

Fairfield Association
Flora, Fauna and Orchard Management Group [FFOG]
Minutes of the Meeting held on Thursday 14th January 2016 7.00 pm
at Whitegates, Sunnyside Close

Present: Graham Brandwood, Dave Brookes, Glenys Ferguson (Mins), Sue Nieduszynska (Chair), Ian Procter, Hilary Short, Mick Short, Chris Workman

1. **Apologies:** David Elliott, Tony Finn, Ian Fraser, Oliver Fulton
2. **Minutes of last meeting:** In relation to items 3.7 and 8.9, the Minutes failed to note that grazing-related matters would be discussed further once the Grazing Agreement has been finalised. (**Glenys** to add item to future Agenda.)
3. **Matters arising from Minutes:**
 - 3.1. **Herbicide spraying course:** There has been no reply to Hilary's letter requesting a charity rate. **Ian** needs to book places soon to have qualified people in time for the ragwort season. **Hilary** will phone Myerscough College and also try for a grant from Lancaster Green Spaces ASAP. If these initiatives are unsuccessful, it was accepted that the FA will have to pay the full fee.
 - 3.2. **Maintenance plans for Long Pads path:** The proposal that the FA maintains the path through the growing season (but only on a year by year basis) with council work at the end of the season has now been agreed with Lancashire CC. The FA has been asked to contact the Public Rights of Way Officer at the start of the season (**Glenys** to add to Arrangements Calendar).
 - 3.3. **Dead sycamore & horse chestnut in Pony Wood:** The Tree Protection Officer has given permission to fell these two trees. The tree surgeon will carry out the job shortly.
 - 3.4. **Dock control:** Oliver's researches have not identified an easy solution. Docks must not be allowed to seed. **Ian** will add to the list for spraying.
4. **West Field grazing:** Both the graziers and the FA have been keen to move the cattle into the West Field where the grass has remained quite lush into winter. Following confirmation from Ben Hibbins, Natural England Adviser, that the FA does have the flexibility to allow the cattle onto the reserve fields in the winter if considered appropriate, the graziers were given permission to move them in to West Field on 19th December. However, they had to be taken out again on 31st December because the west boundary has yet to establish as a strong stock-proof barrier. **Ian**, **Graham** and **Mick** will meet on site to assess whether adding a double breast wire along the more-recently planted parts of the hedge would be adequate.
5. **Revised regime for mowing the margins:** Natural England has confirmed that the floristically enhanced grass margin must be cut twice a year: after 15th July and after 31 August (there are no 'before' dates). **Mick** will contact the arable farmer to establish whether he is willing and able do the first mowing (including moving the cuttings into the stubble). **Ian** will then approach a contractor to quote for either the final or both cuts.
6. **Review of cycling and dogs policy:** The extent of unauthorised cycling appears little changed and continues to generate periodic complaints. The consensus is that dog mess has been increasing recently. It was decided that volunteers would spend a day monitoring

and talking to dog walkers (possibly in April). **Graham** offered to devise a survey with 'challenging' questions (draft for March FFOG). Re-contacting the Dog Warden and moving the notices on the Fauna path to more prominent locations are two measures that could be implemented, but after the survey.

7. **Management:**

7.1. Improvement of the Long Pads path and creation of the Flora path: The FA's application is still going through the planning process.

7.2. Resurfacing of footpaths: No progress (**Dave**). Ian noted that grass is starting to colonise those paths that were resurfaced last year. The three options are to a) accept that they will eventually become green paths (not push- or wheelchair friendly) b) use a 'flamethrower' (effectiveness and safety considerations) c) spot spray (effective, but against existing FA policy in the Orchard). Item to be referred to FA meeting for decision (**Hilary**).

7.3. Local Nature Reserve designation: Oliver's second draft of the document required by Natural England was circulated. The meeting endorsed the general approach. **Meeting members** were asked to contact Oliver directly with specific comments, corrections, queries etc. An appropriate map is outstanding. **Hilary** will eventually be able to supply one (see item 12.1).

