

**Fairfield Association**  
**Flora, Fauna and Orchard Management Group [FFOG]**  
**Minutes of the Meeting held on Thursday 29th January 2015 7.00 pm**  
**at Whitegates, Sunnyside Close**

**Present:** Graham Brandwood, Dave Brookes, David Elliott, Glenys Ferguson (Mins), Tony Finn, Ian Fraser, Oliver Fulton, Sue Nieduszynska (Chair), Ian Procter, Hilary Short, Mick Short, Chris Workman

The meeting started by thanking Mick for his efforts and achievements as Chair since the inception of FOG. He was presented with a painting of Flora.

1. **Apologies:** Andrew Brennand, Helen Hicks, Anne Murphy, Rebecca Procter, Louisa Reynolds
2. **Minutes of last meeting:** Approved.
3. **Matters arising from Minutes:**
  - 3.1. **Outcome of defibrillator grant:** Grant application has been successful (see 15.2).
  - 3.2. **Mower purchase:** Andrew has been invoiced. Delivery is due shortly.
  - 3.3. **Arable arrangements for 2015:** An agreement, worded as per last year, has been signed by Neil Sutcliffe and will be forwarded to Mick by Richard Storton. As yet, there is no information as to what crop he will plant or what herbicide he will use should it be necessary. Recording problems mean that Neil cannot name the herbicide used last year, however he has given assurances that it complied with Natural England's requirements. **Mick** and Richard will continue to pursue Neil for further detail of his plans for 2015. Dave suggested that it might be appropriate next time to have a contract that covers a number of years, or renews automatically unless terminated by either party. **Tony** and **Sue** will arrange a visit to Neil's farm.

Mick broke the news that Richard is unlikely to continue in his current role with the RSPB. Before he leaves, he has committed to organising the weed-wiping (item 8.8), finishing the installation of the eel-friendly pipe and sourcing the bird-friendly seed for the arable margin. Richard's support, enthusiasm and expertise will be sorely missed by the FA. The implications of the loss of this key adviser will be discussed at the next meeting (**Glenys** to add to Agenda).

4. **Campfires in Pony Wood:** Since the last meeting, further advice has been gathered from Gail Armstrong (specifically re bats), tree surgeon Andy Lee, and Richard Storton. Oliver has also found some interesting information on the Woodland Trust website (<https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/publications/2002/10/urban-woodland-guide-1/>). This will all help inform future discussions about public access to Pony Wood. However, Sue reminded the meeting that the current discussion was restricted to determining the time of day and year (and location) for this summer's campfires to minimise the impact on wildlife. Guidance from Gail and Richard on this is that late June/July/August (i.e. after birds have reared their first brood) is the best, and dawn/dusk should be avoided. **Graham** agreed to hold his Forest Schools campfires during this period. (**Tony** also confirmed that – as last year – school visits to Pony Wood would be made at this time.) In terms of location, Andy Lee noted that he had been involved in the selection of the current campfire site, which had been chosen specifically because it was clear of both canopy and tree roots. Richard's suggestion that it

be moved nearer to the Long Pads path was rejected. It would interfere with the development of the newly planted saplings and could be more attractive to unauthorised users.

It was agreed that procedures for dealing with any vandalism and unauthorised use of Pony Wood and the campfire circle should be established (**Glenys** to add for discussion at next FFOG). In preparation, **Mick** and **Sue** will consult with local residents who are in a position to watch the area.

The experiences of this summer will be reviewed in September/October (**Glenys** to note for Agenda).

- 5. Wildflower development:** A discussion document including recommendations was circulated. It pulls together advice and information from Graeme Skelcher's July 2014 Meadow Survey (available on the FA website), Martin Sherlock's 2014 surveys of Pony Wood and Hay/Carr House Meadows and some further advice from Helen Rawlinson (Grassland Adviser, Cumbria Wildlife Trust).

