

Fairfield Association
Flora, Fauna and Orchard Management Group [FFOG]
Minutes of the Meeting held on Thursday 14th November 2019 at 7.30 pm
at Whitegates, Sunnyside Close

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

1. **Apologies:** Graham Brandwood, Dave Brookes, David Elliott, Oliver Fulton

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

3. **Matters arising from Minutes:**

3.1. **Progress with fern offer (3.1):** The ferns have not materialised. However, there are a lot of ferns in Upper Sowerholme. It was agreed to transplant a few into Pony Wood to see how well they establish (**Ian**).

3.2. **Harries View (4.4):** A sign is now in place honouring 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.

A map of reserve has been installed on the information board at the Aldcliffe Road end of the Flora path. Disappointment has been expressed that it repeats the problem with the map on the shed. Public and permissive paths are almost impossible to distinguish given the colours used. It was felt that the cost of altering and reprinting was not justified, but this problem should be borne in mind when the maps need renewing.

The sign maker will be visiting the reserve on Monday to assess the condition of the information board by the Fauna stones. In the light of this advice, **Hilary** will consider the options for all the existing boards.

3.3. **Neighbour's hedge in Orchard (4.8):** Ian reported that a new fence has been erected which appears to be in the right place. However, the debris pile has yet to be removed (**Hilary** to contact). Once the area has been cleared, Ian will consider how to reinstate a good habitat.

4. **Management:**

4.1. **Arable update:** The second cut of the floristically enhanced grass margin took place on 5th November. A cut of the northernmost beetle bank was requested (**Sue** to confirm that this happened).

4.2. **Grazing matters:** Herd size remains at 18 animals: 9 adult females, 7 aged 6 months to two years, and 2 calves. The cattle have still not been into Carr House Meadow. Chris advised that this should not have an adverse impact on wildflower development. Nevertheless, **Sue** will send another reminder to the Graziers. The winter limitation on cattle access to the reserve comes into force on 1st December. The number of days allowed will be lower than last year (**Glenys** to advise the Graziers).

4.3. **Woodland and hedges:** **Hilary** will contact the Tree Surgeon to a) raise concerns about the veteran sycamore, b) identify the diseased ash tree taken down and

removed and c) check progress with the survey of the play area and Aldcliffe Road triangle.

A source of Lancaster Whitebeam has been located (Sept item 8). A tree will be available for planting next year (**Sue**).

Delivery of saplings from The Woodland Trust has been arranged for 28th November. **Ian** will co-ordinate their planting in various parts of the reserve in the four Volunteer sessions before Xmas. He noted that individual donations from local gardens and allotments are incorporated as replacement planting. It was agreed that an offer of a Scots Pine could be accepted for location in the wilderness area of the Orchard.

Sue and Ian took part in a Woodland Management walk organised by Morecambe Bay Facilitation Fund on 8th November. It became very clear that introducing light is a priority and a closed woodland canopy should be avoided. An assessment of the implications of this for Little Wood will be presented to January FFOG, along with a report of the walk (**Ian, Sue**). MBFF is holding a session on hedges on 28th November. **Sue** will reserve at least two places. MBFF will be added to the FFOG agenda as a standing item (**Glenys**).