7.4. Arable update: If the arable farmer is open to a longer-term arrangement (**Mick**), **Dave** will adjust the wording of the arable agreement to extend it until the end of the FA's Natural England Agreement. It will incorporate a date by which either party must give notice if they do not want it to roll over into the next year. It was noted that the farmer has not provided details of any spraying undertaken during 2015.

7.5. Pony grazing arrangements: The arrangement for Exmoor ponies has fallen through. The FA has instead been given permission by Natural England for two Fell ponies (a heavier and hungrier, northern, rare breed). Ascot, a 3-year-old gelding, and Bee, a 1-year old mare, arrived in Big Meadow on 23rd December for a two month trial and have settled in well. Passers-by have been appreciative, indeed enthusiastic. The ponies are being checked on a daily basis by a rota of volunteers, co-ordinated by Oliver. They have been given training, added to the volunteers' register, and issued with written instructions and safety advice, both pony-specific and the generic safety advice for volunteers entering the fields. Notices have been posted, including emergency phone numbers. Unfortunately the mild weather means that there is still attractive grass, so the ponies have yet to embark on their required task of eating down the rushes! They have also developed a taste for the field gates. To deter them from damaging the gates further, 'Cribbox', a harmless repellent, has been applied. Notices have been posted to warn passersby to avoid touching the gates as it is smelly and hard to remove from skin and clothing.

7.6. Gates between Hay and Carr House Meadows: The contractor's quote and David Hartley's fee have been approved by the FA. Work is expected to be done in February. The contractor has indicated that closing the Fauna footpath should not be necessary.

8. Monitoring: Maintenance and HLS habitat inspections: Graham's full reports available. There is no evidence of any further leak in the Flora Ponds. West Scrape is currently very

extensive. How long it remains will be a test of the success of the attempts to block its drains. (Graham noted that Richard Storton (adviser) expects it to dry out in summer.) **Graham** will carry out Richard's advice to drag vegetation out of Anna's Pool and the ditches in Upper Sowerholme before the NE's window for such work closes on 31 January. (This work to be added to the Arrangements Calendar, **Glenys**.)

9. Volunteer activities:

9.1. Volunteer activities: Ian's full reports for November and December are attached. Sue, as Chair, recorded her thanks to the volunteers who have continued to turn out in good numbers throughout the appalling weather at the end of 2015.

It was agreed that the saplings, stakes etc required for hedging work for the rest of this season could be purchased (**Ian**).

Ian is concerned about chipping the hedging brash. It is likely to be more expensive than last year and the high volume of bramble incorporated may deter a contractor from quoting. It was agreed to explore the option of burning. This is permitted by Natural England provided it does not damage any features of archaeological or historic interest, is more than ten metres from tree canopies and not on an area managed for its wildlife habitat interest. The proposed location – in Flora Field, between the Long Pads hedge and the bird friendly margin – seems to satisfy these conditions. but this should be confirmed with Ben Hibbins (**Sue** to contact). Fires would be kept small, set on corrugated iron sheeting and done as the work progresses rather than at the end of the season. If this is not approved, then **Ian** will seek quotes for chipping.

9.2. Associate Volunteer Scheme: Ian's draft briefing document for new volunteers who will be making their contribution in their own time rather than in a formal session was circulated. **Meeting Members** were asked to contact Ian directly with any comments or suggested changes. Ian is encouraged that the initial advertising of the scheme has attracted four responses, and from people who do not usually attend formal sessions. Josh Gifford has been added to the Fields Access List. **Ian** will include a reference to the Associate Volunteer Scheme on his various notices, and continue to raise awareness of the scheme when opportunities arise.

9.3. Buffet for Volunteers: This will be held in the bar area at *Nice* at the Storey Institute on Thursday 4th February. Expected price is £8.95 per head, money collected on the night. Menu will include a high proportion of vegetarian items. **Sue** will advertise again for participants, noting that the event is open to current, past and future volunteers, plus their partners and is not confined to those whose volunteering involves the physical tasks on the reserve. Numbers must be confirmed a week before..

