

Fairfield Association
Flora, Fauna and Orchard Management Group [FFOG]
Minutes of the Meeting held on Thursday 5th July 2018 at 7.30 pm
at Whitegates, Sunnyside Close

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

1. **Apologies:** Dave Brookes, Oliver Fulton

2. **Minutes of last meeting:** *Amendment to item 4.3:* Sue took part in the review meeting with the Graziers, not Mick. *Additional item before the start of the agenda:* Hilary requested that substantive reports start with an executive summary. Sue reminded meeting members to leave Chair's actions to be dealt with by the Chair.

3. **Matters arising from Minutes:**
 - 3.1. **First Aid and chainsaw renewals (item May 7.1, July 7.1):** Helen Hicks renewed her first aid certification at a two day course in Staveley in August. Four people have been booked into Dave Padley's chainsaw course on 30th October.

 - 3.2. **Cattle crossing (8):** At the July meeting it was agreed that it is desirable for the Graziers to shut the gate(s) more regularly to prevent unnecessary crossings of Lucy Brook. This meeting was charged with deciding on the operational details. Ground conditions at the moment do not really justify restricting access. Instead, a Chair's action will be taken as soon as a problem arises, without delaying for a FFOG meeting. Whenever **meeting members** are in this area they should check the state this pinch point, particularly on the Lower Sowerholme side. Concerns to be reported to **Sue**.

 - 3.3. **Adviser visit (4.3):** Mick has re-established contact with Richard Storton, the FA's adviser when he worked for the RSPB. He is happy to visit the reserve, but is currently too busy to agree a date. Questions for Richard should be sent to **Sue** in advance (**meeting members**).

 - 3.4. **Fruit picking (9):** Facebook and the FA's email list have been used to remind people that the Orchard fruit should only be taken for personal use. Disappointingly, a lot of the crop suddenly disappeared around 3rd September. The Wednesday Work Group (WWG) will be cutting the Orchard grass on 12th September. It was suggested that they pick the remaining fruit and distribute it, with an explanation as to why they doing this (**Ian**). Suggestions for next year: try to establish a culture of local responsibility for the crop (Applewatch!), signage around the Orchard itself, alert the PCSO to be aware of such behaviour before it happens. To be revisited at July 2019 FFOG (**Glenys**).

4. **Management:**
 - 4.1. **Arable update:** The crop was harvested on 6th August: no information from the farmer as to its quality or quantity. **Sue** is trying to contact him to arrange a cut of the floristically enhanced grass margin. The newly restored eastern margin has been very floristic, although little of the grass sown has appeared (the report of ecologist's survey will provide more detail – item 5.2). The northern part of the margin is still dominated by grass. The width of the margin here appears to have been gradually reduced by the ploughing. Before the farmer starts work on the field next year, its boundary needs to be marked to prevent this (**Glenys** for Arrangements Calendar).

- 4.2. Grazing matters:** Formal change in NE Agreement and installation of new trough – deferred in Dave’s absence.

Haymaking took place on 23rd July. At the Graziers’ request, larger bales were made this year. This had the benefit of reducing both the amount of plastic wrap and cost (by more than half – see 7.2). The Arable Farmer was the contractor and the operation was quick and highly effective, although removing the opportunity for volunteer involvement. The bales (now difficult to move) are at the bottom of the Gun Range, raising a potential poaching problem if supplementary feeding and watering are concentrated there in the winter. Next year, the FA needs to be more pro-active in ensuring that the bales are located in a more suitable place (an item for discussion at the June review meeting with the Graziers – **Hilary**).

The water pump installed in West Field shortly after the last meeting (July 4.2) lasted just long enough to establish that a manual pump drawing water from Lucy Brook was a feasible option. It has since been replaced (see Volunteer Report 19th July below) with a more robust and expensive version (item 7.2). However this has now been in action for a few weeks without any problems reported. There has been no progress with the sale of the nose pump (**Ian** to contact **Dave**).

Whilst the number of animals in the herd remains at 24, the livestock unit measure will soon be rising as the calves are approaching six months. There is no NE restriction on LUs at this time of year, so this is not a problem as long as ground conditions remain acceptable. The cattle have been grazing the Hay Meadow as required post haymaking, but not Carr House Meadow. **Ian** will contact the Graziers and ask them to mob graze this field, accessing from the Hay Meadow once the gap in the fence (5.1) is plugged.

