

Fairfield Association
Flora, Fauna and Orchard Management Group [FFOG]
Minutes of the Meeting held on Thursday 6th July 2017 at 7.30 pm
at Whitegates, Sunnyside Close

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

1. **Apologies:** Dave Brookes, David Elliott, Tony Finn, Emma Foster, Oliver Fulton
2. **Minutes of last meetings:** Approved.
3. **Matters arising from Minutes:**
 - 3.1. **Damaged manhole in Flora Field (6.4):** Still leaking as effecting the repair is not a straightforward matter. United Utilities hope it can be resolved soon after 10 July. Missing padlock on the Howson's Gate to be reinstated once the work completed (**Ian**).
 - 3.2. **Powering the nose pump (6.5): Hilary** will to try to find a local contractor who can provide advice on using solar power.
 - 3.3. **Towneley wall (6.10):** Lancashire County Council has confirmed that the wall is not the FA's responsibility. Hilary has written a letter alerting its owner to the fact that it has been damaged by vandalism.
 - 3.4. **COSHH annual review (March 9.1):** Sue (as Trustee/employer), Ian and Graham (trained operatives) have reviewed the arrangements and safety relating to application of pesticides on the reserve. No changes were made.
4. **Hedge management proposals:** Ian was thanked for his thoughtful and comprehensive analysis and proposals for the management of the 4km of hedges on the reserve. The overall objective is to encourage wildlife of all kinds (subject to other considerations such as stock control, neighbours, NE stipulations, factors affecting the practicality of management). Ian argues that this is best achieved by creating low, dense growth from the hedge base, whilst encouraging diversity of type (height, width, presence/absence of trees, form of maintenance, range of flora species within). The *Management Cycle* advocated by *Hedgeline* will be followed, with hedges that are at the stage for trimming every three years preferably being tackled as one-third each year as this is better for wildlife.

Ian has also produced individual plans for each hedge, which will guide the annual winter hedging work over the next few years. The meeting considered specifically those hedges to be tackled during the coming winter. It was agreed that:

 - *Fauna Path / School Pond, eastern side from ash tree corner to gate:* Consult with LGGS (**Sue**). [Note: now done – LGGS has no objection to the proposed work on this hedge.] Lay early in the season, having alerted the Graziers (**Hilary**). Subsequently consider the erection of a 'bird watching screen' at the wet section.
 - *Fauna Path – the small triangle of land under the big ash tree:* Lay.
 - *Fauna Path / Grammar School Field, eastern side from School Pond gate to Gun Range:* No work. Discuss options with Graziers at annual review meeting (see 6.6) in June 2018 (**Hilary**).

- *West Field, west hedge:* Leave alone under sycamores, infill other gaps with new planting (about 200 whips), Volunteers to erect stock fence to protect new planting from cattle (cost estimated as less than £100).
- *Lower Sowerholme/Flora Field:* Further sapling planting for diversity and thickening.
- *Flora Field south:* Further sapling planting for diversity and thickening will be part of the Flora path plans (item 6.1).
- *Lower Sowerholme boundaries:* Strengthening of the stock fencing where necessary.

In addition it was agreed that the difficult-to-access *West Field, north hedge* will be flailed annually by a contractor (**Ian** to arrange) in order to a) keep to NE requirement for maximum 2metre height and b) maintain good relations with neighbours. (The flail does not include the stream edge of the hedge where there is lots of wildlife-friendly growth.)

Ian pointed out the requirement for an extending petrol-powered trimming machine. (The existing 'multi-tool' is unreliable and regarded as too heavy.) Unfortunately, it appears that it is not possible to hire such a machine for trial. Expenditure on a good quality machine will be £1000+. Unless a source of funds can be identified (**Hilary**), it was agreed to persevere with the existing trimmer.

The vegetation alongside the Long Pads path has been unexpectedly trimmed, with the debris piled into the hedge line, swamping new saplings. Sue has been in contact with Lancashire County Council, who denies responsibility, and re-iterated that the vegetation is in the programme for tackling in late August/September as previously agreed with the FA. Investigation will continue (**Sue**). [Note: It has since been established that the work was carried out by Lancaster City Council at the request of LGGs in preparation for an organised run. **Sue** to liaise with LGGs prior to next year's event (**Glenys** for Arrangements Calendar).]

