

**Fairfield Association**  
**Fauna, Flora and Orchard management sub-Group [FOG]**  
**Minutes of the Meeting held on Thursday 13th March 2014, 7.30 pm**  
**at Whitegates, Sunnyside Close**

**Present:** Graham Brandwood, Andrew Brennand, Dave Brookes, Glenys Ferguson (mins), Tony Finn, Ian Fraser, Oliver Fulton, Ian Procter, Hilary Short, Mick Short (chair), Chris Workman

1. **Apologies:** Helen Hicks, Sue Nieduszynska, Rebecca Procter
2. **Minutes of last meeting:** Approved
3. **Current/recent developments:**
  - 3.1. **Fields Access List:** The addition of Sue was ratified.
  - 3.2. **Japanese Knotweed:** This was spotted during the Open Learning Programme field visit on 8th March close to the Howsons gate on the old track behind the hedge line that bounds Flora. As ownership of the track is unknown and untraceable, FOG decided that action should be taken. The knotweed is not very extensive and probably quite recent. The advised approach is systematic repeated treatment with glyphosate (**Ian** to arrange). **Graham** will monitor this patch as part of his monthly inspections and also watch for any other outbreaks along the length of the boundary with the Aldcliffe Road gardens.
4. **Matters arising from Minutes: Tool shed coping stone and key:** With the work on the play area awaiting grant funding, Mr Edwards will not be coming to deal with the coping stone in the immediate future. **Hilary** will ask the builder to return the key.
5. **Fauna:**
  - 5.1. **Water trough hardstanding and other works:** Completed by the contractors. The footpath at the Cromwell Road is now smoother than elsewhere! Digging down at the Paddock gateway indicated the presence of a sough (an old, stone land drain). It is hoped that this is now back in action. Certainly the Paddock entrance seems drier, and so too does Big Meadow. The Paddock entrance has also been backfilled with clean stone to improve drainage.
  - 5.2. **Paddock hedging:** The contractors have erected the allotment fence and tackled the existing hedge on the east side of the Paddock. Unfortunately, much of this has proved impossible to lay, so extensive replanting is required. To qualify for payment under the Natural England Agreement, this must take place immediately (**Dave** to liaise with Hanafins). Meanwhile, the Hedge Working Party has been addressing the west boundary in the Paddock - removing dead wood and stumps, increasing the light by reducing the amount of ivy, and planting saplings in gaps.
  - 5.3. **Anna's Pool repairs:** Richard Storton (RSPB), with some assistance from the contractors, has tried again to stem the leak, but without success. It requires an engineered solution to improve the seal around the pipe, perhaps using sodium bentonite which swells in contact with water. Although the leak is getting worse, the task is not urgent: it is funded by S2S rather than Natural England and better done when the ground is drier. **Dave** will follow up with Richard Storton with the view to another repair attempt in late spring/summer. To prevent the cattle contributing to the problem by trampling, Ian and Graham have sealed the gap in the fence that was

providing access from the Gleasons field. The hazel fence protecting the bund needs to be repaired before the cattle are allowed back in the Hay Meadow (**Ian**).

**5.4. Rural Payments Agency remapping and field numbers:** During the volunteer session on 8th March, Dave plus a student took measurements of the footpath and ponds. To avoid confusion, submission to Natural England will be delayed until the capital works claims are finalised. The new fence erected around Pony Wood in Flora also needs to be added to the remapping.

**5.5. Local Nature Reserve Designation, Concessionary Path Agreement:** It has been decided to link LNR designation for Flora with the application for Fauna. So no further action on LNR designation will now be taken until any Single Payment Scheme entitlements are in place (see item 6.3). Tarja Wilson, Environmental Projects Officer, Lancashire County Council, considers that the Fauna footpath is already concessionary (that is, open with the agreement of the landowner). She has provided notices which **Ian** will install at each end. **Oliver** will contact the Ordnance Survey about including the footpath on maps.

