

Fairfield Association
Flora, Fauna and Orchard Management Group [FFOG]
Minutes of the Meeting held on Thursday 1st March 2018 at 7.30 pm
at Whitegates, Sunnyside Close

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

1. **Apologies:** Dave Brookes, Tony Finn
2. **Minutes of last meeting:** Addition to item 12.2 Financial Control: *The new tools and materials fund to be added to the annual spreadsheet (Dave)*. Otherwise approved.

Sue took the opportunity to propose that this spending on tools be appraised as part of the annual financial review in January (**Ian**). It was also decided that future discussion of surveys etc should consider value for money to inform decisions about recommissioning (**All**).

3. **Matters arising from Minutes:**
 - 3.1. **Missing NE payment (3.1):** Latest information is that the first payment for 2017 is 'imminent', and the second should be received by June.
4. **Wetland management plans:** Graham circulated a revised paper, updating the one which had been deferred from January. This provided an analysis of the state of the ponds and Lucy Brook, with proposals for management, which were welcomed and supported.

A significant amount of work has been done over the past few months clearing vegetation to create more open water on the reserve. Whilst this has included removal of bulrushes, their invasive nature means that there will still be some for biodiversity etc. Clearing work will pause for the breeding season. Interested volunteers will be invited to form a Pond Working Party, to operate within regular Volunteer sessions and/or separately (**Ian/Graham**).

Lucy Brook is suffering from an accumulation of debris over many years, so clearing its channel is a major and ongoing project. Particular issues raised:

- in the area where the channel is unclear, self-seeded willows are establishing. These could block the water course. Removing them will be a big task and it is unclear where the reserve boundary is here.
- there is a substantial fallen tree that requires removal.
- permission will be required where the brook runs through the gardens of houses on Aldcliffe Road. The residents will be contacted by letter at an appropriate time.
- near the Cromwell Road gate there is a stretch where the cattle still have access to the water. This will be inspected in a dry spell with a view to fencing it off (**Ian**).

The Upper Sowerholme channel will be cleared on an annual basis in autumn. Willow Pond and the West Field scrape are both suspected to be leaking through a puncture in the clay base. This would be very difficult to treat. **Sue** to consult RSPB contacts.

The eel pipe in Anna's Pool has a tendency to drop, draining water unintentionally. A float or shortening the length of the pipe were suggested (**Graham**). A tarpaulin is now in place on Lucy's Pool, hopefully deterring mare's tail.

5. **Rush control review and proposals:** In a background report, Glenys described the characteristics of the soft rush cover required to create/maintain a good habitat (principally for the NE feature species) without conflicting with grazing, arable or wildflower areas. Appraisal of the 2017 experiment of managing by scything alone concluded that, compared to other methods, there is nothing to indicate scything is less effective. It also has several positive benefits (such as avoiding use of chemicals and damage from machinery, popular with volunteers, lower cost). The FA has the equipment and trained personnel to make a significant impact on the rush.

A separate paper advocated on-going annual cutting of the soft rush and recommended scything again, for 2018 at least. This was agreed. The paper included specific proposals for each field. In discussion, there was support for rotational cutting and keeping the fringes of fields such as Big Meadow clear. It was also noted that snipe numbers in School Pond will have been reduced by the very wet conditions recently as well as by the severe cropping of the rush by the cattle. The proposed actions by field were agreed, with the exception of West Field. Snipe and lapwing have differing preferences, but the nature of the rush developing around the scrape is not ideal for either. **Sue** will seek advice on the best approach to West Field, taking into account the presence of large trees on the west boundary which attract predators..

Ian will arrange the timings and programme of work with Paul.

6. **Management:**

6.1. **Arable update:** The Arable Farmer has agreed to delay ploughing and drilling until April to allow for the construction of the Flora path. Sourcing of the seeds for the re-sowing of parts of the floristically enhanced grass margin are in hand. Sue has found a mix potentially suitable for the damper parts, but **Mick** is still trying to establish what the FA's usual supplier can provide. It was noted that seeds for this margin are considerably more expensive than for the bird friendly margin (see 9.2). **Hilary** has not had a response from the Green Hay Group. It was noted that in the Hay Meadow the advice to cluster the sowing of yellow rattle had quickly led to a spread across the whole field. **Sue** has still to seek approval for yellow rattle from the Arable Farmer, and, when finalised, send the proposed species list to NE for approval.

