

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

**Present:** Dave Brookes, David Elliott, Glenys Ferguson (Mins), Sue Nieduszynska (Chair), Ian Procter, Hilary Short, Mick Short

1. **Apologies:** Graham Brandwood, Tony Finn, Oliver Fulton

2. **Minutes of last meeting:** Approved.

3. **Matters arising from Minutes:**

**3.1. Chainsaw renewals (item Sept 3.1):** Ian, Graham and Ken successfully renewed their chainsaw certification on 23rd October (for five years) on what was judged to be a very well run course. Certificates awaited. Unfortunately Keith had to drop out and his certification has expired. **Ian** will present a report to the next meeting on further actions arising from the course.

**3.2. Status of Pony Wood gorse (5.2):** Ian has confirmed that only two of the eight bushes planted have survived (see also 4.1).

**3.3. Hedge between Fauna path and Carr House Meadow (6.1):** As agreed at FFOG 6th September item 6.1, Hilary has had a meeting with Robin Loxam. Robin wishes the hedge to be flailed in order to maintain a consistent height. When the Fauna footpath was put in, the FA undertook to keep the hedge 'high' in return for an agreement from Robin which allowed the Fauna footpath to be constructed closer to his property than the line agreed on the original plan.

FFOG recognises that the hedge between the Fauna path and Carr House Meadow should be managed on nature conservancy principles. It also recognises that the Fairfield Association has obligations to our neighbour which have proved inconsistent with these principles. Undertakings made by the Fairfield Association must be respected and the matter is now closed until our neighbour indicates a change of mind.

Ian Procter's argument in favour of a laid hedge is held with these Minutes.

**3.4. Replacement dog signs (6.1):** Awaiting pieces suitable for creative woodwork (**Ian**).

**3.5. First aid review (7.1):** Now scheduled for the November Volunteer session (**Ian**).

4. **Management:**

**4.1. Adviser Visit 18th October:** Graham, Mick, Ian and Sue had a highly productive walk around with Richard Storton. Overall he was very impressed with the way in which the reserve that he helped plan has developed. FFOG considered his recommendations:

1. *Use a digger to clear ponds e.g. Cromwell Pond.*

FFOG's initial thoughts concerned the size and practicality of the digger and whether the cost of hiring one can be justified if some of the ponds can be cleared manually by Volunteers. It was agreed to discuss more fully at July's meeting (**Glenys** for Arrangements Calendar)

- 2. Leave the growth of willow in Lucy Brook at the bottom of Aldcliffe Rd gardens unless neighbours complain or we are worried about the flow into Upper Sowerholme.*

Agreed to leave. The developing carr habitat is valuable and water should still be able to trickle through (to be monitored).

- 3. Clear the channel in Upper Sowerholme and restore to original width with a digger about once every 5 years. This should be done at the end of August/beginning of September when the ground is driest and we don't risk disturbing nesting birds or over-wintering snipe. Also transplant reeds to areas that need more.*

Volunteer work on the channel and Lucy's Pool is largely finished for this year. Ian and Graham currently consider that a manual approach will remain feasible next year, but that thereafter a digger may well be required – see Ian's Volunteer report for 13th October in Appendix. This will be discussed further, along with rec. 1 above, at FFOG July 2019. Richard was most pleased with the development of the phragmites in Upper Sowerholme.

- 4. Raise the sluice in Anna's pond in winter to increase the "backflow" into Upper Sowerholme.*

Already done by Graham. Monitoring needed to check this is not adversely affecting the water flow at the cattle crossing.

- 5. Lay the remaining hedge between Lower Sowerholme and Flora field gradually and gap up with new saplings.*

This contains very old, mature hawthorn. Ian's opinion is that laying is not a feasible option. Whilst surveys have not noted much in the way of breeding birds, the berries are currently proving very attractive to winter migrants, with over 100 redwing and fieldfare recently observed by Sue. It is also a landscape feature (why it was not laid as part of the Flora NE capital works) and provides shelter for the cattle. So Richard's recommendation was rejected in favour of boosting the hedge's wildlife value by filling it out at the bottom with species such as holly, hazel and rose. A few trees, especially sycamores, may be removed at discretion. The hedge is too shady for blackthorn to thrive, but this good foraging plant could be used to widen it on the south side (although the implications of this for future hedging work need to be considered first) (**Ian**). Mick expressed concern that there may not be enough food sources to last through the coming winter. Supplementary bird feeding will be considered if this proves to be the case.

