

Fairfield Association
Fauna and Orchard sub-Group [FOG]
Minutes of the Meeting held on Thursday 6th June 2013, 7.30 pm
at Friends Meeting House

Present: Andrew Brennand, Graham Brandwood, Dave Brookes (chair), Glenys Ferguson (mins) Oliver Fulton, Rebecca Procter, Chris Workman.

1. **Apologies:** Tony Finn, Helen Hicks, Sue Nieduszynska, Ian Procter, Hilary Short, Mick Short.
2. **Minutes of last meeting:** Agreed.
3. **Current/recent developments: BBC North West invitation:** This was a general mailing rather than a specific request to the FA. It was decided it was not worth pursuing.
4. **Matters arising from Minutes:**
 - **Squirrels in owl box:** On Richard Storton's advice, the owls and squirrels are to be left to sort it out themselves.
 - **Cromwell Road gate catch:** There was discussion of various options for making the gate more accessible for all. Finding funding may be a problem. **Rebecca** will investigate further for discussion later in the year.
5. **Report from the FA meeting:** See item 19. Otherwise nothing of specific relevance to FOG.
6. **Orchard:**
 - **Repairs to noticeboard:** Done.
 - **Tree survey: repeat timing, actions on sycamores:** **Ian** and **Graham** will be meeting Andy Lee to look at the Flora trees. As part of this, they will clarify whether his recommendation of annual monitoring of the Orchard/Fauna trees (rather than the current pattern of every two years) is necessary. Andy Lee has agreed to approach to the Tree Protection Officer about the sycamores and this will also be discussed.
7. **Fauna:**
 - **Monthly maintenance and monitoring inspection:** Full reports available. Richard Storton has inspected the algae which is now also affecting Alder Pond. He is contacting the RSPB's ecologist for advice. **Graham** is trying to find a source of barley straw. A second calf has now been born. Children from Willow Lane School will be giving him a name..
 - **Water trough, track extension and other works:** With other options exhausted, the graziers have agreed to provide the water supply for the trough themselves and will show the proposed connection point to **Oliver** and **Dave**. The trough itself is to be located in the Gun Range (FA land). **Dave** will seek quotes (the graziers have suggested a contractor) and establish the Natural England contribution to the costs. Dave has still not received prices from Hanafins for the extension of the track through Carr House Meadow, draining the Paddock entrance, and smoothing the surface of the ramp by the Cromwell Road gate. Smoothing the path by the Fauna stone is a

snagging task, and the FA is retaining the final part of its payment for the earlier capital work until this is finished by Hanafins.

- **Breeding birds survey:** Dan Haywood has been seen in Fauna carrying out the second of his three counts. For 2014, Dan (assuming he is available) would appreciate a financial contribution (available from Natural England?). However, a leader needs to be recruited to run the bird group that will be established as part of the Flora Open Learning Programme and perhaps this person could carry out next year's survey (**Sue**).
 - **Hare monitoring:** Andrew's announcement of the demise of the North West Brown Hare Survey was premature (FOG 2 May). However, the new system of reporting sightings in Flora/Fauna through the wildlife blog on the FA website is working well, with some 20 sightings logged since late January.) Clare Brown will therefore use the website records as the basis for her reports to the NW Survey.
 - **Bioblitz including wildflower survey:** Chris is all set for tomorrow night. Activities will be concentrated in the Hay Meadow later moving on to the Orchard to monitor bats. A moth trap will be left in Upper Sowerholme overnight. Reuben Neville (LWT) has enquired whether the Hay Meadow will benefit from the sowing of extra wildflower seed this season. This will be considered during the Bioblitz (**Oliver**). A member of the organising group has expertise relating to wildflowers and will be approached about leading the more formal wildflower survey scheduled for July/August as well as leading the Flora wildflower group (**Chris/Sue**).
 - **LEF AGM invite and proposed visit:** Lancashire Environmental Fund (which gave the FA a best practice award for Fauna last year) have asked the FA to provide a speaker for the AGM on the morning of 20th September at Ellel Village Hall and host a visit to Fauna in the afternoon. (**Oliver** will approach Mick and Hilary.)
8. **Flora update:** The purchase is still in the hands of solicitors with no date for completion yet advised. Ian is gearing up for the fencing tasks required to make the site secure and keep dogs out. Litter picking will continue in the volunteer session on 8th June. Flora does not appear to have any problems with ragwort, but it was suggested that the site is inspected for the 'dreaded weed' once the sale is completed (**Ian**). To help with increasing volunteer numbers, Ian would welcome more replies to the questionnaire recently circulated to people on the email volunteer database.
9. **Volunteer activities:** Ian's full reports of May's work and the tasks for June are attached at the end. It was agreed that the Oak circle would be an appropriate place for a number of the wildflower plants kindly donated by the Friends of the Storey Gardens. Andrew noted that there is (non-urgent) volunteer work required in the playground. To be added to the next agenda (**Glenys**).
- **Break in barbed wire fence:** Ian has been authorised to buy essential kit for fencing repair for Flora using HLF funding. A more permanent repair to the fence in Big Meadow will be done at the same time as this priority work in Flora.
 - **Tool shed including security:** The installation of the green roof at the start of May was the final major task. The tool shed is now in full use. However, there are a few aspects of the build outstanding, notably the battery lights and solar panel have yet to

