

Fairfield Association
Fauna and Orchard sub-Group [FOG]
Minutes of the Meeting held on Thursday 5th September 2013, 7.30 pm
at Whitegates, Sunnyside Close

Present: Ken Capewell, Glenys Ferguson (mins), Tony Finn, Ian Fraser, Helen Hicks, Ian Procter, Rebecca Procter, Hilary Short, Mick Short (chair), Chris Workman

1. **Apologies:** Andrew Brennand, Graham Brandwood, Dave Brookes, Oliver Fulton, Sue Nieduszynska
2. **Minutes of last meeting:** Agreed.
3. **Current/recent developments:**
 - **Vandalism:** The Fauna 'rules' notice by the Orchard crossroads has again been subject to what appears to be intentional vandalism. **Ian** will re-write the notice to change the tone and approach a signwriter to investigate a plastic one that will fit snugly on the post.
4. **Matters arising from Minutes:**
 - **Tool shed coping stone and key:** Ian has been prompting the builder on a regular basis to undertake these final tasks. **Hilary** now to take over.
 - **Celebrate Your Space:** Dave has received notification that the FA's grant application has been successful. (To be handled by the FA meeting.)
5. **Report from the FA meeting:** Nothing of specific relevance to FOG.
6. **Flora update:** Andrew is chasing the solicitors to complete the purchase of the Gleasons Field. The Public Consultation is scheduled for 6/7 September. Following this there will be feedback to the Flora Steering Group, prior to discussion of the results at the next FA meeting. It is also hoped to generate new interest in volunteering at the Public Consultation.
7. **Orchard sycamores:** Notification to the Tree Protection Officer of the proposed work on the sycamores along the Martins' boundary is in the hands of Andy Lee. The ancient sycamore to the north east of the oak circle will be reviewed by Andy next year. Ian is operating a watching brief on this tree, but it was agreed it would be better to formalise this by adding it to the monthly maintenance inspection (**Graham**).
8. **Fauna:**
 - **Monthly maintenance and HLS monitoring inspection:** HLS inspections have not been carried out in August or September. Full reports of the two monthly maintenance inspections are available. Ian has tried without success to loosen the bollard padlock at the end of Sunnyside Lane. **Ken** will now try. There has been no response yet from the RSPB's ecologist about the algae. Chris noted that algae will continue to be a problem until the fertility of the ground is reduced significantly and that the mare's tail is impossible to remove. **Ian** will rebuild the hazel fencing.
 - **Water trough, track extension and other works:** The water trough and associated works are to be added to the extension of the Natural England agreement, but this will

not be finalised for several weeks. However, under the existing NE agreement, the cattle must be excluded from Big Meadow and School Pond by the end of November (earlier if the sward height drops too low). So providing an alternative source of water in the Gun Range is now a matter of urgency (**Dave** to arrange). **Dave** was also asked to press Hanafins to do the work on the Paddock entrance in preparation for the Apple Day/Celebrate Your Space event on October 5th.

- **Paddock hedging including notice to allotment holders:** **Ian** will make contact with Sam Hanafin to establish the price and proposed start date. The allotment holders, via John Lambert, have been given advanced warning of the work by Ian. John is keen to meet Sam to get further information (**Ian** to arrange).
- **Breeding birds survey:** **Sue** was asked to continue chasing Dan Haywood for his results, and contact Oliver for advice.
- **Bioblitz 7th June results; Bioblitz 8th Sept:** Martin Sherlock did undertake a wildflower survey in the Hay and Carr House Meadows on 7th June. **Chris** will circulate these results as well the details of the insects etc recorded. The Bioblitz on 8th September will again focus on the Hay Meadow, with access into Upper Sowerholme if ground conditions are considered safe. It is hoped to set up a light trap overnight in Upper Sowerholme. The cattle will still be out of these fields. **Chris** was asked to report on the state of the phragmites reeds planted last year in Upper Sowerholme.

9. **Volunteer activities:** Ian's full reports of the considerable amount of volunteer work undertaken during July and August are attached at the end. Ken was thanked for his major contribution. Overall, though, volunteer numbers have been rather disappointing through the summer months. For instance, members of the Red Rose Recovery Group have not offered further help. (Ian may suggest another formal session when an appropriate activity presents.)

On the ragwort front, there are still some first year plants appearing. **Ian** will prepare a report on the lessons from this year's campaign. **Rebecca** offered to donate a bicycle pump for use on the sack trolley.

