

Fairfield Association
Flora, Fauna and Orchard Management Group [FFOG]
Minutes of the Meeting held on Thursday 6th November 2014, 7.00 pm
at Whitegates, Sunnyside Close

Present: Andrew Brennand, Graham Brandwood, David Elliott, Glenys Ferguson (mins), Tony Finn, Ian Fraser, Oliver Fulton, Sue Nieduszynska, Ian Procter, Louisa Reynolds, Hilary Short, Mick Short (chair), Chris Workman

1. **Apologies:** Dave Brookes, Helen Hicks, Anne Murphy
2. **Minutes of last meeting:** Approved.
3. **Matters arising from Minutes:**
 - 3.1. **Non-native planting in the Orchard:** A notice letter has been sent to one of the offenders and a conversation had with the other. The plants will be removed during the upcoming Volunteer session, although the box hedge on either side will be retained.
 - 3.2. **Queries to Natural England:** Mick has had replies/comments from Ben Hibbins (NE adviser) to points raised in follow up to August's site meeting (see FOG Sept 11, item 6):
 - Ben is still to review stocking levels and has asked for information on the cattle numbers that the graziers have in mind (**Mick**).
 - He has confirmed that the wording of the grazing calendar in the NE Agreement does imply that it is at the FA's discretion to how to interpret the clause that says between 1st December and 31st March the cattle "should preferably graze the LGGS Field" (outside our HLS agreement) unless "this is not possible". Therefore there is no need to apply for permission to allow the cattle to use parts of the reserve covered by the NE Agreement.
 - He is happy for supplementary feeding to take place in Hay and Carr House Meadows, provided that the feed is our own wildflower hay and a limit is agreed so there will still be a net loss of nutrients.
 - Arranging soil testing for Hay and Carr House Meadows is still on Ben's 'to do' list.
4. **Tool matters:** Ian and David have investigated further the options for increasing our grass cutting capacity (report available). A decision has become more urgent as the existing mower sustained serious damage by hitting a tree stump in the Orchard. Its repair will not be cost effective. Mick has approached the Heritage Lottery Fund to establish whether it would be possible to vire surplus money to the purchase of a new stand-behind machine (to be considered at the upcoming Flora Steering Group meeting). If it is decided to use HLF funding then it can be bought without further consultation, otherwise its purchase needs approval at the next FFOG meeting (**Ian**). However, Ian and David still need to do a bit more research as to whether increasing the size of the stand-behind model is the best option. It was agreed to delay decisions on any larger machinery, as exactly how and where it would be used is not yet fully clear.

5. **Rush cutting and weed-wiping:** Richard Storton has secured a priority habitat grant for this work from the Nature Improvement Area project. The Softrac will be delivered on Friday 7th November, for rush cutting to take place the following Monday to Wednesday. **Mick** is arranging a rota of FA people to be present whilst Richard cuts the rush in case of problems.

Ben Hibbins (NE adviser) has suggested the following 'minor amendments' to the FA's agreement to accommodate these actions:

For HK10-

Do not carry out control on more than half of rush dominated areas in any individual year, and not between 1 October and 30 June, unless otherwise agreed in writing with your Natural England contact. Topping and careful weed-wiping with glyphosate are acceptable methods of control. All cuttings which could otherwise damage the sward must be removed. (Ben is happy to agree an exception to the Oct-Jun restriction on timing.)

For HK7-

Rush control may be carried out by topping and/or careful weed-wiping, but not before 15th July / not before the hay cut in field 1293. All cuttings must be removed.

Weed-wiping is a separate stage to be carried out probably in January/February when there is sufficient regrowth. The chemical used would be a systemic herbicide such as Roundup. Prior to the meeting an article about the emerging problems of Round-Up was circulated as well as information gathered about the pros and cons of weed-wiping from Richard, Ben and Reuben Neville at Lancashire Wildlife Trust. The basic view of these three is that weed-wiping is a necessary evil. There is no practical alternative, and without it the marsh vegetation risks being too dense to be attractive to wildlife. Oliver endorsed this view having talked to Cumbria Wildlife Trust, who said it makes an enormous difference and the only other option would be to use diggers. It was agreed to go ahead with weed-wiping, taking measures to ensure that is done carefully (e.g. applied at the optimum time to achieve success, operator briefed to ensure that the application of the herbicide is well controlled). **Mick** will inform Richard and confirm permission with Natural England.

6. **Campfires in Pony Wood:** Glenys reminded the meeting that access to Pony Wood had already been considered at the meeting in June (item 6) where it was decided that the wood should be fenced off until the new planting has established, at which point the matter would be revisited. (Consideration of the type of fencing will be deferred until there is more progress on the plans for the Flora Path – **Glenys**.) So the meeting therefore confined its discussion to the specific issue of campfires.