be installed, there is a break in the coping stone, and the door threshold requires snagging. **Dave** to pursue with Sam Edge who is liaising with the builder. The neighbours at Edenbreck Cottage are proposing to install CCTV on their property and have whether the FA will host a CCTV camera (which they will monitor) on the shed. Request agreed.

10. **Monitoring of Natural England Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) Success Indicators:**

Finalised version of the monitoring process was circulated. It was noted that soil pH was measured when feasibility of creating a hay meadow in Fauna was assessed. Soil conditions were judged suitable then and are unlikely to have changed much, so regular testing of soil pH is not necessary.

- **RSPB: Reedbed and wetland indicators:** Written report of Richard Storton's inspection (discussed at May FOG) circulated.
- **Orchard:** The first annual health check was carried out by Keith Taylor (with Glenys) on 21 May. Full report and maps circulated. Out of a total of 100 fruit trees at the start of the Natural England agreement, two badly cankered apple trees have been taken out (see May FOG). Of the remaining 98, 46 were judged to be flourishing. The main challenges to the other fruit trees are shading out and competition with other trees and vegetation in the Orchard. The following recommendations were accepted by FOG:

1. *Take out four fruit trees: nos 29, 58, 80, 92. (Ian to arrange with Keith Taylor.)*
2. *Plant a new apple tree on an M9 rootstock in the space south of no. 47. (This is a sizeable gap in the central area of the apple orchard where light conditions are at their best.) (Keith, Mick & Hilary will be asked for suggestions for this space as well as for the one where the cankered apple trees were removed in May. For discussion at the September meeting – Glenys. It was noted that Steve Edwards, Countryside Officer for Lancashire County Council, might provide advice – and possibly free trees.)*
3. *Prioritise the laying of sections of the Pads path hedge adjacent to the fruit trees (Ian - this should be consistent with the current approach of concentrating on areas where the trees behind minimise the visual impact of the hedge laying.)*
4. *Consider whether there are further places where vegetation and other trees could be removed or cut back to benefit the fruit trees. (Ian with Keith and others.)*

Longer term:

1. *Continue to press for action on the Martins' sycamores if Andy Lee is unsuccessful*
2. *Consult owners of properties adjacent to Oak Circle about reducing the height of the hedge*

11. **Local Nature Reserve designation & Fauna Management Plan:** The LNR designation process is quietly progressing. The decision was made to leave this item on the agenda as a reminder but to wait for Ann Wood (Lancaster City Council) to make contact with Oliver. (A comprehensive management plan is not required until LNR is designated.)

