

Fairfield Association
FAUNA and Orchard sub-Group (FOG)

Minutes of the meeting held on
Wednesday 4 May 2011, 7.30 pm
at Whitegates, Sunnyside Close

Present: Andrew Brennand, Dave Brookes, Glenys Ferguson, Tony Finn, Oliver Fulton (mins), Sue Nieduszynska, Hilary Short, Mick Short (chair)

Apologies: Simon Gershon, Helen Hicks, Rebecca Procter, Chris Workman

Minutes of last meeting: Approved

Matters arising: None

Progress report (matters not on remaining agenda)

- Easter Egg Hunt. Tony and all others involved were thanked for their efforts towards another very successful day. Tony reported that some smaller eggs had been sold for reduced ticket prices. Dave commented that the hunt had been rather difficult for toddlers and Tony agreed to consider, for next year, offering graded hunts for different ages/abilities, though this might be complicated to arrange.
- We are still in the appeal period for the Towneley Close path. Once we hear that the County Council is going ahead, we need to:
 - Plan to remove (and find a place for) the spoil from the path excavation.
 - Talk to the nearest households on Towneley Close about landscaping the area just inside the Orchard – and find a new home for the brash we have been tipping there, perhaps getting the stuff which is already there chipped for mulching.
 - Apply for the promised Green Partnership grant to cover the costs of upgrading the path to our standard.
- Ragwort is growing strongly in the future FAUNA hay meadow. We will need to remove as much as possible if we are to sell this year's hay crop, or exchange it for the cost of mowing and baling. This would be a suitable job for the next student volunteer day in June. Oliver will investigate methods, and tools required.

Current developments

- A small tree at the far end of the Orchard, near the area where bleach was poured on the ground, is dead. Volunteers will remove it if time permits on Saturday 7t May.
- There is another clear case of dog attack on an apple branch. Mick will ring the dog warden or PCSO and ask them to investigate. It was reported that the dog wardens and police have recently impounded several dangerous dogs in Lancaster.

Grants and fund raising

- Dave expects to have the bridge design from Graham Schofield in the next few days and will then seek estimates for the work.
- Hanafins' bill for the fencing has not yet been received
- We have received a further £250 for tools, from the Duchy of Lancaster. There is no immediate deadline for spending it so we will keep it for the time being until more needs are identified.

FAUNA

- The draft materials for the proposed naming competition were approved, subject to minor changes. It was agreed that the competition is to name FAUNA as a whole. For the individual sections we will simply invite suggestions. Oliver will finalise, include an entry form, and send to James for the website a s a p – the closing date is May 31. Oliver will also prepare and send out a press release.

- It was agreed to spend up to £130 from the annual HLS income on inviting Graeme Skelcher to provide training and support for the first flora recording session in the hay meadow, probably in late July.

Orchard

- The provisional list of volunteer tasks was approved, with the addition of removing the dead tree and checking on the lockable section of the N end notice board, whose hinges have started to come loose. This will be repaired if possible – if not, we will ask Jeff Dade to examine it and make suggestions for improving the design.
- Graeme Skelcher has quoted a maximum of £390 to revise the Orchard management plan, which he would draft in May. The fee would include coming to our next meeting and discussing it with us before final revisions. Approved.
- We have not heard from Jonathan whether he has had any responses to the question (emailed to the volunteer list) about increasing the number of work evenings in the summer.
- Jigsaws for school use. Helen has costed up doing this ourselves, using designs by school students: the materials cost would likely be around £250. Workspace might be willing to help, but they would probably charge us for materials. Helen and Tony's impression was that the response from LGGS suggested that they had not understood the scale of what we are looking for. It was agreed that Tony and/or Helen will go back to LGGS and discuss it further, making clear that we would be looking for jigsaws about 4' square. If the school is able to help they might also provide the materials.

Events

- Go Wild: Oliver will act as local contact and donation collector on May 8 (Tarja Wilson – hedgerows), May 11 (Alan Sandham – birds) and May 28 (Emma Garston – 4-mile walk). Mick and Hilary will handle May 13 (Jo Gregory and Jack Sykes – bats) and Andrew May 25 (hares – Tim Graham). It was also agreed that the FA should acquire official-looking collection boxes for these and other events. Oliver will order, with help from Dave.
- School visits: Tony and Emma Garston are inviting local primary schools to the Orchard, as part of the Wildlife Trust's Morecambe Bay Wealth of Wildlife project, on May 23 and 25. No responses yet.

Next meetings :

7.30 pm, Thursday 2 June 2011 at **Whitegates, Sunnyside Close**

7.30 pm, Wednesday 6 July 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.