5. **Renovating the wildflower margin:** **Sue** (and anyone else interested) will seek advice on site from Graeme Skelcher when he comes at the end of July to carry out his surveys of the margins in Flora Field (see 7.2). Afterwards, costings and proposals will be circulated by email for decision between meetings as this has implications for the annual cuts of this margin, the first of which is due after 15th July. **Sue** will also follow up on a request made to NE for advice on species more suited to the wetter parts of this margin. Seed from yellow rattle in the Hay Meadow needs to be collected before haymaking, for introduction into the wildflower margin (**Ian**).

6. Management:

6.1. Improvement of the Long Pads path and creation of the Flora path: Georgina Peacock (Landscape Architect) has been asked to discharge planning conditions and prepare tender documentation (to include resurfacing work, item 6.2), but there has been no feedback. **Hilary** to chase. **Hilary** will again follow up with the Canal and River Trust regarding the access point onto the canal. Lancashire Environmental Fund is due to make a decision on the FA's grant application on 18th July. Hilary is confident that the FA can meet LEF's requirements regarding third party funding.

6.2. Resurfacing of footpaths: See 6.1. Note: decisions on any tenders will be a matter for the FA meeting rather than FFOG.

- 6.3. AGM decision re Little Wood:** It was unanimously agreed at the FA AGM on 20th June that Little Wood should not be opened up for public access.
- 6.4. Local Nature Reserve designation:** This is still in the hands of Lancaster City Council. [Following the meeting, Oliver noted that slow progress was being made and some questions have been raised that require him to consult the FA Trustees.]
- 6.5. Arable update:** The crop appears to be growing well. No sign (yet?) of the wildflowers sown within it.
- 6.6. Grazing matters:** Hilary, Andrew and Dave held the first annual review meeting with the Graziers on 25th June, notes of which have been circulated to FFOG. It was a productive meeting, and will be repeated at a similar time in future years (**Glenys** for Arrangements Calendar).

On **herd size**:

As agreed at May FFOG 6.5, Glenys, Sue and Mick produced an analysis of the revised cattle stocking regime for the HK10 fields based on livestock units (LU) proposed by Ben Hibbins (NE Adviser). After their report had been sent to FFOG members for comment, its recommendations were shared with the Graziers at the meeting. They appeared happy with the proposals, namely:

- Switch to a new Stocking Calendar based on the current proposal from Ben.
- The Graziers should reduce the herd size in Autumn 2017 to achieve both better winter conditions (i.e. maximum of 14 animals on 1st December 2017) and ensure compatibility with the breeding season requirement (i.e. maximum of 1.2 LU at any point between 1st April and 30 June).
- Greater winter grazing should be permitted by arrangement, taking into account the amount of grass and condition of the fields.
- Ben has suggested monitoring the impact on the reserve, so the LU target could be reviewed depending on factors such as sward height, and conditions on the Gun Range. These matters should be discussed with the Graziers at an annual review meeting.

The Graziers outlined their intentions for a significant reduction in the herd size in the Autumn. This appears compatible with the new regime.

Glenys will adapt the herd size monitoring system to an LU basis, and to include a forecast over the coming 12 months. To be held on Dropbox.

[Note: Following the meeting it was realised that Ben Hibbins has still not responded to the FA's request for written confirmation of a derogation covering this year's overstocking in relation to the existing NE Agreement and has yet to make formal changes to the Agreement to switch to the new Stocking Calendar – **Sue** to chase.]

On **improving winter conditions**:

The Graziers have no objections to a second gate into School Pond. **Glenys & Ian** will consider its position. **Ian** will contact a Contractor for an estimate of cost, for decision between meetings.

The Graziers agreed to the relocation of supplementary feeding from the Gun Range to the LGGs Field. The ring feeder will continue to be used, but moved around to reduce poaching. They will accept either small or large bales, but require them to be square. FFOG agreed to continue with small bales this year (although the cost differential will be investigated for next year's decision – **Ian**). [Note: Following the meeting, Ian contacted the haymaking contractor. Initial indications are that there are considerable potential savings.] At least half of the bales will be stored in the Gun Range 'barn' (who will move these up in November?). Some could be placed under a tarpaulin in the LGGs field (estimated cost less than £200), but the FA has also had an offer of a surplus shed that could provide storage at the top of the Gun Range. **Ian** to inspect for suitability. **Mick** to consider location and explore the idea with the Graziers.

