

FFOG Minutes: 14 November 2024

- Location: FMH.
- Date: 14.11.24
- Time: 7.00pm to 9.00pm

ATTENDEES

Sue Nieduszynska (chair), Graham Brandwood, David Brookes, Steve Bullen, David Elliot, Clio Graham, Anne Greenwood, Ian Procter, Hilary Short.

APOLOGIES

Rebekah Mulligan, Mick Short, Chris Workman.

PREVIOUS MINUTES

Accepted.

MATTERS ARISING

Countryside Stewardship Agreement

Nicola Evans had previously informed that the new Countryside Stewardship agreement will be available from October. There have been delays and we must wait to be invited to apply which may be early next year.

Tools Budget

An increase in the budget had been requested by RM. There has been an uplift from £500 to £600 and the annual review of the budget is due in January. The upper limit is a guide and not rigid. If there was a specific need for expenditure over the limit it could go to the FA for approval.

Repairs to the footpaths including slope to Towneley Close

HS reported that the FA had agreed that Georgina Peacock, landscape architect, should be asked to look at the footpaths and the Reserve in general. GP said that Frank Huddleston should lay down a tarmac path down the steepest part of the Towneley Close access as far as the wall with the intention that the water would drain into the soak on the other side. The eco drain was full when inspected and needs to be cleared. IP said It is cleared twice a year.

GP is compiling a number of issues for Frank to look at. This includes the posts of the gates, the Cromwell Road entrance. It was queried whether the council has some responsibility for the Cromwell Rd entrance, however, DB said that the whole of the concrete kerb was installed by the FA & therefore we should do the repairs. GP had commented that the paths in the Reserve would benefit from more maintenance including clearing of leaves that cause a build-up of mud & silt & keeping the paths wider. Some paths e.g. Pony wood, Fauna & in the Orchard, had narrowed creating problems e.g. for double pushchairs. This could be dealt with by close strimming & using spades to slice across the edges (though there is a risk of damaging the gravel and making the situation worse). These need adding to the scheduled tasks for volunteers.

The fauna path hedge is also narrowing the path & needs cutting back as does the hedge adjacent to the "Tup field" from the canal to Pony Wood. IP will communicate this to RM and a meeting be arranged with Rebekah to look at these volunteer tasks

The geo-textile fabric on Pony Wood path is exposed in some areas and is on the list for Frank to top up.

AGENDA ITEMS

4.1. Duncan Slater visit.

- See report SN. Ash die-back affects new growth.
- Fallen Sycamore in Pony Wood is due to bleeding cankers caused by *Phytophthora plurivora*.

To keep an eye on the ash trees in Little Wood as new leaves grow next year. To monitor the sycamore trees near pathways. SN to ask CW for advice on bleeding canker in sycamores & the best way to monitor.

4.2. Tree Survey by subgroup.

IP reported on behalf of RM & CW. The main purpose was to look at safety issues and to adapt Andy Lee's tree survey into a more easily accessible format. See report RM.

IP added 2 other trees to the list:

- The big ash (584) by the paddock gate with an overhanging branch that Fraser is concerned is lower.
- The big ash in the stump circle (520) where there is concern about the large branch that overhangs the stones next to the stump circle & as a matter of urgency, we should liaise with Andy Lee to get a recommendation for someone who could deal with it. It will probably require a cherry picker.

Of particular concern in RM's report is Sycamore (526) in the stump circle has multiple split stems and has a cobra brace. There appears to be bleeding canker in a branch that is not supported by the brace. Sycamore (533) at the Towneley Close entrance needs pruning from over the garden (Andy Lees report). IP said another large chunk of sycamore had fallen off in Pony Wood. The ivy overhanging Cromwell Rd gate needs removing.

IP, CW & RM to meet with Andy to look at the urgent matters & the tree list in RM's report. CW is drafting a plan of the reserve's trees for the next meeting

4.3. Bird Feeding Station.

Jennifer Woodward has a rota of volunteers to replenish the bird table daily. There is a WhatsApp group recording information about what has been seen & SN will put this on the blog. There seems to be a good number of small birds, but pheasants remain a problem. Dan's public information poster from last year is going to be put up again & a list of the common species that might be seen. The gate near the bird feeding station can be noisy on closing. SB had suggested attaching a section of rubber tyre to lessen the sound. RM to task volunteers to attach a strip of inner tube to the gate.

4.4. Woodland and Hedges.

HS fed back that Georgina Peacock suggested that the hedge at the southern end of the Orchard should be the same height throughout and this would be beneficial in allowing more light to the area including where the saplings have been planted. IP confirmed that the sapling area had been weeded. GP had also suggested coppicing of the hazel in the southern orchard and raising the crown of one of the oaks on the western boundary.

IP suggested that the hedge going up the hill in Flora field was almost ready for laying. SN thought there should be further consultation on this including SB & CG.

SN said there had been several comments about the darkness of the paths & on the height of hedges & the impact they have on views, particularly the pony wood path hedge & the western side of the Long Pads path. Some of the hedges should be encouraged to widen out. SN will walk around with HS, IP RM, SB & CG to look at the hedge line in the southern end of the reserve & look at other sites requiring action by volunteers including the recommendations suggested by GP

4.5.1. Ponds and Wet Pastures.

Willow Pond East has a much lower level of water than expected and GB thought this could be due to leakage through the clay bottom. This pond is not part of the LWT project. HS to ask LWT about Willow Pond East to see if the low water levels are an issue.