Thanks to the equipment and labour provided by Reuben Neville and Steve Ryder of Lancashire Wildlife Trust (supported for the final stages by a group of FA volunteers), a total of 135 bales of haylage were made and stored in the graziers barn during the first week of September. This was almost double last year's tally. The small-scale LWT equipment can – with care – negotiate the Fauna gates; another contractor would need wider gates. **Ian** will ask Reuben about the prospects of LWT tackling the job again next year.

LWT has also scarified both meadows in preparation for further wildflower seed sowing. Helen Rawlinson of Cumbria Wildlife Trust is providing 6kg. Ian has arranged to collect this on 9th September, along with a list of the types of seed included. On Reuben's advice this seed will be 'thrown about'. The meeting approved the suggestions a) to sow some in the tool shed 'garden' for possible harvesting next year and b) to scatter some around the Fauna stones to extend the patch of wildflowers that has started to develop this year and is an attractive feature (**Ian** to implement).

10. **Local Nature Reserve designation & Fauna Management Plan Edenbreck boundary & garden, Concessionary Path Agreement:** There has been no action on these items.

11. **Educational activities:** With the schools on holiday over the period, there was nothing to report. **Tony** plans to speak to the FA Treasurer soon to agree the spending associated with Fauna.
12. **Health and Safety Policy: Guidance for external contractors:** No progress (**Dave**).
13. **DBS checks:** Progress has stalled. **Mick** will take over from **Tony** in dealing with **Michael Sheppard** over the next steps.
14. **LEF AGM and visit:** Lancashire Environmental Fund has already given valuable financial support for Fauna. In the future it may also provide grants for Flora and other FA projects, such as the Aldcliffe Road Triangle and playground repairs. **Mick** and **Hilary** met LEF on 4th September to finalise arrangements for 29th September. They will attend the AGM in the morning, but the presentation will now take place in the Orchard in the afternoon. The apple press will be set up by **Ken**. There will be a walk around the Orchard with optional tours of Fauna/Flora. It was also suggested that orienteering and various 'apple day'-type activities could be offered. In case of inclement weather, a marquee plus another shelter for the apple press will be needed. **Ian** offered to find helpers to erect these.
15. **Financial control:** In a written report, **Dave** noted that no additional work has been done on Fauna, so the capital budget position is unchanged. The FA Treasurer considers that the work involved in creating a designated fund for the Natural England revenue payments and Fauna/Orchard expenses is not justified, especially as the situation will change if/when the extension to the NE agreement is agreed.
16. **Cromwell Road gate:** A different gate catch was installed by **Tarja Wilson** (Lancashire County Council) on 12th July. Initial impressions were mixed: it would be easier for those in wheelchairs, but seemed slightly complicated to operate and was noisy. However, users generally have managed to open the gate without difficulty. The noise has been moderated considerably, thanks to the efforts of **Ken** in installing strategically-placed pieces of rubber to dampen the sound. The meeting agreed to take no further action.
17. **Orchard:**
 - **Proposals for managing 'excess' trees:** **Ian** circulated his sketch map identifying the trees to be managed during the coming winter. This work is necessary to restore the character of the Orchard as a public space: it is becoming overgrown and trees are failing to thrive as a result of overplanting. The actions proposed include felling, pollarding, coppicing, reducing and uplifting and have all been approved by **Andy Lee**, who has been most generous with his advice. The trees to be managed display a blue paint mark. Some have the word 'save' in response to **Andy's** comments. Four FA volunteers, including **Ian**, are booked onto a four day training course in the use of chain saws. They will therefore be able to tackle this work during the winter, although it may not all be completed because of pressure of other tasks and the need to undertake the management sensitively. It is believed that the trees are outside the conservation area and not subject to any TPOs, but **Ian** was asked to advise the Tree Protection Officer to ensure the proposed work is permitted. The north end of the Orchard will not be tackled on this occasion. It is currently a wilderness area and is best considered as a separate project for a later date.