- 4.3. Wetland management:** All ponds apart from the West Field scrape and School Pond are now holding some water. The bund on Alder Pond requires some repair before it re-fills (**Ian**) and barley straw will be refreshed as the water level rises (**Graham**). The three other ponds in Big Meadow are still clear after last year’s work, so no action needed. The bulrushes have been removed from Cromwell’s Pond. See also item 9.
- 4.4. Digger offer and drainage proposal:** Following on from July item 4.3, **Ian**, **Dave** and **Mick** inspected the area where Flora Field abuts Upper Sowerholme. They agreed that it would be feasible to drain water from the local resident’s garden into the top corner of Lower Sowerholme and then into Upper Sowerholme. This will involve creation of a French drain. The FA’s NE Adviser was initially concerned that the water would be nutrient rich and so contrary to the reedbed creation management prescriptions. However, he has given permission for the work as the drainage will be into the southern corner of Upper Sowerholme, which is outside the NE Agreement. The nutrients will be largely dissipated in this scrubby area, whilst the reedbed should benefit from a rise in the water table. **Dave** will be meeting the digger driver on 7th September. He will ask for any clay that might be found to be put by Willow Pond (as material for leak-repair efforts). He will also ask for turf by Howson’s gate in Flora Field to be scraped off to create better conditions for sowing wildflowers.
- 4.5. Tree surgeon’s progress:** Commissioning of work is still awaiting a decision on the bracing of sycamore 526. **Sue** will continue her efforts to contact an expert on forking trees from Myerscough College and **Hilary** will pursue her contact. They should make a decision and inform **Ian** by 30th September, so that he can instruct the Tree Surgeon.

5. Monitoring:

- 5.1. Maintenance and HLS habitat inspections:** Graham's reports circulated. Many of the points raised are covered elsewhere. There is a place in the Hay Meadow to the east of Lucy Brook where it is potentially possible for the cattle to access gardens. This will be fenced off with barbed wire before the cattle are allowed into the field again (**Ian**). Work has begun on re-cutting a path through Upper Sowerholme, where the rapid growth of the reeds is now making access difficult. Unauthorised activity in Pony Wood appears to have been at a lower level this summer – perhaps deterred by the establishing plantings.
- 5.2. Progress with surveys:** Graeme Skelcher's visits are completed for the year and his report awaited. Dan Haywood's Breeding Bird Survey was submitted just before the meeting. His results will be incorporated by **Sue** into her annual analysis of wildlife sightings for discussion at a later meeting. However, Sue noted that Dan's findings were reassuring. Despite the general impression that this summer had been quiet in terms of birds, he had seen/heard quite a lot, including little owl, tree sparrow and whitethroat. Disappointingly, the grey partridge were not found. His findings provide further evidence that the Fauna land is better at attracting birds than the Flora part of the reserve. (Too soon? Flora – particularly the Pony Wood understorey and extension – is still developing.) Dan has previously advocated the introduction of gorse. **Ian** will check again on the fate of the eight gorse bushes recently planted in Pony Wood.
- 5.3. NLWG Insect Survey report:** A spreadsheet of results from the session on 1st July was circulated. The insects identified were much as expected, but two plants identified in the Hay Meadow marsh were new records for the reserve and local area (flote grass and a hybrid of St John's Wort). It was suggested that next year's study returns to assess the beetle banks and arable margins (**Chris**).

6. Volunteer activities:

- 6.1. Volunteer activities:** Full reports for July and August are attached.

This summer, attendance at the monthly Wednesday evening sessions has been very poor (Mick &/or Ian!). They will be taken out of the calendar for the foreseeable future. In contrast the Tuesday evening Scything Group (running 3rd July to 4th September) has made a valuable contribution, tackling thistles and rush. The meeting expressed its thanks to the participants. Scything of the rush will be continued by the WWG.

The '*Keep Dogs on Lead*' sign at the Orchard end of the Fauna footpath has come off and the one at the Cromwell Road end is badly faded. Dog and cycle signage is due to be considered when the Flora path is installed. In the interim, two replacement signs will be produced as an experiment by burning letters into a slice from a felled tree (**Ian**).

Ian drew attention to the magnitude of the mowing job that David has been doing in the Orchard over the past few years. Manoeuvring the heavy machine under the trees is a particular problem. The WWG will take on this task for the rest of the season, after which **Ian** and **David** will discuss operational details for the future.

