

Fairfield Association
Fauna, Flora and Orchard Management Group [FOG]
Minutes of the Meeting held on Thursday 5th May 2014, 7.30 pm
at Whitegates, Sunnyside Close

Present: Andrew Brennand, Graham Brandwood, Dave Brookes, Glenys Ferguson (mins), Tony Finn, Ian Fraser, Oliver Fulton, Ian Procter, Hilary Short, Mick Short (chair), Chris Workman

1. **Apologies:** Sue Nieduszynska, Rebecca Procter
2. **Minutes of last meeting:** Approved. On item 9.5, Dave noted that potential funding was from the Catchment Sensitive Farming capital grant scheme rather than S2S.
3. **Current/recent developments:**
 - 3.1. **Tree Bumblebee study:** An ecology student at Lancaster University is trying to locate a *Bombus hypnorum* nest. Her appeal for sightings has been posted on the FA's wildlife blog. She is in contact with Mick, and anticipates making a visit to the reserve later in the term.
 - 3.2. **Equine access:** A query has been received as to whether walking a horse will be allowed on the proposed Flora path. **Andrew** will reply in the negative, giving several reasons why this cannot be permitted (including less obvious ones, such as damage to a path not intended for such a weight and the impact of a large silhouette on wildlife).
4. **Matters arising from Minutes: Camper in Little Wood:** Despite requests from FA members and the local PCSO, the camper is unwilling to leave. Contact has now been made with the Street Link charity, and it is hoped that this resolve the situation. Meanwhile **Tony** and **Mick** are making enquiries with solicitors as a back up.
5. **Names for Flora fields and ponds:** Settling on new names is now a priority. Sue has been trying without success to contact the previous tenant, and her other researches have yielded little more than the name 'Sowerholme' covering most of the area. Her suggestion of 'West Field', as it is already in informal use, was agreed. Adopting the name 'Arable Field' for the same reason was rejected as the long term use of this field is not guaranteed. Instead Ian's suggestion of 'Flora Field' was welcomed as maintaining a 'historic' link as a whole adopts the name Fairfield Nature Reserve. The field formerly owned by Gleesons will be called 'Lower Sowerholme'. (Oliver noted that this had been the original intention when 'Upper Sowerholme' was named.) The name 'Pony Wood' will be retained, and be used for the newly planted area as well as the existing wood. The June meeting will take a decision on names for the ponds and scrapes (**Sue**).
6. **Report from Catchment Sensitive Officer:** Report held by Dave. The recommendations from her site visit on 3rd April are:
 - *Reduce the stocking density of White Park cattle to 0.4LU per hectare to reduce poaching.* This is even lower than the reduction incorporated in the new Natural England agreement. The meeting decided not to adopt this recommendation.
 - *Fence all ponds to prevent stock access.* Funding would be available for this. There was some discussion as to whether this measure would actually be effective in reducing algae problems if the cattle continued to have access to the marshes (required in order to manage the rushes). The graziers will need to be consulted if

ponds are no longer to be available as a water source particularly for Long Face, the 'old lady' of the herd. In the first instance, **Mick** will consult the FA's Natural England Adviser, Claire Harris.

- *If ponds are fenced off, pasture pumps may need to be provided as an alternative water supply.* A nose pump has already been sourced for West Field. In Lower Sowerholme and Big Meadow drinking from Lucy Brook is permitted at the cattle crossing. So it is the Hay Meadow where this would be needed. Glenys pointed out that there is currently nothing to prevent the cattle getting into Lucy Brook at the Cromwell Road end.
- *There must be a buffer (2m plus) maintained between the ponds and the arable planting/margins.* This is in place.
- *Alleviate compaction in gateway areas, particularly on the Lower Sowerholme side of the cattle crossing.* Using a sub-soiler attached to a tractor is the suggested approach. It was decided to delay action a) to see whether the problem resolves and b) because tractor access could damage the arable and flower margins. **Mick** will ask the farmer whether he has this equipment and could undertake the task when he harvests the arable crop.

7. **Undesirables and invasive aliens campaign:** **Ian** will be organising a Working Party to tackle ragwort, nettles and Japanese knotweed. A list of dates, starting late May, will be advertised. Glyphosate spraying in the fields and Pony Wood is limited to three people at a time by the number of backpacks available. For legal reasons, these must be people born before 1st January 1965. However, it is hoped to involve a larger number of volunteers in digging and pulling undesirables from the marshes later in the season. **Ian** is starting to tackle a second patch of knotweed found along the boundary with the Aldcliffe Road gardens.

8. **Identification badges:** **Graham's** proposal for badges/cards identifying people as acting on behalf of the Fairfield Association was accepted. **Graham** to produce, showing the wording "Volunteer Ranger".

