

**Fairfield Association**  
**Fauna, Flora and Orchard Management Group [FOG]**  
**Minutes of the Meeting held on Thursday 3rd July 2014, 7.00 pm**  
**at Whitegates, Sunnyside Close**

**Present:** Dave Brookes, Glenys Ferguson (mins), Ian Fraser, Oliver Fulton, Helen Hicks, Ian Procter, Rebecca Procter, Hilary Short, Mick Short (chair), Chris Workman

1. **Apologies:** Andrew Brennand, Graham Brandwood, Tony Finn, Sue Nieduszynska
2. **Minutes of last meeting:** Approved.
3. **Matters arising from Minutes:**
  - 3.1. **Damage to Aldcliffe Road wall:** Two estimates for the cost of repair have been received and will be sent to the driver's insurance company. The insurance company considers that the driver has breached the terms of her policy. They are not willing to settle the claim, but have offered to pursue her for the payment on behalf of the FA.
  - 3.2. **Aldcliffe Road drain and BT cable:** The drain has now been repaired. It was blocked on the road side. New pipes have been laid and it should now drain readily into Flora Field. The workmen uncovered a BT cable, without trunking, running along the wall. This should be mentioned to contractors or anyone else working close to this wall (**Dave and others**).
  - 3.3. **Sowerholme Lane Ponds:** It was agreed to adopt this name for the two small ponds in the north-east corner of Flora Field.
4. **Hiring workers and tool matters:** Andrew, as FA Chair, has already agreed that £200 can be used this summer to implement Mick's proposal that people are hired to complement the work carried out by volunteers. Arrangements have been made for Andy Lee's assistant to undertake a day's work strimming the vegetation in the Orchard. (Raking the debris may have to be scheduled as a volunteer task - **Ian**.) Ian feels that volunteer effort is currently able to cope with the amount of work required in the nature reserve. However, he will monitor the situation and report back to FOG if he feels extra help is needed (for instance, if the hedge working party attracts fewer participants this winter or bad weather creates a backlog of tasks). It was therefore agreed to defer any discussion of a long term strategy (and the funding implications) of using hired workers until further notice.

It was, however, decided that Ian's proposals to introduce rather more elaborate (and expensive) machinery should be considered now. The amount of mowing required has increased (Pony Wood, Fauna path edge, and more in the Orchard with the decision to reduce the area covered by nettles). A larger 'sit upon' mower would be faster and more effective. It would be an added bonus if it could also act as a small tractor and tow a trailer, reducing the need to use wheelbarrows. A 'chipper' would be helpful to deal with the brash created by hedging work, particularly in areas where it is not appropriate to leave the brash in situ or it would have to be moved for burning.

**Ian** was asked to produce a report for the September meeting (with **A.N. Other**). Factors to be appraised include: likely usage, price, maintenance and servicing costs, storage, insurance, operating requirements, movement about site, whether it could be hired (and cost), alternatives (such as finding people to do extra mowing with the current machine, whether Lancaster City Council might carry out some of the work).

Ian also reported the purchase of a chainsaw from the Lancashire Community Fund grant. His proposal for spending the rest of the grant was agreed. Oliver's suggestion of buying a small post driver was noted (**Ian**).

5. **Campfires in Pony Wood:** There has been at least one further instance of unauthorised use since the last meeting. This has prompted Graham to propose a system for allowing families and bona fide groups to book the campfire circle. With Graham unable to attend meetings over the next few months, and the end of the University term hopefully leading to a reduction in incidents, it was agreed to defer discussion. [**Glenys** to add to the October agenda.] In the meantime, the situation will be monitored (**Graham**) and **Mick** will consult Natural England, who prohibit fires within ten metres of tree canopies.

6. **Management:**

6.1. **Anna's Pool repairs:** **Dave** is meeting Richard Storton on site on Friday 4th July to assess. He will also discuss a possible Upper Sowerholme bund (item 7.3).

