

Fairfield Association
Flora, Fauna and Orchard Management Group [FFOG]
Minutes of the Meeting held on Thursday 9th January 2020 at 7.30 pm
at Whitegates, Sunnyside Close

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

1. **Apologies:**, Dave Brookes, Tony Finn
2. **Minutes of last meeting:** Approved.
3. **Matters arising from Minutes:**
 - 3.1. **Fauna information board (3.2):** The Landscape Architect has updated the map. **Hilary** will request a change in the colours to differentiate more clearly the permissive and public footpaths. A new framework will address the 'sagging' problem and should remain in reasonable condition for about 10 years. The quote from Signs Express (see 7.2) will be accepted (**Hilary**).
 - 3.2. **Neighbour's hedge in Orchard (3.3):** The promised removal of the brush pile has not taken place. In fact more has been added by another neighbour. (**Hilary** to contact.)
 - 3.3. **Replacement pond signs (3.3):** A full set will be ordered for stock, as well as replacement signs where the current one is rotten. Is Lucy's sign still in position? – needs to be checked (**Mick**).
 - 3.4. **FA membership of *Charter for Trees*:** The Trustees are in favour of the FA signing up to this Charter. **Hilary** will complete the application form.
4. **Management:**
 - 4.1. **Arable update:** The contract for 2020 has been signed. The Arable Farmer has no concern about his yields from the field.
 - 4.2. **Grazing matters:** The cattle have now grazed Carr House Meadow. The Fauna footpath was closed for hoof trimming on the morning of 2 January (the closure advertised for 31 December did not take place because of machinery failure). So far this winter the cattle have spent 6 of the permitted 50 days in the HK10 fields. Concern was expressed about the heavy poaching in both gateways of School Pond. **Sue** will contact the Graziers to encourage greater use of the water trough.
 - 4.3. **Whiteboard for sightings:** **David** will liaise with **Ian** over the practicalities of installation.
 - 4.4. **Water Abstraction Licence:** The application form was submitted before the 31st December deadline, and its receipt has been acknowledged. The Trustees are unhappy about the whole process and are considering how best to register this dissatisfaction (**Hilary**).
 - 4.5. **West Field drainage:** The scrape in West Field is now holding a better level of water, certainly in the southern part. The outflow into Lucy Brook that had started to drain again has been re-blocked. However, there is another outfall about 20m to the west

which is shedding water. It was agreed to attempt to plug this too (**Graham**). It is also suspected that there is a drain in the NW corner of the field that is removing the water from the northern channel of the scrape. This can only be accessed from neighbouring gardens. **Graham** was given the go ahead to seek permission if he wants to investigate further. **Chris** has established that the FA can borrow equipment for identifying underground water flows, and will liaise with **Ian** and **Graham**. However, these efforts may fail if the underlying clay has been punctured. And – apart from in the early days – the extended scrape has proved disappointing in attracting wildlife. With the long term future of West Field a subject of discussion, it was agreed not to devote a large amount of effort to the drainage problem at this time.

5. Monitoring:

5.1. Maintenance and HLS habitat inspections: Graham's reports circulated. Graham has been busy in the ponds and pools, removing vegetation to give clear water (appreciated by the teal who are now attracted to Willow Pond). Grass corridors are being left to favour invertebrates.

The gate into the Flora Path from the Long Pads has a broken top bar. **Peter** has a strategy for repairing it, unless the problem proves to be structural.

5.2. Progress with surveys: Two *Anabats* (acoustic recording equipment) were installed in the Orchard and Pony Wood for a couple of weeks at the turn of the year. The findings will form part of a report on bats in the nature reserve, expected to be available for the February Special Meeting. Peter noted that he has two hand-held bat monitors and Chris has access to more. A bat walk may be arranged later in the year (**Glenys**).