12. **Edenbreck boundary & garden, Concessionary Path Agreement:** Also in the hands of Ann Wood. Action as item 11.
13. **Educational activities:** Three visits are currently in the diary for June: Sat 8th pm and Sun 9th am – 13th Lancaster beavers; Sun 23rd pm – Castle Hill Brownies; Friday 28th am – children from Belarus. The Community Spaces Sustainability Grant includes payments for specialist tutors. Tony will be asked to provide any invoices to Dave (**Glenys**).
14. **Health and Safety Policy:** Guidance for external contractors. No progress (**Dave**).
15. **DBS checks:** No report. Tony will be asked how this is progressing (**Glenys**).
16. **Review of Fauna fields access policy and approved list:** This annual review was considered an opportune moment to extend the fields access policy to cover Flora as well as Fauna. The revised draft was accepted. Glenys will replace Oliver as contact person. The people currently on the list were given approval to access the fields for another year. Janet Packham, a photographer, has agreed to provide photographs of wildlife and landscape through the seasons for teaching purposes and evaluation of the Flora project for the Heritage Lottery Fund. Tony's proposal that her name is added to the list was approved. **Glenys** will circulate the revised safety instructions to Janet as well as to those already on the approved list, and forward the policy document to the FA as required as a contribution to its Health & Safety Policy.
17. **Managing chain saw use by volunteers:** Deferred to July meeting.
18. **International student visit 24th & 25th July:** Green Lancaster, who regularly bring students to help at volunteer sessions, have approached Ian about participating in this two day session for international students visiting the university. On day 2, volunteer work on site is proposed, involving about 20 students. Day 1 involves presentations and discussion, and Ian has drafted a programme on the theme 'Green public space on the fringe of the city'. FOG welcomed involvement in this. However, Ian will need support and it was suggested that he makes a general appeal through the usual channels, at least for the on-site day, and ask for help at the next FOG. Ian's suggested content for Day 1 looked highly appropriate, but maybe over ambitious (depending on the length of the session).
19. **Financial control:** To appear on all future agendas, to monitor the position of spending relative to grants (currently the capital and revenue HLS grants and the Community Spaces Sustainability Grant). **Oliver** will pass the sustainability grant paperwork to **Dave**, who will collate the figures for this and HLS into a spreadsheet.
20. **AOB:** None.
21. **Date / place of next meeting:** 7.30pm Thursday 11th July (Room 4 Friends Meeting House, Chair Andrew Brennand); August break (to be confirmed at July meeting); Thurs 5th Sept (venue to be decided, Chair Mick Short)

Ian Procter's Volunteer Items:

Friday 3rd May

At long last we heard from the builder that the green roof for the new storage building was to be delivered. Six volunteers came forward to:

- Transport the materials from the delivery pallets in Sunnyside Lane to the building
- Assist in laying the liner
- Lift 40 bags of gravel onto the roof
- Empty the bags and rake

To our frustration we learnt that the delivery of the sedum roof would be delayed because of a vehicle breakdown.

The delayed delivery occurred on Tuesday 7th May when 4 (I think) volunteers

- Transported the sedum to the building
- Lifted it to the roof
- Unrolled the sedum
- Watered the sedum

All the above work was in conjunction with and supervised by *The Better Roofing Company*.

Fairfield Nature Reserve Volunteer Session - Saturday 11th. May 2013.

Seven volunteers came to the session which was led by Ken as Ian was away. Many thanks to Ken for standing in.

Owing to the wet weather it was not possible to mow or strim the grass in the orchard.

Neither did we have the person power to spread daffodil bulbs. They are now enveloped by fast growing stinging nettles and this job will have to wait until next year.

The litter pick along the Long Pads path and the Flora copse was completed. A container was provided for the safe keeping of the discarded hypodermic needles. All the bags of rubbish were removed and arrangements were made to have it collected by the Council.

The algal growth on the Upper Sowerholme pond was removed.

The small dead tree on Fauna /School footpath was removed to the bonfire site.

The brush pile in the Paddock was moved to the bonfire site.

Graham's stumps were moved from the Paddock to the shed area.

Further work was done clearing the Orchard path.

As the weather was wet our refreshments were taken in the new shed – yet another bonus besides the convenience of all our tools being together.

So, on a wet morning with limited numbers a great deal was achieved.

NOTE:

The cankered apple trees had been removed prior to the session, we assume by Keith.

Black plastic was wrapped round the elder tree stumps as a follow-up job.

Broom (FOG Minutes 2nd May Item 7)

A local garden centre is selling (23rd May) broom at £8.00 for a 20 cm pot. Didn't look too healthy and I would not purchase myself. On the internet the best offer I found was at trees-online.co.uk selling 20-40cm plants, cell grown, 12 at £1.50 each incl VAT, free delivery, so that = £18.00 (for delivery after August 15th). I could not find anyone selling bare rooted but of course this is the wrong time of year.