6.2. **Rural Payments Agency remapping and field numbers:** **Dave** now has the appropriate forms as well as the maps.

6.3. **Algae treatment in Alder Pond:** The scattering of barley straw in the spring seems to be having a good effect. At the Bioblitz, Mick was given some further advice. Take out the barley straw after 6 months, when it becomes less effective, and apply fresh barley straw before removal of the previous treatment. Early spring and August are good times. It was recommended that garden fruit netting (or Christmas Tree wrap would be ideal) is used to create a long 'sausage' of barley straw, 12-18 inches in diameter. Attach floats to it (e.g. 3 or 4 empty plastic milk bottles) and stake it from one side of the pond to another, near an edge the cattle do not use to drink from. (**Glenys** will ask Graham to refresh the treatment.)

6.4. **Boundary stone repairs:** Successfully repaired. The boundary stone will be making an appearance at Fun Day before being re-erected in Pony Wood.

6.5. **Improvement of the Long Pads path and creation of the Flora path:** Georgina Peacock's designs will be on display at Fun Day, although she has some notes to add afterwards. **Dave** has not yet had time to pursue the Canal and River Trust about the proposed charges for creating an access onto the towpath.

6.6. **West Field: land drain & grass length:** West Field Scrape is now very dry and the RSPB monitoring visit has identified this (item 7.3) as a concern if it persists over the longer term. However, last meeting's decision was confirmed, namely to wait for autumn and a decent amount of rain before coming to a verdict on the success or failure of recent efforts to block the field drain.

Mick has been trying without success to contact the FA's new NE advisor for permission to cut the grass in West Field now the breeding season has ended. This appears to be the only realistic way of achieving the desirable autumn sward height this year (see also item 7.3). The neighbouring farmer is likely to be willing to take the cut. The graziers would prefer it to be cut before they let the cattle in. **Mick** will continue his efforts to contact NE. He will also discuss with NE how the problem of grass length can be pre-empted next year.

**6.7. Flora field: update on arable crop and margins:** The crop (triticale – a wheat/rye hybrid) is generally growing well, although not as strongly on the wetter Howsons side of the Flora Field. This may need extra lime adding in the next twelve months. It is thought that herbicide has been sprayed, although this has not been confirmed by the farmer (**Mick** to enquire). The first 3m of the field is unploughed, then there is a 3m margin shown with one of the mixes, then the crop. The floristically enhanced grass margin may need to have extra seed adding by hand next year. Concrete blocks for the bee hive bases are now in place in the north east corner. [Hives now *in situ* too.] After harvesting the crop, the farmer is willing to undertake the work of de-compacting the soil around the gateways and by the cattle crossing. (**Mick** to arrange payment and other details later.)

**6.8. Concessionary Path: Oliver** is continuing to correspond with Ann Wood.

**6.9. Tree Survey progress:** Ian has walked around the reserve with tree surgeon, Andy Lee. Andy will soon be submitting a price and details on the work proposed. This will include the semi-dead oak tree in the Hay Meadow and the treatment required to make Little Wood (subject to TPO) safe for public access. Last year, Andy applied to the Tree Protection Officer to carry out work on the Martins' sycamores, whose shading has been identified as a problem for the Orchard. As she modified his proposals substantially, the Martins chose not to proceed with the work. **Ian** will alert Andy to the fact the sycamores are adversely affecting the health of nearby fruit trees (canker) and ask him to take the matter further with the Martins and the Tree Protection Officer.

**6.10. Haymaking arrangements:** Ian has been in contact with Rueben Neville. Lancashire Wildlife Trust is willing to undertake the task as last year. LWT's costs will be paid using the NE funding for heritage breeds. The resulting haylage crop will then be provided to the graziers at zero cost. Depending on weather conditions, **Ian** will arrange a date after 15 August.

