

Fairfield Association
Fauna and Orchard sub-Group [FOG]
Minutes of the Meeting held on Thursday 10th October 2013, 7.30 pm
at Whitegates, Sunnyside Close

Present: Graham Brandwood, Dave Brookes, Glenys Ferguson (mins), Ian Fraser, Ian Procter, Rebecca Procter, Jeremy Pyre, Hilary Short, Mick Short (chair), Keith Taylor (part)

1. **Apologies:** Andrew Brennand, Tony Finn, Oliver Fulton, Helen Hicks, Sue Nieduszynska, Chris Workman
2. **Minutes of last meeting:** Agreed.
3. **Current/recent developments:**
 - **Himalayan Balsam:** Has been found to the east of the tool shed, in the Edenbreck garden. Most the plants have been buried during work on the garden. The remainder have been deflowered. Hopefully none have seeded. To be monitored (**Ian**). Upper Sowerholme – an area where Himalayan Balsam could potentially develop unseen – is regularly visited by Graham, who reports that there is none at the moment.
 - **Concerns about the fruit trees in the Orchard:** Keith Taylor attended the meeting to express his concerns about the fruit trees (particularly the apples) and to initiate discussion of future plans. The fruit trees are gradually deteriorating. In a commercial orchard, the normal replacement cycle is around 15 years; ours are about 13 years old. There is growing evidence of disease: some fruit trees have had to be removed this year because of bacterial canker and now fire blight has been detected. In the short term, there can be replanting in the same locations but with a different type (such as stone or soft fruit to replace apples) and the actions proposed to thin other trees (see item 7) to reduce overshadowing may slow the spread of disease. However, Keith suggests that the FA should be taking more radical measures, as the key problem is that the fruit trees are not in the best place for them to thrive.

His suggestions include:

- a) planting fruit trees elsewhere in Fauna, such as The Paddock, or along the paths.
- b) planting fruit trees in Flora (Ian suggested that the lower part of the Pony Wood extension might be appropriate as the smaller trees would help preserve the view to the higher ones in the existing wood. **Mick** to consult Richard Storton).
- c) establish a nursery for replacement fruit trees, perhaps adjacent to the tool shed or in a fenced off part of The Paddock. Rootstocks could be bought in, and 'suitable' varieties grafted on, considerably cheaper than buying-in trees. It would also create educational and fund-raising possibilities.

Comments made included the greater risk of vandalism and un-reported damage if the fruit trees were further from the houses, the tool shed area is itself is quite shaded, the need to remember that the existing fruit trees are generating management payments – based on survival level and state of health – from Natural England until early 2021.

Keith's ideas were welcomed and it was agreed that they should be considered further at the next FOG meeting. **Mick** will include the item in his report to the FA, to widen the discussion and consultation.

4. **Matters arising from Minutes:**

- **New Fauna notice:** Ian has now fixed a smaller, more durable and more secure sign at the Orchard-side entrance.
- **Tool shed coping stone and key:** Still not finished. **Hilary** will continue to pursue this.
- **Gate-widening for future haymaking:** Ian will ask Reuben Neville directly about the likelihood of LWT's small equipment being available in future years. **Mick** will explore two other possible sources of equipment capable of negotiating the existing gates.
- **Tree offers:** Glenys has contacted all those who have offered saplings for planting in Flora and they are prepared to hold them until further notice. Philip Turner's name will be added to the list.

5. **Report from the FA meeting:** Much of the business related to Flora. A member of a group seeking to improve an open space in Cranwell Avenue attended. The group may request support from FOG in the future.

6. **Flora update:** There are signs that completion of the purchase of the Gleasons Field is imminent. There was feedback on the results of the Public Consultation on 6/7 September, which were essentially in support of the proposed extension to the Natural England agreement. There is optimism that issues relating to the lynchets and use of herbicide can be successfully resolved.

7. **Orchard:**

- **Management of 'excess' trees:** Ian has advised the Tree Protection Officer of the intended work. He received an encouraging reply, helpfully accompanied by a map that outlines the boundaries of the conservation area and individual trees subject to protection orders. It confirms that the work planned for this season affects only 'unprotected' trees. (Note: any work on the wilderness area to the north of the Orchard – a project for the longer term – would be inside the Cannon Hill conservation area and would require permission.) **Ian** intends to run a weekday volunteer session each week through the winter to focus on hedge laying and tree management tasks, drawing on the skills of the four volunteers who will be attending the chain saw training course next month. As is policy, this work will be advertised and explained with notices, but inevitably changes to the Orchard will be visible and may generate comment. A gradual approach, however, must be tempered by the need to make progress with work that is important to the health of the Orchard (see also item 3). **Ian** was asked to provide a monthly report on what has been done and on the next tasks.
- **Replacement of fruit trees and broom:** See item 3 for fruit trees. **Ian** has located a source of bare root brooms. He was authorised to spend about £20 on purchasing replacements for the southern end of the Orchard.

