

Fairfield Association
FAUNA and Orchard sub-Group (FOG)

Minutes of the first meeting, held on
Wednesday 9 March 2011, 7.30 pm
at Whitegates, Sunnyside Close

Present: Andrew Brennand, Dave Brookes, Glenys Ferguson, Tony Finn, Oliver Fulton (mins), Simon Gershon, Rebecca Procter, Hilary Short, Mick Short (chair)

Apologies: Helen Hicks (who subsequently sent a brief report, included in these minutes), Sue Nieduszynska

Minutes of last (final) Orchard Sub-group meeting: Approved

Matters arising:

- Tony is in frequent touch with Dallas Road School and the signage project for the Orchard is in progress.
- The mower is back. The final cost was less than £500.
- Oliver and Hilary have not yet met to finalise the tree label design.
- Helen has not yet heard back from Steve Langhorn about the tools he sent back
- Helen reported that the owl box has been re-fixed by Andy Lee – there was a cost paid by Helen and Henry Hicks, who might appreciate reimbursement

Organisation of FOG

- Mick explained that FOG has been created because there will be a lot of overlap between FAUNA and Orchard matters. We will review how well it is working after a year. Meanwhile, because there will be a lot of business to get through, especially while FAUNA is being constructed, it was agreed that we will try: (a) circulating one or written reports along with the agenda, to save long explanations taking up time at the meeting; (b) putting suggested timings on agenda items to control the length of the meeting and avoid short-changing later items; (c) setting up ad-hoc working groups to progress particular items. Minutes will be prepared and circulated promptly, normally within a week.
- We will provide a written report to the main FA meeting in addition to the minutes.
- The written progress report circulated with the agenda will be attached to the minutes (see below for the first example).

FAUNA progress report

- The first progress report was briefly discussed and Oliver, Mick and others answered questions, e.g. on the Natural England management plan, which will be circulated once the final version has been received, and on opportunities / requirements for volunteer input. It was agreed that we would not ring-fence either FAUNA's or the Orchard's revenue allocations as we will not be held to account for this division, and there will be overlap between spending on the two areas. Other matters were referred to later in the agenda.

Current developments

- None in the Orchard. Robin Loxam has told us there was an intrusion a few days ago in Edenbreck Cottage: the burglars evidently had acquired a key, and the locks have now been changed.

FAUNA contracted work

- The first packages of work (see progress report) will be tree surgery – Andy Lee has been asked to work on the two big ash trees as soon as the lease is signed – and fencing: Dave has had an estimate from Hanafins for approximately £2,000, which he recommended accepting. Oliver will ask permission from RSPB and Community Spaces (CS) for work on the Cromwell Road bridge before the end of the summer, as it should not affect the birds unduly.

- Dave and Oliver will inspect two boundaries (the Edenbreck Cottage end of the paddock, and the back of Aldcliffe Road gardens nearest Cromwell Road – suggested by Glenys) on Saturday, to see if they are urgent enough to need adding to the early fencing contract.
- There is also the problem of the asbestos roofing from the pigsties. Agreed that Hilary was unlikely to get a grant for this, though we will ask Lucia Marquart for suggestions if necessary, and that Oliver should first ask LEF for permission to spend around £500 from their grant on professional removal.
- Simon asked who would be the ‘main contractor’ (which has legal implications) for FAUNA work. Dave will look into this for both minor projects and the main sealed-tender footpath etc. project in the autumn.

Orchard and FAUNA volunteering

- It was reported that plans were well in hand for Saturday (12 March): around 20 students were expected, the Martins were preparing lunch, our Woodland Trust tree pack had arrived: Simon will swap most of the standard trees (oak and rowan) for more hedging plants from another pack he has ordered for Ryelands Park. Helen will provide some hollies which she has been bringing on. She will also bring a camera to record the day. Priorities will be the Martins’ hedge in the morning and the FAUNA LGGS hedge in the afternoon: other tasks include ivy removal from the Martins’ sycamores and removing the concrete posts from the far (hay-making) FAUNA field. If the event is successful, Simon will apply for another tree pack for FAUNA for the autumn.
- We will want to recruit, and probably train, wildlife recorders. Clare Brown has already volunteered for brown hare recording and has been to a training day. Sue, Oliver, Glenys and Rachel Malloch have expressed an interest in wildflower recording. We don’t yet have confirmed volunteers for birds, and Peter Crooks was suggested as a contact. Oliver will follow up for now.