On **other matters**: Outstanding ear tagging is expected to be done alongside upcoming routine TB testing. Cattle passports are not proof of pedigree; **Hilary** to ask the Graziers to provide evidence of pedigree registration. A robust water supply to West Field is still an issue (see 3.2 and 7.1).

- 6.7. Tree Surgeon's progress & new survey report:** There has been no further work on the reserve since May FFOG: **Ian** will contact Andy Lee to establish his plans for the outstanding work on the ash tree by the stump circle. Meanwhile, Andy's new survey has been submitted. Given its wider scope, the meeting agreed to Ian's suggestions for how to handle its greater detail. The Tree Surgeon's recommendations relating to trees in the Aldcliffe Road Triangle will be left to FOTT for consideration, decision and commissioning (**Dave**). The remaining recommendations relating to the Orchard, Flora and Fauna and also the Playground will be dealt with by FFOG through the Woodland Management Group (Oliver, Graham and Ians N., F. and P.) – **Ian** to convene. Commissioning new work on the reserve and Playground trees will await the group's feedback to September FFOG.

7. Monitoring:

- 7.1. Maintenance and HLS habitat inspections:** Apart from the ponds and ditches (see 9.1), Graham's inspections reveal relatively minor problems. The nose pump does not appear to be working. **Ian** will look at this with Ken, but it is not urgently needed at the moment, so can wait to be combined with the solar powering investigation. Graham recommends that the odd bit of graffiti that has appeared be dealt with promptly so as not to encourage more. There have been a handful of instances of unauthorised access to Pony Wood, some of which have involved campfires and some of which have been dealt with by FFOG members. Graham confirms that ragwort appears under control (see 8.1).
- 7.2. Progress with surveys:** Dan Haywood has now carried out two of his three breeding bird surveys. Graeme Skelcher will do his second meadow survey on Wednesday 12th July, with the arable margin survey scheduled for the last week in July (see 5). Sue has been in contact with Christine Bennett who is continuing to record butterfly sightings on a spreadsheet and on the website. There has been good feedback from the NLWG organised event in the Orchard on 9th June, focusing on mosses, lichens and invertebrates. Results are being collated, with report to follow (**Chris**). An agricultural ecologist has been encountered doing survey work in the Orchard in his spare time, **Sue** will contact him.

7.3. Bumblebee surveying: Oliver is keen to put his recent training in bumblebee identification and recording into practice, concentrating on Hay and Carr House Meadows. He will provide a report at the end of the season.

7.4. Orchard monitoring: The annual inspection was carried out on 27th April by Keith Taylor, Emma Foster and Glenys. The report contains individual details for each fruit trees which will guide work over the coming year. Despite accomplishing more of the basic maintenance work as a result of Emma joining Keith on a fairly regular basis, overall there has been a slight decline in the health of the Orchard. But still over half the trees are judged to be very healthy and thriving. Conditions have changed for the better since 2013 – when monitoring began – due to the attention given to the trees as individuals, and also to the considerable effort made by Volunteers to raise light levels and reduce competing vegetation. There is now little more that can be done. The trees, hedges and houses to the west will continue to deprive the Orchard of light from afternoon onwards. Keith warns that as the FA's fruit trees age, it will become more challenging and time-consuming to keep them healthy and thriving. Longer term, the meeting agreed that a strategy for managing/renewing the Orchard after the end of the NE Agreement needs to be discussed (**Glenys** to note). On specific recommendations:

- It was agreed to take out fruit trees no. 58 and 62, which are suffering from canker (**Ian**).
- The Hedge Working Party (**Ian**) will do more work on the old damson copse: reduce undergrowth, take off suckers, remove branches extending into Orchard (e.g. by no. 30) and generally open up.
- Further reduction in the height of the Pads path hedges between the Orchard crossroads and middle entrance has since been incorporated into Ian's hedging programme (see 4).