8. **Fauna:**

- **Monthly maintenance and HLS monitoring inspection:** Full reports available. Algae is continuing to choke some of the ponds, and others are being choked by mare's tail. The hot summer conditions may have exacerbated the problem this year, but plans need to be made now in case problems continue next year. **Graham** will contact Richard Storton for advice. He will also consult the RSPB at Leighton Moss and Martin Sherlock of the North Lancashire Naturalists Group.
- **Water trough:** Mick and Ian have been investigating water troughs for the cattle in the Gun Range. The graziers' preference is for a large-size circular plastic trough. Quotes obtained are in the order of £225 + VAT, but the graziers think a cheaper source can be found. Currently awaiting further developments, although installation cannot be delayed much longer. (**Mick** to continue liaising with the graziers.) Ken, Ian and Mick have roofed a cattle shelter, which might be extended if suitable construction materials come to light. They will clear a site for the trough and hardstanding (a supply of rock will need to be purchased for this).
- **Track extension and other works:** The meeting agreed that the track from Carr House Meadow into the Gun Range should still be extended. This would be done at the same time as the water trough hardstanding, although the issue of how to get the stones into these two locations needs to be resolved. Hanafins have still not provided any prices for the proposed works, and also show no signs of carrying out the remaining snagging work in order to claim their final payment for the Fauna capital works. A drain under The Paddock entrance has been installed, but the mud around the entrance has not (yet) been replaced with stone as requested.
- **Paddock hedging including notice to allotment holders:** Ian had a detailed site meeting with Sam Hanafin and John Lambert of the Allotment Holders Association. Despite this, neither a quote nor indication of start date have been received from the contractors. **Dave** was asked to push Hanafins for this (and also in regard to the other works above) and to investigate an alternative contractor (e.g. via Georgina Peacock).
- **Breeding birds survey:** Dan Haywood has finally responded to Sue, and intends to supply her with the results next week (in time for the Flora wildlife session on 17th). His survey this year was based on two visits rather than three.
- **Results of wildflower survey 7 June:** Chris has supplied the results of the survey by Martin Sherlock (North Lancashire Naturalists Group). The meeting was unclear how to interpret these and **Sue** was asked to clarify with Martin.
- **Bioblitz 7th June results; Bioblitz 8th Sept:** With **Chris** absent, this item was deferred until the November meeting.

9. **Rural Payments Agency remapping:** There are three separate issues relating to our landholdings that are affecting both the existing Natural England agreement and its extension:

- a) new landholdings on Flora need to be correctly mapped and numbered.

- b) there are errors relating to the Fauna mapping (notably the footpath).
- c) the existing agreement contains inconsistencies. The guidance is that all internal boundaries should be recognised as creating individual fields, yet one field number covers all bar School Pond in Fauna. The Orchard does not appear to have a field number.

Dave has waded through the handbook and submitted form RLE1 to deal with item a). This will generate a revised map. **Dave** will then use this as the basis for tackling the more tricky b), and also deal with c).

- 10. **Volunteer activities:** Ian's reports of the volunteer work undertaken during September and proposed for October are attached at the end. It was noted that the wildflower seed provided by Cumbria Wildlife Trust contains a high proportion of the G06 species which Natural England wishes us to encourage (see September minutes, item 18). Ian was asked to remind Reuben Neville to provide a detailed invoice for previous wildflower seed as a matter of urgency, so that money can be claimed as a Fauna capital payment before the end of Feb 2014. There are several rowan trees growing strongly in the Grammar School hedge. This is a potential problem as tall trees can provide perches for predators of the wading birds the reserve is seeking to attract. **Graham** was asked to speak to Richard Storton as well as hedge-laying contacts as to whether it is advisable to retain them and, if so, how many. (The oak and two ash trees deliberately planted in this hedge are thriving although only just starting to appear above the hedge level.) The Woodland Trust tree pack should arrive in time for the November volunteer session. Saplings intended for eventual planting in Flora will be healed into **Ian's** garden.

Ian's report on this year's ragworting programme was circulated. A key lesson learned is to delay spot spraying until later in the season when a greater number of plants will have germinated (but seed has not yet set). The ragworting task fell heavily on just two people (Ian and Ken); more volunteers must share the burden next year.