Events

- Wassailing (Saturday January 15) was cancelled, with great regret, owing to appalling weather.
- A small celebration was being planned for Monday March 14, provided the lease was signed that day as planned (confirmation expected shortly after the meeting). Mick and Hilary offered to provide sparkling wine, Andrew to bring glasses / cups, and Hilary fruit juice. Oliver would draft a press release to be sent out by Mick with Andrew’s help, and prepare material for a symbolic exchange of documents.
- The Ceilidh on March 26 (which is a fundraiser for the Fields) was noted.
- Easter Egg Hunt (April 25): Tony is planning the usual programme, some volunteer helpers have come forward and he will use Ruth’s email list to recruit more nearer the time. Posters will be prepared by Tony and run off and laminated by Mick. Tony will buy the same number of eggs or other prizes as last year.
- Annabel Orr is arranging a cross-bay walk on 14 May.
- Robin and Helen Loxam’s open garden for the benefit of the FA will be on 11/12 June as part of the National Gardens Scheme (in the ‘big yellow book’). We have agreed to provide catering and organise brief tours of FAUNA.
- Go Wild events: it was agreed to aim for most if not all events to be held on weekends in May/June. Emma Garston is arranging a guided walk including Freeman’s Pools and FAUNA on May 28. Other suggestions were: bats or small mammals (Steve Bradley, who did the bat walk last year); hedge restoration and maintenance for wildlife (Tarja Wilson has offered to do this); birds (perhaps Alan Stamford from RSPB again); hares (Clare’s contact in Lancashire Wildlife Trust); and possibly wild flowers / hay meadows, though that might be better kept for a later year. Oliver to liaise with Tony and bring firm proposals to the next meeting, then hand over to Rebecca and Jonathan to run them as last year (subject to their agreement).

Grants and fundraising (other than FAUNA main grants)

- Hilary has obtained £500 from Small Sparks for tools for volunteer use, based on a list supplied by Simon.
- We will probably need some kit for the volunteer wildlife recorders: Dave suggested we should bid for this in the ‘sustainability grant’ from Community Spaces which we will qualify for in the autumn.

- Because educational visits were cut from the HLS grant, we should consider a further application for support for school visits.

Any other business

- Helen reported that she delivered 2 green gage plum trees, Cambridge variety, bare rooted, to Storey Gallery Garden two weeks ago,. These were bought with the money raised at Fairfield Apple day from the sale of Matrimony Jam that she made with Storey Orchard plums and apples, and from the sale of Lord Derby apples collected from Storey's. All the left-over apples were taken to the Edward Street Homeless Shelter, where they were used to make pies which were stored in the freezers for winter supplies.
- Tony asked for clarification of possible reimbursement for his sighted assistant for primary school visits. After some discussion it was agreed to recommend to the FA that it set aside a sum of £150.00 (enough for 5 visits) for use by any local schools on a first-come, first-served basis.
- Andrew reported that the A level Geography syllabus has a section on urban nature reserves. Agreed that we should contact secondary school geography teachers and invite them to plan visits once FAUNA basic facilities are in place (next agenda).
- It was agreed that dog mess is becoming a significantly worse problem in the Orchard. After various suggestions were aired including the feasibility and consequences of requiring all dogs to be on leads, it was agreed that Mick would contact the Council dog warden for advice.

Next meetings :

It was clear that a number of previous or current members of the group would find it difficult or impossible to come regularly on Wednesday nights (which had been chosen to suit other members). It was agreed to try alternating between the first Wednesday and first Thursday of the month.

7.30 pm, Thursday 7 April 2011 at **Whitegates, Sunnyside Close**

7.30 pm, Wednesday 4 May 2011 at **Whitegates, Sunnyside Close**

Addendum: FAUNA progress report, as circulated 8 March 2011.