## **7. Monitoring:**

**7.1. Maintenance inspection:** Graham's full report available. A barbed wire fence is down by the side of the cattle crossing, allowing the cattle access to Lucy Brook. (**Ian** to arrange repair.)

**7.2. HLS habitat inspection:** Full report available. Ian noted that Graham's assessment of the health of the big sycamore near the Oak Circle in the Orchard is too optimistic. Andy Lee (see item 6.9) has identified a number of dead branches and weak growth elsewhere. Considerable remedial work on this tree can be expected. The sward in School Pond is now becoming too high, and some grazing of this area is required when there is limited risk of poaching. **Mick** will suggest to the graziers that they now open the gate, particularly if the herd is being split. **Mick** will also remind the graziers that from 1 July Big Meadow and Lower Sowerholme should be run as separate fields by shutting the gate at the cattle crossing. Arrangements have now been made for TB testing, after which it should be possible for the graziers to reduce the herd size to the level permitted by Natural England.

**7.3. RSPB Annual Monitoring Visit:** A group of FOG members accompanied Richard Storton on a site visit on 20 June. Full report available. Overall, Richard was impressed with the state of the reserve and the amount of progress made in a short time. The variety of habitats that the extended reserve is now able to offer is already reaping

benefits for wildlife. Lapwing, for instance, can nest in the arable but then have attractive grassy areas in neighbouring fields for their chicks.

This year there has been a massive expansion of water figwort. Previously concentrated in Upper Sowerholme, it has extended significantly in both Hay and Big Meadow to the potential detriment of the marshes. However, Richard reminded the group that there will always be changes taking place, even when the reserve is well-established. What is important to note and investigate are sudden and significant changes.

There are prescriptions in the NE agreement in relation to 'undesirables' such as thistles, docks and nettles, but whether they are a significant problem or not depends on the context and location. Action is needed if they are dominating other species, particularly if they are in the main body of the field. However, they all have their merits for wildlife too: nettles are excellent for nesting partridges, for instance. It is therefore acceptable to leave 'undesirables' alone in some places, particularly in the hedge lines.

With the exception of West Field, sward height and condition is pleasing, Also the degree of wetness in the reserve is generally appropriate given the time of the year and weather conditions. The ponds vary in water depth. It is not a problem if some of them dry up in summer. There are positive benefits to wildlife from a muddy edge as it provides a rich food source. A long dry spell can give plants time to colonise and break down, regenerating the supply of larvae in future years. However, the principal aim is to maintain a good basic level of wetness for wintering waders and wildfowl and efforts to raise water levels in the West Field Scrape and Upper Sowerholme should continue.

Recommendations arising from the visit:

1. Take advice on the water figwort a) whether this could have been caused by rush-cutting two years ago and b) whether it a problem and if so what management strategies should be pursued. (**Richard** has offered to investigate.)
2. Remove (or coppice) self-seeded trees in marshes (**Ian** to add to task list.).
3. Continue attempts to repair Anna's Pool (**Dave**, see item 6.1).
4. Create a new bund in Upper Sowerholme, especially if 3 fails. (**Dave** to discuss this with Richard.)
5. Investigate the "paddy field" grass in Big Meadow ponds (**Richard**).
6. Approach Natural England about the West Field: a) taking hay this July and b) altering the cattle grazing prescriptions during the breeding season (**Mick**, see item 6.6).
7. Continue trying to block the drains in West Field Scrape (**Ian**, see item 6.6)
8. Add the Flora fields to the winter flush count (**Graham**).
9. Do not lay both sides of the Long Pads path in the same year (**Ian** to note).

**Dave** will also ask Richard about cutting the rushes – when, how much, and whether it should be by soft track, scythe or both.

**7.4. Results of wildflower surveys:** Martin Sherlock led another survey on the evening of 26 June, looking at Pony Wood (no evidence of much, apart from grass) and checking the margins. Formal results have yet to be received for any of this year's surveys. (**Glenys** will ask **Sue** to follow up.)