- 11. **Local Nature Reserve designation & Fauna Management Plan, Edenbreck boundary & garden, Concessionary Path Agreement:** There has still been no news on these items. **Mick** will contact Ann Wood to clarify the position regarding the purchase of the Edenbreck garden and also now to press for progress on the LNR designation and Concessionary Path Agreement.
- 12. **Educational activities:** A Beaver group is due to visit the Orchard on 19th October. **Ian** will contact Tony to ask if any preparation is needed.
- 13. **Health and Safety Policy: Guidance for external contractors:** No progress (**Dave**).
- 14. **DBS checks:** Moving forward. Ian has passed his form on for Michael Sheppard to complete his sections. **Ian** will check whether Tony has also submitted his form.
- 15. **LEF AGM and visit:** Turned out to be a prize-giving rather than an AGM. Organised by Mick and Hilary, the site visit to the Orchard and nature reserve was well received. A very successful and enjoyable event, with many apples pressed.
- 16. **Financial control:** Dave reported that there had been no spending this month. An invoice from Hanafins for The Paddock gateway is expected.

17. **Fundraising: Guided walk for MA language students:** Diane Potts (Lancaster University) has booked a room at the Friends Meeting House from 12.30pm on 19th October. Because course recruitment has been lower, the number of students expected is about half that of last year. So fewer tutors will be needed. **Mick**, Ruth Haigh and Diane have the arrangements in hand.
18. **Willow screening of School Pond:** Concerns have been raised that traffic on the Fauna path is reducing the attractiveness of School Pond for over-wintering birds such as snipe. The Grammar School hedge is not yet an effective screen, particularly in the wetter areas by the boardwalk where the saplings are finding it harder to establish. A woven screen was felt to be alien and unattractive. Instead, Graham has suggested creating a living screen by planting willow, which will be fast growing and adapted to the wetter conditions. This would be another task to be undertaken during the winter months. There is a risk though that the willow has the adverse effect of reducing the water level in School Pond (which ideally should be retaining water throughout the year) and previous advice has been not to plant extra trees in this area. **Graham** will consult Richard Storton for his views, prior to further discussion at the November FOG.
19. **Flora:**
 - **Paths:** Decisions on paths require considerable consultation within and outside the FA (owners of the adjacent fields, the Council). Mick and Ian have met on site with Tarja Wilson (Lancashire County Council Environment Officer) to discuss the feasibility of widening the Long Pads footpath to improve accessibility. She considered that this should be possible without adversely affecting the character, wildflowers and structure of the path. Subsequent tests by Mick and Ian reveal that the existing gravel surface is actually about a metre wide. Tarja Wilson suggested that track out to Aldcliffe Road would be best tackled by using a lot of rock to create a camber. Expensive, and would have to be funded by the FA. A footpath up to Pony Wood, exiting to Aldcliffe Road (one of the Flora path options favoured at the Public Consultation and by Natural England) might be a cheaper alternative.
 - **Tasks for volunteers and contractors:** Given the tight timescale for delivery of the capital works element of the extension to the Natural England agreement, it is essential that a start on site can be made as soon as the agreement 'goes live'. This requires the systematic compilation of a detailed and prioritised list of the tasks to be undertaken by volunteers and those to be undertaken by contractors. (From this, **Dave** can start to line up contractors.) Mick proposed to begin work on this during an on-site visit involving trustees, Flora Steering Group members and other interested parties. The time suggested was 2pm on 20th October (**Mick** to contact potential participants). The resulting list will be shared with Richard Storton (and possibly Georgina Peacock) if they are unable to attend.
20. **AOB:** None.
21. **Date / place of next meeting:** Thurs 7th Nov 7.30pm (Whitegates, Sunnyside Close), Thurs 5th Dec (venue to be decided)

Ian Procter's Volunteer Items:

Volunteer activities September 2013

4th and 5th of September

8 volunteers harvested our hay crop of Carr House and the Hay Meadows, assisting Reuben Neville and Steve Rider from the Lancashire Wildlife Trust. A total of 135 small bales, nearly double last year's harvest of 70 bales, a sign of the good summer we have had.

NOTE to remember for next year. The baler does jam up but when we separated the rows into two this problem was resolved. As we tend to have ample hands on hay making day we should do this from the beginning.

After the fields were cleared Reuben went round several times with a small chain harrow to scarify the ground ready for wildflower seeds.

