parts of the southern end of Pony Wood to be a bit more open this year with a good spread of seeding trees including ash, birch, hawthorn and blackthorn as well as sycamore (though this may partly be due to the slightly earlier survey). However, he considers dense and tussocky grass may be limiting the natural spread of the woodland herbs that have been planted. He advises trying to create some small bare patches on the ground immediately around planted herbs to allow fallen seed to germinate more readily (just by disturbing the ground a bit in these areas). Also, if possible, cutting some of the denser and more tussocky areas of grass (with removal of cuttings) (**Ian**).

Graeme will be carrying out the early survey of the wildflower meadows towards the end of May.

- **Winter Bird Survey & Breeding Bird Survey:** The two outstanding parts of Dan Haywood's Winter Bird Survey have been received. He adopted a different methodology in this year's four visits. The systematic walk through the rush has been dropped (recognising that this is done by the FA flush counts, see below) and substituted with one through the arable field to give a better assessment of its use by songbirds. As a result, the relatively hard to 'dislodge' Skylark was found on two visits. Only 1 and 2 respectively, but Dan hopes flocks will find the habitat in future winters. The arable field is proving popular with amber-listed Meadow Pipits (maximum day count 13 in the grassy stubble), Greenfinch, Wren, Jackdaw and Mistle Thrush too. This habitat of stubble and margins is also increasing the year-round presence of Reed Bunting. But Dan indicates that the clearest positive impact of the site management here has been on the red-listed Linnet (maximum count in December of 75). Seen feeding in the margins and the more open stubble zones, seeking refuge in Pony Wood trees when disturbed. Unfortunately Grey Partridge appears no longer present on the reserve. Perhaps, he concludes, not surprising for a bird in such steep decline.

Dan has made his first site visit for the Breeding Bird Survey and reports a male lapwing on Flora Field.

- **Flush counts:** April's count, the last of the winter, was cancelled. Despite being a month short, 2019/20's total of 372 snipe (including 34 jack) in the Fauna fields is higher than the last two years. Particularly encouraging and re-assuring given the very low total of 150 last year. The record figure for Big Meadow of 110 on 3rd February, was almost equalled the following month. There has been a significant shift of snipe to Big Meadow over the last three seasons, coinciding with the cattle being allowed winter access to School Pond. This winter only 26 snipe were counted in School Pond over the whole period.

- 5.3. Orchard:** The annual review of the health of the fruit trees, due to take place during 'blossom time', has been cancelled. A health check will be undertaken as soon as permitted, recognising that the Orchard is a public space. Whilst the results will not be directly comparable with previous years, this will at least identify what work is required (**Glenys**).

**5.4. Photographic recording:** Recording for identifying Ash-dieback (see FFOG Sept item 8) is in progress during late spring after Ash leaf burst. Ian has not yet been able to co-operate with Chris on this but notes that the incidence of dieback is becoming ever more evident across not only the reserve but the local area. The first of this year's four photographic records of the reserve was completed before the lockdown. **Chris** has started the next set, keeping to social distancing.

## **6. Volunteer activities:**

**6.1. Volunteer sessions:** Full reports for March and April are attached. Since mid-March very little work has been done due to the restrictions associated with the coronavirus emergency. All group sessions were suspended from March 18. Since then only minimal, necessary tasks have been done by individuals. However, Ian notes that early Spring is a quiet time for maintenance tasks and this has been exaggerated by the extremely dry weather. He concludes that, to date, routine maintenance work is not that far behind. But this will soon change, and plans are being put in place to allow the safe extension/resumption of volunteer work as soon as permitted (see 11).

**6.2. Addition to Fields Access list:** Peter Tilley has been added as an Associate Volunteer. Also Phil Hendry for dragonfly monitoring.

**6.3. Record of Thanks:** After many years, Tony Finn has given up the job of supplying beverages and cake to the Saturday volunteers. Hilary and Sue have thanked him on behalf of FFOG and the Volunteers, who will miss his baking!

