

Fairfield Association
Flora, Fauna and Orchard Management Group [FFOG]
Minutes of the Meeting held on Thursday 12th January 2017 at 7.30 pm
at Whitegates, Sunnyside Close

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

1. **Apologies:** Dave Brookes, Tony Finn, Ian Fraser, Oliver Fulton
2. **Minutes of last meeting:** Approved
3. **Matters arising from Minutes:**
 - 3.1. **Management of the LGGS hedge (item 5):** The Graziers have indicated that a Contractor has been organised to flail the hedge, which is starting to encroach on the Fauna path (**Sue** to follow up). The FA's stance is still that laying is the best approach. **Sue** will seek to clarify ownership.
 - 3.2. **RPA Adjustments (7.9):** It was clear from the visit by the Rural Payments Agency that FA funds will be cut slightly. Details still awaited (**Dave**).
 - 3.3. **Tools purchase (9.1):** Ian has realised that buying extra shears etc cannot be delayed in anticipation of grant funding. Approval given to purchase from general funds (**Ian**).
 - 3.4. **Woodland Management Plan (9.2):** Group members have had a site meeting and the first draft has been written by Oliver based on a Forestry Commission pro forma. The plan will be discussed at the Special FFOG meeting in February.
4. **Annual Financial Spreadsheet:** Deferred to March meeting (**Dave**).
5. **Annual Review of Dogs and Cycling Policy:** Situation much the same as last year. It was agreed that notices aimed at dog walkers will again be posted during the bird breeding season (**Glenys**). The signs on the gate into Carr House Meadow are becoming faded and are poorly positioned. These will be retained, but be complemented with a different type of notice on the Cromwell Road gate. **Sue** and **Ian** will explore better options.
6. **Management:**
 - 6.1. **Improvement of the Long Pads path and creation of the Flora path:** Alternative funding sources are being explored (**Hilary**). The Landscape Architect is preparing the information boards. **Mick** to contact Dave about starting work on the Long Pads path.
 - 6.2. **Resurfacing of footpaths:** **Mick** will contact Dave about progress.
 - 6.3. **Local Nature Reserve designation:** No report.
 - 6.4. **Arable update:** The second cut of the floristically enhanced grass margin took place in early November. Both the FA and the Arable Farmer are happy to continue the arrangement for 2017 and an Agreement has been signed,
 - 6.5. **Grazing matters:** The Grazing Agreement was signed towards the end of December. It lasts for 35 years until Christmas Eve 2040. A copy will held on Dropbox (**Hilary**).

6.6. Rush control: Since the last meeting, liming has taken place around the edges of the marsh in Big Meadow (avoiding the area near the Fauna path) and the Hay Meadow. A group of Volunteers carried out the experimental scything in the Hay Meadow, opening up several rides and stacking the cut rush in piles within the marsh.

6.7. Leaking ponds: With the water table in the reserve currently very high, there is no real evidence of any problems. Water is draining through the overflow pipe in Lucy's Pool – something rarely observed. However, the northern Flora pond remains slightly lower than its counterpart. **Graham** will continue to monitor as part of his regular inspections.

7. Monitoring:

7.1. Maintenance and HLS habitat inspections: Full reports available. There is severe poaching in part of School Pond – the gate must remain closed until this recovers. Poaching around the water trough in the Gun Range will only be ameliorated if the Graziers are prepared to move the trough (or have another trough) higher up the hill. Herd size is currently below the NE maximum of 7 adults but four followers are due to reach the age of 2 years shortly. **Mick** will re-contact the FA's NE Adviser about his delayed visit (which will present an opportunity to discuss the 'right' size of herd for the reserve). The bowl of a clay pipe found in Flora Field will be added to the finds collection (**Sue**).

7.2. Photographic monitoring: A replacement photographer has been found and will be briefed shortly (**Chris**). There have been problems with the FA website and the existing photographs are in the process of being reinstated. **Ian** will contact the webmasters to establish whether his wildflower records have been affected too. A map based on the aerial photographs taken by the drone is still awaited (**Hilary**).

8. Volunteer activities:

8.1. Volunteer activities: Full reports for November and December are attached. **Ian** is delighted by the success of the net on the shed roof, although he warned that some sycamore seeds dropped in previous years may still germinate. Proposed tasks approved, with addition of tidying up brash in the region of the stump circle and mending a strand of barbed wire by the Big Meadow Ash tree (**Ian**). It was considered too early to mark out the beetle banks at this weekend's Volunteer session (**Ian**).

8.2. DBS and First Aid course: **Oliver** has co-ordinated the paperwork for the two DBS checks. **Mick** and **Dave** are now DBS registered. **Keith Taylor** has renewed his first aid certificate and **Ian Fraser** has qualified at the same course held in **Staveley**.