- 4.4. **Whiteboard for sightings:** **David** has identified a potential board. In his absence, further consideration was deferred until January.
- 4.5. **Water Abstraction Licence:** Mick, Chris and Dave have carried out measurements of the water flow in Lucy Brook. It remains unclear whether the FA's abstraction meets the threshold for requiring a licence. This needs to be resolved urgently, as any application must be submitted and validated by 31st December (**Trustees**).
- 4.6. **Contacts list:** A list of advisers and any other useful contacts is being compiled. It will be stored on the FA's Dropbox. An extra column will be added to show the name of the FA person who usually deals with the contact (**Glenys**).
- 4.7. **Pond signs:** The wooden signs identifying the reserve's ponds have deteriorated. **Mick** will order a complete set of replacements. The sign for Friars Pond is hidden by the hedge (**Ian** to change its location).
- 4.8. **Report of Special Meeting:** This was held at the Toll House Inn on 17th October, the aim being to review the performance of the reserve and start addressing long term issues that cannot be dealt with effectively within a routine FFOG meeting (see September item 8). A report of the meeting has been circulated. A misunderstanding requires correction (item 9): the monies received from Natural England **do** roughly cover the costs of the managing the nature reserve (i.e. reserve management is **not** a drain on FA funds). A second meeting will be held on Thursday 13th February.
- 4.9. **"Beyond the Castle" meadow:** The FA is still holding funds relating to the "Beyond the Castle" project. Agreement has been given for some of this to be used to create a meadow in the project fields. Initially this will involve planting large wildflower plugs (smaller plugs and wildflower seed will be nurtured by Piccadilly Gardens for later planting). Once notification of arrangements is received (**Sue, Hilary**), FA Volunteers will be approached to help with stage 1 (**Ian**).

5. Monitoring:

5.1. Maintenance and HLS habitat inspections: Graham's reports circulated. Despite last year's digger work, the scrape in West Field is failing to hold a significant amount of water. Graham has now discovered that an outflow that had previously been blocked is still draining into Lucy Brook. An attempt will be made to re-block it (**Ian, Graham**). Ian also noted that one of the Volunteers has expertise as a hydrologist. **Chris** will see whether he can gain access to equipment for identifying underground water flows. Meanwhile, **Sue** will look at maps.

The broken fence posts in the Paddock are the responsibility of the Graziers. The dilapidated fencing on the **north west** corner of West Field is not urgent as it does not serve to contain the cattle. It was agreed that this would be an excellent stretch for introducing a hedge, which – with permission – could be extended the short distance across the neighbouring field (to be considered further at the February Special Meeting).

Mick, Hilary and Sue have been into Upper Sowerholme to inspect the dumping of waste (July item 4.7). This appears to be from yet another garden. The pile is not significant enough at the moment to warrant action (to be monitored, **Graham**). **Ian** will liaise with **Graham** about replacing willow path-markers in US with stakes.

5.2. Progress with surveys: The Breeding Bird, Wildflower and Butterfly surveys have all been submitted. **Sue** offered to collate the various records for the February Special Meeting. Graeme Skelcher has questioned the NE prescriptions for the meadows and margins:

- He is clear that the requirement for Lowland Meadow status is for 2 frequent and 2 occasional GO6 species, not 4 and 2, and that there is an error in the NE specification. Graeme's conclusion that Hay and Carr House meadows are on the cusp of lowland meadow status is based on the lower figure. **Sue** will email the FA's NE Adviser.
- He has queried the seed mix in the floristically enhanced grass margin and also wonders whether this survey should be brought forward, given that mowing is allowed from 15th July. **No action** considered necessary: the minimum requirement of 5 indicator species is being achieved and in practice mowing occurs after the end of July.
- The bird seed mix seems to vary in composition from that prescribed, although Graeme considers that given targets are being met and it is providing habitat for purple ramping-fumitory there would need to be a very good reason to change it. **No action.**

Sue will reply to Graeme.

5.3. NLWG field visit 31st July: 10 NLWG and 4 FA members spent a merry morning investigating the margins, beetle banks and ponds in Flora Field with an excursion into Upper Sowerholme. Highlights were the proliferation of painted lady butterflies and bumblebees attracted to the floristically enhanced grass margin. The Flora ponds yielded an adult and juvenile smooth newt. In contrast, the beetle banks were a disappointment: too much grass and very few species. Mowing the banks on rotation has now been started (see 4.1) and the impact of this on invertebrates will be reviewed (**Chris**).

5.4. Photographic survey update: Access to these photographs of the reserve (taken 4 times a year) has been made more user-friendly. The FA website now has an interactive map with markers that launch the relevant photo album and indicate the direction of view. (**Hilary** will arrange for this to be publicised to FA members.)

