The Fairfield Association

Wetland (particularly Upper Sowerholme) – A brief report on the development of a reedbed area in Upper Sowerholme.

Opening disclaimer/caveat: I am not a botanist and therefore some names given to plants could be open to query/challenge!

Natural England Agreement: To create areas of new reedbed on land of existing low conservation interest and to support wild bird and associated invertebrate species that are associated with reedbed habitat.

3.1. Historical Note: To assist in the creation of the reedbed area a pond was excavated in UpperSowerholme linked by means of a water channel to Lucy Brook in the NE corner at Lucy's Pond. In addition, a bund was constructed in the NW corner by Anna's pond with an exit pipe set quite high so that water would flood into Upper Sowerholme. Unfortunately, there were problems with the bund leaking for a considerable period of time with the result that Upper Sowerholme remained relatively dry. The bund has now been repaired and as a result Upper Sowerholme is now much wetter. **However progress toward the creation of a reedbed is a little behind schedule.**

Boundaries: The Northern barrier to Upper Sowerholme is Lucy Brook and the old mature willow trees. As previously mentioned, there are two ponds in the corners – Anna's and Lucy's. Fencing has been installed, where necessary, to ensure the cattle cannot gain entry into the wetland area. At the Southern end of the area there is a dense thicket of brambles, which has been left alone since FAUNA was created. The ground here is slightly raised and as a result is fairly dry. The brambles do not appear to be encroaching into the wetland area to date. The Western boundary into Lower Sowerholme is partly mature trees, fencing and brambles/hedging. Once again the barrier is sufficient to prevent cattle access. The Eastern boundary is not altogether clear at points where the domestic gardens run down to the wetland. One property owner is dumping garden waste into what might well be Upper Sowerholme land but it is not too much of an issue as it is at the bottom of a slope with dense vegetation. There are some mature trees growing in and out of the slope down this boundary.
Recommendations: Monitor the bramble thicket to ensure it is not spreading North into the wetland. Continue to monitor the rustic fencing between the Hay Meadow and Upper Sowerholme.

Pond and Water Channel: Both the pond and channel were clogged with plants such as *mare's tail* during the Summer months. Vegetation has now died back during the Winter. An attempt to clear the pond and channel of vegetation was carried out at the end of January. Plants/vegetation removed consisted largely of *mare's tail, water figwort and couch grass.* The vegetation removed was spread into the wetland area. There was some growth of reeds (*phragmites)* in both the pond and channel although not in significant numbers. However, those present were robust and they were left in situ. The bulrushes in the channel were also left alone. There were other aquatic species present such as *soft*

rush, *pondweed, duckweed and water cress*? Couch Grass was particularly prevalent at the Lucy's pool end of the channel and proved quite difficult to remove.
Water Depth: The deepest areas in the pond and channel were around 80cm+. Shallower parts were still over 50cms.
Recommendations: Monitor the growth in the pond and channel over the Spring/Summer months. Possibly carry out some work on the banks next Winter in line with the NE requirements.

Wetland Area: As mentioned earlier, the successful repair to the bund has resulted in the wetland area becoming much wetter. It is difficult to measure the exact depth of the water but it is certainly true to say that at present there is standing water throughout Upper Sowerholme, apart from a small area in front of the bramble thicket in the SW corner. The prevalent vegetation in the wetland area is *water figwort,* although there are increasing numbers of *phragmites*. (I was not present when the reeds were planted so do not know whether they were planted throughout the proposed wetland area). However, the most significant area of phragmites growth is an area in the NW corner and this appears to be growing into the rest of the area. This may be natural colonisation? There are also clumps of soft rush throughout and occasional brambles.
Undesirables: The main undesirable found in the wetland area is ragwort. However, the numbers are under control due to the robust procedures which have been in place for a number of years.
Recommendations: Continue to monitor and encourage the growth of phragmites throughout the wetland area. Possibly carry out some more planting of reed stems. Continue to clear ragwort as and when it appears and cut back any developing stands of brambles.

Conclusions: Progress is being made towards the creation of the reedbed, although we remain a little behind schedule.

- The established reed stems are well over 100cms.
- Well behind the 50% target of reeds (and nowhere near the 150 stems per sq. metre)
- We are on top of the undesirables (5%) and scrub (10%), although not if water figwort counts as scrub!
- Open water target of 10 – 30% has been achieved now that pond and channel have been cleared.
- The Winter target of 50 – 95% of reedbed covered by surface water has been achieved (to a depth of 10 -100cms). How much surface water there is during the Spring/Summer months will need to be monitored.

Other Wetland Areas:

I have not covered any other 'wetland' areas in this report. Although there are areas of the reserve in and around the various ponds and scrapes which might be described as 'wetland' the main vegetation found in these areas is *soft rush* and *water figwort*. There has not been any natural colonisation by *phragmites*, to date.

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