## **7. Standing items:**

### **7.1. Arrangements:**

- **Sue** will commission the later survey of wildflowers in Hay & Carr House Meadows for July (prior to haymaking)
- **Hilary** will arrange the annual review meeting with Graziers due in June. The Trustees are considering how best to handle the logistics. However, FFOG members are clear that some form of 'meeting' is a matter of urgency. Several members have already signalled matters to be discussed and Hilary recognises that herd size, hay bales, poaching/sward quality and the question of a second hedge in Carr House Meadow (item 8) should be raised with the Graziers. The points already made by members in relation to items 4.2 and 5.1 will be collated and passed to Hilary (**Glenys**). Without the opportunity for 'face to face' consultation in FFOG, it seems most appropriate for **Meeting Members** with any extra concerns to send them direct to Hilary **by end of May, with copy to Sue**. It was also recommended that this meeting be minuted (or notes taken) for a formal report to FFOG.
- **Sue** will arrange the contractor for haymaking, for after 15th July (delay until after 15th August one year in five). Bale size and storage arrangements need to be confirmed with the Graziers. See also the actions attached to item 4.2.
- **Graham** will check the Hay Meadow to ensure no points where cattle can readily get into Upper Sowerholme.
- Review of Fields Access policy and approved list will be on the July Agenda (**Glenys**).

- Item deferred for future 'face to face' meeting: *Dogs & people in fields plus notices* (**Hilary**)

## 7.2. Financial control:

The total cost of the seed for Flora Field was £348 (including for £69.59 for the Butterfly-and-bee-friendly seed) (Mick 4.1)

Whiteboard kindly donated to the FA by David and Pauline Elliott (David 4.4)

This year's wildflower surveys expected to cost £650. Invoice received for Winter Bird Survey £128. (Sue 5.2.)

The 2020 revenue claim form was received on 25 April and promptly submitted by Dave to the RPA. He has also recently received a remittance advice for 2019/20 educational visits (£1500) and for 2019 calendar year revenue payments (circa £7500). The minor field area adjustments for the footpath have been processed by the RPA.

- ## 7.3. Organised events for notification to FA:
- a) The NLWG session on 19th April has been cancelled. There is currently no arrangement for an alternative date (**Chris**) b) Bird walk scheduled for 25th April cancelled. **Steve** and **Clio** hope to arrange another date in the Autumn.

- ## 7.4. Morecambe Bay Facilitation Fund partnership:
- Nothing to report.

- ## 8. Field Expedition:
- This was convened to consider a) a management plan for the trees and hedges on the reserve for 2020/21 and b) various proposals that had been made at the Special FFOG meeting in February. The large number of participants (13) were split into two groups for tours on 14th and 17th March. The findings of the groups have been collated by Sue. These were reviewed by Ian, leading to specific proposals for matters relating to the 2020/21 management plan. His proposals (identified by number) were circulated for decision at this meeting. The remaining matters considered by the Field Expedition will be turned into proposals when Ian considers the time is appropriate. (This explains the gaps in the Proposal numbers below.)

Ian has seen the individual responses from FFOG Members on his proposals, and considers the following gives a fair representation of the 'discussion':

**P1 Paddock:** *Hornbeam as the specimen tree. Rejected.* Wild Service Tree instead. See item 4.3.

**P3 Either side of the boardwalk under the ash tree at the dogleg:** *During the summer (if possible) continue to keep the ground clear. During the winter create a viewing platform (simple two posts and a horizontal bar) through a gap in the trimmed hedge. Defer decision* for further consideration of the value of a viewpoint. (**Glenys** for future agenda).

**P5 Carr House Meadow / School Field: Winter 2020-21:** *Plant hedge to double the existing one. Include as part of a bid to Woodland Trust. Defer decision.* To be discussed with the Graziers in the first instance (**Hilary**).