Graeme Skelcher's report charts a distinct improvement in the state of Hay and Carr House Meadows since 2011 to the extent that they can now be described as 'semi-improved grassland' (an NE 'feature' for these fields). However, they fall short of meeting Graeme's criteria for a lowland meadow and even further short of the NE success indicator that requires at least 4 species categorised as G06 frequent and 2 occasional. Despite sowing seeds in both 2012 and 2013 containing a diverse mix of G06, the only one recorded is yellow rattle, although this is now 'abundant'. NE also sets an objective that there should be more than 15 species per square metre; Graeme's survey lists no more than 5 species in any quadrat. Martin's two surveys present a similar picture.

In discussion, it was agreed not to intervene with further sowing in the meadows this year. A good bank of seed has already been sown, and it takes a long time for the full effects to be seen. Moreover, with the change of contractor, the timing of hay-making should be more closely under the control of the FA and should take place considerably earlier this year (soon after 15th July) to the benefit of the meadow flowers. So the yellow rattle will be given more time to do its work of creating conditions for other wildflowers to thrive. Collecting yellow rattle seed and distributing it to those parts of the meadows where it is less well established will continue and some local seed will be collected during the summer (**Glenys** to ask Ruth Haigh to appeal for a collector).

In Pony Wood, as expected, Martin's survey reveals an absence of wildflowers, with the exception of some scattered, native bluebells. In contrast, NE's success indicator requires at least 2 of bluebell, primrose, ramsons, wood anemone, wood-sorrel (plus dog's mercury in extension) at least occasional. However, the meeting agreed that there is time to give this area more chance to regenerate. (In regard to this, Chris noted the importance of preventing grass invading current bare patches.) Intervention will therefore be deferred, with the exception of small scale additions. For instance, **Oliver** may have a source of native wood anemone, and **Ian** will consult the gardener at the Storey.

As regards the margins around the arable crop, the bird friendly mix (especially the fodder radish) has proved highly attractive to winter visitors, such as linnets and fieldfare. **Glenys** was asked to contract Ruth to give publicity to this success, drawing on items from the blog on the FA website. It has been queried whether the areas planted with the margin mixes comply with NE's requirements. Dave's response was that they are at least twice as large as required. Non-native species in these mixes are not a concern for NE. Phacelia, for instance, is considered non-invasive and so unlikely to spread into the meadows. A lot of the bee

friendly mix was left over from last year. **Ian** will arrange for more to be sown by the beehives and along the Aldcliffe Road bank during March/April.

The extended monitoring regime adopted in 2014 will be repeated, with some tweaking of approaches and timings, and also further effort to increase participation in the monitoring process. It was agreed to commission Graeme Skelcher again for the July meadow survey (before the now-earlier haymaking), but to establish a date with him well in advance to aid publicity (**Sue**). **Chris** suggested that monitoring and recording could be helped by creating a series of fixed point photographs covering the whole of the reserve, taken at fortnightly intervals. He will discuss his ideas with Martin Sherlock and approach one of the FA's regular photographers.

