

Fairfield Association
Flora, Fauna and Orchard Management Group [FFOG]
Minutes of the Meeting held on Thursday 4th July 2019 at 7.30 pm
at Whitegates, Sunnyside Close

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

1. **Apologies:** None
2. **Minutes of last meeting:** Approved.
3. **Matters arising from Minutes:**
 - 3.1. **Repair of FA moth trap (4.5):** A new charger has been bought and installed. The shed is too damp to store the battery and bulbs, which will now be housed separately by **Ian**.
 - 3.2. **Pony Wood gate latch (5.1):** Minor problems with the operation of the latches of both gates have been addressed.
4. **Management:**
 - 4.1. **Arable update:** The Arable Farmer has decided he does need to use herbicide this year and selected one from Natural England's approved list. **Sue** will clarify whether or not the herbicide has actually been applied. Sue wondered whether the arable crop could be managed in a greener – or even organic – way after the end of the NE Agreement and would like to hear from any FFOG members (or other people) interested in taking part in an investigation. To be considered further at September FFOG.
 - 4.2. **Grazing matters:** Still no formal change to the NE Agreement stocking calendar. To be deleted as a standing item on Agenda.

A breeding season stocking density for the HK10 fields of 0.63 LU/ha was achieved (maximum permitted by NE under the changed prescription is 1.2). Herd size stands at 18 animals including the herd bull and six calves, all heifers. One more calf is anticipated this year.

Sue will be arranging haymaking for after 17th July (delayed by 2 days to give time for preparation work by Volunteers). The Graziers have suggested making hay from the Paddock (where it would be stored and fed to the cattle, reducing pressure on the Gun Range). An attractive idea, but there are practical issues of gaining access (and without damaging other fields) and manoeuvring the machinery in the small field. **Sue** will ask the Contractor to assess feasibility.

Improvement work on the Carr House Meadow gateway has been delayed by the cancellation of the Volunteer session on 8th June. Rescheduled for July 13th.

Hilary and Dave have held a review meeting with Robin Loxam. He is aware that the current herd size would be problematic over the winter and into next year's breeding season and is considering options, including replacing the herd bull with a visiting one from the White Park herd in Clitheroe. He has agreed to use the water trough in the Gun Range this winter. He was happy with the size and location of the hay bales last

year, but will fence them off more effectively. However, FFOG was concerned that this might then compromise access to the water trough. **Sue** will see if Fraser can be on hand when haymaking takes place.

- 4.3. Wetland management:** Points made in Monitoring Reports (item 5.1), so this will be deleted as an Agenda item unless a specific project (such as digger work) needs to be discussed.
- 4.4. Woodland and hedges:** A branch of ash 584 (by the Orchard crossroads) was badly damaged in high winds. The Tree Surgeon attended immediately and without charge to reduce the weight in the tree. Sycamore 526 by the stump circle has been braced although no work has been done on the veteran sycamore 534 yet. **Hilary** will confirm that all the remedial work in Pony Wood (see May item 8) has been completed. A survey of the play area and Aldcliffe Road triangle has been commissioned.

A tour of the reserve with the Forestry Commission's Woodland Officer for Lancashire has been arranged for July 9th. Currently five FA representatives have expressed an interest in accompanying Ian. As well as seeking general advice, **Ian** will ask him about coppicing elm in Little Wood. He will also ask for his views (including about timing) on infilling the current nettlebed area in Pony Wood with saplings (see also 5.2 and 6.1).

Still no reply from NE re wych elm, which has now been planted in Pony Wood.

An offer of native ferns for Pony Wood was welcomed, subject to checking with the FA's ecologist (**Sue**). Alternatively they could be planted in the wild area of the Orchard. **Dave** to contact the donor.

- 4.5. Lancashire Meadow Group:** The LMG-organised moth trapping event on 28th & 29th June yielded an impressive list of species from Upper Sowerholme and the Orchard [details circulated after the FFOG meeting]. It was attended by about a dozen people. Sue thanked Ian and Graham for stepping in to facilitate the event.
- 4.6. Review of Fields Access:** There are now 31 people allowed access to the enclosed parts of the reserve. The policy document will be amended to refer to roles, rather than responsible individuals (although the names of those in post will be shown). Minor revisions to the safety document were agreed, principally incorporating the Graziers' request to be sent a text when someone intends to go into a field containing cattle (**Glenys**).
- 4.7. Disposing of garden waste in Upper Sowerholme:** **Sue** and **Hilary** will inspect the area in the autumn and take action as necessary. The meeting was relaxed about a patch of escaped bamboo, considering it provided an extra habitat. But its spread will be monitored (**Graham**).
- 4.8. Matters relating to the Flora path:** Hilary is waiting on the Landscape Architect to produce a draft map for the noticeboard. The meeting questioned whether this would be a good opportunity to replace/redesign the board by the Fauna stones which is fading (**Hilary** to investigate).