**7.5. Arrangements of July Hay Meadow Survey:** Ecologist Graeme Skelcher has agreed to repeat this survey on Thursday 10 July at 9.45am. It is hoped that Martin Sherlock and others from the Wildflower Group will be able to participate. Helen Rawlinson from Cumbria Wildlife Trust provided seed for the Hay Meadow last year. She is keen to establish its success. Mick has been in contact to invite her to take part in FA surveys or undertake her own, but she is proving rather elusive. If **Chris** sees her at a forthcoming workshop, he will take the opportunity to discuss arrangements.

**7.6. Nestbox monitoring:** Dan Haywood conducted the first of his breeding bird survey visits on 25th April (two more visits scheduled by end June). He has suggested that monitoring nestboxes would provide more conclusive evidence to supplement his efforts. Nestboxes have been cleaned annually in the autumn by Ian & Tony, noting how many are occupied. 13 boxes in Pony Wood and 3 in Little Wood will need to be included now. Several people have shown an interest in helping with the monitoring. It was agreed to set up a more explicit recording system that will generate extra information (such as which boxes are used and hopefully identify the species) and permit comparison over time. **Glenys** will seek a co-ordinator.

**8. Volunteer activities:** Ian's written report for June is attached at the end. Tasks for July are yet to be determined and will be passed to the FOG Chair for approval. Oliver suggested that the new planting in Pony Wood required attention at the next Volunteer session. Grass needs to be cut back, around the most vulnerable ones at least. (Ian considers there are too many to use mulch mats.) The Fauna and Long Pads footpaths also need attention to deal with encroaching brambles and nettles.

**9. Educational activities:**

**9.1. Update from Tony:** Full report available. The last few weeks have seen visits to the site from most of the schools taking part in the Flora schools project. (The final three visits are scheduled for the week beginning 7th July.) A packed lunch was eaten in the log seating area. The weather on all occasions has been excellent. Activities were organised to support the work done in the previous two sessions in school. The children thoroughly enjoyed their visit and teachers commented positively on the educational value of the activities. There were some lovely comments from the children. Particularly poignant were those from children who had previously not seen a hedgerow or indeed visited the countryside. The coach transport for those schools that needed it has worked well. Transport is a major cost for school outings. Without the financial support, provided by the Heritage Lottery Fund, several of the schools would not have been able to come to the reserve. Tony now has one more round of visits to the schools for feedback and to look at some of the work produced during the project.

**9.2. Ripley School projects:** Ian recently visited the Renewable Ripley group. They are making good progress now, and he hopes that the nose pump stand will be ready by the end of term. It has been designed and the Head Teacher is being approached for

permission to buy the wood (cost split 50:50). If it not available soon, a temporary set-up may have to be devised to get the nospump into action in West Field.

**10. Go Wild: Bioblitz:** Took place on Sunday 22 June, starting at 10am. Only 7 participants, but an enjoyable event. Nothing unusual was noted, but a baseline has been established against which future surveys of the beetle banks can be compared. It was agreed that this activity (and the Go Wild series in general) requires greater publicity next year. **Chris** to submit formal results to the next FOG.

**11. DBS checks:** No report.

**12. Recent developments:**

**12.1. Additions to Access List:** The meeting approved the addition of Philip Turner and Paul Ferguson.

**12.2. Ticks:** A health and safety issue was raised by a regular dog-walker's comment that last year his dog had picked up a number of ticks on walks around the reserve and Orchard. He was concerned particularly about school-children. It was agreed to raise awareness of the possible – if very low – risk of contracting Lyme Disease. For their school groups, **Julia** and **Tony** are requested to adopt the approach suggested by Graham (and contact him if necessary for further guidance). They should advise groups leaders to:

- consult the website [lymediseaseaction.org.uk](http://lymediseaseaction.org.uk), which has leaflets available for downloading
- advise children to wear long sleeves and long trousers tucked into socks if going into long grass or woodland
- instigate a 'tick check' at the end of a session
- have a tick removal tool and know how to remove ticks carefully and correctly

**Ian** was asked to acquire a tick removal tool for the Volunteers' first aid kit.

**12.3. Liverpool Visitors:** A request for advice has been received from a group who are in the early stages of planning a small community orchard in South Liverpool. **Mick** will reply and invite them to visit and perhaps attend a volunteer session.