## 6. Flora:

**6.1. Formal declaration of 'no right of way':** Form completed and to be submitted imminently (**Oliver**).

### 6.2. Historical artefacts:

- **Boundary stone:** Hilary will ask Mr Edwards whether he is able to re-unite the two parts of the stone.
- **Metal detecting:** Ian Sharp is keen to detect across the arable field again after ploughing. Finds were presented at the recent Open Learning Programme history session and the metal detectorists will have their own session during the summer. Unfortunately, the acidic land in Flora has meant that many of the coins found have been unidentifiable. FOG agreed that the metal detectorists could search the other Flora fields, subject to the agreement of Natural England (**Mick**).
- **Field-walking post ploughing:** It is proving difficult to arrange for this spring given the limited time available and the lack of offers to undertake the co-ordination. **Mick** will consult an archaeologist at UCLAN to establish whether much would be lost by deferring until next year, when Sue has expressed a willingness to act as co-ordinator. [Answer subsequently received from UCLAN. It is best undertaken before the second ploughing, so could be left until at least autumn. Geophysical investigation using a gradiometer is also suggested as there is a chance of finding an early settlement by Pony Wood.]

**6.3. Single payment scheme entitlements:** Any application must be made before the end of March. However, there is a potential financial risk as it is still unclear as to whether the FA is eligible under the revised scheme. **Hilary** will contact the Rural Payments Agency directly for advice and report to next week's FA meeting for a decision.

## 7. Monitoring

**7.1. Maintenance inspection:** Matters arising from Graham's report (available):

- **Ian** confirmed that it is not essential to provide padlocks for those gates currently unlocked. However, he will restock.
- The Gleasons field around the cattle crossing is a quagmire after the contractors' activities. Natural England has granted a derogation permitting the cattle to graze

this field during March this year because of the shortage of grass in the Grammar School field. However, their presence will slow the healing of the ground.

- The poor condition of many of the trees in Little Wood was noted. It was agreed that remedial work should be a future task, but not urgent (**Ian**).
- Removal of sapling covers, particularly along the Pads path, to be added to the volunteers' tasks (**Ian**).

Subsequent to his written report, Graham has noted two further problems:

- Algae is already returning in Alder Pond. **Graham** will source barley straw for an experiment. **Dave** will contact LEC for expert advice.
- The pedestrian gate onto the proposed Flora path has been re-hung by the contractors to enable it to swing in both directions for wheelchair accessibility. However, the gate latch is almost impossible to open (**Dave**)

**7.2 HLS habitat inspection:** Report available. Graham is gradually extending this monitoring to incorporate Flora. It was felt that he was being premature in worrying about the growth of the phragmites reeds in Upper Sowerholme. The final flush count of the season put up a total of 39 snipe. Encouraging this late in the winter. The snipe appear to find the lower density rushes in School Pond more attractive. Rush thinning will be discussed with Richard Storton during his annual summer inspection (**Glenys**).

## 8. Volunteer activities

**8.1. Report for February and March volunteer sessions:** See the end for Ian's full report on activities during February. The volunteer session on 8th March concentrated on the planting of an understorey and replacement canopy trees in Pony Wood and the creation of the new extension. The turnout was extraordinarily good: 46 people, including 12 students from *Green Lancaster*. This implies that no less than 34 local people came along and helped to plant 558 saplings across the two areas. Details of the overall composition of the planting and the mix in each of the 11 sectors are available from Ian. The species used, including oak, birch, rowan and holly, were agreed by our Natural England advisor after her recent meeting with Mick and Hilary.

There was discussion as to how best to protect the saplings from encroaching growth. It was decided that grass is principally a problem in drought conditions when it can divert moisture from the saplings. So it will just be scraped away as necessary and action only taken to mulch if there is a drought. Any nettle problem will be dealt with using glyphosate. **Graham** has agreed to monitor the progress of the planting as part of his monthly inspection. The larger saplings have yet to be staked and protected. **Ian** will source some hedging stakes to act as supports (to be removed after the first year). Excess saplings will be offered to Lancashire Wildlife Trust or others (**Ian**).

During this session, the gate to the Gleesons field was opened to allow FA members to take wood left from the contractors' activities. There is still a considerable amount available from this field and elsewhere, so the exercise will be repeated in subsequent volunteer sessions.

The new toilet was deployed for the first time during this session. Assembly, dismantling and cleaning all caused problems. **Tony** will investigate whether it can be used with a gel-bag system. **Graham** offered to bring his 'bog in a bag' to the next volunteer session.