The finger post signing the reserve has been knocked out of alignment. The Provider has agreed to fix this.

Ian and **Mick** will consider the best way of implementing the FA's commitment (FFOG Jan 2014) to name the view at the top of the Pony Wood for the late father of the Harries family who sold the Flora land to the FA.

So far dog poo does not seem enough of a problem to warrant requesting a specific bin from the Council (it is not far from either path entrance to the waste bin on the canal). To be monitored. The dog signs stored in the shed (May 10.2) have been replaced by four new ones with more appropriate wording. Disappointingly, three signs relating to dogs and cycling have already been vandalised. They have been reinstated using much longer screws.

There was some discussion of dogs off leads, with a feeling that action to tackle this problem will be more effective whilst the path is still new. An awareness raising/charm offensive approach was suggested. Requests from Volunteers to put a dog on a lead frequently fall on deaf ears, and on occasion trigger abuse and threats. **Sue** will research the issue of dogs on nature reserves for the next meeting.

Concerns have been expressed that the fencing around the path impedes the movement of a) hedgehogs and b) hares. Taking advice from various sources, it appears that there is no problem. Hedgehogs can get underneath and through gaps; the hares can jump. **Sue** will spread this message through the next FA newsletter.

5. Monitoring:

5.1. Maintenance and HLS habitat inspections: Graham's reports circulated. All the ponds are in poor condition with little water. Clearance work will be undertaken over the summer. Trial seeding of the phragmites reeds in Upper Sowerholme is not working. However, they are becoming well established now, and further spread can be left to nature. There is no water in the cattle trough in West Field and the pump handle is missing (**Ian** to contact the Graziers). One of the duck nesting platforms is occupied: there is a moorhen nest in 'Alice' on Anna's Pool.

Ragwort in the reserve fields is being controlled effectively where necessary. Recognising its value for wildlife, the meeting decided to leave any ragwort in the LGGs Field this season. This will be monitored for spread (**Graham**). However, it was agreed that thistles in LGGs will be scythed by Volunteers to forestall the application of herbicide by the Graziers (**Ian**).

This year's weather conditions have caused the grass in West Field to grow faster than it can be cropped by the cattle. Unfortunately it is now too late to cut this for hay. It was agreed to be more pro-active next year, requesting a derogation from NE and managing the cattle in way that would allow a hay crop to be taken if necessary (**Glenys** for May 2020 Agenda).

5.2. Progress with surveys: Two of the three breeding bird survey visits are known to have been made. A full report of the Ecologist's survey of the flora in Pony Wood will be submitted once his other surveys are completed. However, a preliminary recommendation is that nettles are cut and the debris removed (see 6.1) (**Ian**). This is essential to reduce fertility and encourage a wider range of wildflowers than just bluebells. The second survey of Hay and Carr House Meadows is scheduled for 5th July.

6. Volunteer activities:

- 6.1. Volunteer sessions:** Full reports for May and June are attached. Ian noted the first-ever cancellation of a Saturday Volunteer session on 8th June due to adverse weather conditions, incompatible with the tasks planned. (Three hardy souls still reported for duty!) Two trenches have been dug in an attempt to drain the wildflower area by the Howsons gate. If this is successful, gravel infill will be added.

The Tuesday Scything Group will start its summer work on 9th July (meeting 7pm at the shed). The nettles in Pony Wood will be an early task. It was agreed to leave some groups of nettles along the Flora Path as habitat where they are out of the way, and to take off the cuttings (see 5.2). The work will need to be repeated in the woodland to get the nettles under control (see also 8). It was also agreed that the thistles in the beetle banks should be cut to prevent seeding into the crop area. **Ian** will liaise with Paul Ferguson.

Tasks proposed for the session on Saturday 13th July were approved.