10. Standing items:

10.1. Arrangements: **Mick** will check the amount required and place an order for the seed to resow the bird friendly margin. **Ian** has the tasks of marking out the beetle banks in anticipation of ploughing and shredding the hedging brash (item 9.1) in hand.

10.2. Financial control:

Item 7.5 – estimated cost for 2 ponies until March 30 (14 weeks) around £275.

Item 7.6 – total expenditure on installation of new gates expected to be £1328.

Item 7.6 – Ian anticipates spending up to £200 on hedging materials

Keith Taylor is soon to place an order for the 4 replacement fruit trees (*FFOG September 2015, item 3.2*). Anticipated cost around £100.

David Elliott is keen to arrange a service for the new mower in anticipation of the start of the grass cutting season. A price of £150 including VAT has been quoted by the supplier, who will collect. Expenditure approved.

Costs of herbicide training course (*item 3.1*) still unknown.

Dave has produced a helpful and reassuring spreadsheet comparing estimated annual spending commitments against projected income. After paying for regular items, it appears there is a comfortable surplus for unexpected matters and development of the reserve. **Meeting Members** were asked to notify Dave directly of any additions or changes.

10.3. Organised events for notification to the FA: None.

- 11. Preparations for special FFOG meeting:** This meeting, scheduled for 11th February, will follow a different format. It will take one habitat of the reserve at a time and consider the progress, possibilities, any issues and threats. Separate briefing papers (ideally one page summary) will be produced, drawing on monitoring reports and own knowledge:

1. Meadows (**Oliver**)
2. Wetland, in particular Upper Sowerholme (**Graham**)
3. Woodland (**Ian N.** and **Ian P.**)
4. Arable (**Sue** and **Mick**)

The task of the meeting will be a) to approve the reports which will then provide an overview of the reserve at this time and b) to agree action which should enable the taking of a rather longer view. It was agreed to confine the focus of this meeting to Flora and Fauna. The Orchard and wildlife corridors are topics for future consideration, if the exercise proves successful,

The aim is to circulate the briefing papers a week before the meeting. To aid preparation, **Glenys** will send out a list of monitoring reports that have already been issued during 2015, as well as some additional material. **Glenys** will approach Keith Taylor to provide a short report on the success of the bee hives in Flora Field. **Ian N.** and **Ian P.** have recently inspected the nestboxes and are writing up the results and **Chris** is finalising a report on last summer's Bioblitz.

Chris will provide a link to the photographic record of the reserve held on the FA website. This now holds five sets of photographs, but remains 'hidden' until there is a suitable map that can be used to pinpoint the locations of each view and provide clickable access to the relevant photographs. (**Hilary** is commissioning an aerial photo of the reserve. This will provide the basis for an appropriate map – also for the LNR documentation, item 7.3.)

12. AOB:

- 12.1. Soil test results analysis:** Chris circulated his analysis of the results of the tests carried out by Ben Hibbins in Hay and Carr House Meadows (*FFOG 12 November item 8.10*) as well as a generic explanatory document. His main conclusion is that it will

need several years of the current management regime to change the fertility from that of a semi-improved pasture to allow further diversification of the meadow flora. The detailed results will be used to inform the discussion of meadows at the special FFOG meeting (item 11). Chris has concerns about the methodology adopted in these tests. **Sue** to follow this up with Natural England.

12.2. Rush cutting around ponds: One of the recommendations from Richard's Storton's visit in November is that the rushes around the ponds are cut back to increase their visibility. This would have the added benefit of generating cuttings which could be spread across the Gun Range to reduce poaching when the cattle are fed here during the winter. It was agreed that strimming or scything the rushes around the Hay Meadow ponds would be added to the February Volunteer session (**Ian**).