6. **John Muir Awards:** Graham proposed that the FA becomes a member of the John Muir Trust and, as a result of this membership, begins to promote and offer volunteers the opportunity to gain volunteering/conservation awards through the Trust. The cost to the Association would be £60 a year. There are three different levels of award but each one consists of four challenges: through their volunteering involvement participants would *discover* a wild place (the FA nature reserve), *explore* it, do something tangible to *conserve* it and *share* their experiences. **Graham** has offered to co-ordinate. The meeting agreed that this would be an excellent way of encouraging and developing volunteers and recommended that the FA accept Graham's proposal. (**Glenys** to ask Andrew to add to the next FA agenda.)
7. **Arrangements for future meetings:** The Trustees have taken the opportunity of the change in Chair to review the operation of FFOG meetings. Their decision is to switch to meetings every two months, possibly with a rotating Chair, as a trial until the 2015 AGM. The Trustees reasoning is that the work of FFOG is becoming more routine and those in key roles now have greater expertise and experience. Sue clarified that the decision-making mechanism between meetings would be through the Chair. There was some concern expressed, but everyone agreed to give it a try. On a practical note, **Ian** will set up a sub-group to identify and agree tasks for volunteer sessions. This will include the Chair of FFOG, the Volunteer Organiser, the person responsible for the HLS monthly inspection and two senior volunteers (Ian Fraser and Mick). [Revised arrangements for the monitoring inspections were made following the meeting. **Graham** will continue to inspect on a monthly basis, but with reports combined for the meeting. Any minor works required will be notified directly to Ian, with the Chair contacted about major problems.]
8. **Management:**
  - 8.1. **Rural Payments Agency remapping and field numbers:** Dave has now remapped the main field boundaries and the RPA has issued a revised list of field numbers, which supersede those in the NE Agreement. Still to do is to take Pony Wood + extension out of Flora field, tweak the Paddock boundaries, the Fauna path, make all the ponds as ineligible features, potentially separate the Hay meadow and Upper Sowerholme, and add the future Flora path (**Dave**).
  - 8.2. **Improvement of the Long Pads path and creation of the Flora path:** Georgina Peacock (landscape architect) is currently revising the draft proposals in the light of comments. Richard Storton has advised creating a hedge to minimise disturbance to birds in Flora Field. It was considered that this might not be necessary where the route of the path is within Pony Wood, which masks people's silhouettes. The link from the Aldcliffe Road entry point up to Pony Wood is more exposed. So too is the apex of Pony Wood, but this also provides key viewpoints. These could be preserved by

creating gaps in the hedge and installing benches. **Dave** will ask Georgina to add this hedging into the planning application, with a note to indicate that it might not be planted in its entirety.

Dave has now completed the application to the Canal and River Trust for the creation of an access onto the towpath opposite the point where the Flora path will join Aldcliffe Road. He will assume that the concessionary fee applies and that there is no need to pay an undertaking, unless notified otherwise.

- 8.3. Concessionary Path, LNR designation and management plan:** Ann Wood (Lancaster City Council) and Tarja Wilson (Lancashire County Council) are now working steadily through the processes for making the Fauna footpath concessionary and designating Fauna as a local nature reserve. **Oliver** has agreed to write the required management plan once LNR status is awarded.
- 8.4. Edenbreck boundary:** Along with the papers relating to item 8.3, Ann Wood will be sending to Council proposals for the transfer of part of the land currently leased to the FA to the occupants of Edenbreck Cottage. Ann met a group of FFOG members by the storage building on 15th December to identify the boundary. To ensure adequate turning space and provide maintenance access to the storage building, the boundary line will come straight off the gateposts (into the Paddock) for 3m and then diagonally back to the storage building. Ann's plan has now been received and the area measured. A temporary post and wire fence will be installed by a working party of Volunteers (**Ian** to arrange and **Mick** to inform the occupants of Edenbreck Cottage).
- 8.5. Tree Surgeon's progress:** Ian received a quote from Andy Lee on 11th December, which he was authorised to accept by FA Trustees. Andy has been in contact with Maxine Knagg (Tree Protection Officer) regarding the work in Little Wood, although no formal decision has yet been received. She is excited by the presence of live elm trees and has requested cuttings in the hope that they are resistant to Dutch Elm disease. Andy should be starting work very soon. **Ian** will ask Andy whether he can provide some replacement hardwood stumps for the Orchard circle.
- 8.6. Single Payment Scheme entitlements:** Clear advice has now been received. The FA's objectives and the very small percentage of annual income derived from farming mean that an application for these entitlements is currently unlikely to be successful. No further action.
- 8.7. Outstanding Natural England Matters:** The size of the White Park herd is now compliant with the NE Agreement. How to manage the grass in West field during the early summer is yet to be resolved. The graziers will not split the herd as prescribed by NE, so the White Park cattle will not be in until 1st July. There are three potential solutions:
- a) bring in 3 cattle (which do not have to be heritage) from another source from 1st April to 30 June
  - b) cut the grass as soon as permitted (after 1st July) and sell the crop
  - c) get NE to vary its prescription to permit single day mob grazing

**Mick** to discuss with the FA's NE Adviser (and also prompt him again about soil testing).

Last year, work started on drafting a grazing agreement for the fields in Flora. This now needs to be finalised (**Mick**).