- 6.2. Review of work for LGGs run:** As agreed with LGGs, Volunteers tackled vegetation overgrowing the Long Pads path in preparation for the school's run on 20th June. However, crossed wires resulted in Lancaster City Council also preparing the path. Although FFOG considered the impact of the Council's work was more acceptable this year, it was decided that FA Volunteers should do the job in future (**Sue**).
- 6.3. Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults:** The policy document written and approved by Trustees was circulated to FFOG for information. The Trustees are now deciding how to share this policy with Volunteers. FFOG recognised the need for such a policy. However, the Volunteer Organiser in particular was unhappy with its drafting and stated that he did not wish to be involved in the implementation of the policy as it currently stands.
- 6.4. Ripley pupils volunteer session:** A request was received to provide a full morning's work session on 28th June for a class of year 7 pupils from Ripley St Thomas School. With little notice given and the level of adult supervision considered too low, the request was regretfully declined. However, a contact has been made and something may be arranged at another time (**Ian**).

7. Standing items:

7.1. Arrangements:

Sue will remind the Arable Farmer that the crop can be harvested from 31st July and arrange for the first mowing of the wildflower and bee friendly margins and a rotational cut of one of the beetle banks. She will also arrange a second mowing of the wildflower and bee friendly margins for after 31st August.

Ian will add reinstating the path through Upper Sowerholme and open patches in the drier parts into the scything programme.

Graham will be planning winter work on the ponds and ditches. With the water levels in the ponds so low, sluice management is not required, and refreshing of barley straw delayed.

7.2. Financial control:

£80 paid to book a place on a scything course (May 6.4 – **Glenys**)

The mower is back in for repair £ unknown. (**David**)

£1200 for remedial tree work in Pony Wood (May item 8 – **Hilary**)

David suggested installing a whiteboard somewhere on the reserve so that visitors could record wildlife sightings. The idea was welcomed and David asked to flesh out and cost his proposal for the September meeting.

7.3. Organised events for notification to FA:

- NLWG annual field visit on 31st July (**Chris**).
- ‘Walk and talk’ site visit for members of the *Green Forum* on 1st August (**Ian**).

8. **Hedge planting for winter 2019:** The meeting resumed discussion of the proposals introduced by Ian at the last meeting (May 4.4), having had time to consider them on the ground and submit written comments.

It was agreed that **Ian** will apply to the Woodland Trust for saplings to carry out the following planting this winter:

- infill along Lucy Brook and by Anna’s Pool
- on the track side of Little Wood
- between Little Wood and the neighbouring field
- gapping up in other hedges across the reserve
- wild roses for the area around Howsons gate

It was also agreed to lay the ‘NACRO strip’ part of the Long Pads Hedge.

There was a wide ranging discussion of the hedging proposals relating to Pony Wood. Arguments in favour of extending hedging around the path included the desire to redress the national loss of hedges, increased security, a quick means of providing an understorey for wildlife. On the other hand, it was argued that hedging within a wood was ‘contrived’, would simply create an extension of the Long Pads, that all path users should have the opportunity to appreciate the woodland vistas and different habitat of Pony Wood. The meeting also wondered whether a mix of hedging and gaps would be a better approach. Also whether a lower density hedge that merged with the wood (e.g. containing groups of hawthorn) would be more appropriate here than the type of hedge being created elsewhere on the reserve. **Ian** will convene a group to review these matters on site.

Any laying of the hedges planted as part of the Flora project in 2013/14 will not take place before winter 2020/21. It was therefore decided to postpone deliberation of this proposal to a future agenda (**Glenys**). This item will also discuss creating the optimum habitat, as requested by Mick (May 4.4).

9. **Orchard monitoring:** The report of the annual review was circulated. Apple no. 69 has been removed to prevent the spread of its severe canker. This means that 93% of the trees dating from the start of the NE Agreement remain alive (target at least 90% by the end of the NE Agreement). Despite last summer's drought, overall the Orchard remains in good condition, with two thirds of the trees classified as 'green, very healthy'. Keith continues to devote considerable time and effort to the management of the Orchard. He is now being supported on a more regular basis by the Wednesday Work Group. This has made a significant impact, and as a result the list of actions for this year is smaller. **Ian** will continue to add Orchard tasks into Wednesday Work Group sessions as required. He will also arrange the removal of an adjacent fungus-infected branch to increase light to pear no. 22. **Glenys** will ask Keith to source two new plums (another Victoria to replace C lost to drought; greengage for location 29). It was noted that the nature of the main part of the Orchard is gradually changing over time as apples succumb to the endemic canker and are best replaced by other fruit.

