

FFOG Minutes: 13th March 2025

- Location: on-site
- Date: 13.03.25
- Time: 3.00pm to 5.00pm

Attendees

Sue Nieduszynska (chair), Graham Brandwood, David Brookes, Steve Bullen, David Elliott, Clio Graham, Anne Greenwood, Rebekah Mulligan, Ian Procter, Hilary Short, Chris Workman.

Apologies

Mick Short.

Previous Minutes

Accepted.

Matters Arising

1.1. Feedback from SN

Breeding Bird survey: SN has received the species list but not the maps or commentary from Dan Haywood. A stock dove has been seen in Pony wood flying out of the box. There is a ban on entering the wood from 1st April to 1st July.

Jonathan Tansley: SN has sent a calendar.

Woodland Management Plan. IP said this will be on the agenda for the next meeting at FMH with a follow up at the next on-site meeting

1.2. Update on Reserve Map

CW said that Mark Tanner had done a superb job & this area of the website is now up to date.

1.3. Draft Narrative for viewpoints of Flora & Fauna.

CW said that regarding the script for areas of the Reserve, much of this is already on the website and CW has used this to create a draft. FFOG members could feedback to CW to add to the draft narrative. HS said there had been discussion about having QR codes that link to descriptions on the website.

1.4. Biodiversity net gain as a source of capital funding.

This is intended for small sites of less than a hectare. Currently, SN thought it unlikely to apply to the Fairfield Reserve. The city council have appointed someone to deal with the linking up of buyers and sellers in this area and this could make the process easier.

Regarding funding, there has been communication that the government have closed applications for the SFI scheme because the budget has been reached. DB will circulate the letter he has received.

1.5 Snipe counts

Mark Tanner has updated the format which is now much clearer with charts over time and separate figures for common snipe and jack snipe. CG will add some information about snipe to accompany the charts. Snipe numbers are generally stable

Agenda Items

2.1. Playground by the substation.

One of the neighbours had raised concerns about the species planted because of the potential size of the bird cherry, and the suckering & spread of other saplings in the area making it difficult to manage. AG suggested if there is sapling planting in the playground, there should be public consultation prior. IP said that the saplings had been planted a 3m distance between (rather than 2m) to ensure space between bushy plants. Also, IP said that for the past 25 years we have maintained sapling planting areas, and this area would be maintained on an active basis & this includes thinning of blackthorn. RM said that a lot of blackthorn had already been cleared by volunteers. IP added that it would be years before the bird cherry reached a significant site & it could be pollarded. SN said that we need a “vision” for the play area and in areas where there is more concern about aesthetics and public use & the final decision should be taken to the FA for wider consultation.

HS said the brush piles needed clearing. RM will action this.

2.2. Playground by the benches.

The white beam is leaning because of overcrowding by the alder. Simon Gershon who was involved in planting of the area suggested that thinning was required. The general feeling was that the white beam would remain a “wonky” tree, and that the alder should be preserved in preference.

The lower limb of the hawthorn is encroaching upon the cycle track and should be removed.

A tree in this area had been ring barked & will not survive. This also needs removal. SN to reply to Simon Gershon with FFOG’s decisions.

2.3. Willow play domes in the playground.

These need remedial work.

2.4. Willow domes near the stump circle.

GB reported that the domes built under the shadow of the ash tree have failed and should be left to provide a barrier to the wild area. The domes closer to the stump circle need a rebuild which could be done next winter.

2.5. Fauna Stones

Digging of the new wildflower area is to commence next week & RM asked where the turf should be left. A site near the fence was identified that was away from the stones & didn’t cover an existing wildflower patch.

2.6. Willow Management.

See report GB. If there is to be annual review of willow management, it is best done in October so that we can project ahead for hedge laying stakes and the cropping can be fitted into the volunteer program. The 2 willow screens by the ash tree corner to be cut each winter to ensure there is a view of grammar school pond each spring/summer. In the hedgerow there are mature goat willow trees which flower early providing nectar and pollen. GB proposed these should be left alone and that the crack willow should be cut. There is some very tall willow at the back of the screen & GB proposed selective pruning of this. However, IP suggested if we left them another year they would provide better hedging stakes. It was agreed that the tall willow in the screen would be left until the October review as willow management is winter work and when it would be known what was required for hedge laying.