On the one hand, the campfire circle in Pony Wood has been an excellent venue for Graham's Forest Schools events this summer and has the potential for educational use. On the other hand, fires and people may have an adverse impact on wildlife and the presence of the campfire circle has attracted several groups of unauthorised users and led to littering.

Unfettered use of the campfire circle was ruled out. Instead the discussion focused on not allowing any campfires versus allowing them on a managed basis (form to be decided). Points made in a wide ranging discussion included:

- Andrew argued that managed access of the campfire circle was preferable to no access. Unauthorised use would continue under a policy of no access, but those who played by the rules would be denied the pleasure. With the nature reserve located within an urban area, the community should have the opportunity to be involved. David also made the point that the public are likely to have an expectation of access.
- Hilary considered that removal of the campfire circle could well lead to the end of the problem of unauthorised use, citing the precedent of the removal of the picnic table in the Orchard which led to a reduction in anti-social behaviour.
- Sue, Mick, Tony felt that Pony Wood – which currently has little wildlife, primarily as a consequence of being grazed by sheep for many years – needs time to develop.
- Ian argued that the campfire circle might have little adverse effect on wildlife. It is only a small part of Pony Wood. In the Orchard there is abundant wildlife despite the presence of people.
- Graham argued that the campfire circle attracts unauthorised users to a specific point rather than the whole wood (although Mick disagreed, considering their impact would be wider spread). Graham is aware of campfires in other nature reserves and Forestry Commission sites. Pony Wood offers a Forest Schools experience far superior to the Paddock (venue used in previous years).
- Oliver and Louisa felt that unauthorised and anti-social use could be reduced with good site design by a landscape architect and by signage.
- On the practical side, it was noted that removing the logs would be a difficult job,

It was eventually agreed that a consensus was not emerging, and that a vote would need to be held to bring the discussion to a resolution. On the proposal “No campfires next summer”, there were 5 votes in favour, 8 against.

Campfires will now be discussed by the FA meeting (**Andrew**). If the FA supports the majority view in FFOG, then the matter will be returned to FFOG to generate proposals as to what form next summer’s managed access should take. (It was suggested that the best approach might be to set up a sub-group to report back to FFOG. It would consider, for instance, whether access should be Forest Schools only or extended to bookings by families and bona fide groups, to what extent unauthorised use and littering could be contained by signage and design and take advice from other nature reserves, such as Brockholes, and Georgina Peacock.)

7. **Revised name for FOG:** At its last meeting, the FA decided that the nature reserve’s official name should be *The Fairfield Association Flora and Fauna Nature Reserve*. Mick’s proposal to change the name of FOG to *Flora, Fauna and Orchard Group* (FFOG), to be more representative of what we now do, was accepted.
8. **Tree Survey Report:** Andy Lee’s survey report has been received. It identifies several trees where action is required. It was agreed that some of the tasks (removing ivy from 522, the thinning at site 536, pruning near the Cromwell Road gate 617, and any replanting in Little Wood) could be undertaken by volunteers (**Ian**). **Ian** was asked to get a quote from Andy for the rest of the work, including thinning and felling in Little Wood, for the next FFOG meeting. He will also advise Andy that the preferred option is to retain the stem of tree 532 and cut

back oak 616 (i.e. retain as much standing for wildlife as is safe). Andy is proposing a further request to the Tree Protection Officer to coppice the sycamores in the Martins' hedge whose shading is adversely affecting the health of the Orchard.

9. Management:

9.1. Rural Payments Agency remapping and field numbers: No report.

9.2. Algae treatment in Alder Pond: Graham has this in hand and will provide feedback through his monthly reports.

9.3. Improvement of the Long Pads path and creation of the Flora path: Awaiting costings on the Flora Path (Georgina Peacock is busy with design work for FFOT). Consideration of the Long Pads path will only start once the Flora path has been planned.

9.4. Concessionary Path: Ann Wood (Lancaster City Council) has finally started to look at the paperwork.

9.5. West Field grass and drain: W&H Contracting have now finished cutting and disposing of the grass. The graziers are being encouraged to move the cattle into this field as much as possible over the next few weeks to keep on top of the grass in the hope of avoiding the length problem that developed this year. Volunteers have blocked the drain in a second place, much closer to the scrape. However, although there is now water in West Scrape, the level is considerably lower than elsewhere in the nature reserve. It may be that it is simply a matter of time, or there is something else that needs blocking. If the problem persists, then approaches suggested are to arrange a water diviner, undertake a geophys survey (Chris has a contact), ask previous farmers of the field if they have knowledge of extra drains. Sue will also check the LiDar maps.