9. **Fauna:**

9.1. **Anna's Pool repairs:** No progress. **Dave** to contact Richard Storton. A donation has been received from the farmer who has taken the old pipe.

9.2. **Rural Payments Agency remapping and field numbers:** No action.

9.3. **Algae treatment in Alder Pond:** The jury is still out on whether the barley straw bales will reduce the algae. **Graham** may supplement it with raking out. Such actions are only tackling the symptoms, not the underlying problem. Once the algae is cleared, oxygenating plants (including watercress taken from elsewhere on the reserve) can be introduced. This should be done in every pond, regardless of whether the Catchment Sensitive Officer's recommendation of fencing is implemented (see item 6).

10. **Flora:**

10.1. **Boundary stone repairs:** Henry Hicks now has both parts of the stone.

10.2. **Metal detecting:** The metal detectorists felt that the ground in Flora Field was too claggy after ploughing, so are now waiting until the arable has been cropped.

10.3. Widening of the Long Pads path and creation of the Flora path: Georgina Peacock has now been commissioned to produce a design. **Dave** is pessimistic about persuading the Canal and Rivers Trust to reduce the hefty charges for creating an access onto the towpath, but will give it one last try. Public consultation on the project will be scheduled for autumn/winter. The opinion of a naturalist will be sought on the effect of widening the Long Pads path on bees etc (**Hilary**).

10.4. Land drain in West Field: As predicted, an active drain was found about 1m down, flowing into Lucy Brook. Graham's hole digging revealed a circular, vitrified clay drain about 9 inches in diameter, comprised of tightly fitting segments. **Ian** proposes to block this off at two points by inserting a piece of metal as a seal and ramming in soil and clay. This may cause water to come out of the seams elsewhere. This does not matter if it simply escapes into the area of the scrape, but it is possible that more action may subsequently be required.

10.5. Arable field update: The actions listed in the previous Minutes (item 10.7) were taken. The other local contractor approached was unwilling to accept the financial risk of a no-cost arrangement. Moreover, his approach would have been no more organic: he too would have wanted to use herbicide to tackle the weed problem. An agreement has now been signed with a farmer from Cockerham, who ploughed and sowed Flora Field with a wheat crop over the Easter weekend. A leveret was moved away to safety during the ploughing. (This will not have done it any harm and it is good to have evidence that brown hares are breeding on the reserve.)

In compliance with the Natural England Agreement, two other seed mixes were sown around the margins: an annual wild bird seed plot mix as specified by Richard Storton (RSPB) around the Pony Wood and Long Pads path boundaries and King's HE10 mix to create a floristically enhanced grass margin around the rest of the boundary. In addition, a butterfly- and bee-friendly mix, also supplied by King's, has been scattered at the north eastern corner. It has been sown along the bank against Aldcliffe Road and will soon be sown elsewhere in the nature reserve too.

Flora Field is starting to green up rapidly and the line of the margins is already visible. Almost immediately, a lapwing started displaying, indicating that a pair are holding a territory, although the carrion crow and gulls also frequenting the field may prevent them from rearing a brood. However, **Mick** will ask Richard what precautions need to be taken to avoid damage to any nests when equipment is used and if/when herbicide is sprayed.

11. Monitoring

11.1. Maintenance inspection: Graham's full report available. **Dave** will ask the contractors to ease all the new gates. The Paddock gateway is still dry, suggesting that the actions taken to improve drainage here have finally succeeded. Mare's tail is extending its incursion into the Hay Meadow. Chris took the view that there is no action that can be taken.

11.2. HLS habitat inspection: Full report available. A number of young trees (alders?) are appearing in the marshes in Upper Sowerholme and Big Meadow. **Mick** will ask Richard Storton whether these should be taken out. The herd of White Park cattle remains larger than permitted by the new Natural England Agreement and still includes last year's three cross-breed calves. It is not currently possible for the graziers to

address this. A local TB outbreak means that they cannot be legally be moved until the herd has been tested with satisfactory results. **Mick** will inform Claire Harris.

11.3. Woodland Flora Survey and May Wildflower Survey of Hay Meadow: Glenys has provided templates and guidance notes to Wildflower Group leader, Martin Sherlock. Oliver reported that he had accompanied Martin to survey the wildflowers in Pony Wood on 30th April. Livestock have only been excluded for a few weeks, so little regeneration was expected. They were therefore pleasantly surprised by the number of native bluebells found, along with a self-seeded birch and hawthorn. On the downside, they also confirmed an ongoing nettle problem. Martin will be submitting a written report. He is also making arrangements for the May Hay Meadow survey. **Glenys** will ask **Sue** to liaise further with Martin on this. To attract more participants, it is suggested that he offers a wider choice of dates, avoids a clash with other events and reviews his email list as a number of FOG members were surprised that they had not been invited.