**P8 In Big Meadow Alongside Lucy Brook c. 50 metres from the cattle crossing:** Winter 2020-21. Continue the hedge planting started last year. Include a black poplar in the hedge line. **Agreed**, although addition of black poplar would need to be checked with NE (Dave)

**P10 The mature hawthorns between Lower Sowerholme and Flora Field:** Winter 2020-21. Convert this into a linear copse: selectively remove some deadwood and live trees and/or coppice to create light for plantings to thrive. Buy appropriate saplings not standard pack. Propose: blackthorn, hazel, holly, dog rose, crab apple, gorse. **Approval given to modified proposal** of thickening of the hedge-line which would not require NE consultation. Remove gorse from the mix and focus on shrubby plants that a proper diverse hedge would have had in the first place. (Ian)

**P11 Beetle banks in Flora Field:** Include in the arrangement with contractor to cut and clear margins during the late summer and autumn. **Agreed**. Sue is encouraged by the number of broad-leaved plants appearing in the sward on the bank mowed last year. So stick to this approach of rotational mowing late summer/ autumn, with scything of nettles and thistles earlier so that they may be spread into the crop area. Dave also adds that Beetle bank management was one of the things that came up in the phone call with Joe Walker from NE. He was comfortable with the current staggered cutting regime, and there was no suggestion that more would be better. Purpose is to control undesirable species and scrub, not to promote a wildflower margin. (Sue)

**P12 The section of Flora Field between the wildflower margin and Aldcliffe Road:** Winter 2020-21. Create a goat willow carr along the flat, wet area using our own cuttings. Plant gorse on the bank. Purchase separately. **Decision deferred**. Dave is in favour of leaving the area as it is. Those for change have a lot of views, often conflicting. Sue will produce a short paper with a concrete proposal for a future meeting.

**P14 The eastern section of Pony Wood between existing woodland and the Flora path:** If possible, continue scything during the summer. Review in the autumn. It will be too late to include in a Woodland Trust application for November. **Agreed**. Reminder to check against the NE Agreement when future application for trees made (Ian).

**P15 Alongside the Flora path:** Summer 2020, if possible collect yellow rattle seed and any other of our own wildflower seed. Purchase Emorsgate Nectar & Pollen mix code EN1. September, clear patches of turf and plant seed. **Agreed (Ian)**. This is consistent with Graeme Skelcher's recommendations in 5.2.

**P16 Alongside the Flora path but inside Pony Wood and the Extension:** Winter 2020-21. The woodland extension to the west side of the path going up the slope. Purchase and plant 6 alder buckthorn. This is an appropriate place to plant the donated tree originally intended for the Paddock. Also propose aspen which is common throughout Lancashire. Wild Service tree **rejected**: to Paddock instead (4.3). Aspen and buckthorn **agreed**, subject to checking with NE (Dave). Note: Oliver suggests that purging buckthorn (a different but related species) is also good for brimstones according to Butterfly Conservation. They sound like fussy trees so he suggests trying 4 of each.

**P17 Within the Extension:** Transplanting of bluebells 'in the green' should be in June. Unlikely to be possible, postpone until 2021. Explore availability of a wildflower mix of woodland plants OR purchase suitable plugs for planting September. **Agreed**, subject to state of grass in 2021 and adopting suggestions from Graeme Skelcher in 5.2 (Ian)



**P19A West Field West side (scrub corners):** Create 5 metre fenced off triangles in the SW, SE and NE corners of West Field. Include in the Woodlands Trust application with a view to planting as a 'scrubby' area not a hedge. **Agreed**, subject to consultation with NE (Dave)

**P21A West Field northern boundary western side:** Plant a hedge, including in an application to the Woodland Trust. **Agreed**, subject to consultation with neighbour (Ian)

**P21B West Field northern boundary eastern side:** Hedge running along the side of Lucy Brook. Lay. **Agreed (Ian)**

**P23 Long Pads hedge:** Winter 2020-21 management of Long Pads / Flora Field hedge. Leave to become scrubby on Flora Field side. Trim to different heights. **Agreed (Ian)**

**P24 Pads footpath/Big Meadow:** Winter 2020-2. Lay those sections of the Pads / Big Meadow hedge planted in 2012. Only trim back those sections of Pads / Orchard hedge adjacent to fruit trees. **Agreed (Ian)**

In addition, there was no objection to a neighbour's request that the FA lower the elder and hawthorn forming the mutual boundary between her property and the Orchard (Ian, noting that other neighbours may need to be informed).