24th May 2013

Two volunteers used recycled material to build a temporary fence between the storage building and Fraser's future garden. This was at Fraser's request to increase the security of his property. A 'gate' arrangement was constructed so that access to our land is maintained.

The former FA shed located at Whitestones, Sunnyside Close was dismantled and moved to the back of the storage building.

A request was made for its availability to be advertised amongst the FA membership.

Many thanks to Hilary and Mick for hosting this apparently 'temporary' facility for many years.

Ruth and Philip have donated a rather superior shelving system for use in the storage building. Again many thanks. Any other spare shelves welcome.

29th May 2013

A quick response to Ruth's advertisement of the plastic shed. A young couple transported the component parts by sack trolley to their allotment on the Ridge. They may a contribution to FA funds.

29th May 2013

9 volunteers reported for evening duty on a cloudy but thankfully dry night.

1. The grass was mown
2. Sections of long grass and nettles in the Orchard were strimmed
3. Long grass and rampant cow parsley were slashed back around the fruit trees, insect logs and broom shrubs
4. Loose stones were cleared from the stretch of land adjacent to the shed and used to fill in the sump hole for draining water from the roof.
5. Some conversations were held about what to do with this land. In view of the need for access between Edenbreck Cottage and the Paddock it can probably only be grassed.
6. Plastic protectors were removed from the established saplings in the 'Loxam hedge'.
7. On Richard Storton's advice some of the algae was removed from Alder Pond. More to be done.
8. Spot spraying of ragwort began with a section of the Pads footpath. Much more to be done!

30th May 2013

A pool of 6 volunteers have volunteered for ragwort duty and following the start made on the evening of the 29th three volunteers continued by completing the Pads footpath and moving into Carr House Meadow. Although we found a concentration of thistle there (we are spraying this in the fields this year) there was virtually no ragwort. In view of this we surveyed the Hay Meadow and found the same. There are a few small plants but not nearly enough to justify spraying. One of our team has volunteered to dig these out. The extra work we put into these two areas last year preparing for the hay harvest has really paid off.

However, surveys of the Paddock and the Big Meadow showed there is still much to do.

1st to 5th June 2013

Three volunteers tackled the ragwort in the Paddock where there was a heavy concentration. We then moved on and made a good start in the Big Meadow. In the near future the weather seems set fair and we hope to make rapid progress. Discussions with the grazier have led to the mutually convenient arrangement whereby the cows will eat the grass in the Grammar School Field during the day and be moved into Big Meadow for the water overnight. This leaves the latter available for our work during the day.

Three further intensive sessions have enabled us to spray all of the Big Meadow and thus complete this round of ragwort control. We still have to dig out the plants in the marsh areas but as the specimens are still quite small it is best to leave this for some weeks.

In theory that should be it for this year but experience tells us otherwise and I anticipate a later round of the fields to get the cunning beasties that either hid or started late. This will especially apply in the Hay and Carr House Meadows where we hope to make hay again.

Many thanks to the team who have worked so hard on this. Ken and Josh are awarded their level 1 cub badges in ragworting, Graham, Glenys, Oliver and Ian are up to level 2. Hopefully there will be no need for level 3 next year - but again that's the theory!

Proposed tasks for the volunteer session on Saturday 8th June

N.B. 1. We have a group of *Green Lancaster* students joining us

N.B. 2. I have a note that a group of Beavers are in the Orchard on the Saturday afternoon.

- Mow grass
- Strim / slash excess undergrowth in the Orchard (students confined to the latter)
- Litter pick round the edges of the Flora fields, black bag and return them to the storage building. (Note; this will only include fields without livestock)
- Remove the plastic protectors in the hedge alongside the Grammar School field north-east of the large ash tree
- Remove excess vegetation around new saplings in the Pads footpath
- Plant out some flowers, including primroses, common valerian, meadowsweet, betony and wild garlic. These are British wild flowers but potted up, they are from the Friends of the Storey Gardens who supplied notes for where they should be located.