12.3. Group use of Little Wood: Hilary has been approached by the organiser of Calico Kids Club. She is keen to introduce a small number of children on an occasional basis to a wilderness area, and would like access to Little Wood. The dates of the visits would be notified in advance to the FA, and the organiser would need to undertake a risk assessment and ensure that insurance cover is in place. FFOG members supported the request in principle, but questioned whether Little Wood was the most suitable area. **Hilary** will arrange a site meeting with the group organiser.

12.4. Hay Store roof: Repairs have been put on hold following an accident to a volunteer, who sustained broken ribs in a fall. This has called into question a) the suitability of such a task for volunteers and b) the basic soundness of the building. The increased costs of bringing in a contractor and/or doing more extensive work would be hard to justify. In the first instance, the ownership of the building will be clarified (**Dave**). Then **Mick** will request a meeting with the graziers.

13. Date/place of next meetings: Special FFOG Thurs 11th February; Thurs 10 March both 7pm, Whitegates Sunnyside Close.

Ian Procter's Report on Volunteer Activities:

4th November 2015

The first meeting this year of the Hedge Working Party (HWP). Only three attendees which is disappointing. The Site Specific Risk Assessment (SSRA) was agreed. We made a start on the hedge along the east side of the Long Pads footpath but found a lot of rotten stems.

14th November 2015

Despite a damp morning and a forecast of heavy and persistent rain 16 volunteers turned out. The rain was quite persistent but not very heavy and we had a good session.

1. 30 saplings from the Woodlands Trust were planted in Pony Wood and the extension to replace those that had failed.
2. The nose trough and stand was retrieved from the West Field and brought up to the shed.
3. An assessment of the damage to the West Field north west gate was made and plans for its repair were made.
4. Fallen leaves were cleared from the track from Sunnyside Lane past the shed.
5. Self seeded alders were removed from the Alder Pond area of Big Meadow. These each have a big rootball and could easily be transplanted if anyone has a need for them.

6. Flowering ragwort were removed from the soft rush area of Big Meadow.
7. We continued hedge trimming along the south boundary of The Paddock and along the Orchard / Pads footpath.
8. Brambles growing out of the grass verge along the Fauna footpath were dug out.
9. Hazel in the 'wild area' at the north end of the Orchard were coppiced and the stems harvested for hedging stakes.

18th November 2015

3 members of the HWP gathered and agreed the SSRA before continuing with the Long Pads hedge on a wet morning. We finished early as the weather deteriorated further.

25th November 2015

5 members of the HWP gathered on a warm and dry (hurrah) morning. The SSRA was agreed and good progress was made laying the Long Pads hedge.

9th December 2015

After losing last week's session to heavy rain five volunteers assembled for the Hedge Working Party (HWP). The Site Specific Risk Assessment (SSRA) was agreed and work continued on the hedge adjacent to the Long Pads footpath.

12th December 2015

The weather forecast for heavy and persistent rain proved to be correct but nevertheless 5 volunteers gathered for the Monthly Saturday session.

- We cleared leaves:
 - From the shed roof to protect the sedum which is doing really well.
 - From the area around the shed
 - From the track between Sunnyside Lane and the Orchard.
- The bund around Alder Pond was strengthened with sods to stop the water overflowing and encourage it to go down the drain.
- The hedge between the Orchard and Orchard House was tidied after an Associate Volunteer had one good work pruning the hedge and clearing the area.
- Orienteering post number 5 was restored to its proper position.
- The holly obstructing access to the south notice board in the Orchard was cut back.
- We called it a day at 11.30.

16th December 2015

Three members of the HWP agree the SSRA and complete the laying of the Lower Sowerholme section of the Pads footpath hedge. We almost re-instated the fence but ran out of posts. There are some gaps which need new saplings.

18th December 2015

Two volunteers reinforce the fence across the gap in the Long Pads concrete wall with a five rail and three post extra fence. This will increase the security of the field.

23rd December 2015

At last some winter sunshine for the HWP! 8 volunteers agreed the SSRA and started on the hedge in the Flora Field finding it even worse than the Lower Sowerholme section in being a tangle of brambles. But a good start and the fence in Lower Sowerholme is re-instated.