9.6. Cutting of bee/wildflower margins: Ian arranged a few weeks ago for W&H Contracting to do the work of cutting and removing the bee friendly and floristically enhanced grass margins in Flora Field. The job has yet to be done, so Ian was asked to follow this up. (The bird-friendly seed mix margin will remain until the spring.)

9.7. Single Payment Scheme entitlements: The FA's eligibility remains in doubt. The deadline for an application is not until 15th May 2015, so there is still time to clarify the position. Hilary was asked to contact Richard Storton to find out on what grounds some RSPB sites qualify for these entitlements.

10. Monitoring:

10.1. Maintenance inspection: Graham's full report available. The exit pipe in Anna's Pond had become blocked by grass, causing water to overflow the bund which had become very soft. Graham has cleared this, and will keep an eye open for this problem in the future.

10.2. HLS habitat inspection: Full report available. The ground on the Lower Sowerholme side of the crossing appears to be improving. It was decided against trying to tackle the compaction on the Big Meadow side by forking, in favour of continuing the previously agreed approach of monitoring and bringing in a machine if necessary. The reserve is now very wet, and there is a poaching risk, particularly in School Pond. The flush count tally was 54 snipe.

10.3. Breeding bird survey results: Dan Haywood's report was circulated (and is on the FA website). **Sue** was also asked to blog the principal findings. The report, which contains the records of four visits to Fauna and the Orchard made between 25th April and 20th June, is encouraging. Reed Bunting (an amber list and Lancashire BAP species) have returned to breed, with up to three males holding territory. Absent as a breeding species for several years, Dan was pleased to identify a female Whitethroat, and one or two singing males (also amber list). Starlings are one of Natural England's feature species for the FA's nature reserve and on the red list. Dan reported a maximum count of 26 foraging birds, noting that they were likely to be breeding in nearby houses. Next year, whoever is commissioned to undertake the breeding bird survey will be asked to include Flora (**Sue**).

10.4. Nest box monitoring: Ian Nieduszynski and Ian Procter examined, and emptied, all of the nest boxes on 3rd November. The original numbering has been retained for the Orchard boxes and a numbering system with prefixes F (Fauna), P (Pony wood) and L (Little wood) set up for other boxes. Ian N. promises a full report identifying each box, its type, its accompanying tree, nest contents and comments submitted in Excel spreadsheet format once the nest contents have been further examined. (To that end, at the meeting Sue N. passed two plastic bags containing creepy crawlies over to Chris for identification!)

11. Volunteer activities: Ian's reports for September and October are attached at the end. Ian drew attention to a change in the relationship with Green Lancaster. Rather than a group of student volunteers attending a Saturday session once a term, they will come to these monthly sessions on an individual basis as and when they choose. It is hoped that this will lead to regular attendance from some, and the continuity will give them a better opportunity to develop skills. Green Lancaster has requested advice on fruit tree pruning. Keith Taylor has willingly agreed to give them a tutorial. The weather forecast for the coming Volunteer session is poor, but Ian is determined that the priority task of planting saplings from the latest Woodland Trust pack will go ahead. The nose pump for the cattle will remain in West Field as long as there is no threat of prolonged frost (see item 9.5).

12. Ripley School projects: Despite sending a couple of emails, Ian has had no news from the group this term. He noted that the school had not charged the FA for half the costs of constructing the nose pump stand, providing it as a donation instead.

13. DBS checks: Progress has stalled. **Andrew** will investigate and expedite.

14. Recent developments:

14.1. Metal detecting in Fauna: The metal detectorists who have been detecting in Flora Field earlier this year (and will be shortly moving into the other fields in Flora) have requested permission to detect in Fauna. As these fields are leased from the City Council, Mick has contacted Ann Wood for approval. She is happy for this to happen subject to (a) consultation with the graziers and (b) completion of an indemnity form (which she has provided). FFOG also gave the go ahead. **Mick** to arrange.

14.2. Additions to Fields Access List: The meeting approved the additions of David Elliott and Ian Fraser (FA members). Ian P. also noted that Ian F. was now doing volunteer work on an individual basis, primarily trimming hedges.

14.3. Visit by Finnish agricultural advisers: Richard Storton (RSPB), accompanied by Mick, took a group around the reserve on 14th October to illustrate the practice of environmental stewardship. They were biodiversity, nature management and water protection advisers from all over Finland. They seem to have a role similar to our Natural England adviser and were very interested in (and indeed impressed by) what we have been doing, and how.