8. Volunteer activities:

8.1. Volunteer activities: Full reports for May and June are attached. The Ragwort Working Party has reconvened with two sweeps of the reserve now completed. There has been no use of glyphosate; digging out all the ragwort has proved to be a manageable task. "Real progress" to quote Ian. The reserve will be swept again in August. Meanwhile the Wednesday morning RWP will morph into the SWP (see 8.4). Associate Volunteers are also continuing to make a valuable contribution to day-to-day management. The long-planned introduction of purple ramping fumitory faces further delay as the season has not been favourable to the intended donations. [But perhaps not! Pots for planting out delivered on 8th July.] The fence rail by the Lucy Brook crossing has been repaired. Tasks proposed for the Volunteer session on Saturday 8th July (to be led by Mick) were approved, with the addition of tackling a large branch that has fallen by the stump circle.

8.2. Summer pruning working party: As a Chair's action between meetings, the practicalities and health & safety matters were sorted out to establish a new Volunteer group to undertake specific summer tasks in the Orchard. Led by Emma Foster, in the first instance the Volunteers will be local refugees and asylum seekers. Various factors hindered the group's start such that the main work window was missed. Establishing this working party may now be delayed until next year (**Ian, Emma**).

- 8.3. Haymaking preparations:** Now that the issue of bale size has been resolved (see 6.6). **Ian** will instruct last year's contractor to carry out the work ASAP after 15th July.
- 8.4. Scything plans:** Five FA Volunteers took part in a scything training course on 17th & 18th June and six scythes have been purchased. This new equipment and expertise will soon be put into action scything thistles, undertaking rush control (FFOG May item 4) and curbing grass along the Fauna footpath. (Grass cutting in Pony Wood is also a possibility but surface rocks risk damaging the scythes – clearing rocks to be considered as a task for winter, **Ian**.) Scything will be carried out during Wednesday morning Volunteer sessions. FFOG also agreed to the introduction of a regular Tuesday evening session starting 11th July, meeting 7pm at the shed for about 2 hours. The latter sessions will be co-ordinated by Paul Ferguson. Initially an email about the Tuesday sessions will be sent to all those that have received scything training or specifically expressed an interest. But the intention is to share knowledge with others as the group gains experience. At the start of each session, time will be devoted to setting up for the work and at the end to cleaning and careful storage of the scythes. **Ian** and **Paul** have discussed the practicalities and health & safety matters and written a Site Specific Risk Assessment (circulated to FFOG members). The aim is to cut thistles in the first session(s) to provide (hopefully!) an easy introduction before moving on to more challenging tasks. **Paul** and **Ian** will be meeting before the first Tuesday session to map out the work programme. [Done and circulated to FFOG members on 12th July].
- 8.5. Fields Access List annual review:** There are currently 38 people who have permission to access the nature reserve fields independently, at a time of their own choosing. Temporary permission has been granted to a Lancaster University student to undertake research into the behaviour of *B. hypnorum*. They were all contacted recently to alert them to the presence of a bull in the White Park herd. The proposed amendment (re a bull) to the safety information sheet issued when people are added to the list was approved. **Glenys** will add the updated information and the list of people to the FA's Dropbox (and send copies direct to **Ian**). FFOG agreed to a request from Carole Martin to take photographs from within the reserve (**Glenys** to contact and add to list).
- 8.6. Queen's Award for Voluntary Service:** The efforts and achievements of all the FA's various Volunteers has been recognised by the receipt of The Queen's Award for Voluntary Service 2017. An award ceremony will be held in Preston on 27th September at 4pm. Hilary is keen for all the 10 places available to the FA to be taken up. **FFOG members** interested in attending should contact **Hilary** ASAP.

9. Standing items:

- 9.1. Arrangements:** **Sue** will remind the arable farmer that harvesting is allowed by NE after 31st July. She will also assess the success of the wildflower sowing within the arable and its impact on the crop for report to September FFOG.

Mick has some spare bird-friendly mix and will scatter this into the stubble when the arable has been harvested.

Once haymaking is over, **Ian** will remind the Graziers that the cattle need to be brought in to graze the aftermath. He will install the anti-sycamore netting on the shed roof during August.