**8.8. Weed wiping:** Richard is making the arrangements and will inform **Mick**, who will set up a rota of volunteers to act as sidesmen.

**8.9. Resurfacing of footpaths:** Dave has been researching costs, and discovered that the Volunteers from the Prince's Trust are looking for jobs. He has met with two of their leaders, who have shown an interest in upgrading some of the paths in the Orchard, but not the Fauna footpath. Whilst they will provide free labour, there will be other associated costs and their productivity is unclear. These matters will be clarified at the next meeting, which will involve **Ian** and **Mick**. Contractors will be needed to carry out whatever work is not done by the Prince's Trust.

## **9. Monitoring:**

**9.1. Maintenance inspection:** Graham's full report available. No problems noted.

**9.2. HLS habitat inspection:** Full report available. The first calf of 2015 was born on 25th January. To allow her mother access to water, without subjecting the baby to the quagmire in the Gun Range, the gate to School Pond has been opened. **Mick** will discuss other solutions with the graziers, including installing a water trough in the Paddock.

**9.3. Moth trap and bat detector:** **Sue** will pass these new acquisitions to **Ian** to be held in the storage building.

**9.4. Annual review of Fauna cycling and dogs policy:** No additional cycling permits have been issued this year (the total remains at 5). The level of unauthorised cycling appears much the same. Some months ago, Andrew added a sign to the noticeboard warning of substantial fines for dog fouling and requesting dogs be kept under control. The number of dogs off leads (a significant number of which run freely often at quite a distance from the owner) seems little changed. However, there have been no reports of dogs getting into the fields in the last twelve months, and the amount of dog poo seems relatively small. No action.

**10. Volunteer activities:** **Ian**'s reports for December and January are attached at the end. The Hedge Working Party is making very good progress. The Orchard hedge is on track for completion by mid-February, after which attention will be turned to tree management in the Orchard implementing the plan agreed two years ago. A blitz on the brambles is a key task identified for the upcoming Volunteer session. As previously authorised, **Ian** will soon be hiring a contractor to chip the brush. He will obtain quotes from three sources, one of whom also has the equipment required to flail the hedge in West Field that runs along Lucy Brook (which is not practicable to lay).

**Ian** attended another meeting of the Greenspaces Group Forum on 26th January. He gleaned some interesting information relating to the planning and protection of local green spaces, which he has passed to Andrew.

Ian and Ken have carried out a detailed survey of the 30 gates on the nature reserve. All the problems identified are capable of being resolved by the two of them, so there is no need to bring in contractors. All the gates that need a lock have one.

11. **DBS checks:** Successfully completed.
12. **Finalising the Flora HLF project:** Mick and Hilary have almost finished completing the form on the HLF website. The FA Treasurer is gathering together the receipts. An evaluation report needs to be submitted, and **Hilary** will email those who had responsibility for an aspect of the project to request information as necessary. All the project money had to be spent by the end of January but the deadline for the report is the end of February (the grant expiry date) and even this date is flexible with good reason.
13. **Hedge Laying training:** This event, to be held on 27th-28th February, offers an excellent opportunity for FA volunteers to gain and develop skills and has been publicised by notices and email.
14. **Recent developments:** None
15. **Standing items:**
  - 15.1. **Arrangements:** A list of matters to be arranged/set in train during the next two months was circulated prior to the meeting. **Ian** will action February items 2, 3 and 5 and March 6 & 7. **Sue** will commission the Pony Wood flora survey and also the breeding bird survey (it was agreed to approach Dan Haywood again and ask him to cover Flora too). **Graham** has barley straw refreshment in hand. Ordering the bird seed mix for the arable margin is also in hand, through Richard Storton (**Mick**). It was agreed that mowing the wildflower and bee friendly margins was unnecessary as it was cut late last autumn. **Sue** (liaising with the UCLAN archaeologist) and **Mick** (arable farmer) have already started considering arrangements for fieldwalking. It was agreed that the priority is to establish whether it is feasible to fieldwalk prior to ploughing given the amount of growth in Flora Field (**Sue** to arrange a site visit).
  - 15.2. **Financial control:**
    - Item 3.1* – £500 grant received from Lancaster Community Fund to be used, with top up of up to £300 from FA, to purchase defibrillator (**Hilary**)
    - Item 3.3* – approx £100 for seed to resow the bird friendly margin (**Mick**)
    - Item 8.2* – £150 + VAT for application to Canal & River Trust (**Dave**)
    - Item 8.5* – Quote received from Tree Surgeon for £1440 for work on the old sycamore in the Orchard (no. 534), a beech and sycamore by the Towneley entrance (532, 533) the oak by the Cromwell Road gate (616) and felling 10 ash with canker and two dead elms in Little Wood. (**Ian**)