14.4. Flora HLF project: feedback on public exhibition: The public exhibition at the end of September was very successful. The location in St Nicholas Arcades had the desired result of attracting a good attendance, including many people who were previously unaware of the nature reserve. It has generated several contacts, and a new leaflet produced for the event can be used for other purposes.

15. Standing items:

15.1. Arrangements: Glenys circulated a calendar that lists by month matters to be arranged, reviewed or noted at that FFOG meeting. **Meeting members** were asked to contact Glenys with any additions or changes. For this month, there is only one item on the calendar – a note to remind the graziers that the 1st December signals a change in cattle access (**Mick**). (They are allowed in Hay and Carr House Meadows for brief periods. They should be out of other fields – including School Pond – unless specifically permitted by FFOG because of problems with LGGS field. See also items 3 and 9.5.)

15.2. Financial control:

Item 8 – Andy Lee has invoiced £250 for the survey. A quote for the remedial work is expected shortly (**Ian**)

Item 9.6 - W&H Contracting has quoted £180 for cutting of bee/wildflower margin (**Ian**)

15.3. Organised events for notification to the FA: Jon Carter will be leading two bird walks starting from the Sunnyside Lane entrance to look and listen for resident species and recently arrived winter visitors on 10th November at 9.30am and 30th November at 8.00am. These have been advertised in the FA newsletter and on the website.

16. AOB: Guided walk for MA language students: Mick has been approached by the University, as in previous years, to see whether the Fairfield Association can provide a 'walk and talk' afternoon during November round the nature reserve for foreign MA students studying for English language teaching MAs. There may be as many as 30 students, each of whom will make a donation to the FA's funds. As before, they will be split into groups of 5 or 6, each of which requires a tutor. Anyone interested in helping was asked to contact **Mick**.

17. Date/place of next meetings: Thursday 4th December, Thursday 8th January both 7pm at Whitegates, Sunnyside Close

Ian Procter's Volunteer Items:

1st September 2014

One volunteer attended the meeting of Greenspaces Groups held at Greaves Park. This was a well attended meeting, around 17 people although I think 6 were from the local group. A tour of the Park and then a session on Health and Safety, Risk Assessment and Insurance. I made a note about a Conservation Volunteers insurance scheme and have informed the FA Chair but I think he

will be aware. Otherwise nothing of great interest on the theme although I think we are doing everything correctly.

Presentation by Paul Bullimore – see my reported meeting in the August report

2nd September 2014

Our contractor, David Hartley, mowed the two hay meadows and the West Field. Sent out email asking for volunteer assistance with loading bales.

5th September 2014

In the afternoon 9 volunteers assisted the contractors in loading the bales in the Hay and Carr House meadows and transporting them to the wrapping machine in the Gun Range. We then staffed the machine.

In the evening three volunteers doggedly worked the wrapper until we had completed wrapping 188 bales with another 12 or so oversized so stored unwrapped for bedding use.

This released the contractor to work on West Field but despite working into the night the rain came and the field is not cleared.

10th September 2014

A walk around Big Meadow and the School Pond to dig out the flowering ragwort. Just one bag so nearly there now although this Indian Summer might bring on some more.

5 bags had accumulated at the Shed so took them to the tip.

Running total 131 bags plus Cromwell Road 39

13th September 2014

The monthly Saturday volunteering session attracted 21 volunteers on a warm summery morning.

- Four protruding old stumps were removed from the apple tree section of the Orchard to make grass mowing safer.
- Orienteering post number 4 was re-instated after someone had removed it.
- The 'Don't pick' signs were taken down from the apple trees
- The nose pump was successfully trialled in the West Field. This included locating the supply pipe in Lucy Brook. This remains in place as does the stand, suitably chained to the fence.
- The pruning of the soft fruit hedge began. Note that this has not been done properly for some years and radical cut back is needed. Keith is also planting cuttings of red and blackcurrent and gooseberry to fill in the hedge next year.
- Considerable work was done trimming the Pads footpath hedge alongside Big Meadow. Further work is needed.
- Considerable work was done trimming the Fauna footpath hedge alongside the Grammar School field. Further work needed.
- Another section of the Fauna path edge was strimmed.
- Yellow rattle seed, collected from the Hay Meadow, was sown in Carr House Meadow in an area not yet colonised by this plant. Meadowsweet seed was collected in the Hay meadow and sown in the damp section near the south west corner. Both yellow rattle and meadowsweet seed was sown in a seedtray for planting out next year.

24th September 2014

As part of the preparation for the Flora Public Exhibition, two volunteers dug out wild flowers from the Flora field for wheelbarrow display in the Exhibition.