On 18th July, the WWG stepped in to help Keith Taylor with summer pruning of the fruit trees. This had become urgent to reduce the stress on the trees caused by the drought. As a result of the success of this session in reducing the burden on Keith and spreading knowledge of fruit tree management, Orchard maintenance will be added to the tasks of the WWG (**Ian**).

Tasks for Saturday 8th September were approved, with the addition of blocking the fence gap highlighted in item 5.1 (**Ian**). A large donation of strong plants (hemp agrimony, red campion and yarrow) and wildflower seeds has generously been made by a member of the Fairfield Allotments (**Hilary** to thank). This will be supplemented with ox-eye daisy (**Ian**) and yellow rattle seed (**Sue**). These will be planted in the wildflower strip beside the Fauna Stones after a light forking and the removal of grass and buttercup.

Plans for winter hedging work were considered. Ian's approach to hedge management and detailed proposals for each hedge were presented to FFOG in July 2017. Work during the coming months will draw on this and mostly involve trimming. However, the short Fauna Path / Carr House Meadow hedge is now ripe for laying during the coming winter. This hedge was planted in 2012 with larger saplings as a screen for the Graziers following the decision to change the proposed route of the Fauna footpath. The meeting discussed the merits of different types of hedges here (considering matters such as wildlife, landscape value and screening). Laying the hedge will clearly reduce its height in the short term, but after two or three years it should be tall, dense and wide: attractive to wildlife, stockproof and an effective screen. There is no Natural England requirement to limit its height to 2m and after it has regrown to an appropriate height it can be managed by trimming. The hedge is the FA's, but acting as good neighbours and given its history, **Hilary** will talk to Robin Loxam before work is carried out. The new Flora path will require considerable new hedge planting which will be shared between the regular work parties and one or more special planting Saturdays.

6.2. Working with Volunteers with dementia: Mick intends to hold a further dementia-friends induction session in October. He has met the Chair of the Bay Dementia Hub who has some interesting proposals that might involve the FA: possibly more volunteers, possible use of the Orchard and Triangle for a University research project on helping to delay the development of the disease. Further detail to be reported to the FA meeting (**Mick**).

7. Standing items:

7.1. Arrangements:

Glenys will arrange winter flush counts, for start of each month from October to April inclusive.

Ian has already made arrangements for the neighbouring farmer to flail the north hedges of West Field. He will review and update first aid equipment and remind First Aiders of what there is and where it can be found at October Volunteer session. From October onwards he will be alert for falling temperature to remove the West Field pump before it freezes.

Sue will commission a winter bird survey.

Meeting members were asked to consider ideas for the Volunteers' Buffet in February (for November meeting).

7.2. Financial control:

Item 3.1 – Cost of chainsaw certificate renewal confirmed as £580 (**Ian**)

Item 4.2 – Haymaking £520.98 (Ian)

Item 4.2 – Cost of second new pump and materials £158.81 (Ian)

7.3. Organised events for notification to FA: None

- 8. Harrowing of reserve fields:** Graham's contact has been too busy to make a site visit. The aim of harrowing and rolling is essentially to improve grass conditions for the cattle; it is of no benefit to wildlife. No further discussion.
- 9. Channel-clearing session in Upper Sowerholme:** Graham reported that the channel is now completely overgrown. July's decision to undertake clearing work again (item 4.3) was therefore confirmed. Timing to be the Saturday volunteer morning on 13th October (Ian). Sue will invite RSPB staff. There was a reminder from Chris that debris should be left in piles on the side. The phragmites have been expanding rapidly and are both alongside and within the channel. Any plants cleared will be replanted elsewhere in Upper Sowerholme.
- 10. AOB:**
 - 10.1. Bird walk:** Sue is seeking a new leader for a winter bird walk around the reserve. Two names have been suggested and she will follow this up.
 - 10.2. Update on Flora Path and improvement of Long Pads Path:** (Item now usually handled by the FA meeting.) The deadline for spending the major grant funding for the project has been extended until the end of November. Approval for the amendment to the planning permission altering the Flora Path at the eastern end is outstanding. Hilary hopes that contractors can start at the western end and do work on the Long Pads whilst this is awaited.
- 11. Date/place of next meetings:** Thursday 1st November, Thursday 10th January 2019, at 7.30pm. Venue: Whitegates Sunnyside Close.