5.5. Beehives in Flora Field: The owner of the beehives reports that 2019 has been challenging for his honey bees. Weather conditions adversely affected the replacement of queens, and meant the colony was weaker than usual in July. The hives have had to be protected during the warm, wet autumn.

6. Volunteer activities:

6.1. Volunteer sessions: Full reports for September and October are attached. When publicising proposed tasks for the Saturday sessions, **Ian** will try adding a few sentences of explanation. The aim is to increase Volunteers' awareness of, and engagement in, the overall management of the reserve.

6.2. First Aid training: 12 people and one reserve (all from the FA) have signed up for the one day course on 27th November.

6.3. Volunteers buffet: This will take place on Thursday 30th January, hopefully at the Storey (**Sue** is confirming availability).

7. Standing items:

7.1. Arrangements:

Ian will arrange the annual next box monitoring with **Ian N**.

Sue will contact the Arable Farmer and establish (in writing) agreement, herbicide regime & timings for 2020. She will also discuss the impact of limited crop rotation on soil quality.

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.

7.2. Financial control:

Set of Pond signs estimated about £100 (4.7 – **Mick**)

Bill for haymaking and maize seed £1500 (**Sue**)

Saplings from Woodland Trust £505 (4.3 – **Ian**)

Breeding bird survey invoice £120 (5.2 – **Sue**)

7.3. Organised events for notification to FA: **Sue** will try to arrange a winter bird walk.

8. Charter for Trees and Hedgerow Survey: The FA has been alerted to these two initiatives through its membership of the John Muir Trust. FFOG was enthusiastic about both.

The *Charter for Trees* was initiated by the Woodland Trust. It has gained considerable support from other organisations. Individuals can readily sign up to the Charter. Participation in the branch network seems to be more difficult. **Ian** will explore the practicalities, and the **Trustees** will confirm that it is appropriate for the FA to join (for January FFOG). Unfortunately, it is too late to arrange an event for Tree Charter Day on 30th November.

The *Great British Hedgerow Survey* is organised by the People's Trust for Endangered Species. Participation involves a comprehensive, one-off survey of the hedges on the reserve, to contribute to a national picture. For the FA it will provide information on the health of each hedge (strengthened by feedback on the results submitted) and increase knowledge of hedge management. **Ian** will arrange for the survey to be done next Spring. Initial thoughts are to form a survey team, train for consistency, then allocate groups to particular hedges.

9. **AOB: Local Nature Reserve designation:** This process has moved on with the agreement now signed by the FA and signatures from LGGs and Lancaster City Council imminent, if not already done. It is hoped that the final stage of advertising and declaring will happen very soon (**Hilary**).

10. **Date/place of next meetings:** Thursday 9th January 2020, Thursday 5th March 7.30 pm.
Venue: Whitegates Sunnyside Close.

Ian Procter's Report on Volunteer Activities:

3rd September 2019

Five volunteers formed the last Scything Group of the summer.

- We began the second swoop of scything the Pony Wood nettles, clearing the cut nettles into stacks.
- Further purple-ramping fumitory seed was collected.

4th September 2019

The Wednesday Work Group (WWG) attracted 12 volunteers on a chilly and blustery morning.

- Ragwort and bramble were removed from the hay meadows.
- Further work was done on the Upper Sowerholme path.
- We finished mowing the grass in the Orchard after David had to finish early.
- The overhanging vegetation along the Long Pads was trimmed back.
- Further work was done scything and stacking the Pony Wood nettles.

We finished work around 11.15 for one of our picnics! Well deserved after a summer's hard work.



11th September 2019

Seven volunteers gathered for the WWG on an improving morning. In Ian's absence:

- Graham led a sub-group making a start on clearing the ponds and channels in Upper Sowerholme.
- Julia led a sub-group continuing the scything and stacking of the Pony Wood nettles.
- With Glenys continuing clearing the Hay

Meadow of ragwort and bramble.