28th September 2014

The Exhibition has ended and the wild flowers were replanted alongside the gateway to the Shed patio. Not ideal given the shade but they might take and better than nettles!

3rd October 2014

Two volunteers installed the nose pump in the West Field ready for Fraser to induct the cows in its working. Fingers and noses crossed.

7th October 2014

What I hope is the last foray into Big Meadow to dig out flowering ragwort plants. Two smallish bags. Email and telephone conversation with Kate Jackson of Lancaster University Student Union Green Lancaster Group. Earlier in the year she asked us to send our insurance policy. This has now been reviewed by their insurers who have said that our procedure and policy is satisfactory and Green Lancaster volunteers do not have to come as an organised group with student leaders and their separate Risk Assessment and insurance. This means that students can come along each month (rather than the generally once a term in the past). Kate will promote our sessions and we should get a steady supply of volunteers. Other points:

- I need to speak to Darren Axe about borrowing tools.
- Ask the students who come along whether they want to go on our email list and so get Jonathan's emails.
- Tell them they can still claim their bus fares from Green Lancaster
- Let Kate know of any 'student champions'
- This is still a link between us and Green Lancaster, not its fragmentation.

8th October 2014

Four Fairfield volunteers joined the hedge laying course organised by Lancashire County Council at Crook O'Lune. A good day to get us back into the way of things and there's always something new to learn!

The session booked for the 9th is cancelled due to the weather forecast.

11th October 2014

32 volunteers turn out on a bright autumn morning. This number includes 11 students from Green Lancaster under the new procedure described above. Most of them want to go onto our email list so I am hopeful that some of them will come again. The numbers also include 5 new local people but, perversely, only one of these is from the eight we recently 'signed up' at the public exhibition. Perhaps the remainder will come in the future!

- We removed self seeded saplings in the Oak Circle and planted wild flowers supplied by Fiona Sturgess of Friends of Storey Gardens.
- We completed the radical pruning of the soft fruit hedge under Keith's expert guidance.
- After considerable effort and trial digs we located the drain in the West Field nearer the new and rather dry scrape. Graham will return and block the drain.

- We experimented with removing the staples holding the fence alongside the east hedge of the West Field. After several tries Philip supplied a spike which held the key to loosening them. Ian will try to get down there to continue before the Hedge Working Party starts work.
- The hedge alongside the Fauna path adjoining the Grammar School Field was trimmed back further and the brash carted away.
- An area of self seeded blackthorn near the Stump Circle was cut back and the brash cleared away. The stumps were left for a second go as they were rather larger than anticipated. Hopefully the ramsons and daffodils can thrive there next spring.
- Nettles were cut back in the area to the south of the Towneley path in preparation for a visit by a Beaver group tomorrow. Debris carted away.
- Long grass, nettles and other invasives were cut back in three areas toward the southern end of the Orchard and the debris removed to habitat piles.
- Part of the Pads path hedge at the northern end of the Orchard, laid last summer, was trimmed back and cleared of nettles and brambles

16th October 2014

Two volunteers attended a further hedge laying course at Crook O'Lune (above).

22nd October 2014

Three volunteers attended a further hedge laying course at Broadgate Farm near Garstang. Over the three sessions noted, five FA volunteers have renewed their hedge laying skills.

24th October 2014

Three volunteers undertook preliminary work for the Hedge Working Party, along the east hedge of the West Field. A section of the wire fence alongside the hedge was removed and the staples in the rest of the fence loosened. The HWP can now get on with actual hedging.

October 2014

Ian F has begun working in his own time, primarily on hedge maintenance work trimming and tidying the hedges. This is after two induction sessions with the Volunteer Organiser. This is after consultation with the Chair of FOG and subject to FOG ratification.

27th October 2014

Two volunteers accepted an invitation from Richard Storton (RSPB) on behalf of the *Morecambe Bay Limestones and Wetlands Nature Improvement Area* to a demonstration of a Soil Spreading machine at Cote Walls Farm, Preesall. This machine is used to cut shallow channels in wet areas to encourage wading birds. It has been very successful in Norfolk. As Richard pointed out it would have cut the channel in our West Field very efficiently and may be useful in the future for extending or renewing such channels.

We wondered if it might be used to flatten our poached areas and the ruts left by last winter's contractors but discussion suggested these were actually good for the birds we are trying to encourage such as lapwings. Which once again left us puzzled as to why poaching etc is discouraged by NE?????



29th October 2014

7 volunteers attended the first meeting of the Hedge Working Party (HWP) on a sunny morning. The Site Specific Risk Assessment was agreed and a start made on the east hedge of the West Field. Good progress.