- 6. Lay and plant a hedge alongside Lucy Brook as it runs through Lower Sowerholme / Big Meadow.*

Agreed (**Ian**). This hedge will be 'inconsistent', zig-zagging because of the obstacle posed by Lucy Brook. But this is acceptable as it will improve habitat and is not needed for stock control.

- 7. Leave bigger patches of nettles and thistles until August before scything to encourage partridge.*

The nettles and thistles around the beehive end of Lower Sowerholme and the south end of West Field have been deliberately left out of the scything programme. Possibly the dry summer has caused them to disappear this year. These areas will continue to be left for the bees and partridges. Richard complimented the scything work being done to control undesirables and manage the rush in the marshes.

- 8. Dig a trench across the northern end of the scrape in West Field to find and block any field drains. (Digger work).*

Richard noted that the FA is funded by NE for wet grassland here and that the scrape is important. It was agreed that this work could be undertaken by the Contractor constructing the Flora path. (**Hilary** to instruct the Contractor, with input from **Ian**.)

- 9. Ask the neighbouring tenant farmer if we can lay his hedge between his entrance gate and the concrete wall.*

**Ian** to approach. The fence appears weak and may need to be strengthened. FA to do this if necessary and the neighbouring farmer is unwilling.

- 10. Plant holly rather than gorse in the Pony Wood area. If it succeeds gorse takes over.*

It was agreed not to plant replacement gorse where bushes have died (see 3.2).

- 11. Scythe the beetle banks in rotation. One bank per annum in autumn*

The beetle banks have not been cut to date. Scything the grass could be very hard and potentially counterproductive. Instead the focus will be on tackling the 'undesirables' (**Ian** for Saturday Volunteer session). **Sue** will ask the Arable Farmer about incorporating a cut into his 2019 tasks.

- 12. Cut back around the Flora Ponds as we have done with others. Keep some clear water.*

**Ian** to add to Saturday Volunteer session.

- 13. Apply gravel to either side of the Brook crossing. Others have suggested gravel in gateways also.*

Photographic evidence supports the site visit conclusion that the cattle crossing is now in need of repair, particularly on the Big Meadow side. Slop should be removed and the geotextile under the stones checked. New 'gravel' added should be compacted. In the first instance, **Hilary** will ask the Flora path Contractor to give a price for the whole job.

**Dave** and **Mick** will inspect and judge whether the state of the Lower Sowerholme and West Field gateways merit adding gravel here too. If so, another extra job for the Flora path Contractor (**Hilary**).

14. *Let the Fauna path / Grammar School field hedge thicken on the path side.*

It was agreed to let it grow out a bit, controlling as necessary to keep the path open and accessible (**Ian**). Meanwhile it is anticipated that this hedge will soon be flailed by the Graziers. Mick has cleared around the trees to be saved, to make them more obvious to the workers.

Richard also noted that NE is offering extensions to some Agreements. Mick has approached the FA's NE Adviser to enquire about the possibility of extending the current agreement (which has just over two years to run).

- 4.2. **Arable update:** The floristically enhanced grass margin was cut on 18th October. Not using the forage harvester has resulted in a closer (better) cut. The cuttings still need to be cleared and Sue is pursuing this. The wildflowers within the crop have been brilliant this year and widely admired.
- 4.3. **Grazing matters:** Formal change in NE Agreement – still no response from NE, despite Dave referencing this when he made the annual claim.

The Graziers have rejected an extra water trough located in the NW corner of LGGS field. The water trough from the Gun Range has recently appeared in Carr House Meadow (although the cattle have not been using it as they are elsewhere on the reserve). **Hilary** will ask the Graziers to move it back. She will also ask them to take some of the pressure off School Pond this winter, by sharing the watering of the herd between the pond and the trough. If this, plus the second gate into the pond, plus the smaller herd still result in unacceptable habitat conditions in School Pond, then the extra trough will be revisited.

