

**Fairfield Association**  
**FAUNA and Orchard sub-Group (FOG)**

**Minutes of the meeting held on**  
**Thursday 7 April 2011, 7.30 pm**  
**at Whitegates, Sunnyside Close**

**Present:** Andrew Brennand, Dave Brookes, Tony Finn, Oliver Fulton (mins), Helen Hicks, Sue Nieduszynska, Rebecca Procter, Mary Ridley, Hilary Short (chair), Chris Workman

**Apologies:** Glenys Ferguson, Simon Gershon, Mick Short

**Minutes of last meeting:** Approved

**Matters arising:**

- Helen has not heard from Steve Langhorn about the tools he sent. She has labelled them, and will keep them at her house and bring them each time.
- The owl box will need checking each year, as the ties may need slackening as the tree grows. Andy Lee has been paid (by us) for his time installing it.
- Dave and Oliver have looked at the Cromwell Road / Aldcliffe Road gardens' boundary with FAUNA, and decided that fencing is not urgently needed and can wait until the main contract in the autumn.
- RSPB has given an opinion that the Cromwell Road ramp can safely be reinforced / re-sloped over the summer. We have copied this to Community Spaces and informed them of our intention to proceed in the next few months, so it is ready for the main contractors to start in September.
- We have not heard back from LEF about using their money to remove the asbestos roofing.

**Progress report**

- Noted. Nothing to discuss other than matters on the agenda.

**Current developments**

- We have heard that once it has been refurbished, Robin Loxam's stepson Fraser will be moving into Edenbreck Cottage. This is very welcome news.
- The Ceilidh raised approximately £120 after expenses.
- Dog mess and vandalism. Mick and Helen met Alison McGowan, the Council Dog Warden, in the Orchard and Mick provided a short written report to the meeting. On dog mess, she offered to draft a press release to the *Lancaster Guardian* highlighting the problem and saying that we are considering a dog control order or even a dog ban if it doesn't improve: such a proposal would in practice trigger a public consultation which would help to raise consciousness. Members were wary of such a draconian threat but agreed that we should do a press release saying we are getting desperate and need public support to help control the problem. Mick will be asked to edit Alison's draft accordingly. There has been more damage to tree bark. Following reports that a Staffordshire terrier has been seen 'attacking' trees, Alison offered to contact the owner (whose name and whereabouts are known) and warn him this is criminal damage. She, Mick and Helen think it quite possible that last year's supposed knife attacks were in fact caused by dogs. It was also agreed that if/when the Towneley Close path is put in place, we should not only ask for a new bin at that entrance but request the Council to empty the bin at the south end, as Helen should not be expected to do this indefinitely. The Dallas Road poster designs have arrived and Mick will scan them for printing. He and Helen are investigating the cost of putting them on a metal backing.

**FAUNA contracted work**

- Dave is meeting Hanafins (fencing contractor) on Monday 11 April to review and agree the work needed. They hope to start it towards the end of that week.

- Dave will chase up Graham Schofield (structural engineer) for final designs for the Cromwell Road bridge/ramp, and will then get estimates.
- Dave and Oliver will arrange a meeting with Georgina and Richard Storton, to finalise footpath plans etc, including determining exactly how much boardwalk will be needed once the scrapes, ponds and sluices are in place.
- Dave, Oliver and Jane are to meet shortly to go over the budgets from different sources.

### **Orchard and FAUNA volunteering**

- Various people, including volunteers and neighbours had expressed concerns about the new 'thicket(s)' at the S end of the Orchard which Simon arranged for the volunteers to plant on March 12. After some discussion, and following reassurance from Chris that it was not too late to dig up and replant, it was agreed that the newly planted trees should be moved to the public footpath hedge on Saturday April 9. Oliver will email Simon to explain. Simon's suggestions for work were approved with this addition. It was agreed that we must take care that future planting plans are both clearly specified and consistent with the management plan.
- Oliver reported that Graeme Skelcher has just sent in his completed report on the Orchard survey which we commissioned in two stages in 2009-2010. Oliver will circulate. Highlights include his discovery of another BAP target species, which gets us closer to qualifying as a BAP area. Graeme has offered to revise the management plan for us. It was agreed that this would be very helpful, as it would benefit from both Graeme's survey and the HLS prescriptions. Graeme had also made a number of useful suggestions after his Go Wild session last summer, and it would be good to get these in writing and, hopefully, avoid any future confusion about where (and where not) to plant trees. Oliver will commission the plan from Graeme.
- Oliver is researching training opportunities for wild flower recorders. For bird recording, Tony reported that Peter Crooks appears to be very busy. Instead he will contact Lancaster Ornithologists to see if they can help to support a volunteer group.
- Dates for the May volunteer session followed by the Blossom Picnic (May 7, to avoid the Cross-Bay Walk) and the June session (June 4, to avoid Robin's open garden weekend) were approved.

### **Events**

- Easter Egg Hunt (April 25): Tony had circulated a list of tasks. He will liaise with Ruth to assemble the team of volunteers. Mick is organising music.
- Cross-bay walk (14 May): noted.
- Dates confirmed so far are: May 8, 11.00 (Tarja Wilson – hedgerows); May 28, 13.00 (Emma Garston – Freeman's Pools and FAUNA: 4-mile walk, booking essential via Oliver). Proposed dates for other sessions, all subject to confirmation, were May 13, dusk (bats) – need to confirm leaders; May 22, 11.00 (birds – Alan Sandham); May 25, dusk (hares and other mammals – Tim Graham).
- Tony had circulated a paper on funding for school visits, which was approved. It was agreed that it is appropriate to ask the schools to fund any extra tuition which is needed, unless this is covered by a grant (as is the case for a limited number of visits this year under the Morecambe Bay Wealth of Wildlife project co-ordinated by Emma Garston at the Wildlife Trust.) However, the FA will pay for up to 5 sessions this year of sighted support for Tony at £30 each, in cases where Tony is volunteering his support rather than acting as a paid tutor. Tony and Helen have been investigating the possibility of getting large-scale wildlife jigsaws made. Chris offered to talk to local secondary schools to see if this would make a suitable art/design/technology project for pupils.
- Robin and Helen Loxam's open garden (11/12 June): noted. Agreed to invite the FA meeting to discuss next week.

### **Grants and fundraising (other than FAUNA main grants)**

- Oliver and Hilary have met to finalise the tree label design, which will come in within budget. The labels will contain brief information on apple varieties (cooking/eating/all-purpose, date of first discovery or introduction) and be fixed to trees with special nails approved by Kew gardens.

**Any other business**

- Oliver is going to the first meeting of a N Lancs Hay Meadows group on Monday 18 April at Leighton Moss and will report back.

**Next meetings :**

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

7.30 pm, Thursday 2 June 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.