11.4. Wildlife and wildflower photographic recording: Tony proposed engaging someone to provide high-quality photographs on an ongoing basis. A database/library could be created that for use for publicity, public consultations and so forth as well as for monitoring. After discussion, the conclusion was reached that the cost could not be justified. Monitoring itself requires relatively few photographs, and there is no pressing need for them to be of high quality. **Hilary** can provide advice on how to monitor accurately NE's requirements using photographs. She will ask Dave Herrod if he is interested in providing photographs, as Helen may be unavailable. The FA's research groups will also be encouraged to take photographs of notable observations for more informal monitoring. **Mick** will contact the FA's webmasters to discuss setting up a digital library of photographs (using Flickr?).

11.5. Orchard: Glenys noted that she and Keith Taylor had carried out the second annual check of the health of the fruit trees whilst the Orchard was in full blossom on 28th April. A report will be circulated for discussion at the June FOG meeting.

11.6. Soil testing: No action. **Dave** will follow up the tip from the Catchment Sensitive Officer that Natural England can provide free soil tests.

12. Volunteer activities: Ian's written report for April is attached at the end. A high level of attendance at the monthly Saturday sessions continues, with 23 volunteers counted. Ian's report does not include feedback on the first of the summer Wednesday evening sessions held last night (30th April). He was encouraged by the turnout of eight volunteers, who between them made significant inroads into the task list (attached) proposed for May 10th! **Ian** will now rethink this list in consultation with **Mick** as FOG chair. Staking of the larger saplings in Pony Wood will be the principal job. It was advised that this is done on the diagonal, taking care not to damage the roots. During April, the storage building has been reorganised thanks to the generous donation of shelving by the Shorts. Ian also now holds an inventory of the FA's tools. A £500 tool grant has been awarded by Lancashire Community Fund. **Hilary** will clarify with the FA Treasurer whether this is now available for spending and inform Ian.

13. Educational activities:

13.1. Update from Tony: The second set of class-based sessions as part of the HLF funded Flora Schools project has been successfully completed. Tony is now making preparations for the visits to the nature reserve during the summer term. Amongst other activities, this will involve tree identification, art work and map work (such as

pinpointing locations and matching to photographs). Tony's intention is to take pupils into Flora Field for the first part of the visit, entering through the double gates and following the grass strip to the top of the hill. For the second part of the visit, they would go back down to enter through the pedestrian gate and then up to the clearing and viewpoint area in Pony Wood. **Tony** was asked to re-consider these arrangements. Could he achieve all his objectives from Pony Wood, where there is a larger open area and which offers good views across the arable fields without the risk of damage to the crop and margins? **Ian** will arrange for the route into Pony Wood to be cleared of nettles etc. and for any areas to be avoided to be taped off.

13.2. Ripley School projects: Ian has been notified that there might be a delay in the pupils starting the two agreed projects as the group members have yet to complete last term's task. It is not important if the finger posts are postponed until the autumn term. The nose pump stand is more pressing as the cattle have no other water supply in West Field. Three cows (plus followers) are allowed to graze West Field during the breeding season (1 April to 30 June). However, as the graziers tend to be reluctant to split the herd, it is unlikely that this field will actually be used until the start of July, when the whole herd can have access. Even then, a lack of water can be overcome by the graziers moving the cattle to another field overnight (as they do when the Paddock is being grazed). **Mick** to consult the graziers. He will also talk to Claire Harris to clarify Natural England's intentions for the West Field. Is the sward getting too long in the absence of grazing or is this what the grey partridge and other target wildlife prefer? Would a brief visit by the whole herd into the West Field during the breeding season be a good idea to reduce the length of the grass or is it placing any nests at risk?

13.3. Natural England Farm Visit forms: Forms have been submitted for the last financial year. Dave urged everyone to ensure a form is completed for every qualifying activity.

14. Go Wild

14.1. Report on Birding Group walks: Birding Group leader, Jon Carter, arranged three walks during May. The first, an early morning start, attracted four people. In contrast, the evening session had 25 attendees. This made it quite difficult for Jon to share his knowledge and expertise, as people were scattered along the narrow paths often out of earshot. The second morning session (starting at 7.30am) comprised a more comfortable number of participants – 12. Everyone saw the couple of grey partridges that have been sighted regularly over the last two/three weeks in West Field, usually in the mud by the side of the scrape. Wheatears on migration were a highlight, about twenty showing clearly in the sunny morning on the east side of Flora Field. It is anticipated that Jon provide a write up on the FA blog (**Sue** to follow up). Jon is expected to organise further birding walks during the early summer.

14.2. Campfires and other events: **Chris** will arrange a bioblitz for the end of June, probably a weekday evening. More information, including proposed location within the reserve, to be provided to June FOG. Graham has had some interest in his campfire sessions, the first of which is scheduled for 12th May. Publicity continues.