### **15.3. Organised events for notification to the FA:**

- Fieldwalking in Flora Field, possibly before next FFOG.
- Invertebrate survey cum bioblitz Thursday 4th June and Thursday 30th July, both early evening. Organised by Chris Workman, with North Lancs Naturalists Group. To be badged as 'Go Wild' events.

**16. AOB:** None

**17. Date/place of next meetings:** Thursday 2nd April, at 7pm at Whitegates, Sunnyside Close.

## **Ian Procter's Volunteer Items:**

### 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2014

Seven volunteers attended the Hedge Working Party (HWP) and made good progress. We came upon three birds' nests, the first we have found in the east hedge of West Field after laying about 150 metres of hedge. A photo is posted on the blog. We also dug out a sample of the reeds growing in the hedge and stored for replanting in the Sowerholme area. This will be a test as to whether we can transplant them.

### 6<sup>th</sup> December 2014

The weekend meeting of the HWP attracted 8 volunteers including 4 people who don't attend Wednesdays. These included one experienced hedger and three novices so a useful occasion. More progress made.

We discovered a 'geocache' stashed in the hedge which we replaced.

### 8<sup>th</sup> December 2014

A volunteer attended the meeting of the Lancaster Greenspaces Forum on the theme of Volunteer Training. 11 people attended from about 7 groups including people hoping to establish a 'Friends of Miss Worley's Field' on the Ridge. Ideas exchanged and themes for next year explored.

### 10<sup>th</sup> December 2014

Three volunteers joined the HWP on a blustery day. Despite a couple of hailstorms more progress made on the east hedge of West Field.

### 12<sup>th</sup> December 2014

Two volunteers blocked the leak in one of the Flora ponds near Aldcliffe Road. The leak was very obvious - the scraping out had broken the field drain and the water was running down. So hopefully a simple block but our experience in the West Field augurs caution.

### 13<sup>th</sup> December 2014

The Saturday volunteer session attracted 15 volunteers on a cold but sunny winter's morning.

- The remaining stumps and roots were removed from the patch of self seeded blackthorn in the Orchard. The ground was flattened out prior to grass seeding in the spring.

- Those parts of the Orchard mowing area with a potential for stumps and obstacles were double checked so as not to damage the mower.
- The hedge near the Orchard / Fauna crossroad was cleared on bramble and extra saplings planted.
- The saplings planted in the lane going north from the Orchard were tidied with treeguards and canes replaced and straightened.
- Two non-native plants were removed from the Orchard
- A start was made in clearing self seeded thorns near the middle Orchard entrance ready for the Wassailing bonfire.
- Some of the self-seeded ash in Upper Sowerholme was dug out. More to do.
- The self-seeded alder near Alder Pond were dug out and dragged to the fence. Not sure what to do with them as they all have healthy root balls. Any ideas for where alder might go?
- The reed roots extracted from the east hedge of the West Field were planted in a marked area in the wet corner of the Hay Meadow. We will check whether these thrive with a view to taking more next year.
- A good proportion of the track from Sunnyside Lane to the Orchard was cleared of leaves. More to do.
- A good start was made to pruning the apple trees.
- The willow tree leaning on a pear tree near the middle entrance was pruned back.

#### 15<sup>th</sup> December 2014

Two volunteers repaired five bird boxes in Pony Wood and Little Wood. Their lids did not fit snugly so a catch was fitted to each.