14th September 2019

Only 7 volunteers for the monthly Saturday session, a disappointing turnout on a sunny morning. Nevertheless, we achieved a great deal:

- We checked out the marquee frame and discovered that some repair work had been done (by the Trianglers? LATER - CONFIRMED) but we established what more needed to be done as we assemble the frame for Apple Day.
- Eight stock fence posts were replaced in the Paddock.
- The shed roof was weeded especially of sycamore saplings. Considerably fewer than when we last did this job so perhaps the netting is working.
- Samples of apples were taken from our trees and carefully bagged and labelled for the apple tasting table next week.
- We worked as we walked trimming the Pads footpath.
- We continued to scythe the nettles in Pony Wood and to rake and stack the debris.
- The orienteering post at the Towneley Close entrance had rotted and fallen down so it was refurbished and replaced.
- Anna's Stone was cleared of vegetation.
- We surveyed what needs to be done to make the entrance to Upper Sowerholme a little safer .

18th September 2019

Ten volunteers formed the WWG on a pleasant warm morning.

We split into two groups

- One group completed the scything of the Pony Wood nettle beds and the raking and stacking of the debris.
- The other continued the clearance of the Upper Sowerholme water channel and ponds. This included:
- Constructing a fence around the deep hole near the entrance.

25th September 2019

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

- We continued the clearance of the Upper Sowerholme channel and Lucy Pond.
- A broken rail was nailed back in place between the Fauna path and Carr House Meadow.
- The Fauna path / Grammar School field hedge was trimmed around the benches
- We cut back grass under the gates on the Fauna path.
- We ensured that the path through Upper Sowerholme was clear for the upcoming snipe flushing season.
- Overhanging bramble at the Big Meadow / Hay Meadow gate was cut back to ensure clear passage for the flush season.
- An area of thick grass and thistles near the beehives was scythed and cleared to facilitate wildflower growth.
- We trimmed back the Carr House Meadow / Gun Range hedge to the stock fence.
- Further work was done clearing bramble from the Hay Meadow wet area.
- We retrieved the apple picking guidance signs from the Orchard. Glenys's wording seems to have been far more effective than our previous signage and should be repeated next year.

Associate volunteers in September

- Cleaning the Cromwell Road notice board and trimming back encroaching vegetation.
- Mowing the Orchard grass.
- Our Dementia Champion worked with a family removing flowering ragwort heads and digging out ragwort plants. (X2)
- Ten bags of ragwort to the tip. (3 bags in second trip)

- 23/9/19 phoned Martin Ayrton, our farming neighbour, to request he flails the North hedge of West Field (ONLY). He will get back to me in 3-4 weeks.
- Cleaned, sharpened and oiled the scythe blades before putting them away for the winter.
- Inspected near Howson's gate for JKW. Perhaps one weedy strand (?) so I sprayed it.

2nd October 2019

The Wednesday Work Group (WWG) included 8 people on a beautiful sunny morning.

- We finished off trimming the Carr House Meadow hedges and raked and cleared the brash.
- 10 new posts were put in along the Carr House Meadow / Gun Range fence
- A mix of wildflower seeds was sown in the Fauna Stones flower bed
- The paving slab supplied by Peter was tested in the manhole in Lower Sowerholme. It is too large and was marked up for angle grinding.
- The clearing of Lucy Pond completed and further work was done clearing Cromwell Pond.
- The meadowsweet we potted up from the Hay Meadow last week was barrowed to the Howson's gate flower bed and planted around the perimeter of the wet section.
- We started to clear the nettle area under the Fauna Path ash tree. First stages in preparing it as a wildflower bed.

9th October 2019

Ten people formed the WWG under Graham's leadership as Ian was away.

- The hedge down the track from Sunnyside Lane to the Orchard was trimmed back and the debris cleared to the wild part of the Orchard.
- The hedge between the Fauna path and the Grammar School fields was trimmed back to the fence and the debris cleared.
- Further work was done digging out nettle roots under the big ash tree on the Fauna path in preparation for creating a further wildflower bed.