Ian Procter's Report on Volunteer Activities:

21st and 23rd June 2018

The Cromwell Road sub-group (CR) scythed and cleared edges of the Fauna path

27th June 2018

Seven volunteers formed the Wednesday Work Group (WWG) on a hot morning. Lead by Graham in Ian's absence.

- Cutting back of the invading bramble in Upper Sowerholme was completed for this season.
- Ragwort dug out of the Grammar School fields. (LATER – 6 bags to Ian's bin)

The evening session attracted only one volunteer, Mick, who had agreed to lead it. Attendance at these Wednesday evening session has been low for some time, should we continue?

2nd July 2018

The CR took a bag of ragwort out of the Hay meadow marsh.

3rd July 2018

The first meeting of the Scything Group attracted only two volunteers as we unfortunately clashed with other activities including the England World Cup match! However the two of us ensured the Orchard Orienteering Posts were accessible for the following day's school group and then scythed a big patch of near seeding thistle in West Field. So, a satisfactory start.

4th July 2018

Eight volunteers formed the WWG on another hot morning.

- Thanks to Fraser supplying us with water we applied six buckets of water to the hedge saplings heeled in in the Orchard wild area.
- Thanks to Julia for supplying us with water to water the new gorse, broom and holly saplings in the Old Damson Copse.
- Overhanging shrubs were cut back along the Fauna path after a wild rose nearly blocked the path. Too much weight too high up. The hedge really does need laying!
- Ragwort was dug out of the Paddock, Big Meadow, the hay meadows, School Pond and the school field, the latter including some monsters that we hadn't reached before. None are ready to seed so our interventions are timely.

Below are a merry group of ragworters, note that these monster ragworts are from the school fields not the Reserve as such.



5th July 2018

16 bags of ragwort to the tip. Apparently now it's non-recyclable waste. They change it from recyclable to non about every two years.

Also the 'Hand made Pizza' sign and the standard lamp found dumped in the Orchard

9th July 2018

Four volunteers formed the SG and made good progress scything thistles in the School Fields.

10th July 2018

Ten volunteers formed the WWG on another warm and sunny morning.

- The saplings heeled in in the wild part of the Orchard were given another watering.

- Keith made an assessment of drought stress amongst the Orchard fruit trees and concluded they needed a relieving pruning. Top priority for next week.
- We worked as we walked along the Pads footpath trimming overhanging vegetation.
- As recommended by the Woodlands Trust we inspected the new hedge in Pony Wood and removed any intrusive growth within the protective plastic sleeve.
- The same was done for the saplings in the Rotary section.
- Only two of the gorse we planted last autumn could be located. These two looked healthy but this is disappointing.
- Bramble expanding from the south hedge of Flora Field was cut back to keep it under control in the summer and present less of a winter challenge.

The work session as such then ended early, first of all for a walk along the new wild flower margin to the East of the barley crop to admire the wild flowers in the crop and coming along the margin. We then decamped to the log circle in Pony Wood for the first Annual Picnic. Very enjoyable but we should remember to bring some sort of cloth and crockery to put the food on and basic cutlery to eat with!



14th July 2018

Ten volunteers attended the monthly Saturday volunteering session on a hot, sunny morning.

- The final Orchard bench vista was cleared by lowering the hedge levels on either side of the Pads footpath.
- Ragwort was dug out from the Paddock, the northern section of Big Meadow, the Big Meadow marsh and from the hay meadows.
- Vegetation enveloping the apple trees alongside the Pads footpath was cut out and carted away.
- Dock flowering heads in the Orchard were cut off to prevent seeding.
- Invasive vegetation around the new saplings in the Old Damson Copse was cut out and cleared away.

- Bramble growing in the Big Meadow marsh was cut back. I think this is more a job for the scything group as it is difficult to disentangle the bramble from the rush.
- Bulrushes dug out of Cromwell Pond.

17th July 2018

In the morning two volunteers did further work on the hand pump in West Field

In the evening two volunteers formed the SG and continued the scything of thistles in the Grammar School Fields.

In addition a bag of ragwort was dug out.

18th July 2018

Nine volunteers formed the WWG on a warm and pleasant morning.

- The main job of the morning was summer pruning of the Orchard fruit trees. This had become urgent due to the drought conditions of recent weeks. We worked under Keith's guidance. It became clear that this is the best way of relieving pressure on Keith and that, rather than trying to find an 'apprentice', Orchard tree maintenance should be added to the tasks of the WWG. That way 'many hands make light work' and knowledge of what is involved is disseminated.
- The prunings were carted away.
- Ken continued work improving the fitting of the West Field hand pump.
- Ragwort was dug out of the Grammar School fields and Big Meadow.