#### 16<sup>th</sup> December 2014

Two volunteers surveyed all 30 gates in the Nature Reserve to check for damage and poor fit. A report will be made to FFOG. We noted that the sealing of the leak (see 15<sup>th</sup> Dec above) had worked and the pond was full of water.

#### 17<sup>th</sup> December 2014

The HWP attracted 10 volunteers on a dull morning but it stayed dry and good progress was made. Depending upon numbers, one more session should complete the east hedge of West Field.

#### 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2015

The first New Year meeting of the Hedge Working Party (HWP) attracted 6 volunteers, 5 being 'Wednesday regulars'. We completed the laying of the east hedge of West Field, the first priority for this winter. We also cleared away some of the excess barbed wire but that still leaves further tidying, gapping up, covering the elders and sycamores with black plastic and the chipping of the brash. The first three jobs are on the agenda for the regular volunteer sessions whilst the latter will be done at the end of the season.



## 7<sup>th</sup> January 2015

For the first time in three winters we had to cancel the HWP due to adverse weather conditions, heavy and persistent rain making for unsafe conditions with wet tools and cold hands.

Ian met with Reuben Neville of Lancashire Wildlife Trust and passed on the spare oak and silver birch saplings left over from our recent planting. Reuben also inspected the alder rootballs we took out of Big Meadow and can replant them at Heysham but he will have to return with a trailer to collect. This was agreed.

## 10<sup>th</sup> January 2015

17 volunteers braved a windy morning for our monthly volunteer session. Fortunately it stayed dry although those in more exposed locations were a bit chilly.

- We finished clearing the leaf debris on the track from Sunnyside Lane to the Orchard.
- We finished removing the self seeded ash and other trees in Upper Sowerholme.
- We finished clearing self seeded thorns from the Wassailing bonfire site and cleared away all the resulting brash.
- Branches from broom and gorse bushes were pinned down to test whether we could renew them. Very much experimental.
- We cut the ivy growing around trees in the Stump Circle area. Still more to do.
- Encroaching bramble in the Stump Circle area were cut back.
- We continued the winter pruning of the apple trees. This will continue for some time.
- Hedge saplings (hawthorn, blackthorn, hazel and rowan) were planted in gaps in the east hedge of West Field. Still more to do.
- Black plastic was placed over elder and sycamore stumps in this hedge to stop them re-growing.
- Fencing posts were moved from Pony Wood to the Shed for use in the new fence there.
- We moved spare and scrap wire (barbed and netting) from the West Field to the Shed.
- The nose pump stand and its pipe were moved to the Shed.
- Decent timber recycled from the hedge line was moved from the West Field. There is more to get.
- Tree guards were retrieved from the field adjoining West Field (mystery how they got there) and replaced insofar as the saplings were accessible.
- A small fencing repair was carried out on the west side of West Field.

Before the session started I had met with a volunteer who was no longer able to participate in our routine activities but still wanted to make a contribution. We had agreed that he could borrow one of our litter tongs and engage in litter picking in his own time and at his own pace. He thus joins a growing number of individuals who give their time outside our 'official' volunteer sessions. These include:

- Hedge trimming and maintenance
- Machine maintenance and tool sharpening
- Ragwort digging even in winter
- Upkeep of FA land adjacent to people's house

These monthly records do not record in detail these activities but this gives me the opportunity to note them and thank the individuals concerned.

12<sup>th</sup> January 2015

Put up three more shelves in the Shed to store machines which have become too inaccessible toward the back with increased amounts of stuff to store.

14<sup>th</sup> January 2015

Despite the first light covering of snow of the winter 6 volunteers agreed the Site Specific Risk Assessment for the Orchard / Pads footpath hedge and made a good start.

We also finished off planting saplings in the east hedge of West Field and cut off low slung branches of the Orchard apple trees which have obstructed the new mowing regime.

21<sup>st</sup> January 2015

Seven volunteers formed the HWP and made good progress with the Orchard / Pads hedge, indeed apart from some tidying and staking we have finished to the middle entrance.

We also trimmed back the section of hedge we laid two years ago which had grown substantially in the interval.