- **Replacement of fruit trees and broom:** Ian will consult with Keith Taylor about replanting fruit trees to replace the dead/diseased specimens that have (or are scheduled to be) removed. He will also investigate whether broom can be propagated or layered, or whether it is better to purchase bare rooted plants during the winter.
18. **Results of July's wildflower survey:** This year's survey was undertaken by ecologist Graeme Skelcher, accompanied by one FA volunteer. Unfortunately, matters of timing and availability meant that it proved impossible to involve a larger number of volunteers. The results of the survey are pleasing, particularly given the short space of time since the start of the Natural England agreement. Yellow rattle was not present in 2011, occasional in 2012 and is now abundant. The percentage of herb/sedge cover has risen from 15% to 47%, undesirable species are down from 5% to 1% and bare ground is at 0%. These results are all in line with Natural England's HLS success indicators. However, there is still further progress needed. Graham's report (circulated) notes that the current species mix falls short of the criteria for a 'lowland meadow', and just short of the requirements for 'semi-improved grassland'. In terms of NE's success indicators, there is only one BAP grassland G06 species (yellow rattle) in the sward, whilst the target for March 2016 is four. However, Graeme's survey focuses on the drier areas of the meadows. There are actually notable, and expanding, clumps of meadowsweet (G06) in the Hay Meadow, around Lucy Brook and the marsh (and it is widespread in Upper Sowerholme). Seed will be gathered from these plants and scattered in other parts of the field (**Ian**), although how successful this will be is dubious as it prefers the wetter conditions. Graeme's report recommends considering further reseedling to increase the diversity of species as the potential for natural colonisation from neighbouring fields is low. Some extra sowing is already proposed (see item 9). Several G06 plants (such as birdsfoot trefoil, meadow vetchling) have been observed in the Orchard and Flora and seed can also be collected from these sources. Whether more radical action is needed will be considered after next year's survey.
 19. **Offers of trees; Woodland Trust tree pack:** Over the last few months, four people have kindly offered saplings (principally oak, including a 10 foot oak tree) for planting in Flora. It was decided that plans for Flora are still at too early a stage for them to be taken. **Glenys** will contact these donors, and ask them to hold on to their saplings for a while longer. Helen noted that she will also be able to provide quite a variety of saplings that are self-seeding in her garden adjacent to the Orchard. It was suggested that oak saplings appearing around the Millennium oak would also be useful for Flora – another task for **Ken**. Ian advised that our application for a Woodland Trust pack had yet to be accepted and would not contain species suitable for hedges.
 20. **Fundraising: Guided walk for MA language students 2:** Diane Potts (Lancaster University) is keen to repeat last year's highly successful and enjoyable event. She has already booked a room at the Friends Meeting House (date needs to be checked - probably either 26th or 19th October). **Mick** is prepared to undertake the presentation element and will liaise with Diane about the arrangements. Volunteers to guide groups of students around Fauna, Flora and the Orchard will need to be found and refreshments organised.
 21. **AOB:** None.
 22. **Date / place of next meeting:** Thurs 10th Oct 7.30pm (Whitegates, Sunnyside Close), Thurs 7th Nov (venue to be decided)

Ian Procter's Volunteer Items:

From Monday 8th of July a small team of volunteers tackled the next phase of ragwort control. Despite starting phase 1 quite late because of the late spring it appears that a great deal of ragwort has sprouted since we sprayed in early June. So much so that there was no alternative but to respray the Big Meadow. At the same time we pulled ragwort from the boggy areas of Big Meadow and dug it out from the Hay Meadow.

13th July 2013

Only five volunteers attended the monthly volunteer session on a hot and sunny morning.

1. We mowed all the grass paths in the Orchard.
2. We strimmed the area in front of the fruit hedge to allow access to the fruit bushes.
3. We also strimmed around the log slices as a party of children are coming next week.
4. Graffiti was sanded from a bench on the Fauna path but unfortunately the battery ran out before the job was complete. I hope this means it was not fully charged but we will have to experiment.
5. Overhanging branches were pruned back on the lane to Edenbreck Cottage and throughout the Orchard
6. Grass around the stumps was trimmed.
7. Ragwort was dug out from the Paddock, not nearly as much as I had hoped.

So a productive morning despite shortage of people.

15th July 2013

The graffiti (above) was finished off.

16th July 2013

Email to John Lambert informing him of intentions for the Paddock / allotments hedge.

17th July 2013

We have now completed removal of ragwort from the Hay and Carr House meadows and Sowerholme. We have also completed the re-spraying of the pasture in Big Meadow. Work continues pulling the ragwort from the Big Meadow bog. Photo below shows Ken joined by his helpers. As we now own the Flora land I was able to apply for a consignment of tree saplings from the Woodland Trust. I asked for 420 of the Wild Harvest selection.

