

Fairfield Association: Flora, Fauna and Orchard Group [FFOG]
February 4th 2021 Meeting held by "Zoom"
Chair: Hilary Short
Minutes

Participants: Graham Brandwood, Sue Nieduszynska (mins), Ian Procter, Hilary Short,(Chair) Peter Tilley, Chris Workman Dave Brookes, Steve Bullen, David Elliott, Clio Graham, Mick Short

1)Apologies: Oliver Fulton, Tony Finn

2)Minutes of last meeting: Approved

3) Matters arising from Minutes:

3.1 Letters to Neighbours: These are ready to go out in March

3.2 Crab apple collection: Lancaster Brewery agreed to only take windfalls this year and will be in touch next year. They understand our reasons for leaving fruit on the trees

3.3 Seed Collection for MBFFP: We will not be purchasing a seed Hoover

3.4 Pop-up Stall: Around £300 was collected in donations. This included monies from bird feeders and bamboo canes.

4)Management:

4.1 Arable update:

4.1.1 Arable Contract: The contract which has been updated and includes the key dates and is on dropbox. Ian Ward has not returned a signed copy (**Sue to follow up**) Sue has spoken to Paul, who is responsible for the ploughing, about the state of the field and the lapwing project. He will chop the weeds before ploughing and given 2-3 dry days will plough at the beginning of March which is desirable for lapwing nesting.

4.1.2 Staking Field in preparation for Ploughing: Following discussion with Dan Heywood smaller stakes with coloured balls on the top will be used (**Mick** to organize, **Graham** to cut bamboo to the required length)

4.1.3 Wild Flower Seed Order: **Mick** to put in order at the end of March for bird friendly and possibly wild flower mix as needed.

4.2 Grazing matters

Dave researched taking water from the end of Cromwell Rd. Trustees have decided that the costs are too great to install an additional water supply.

4.3 Woodland and hedges

4.3.1 Tree Surgeon: Survey Progress:

Andy Lee's annual survey of the Association's trees had been received and Ian's proposals for acting on this were accepted. In particular:

- It was agreed that, although inspections for ash die back are normally done three times a year, to add this to Graham's monthly inspection reports. If a problem is identified this will be picked up by the trustees who would refer it to Andy Lee (**Hilary**). This paper trail, along with Andy's annual inspection should be sufficient for insurance purposes.
- Ian's proposal to prune ash trees in Little Wood when needed because of dieback rather than creating a glade was accepted.
- It was agreed to lay the playground hedge between the substation and the path by the allotments as this hedge belongs to the FA and does not border a neighbouring garden
- David Dawson will be asked to monitor the leaning silver birch tree in the playground when he does the playground inspection. It was noted that the council inspects the playground annually and the tree was planted at an angle. (**Ian** to communicate decision to Andy). Andrew will be asked to contact David. (**Hilary**)

4.3.2 Environment Agency tree planting offer: No response from the EA. Not to be pursued

4.3.3 There has been no response from the RPA regarding the planting of the corners in West Field, however the work is now complete

4.3.4 Update on Field Expedition Proposals: It was agreed:

- To continue using Cheviot trees, although more expensive than the Woodland Trust, as the saplings are of good quality
- To defer action on a viewing platform at Ash Tree Corner because of the risk from tree which has ash dieback
- To ask Oliver to suggest a suitable name for the eastern end of the hedgeline between Flora Field and Lower Sowerholme, which has been successfully thickened and should make an attractive landscape feature.
- Machine cutting the beetle banks: It was noted that the boulder has now been removed. **Mick** will check for hazards when he stakes the field
- Nettles in Pony Wood: Current management of scything and digging out will continue (**Ian**)
- Hazel copse on the eastern edge of Pony Wood: see item 4.3.5
- Wildflowers by Pony Wood path: So far only yellow rattle has been sown.
- Nonnative bluebells: Ian to accompany Graeme to identify clumps which will need to be removed (**Ian** to liaise with Hilary Smith)
- West Field Hedge – This will be In-filled in the autumn with more diverse species

4.3.5 Hazel Coppicing in Pony Wood: it was agreed that hazel will be planted together rather than spread out among other species and used as a demonstration of coppicing. Withies are pruned to give stronger growth and provide suitable material for use on the reserve. It was suggested that coppicing technique used should aid the suppression of nettles. A further report to go to FFOG in the autumn (**Ian, Peter and Graham**)

4.3.6 Great British Hedge Survey: The British hedge survey was done by Keith and his 2 grandsons. It generated a huge amount of data to produce 30 2-page reports (1 per hedge). Ian is currently working on

collating this information for a future FFOG meeting. Thanks to be conveyed to Keith and his grandsons (**Hilary**)

4.3.7 Strawberry plant in Pony Wood: A non-native “strawberry” plant was found on the eastern edge of Pony wood, identified by Oliver as *Potentilla Indica* https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Potentilla_indica. It is not poisonous. Monitor the spread

4.4 Whiteboard for sightings

It was agreed that this has been a successful project, benefitting from the proximity of the feeding station. **David** to consult **Peter and Winston** about improvements to the cover. **Sue** to liaise with **David** about how to use the observations which contain useful information on dates, not captured elsewhere. **Hilary** to try to source free pens. David is happy to continue at the moment.