- 8.2. Hedge Working Party:** Activities included in Ian's report at the end. Work on the west boundary of the Paddock is almost complete. The HWP has agreed to continue on Wednesday mornings until the end of March.
- 8.3. Group leaders list:** Ian has approached 10 people, only five of whom have agreed to be available to act as a group leader during a volunteer session. **Andrew** will add this to the FA's task list and **Ian** will ask other people as the opportunity arises. It was noted that volunteer leader training may be available from CVS.
- 9. Educational activities:**
- 9.1. Update from Tony:** Dallas Road School were in the Orchard on 13 March for their regular mini-beast session. (This will qualify for NE educational access funding. **Tony** to pass completed evaluation form to Dave.) FA webmaster, Julia, is involved with technology activities at Dallas Road School and will be bringing children to the Orchard on occasion. The second session of school-based activities as part of the Flora Heritage Lottery Fund programme starts on the 17th March. Purchase of extra binoculars using funds from the Community Spaces Sustainability Grant has already been authorised. However, Tony advised that they had increased in price by about £70. (Note: binoculars are held by Tony, but are not exclusively for use by schools.)
- 9.2. Ripley after-school club Flora visit 27 March:** **Oliver** and **Ian** will be meeting a technology teacher and group of students on site. They are keen to design and make something for use in Flora. In addition to nest boxes, a stand for the cattle nose pump and finger posts were suggested. Other ideas welcomed.
- 10. Go Wild including campfires:** **Graham** is proposing to hold evening campfire sessions for families and adults in Pony Wood, probably in May. These will be branded as Go Wild events on Graham's posters as well as being included in the overall Go Wild listing. The field visits incorporated in the Summer Open Learning Programme will be also be treated and advertised as Go Wild events (**Sue**). Go Wild to be discussed further at April FOG meeting.
- 11. DBS checks:** Some confusion with the process. Michael Sheppard is now sorting it out.
- 12. Financial control:** Tony's binocular purchase using Community Spaces Sustainability Grant now likely to cost about £270 (item 9.1). Payments for the remedial works that contractors have been carrying in out in Fauna are imminent. There are financial implications from the decision not erect fencing in the Paddock (about £300 cannot be claimed from Natural England). **Dave** will adjust the budget.
- 13. Widening of the Long Pads path:** see item 14.
- 14. Flora path:** There was debate as to whether plans for both the Flora and Long pads paths could be deferred until next year. However, the surface of the Long Pads path is poor, and it will be difficult to lay its hedges next season if the path is not widened. There is also a feeling that funding opportunities for both paths may become more scarce. Hence the decision was made to continue with both projects, but to find ways of reducing the workload. Partly for this reason, it was decided that the Flora path should now be considered in conjunction with the widening of the Long Pads path, so as to combine any funding and planning applications and consultation exercises. Rather than a public meeting, the latter could take the form of a document outlining proposals and pros and cons, with comments invited via completion of a questionnaire. (Dissemination through the newsletter and/or website.) This consultation would precede and inform the application for planning permission. The next step is to await a

quote from Georgina Peacock for the design (although **Hilary** was requested to ask Georgina to incorporate the Long Pads path). Dave has approached the Canals and Rivers Trust about creating an access to the canal footpath opposite the proposed exit from the Flora path onto Aldcliffe Road. [Reply has subsequently been received. There is a fee payable for this – £380 plus VAT – which could be incorporated into a grant application.]

15. **Monitoring of the new Natural England Agreement:** Because of time constraints, this item was deferred until the April meeting. However, arrangements for the breeding bird survey (to be done – as in the past – to British Trust for Ornithology guidelines with the first visit in April/early May) need to be made now (**Glenys** to liaise with **Sue**).
16. **Bee hives in Flora:** Keith Taylor has asked whether he can move some of his hives into Flora (to a site by the ponds and hedge boundary in the arable field to the north side of the Howsons gate). This idea was welcomed unanimously. But before this can happen:
  - Natural England will need to be consulted (**Mick**)
  - Keith should notify the occupants of the nearby houses
  - the cattle must be out of the arable field (they are being encouraged to graze this field prior to ploughing).
17. **AOB:** There are overhanging branches on the east side of Pony Wood which will create a shady grassed area (with nettles?). What should be done with this? A non-urgent item for future discussion.
18. **Date/place of next meetings:** It was agreed to experiment with an earlier start time for the April and May meetings (with the aim of a 9pm finish at latest). So future timings are Thursday 3rd April and Thursday 1st May both at 7pm at Whitegates, Sunnyside Close.