Winter work on ponds and ditches will be a discussion item on the September agenda. In preparation: **Sue** will seek advice on how to deal with the Upper Sowerholme channel, consulting a group of FFOG members as necessary, **Graham** will experiment with moss etc removal and **Chris** will consult NLWG members.

All members to consider the impact of the open gate at Cromwell Road for review at September FFOG.

9.2. Financial control:

May Item 9.1– First Aid certificate renewal for Graham £133.20

Item 4 – Maximum £100 for materials for stock fence

tem 6.7 – Tree survey invoice £550 (**Ian**)

9.3. **Organised events for notification to FA: Graham** is running two Forest Craft sessions, aimed at children accompanied by their parents, in the Orchard on the afternoons of 22nd and 29th July. He will arrange publicity. Graham may also be holding sessions for a local refugee and asylum group and Winmarleigh C of E Primary School (usual school visit booking arrangements to be followed). The school is participating in the Woodland Trust Green Schools Award. **Graham** will check whether Tony is aware of this scheme.

10. AOB:

10.1. **Working with Volunteers suffering from dementia:** FFOG welcomed the idea of trying to involve people with dementia in work on the reserve. **Mick** will initially work with someone on a one-to-one basis and evaluate for September FFOG. H&S documents etc will be designed with the help of Michael Sheppard.

10.2. **Lyme's Disease:** Following his first aid refresher course, **Graham** will be raising awareness of this disease at his Forest Schools sessions (see 9.2). FFOG will consider further at the September meeting.

11. **Date/place of next meetings:** Thursday 7th September, Thursday 2nd November, at 7.30pm Venue: Whitegates Sunnyside Close.

Ian Procter's Report on Volunteer Activities:

1st May 2017

Inspected for JKW in the Howson's gate area. Found two weak stems. Sprayed with glyphosate. Graham reports no JKW elsewhere in the reserve.

2nd May 2017

15 bags of ragwort taken to tip.

3rd May 2017

The Ragwort Working Party (RWP) recruited 7 volunteers on a beautiful if breezy morning.

- We returned to the Grammar School fields and the Gun Range and finished off digging out their ragwort.
- We made our way into Upper Sowerholme to assess whether it was feasible for the working party to clear unwanted and rotting vegetation from the drainage channel and pond. It was decided not to as:
 - This requires more specialist equipment that we don't have, apart from Graham. Long waders rather than wellingtons together with long waterproof gauntlets will be needed. See photo.
 - The problem of removing the reeds we are encouraging along with the undesirables.
 - NE requirements
 - Note that although not a deal breaker this will be extraordinarily hard work
- Meanwhile Graham was preparing his material for the weekend Exhibition and then clearing out Anna's Pond.

We have completed the first sweep of the Reserve clearing its ragwort. The dry weather and our good start to the season means that we have run out of ragwort. This is very good news as compared to previous years but we are sure there is more to come. But for the moment the RWP is suspended. 13 bags of ragwort to the tip in the afternoon.



13th May 2017

The Saturday volunteer session saw only 9 volunteers attending on a damp but improving morning.

- We cleared overgrowing vegetation from around the fruit circle.
- Planted woodland plants from Fiona Sturgess in Pony Wood (Woodruff, primrose, wood anemone, betony).
- Planted cowslips from Fiona Sturgess in the Fauna wildflower plot and the Hay Meadow. (NOTE the purple ramping fumitory from Keith are not ready due to the dry weather and may not be available this year).
- Also in the Fauna wildflower plot we sowed wildflower seed from the Yorkshire Dales Millenium Trust. Thanks to Oliver.
- The trees growing by our wall in Aldcliffe Road were cut back (more to do BELOW).
- Self-seeded willows around the ponds in Flora Field were dug out.
- A large rock, exposed by the ploughing, was moved to the edge of the sown area of Flora Field (needs to go further).

- The access points alongside Lucy Brook where the cattle are gaining access to the stream area were wired off.
- Self seeded birch and willow in the Hay Meadow wet area were dug out, more to do (DONE ON THE 14th).
- The fallen wall stones at the Towneley entrance were moved to the shed for safety and security.
- A large log which had been moved near the Towneley entrance and was blocking a path was moved to a more secure and safe area.
- Nettles, brambles and other obstructions were cleared from around the children's orienteering posts.