4.5 Bamboo Control

Graham’s proposals were agreed: to use a combination of digging and organic herbicide where the stands are accessible (free-standing) and are not close to the reed-bed. Stands which cross garden boundaries will be monitored. (**Graham**) (**Sue** to inform neighbours). Bamboo rhizomes will be taken to the tip in bags as bamboo is not defined as invasive species (**Graham**)

4.6 Lancashire Wildlife Trust pond improvement and lapwing project

Peter’s report was accepted. Work to take place in February. It was agreed that we should suggest to LWT that having observed the creation of a hibernaculum the others could be constructed by volunteers. (**Peter** to speak to Steve Cowell) **Graham** agreed to organize the construction. *

4.7 Nettles and thistles in Flora Field

It was agreed to scythe the “buffer strip” as we do in Pony Wood. There is potential to use the power scythe. (**Ian and Peter**)

4.8 Approved Routes for Plant

The document was produced by Glenys. A copy will be given to Fraser. (**Hilary**) and Steve Cowell of LWT (**Peter**). It was noted that there may be occasions when other access is necessary in which case the contractor should liaise with the relevant member of the organization.

4.9 Review of Bee Hotels and Duck Houses

It was agreed to continue the “experiment” for one more year on ponds not used for the newt project. (**Graham**)

Phil Hendry has agreed to check the earlier bee hotels for use.

4.10 Bird Feeding Station

It was agreed that this is a successful project, attracting birds including reed buntings and interest from the public. Continue next winter. (**Sue**)

5) **Monitoring**

5.1 Maintenance and HLS Habitat Inspections: Following points were noted:

- There is poaching at the cattle crossing, worse where we do not have hard standing which is proving effective.

- There are just 4 hay bales left (note 1 had rotted). The graziers are well within the limits allowed for days on the reserve but we need to monitor ground conditions. (**Trustees** to check and liaise with Fraser)
- Ask Graeme when he does his spring wildflower survey whether the clearing of rank grass in Pony Wood has been effective. (**Graham/Ian** to communicate this to Hilary Smith)
- We could probably get turf cover for newt hibernacula from grass removal in Pony Wood

5.2 Progress with Surveys

There was insufficient time in the meeting to discuss the contents of reports.

5.2.1 Breeding birds: Steve and Clio will take over liaison with Dan.

5.2.2 Odonata report received

5.2.3 Nest box monitoring. Still to be arranged (**Ian**).

5.2.4 Butterfly survey: Although sightings are dated there is no year on year consistency. Peter and Dave have noted species not represented (Note the blog is a useful additional means of recording sightings as the surveys can only be snapshots). **Peter** to liaise with Christine Bennet in setting up additional monitoring at key points in the life-cycle.

5.2.5 Bat Report: **Peter** will liaise with William Walton (Note Bat Report to be requested for March meeting)

6) **Volunteer activities**

6.1 Reports for November, December and January: accepted.

6.2 Volunteer Plans:

- The trustees did not approve a plan for a large group to work in West Field during a lockdown. Proposals for dealing with West Field brash will be reviewed after the government announcement on March 8th. It was made clear to the meeting that the trustees have ultimate responsibility for health and safety issues and also for compliance with government guidance. It was noted that although normal good practice would be to deal with the brash sooner, the trustees are advised that it is unlikely to prove a hazard to cattle or a problem for nesting birds.
- Willow pruning will proceed

6.3 Risk Assessment: revisions agreed

6.4 Volunteers' Social Event: **Ian** to look for a volunteer to organize a summer event

6.5 John Muir Awards: No certificates being produced currently but **Graham** is putting volunteers forward.

7) **Item for Discussion: Alder Pond, Managing Water Level**

- A decision is needed about management of the sluice to control the wetness of Big Meadow, given the ground conditions for the cattle and needs of wading birds. **Graham** will report to next meeting. **Sue** will consult **Dan** about the needs of birds. (Note Graham flushed about 50

snipe in that area, so our current ad hoc arrangement seems not to be upsetting them).

- It was agreed that LWT should dredge the pond and strengthen the bund if possible, depending on timescales and ground conditions wrt machinery used.

8) Standing Items

8.1 Arrangements

These were circulated for checking ahead of the meeting.

8.2 Financial Control

The Annual Revenue Budget was received without comment

8.3 MBFFP

The Grassland Management Strategy is almost ready to go live and a Green and Blue Infrastructure Map for the area is in the process of being created. No further information on seed collection.

8.4 Items to Report from the FA

- Meadow and Window Box Project: It has been agreed in principle to create a small wildflower area between the substation and the dog bin at the end of Sibsey Street. It will be created as part of the Virtual Meadow Exhibition currently being prepared.
- The Bee-friendly Window Box Project is also going ahead and the plan is to distribute 50 planted boxes around the beginning of May. The FA will ask for donations.
- No Entry notices: Sue apologised for inadvertently sending out an earlier version. The revised one will go out with minutes and taken to the FA for final approval.
- Improvement of Track from Sunnyside Lane: Two contractors supplied estimates: it was decided to use Paul Deardon who will improve the drainage.

9) **AOB:** Graham's query regarding the FA constitution is to be referred to the trustees (**Hilary**)

10) **Date, place and organization of next meetings:**

Thursday April 1st; Thursday 3rd June (format and location tba)

*Following the meeting we were contacted by LWT, to inform us that work will start on Feb 11th and they are happy with the proposal regarding the hibernacula.