9th September 2013

Two volunteers:

- * Removed fly tipped rubbish from behind the stump circle
- * Strimmed an arc of grass around the Fauna stones and sowed a small amount of wild flower seed (below)
- * Repaired the breaches in the hazel fence between the Hay Meadow and Sowerholme to keep the cows out of the latter.
- * Gathered meadowsweet seed from the Hay Meadow margins and sowed it in the damp sections of the field to the south west.
- * Sowed 4 Kg of wild flower seed donated by the Cumbria Wildflower Trust throughout Hay and Carr House meadows.

Here is the list of species in the mix:

Achillea millefolium	Yarrow
Centaurea nigra	Common Knapweed
Galium ventm	Lady's Bedstraw
Geranium pratense	Meadow Cranesbill
Knautia aruensis	Field Scabious
Lathyruspratensis	MeadowVetchling
Leontodon hispidus	Rough Hawkbit
Leucanthemum vulgare	Oxeye Daisy
Lotus corniculatus	BirdsfootTrefoil
Malva moschata	Musk Mallow
Plantago lanceolata	Ribwort Plantain
Primula veris	Cowslip
Prunella vularis	Selfheal
Rununculus acris	Meadow Buttercup
Rhinanthus minor	Yellow Rattle
Rumex acetosa	Common Sorrel
Silene vulgaris	Bladder Campion

14th September 2013

Prior to the regular Saturday session the Volunteer Organiser met with Sam Hanafin and two members of the Allotment Association to take planning the Paddock hedge and fence a step further. We should be given a quotation for the hedge work soon.

11 volunteers attended the monthly Saturday morning session.

1. The grass paths were mown
2. Overhanging nettles etc were cleared from the Orchard grass paths and a considerable area of long grass and nettles slashed back
3. The whole of the Oak Circle was strimmed and the grass carted away for the cattle
4. Overhanging brambles and other obstructions were cleared from the Long Pads footpath.
5. Ripe apples were collected for the Lancashire Environmental Fund visit
6. Keith continued his pruning regime and showed a new volunteer how to prune the apple trees. Note that fireblight was detected amongst some of the trees. Keith is to investigate. Keith also has ideas about a Flora apple nursery.
7. Himalayan Balsam was detected near the Paddock. Flowering heads were removed and a message circulated to FOG members with suggestions.

18th September 2013

1. Reviewed the himalayan balsam – no flowering heads
2. Posted signs warning public of work on Fauna path on 24th September
3. Fixed new aluminium composite sign at west end of Fauna path replacing the vandalised one with a revised text and
4. Began work on hedges by trimming back part of the Fauna / Grammar School field hedge 15 cms above last year's level, leaving the ash tree planted with the hedge saplings last year. NOTE: there are a number of rowan trees growing nicely in the hedge. I left most of these but there seem to be too many. Do we want rowan to mature? If yes, how many?

22nd September 2013

Two of us completed trimming back the Fauna / Grammar School hedge. The ash and two oak we planted in the hedge last year are thriving although only the former is above the hedge line. We discovered a hornet's nest in the ground under the hedge between Carr House Meadow and the Grammar School field (6 posts from the bracer). We assume this is a good thing. Do they remain in the same place over time?

30th September 2013

Three volunteers constructed a shelter in the 'Gun Range' to protect the cattle in bad weather. We used materials already on site to put a corrugated iron roof on part of the existing timber framework. Some other maintenance work on the cattle pen was completed.

2nd October 2013

Received confirmation from The Woodland Trust that they will be sending a 'Wildlife' tree pack of 420 saplings between 4th and 8th of November, i.e. in nice time for the November volunteering Saturday when we should have student assistance. Thus we should be able to get the hedgerow saplings in straight away even if the trees for Flora may have to wait.

Confirmed that we don't need tree protectors as we have lots in stock.

Proposed volunteer tasks for Saturday October 12th

1. Mow the grass
2. Level ground in the playground where the new surface forms a step
3. Trim hedge at bottom of the play area
4. Repair broken bird box number 1
5. Plant five sweet briar donated earlier in the year in the northern section of the Pads / Orchard hedge
6. Remove the notices from the fruit trees
7. Trim back apple trees overhanging the paths (consult with Keith on this). (Keith to continue training other volunteers)
8. Remove debris from hedge cutting along the Fauna path to a brash pile under the big ash tree.
9. Lop back self seeded saplings at the bottom of the Towneley path
10. Clear away broken red currents in the fruit circle.
11. Clear fly tipped rubbish alongside Towneley path
12. Slash and strim sections of the Orchard