12th October 2019

The monthly Saturday morning work session attracted 11 volunteers on a bright morning. The session was curtailed as the volunteers joined other Fairfield well-wishers for the official opening of the Pony Wood path at 12 noon.

Before then we

- Sowed a wildflower mix gathered from the Reserve and other local areas over the summer in the wildflower bed at Howson's gate.
- The seed included some gathered from the purple-ramping fumitory discovered in the Flora Field margin. Three patches of this seed were sown at the Eastern boundary of the wildflower patch.
- We had some of the bee-friendly seed mix left over so this was sown in the Southern margin of Flora Field.
- A start was made trimming the Pads footpath / Flora Field hedge.
- The table and refreshment were barrowed to the top of the Pony Wood path where the opening event was to take place. Notices were posted and after the event everything was carted back!

16th October 2019

The WWG included 9 volunteers on an improving morning which started dull and damp but ended with bright sunshine.

- A broken fence post in the Paddock was replaced along with its wiring.
- A start was made clearing grass from Alder Pond to maintain some clear water.
- We continued trimming the Pads footpath / Flora Field hedge.
- We trimmed the hedge between the Pads footpath and Ayrton's field.

- A start was made clearing the line for the future hedge in Little Wood. Part of the intended hedge seems to be on a former wall or the foundation for the track so further exploratory work needs doing.
- The pump was retrieved from West Field.

23rd October 2019

Eleven volunteers formed the WWG, led by Laura and Emma as Ian was absent for the SECOND time this month.

- The trimming of the Pads footpath / Flora Field hedge was completed.
- The west hedge of West Field will be flailed from the top by the farmer but volunteers:
 - Trimmed the new(ish) saplings to increase low, bushy growth.
 - Removed invasive bramble,
 - Removed redundant plastic protectors.

30th October 2019

The WWG included 15 volunteers on a lovely autumn morning. As chain saw work was undertaken the appropriate Site Specific Risk assessment was agreed.

- Lower branches of the fruit trees were cut back to make the mowing of the surrounding grass a little lower. This was requested by David but as Keith points out this is always a compromise as if the trees are too high we can't properly prune them.
- On the advice of both our tree surgeon and Forestry Commission (FC) contact the poplar tree (*Populus tremula*) with rot at its base at the bottom of the Towneley path was felled.
- On the advice of our FC contact the near dead cherry (*Prunus avium*) near the middle entrance to the Orchard was pollarded to leave a high rotting stump.
- The dead silver birch (*Betula Pendula*) adjacent to the Orchard dog wood was felled for safety reasons.
- Suitable sized logs were cut for use in the stump circle (below).
- For all the tree work, the resulting brash was carted away to a suitable habitat pile covering up logs which might be attractive to wood burning stovers.
- Four of the stumps in the stump circle which had become unsuitable for sitting upon were replaced with logs cut as above.
- Brash generated by the trimming of the Orchard / Pads footpath was moved to a suitable habitat pile.
- Nettles were cut back in the willow tunnels at the edge of the Stump Circle.
- At the break, the secret mix of sloes, sugar and spells was added to the gin for the Christmas picnic.

Associate Volunteers in October

- Barrowed the replacement flagstone to the manhole in Lower Sowerholme.
 - NB 1 This is a bit too big but has defeated the angle grinder capacity of the WWG volunteers. If anyone knows how to access a more powerful petrol / battery stone cutter then let Ian know. At the moment it simply lies on top of the manhole with the former slab on top in two pieces.
 - NB 2 The manhole contained water. I have never seen water there before. We have had a lot of rain and the immediately surrounding land was waterlogged.
- Started the trimming of the Orchard / Pads footpath hedge.
- Mowed the Orchard grass for the last time. N.B. as the Toro mower was repaired recently and serviced at the same time (by mistake!), it does not need a service this year. The Ariens mower has not had sufficient use to justify a service this year.