So, despite small numbers, a very productive morning.

18th May 2017

Three volunteers spent most of the morning replacing a broken belt on the mower.

21st May 2017

One volunteer spent the evening finishing off cutting back the tree growth on Aldcliffe Road.

31st May 2017

Three volunteers attended the Wednesday evening volunteer session, led by Mick in Ian's absence on royal duties.

- A census of saplings in Pony Wood revealed 17 dead saplings which need to be replaced this winter. A record was kept of where and what species as far as we could tell.
- The half fencing posts we rescued from old fencing in Flora Field were brought back from Little Wood to the shed for future use in hedging or similar work.

Associate Volunteers (May)

- Trimming back and digging out bramble around the Paddock
- Keeping the small saplings clear of enveloping vegetation
 - Pads footpath south of Lucy Brook
- Mowing the Orchard
- Strimming the playground
- Trimming back the Pads footpath
- Cutting back nettles encroaching on the path near Cromwell Road
- An enormous amount of work done on repairs to the playground, see Ken's FA reports

8th June 2017

Two volunteers added strengthening barbed wire to the fence along the west hedge of West Field to deter our bull from courting our neighbour's heifers. Whilst we were there the heifers were more than provocative and Billy showed interest but from our side of the fence / hedge.

10th June 2017

The weather forecast was for heavy rain all morning. This was nearly right, it rained heavily most of the morning. Despite this nine people attended the Saturday volunteering session.

- We trimmed around the smaller saplings in Pony Wood and the extension to give them a head start against the grass. (Job continued and finished by Associate Volunteer)
- The loose hedging stake just down the Pads footpath was hammered home.
- Overhanging grass and nettles throughout the Orchard was trimmed back to protect children and facilitate the mowing.
- Keith continued his summer pruning of the fruit trees.

- The overhanging rowan in the Orchard was cut off.
- Overhanging soft fruit in the circle were tied back and / or staked.
- The ivy climbing the Norway maple, severed last year, was checked and is indeed dead.
- The yard area around the shed was tidied.
- Ragwort was dug out of the Paddock.
- Dock was cut back to prevent flowering and seeding in the Paddock, along the Fauna path and in Carr House Meadow.

21st June 2017

The Ragwort Working Party (RWP) resumes work with eight volunteers making a sweep through the Hay and Carr House meadows and a start made on another tour through Big Meadow. The hay meadows were delightful, brimming with herbs: yellow rattle, red and white clover, ox eye daisy, self heal, meadowsweet around the edge and lots of other flowers in smaller quantity including sneezewort¹, meadow vetchling, black medick, common fleabane, purple loosestrife, hawkbit, meadow cranesbill and a scattering of the plant not to be publicised! The latter found both in Carr House and Big meadows, I think on the first occasion in recent times.

A discussion on developing the RWP as a scything group once we are on top of the ragwort again. In the afternoon, 16 full bags of ragwort to the tip.

28th June 2017

Five volunteers joined the RWP on a damp morning but not as damp as the weather forecast suggested. The second sweep through Big Meadow was completed. Ragwort dug out from the southern end of the Orchard. In the afternoon 12 bags of ragwort to the tip.

The rain continued and worsened for the evening session which saw three volunteers tackle urgent tasks:

- The Orchard orienteering posts were cleared for an upcoming school visit.
- Along the Pads footpath, the debris left by the Council strimmers on top of our young saplings was cleared and surrounding vegetation cut back.
- Overhanging brambles and nettles, emphasised by the rain, were trimmed back.
- We rescued a fallen bat box from beneath the oak between the Pads footpath and Big Meadow.

Associate volunteers (June)

- Selective strimming of the Fauna path to maintain access and cut back stinging nettles.
- Clearing and trimming round the smaller saplings along the Pads footpath and keeping the path clear (between the Orchard and Big Meadow).
- Clearing and trimming round the smaller saplings along the Pads footpath and keeping the path clear (between West Field and Lower Sowerholme / Flora Field)
- Mowing the grass
- Emergency removal of the broken 'Spring Chicken' in the playground.

¹ This was from a plug planted last year but the overall picture with these is very disappointing.