18th July 2013

The Volunteer Organiser was joined by three volunteers from *Red Rose Recovery*, plus a facilitator, for ragwort digging in the Paddock. (One man returned on the 19th). We have now finished pulling ragwort from the Big Meadow bog area and the Paddock.



20th July 2013

Phase 2 of this year's ragwort control is completed with the spraying of the plants in the Grammar School fields (with Fraser's agreement). Many thanks to Josh and Ken for their support, to Rebecca for patrolling the paths and reminding us several times that there was ragwort in the Grammar School fields, and to Glenys and Paul for looking after their corner. I hope to start phase 3 in the August Saturday volunteering session when we should begin spotting and removing anything left that may seed.

22nd July 2013

The last of 62 bags of ragwort taken to the tip at Salt Ayre. We have a problem with a flat tyre on the sack trolley we use to move the frame for our marquee. I took it to ATS at White Lund whom, I am told, are the only local firm who will repair such tyres and they changed the valve, blew it up and tested it under water but could not detect a leak. The man warned me that these small wheels are prone to slow leaks and there was not much to be done. As he predicted, after several days the tyre is flat again. I will try other repairers but in the meantime if we are to use the trolley we will need to pump up the tyre. It then lasts about 3 days before being too flat to use. Any further ideas or does anyone have a spare bicycle pump ?

25th July 2013

16 students, plus two student leaders, joined four local volunteers for a session with international students.

- We made a start in fixing up guide posts for Tony's project to construct a tree guide.

- The green path edge in the Orchard was cut back so that children can roam freely without getting nettled.
- A section of the Fauna path was cut back of overhanging grass.
- A group of us roamed the Big Meadow searching out flowering ragwort that had escaped earlier attention.

Most of the students worked well and with good cheer and made a valuable contribution. However, three men turned up in flipflops and shorts and seemed to have no intention of contributing at all. This was very frustrating for others, especially our young volunteer leading that group. I have made it clear to Green Lancaster that we don't want freeriders.

31st July 2013

In a period of lovely summer weather our Wednesday evening volunteer session was blighted by heavy rain and only 5 brave souls reported for duty, led by Ken as Ian was on holiday. Nevertheless a lot was achieved with long grass and nettles cut back in the Orchard, the nettles enveloping the south notice board trimmed back and the overgrown quince shrub cleared to give a better chance of thriving. As well as thanking Ken for leading this session we should note his return to work in the following days to clear the fallen willow and mow the Orchard grass.

3rd August 2013

I noticed that the wire fence we erected at the Pads footpath corner had been pushed back, presumably by someone trying to get over. I straightened it and it still seems in good order.

6th August 2013

Phase 3 of ragwort control began with five volunteers tackling ragwort in the Hay and Carr House Meadows. It has been a puzzle why our earlier efforts have not succeeded in eliminating the problem this year? I think I know the answer. The great majority of plants we dug out today were second year specimens. This has been the case in phases 1 and 2. So, we have more or less eliminated the perennials (but see below) and there are very few (although some) first year plants, consistent with our prevention of seeding last year – although, again, this was not / is not perfect. BUT, the second year plants do not all sprout at the same time! Some come early, and we caught them in the first spraying, some later, and we got many of them in phase 2 of spraying and digging, but some have only just taken off and grown very quickly with last week's rain. We moved on to the Grammar School Pond area and the Grammar School field. In the latter a different pattern was evident. This field has been sprayed by the grazier and recently by us. It was noticeable that the plants we dug out today had badly eroded roots although the flower head looked sound. This must be the long term result of the first spraying which was over the whole field rather than our spot spraying. Yet the plants have sprouted with recent warm weather / rain so whether Fraser's spraying kills the perennial roots is questionable. Puzzled again but the flowering heads have been removed to prevent seeding.

7th August 2013

Two volunteers continued with phase 3 starting with the inaccessible plants along the Fauna / School Field boundary and then moving into Sowerholme. Lots of insects and butterflies in there but I could see no sign of the reeds we planted a year ago.

15 bags taken to tip, total now = 77 plus c. 8 in Cromwell Road bins via Glenys.