15. DBS checks: These have disappeared into a black hole. **Andrew** has taken on the task of moving matters forward. He will clarify the current position with Michael Sheppard so that specific action can be taken, if necessary, at the next FA meeting.

16. Financial control: Item 7: Claim for £56 for glyphosate to be submitted imminently by **Ian**. Maximum anticipated total spending on glyphosate this year £150. Item 10.5 - **Mick** will be

claiming reimbursement for the £205.98 (including discount) paid for the various seed mixes for the margins in Flora Field (NE agreement).

17. AOB:

- Oliver noted that – contrary to the report to FOG 3 April, item 9.4 – the Ordnance Survey will now not show the Concessionary Path on its maps until officially endorsed. **Oliver** will go back to Ann Wood at Lancaster City Council and press her to complete the requisite paperwork. Once this is finally dealt with, **Oliver** will follow up other outstanding matters with Ann Wood.
- Dave has a booklet outlining the new Common Agricultural Policy. It appears there is still a lot of detail to be decided, so it remains unclear whether the FA will qualify for Single Payment Scheme entitlements. However, there is nothing in the document that would definitely rule out the FA. So the waiting game continues.

18. Date/place of next meetings: It was agreed to continue with the earlier start time of 7pm until further notice. Thursday 5th June and Thursday 3rd July both at Whitegates, Sunnyside Close.

Ian Procter's Volunteer Items:

Volunteer activities April 2014

2nd April 2014

We put barley straw in Alder Pond to try to eradicate the algae that has plagued the pond over the last year of so.

12th April 2014

23 volunteers attended the monthly Saturday session on a blustery morning, dry despite the forecast.

- We mowed the grass for the first time this spring
- A fallen hawthorn at the back of the fruit hedge was pruned back to allow access.
- We made a start to staking the larger saplings in Pony Wood and the Extension.
- Notices were posted at Little Wood prohibiting camping
- Rubbish in Pony Wood was moved down to the gate area. This included old ironwork which had to be cut out. This improves the safety of Pony Wood.
- The boundary stone was transported from the Woodland Extension to Henry Hicks' garage for repair.
- Logs were moved in Pony Wood nearer to their eventual locations in the Fire Circle and the Viewing Area.
- We cut back bramble enveloping saplings in the hedge between the Fauna path and the Grammar School field.
- Some of the ruts left by contractor's machinery in Big Meadow were flattened out.
- Self-seeded sycamore saplings on the Storage Building roof were removed
- We retrieved a considerable number of now redundant plastic spirals and canes from the Pads / Big Meadow hedge
- Rubbish left in the Paddock / Allotments hedge was cleared to a skip provide by the Allotments Association (by agreement)

- The Paddock gate was left open for firewood collectors but no one came

13th April 2014

Three volunteers staked out the lynchet lines in Flora to mark out the beetle banks that are not to be ploughed. The man holes were also staked. Iron was dug out of the former fence line and removed to the temporary dump by the gate.

15th April 2014

Three volunteers began the glyphosate spraying of the nettle beds in and around Pony Wood. About 20% is left to do.

The JKW near the Howson's Gate is checked and given a second dose. It is responding.

We note that the great majority of the newly planted saplings in Pony Wood and around our hedges are coming into leaf and looking healthy. The exception is the holly transplanted bare root from a local garden but perhaps a little early to say.

In the afternoon the edges of the Fauna path were sprayed to preserve the width of the path and the integrity of the gravel surface.

18th April 2014

The initial spraying of the Pony Wood nettles, plus a bed in the ex-Glesons Field, is completed.

23rd April 2014

Two volunteers make a start in erecting the shelving donated for the Shed by the Short family.

Proposed volunteer tasks for May 10th 2014

Note: It so happens that I have to make these proposals before the Wednesday evening Volunteer Session on 30th April so I am unsure what we will have completed on that evening. However, I think the following gives us plenty to do on both occasions.

I have been in touch with Green Lancaster. They are going to contribute but it is very early in the term so numbers may be small this time.

1. Mow the grass
2. Strim / scythe the area between the Orchard path and the newly laid hedge
3. Continue to work on the drainage problem in the Flora West field
4. Sowing bee friendly seed at various places around the reserve
5. Finish clearing brambles enveloping hedge saplings between the Fauna path and the Grammar School field
6. Position logs in Pony Wood for use as seating
7. Stake the larger saplings planted in Pony Wood and the Extension
8. Make further adjustments to the pedestrian gate at the 'treble gates' to improve its working
9. Repair the broken rail at the cattle crossing
10. Retrieve further redundant spirals and canes from the Pads footpath
11. At the end of the session put up some of our tables in the Orchard for the 'Blossom Picnic'