The meeting revisited the discussion of September 2018 item 3.4 instigated by the sudden and early disappearance of much of last year's crop. Reluctantly, FFOG concluded that any steps taken to address this problem are unlikely to have much effect. Despite this, notices will be posted in the Orchard and on Facebook (**Glenys**).

10. **AOB:** None

11. **Date/place of next meetings:** Thursday 5th September, Thursday 7th November at 7.30pm. Venue: Whitegates Sunnyside Close.

Ian Procter's Report on Volunteer Activities:

1st May 2019

Twelve volunteers formed the Wednesday Work Group (WWG) on a dull but improving morning.

- Glenys and Keith conducted the annual survey of the fruit trees.
- The broken fence across the crossing of Lucy Brook was repaired with new rails.
- A gap in the fence along the Lower Sowerholme boundary with Lucy Brook, identified by Fraser as a hazard for calves, was blocked.
- We continued to remove plastic spirals from hedges initially planted as part of the Fauna and Flora groundwork. We really should have done this some years ago as the plastic is brittle and the shrubs inaccessible. But we do what we can and will continue to as we trim and lay hedges in the future. Future good practice should be that, normally, new plastic spirals should be removed after three years. Work done:
 - The hedge between the Fauna long boardwalk and School Pond.
 - The hedge between Lower Sowerholme and Flora Field. Note that we abandoned this as three pairs of lapwings were displaying in the area and we wanted minimal disturbance.
 - The southern hedge of West Field.
 - The hedge between Little Wood and Pony Wood.

4th May 2019

Twelve volunteers gathered at the gates of Flora Field to sow the field margins with bird friendly and bee friendly flower seed.

NOTE: the shed door handle was repaired by Keith, the Lune Locksmith, today.

8th May 2019

The weather forecast was for persistent heavy rain throughout the morning but 9 volunteers were undeterred and were rewarded by a dry, if dull, morning for the WWG.

- Graham tested out a new method of removing the invasive grass in Alder Pond, this time using a hand sickle. Worth pursuing was the verdict.
- The catch on the gate into the new Pony Wood path was adjusted to ensure a smoother working.
- Ten teasels, donated by Hilary and Mick were planted out in the margin between the new Pony Wood path and the fence.
- We completed the first ragwort sweep of the year working through the Paddock, Big Meadow, the Hay Meadow and Carr House Meadow. Compared to past times there was relatively little but we collected 21 bagfuls.

11th May 2019

Thirteen volunteers joined the Saturday morning volunteering session on a sunny and warm morning.

- 15 replacement fence post were put in and the wire attached in
 - Carr House Meadow
 - The Hay Meadow
 - Big Meadow.
- All these posts had to be transported from the shed.
- The gate padlocks were oiled and the gap under the gates cleared so they open smoothly.
- Overhanging vegetation at the Cromwell Road gate was cut back so as to allow access by large machinery at hay making time.
- Another 12 teasels were planted alongside the path running up to Pony Wood.

15th May 2019

Just five volunteers formed the WWG on a lovely warm and sunny morning.

- David had cut the grass so we followed on with the smaller mower to complete the more awkward bits.
- We strimmed and cut back enveloping vegetation in the Soft Fruit circle.
- More work done encouraging reed growth in Upper Sowerholme.
- The boundary between the Hay Meadow and Upper Sowerholme was checked that it was cow-secure for later in the year.
- Three new saplings in the Orchard were watered.
- As we walked to the Flora Field gates, we trimmed overhanging cow parsley and bramble.
- Gravel, surplus to path renewal was bagged up and stored at the Flora Field gates. Over half done but more bags needed!

22nd May 2019

In Ian's absence, Graham led the WWG on a warm and sunny morning, joined by 8 other volunteers.

- More gravel was bagged up at the Flora Field gates.
- We began the task of weeding the new hedge saplings.
- On such a beautiful morning it seemed appropriate to have a picnic!



29th May 2019

Nine volunteers formed the WWG on a cloudy but dry morning.

- Our priority was to fix the signs on the new Pony Wood path so that it could be opened. By the end of the morning with padlocks and hazard tape removed, quite a few members of the public were enjoying the path.
- Overhanging vegetation was cut back all along the Pads footpath.
- The remaining gravel left over by the contractors was bagged up.
- The new saplings forming the Pony Wood path boundary were weeded of enveloping vegetation. We began the tidying of Pony Wood after the tree surgeon had finished his work. We concentrated on those branches which had fallen on the Rotary Club planting, clearing this and restoring the saplings.