**12.4. Non-native planting in the Orchard:** There is one flagrantly (and huge) non-native planting in the Orchard, outside one house's gate and another more or less next door. **Oliver** and **Hilary** will write a letter to all Orchard neighbours reminding them that Lancaster City Council and Natural England forbid such planting, and giving notice that the offending plants will be removed by the FA.

**13. Financial control:**

- Item 4: Purchase of chainsaw £330. Other tool purchases totalling around £170 approved (**Ian**, Lancashire Community Fund). Approximately £200 committed to pay for work in the Orchard (**Mick**, General Fund).
- Item 6.5: Payment to Georgina Peacock anticipated shortly of £800+, **Hilary**, HLF.
- Item 6.9: Payment to Andy Lee for Tree Survey, **Ian**, amount & timing not yet known.
- Item 6.10: Payment to LWT for haymaking, **Ian**, estimate £420 + VAT, mid August, HLS.
- Item 7.5: Payment to Graeme Skelcher for wildflower survey, **Sue**, £130, July, General Fund

- Item 9.2: wood purchase for nose pump, **Ian**, General Fund or Community Spaces Sustainability Grant.
- **Dave** will shortly be submitting a claim to Natural England for at about £1100 for educational access.

Dave requested that information on recurring items of income and expenditure is passed to him so that he can produce an annual spreadsheet (**All**). (Tree survey is one item identified in discussion – 6.9.)

14. **Organised events for notification to the FA:** This will be a standing item on future agendas (**Glenys** to alert Andrew). The FA Constitution Appendix 2 Sub-Groups 1v) reads: “Events organised by the subgroup will be the business of the FA in order to guarantee they comply with the H&S Policy and are covered by the FA’s public liability insurance. Ideally, events need to be notified to the FA no later than the FA meeting immediately prior to the proposed event.” The guidance from Andrew is that this applies to publicly-advertised events, which anyone can attend and which might demand a recourse to our public liability insurance if anything was to go wrong. So it would depend on whether it was open to all or just organised within a closed circle. It does not apply to activities, such as haymaking, if arranged purely as a volunteer session.

Two forthcoming events were identified:

Visit to Brookholes Nature Reserve as part of the Open Learning Programme 6-7.30pm  
10th July, organised by Sue

Hay Meadow Wildflower Survey to be led by Graeme Skelcher, morning of Thursday  
10th July, currently advertised to members of Wildflower Group, arrangements being  
co-ordinated by Sue

15. **AOB:**

15.1. **Thanks:** The Flora Schools project and the Open Learning Programme (both financed by the Heritage Lottery Fund) are now coming to an end. The meeting expressed its thanks to Tony Finn (and his team of helpers) and to Sue Nieduszynska for all the time and effort they have put into delivering these programmes so successfully.

15.2. **Single Payment Scheme entitlements:** There should now be enough information available on the new scheme to determine the FA’s eligibility. **Hilary** will take up the investigation again and discuss with Andrew as to whether to submit an application.

16. **Date/place of next meetings:** Break in August. **Thursday 11th September**, 7pm at Whitegates, Sunnyside Close (**Note: the meeting has been moved to a week later**).

**Ian Procter’s Volunteer Items:  
Volunteer activities June 2014**

2<sup>nd</sup> June 2014

Three volunteers formed the Ragwort Working Party (RWP) and made excellent progress spraying Big Meadow. 20 bags of ragwort taken to the tip.