There has been a prolific growth of bullrushes in Westfield-south and these may take over the pond.

Alder Pond is leaking through the bund & entering the channel beyond the bund rather than going through the sluice pipe. The cattle could cause further damage to the bund. IP said if it was not repaired it would lead to considerable drainage of the boggy area thereby altering the very successful soft rush habitat area for the snipe. DB gave an example of a pond leaking through the bund down the side of a pipe where a slit trench was dug across the bund (parallel to the bund and inside it) and bentonite added to the trench which swells when in contact with water and forms a watertight seal. DB to assess Alder Pond. Repairs could be added to Frank Huddleston's list if it is deemed suitable for a digger repair.

4.6. Orchard.

AG had 3 points relating to the report from Duncan Slater.

- Mulching of the orchard trees with woodchip- it is always ensured that there is an approx. 6-inch area clear of mulch around the trunk.
- Duncan indicated that some of the older trees may have been planted too deeply. Current practice is to ensure that the graft union is at least 3 inches above the soil.
- The death of crab apple (tag no 1) was most likely due to past strimmer damage. AG therefore requested that the tree should be replaced with another crab apple. This was agreed.

GB commented that the Orchard fruit tree area was looking very good

4.7. Meadows

The gate into hay meadow should be closed & SN apologised that she had forgotten to action this. Also, the northern gate of school pond is to be opened & the southern gate closed. Carr House Meadow has not been grazed off & SN had spoken to Fraser about this.

5.1. Volunteer Reports.

See report from RM.

5.2 Proposed tasks

See reports from RM for proposed tasks for November and December. IP said there is a stretch of hedge ready for laying. It is on the left as you come through the gate from the canal & behind the notice board & about 25 metres in length. It was planted in 2013. Tree planting. The saplings are due to be delivered on 12th December and the community sapling planting day is Saturday 14th December. There are 310 saplings to be planted in 6 different sites

6.1. Monitoring Report

See report from GB. Manhole covers near Howson's gate & in the beetle bank need to be clearly marked to prevent accidental damage and the one in the wildflower margin at the top of the hill. RM to task volunteers.

6.2. Progress with surveys.

- Dan's breeding bird survey is awaited. SN to ask Jennifer Woodward to follow up.
- SB said that Will Walton had inspected the bat boxes in Pony Wood & two are in use.
- Barn owls have been seen. Previously there had been 2 owl boxes at Lucy Brook & GB thought these should be reinstated. SB will source the boxes.

6.3 Grazing.

HS said there was a meeting with Robin scheduled for next week. The herd is currently 16 & there are two herd bulls.

7.1. Arrangements

November arrangements: GB requested to coppice hazels. One at the far southern end of the orchard near the notice board & two in Pony Wood extension, GB assured SN that there would be plenty of catkins in the area. GB's hazel coppicing proposal was agreed.

In addition, there are 3 hazels that were coppiced 3 years ago, in front of one of the houses in the southern orchard. Although they are not ready for coppicing, the occupant has requested that these be cut back to provide more light. To see if cutting back the hedge will improve the view for the neighbour prior to taking a decision to cut back the 3 hazels

Bird box annual review. RM has requested moving this from the November arrangements to January. This was agreed

Aubrey to be contacted to agree timings for coming year. SN said there had been tractor damage to the bird feeding station & Aubrey will reduce his bill.

7.2. Financial Control.

£110.45 for the cage to keep the pheasants off the bird seed. (SN)

£42.50 for the cage squashed by Aubrey (SN)

£118.14 for tree guard materials in the Orchard (AG)

7.3. Organised Events.

Wassailing has been cancelled this year.

7.4. Items to report from FA

Nothing to report.

7.5 Items to report from trustees.

SN said that Cumbria Wildlife Trust have acquired Land next to a housing area. Claire Harris, previously an NE adviser, approached the FA seeking advice on community involvement & volunteers. She & a member of the trust visited and were positive generally & particularly impressed with the Orchard.

DB had recently met the City Council's new Biodiversity officer, Dr Stephanie Peay (circa 2 months in post) and mentioned Fairfield Nature Reserve, which she didn't know existed. She seemed interested in learning more. There was a discussion about the potential for accessing Biodiversity Net Gain credits - this is where a developer cannot achieve BNG on site and therefore pays for someone else to do it at another location. It's not straightforward for small sites to access this. DB is going to a Groundwork focus group meeting specifically about smaller sites accessing BNG credits on 18th December. DB will send Stephanie an email about Fairfield Nature Reserve, and has offered a tour, which was agreed would be better to do in the spring.

AOB

- Thursday is the preferred day for FFOG meetings.
- SN has been advised that it is good practice for the chair to see papers before they are distributed generally & this will be the practice going forward.
- Jonathan Tansley has moved away and will no longer be sending out group emails to volunteers. SN to write a thank you letter to Jonathan & run it past IP.

NEXT MEETING

Thursday 30th January 2025 7pm FMH