6.2. **Grazing matters:** Still nothing from NE on formally incorporating the new stocking arrangements into the FA's Agreement. The cattle have been on the reserve for a few days, but the FA is comfortably on course for remaining within NE's limit for winter access. The second gate into School Pond has been installed. Because of the sloping ground it is catching when fully open. **Ian** will arrange to move the fastening post. The contractor has also replaced the cracked supporting post on the hinge side of the gate into LGGS field. Graham's monitoring reports (item 7.1) make a number of points relating to the the cattle during such a wet and cold winter. It was agreed to defer further discussion until May FFOG, which will prepare for the annual review meeting with the Graziers in June. **Sue** asked **FFOG members** to contact her with observations and suggestions for collation in advance of the meeting. (**Glenys** to remind FFOG members.) **Glenys** will also provide the latest herd size/livestock unit predictions.

6.3. Barn owl introduction: The RSPB's plans to release a female barn owl into the reserve have been put on hold until weather conditions are more favourable.

6.4. Paddock trees: An elder in the west boundary of the The Paddock recently came down in the wind, encroaching onto the track. It was kindly moved by a resident. Volunteers have made a check and found no other obviously 'loose' trees, but **Ian** will consult the Tree Surgeon. As this is in the conservation area, work on any of the larger trees will require permission from Lancaster City Council.

7. Monitoring:

7.1. Maintenance and HLS habitat inspections: Graham's reports circulated. A number of the points he raised were covered elsewhere in the meeting. Graham was disappointed to find that someone had taken the 'offcuts' from the trimming of the living willow hedges around School Pond without permission. (They were to be offered to FA supporters.) [They have mysteriously returned! The offer will now continue – **Graham.**]

7.2. Progress with surveys: Reports on the latest nest box monitoring were circulated. Dan Haywood has now made his final visit and his report on winter birds is expected soon. (A highlight was the noting of two skylarks in Flora Field.) **Sue** will collate and summarise the results of the year's bird surveys for the next meeting.

8. Volunteer activities:

8.1. Volunteer activities: Full reports for January and February are attached. In early January, an attempt was made to remove the netting (intended to prevent sycamores seeding) from the shed roof. This proved to be impossible without considerable damage to the sedum. This means returning to hand-clearing the sycamore keys and self-seeds, with the hope that when the sedum is fully established the problem will diminish.

An extra Volunteer session is scheduled for Saturday March 3rd to plant saplings as part of the 'Pony Wood project' (**Ian**). The plan is to plant up to 600 saplings (sourced from the Woodland Trust's MOREhedges Scheme whereby the FA gets hedge saplings at a considerably reduced cost). These will begin the new hedge by being planted alongside the existing new fence slanting up the hill from the gateway into Pony Wood. It is hoped that FA Volunteers will be joined by those from the Lune Rivers Trust and Rotarians. Supervised by **Mick**, the latter will be planting their donation of 105 saplings of the Woodland Trust's 'Wildlife Collection' as an easterly extension of Pony Wood. This work has received the support of the Tree Protection Officer. The work will be deferred until the following Wednesday Work Group and the regular monthly Saturday session on the 10th March as and if necessary. Otherwise **Ian** has a more routine list of tasks for the Saturday session. His proposals were approved.

8.2. Review of Associate Volunteers scheme: The Associate Volunteer (AV) Scheme extends the FA's group volunteer sessions by providing the opportunity for individuals to work on the reserve *in their own time*. **Ian's** report identified the various ways in which the 15 active AVs contribute (grass cutting, hedge trimming, tools maintenance etc). The meeting recognised that with their valuable contribution plus the regular programme of volunteer sessions has put the FA in a good position to manage the reserve effectively. For instance, **Ian** noted that the winter hedge trimming programme he devised in September is close to being achieved. It was agreed that **Ian** will

promote the AV scheme on an annual basis, advertising for new members through both the Volunteers and general email lists. (**Glenys** to add to Arrangements Calendar.)

8.3. Working with Volunteers with dementia: The FA has been approached via the website to accept a second Volunteer with dementia (**Mick** is assessing). Eight FA supporters participated in the second induction session led by Mick on 22nd February. Mick has walked around the reserve with another Dementia Champion. A report will be presented to the FA and/or FFOG. One comment was that the main paths are very helpful as they are clearly demarcated by fencing and hedging.