6. Volunteer activities:

6.1. Volunteer sessions: Full reports for November and December are attached. Ian was proud to note that the complex operation to plant 1405 saplings in various locations across the reserve has been completed. (This has been reported to Lancaster City Council to count towards its million trees pledge). **Ian** is now adding a few sentences of explanation to the advertising of proposed tasks for the Saturday sessions. This idea seems to be working well. If the adverse weather forecast for the session on 11 January materialises tasks on the day may be changed to focus on work in the more sheltered Orchard.

The plan is to allow the hedge between Flora Field and the Long Pads path to widen over time. However, on the field side there is a wire fence that is in poor condition which needs to be removed before it becomes enmeshed in the evolving hedge. As there are no stock to contain and the hedge itself is now a dog-proof boundary, it was agreed to take this out promptly (**Ian**).

6.2. First Aid training: The one day course on 27th November at the Friends Meeting House proved a very cost effective means of certifying and re-certifying a total of 12 FA Volunteers as first aiders. Ian has provided feedback to the course organiser in relation to the timing/balance. A similar approach will be considered in three years' time when the current certifications run out.

6.3. Volunteers buffet: The Print Room at the Storey has been booked for 7pm on Thursday 30th January. It will be a £10 buffet, as last year. Advertising notes that

places must be reserved in advance by contacting **Sue** or **Ian** so that numbers can be given to the caterer (payment to be made on the night).

7. Standing items:

7.1. Arrangements:

Mick will order the bird seed mix for the margin as usual, plus any other seed required.

It was agreed that the development of the phragmites means there is no longer any specific need to cut bramble in Upper Sowerholme. This task will be removed from the calendar (**Glenys**).

NE allows the Arable Farmer to plough in the stubble in Flora Field from 15th February. In anticipation, **Ian** will arrange for the beetle banks, manhole/drain covers and margin boundaries to be marked out. He will also present a review of the Associate Volunteers scheme to the March FFOG.

Graham will prepare an update on the John Muir Awards for the next meeting. This item will be moved into the January agenda in future (**Glenys**).

A second Special Meeting, continuing the discussion started on 17th October, will be held on **27th February**, 7.30pm. **Sue** will try to book the room at the Toll House Inn again.

7.2. Financial control:

New map and information board around £650 (3.1 – **Hilary**)

First aid course around £550 (6.2 – **Ian**)

Dave has produced his annual spreadsheet outlining the anticipated costs of running the reserve, and comparing this against the funding expected from Natural England. He notes that income more than covers the estimated outgoings. The spreadsheet also gives an indication of the shortfall of funds that could be anticipated if an extension/new agreement was not secured with NE. Hilary has compared Dave's anticipated costs of running the reserve against the actual costs recorded by the FA Treasurer. Dave's figures appear quite significantly understated (but not to the extent that income falls short of expenditure). **Hilary** will liaise with **Dave** and the Treasurer to determine the cause of the variation. She also noted that the Trustees are due a meeting to discuss finances.

Ian submitted a breakdown of his delegated £500 allowance, the Tools and Materials Fund. His expenditure slightly exceeded this total, with the extra items sanctioned by Hilary as FA Chair. A sizeable chunk of the budget was spent on fencing posts. It was agreed that these essential and routine purchases did not need to be counted against this fund in future.

7.3. Organised events for notification to FA: **Sue** is struggling to find someone to lead a winter bird walk.

7.4. Morecambe Bay Facilitation Fund: A Wilding/Habitat Regeneration conference is being run on 14th February at the Lake District National Park offices in Kendal.

Graham, Mick/Hilary and Sue are keen to attend. **Sue** has reserved two places, but will now ask whether a third can be allocated to the FA.

8. Woodland and Hedges:

8.1. Tree Survey: The Tree Surgeon's survey dated 27 November was circulated. It covers the whole reserve, plus the playground and the Aldcliffe Road Triangle. His recommendations for the latter area were delegated to **Dave** to deal with. His other recommendations will be considered by **Ian**. He will identify the actions required and consider which need the Tree Surgeon's attention and which are suitable for Volunteers. Ian's proposals will be circulated for a prompt decision between meetings so as not to delay remedial work.