9. **Rush control programme for 2020:** 2019 was the third year of Volunteers managing the soft rush by scything. Work focused on Big Meadow, cutting further rides through the denser areas of soft rush and preventing its outward expansion into the main grazing land. There was no scything of rush in either the Hay Meadow or School Pond. This year's snipe numbers (see 5.2) have returned to 'normal' levels suggesting that the causes of last winter's drop were not associated with the rush management regime, but lie elsewhere.

Members had no objections to the proposals. So:

1: The FA will continue to rely on scything during 2020, with cut rush collected into heaps as usual (Ian). The chances of being able to implement this, given the coronavirus problems, are promising. Scything is one the tasks that Ian identifies as compatible with maintaining social distancing rules (see item 11). Moreover NE prohibits work starting until 1 July (the later of 15 July/haymaking in Hay Meadow).

2: This year's work will concentrate on Big Meadow (Ian). This is a priority to prevent further extension of the rush areas, including the patch in the SE expanding out from Lucy Brook and new clumps starting to establish in the grassy parts of the field. Then continuing the creation of rides focusing on the SE part of the main rush area. If time permits (30 September deadline, except possibly for the Hay Meadow), tackle rush as necessary elsewhere in the reserve.

3: **Glenys** will convene a site meeting in Spring 2021 (especially if the pandemic does limit the amount of work that can be achieved this year) to inspect the extent and density/structure of the rush in the Big and Hay Meadows more closely. It will assess the balance between a) grazing land and rush in Big Meadow and b) wildflowers, rush and mare's tail in the Hay Meadow, and decide whether the time has come for more aggressive management (machine cutting and/or weedwiping). Graham stresses the importance of this site meeting, noting that

soft rush is rapidly becoming dominant in Big Meadow, and threatening to exceed NE prescriptions.

10. **Digger work in Ponds and Upper Sowerholme:** At previous FFOG meetings Graham and Ian have indicated that the job of clearing water would become too much for Volunteers and require the bringing-in of a digger. They have reviewed the position again and come to the view that a digger is still not needed at the moment. (To be reconsidered next year – **Glenys** for calendar). They have also discussed, with Dave, NE's point that the scrapes need clear water and muddy margins (see 4.10). This is consistent with the FA's understanding and practice of clearing the ponds and their edges which will continue. **Dave** will report this back to NE. Graham adds that Ponds are cleared in the winter to create clear water but most are rapidly overwhelmed by new growth in the spring.
11. **Volunteer maintenance of the Nature Reserve under social distancing rules (R Ian):** Ian has outlined his thinking on how to accommodate volunteer work on the reserve with the new world of the coronavirus pandemic and the requirement for social distancing (paper circulated). He recognises that the situation is extremely fluid and is trying to judge what is safe and practical on shifting ground. He also notes that Government guidance could change such that he and several other key volunteers are prohibited from working on the reserve. FFOG members have provided positive and helpful feedback on the ideas in his paper and have added other suggestions. He will now work up formal proposals to be put to FFOG for approval. The timing and nature of these will be influenced by how the pandemic and government policy evolve, and the desire to resume volunteer work at scale as soon as possible. Consequently **Ian** will present proposals for decision between meetings, with report and/or further discussion at July FFOG. At the moment the Trustees' judgement is that is not yet appropriate to resume any form of group session.
12. **AOB:**
  - 12.1. **Snares:** Graham discovered two metal snares in the SE corner of Lower Sowerholme towards the end of April. He disabled and removed them. Having identified the perpetrator, the Trustees decided that this could be handled internally. Assurances have been made that there will be no recurrence.
  - 12.2. **Unauthorised tree planting:** Ian has been alerted to a tree that has appeared just to the South of the bottom of the path from the Towneley Close entrance to the Orchard. A considerable sapling that has been staked. Ian is struggling to identify the species. **Meeting Members** were asked to help confirm identify, before **Ian** takes the matter further.
13. **Date/place of next meetings:** Thursday 2nd July, Thursday 3rd September. Format and location tba. A meeting in some form will take place, centred on these dates. Given current Government guidelines, it is highly unlikely to be 'face to face' in July. (**Glenys** and **Sue** to arrange, in consultation with FFOG members.) Note that – apart from matters for the Graziers' meeting which go to Hilary, copy Sue (7.1) – issues for FFOG in general between meetings should go to Sue.