8.4. Review of John Muir Award scheme: Graham has been offering this scheme to FA Volunteers for three years now. 8 people hold the highest level of certification (Conserver), 7 Explorer and 18 Discovery. A pupil from LGGS has progressed through all three levels. Despite her example, the scheme has not attracted many young people, particularly as the University no longer participates as a group in FA Volunteer sessions. However, JMA continues to provide a good means of recognising the contributions being made to the management of the reserve and several certificates were presented at the recent Volunteers buffet. It has proved more difficult than expected to identify appropriate recipients from among the Triangle Volunteers, where the mix of tasks is rather different. **Graham** will continue to liaise with **Dave** with the aim of including Triangle Volunteers in the award scheme in future. Following Graham's example, the Lune Rivers Trust is starting to offer the John Muir award to its volunteers.

9. Standing items:

9.1. Arrangements:

Ian:

- Arrange path and grass/nettle cutting regime for Orchard
- Plan programme for tackling undesirables and invasive aliens.. For thistles, co-ordinate with the graziers and arrange scything and pulling tasks at appropriate times
- International scythe peening day 1 April
- Put out nose pump to permit use of West Field. Start maintenance of Long Pads path vegetation, if job not taken back by Lancashire County Council
- Arrange summer pruning working party
- Arrange with Sue and Graham the annual review of herbicide spraying COSHH and Site Assessment forms

Sue:

- Commission Pony & Little Wood flora survey for end April/early May.
- Commission breeding bird survey
- Commission early survey of wildflowers in Hay & Carr House Meadows for May.
- Organise maintenance arrangement for Long Pads Path (Lancaster FP no.41) by contacting the Public Rights of Way team at Lancaster County Council .

Glenys will organise monitoring of Orchard fruit trees for 'blossom time'. (This year to extend to an inspection of cherry trees).

9.2. Financial control:

See also item 2.

Item 6.1 – Seeds for the floristically enhanced grass margin of the order of £650 plus VAT. Seeds for bird friendly margin about £25 plus VAT.

9.3. Organised events for notification to FA: It has not be possible to arrange a bird walk this winter. **Sue** will try to arrange one for the spring.

10. AOB: None.

11. Date/place of next meetings: Thursday 3rd May, Thursday 5th July, at 7.30pm. Venue: Whitegates Sunnyside Close.

Ian Procter's Report on Volunteer Activities:

3rd January 2018

Nine volunteers formed the Hedge Working Party (HWP) on a blustery morning following Storm Eleanor.

- Two volunteers continued the scything of the Flora Field wildflower margin.
- The rest of us continued to de-bramble and trim the hedge between the Pads footpath and Flora Field.
- That completed we moved on to the hedge forming the southern boundary of the Pony Wood extension and then the southern boundary of Flora Field.
- Along the way we repaired and replaced sapling sticks and plastics.

9th January 2018

A new hasp fitted to the pedestrian gate entering the Pony Wood extension. Much better.

10th January 2018

Ten volunteers formed the HWP on a mild, pleasant morning.

- We took a look at the site by the Towneley Close Orchard entrance to consider the proposal for planting holly and gorse. Keith pointed out the fire risk with gorse, and suggested broom.
- Keith continued the pruning of the fruit trees.
- Ken continued the application of glyphosate to invasive elder and sycamore in the hedges.
- Paul and Glenys continued the scything and clearance of the Flora Field wild flower margin.
- The rest of us continued the de-brambling and trimming of the southern boundary hedge of Flora Field. Virtually finished although we need to return to plant extra saplings and burn the brash.

As the list of tasks above indicates this is not now just a hedging working party. Neither is the summer Wednesday morning group just for ragwort. So it was suggested that we rename as the Wednesday Work Group (WWG).

11th January 2018

Five volunteers carted fencing supplies from Sunnyside Lane to the shed.

13th January 2018

14 volunteers attended the monthly Saturday morning session on a chilly but fine winter's morning.

- A great deal of unwanted self seeding saplings and bramble were cut out throughout the Orchard.
- We attempted to move the netting from the shed roof but found that, unlike last year, the sedum had grown through and moving the net ripped out the sedum by the root. UNSURE WHAT TO DO other than gather up several bags of leaves / seeds.
- The broken fence post between the Hay Meadow and the Fauna path double gates was replaced and rewired.
- A new post was put in for keeping open the Big Meadow / Hay Meadow gate.
- A new gate post for repairing the gate between the Grammar Scholl Field and the Hay Meadow was taken to site.
- Around 50 fencing posts were barrowed down to the West Field for fencing repairs. They were positioned around the field.
- A start was made to strengthening the West Field / Pads footpath fencing with new posts and barbed wire.
- Further work was done clearing Lucy Brook.

15th January 2018

Repairs were made to the gate and posts between the Hay Meadow and Big Meadow.