## **Ian Procter's Volunteer Items:**

### **Volunteer activities February 2014**

#### 1<sup>st</sup> February 2014

The Saturday meeting of the Hedge Working Party (HWP) attracted 11 volunteers including three from Bolton, Blackpool and Garstang. We agreed the Site Specific Risk Assessment (SSRA). The group included 5 hedgers who each had a learning assistant so good progress was made with the west hedge. We also completed adding plastic protectors to the saplings planted last week.

#### 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2014

The gap in the south Flora boundary where sheep have previously entered was plugged. It was in 6" of water which is perhaps why the adjoining sheep have not come through this time. Two broken spades re-shafted.

#### 5<sup>th</sup> February 2014

Nine volunteers agreed the SSPA and continued to lay the west hedge, making good progress. This number included 5 'hedgers' but one or two of the assistants are coming on well!

#### 8<sup>th</sup> February 2014

Twenty-two local volunteers were joined by 25 Green Lancaster students for the regular Saturday session. 47 individuals meant that the newly introduced 'team leaders' were very much required and the new system worked reasonably well and everyone soon got to work. A blustery day but the promised rain held off until after our session had finished.

1. A willow 'living fence' was planted out to screen School Pond, using our own willow saplings. This was strictly for the 'wellied' as the land is waterlogged here but that should give the willow a good chance.
2. Brash was cleared from the hedging work in the West Field. It was either pushed up again the hedge to form a thicker but still low layer for insects and birds or moved up against the new saplings to protect them and form a cattle proof fence.
3. Hawthorn saplings were planted alongside the lane to the south of the Storage Building. Further clearance work was undertaken to further restore the hedge in amongst the tree line.
4. A 'litter pick' was conducted in Little Wood, along the Pads path, from within Lucy Brook and around the Orchard stumps. Six black bags of rubbish were taken away to domestic grey bins.
5. A substantial section of the Long Pads hedge was trimmed back along its path side, leaving the top to grow for future hedge laying. This included lopping back elder and sycamore. The created brash was stored in the hedge.
6. Further work was done clearing trees and shrubs encroaching on the apple trees. The brash was cleared.
7. After the break a group of volunteers were given instruction in how to prune fruit trees.
8. Some gale debris was cleared from the Sunnyside Lane path.
9. Photographs were taken of our activities for the general record and to support the report to the Heritage Lottery Fund. Everyone was given the opportunity to opt out of being photographed.

#### 10<sup>th</sup> February 2014

Two FA supporters have donated damaged wheelbarrows but the damage is complimentary and the two are cannibalised to make a good barrow. We now have five.

#### 12<sup>th</sup> February 2014

Five volunteers attended the HWP despite the storm forecast. This came later in the day, we just got rather wet and very muddy. The SSRA was agreed, we carried on with the hedge (3 hedgers).

#### 19<sup>th</sup> February 2014

Seven volunteers attended the HWP and agreed the SSRA.

- A stray lamb was rescued and returned to its mother. We then blocked the gap with brash.
- We continued to lay the west hedge although the thorn stems get thicker and in poorer condition – we think because of the deterioration of the bank and the exposure of roots.
- We continued to fill in the ever increasing gaps with thorn saplings.
- Brash was moved up to the hedge line once the laying and gapping up was completed.
- On the way we inspected a fallen dead elder in the Orchard and established that it did not pose an imminent danger. Another job for another day.

#### 20<sup>th</sup> February 2014

Three volunteers joined Steve Rider from Lancashire Wildlife Trust and one of their volunteers to plant hedge saplings in the Freeman's Pools site. Over 100 metres of hedge was planted joining with the section we did last year.

#### 26<sup>th</sup> February 2014

Seven volunteers attended the HWP and agreed the SSRA and continued laying the West hedge. It is almost complete with just a little tidying, some more gapping up with saplings and moving the brash up to the hedge. This should be completed this coming Saturday.