The nose pump has been sold for a good price (see 7.2).

As indicated, the Graziers have reduced the herd by 11 animals (on 18th October). It now comprises 13 White Park cattle, all females bar the herd bull. With fewer animals over-wintering than last year, a problem achieving NE's stocking prescription is not anticipated. The current prediction also suggests that NE's stocking requirement for the bird breeding season should be met.

- 4.4. **Digger and drainage work:** The drainage work described in previous meetings has been carried out. There is now a significant flow from the local residents' garden into Lower Sowerholme. A trench around Willow Pond was also dug and back-filled to destroy land drains. At long last the source of the leak has been located and the pond is holding water. It needs to be checked to ensure that the pond drains towards the brook rather than down the field in periods of heavy rain. The general view was that the job was well done although Volunteers needed to repair the barbed wire fence which prevented cattle accessing Upper Sowerholme and there was a bit of collateral damage. This secluded part of the reserve should now develop into a valuable habitat.

The digger also cleared a patch of ground by the Howsons gate which has subsequently been prepared by Volunteers and sown with 2kg of K54 Meadow Mix comprising 20 per cent native wildflowers and 80 per cent non-competitive grasses. Some plants have been added, including a large number of teasel donated by Hilary and Mick.

(Dave has the Digger Driver's contact details for future reference.)

**4.5. Tree surgeon's progress:** On 31st October, the Tree Surgeon spent a 'short' day removing the deadwood and thinning ash 520 by the Orchard crossroads. He was assisted by eight FA Volunteers who acted as safety marshals and helped manoeuvre the hired cherry picker. Ian showed the Tree Surgeon the oak in the Orchard boundary. He will carry out this work without FA assistance, accessing from within the Orchard. It has not proved possible to get advice from the expert on forking trees at Myerscough, so the Tree Surgeon will go ahead with bracing sycamore 526. It appears that this work will be cheaper than originally thought.

**4.6. Green hay and meadow seed sharing:** Sue attended an exploratory first meeting on 17th October to establish a support network to help develop wildflower meadows. Bodies interested include Butterfly Trust and Claver Hill, and possibly Lancashire Wildlife Trust, Lune Rivers Trust, Piccadilly Garden Centre. FFOG agreed that it was worth participating and that, in the first instance, the FA could offer to donate yellow rattle seed. **Hilary** will represent the FA at future meetings.

## 5. Monitoring:

**5.1. Maintenance and HLS habitat inspections:** Graham's reports circulated. Issues raised were addressed elsewhere in the meeting and/or added to Ian's list of tasks. **Graham** is preparing a paper on managing the Upper Sowerholme reedbed (**Glenys** for January agenda).

**5.2. Progress with surveys:** Still awaiting Graeme Skelcher's report. **Sue** to phone.

## 6. Volunteer activities:

**6.1. Volunteer activities:** Full reports for September and October are attached.

A borrowed domestic lawn-mower has started being used to supplement the main mower. This has made it easier to mow beneath the trees in the Orchard and has also meant the task has become more efficient as it is has become a two-person job (plus one to empty). When **Ian** and **David** discuss arrangements for next year, they will consider whether the FA should buy its own supplementary mower. This could be grant funded, **Ian** to price for **Hilary**.

Ian noted that the power scythe, recently donated to the FA, has been put to use in Big Meadow. He was most pleased with the way in which it was able to achieve a close cut on the rush, taking down spikes left by hand scything. It will be used to complement hand scything in future work on the rushes (**Ian**). Its drawback is that it is very slow to move to the place of work.

Retrieval of the water pump in West Field for winter storage will be delayed until Ken is available.

**6.2. Working with Volunteers with dementia:** The next dementia friends induction session is scheduled for 27th November. The FA meeting has agreed to the use of the Orchard and the Triangle as part of a research programme for people in the pre-dementia phase investigating whether socialising and volunteering can help delay the onset of dementia. Both the Orchard and the Triangle are public spaces, often used by groups without the FA's awareness. It was agreed that it would be helpful to collect evidence of such use (type of group, times, numbers) to support grant applications, for instance. **Mick** will contact the researcher running the dementia programme; **Sue** will contact the Steiner school which has been identified as using the Orchard.