Queries were raised in relation to the Tree Surgeon's approach:

- he is keen for ivy to be removed so as to reveal safety issues. From a wildlife perspective this is often better left. **Ian** and the Volunteers will make judgements on the ground.
- removal of trees because of ash dieback is not explicitly mentioned in the report. However, a small ash was recently taken out without consultation on the grounds of preventing spread. It was agreed to continue to follow Forestry Commission guidance on ash dieback (i.e. leave to die *in situ* unless there is a safety issue). **Ian** will raise this with the Tree Surgeon and remind him not to undertake work without consultation.
- regular checks are recommended at various points in the survey report. **Ian** clarified that these would be undertaken by Volunteers and a record kept. **Chris** will shortly be arranging with **Ian** and the reserve photographer for a regular photographic record of the state of the ash trees.

8.2. Light in Little Wood and feedback on MBFF sessions 8th and 28th November: Sue and Ian attended the *Woodland Management Walk and Talk* at Challon Hall Allotment while Graham and Oliver participated in the *Hedges, Wildlife and Payments Workshop* at Leighton Moss. Reports have been written for both events, which provide material for further discussion at the February Special FFOG.

An outcome from the first session was the decision taken at November FFOG (4.3) to consider ways of introducing more light into Little Wood. **Ian, Graham** and **Peter** will look at this on site.

Oliver drew attention to the following points from the second session:

- that the latest NE prescriptions require hedges maintained at least 2m tall and 1.5m wide (in contrast to the max 2m for the HK10 fields specified in the FA's current agreement)
- a hedge should not be cut on both sides in the same year
- low scrubby growth is very important
- a 'gardening' approach to hedge management should be avoided: intervention to remove bramble and other 'weeds' can adversely affect wildlife. Ian added the

qualification that the approach needs to be adapted according to the hedge in question (e.g. a newly planted hedge requires good light to establish strongly)

- the Woodland Trust is encouraging the planting of trees in open fields, suggesting a large slow-growing specimen, plus a smaller tree and some hawthorn and blackthorn in an enclosure for which they can provide construction materials (see also 8.4),

8.3. Environment Agency Tree Planting Offer: An enquiry has been received via the FA website from someone in the Risk Management department of the Environment Agency. She is interested in working in partnership with the FA to replant trees to offset those removed or cut back as a result of flood management works locally. It appears that hedges count, but it is not clear whether the EA would provide the saplings or funds. Peter advised that this has the potential to be a very beneficial relationship for the FA. **Hilary** will therefore pursue a meeting to explore options.

8.4. Financial donation for a tree: The FA has kindly been offered a £100 donation for a tree (no strings attached). It was agreed that this would be a good opportunity to introduce a substantial specimen tree to commemorate the eventual award of Local Nature Reserve status (still being held up by administrative hiccups!). The Paddock was chosen as an appropriate site: it is visible to the public, not covered by NE restrictions, acceptable to the Graziers and the FA has struggled to find a good use for this field. The Woodland Trust approach outlined in 8.2 will be adopted (**Oliver** to investigate the fencing aspect and liaise with Ian). **Hilary** will contact the donor as to whether she prefers oak or small-leaved lime as the specimen tree.

8.5. Willow Rods: Graham will soon be starting the annual cutting of willow screens etc and has suggested a number of ways in which the resulting rods could be put to good use. **Ian** noted that some would be added to fencing (around manhole covers for instance). The idea of donating surplus to local groups or residents was unanimously supported. The play domes at the northern end of the Orchard are very popular and it was agreed to extend these (which will also reinforce the divide between the public access and northern wilderness area of the Orchard) (**Graham**). Introducing such play domes in the Playground was seen as potentially more problematic and the matter will be discussed at the FA meeting (**Hilary**). Introduction of a willow screen in Big Meadow along the boardwalk was put on hold. It could help encourage wildfowl into BM, but might adversely affect the water level. Also is it better to leave this whole boundary area to develop naturally as it is already starting to do? Matters for further consideration as the whole hedging strategy evolves through the Special Meetings. It was also noted that willow rods can be left *in situ* as habitat piles: with careful stacking there is little risk of them rooting.