8.3. Volunteers Buffet: To be held at the Storey Institute on Thursday 9th February 2017 from 7–9pm. This has now been advertised by email, with the first bookings received (deadline 30th January). **Sue** will ask **Jonathan Tansley** to send out a further advertisement, including the menu (£10 per head). **Graham** and **Sue** will liaise over the presentation of John Muir Awards during the evening. **Sue** will contact Lancaster Guardian about photos and a press release.

8.4. Addition to Fields Access List: **Julia Salmon** approved (Associate Volunteer).

9. Standing items:

9.1. Arrangements:

Mick will order last year's quantity of bird seed mix for the margin in Flora Field. He will also re-order seed to develop the wildflowers within the arable crop.

Sue will remind the Arable Farmer that ploughing of the stubble is permitted after 15th February.

Ian will add pruning of the dogwood and marking out the beetle banks to the March Volunteer session. He will also prepare a review of the first year of the Associate Volunteer Scheme for March FFOG.

9.2. Financial control:

Item 3.3 – Purchase of tools approx. £250 from general funds & specific donation (**Ian**)

9.3. Organised events for notification to FA: None.

10. Preparations for Special FFOG meeting: This extra meeting to be held on 2nd February will focus on the development of birds and wildflowers: discussing, evaluating and proposing actions by drawing on various surveys, reports on the FA blog and other observations (**Sue, Glenys**). Development of the woodland, encapsulated in the draft Woodland Management Plan will also be on the agenda (**Oliver**).

11. AOB:

11.1. Aldcliffe Parish: Newly created January 2017.

11.2. Beaumont College visits: Following a contact at the LESS event, Tony has been approached by Beaumont College about using the Orchard. Some of their students are enrolled on the John Muir Award, and the Orchard is viewed as a safe and accessible place for them to explore and undertake some simple conservation tasks (such as hedge trimming). The FA's involvement would be limited to some co-ordination by Tony and Ian. The meeting approved this, subject to Beaumont College completing Tony's external group booking form, providing a risk assessment and any other health and safety information required before coming on site (**Ian** to notify Tony).

12. Date/place of next meetings: Special FFOG Thursday 2nd February, FFOG Thursday 2nd March, 7.30pm Venue: Whitegates Sunnyside Close.

Ian Procter's Report on Volunteer Activities:

31st October 2016

Two volunteers repaired the fence by the Lucy Brook cattle crossing. We also blocked a gap with brash in the hedge into Lower Sowerholme where someone had been climbing through.

NOTE Both the September and October reports omitted to mention that the Orchard grass has been regularly mown by an Associate Volunteer.

2nd November 2016

The Hedge Working Party (HWP) attracted 11 volunteers on a lovely autumn morning. We agree the Site Specific Risk Assessment (SSRA) and continued to work on the hedge between the Pads footpath and the Flora Field. We also repaired the wire fence on the east side of West Field which the cows had damaged.

9th November 2016

The HWP was attended by 9 volunteers on a pleasant morning. The SSRA was agreed and work continued on the hedge between the Pads footpath and the Flora Field. We also applied Ecoplug Tree Stump Killer to one of the elders we had cut back. They proved trickier than expected to apply and the other elder remains to be done.

12th November 2016

Despite a damp early morning and five 'regulars' sending apologies we had 13 volunteers for the monthly Saturday session.

- The pruning of the apple trees continued.
- The ivy climbing the hawthorns adjacent to Orchard House garden was cut so that weaknesses in these trees adjacent to the footpath can be observed.
- The self seeded blackthorn surrounding pear, cherry and the purging buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica*) near the Orchard middle entrance was cutback and adjacent willow pruned down. The resulting brash was carted away to form the material for the next job.
- The blackthorn and ash brash was used to plug 'entrances' to the northern section of the Orchard where a mountain biker had been noted.
- The suckers growing adjacent to the Fauna path turned out not to be from the hawthorn. One view was they are wild rose. We dug them out and planted them in the gap in the west hedge of West Field.
- The invading bramble on the north edge of Carr House Meadow was cut back and dug out. Still more to do.
- The south hedge of the Paddock was trimmed down.

16th November 2016

The HWP met on an initially very wet morning but as we set off the weather held back and improved. 6 volunteers attended and agreed the SSRA. We finished the actual laying of the Pads / Flora Field hedge. Another elder was treated with Ecoplugs and we began the fence re-instatement. Toward the end we discovered another elder lurking amongst the stand of ash we are leaving. The elder was taken out and will be treated next week. The fence needs finishing off.

23rd November 2016

Nine volunteers attended plus one Associate Volunteer for an induction session.