**6.3. Volunteers buffet:** **Sue** will try to book this for first Thursday in February (7th) returning to the Storey. Price to be held at £10 per head and Sue will inspect the menu.

## 7. Standing items:

### 7.1. Arrangements:

Change in cattle access from 1 December: winter access to HK10 fields not to exceed 0.5LU/ha over period to 31st March. **Glenys** will calculate the maximum number of days this implies given the current size of the herd and redo the annual timetable for the Graziers in consultation with **Sue**.

Nest box monitoring arrangements are in hand (**Ian & Ian N.**). **Ian** will also make the annual check of the defibrillator including battery.

Once this year's work has been completed, **Sue** will contact the Arable Farmer and establish (in writing) agreement, herbicide regime & timings for 2019.

**Dave** will present a revised annual financial spreadsheet to the January FFOG meeting. In addition **Ian** will report on the delegated tools and materials fund.

There will be no Special FFOG meeting in February, discussion of survey results being incorporated into a normal meeting instead.

### 7.2. Financial control:

*Item 4.3* – Sale of nose pump for about £170 (Dave)

*Item 4.4* – Wildflower seeds for Flora field approx £83 (Mick)

*Item 4.5* – Tree Surgeon's invoice for ash 520 £600 (including £200 equipment hire)  
(Ian)

*Item 6.1* – Repairs/servicing of existing mower about £150. Possible second mower around £250 (Ian)

**7.3. Organised events for notification to FA:** A bird walk has been advertised in the newsletter for 26th January. To be led by Dan Haywood.

**8. Duck nesting platforms:** These are quite a common feature on other wetland reserves. They could offer some protection for breeding ducks, particularly if water levels fall, as this summer. Dave also considers this would be a good way of recycling unused plastic and other materials from the Triangle. He has seen an appropriate design, with instructions, on the

RSPB website. It would be on stilts and have a roof, It could be constructed by Triangle Volunteers. Graham has seen a different design, using wire and straw. It was agreed to trial both designs (**Dave** and **Graham**).

**9. AOB:**

**9.1. Donations:** **Ian** now has five stacking garden chairs in the shed. One of the Volunteers would like to donate a tree. **Ian** has identified two suitable spaces: the wild end of the Orchard and the east of Pony Wood. FFOG supported this. **Glenys** will notify the potential donor and **Ian** will deal with the practicalities.

**9.2. Update on Flora Path and improvement of Long Pads Path:** (Item now usually handled by the FA meeting.) Planning permission for the Flora path is still awaited, but the work is expected to go ahead this winter. Meanwhile the Contractor will be starting work on upgrading existing paths (plus the other tasks added at this meeting) during November. A further extension of the funding grant has been negotiated.

**10. Date/place of next meetings:** Thursday 10th January 2019, Thursday 7th March at 7.30pm. Venue: Whitegates Sunnyside Close.

## **Ian Procter's Report on Volunteer Activities:**

### 4<sup>th</sup> September 2018

Four volunteers formed the Scything Group and continued to cut pathways through the Big Meadow rush to encourage snipe. We also scythed around two of the scrapes to facilitate wildlife access. It was agreed that this was the last meeting of the Group for this season as the nights draw in.

### 5<sup>th</sup> September 2018

Nine volunteers attended the Wednesday Work Group (WWG) on a beautiful sunny morning with a chill in the air. Scything work was undertaken as follows:

- In the Hay Meadow the encroaching rush in the south east corner was cut back .
- Again in the Hay Meadow, pathways were cut through the dense rush in the north east sector and the edges of the scrapes selectively cleared.
- Access to Upper Sowerholme was cut out and the pathway through the vegetation scythed. More to do here.
- The boundary with the Aldcliffe Road gardens was reviewed given the evidence of cattle encroachment. As they are almost through this is a priority job for the 8<sup>th</sup> (below). Fraser was informed.