9. Flora path:

9.1. Closure in strong winds: There are padlocks in place at both ends to allow this permissive path to be closed easily as necessary. This has already been done over the Christmas period when high winds were considered a safety issue around Pony Wood. This caused resentment from some members of the public who felt they should make their own safety decisions. **Hilary** and **Sue** will consult with the Trustees to establish a policy.

9.2. Bin request: A request has been received via the FA website for a bin to be located at the Aldcliffe Road end of the path for people to dispose of dog mess. There is already a

bin about 50m away on the canal towpath. It was agreed to approach Lancaster City Council about relocating this next to the fingerpost pointing into the reserve (**Hilary**).

10. **AOB: “Beyond the Castle” meadow (Nov 4.9): Ian** will offer **Hilary** some times when FA Volunteers can be available to help plant large wildflower plugs in Vicarage Field. She will then make arrangements with the Project Organiser.
11. **Date/place of next meetings:** Special Meeting **Thursday 27th February** 7.30pm Toll House Inn, Thursday 5th March 7.30 pm, Thursday 7th May both Whitegates Sunnyside Close.

Ian Procter’s Report on Volunteer Activities:

6th November 2019.

Eleven volunteers formed the Wednesday Work Group (WWG) on a morning on which the forecast rain held off.

- We continued work to ensure that the ponds and scrapes have some clear water.
- We began the laying of the hedge between the Long Pads path and the former NACRO land.
- This included removing an old fence which had to be cut up and carted back to the shed for disposal.
- On the field side was considerable growth from blackthorn suckers which we left alone to eventually thicken up the laid hedge.
- We began the trimming of the east hedge of West Field taking care to leave it quite high so that people on the path are shielded from possible birds in the field. It has to be said though that the pond created by last winter’s digger work seems to have gone and the water is finding another escape route.

9th November 2019

Thirteen volunteers formed the Saturday work group on a cold but dry morning.

- We continued the clearing of the ponds to maintain clear water.
- The hedge around the electricity sub-station in the playground was trimmed back as far as we could access it.
- This generated a considerable amount of brash which was transported to the habitat pile near the shed.
- Work continued clearing the earth from underneath the toddler’s play area fence.
- At the break the Volunteer Organiser conducted the annual review of First Aid arrangements including:
 - The duty First Aider
 - The contents of the First Aid wheelbarrow.
 - Key items in the First Aid box including the tick remover.
 - The defibrillator was checked as OK
 - The sheets with the list of First Aiders and key post codes for emergency services.
 - The list of emergency contact numbers in the Health and Safety Box.
 - Wearing whistles to signal the need for help.

13th November 2019

The WWG included 10 volunteers who, after an initial shower, just to wet us through, enjoyed a dry morning.

- We continued clearing ponds to maintain some clear water.
- The laying of the former NACRO land / Long Pads hedge was concluded.
- We continued trimming the West Field / Long Pads hedge.

- At the break the annual First Aid review was held, see above.

20th November 2019

Fifteen volunteers gathered for the WWG on a chilly but pleasant morning.

- The Weedy family delivered a scots pine which had been growing in their yard. We transported it into the 'wild area' of the Orchard and planted it there.
- Debris left by trimming the Pads / Orchard path was cleared away.
- Peter worked his magic with the two trimming machines we could not start on a previous occasion and trimmed the high reaches of the Long Pads / West Field hedge we have been working on of late. The said hedge was finished off.
- We explored the drain in West Field, digging out where we blocked it some years ago. There was a significant flow of water. This was blocked and the hole refilled. We also discovered another drain coming out of the stream, apparently with no outflow. This must be checked after heavy rain. The Lidar map was compared to the field and the line of the main drain identified. So, if blocking the first hole does not work, we have other possibilities.
- We continued clearing the line of the new hedge between the track and Little Wood. A new hedge is feasible here.
- Redundant plastic protectors were collected from various parts of Pony Wood and surrounding hedges. These were bagged up ready for the tip.
- Eight locally donated oaks and two hazel were planted out in Pony Wood to replace failed saplings. Each marked with an old hedge stake.
- The hedge between the new path and the small neighbour's field was trimmed to remove excess briar where it was swamping the saplings we have planted to gap up the hedge. Hopefully from next year this hedge can be left to grow tall and thick.