2.7. Path near Alder Pond.

A report from SN listed work to be carried out by the contractor).

- **Work on the bund.** DB said there was a hole where the rocks are in the middle of the bund and the water pours down to the line of the old drain. It needs filling with an impermeable material such as puddle clay or sodium bentonite clay. SN is awaiting an estimate from Craig Walker for the work. (Craig does work for Robin Loxam). The plan is for a horseshoe fence that then returns into the water to restrict cattle access. DB said if the horseshoe fence doesn't work that it can be added to in the future. The middle of the bund has slumped & needs building up.
- Regarding the **gate post repairs**, GB inquired whether the posts would be set in concrete as we hadn't done this previously.
- The **notice board at Cromwell Rd** is to be removed, refurbished & sited in a more convenient location. Craig will remove the board for refurbishment by Woodscape who are providing new benches for the playground.

2.8. Lower Sowerholme/Lucy Brook

SN gave feedback from the FA regarding the installation of leaky dams forcing the water out into braided streams & ponds. This had been suggested by Calum Booth. Kerry Diamond works with the environment agency & will help with grant applications to do this work. After the meeting SN sent out a plan showing the site of the proposed ponds above the cattle crossing. IP said that LWT contracting team are a possibility for managing this project. Also, SN said the RSPB have a designated team for this type of work.

2.9. Double gates near Pony Wood-New sapling planting.

On the long pads side of West Field, bays are being erected where the hedge will be allowed to grow out & new saplings planted in winter. RM will project manage the acquisition of the 500+ new saplings mentored by IP.

2.10. Bird Nest census.

The boxes had been cleaned out by volunteers & a survey found over 50% of the 24 were being used. CG & SB had done a survey of the boxes in the main part of Pony Wood in October/November '24 & this needs to be integrated. Over the years there have been

various systems for identifying the individual boxes & this needs to be streamlined. CG will renumber the bird boxes in logical sequence (with past referencing)

2.11. Bird Food Margins.

The surveys from Graham Skelcher over years were very helpful and showed a drop off of desirable vegetation over years. SN had sent this to Calum Booth & Nicola Evans for feedback. The advice was that the plants are not wildflowers & should be fed like a crop & that crop rotation would be beneficial. Aubrey has agreed to manure the bird food margins & the margin at the top has been swapped with a gap between 2 beetle banks. This has required re-staking of the area.

2.12. Blackthorn in Pony Wood

GB pointed out numerous blackthorn suckers in Pony wood creating an understorey. SN asked if the other trees were able to grow up through the blackthorn. IP thought it was a rich habitat that should be left undisturbed. However, if it spread further into the shade where it could swamp smaller shrubs, then we should review. To include this issue in the Woodland management plan discussion.

3.1. Arrangements

See item 2.2 Annual willow review to take place in October

3.2. Financial Control.

Nothing to report.

3.3. Organised Events.

April 21st Easter Egg hunt

May 24 Fairfield Festival

June 21-22 Open Yards

May 25th Pond dipping (NLWG)

June 13 -15 Wild Roots Nature Festival (Ros Jones)

3.4. Items to report from FA

There is a trial of pink poo spray paint which is water soluble and doesn't harm the environment and is intended to shame owners who fail to pick up after their dogs. A member of the public had suggested installing poo bag dispensers. Another suggestion was to have a notices on stakes in areas that are commonly soiled and in the Orchard area. Targeted notices will be used as deterrents. Bag dispensers won't be installed, as they are always in the wrong place.

RM said that the dog warden can be contacted for known frequent offenders.

3.5 Items to report from trustees.

Nothing to report.

AOB

Nothing raised.

NEXT MEETING Thursday 15th May 7.00pm to 9pm FMH