Richard's big 5-0 birthday was celebrated with cake, in fact, two cakes!

### 8<sup>th</sup> September 2018

On a thoroughly wet and miserable morning 6 volunteers gathered for the monthly Saturday session. We huddled in the shed for half an hour whilst the rain poured down ever more heavily and ever more persistently. We then cancelled the session as the main jobs would have led to the ruining of plants in a mud bath and unsafe working with barbed wire.

However, four of the six met the following day, 9<sup>th</sup> September, to get the plants donated by local residents into the Fauna wildflower bed. The latter was lightly forked over and grass and creeping buttercup removed before planting: red campion, hemp agrimony, yarrow, self heal, ox eye daisy and teasel. All strong plants so we are hopeful of success. Yellow rattle seed was then spread in the gaps.

## 12<sup>th</sup> September 2018

The WWG included six volunteers on a lovely sunny morning.

- We mowed the Orchard grass once again using a borrowed domestic garden mower to work under the fruit trees where manoeuvring the Toro mower is most difficult.
- As agreed by FFOG last week we picked the remainder of the apples and pears and put them on the Orchard benches with this sign attached:

### THE LAST OF THE APPLES

These are the last of this season's apples.

This is a community orchard with fruit for **everybody**

So please take some.

But we do mean **EVERYBODY** so please only take your fair share.

We are making this point as we believe, on rare occasions, a small number of people take a large amount. We don't know why this is, especially if the fruit is not properly ripe, but want to emphasise that everyone should be able to pick their share of ripe fruit.

Sorry they are not sorted, you will have to experiment to find your taste.

Fairfield Association

- We removed the 'Don't pick until I'm ripe signs'.
- The green paths in the Orchard were trimmed back to remove overhanging bramble and nettle.
- The gap we discovered between the Hay Meadow and Aldcliffe Road gardens was plugged with barbed wire. The gate between Big Meadow and the Hay Meadow was reopened and Fraser informed and asked to 'mob graze' Carr House Meadow.
- The narrow gap between fences adjacent to the Cromwell Road notice board was shut down to calves by using a bungee which humans can easily remove and replace.
- Anna's Stone was cleared of enveloping vegetation.
- The break in the Hay Meadow stock fence between the two gates was repaired. Note that we suspect this was cut deliberately.

## 19<sup>th</sup> September 2018

Seven volunteers formed the WWG accompanied by the winds of Storm Ali and blustery showers.

- Further scything work was completed in Big Meadow cutting the soft rush on the margins of the marsh and ponds and snipe friendly channels through the thickest of the rush.
- The resulting debris was raked into piles.
- The bund around Alder Pond was repaired after cow damage.
- The signs for Alder and Friar's ponds were trimmed back of enveloping vegetation.

## 26<sup>th</sup> September 2018

Twelve volunteers formed the WWG on a dull but dry morning. A good turnout was welcome as there was a lot to do.

- The Orchard grass was cut using two mowers as above.
- The scything of both the Hay Meadow wet area and the path through Upper Sowerholme was completed and the path used by the flush count group cleared.
- The fallen bat box in Pony Wood was reinstated.
- Saplings in Pony Wood and its environs were inspected for summer drought mortality and the casualties marked with a flag or post for winter replacement.
- Two large fallen branches (one in West Field, one in Pony Wood), victims of recent windy weather, were cut up and the debris stacked into habitat piles.



- Recent work by the digger around Willow Pond had left a gap in the fence / hedge between Lower and Upper Sowerholme. This was patched with wire on a temporary basis. A permanent job will be undertaken once summer vegetation has died back.

### 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2018

Eight volunteers formed the Wednesday Work Group (WWG) on a dull but dry morning.

- Following the suggestion that some of the scything in Big Meadow had left the rush too long and sharp, we deployed the power scythe to cut the rush shorter. This proved very effective and the machine showed remarkable adaptability in the uneven ground. In future it should be standard procedure to follow up the hand scything with the machine where the ground is very uneven.
- Following the removal of the turf in Flora Field to the south of Howson's Gate we made a start on digging the patch over. This proved very tough work and we need to review exactly what we are trying to do here.
- We also explored the availability of clay under the patch. Whilst there may be usable clay here it is not at all easily available. As we have no immediate need for clay it was agreed to note the possibility and leave alone.
- Encroaching bramble was cut back and dug out throughout the Paddock, working back to the stock fence.
- Wild rose overhanging the Fauna path was cut back.