8th August 2013

After clarification from the County Council Rights of Way Office, overhanging hedge was cut back on the Long Pads footpath and ragwort collected from the Flora side of Lucy Brook. Only one bagful and this almost exclusively from the brook-side and within the barbed wire strand. The bulk of the field is free of ragwort (and of any other wild flower!). However, I did notice from afar that there was ragwort growing just under the wall adjacent to Aldcliffe Road so went over there and cleared another bagful. There are other wildflowers, especially birds foot trefoil, under the wall (reported to Sue for her baseline survey).

10th August 2013

The Saturday session with 10 people turning out (two outliers at Cromwell Road) on a dry and thankfully rather cooler morning.

1. The grass was mown.
2. Ragwort was cleared from the Paddock, a large part of the Big Meadow and the marshy area of the Hay Meadow
3. The path around the back of the fruit hedge was trimmed back.
4. The grass edge of another section of the Fauna path was strimmed and trimmed.
5. An inventory of events equipment in the shed was recorded.

11th August 2013

Two volunteers review the ragwort situation clearing anything flowering from the Grammar School fields and the pasture part of Big Meadow. Whilst we made a start on this phase of the Big Meadow marsh there is clearly more to do there. In Ian's absence for the next two weeks on granddad duty Ken will finish the marsh off and keep an eye on things.

There are still a frustrating number of non-flowering ragwort plants in particular concentrations through the fields. Cannot at the moment tell whether these are second year plants still to spike (see the 'theory' above about differential sprouting times) or first year plants. If the latter where did the seed come from as we were confident last year that very little seeded? How long do seeds remain dormant on the ground?

Another 15 bags to the tip, total = 92 + Cromwell 8.

18th August 2013

Ken reports he has cleared the Big Meadow marsh of flowering ragwort for the moment at least!

Mid-August 2013

Ken trimming back the Fauna path.

28th August 2013

The last of the summer evening volunteer sessions. Again a disappointing turnout of only 4 volunteers on a pleasant evening. Nevertheless we achieved a lot.

* The grass was mown.

- * The 'Don't Pick until Ripe' signs were posted on those trees where the fruit is not ready.
- * The main north-south path through the Orchard was trimmed to remove overhanging vegetation. We also cut back the worst of the overhang on some of the grass paths.
- * On the pads footpath the hedge at two of the Orchard bench viewpoints was trimmed back to preserve the view. This complimented the trimming of the two other viewpoints, presumably by Philip.

30th August 2013

Two volunteers caught up with some jobs:

- * the elder overhanging the Towneley Close garden was cut back
- * another quick tour of the Paddock and Big Meadow getting flowering ragwort heads. It is noticeable that although most of these plants are very small they appear to have 'old' roots, many seem to be the remnants of sprayed perennial plants with big root systems. Nevertheless, the point made above (11/8/13) still holds, there are still lots of plants in the ground but they seem mainly to be first year non-spiking.
- * a fault had developed in the Cromwell Road noticeboard lock which was alleviated by lubrication and a sharp tap.

15 bags of ragwort and assorted other vegetation taken to the tip. 107 + 8 Cromwell.

Haymaking

I have had a series of email and telephone conversations over the summer with Reuben Neville of the Lancashire Wildlife Trust to check the earliest date of our haymaking (which has to be after 15th July), whether he can harrow / scarify the land after haymaking (yes) and whether he can supply further wildflower seed (yes).

The two meadows (Hay and Carr House) were mown on Sunday 1st September. The plan is to let the hay dry over Monday and Tuesday, turning it mechanically on Tuesday. It will then be rowed, baled and wrapped on Wednesday and it is then that we need the help of volunteers. A message has gone from Jonathan on Sunday 1st September.

Storage Building Snagging

Perhaps I can record here that I have tried to get the snagging completed throughout the summer. The shed was handed over to us by the builder on 26th April. There were a number of snags to fix and most of these were done within about a month. But one remains. It is the repair / replacement of the broken coping stone on the wall near the door. At approximately monthly intervals I contact the architect, who acts as project manager, remind him that the job is not complete and ask him to get the builder to respond. So far I have not been successful.

Proposed tasks for Saturday 14th September 2013

- * Mow the grass
- * Continue cutting back the long grass / nettles overhanging the Orchard grass paths
- * Strim the Oak Circle and clear in preparation for 'Apple day' (or whatever)
- * Trim overhanging brambles all along the Long Pads footpath
- * Collect appropriate apples for Mick and Hilary's LEF event on September 20th
- * trim the hedge between the Fauna path and the Grammar School field (to the east of the ash tree) back to 15cms above last year's growth.