19th July 2018

6 bags of ragwort and dock to the tip.

Two volunteers completed the work on the hand pump in West Field. It works brilliantly.

Elation after all the trials and tribulations. Fraser is also very pleased.



24th July 2018

The SG included 4 volunteers who continued to scythe thistles in the Paddock, School Fields and West Field. Stray ragwort pulled on the way.

25th July 2018

Ten volunteers formed the WWG on a warm, summer's morning.

- Signs were tied to the fruit trees asking people not to pick the fruit until it is ripe.
- The Pads hedges were trimmed of overhang from the Orchard crossroads right along to the canal track.
- The stand for the nose pump was retrieved from West Field and carted to the shed.
- The new saplings along the west hedge of West Field were weeded of encroaching growth.
- Encroaching bramble and nettles were cut back along the Fauna path.

As we are on top of the work the WWG will now take a break.

26th July 2018

Five bags of ragwort to tip.

31st July 2018

Two volunteers formed the SG, continued scything thistles and started to scythe the soft rush

Associate volunteers in July

- Mowed the grass in the Orchard
- Maintained the Orchard and Big Meadow hedges alongside the Pads footpath, particularly to maintain the vistas from the Orchard benches.
- Maintenance work in the playground
- Fitting the new hand pump to the West Field water trough
- Watering the new fruit trees
- A smoother screed applied to the concrete shed ramp to protect from frost damage.
- Ragworting Big Meadow
- Ragworting Hay Meadow (1 bag)
- Repair to fence between Fauna path and Big Meadow, adjacent to the first gate. NOTE: The *Keep Dogs on a Lead* sign has fallen / been pulled off the post here. It is at the shed but really needs a replacement

7th August 2018

Four volunteers form the Scything Group (SG) and scythed the thistles in Lower Sowerholme. We also discuss what to do about the wildflower margins which the Flora Field contractor has not cut.

8th August 2018

The Wednesday Work Group is 'on holiday' at the moment but there are still odd jobs to be done. Two volunteers add a third strand of barbed wire to the fence alongside Lucy Brook from the Cromwell Road gate to stop invading calves.

11th August 2018

The Saturday monthly session attracted 12 volunteers on a fine, sunny morning.

- Just before the session started Fraser informed us that he was content with the present location of the hay bales so we did not move them as intended.

- The hedge bordering the track down from Sunnyside Lane to the Orchard was trimmed back and encroaching weeds dug out.
- Further work was done clearing around the bases of the fruit trees bordering the Pads footpath and then throughout the Orchard.
- Trees growing alongside the Aldcliffe Road / Flora Field wall were cut back.
- Rubbish was collected from the area and barrowed back for disposal.
- The Orchard paths were trimmed of overhanging vegetation, including the notice board at the south end.
- The new shrubs in the Old Damson Copse were cleared of encroaching growth.
- The grass around the shed was mowed.

14th August 2018

Three volunteers formed the SG and began scything the Big Meadow soft rush both cutting 'rides' through the dense rush to favour the snipe and cutting the rush around the edges of the swamp to discourage it invading the pasture.

21st August 2018

Five volunteers attended the SG and continued to scythe the rush in Big Meadow.

22nd August 2018

Six volunteers formed the WWG, reconvening to mow the Orchard grass. After discussion with David it was decided to try out using a smaller mower to supplement the Toro and work around the trees where manoeuvrability is key. Other volunteers were armed with large bags to collect the mowings and take them to the field (as cow feed). Everything went well and we had had completed almost half the job when disaster struck. The Toro was jammed underneath with the wet grass. In lifting it to clear we flooded it and struggled so hard to restart that the starting cord snapped. Collected by McGaffagins that afternoon and returned, repaired, the following day!

28th August 2018

The SG included 5 volunteers who continued scything rush in the Big Meadow.

29th August 2018

The WWG attended the WWG on an increasingly sunny morning.

- Orchard grass mowing, interrupted last week due to mechanical breakdown, was resumed and concluded.
- Soft rush in the southern half of Big Meadow was scythed and stacked.
- The scything from previous SG sessions was stacked.

Associate Volunteers in August

- Mow the Orchard grass. N.B. in David's enforced absence others have to take this on and this makes us appreciate just what a big job it is and how much we should value David's regular contribution.