17th January 2018

Seven volunteers formed the WWG when, after a stormy night the morning turned out to be bright, breezy but cold.

- Pruning of the fruit trees continued in the Orchard.
- Failed fence posts along the West Field / Pads footpath boundary were replaced and weaknesses in the fence addressed by a top line of barbed wire.
- In preparation for the planting and new fence work on the west side of West Field we cleared old brash obstructing the work areas.
- Fence posts were placed in position for the new fence stretches.

24th January 2018

Thirteen volunteers formed the WWG. Once again the storm passed over and we had a bright and breezy morning. The promised help from the Lune Rivers Trust did not attend.

- Keith continued the pruning of the Orchard fruit trees.
- Graham continued clearing the Lucy Brook channel.
- Remaining volunteers planted 250 saplings to fill the gaps in the West hedge of West Field. Canes and protectors applied.
- We also rammed home about half the posts we need to form a protective fence for the saplings.

31st January 2018

Eight volunteers attended the WWG on another blustery but thankfully dry morning.

- Keith continued pruning the Orchard fruit trees.
- Ken applied glyphosate to the stems of elder and sycamore in the Orchard / Pads footpath hedge
- We completed the ramming of posts for the protective fence in West Field and fixed two strands of barbed wire along them.
- Fifty more saplings were planted to strengthen the hedge between the Pads footpath and Lower Sowerholme.

Associate volunteers in January:

- Cleared Lucy Brook.
- Playground repairs
- Fruit tree pruning in the Orchard
- Fruit tree planting in the Orchard
- Hedge trimming between the Orchard and the Pads footpath

7th February 2018

Ten volunteers formed the Wednesday Work Group (WWG) on a cold but beautifully sunny morning.

Three volunteers continued the scything of the Flora Field wildflower margin.

The remaining seven agreed the Site Specific Risk Assessment (SSRA) for brash burning.

Then:

- The brash earlier cut out of the Flora Field south hedge was burnt.
- Most of the remaining 150 saplings donated by the Woodlands Trust were used to gap up
 - In a space in the Pads / Flora Field hedge near the concrete wall
 - In spaces all along the south hedge of Flora Field

10th February 2018

The weather forecast said persistent rain and a cold, blustery wind. Unfortunately it was an accurate prediction. Despite this 10 volunteers attended the monthly Saturday volunteer session. We prioritised the work and completed the necessary jobs.

- In the wild part of the Orchard we planted and staked two horse chestnut, an oak and a bird cherry, all donated by members and replacing trees we had cut down earlier in the winter.
- In the 'old damson copse' at the Towneley Close entrance we continued the clearance of the ground removing brash, digging out bramble and cutting off self seeded saplings before planting and staking 8 holly, 6 broom and 6 gorse.
- We constructed two willow play domes with the tunnel between them to be completed.
- Mud on the path below the Towneley Close entrance was cleared.
- Elder intruding into the hedge between the Orchard and the Pads footpath was identified and marked for removal.

12th February 2018

A special session to catch up on:

- Marking out the beetle banks in Flora Field to indicate where not to plough. Adding hazard tape to the fences around the manholes to highlight their presence.

- Trimming the remainder of the hedge at the southern end of Flora Field.
- Planting the remaining 8 saplings from the Woodlands Trust

14th February 2018

A cold, wet and windy morning saw 7 volunteers attend the WWG led by Emma with Ken as First Aider.

- We continued the application of glysohate to the elder and sycamore in the Orchard / Pads footpath hedge.
- The hedge between the Pads footpath and Big Meadow south of the Orchard was trimmed back.

21st February 2018

Eight volunteers attended the WWG on a lovely Spring like morning.

- The patient scything and clearing of the Flora Field flower margin continued.
- The remaining volunteers agreed a SSRA for brash burning and built a fire in the Big Meadow to burn both the brash generated by the laying of the hedge adjacent to the Fauna path ash tree and that displaced from Lucy Brook by Graham's heroic clearance work.
- The latter had to be abandoned eventually as our energy levels plummeted at the same time as our boots sank deeper into the mud. The remaining brash will form a habitat pile.

Associate Volunteers in February:

- Hedge trimming, Pads footpath / Big Meadow
- Hedge trimming, Pads / Orchard
- Hedge trimming, Pads / West Field
- Scything and clearing of the Flora Field wildflower margin
- Playground repairs
- Clearing Lucy Brook
- Constructing new willow screen adjacent to School Pond
- Trimming and adjusting the willow screen around School Pond

Volunteer activities from February 21st, will be reported with those for March.