The lease and Robin's grazing licence should be ready for signing this week, and the date just agreed by all parties for completion, provided the City approves final amendments, is Monday next (March 14). We have provisionally arranged for a small celebration in the Orchard by the FAUNA gate for 5.00 pm on Monday: invitees (all pending confirmation of the signing date) include Robin Loxam, Castle Ward City Councillors, Lucia Marquart and the residents of Aldcliffe and Cromwell Road, who will be leafleted with a general announcement including an invitation. Ruth will email her FA members' list, Jonathan can email the volunteers' list and we will put up notices in the noticeboards.

The HLS agreement has been approved by Natural England, and the Trustees have agreed to accept it. We are waiting for some minor amendments before we get the exact figures for capital and revenue grants, but the revenue component will be 'slightly less than' £1,619 p/a, of which £232.50 is for Orchard maintenance. Unfortunately the promised support for educational visits was cut by DEFRA following the Comprehensive Spending Review. The other features to which we've agreed are restoration of species-rich grassland, including annual haymaking, in the drier field on the Cromwell Road side, creation of ponds and reedbeds mainly in the small triangular field backing onto Aldcliffe Road, and restoration of grassland in the big field beside the Orchard to encourage winter waders. There are detailed prescriptions for the grassland, including grazing times and levels, plus haymaking followed by spreading of wildflower seed using green hay in at least the first year (2011!) and for restoring and maintaining the hedges. We have been and will continue to be strongly supported with these by the RSPB (Richard Storton, Farmland Adviser in the Lancaster office), Lancashire Wildlife Trust (Emma Garston and Reuben Neville at Heysham) and Lancashire Countryside Service (Tarja Wilson, based at Dunsop Bridge but in Lancaster once a week). Some of the contractors we plan to use will also have specialist expertise. The grazing level prescriptions have been cheerfully accepted by Robin Loxam, who will be using the LGGs land as overspill for the cattle when they are excluded from our fields, and he is aware that the total number of cows permitted will be reduced compared with current numbers.

We have a total of approx. £117,000 in grants (including £5,000 allocated by the FA as match funding for other grants), with restrictions on eligible costs for each of them. The FA has set up a sub-group of Dave Brookes, Jane Parker and Oliver Fulton to monitor and manage the grant expenditure. The funding will be used for the wildlife features mentioned above, plus footpath construction and associated features (strengthening the bridge at Cromwell Road, fencing, interpretation boards, benches etc). One of the grants requires us to start spending by mid-April, so we are undertaking some enabling work as soon as the lease is signed: Andy Lee will tidy up and make safe the two veteran ash trees (one by the Orchard entrance, one at the central corner); Dave is commissioning a fencing contractor to fence the field boundaries and/or insert gates so Robin can move cattle around and keep them out of designated areas; we will make a start on diversifying the new LGGs hedge on the March 12 volunteer day if time/resources permit. Most other construction work will have to wait until the bird-nesting season is over in September, except that we may be able to get the Cromwell Road bridge strengthened during the summer. The main footpath work has to be contracted by sealed tender; Georgina Peacock will draw up final tender documents and Dave will preside over the contracting process. We have said that we aim to finish the contracted work by December 31. We will need to get more interpretation boards designed !

There are a couple of other small jobs to be done. We need to remove some dozen old concrete fence posts from the future hay meadow before the hay conceals them, or they will damage the haymaking machinery. We would like to do this on Saturday. The asbestos roofing material from the old pigsties is now on the ground. It will cost £500 to get it removed professionally, and Hilary is applying for a grant for this. Failing that, we may have to do it ourselves, which will involve getting it bagged up in prescribed materials and taking it to Saltaire. It is said not to be dangerous unless broken up.

Clearly the site will be quite inaccessible this summer. However, there is a lot of interest and so we should probably aim wherever possible to cover both the Orchard and FAUNA during Go Wild events, even if FAUNA involvement just means leaning over the gate and talking about it. A guided walk is being arranged by Emma Garston for Saturday May 28, between FAUNA and Freeman's Pools, to discuss and illustrate some of the issues in wildlife conservation/restoration and the creation of new nature reserves. Robin Loxam's open garden weekend is on June 11/12, and it has been advertised as including visits to FAUNA from his garden gate.

There will be new volunteering opportunities in wildlife recording (birds, flowers, brown hares for starters). We already have a newly-trained volunteer to record hares.