Associate volunteers in May:

- Took a car load of plastic spirals to the tip.
- Maintenance work on the playground
- 19 bags of ragwort taken to the tip. (2 forgotten and left in field!)
- Mowing the Orchard grass
- Trimming around the Pads footpath saplings
- Completed the signage on the new Pony Wood path and did some updating of signs in the Orchard and Fauna path.

5th June 2019

Nine volunteers formed the Wednesday Work Group (WWG) on a dull but dry morning. As a chain saw was in use, we agreed the appropriate Site Specific Risk Assessment.

- On the way to Pony Wood we cleared some debris from the Pads and Long pads footpath.
- The main task of the day was to cut up the fallen wood left by the recent work by the Tree Surgeon and form these into log piles and habitat piles. We disguised the former as best we could to deter wood theft.

- We took a walk along the Flora Field east flower margin, which was a delight, to assess how to form a drain to keep the Howson's Gate wildflower patch from flooding.

8th June 2019

The weather forecast for heavy rain led to the cancellation of the monthly Saturday session. This was the first time I have felt compelled to cancel a Saturday session since I took on the organising job in 2011. However, the tasks we had planned were not compatible with very wet conditions. Ragworting in sodden hay meadows would have flattened the grass and repairing the path under the Carr House Meadow gate would have risked damaging our new path surface.

As it rained all morning, I think this was the right call.

12th June 2019

In Ian's absence, Paul and Emma led the WWG along with 4 other volunteers on a dry but dull morning.

The main task was to ensure that the Pads and Longs pads footpaths were clear for next week's Girls Grammar School run.

19th June 2019

Eleven volunteers formed the WWG including a new volunteer who has just finished his GCSE exams and who more or less halved our average age. We also had Graham pay us a visit to check that all was ship shape in his enforced absence and we were not doing too much sunbathing on this beautiful sunny morning.

It was disappointing to see that one of Julia's signs asking people to keep dogs on leads has gone missing. We have a spare which we will attach with long screws. Note this is the second occurrence of sign vandalism in the last month or so.

- Peter adjusted the mechanism on the new path canal side gate to lesson the pressure of the spring.
- We planted around 20 red campion and 2 cranesbill, donated by John Payne, in the wildflower patch by Howson's gate.
- Part of this patch has been subject to flooding so we cut two drainage trenches to drain the water away. This is very much a trial to see how we go. If it works we will fill the trenches with course gravel. First indication was not good as one of trenches seem to tap into a spring! LATER – NO, NOT A SPRING, JUST A POCKET OF WATER. IT SEEMS TO BE WORKING
- Ian checked out the JKW. Just one strand which will be dealt with.
- We tidied up after the tree surgeon had made safe the fallen ash branch over the Fauna path. We used the debris to
 - o Add to an old log-pile in the 'wild' section of the Orchard. Hopefully those with woodburning stoves will not discover this.
 - o Reinforce the dead hedge section of the boundary between the Pads footpath and the Paddock.
- We continued the second ragwort sweep of the season making a start on Big Meadow.

26th June 2019

Eight volunteers formed the WWG on a warm and pleasant morning. At the break we enjoyed slices of birthday cake from Suzanne.

- One of the duck nesting platforms knocked over by the cattle was retrieved from Alder Pond. The one in the Grammar School Pond is in much too deep to access.
- Overhanging branches were cut back in the Orchard using the Tony Finn test to judge height.
- Birdbox P4 which had been mounted on one of the now felled beech trees was remounted on an adjoining ash.
- Redundant plastic protectors were retrieved from around shrubs in Pony Wood and the extension and barrowed back to the shed.
- Rowan in Pony Wood with twin stems were pruned to leave the stronger one.
- Thistles and nettle overhanging the Pony Wood path were cut back and the debris cleared.

Associate volunteers in June

- Cleared around the still small saplings in the Old Damson Copse.
- Mowed the Orchard grass.
- Ragworted in the Hay Meadow
- Playground maintenance including clearing grass and nettles around the fencing.
- 10 bags of green waste to the tip
- Sharpening of hand cutting tools and chain saws.
- Reinstatement of the metal rim around the shed door handle
- Apparently, someone has stolen one of our decorative 'Dogs on leads' signs from the Orchard end of the Fauna path. This was replaced with a spare using 2½inch nails and covering the screw head with Polyfilla.
- Cutting back overhang along the Fauna path.
- Cutting back overhang along the Orchard paths
- 10 bags of redundant plastics plus a broken table to the tip.