## Ian Procter's Report on Volunteer Activities:

### 4<sup>th</sup> March 2020

On a fine, Spring morning 13 volunteers formed the Wednesday Work Group (WWG).

- We continued the trimming of the Fauna path / School Field hedge.
- The top wire of the fence between the Fauna path and Carr House Meadow was tightened.
- Gates along the Fauna path were checked, adjusted if necessary and the locks oiled.
- Graham's patented duck nests were serviced and three were replaced.
- Grass and algae were cleared from Anna's Pool.
- The Pads footpath alongside Lower Sowerholme had been damaged by heavy rain. The run off was shovelled up, returned to the channel and stamped down.
- Seven bird cherry and field maple, donated by Oliver, were planted in Pony Wood.
- The plastic guards of the 'Rotary' saplings in Pony Wood tend to be blown over by the wind. New and stronger canes were fitted.
- Redundant plastic guards were gathered from various locations in Pony Wood and along the Pads footpath.
- The fence and dead hedge alongside the West edge of the Paddock was strengthened to prevent further entry by dogs.
- The northern 'entrance' to the wild section of the Orchard was blocked with brash. This is not to close it off entirely, especially to adventurous children, but to prevent a regular path developing.
- Mud was cleared from the track between the shed and the Orchard.

### 11<sup>th</sup> March 2020

Fifteen volunteers formed the WWG on a fine but blustery morning.

- The remaining gates were checked, adjusted and their padlocks oiled.
- Birdbox L2 was positioned on one of the ash to come down in Pony Wood. It was taken down and re-fixed on one of the elms.
- Oliver had found one more bird cherry / field maple which was planted in Pony Wood.
- Most of our time was spent barrowing wood chippings from the Willow Lane area to Pony Wood and spreading it to form a mulch for those hedge saplings competing with nettles.

### 14<sup>th</sup> March 2020

Fourteen volunteers attended the Saturday volunteer session on a dull but dry morning.

- The main task was the construction of another willow dome, this time in the playground. The willow was brought from the School Pond area, the ground prepared and the dome constructed.
- Two volunteers fixed red hazard tape 'flags' to the stakes marking out the Flora Field so that the farm workers can clearly see what is to be done.
- Meanwhile 14 barrowloads of mulch were transported from Willow lane up to Pony Wood and applied to further saplings surrounded by nettles.

### Associate Volunteers in March:

- Rebuilt the Alder Pond bund
- Installed two new bird nest boxes, fitted four plates and did other box repairs.
- Oiled padlocks and adjusted the hang of gates
- Continued to improve the base of the toddlers' area fence in the playground.
- Prepared bundles of willow for members of the public / green groups to use.
- Mowed the Orchard grass.

NOTE: A local resident (and now future volunteer) planted four saplings in Pony Wood in remembrance for his deceased son. This was agreed with the Chair of the Association and under Ian's direction. The saplings are small leaved lime, hazel, holly and crab apple.

**Because of the CORONA VIRUS emergency volunteer activities were suspended as of 18<sup>th</sup> March 2020 and there were no formal volunteer group sessions during April 2020.**

Some Associate Volunteer activity continued in April:

- Graham has constructed small 'bee hotels' and located them around the Reserve.
- Sue co-ordinated the ploughing of Flora Field.
- Mick checked the positioning of the stakes marking the Flora Field margins between ploughing and drilling.
- Several members litter-picked on their daily exercise walks.
- The Orchard grass was mown once by David and Ian. This was after consultation with the Chair of FFOG and maintained social distancing both between the two volunteers and with the general public. The Orchard grass had, in places, grown to a length that if it had been left longer, would have required strimming / scything rather than mowing. As these are more complex operations it was agreed to mow the grass to maintain the valued amenity.
- Following a request from Fraser, Ian and Suzanne fitted the water pump to the trough in West Field and, after some adjustments, got it working. This is a two-person job which required co-members of a household to work closely.
- Four volunteers met at Flora Field to sow appropriate seed mixes on the field margins. Social distance was maintained throughout.