### 10<sup>th</sup> October 2018

Nine volunteers attended the WWG on a positively hot, sunny morning.

- One volunteer worked in Upper Sowerholme making preparations for Saturday's work
- The rest went 'mob handed' to prepare the new Flora Field wildflower bed for seeding and planting using a mixture of hoes, rakes and forks to roughen the surface and clear out remaining sods of grass.
- We oiled the wheelbarrow wheels.

### 13<sup>th</sup> October 2018

For the second consecutive month the Saturday volunteer session was blighted by heavy and persistent rain, this time associated with Storm Callum. This restricted volunteer numbers to six, who worked for varying time periods but who should all be commended for service beyond the call of duty.

- The intention to plant up and sow the new Flora Field wildflower bed was abandoned. However, Keith and Stuart came along with purple rampion for the Fauna wildflower bed.
- Invasive bramble was cut back to the fence along the Fauna path.
- The standard trees in the hedge between the Fauna path and the Grammar School Field are proving difficult to mark so as to be visible to the contractor. Thus, the area around each was trimmed to allow their sighting.
- Our main job was clearing vegetation in the Upper Sowerholme ponds and channel to restore clear water. More work need to be done but this was a good learning experience for Ian and Graham who drew the following conclusions:
  - 1) The phragmites reeds are well on the way to being the dominant species in Upper Sowerholme. We indeed have the reedbed we have been aiming for.
  - 2) Last year we were able to clear much of the pond and channel standing at the side and using rakes to draw the vegetation out. This was not possible this year as the reeds have really taken hold and their rhizomes spread. The only way to clear the water is by standing in waders in the channel / pond. Photo 1 shows the length of the rhizomes. It is tough work. We need further waders. NOTE ADDED LATER four pairs of waders purchased.
  - 3) The reeds are gaining a hold at the edges of both ponds and channel and it is only possible to pull them out from the centre. See Photos 2 and 3. As the reeds gain a firmer hold this centre

will narrow once more. Our guesstimate is that we should be able to use manual methods to create clear water for one more year.

- 4) But after that we will have to get some sort of digging machine in to re-establish the clear water. This will also clear the mud which is inevitably silting up the ponds / channel from below.
- 5) Again our guesstimate is that this will have to be done approximately every five years. We need further advice / research on this. NOTE ADDED LATER Richard Storton agreed with both our guesstimates and that a digger would be needed.
- 6) This kind of work can only be done when the water is relatively warm. In another month or so it will be too cold to work safely.
- 7) From Graham's research the time to plant rhizomes to spread the reeds further is the spring. There should be no shortage but this needs adding to the to-do-list for April / May.

P1: Note length/thickness of rhizomes    P2 The reeds behind Graham cannot be pulled out manually



Photo 3 Showing how the channel is narrowing. Again, the reeds establishing at the edge cannot be pulled out manually.



17<sup>th</sup> October 2018

In Ian's absence the WWG was led by Graham, with 8 volunteers attending.

- The Orchard grass was given its last cut of the season.
- The vegetation around the base of the apple trees near the Pads hedge was trimmed back.
- A long stretch of the Orchard / Pads footpath was trimmed down.

24<sup>th</sup> October 2018

Five volunteers formed the WWG on a dull but dry morning.

- Teasel plants donated by the Shorts and a small selection of wildflower plants donated by John Payne were planted out in the new wildflower bed at Howson's gate.
- The bed was sown with 2 kg of wildflower seed mix (Kings K54 Meadow Mix 80/20 Ref No 1501/130JC4230/7138) and the bed raked over.
- We continued clearing the Upper Sowerholme pond and channel which are now complete for this year. We began clearing the pond at the northern end of the channel (forgotten name!!!).
- Phragmites seed was collected for sowing next spring.