The finishing off work at the far end of the Pads Footpath included:

- Inserting Ecoplugs into another elder.
- Staking a section of the laid hedge
- Installing new fencing posts.
- Re-instating the wire fence.

Meanwhile at the Lucy Brook path junction we agreed the SSRA and:

- Started laying the next section of hedge
- Tidied up the wire fence behind and at the end made it stockproof
- Began trimming the Pads hedges laid over the last two years, including an induction session for a new Associate Volunteer
- Began gapping up sections of the Pads / Lower Sowerholme / Flora Field hedge which had failed.

30th November 2016

The HWP attracted nine volunteers on another lovely morning. We agreed the SSRA.

- The hedge between the Pads footpath and the corner of Lower Sowerholme was finished.
- We started laying the corner hedge between the Pads footpath and West Field.
- The brash from the laying was carted to a suitable spot for burning later in the winter.
- A section of ash saplings in the Pads / Big Meadow hedge were laid.
- Hedge saplings were planted in a hedge gap between the Pads footpath and the Flora Field, adjacent to the Lower Sowerholme gate and in a gap in the west hedge of West Field. More to do on the latter.
- Wire fence was retrieved from the far end of Flora Field
- Ecoplugs were inserted in the stumps of two sycamore in the Pads / West Field hedge. More to do.
- Cattle damage of the wire fence between the Pads footpath and Lower Sowerholme was repaired.
- We started trimming the hedge between Lower Sowerholme and Flora Field.

Associate Volunteers

New Associate

Julia Salmon	November 2016	Hedge Trimming	No Shed key	Own tools	Yes Field access
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- Four Associate Volunteers have agreed to trim hedges over the winter
- We started trimming the Pads hedges.
- A volunteer, unable to attend the next Saturday session, puts in a shift clearing leaves down the track from Sunnyside Lane.

7th December 2016

The Hedge Working Party (HWP) attracted 9 volunteers who agreed the Site Specific Risk Assessment (SSRA) for working near Willow Lane. On a pleasant, warm morning we

- Finished laying the hedge around the corner of Lucy Brook and the West Field.
- Installed a new fence behind the laid hedge in the corner of Lower Sowerholme.
- Planted hedge saplings in two gaps in the hedges between the Pads and the Orchard / Big Meadow, plus infilling a gap between the Long Pads and Lower Sowerholme.
- Continued trimming the hedge between Lower Sowerholme and the Flora Field.
- Shifted the brash from the laying from the corner near the houses to the future bonfire site further away.
- Moved the fence removed from the corner of Lower Sowerholme into a gap in the west hedge of West Field to protect the saplings there from cattle damage.
- We also moved the former gate from the NW corner of West Field into an adjacent gap for use when we plant saplings next time.
- Prepared a series of elder stumps on the Long Pads / West Field hedge for insertion of Ecoplugs.

10th December 2016

Thirteen volunteers attended the monthly session on a warm, dry but overcast morning.

- The hedge overhanging the lane running from Sunnyside Lane to the Orchard was trimmed back.
- The debris was moved away including the fallen leaves on the track.
- The netting on the shed roof was carefully removed including its 'harvest' of sycamore leaves and seeds. The experiment has been very successful as the sedum appears undamaged and entirely clear of sycamore debris. There should be a huge reduction in sycamore saplings next spring.
- Leaf debris around the shed was cleared away.
- The broken fence post adjacent to the new double gates across the Fauna path was replaced.
- The hedge between the Fauna path and Carr House Meadow was trimmed. Still needs reducing in height.
- The hedge between Carr House Farm garden and the Fauna path was trimmed back and the debris removed.
- More work was done trimming the hedge between the Orchard and the Pads footpath.
- Further work was done pruning the fruit trees.

Tony was unable to provide refreshments on this occasion but Emily and Julia stepped into the breach with two excellent cakes.

13th December 2016

Two volunteers changed the oil on the mower.

14th December 2016

Nine volunteers attended the HWP on a warm and sunny winter's morning. The SSRA was agreed.

- We continued inserting Ecoplugs in the elder along the Pads / West Field hedge.
- The temporary fence inserted in the West Field west hedge last week was strengthened.
- Hedge saplings were planted in a gap in the West Field west hedge and an old gate used to protect them.
- Hedge laying moved to the hedgerow between the Sunnyside Lane / Orchard track and the 'wild' area of the Orchard. Although too secluded by trees to thrive properly the old hedge laid better than expected.

21st December 2017

Our record of good weather this autumn is broken as the rain arrives just as we are due to start. Eight volunteers agree the SSRA and make a start but we have to abandon the morning fairly soon in heavy rain and hailstones. Mince pies were 'enjoyed' huddled in the shed.

Associate Volunteers.

- Machine maintenance and tool sharpening is routinely undertaken.
- Very slow progress on hedge trimming at the moment.