27th November 2019

In lieu of the WWG, 12 volunteers took a full day First Aid course with Cumbria First Aid at the Friends Meeting House. This thus increases considerably the number of our qualified first aiders for volunteer sessions and events.

Associate volunteers in November

- Continued the trimming of the Pads footpath / Orchard hedge.
- Dug out the excess earth under the toddlers' play area fence to prevent the fence from rotting.
- Cleared the grass from Alder Pond to create clear water.
- Two volunteers conducted the first part of the bird box survey, including repairing boxes where needed.
- Rubbish, especially redundant plastic tree guards, to tip.
- Took delivery and sorted into diverse bundles, hedge saplings from the Woodlands Trust.

4th December 2019

Fifteen volunteers formed the Wednesday Work Group (WWG) on a cold but dry morning.

- The first 470 of the Woodlands Trust hedge saplings were planted along the edge of Lucy Brook and alongside Anna's Pond.
- This included the considerable task of transporting the saplings, guards and canes to the dog leg corner of Pads footpath and then across the field to the site.

11th December 2019

Nine volunteers attended the WWG on a largely dry morning amongst turbulent, wet and windy days.

- We continued to plant hedge saplings plus standard wild cherry along the edge of Lucy Brook and beside Anna's Pool.
- 300 saplings were planted, a good number on often very difficult ground. This concludes this section of the current planting.

14th December 2019

Twelve volunteers heroically braved wind and hail showers to form the monthly Saturday morning volunteer session.

- The hedge planting continued, this time replacing the failed saplings in the Pads hedge between the Orchard and Lucy Brook and between the concrete wall and the Flora Field gates. We then moved into Little Wood for the stretch adjacent to the Canal bound track.
- Over 300 saplings were planted and the canes and protectors transported and fitted.

Volunteers enjoyed a delicious stollen cake supplied, as ever, by Tony.

18th December 2019

The last WWG before the seasonal break attracted 13 volunteers, several people sending apologies because of illness and commitments. We enjoyed a dry morning.

- The remaining hedge saplings were planted in Little Wood, with the exception of about 50 which are healed in. Time ran out.
- Further locally donated tree saplings, mostly oak, were planted to infill gaps in Pony Wood.
- The remaining Woodland Trust supplied wild cherry, unsuitable for the Little Wood site were planted in appropriate sites near Howson's Gate, along the Pony Wood path and in Pony Wood.
- Ten wild roses were planted around the edge of the Howson's Gate wildflower patch.
- In total the Woodland Trust planting has included
 - 50 Wild Cherry
 - 200 Blackthorn
 - 75 Crab Apple
 - 75 Dog Rose
 - 75 Common Dogwood
 - 150 Field Maple
 - 650 Hawthorn
 - 150 Hazel

A total of 1375 saplings, plus 30 locally donated, mostly oak but also holly, rowan, hazel, horse chestnut. Grand total 1405

- So, our Christmas picnic was well deserved:



Associate volunteers in December

- Cleared fallen leaves from the track running past the shed.
- Transported donated potted up tree saplings to Pony Wood.
- A big tidy up of the shed after the turbulence of the sapling planting season.
- Rubbish to tip.
- Shears and loppers sharpened.
- Replaced broken tines on our hay rakes.

Plus, Keith has donated a second hand wheelbarrow. This brings our 'fleet' 🧡 to 6 barrows, the first aid barrow and the sack trolley – watch out Eddie Stobart!