## 6<sup>th</sup> June 2014

Ditto the 2<sup>nd</sup> (but not the trip to the tip)

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

Three volunteers formed the RWP and completed the spraying of Big Meadow plus the Paddock. Algae was also removed from part of the surface of Alder Pond. This is to further test the effectiveness of the barley straw treatment which appears to be working.

## 11<sup>th</sup> June 2014

Purportedly the last outing for the RWP in phase 1 – very much a tidying up day.

- A few rogue ragwort were dug out of the Orchard.
- Nettle beds in the West Field were sprayed. I also sprayed some of the thistles but realised there were far more than first appeared. Should there be one more outing in Phase 1 of RWP? Email sent round to consult.
- An outbreak of thistles to the north west of the treble gates in the Arable Field was sprayed.
- Remaining nettles in the nettles beds around Pony Wood were sprayed.
- Ragwort in the Arable Field just over the Aldcliffe Road wall was sprayed. Note this probably comes from ragwort along the road and canal. But also note that it does not penetrate very far into the Arable Field and this and the West Filed are largely clear.
- The JKW near the Howson's gate was re-sprayed. It is responding very well.
- The JKW alongside Lucy Brook at the bottom of the Aldcliffe Road gardens was re-sprayed. This time I could reach further and I hope for a better result.
- Grass growing through the path near the Cromwell Road gate was sprayed.
- Meanwhile the Cromwell Road sub-group was completing their Phase 1 sweep of the Hay Meadow bog. 13 black bags of ragwort removed.

## 14<sup>th</sup> June 2014

The Saturday volunteering session attracted 22 volunteers on a lovely summer's morning.

- The Orchard paths were mown but this time rather wider as the surrounding vegetation is encroaching.
- Graffiti was cleaned off the playground equipment using the sander.
- Encroaching nettles were cut back in the playground in preparation for Fun Day.
- In the Orchard the area between the main path and the Pads footpath was strimmed back down to the Towneley Close path. The area was raked and cleared.
- Nettles growing round fruit trees were cut back and the results cleared away.
- The hawthorn / blackthorn in the fruit hedge was pruned back. Self seeded saplings of elder and sycamore were removed from the hedge. The surrounding path was widened.
- The path from the stump circle round the back of the Orchard was cleared of encroachment.
- Rampant cleavers was cleared from new planting in the Pads hedge.
- The benches, stumps and notice boards were cleared of encroaching vegetation.
- Bullrushes, flag iris and marsh marigold was planted in the wet area near Ana's Pool.
- The portable toilet was transported to Tony's house ready for use on the school visits.



- The gates of the Paddock and Lower Sowerholme were opened for firewood collection although I don't think anyone came.

Note that toward the end of the session the Draper strimmer broke down. It was inspected by two volunteers after the session and then taken to the retailers (Lyle Tool Shop LTS). The consensus so far is that the drive shaft has broken. LTS will consult with the manufacturer. The machine was purchased in February 2012 so is out of guarantee.

#### 15<sup>th</sup> June 2014

Tidying up around the Storage Building.

#### 16<sup>th</sup> June 2014

We fixed a donated vice to the new bench in the Storage Building

#### 18<sup>th</sup> June 2014

Two volunteers sprayed the thistle infestation in part of the West Field. Fortunately this proved to be fairly localised in the north east and northern areas of the field. It was gratifying to notice only one first year ragwort plant in all our patrolling through the field.

#### 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2014

The last session of Phase 1 for the RWP. A quick circuit of the Paddock and Big Meadow spraying those plants we missed the first time round.

#### ?? June 2014

One volunteer cleared the fly-tipped sofa from Pony Wood and carted it away to the tip. Truly a Hero of the Fairfield Soviet.

#### 25<sup>th</sup> June 2014

The Wednesday evening session attracted seven volunteers.

- The Orchard grass was mown in the afternoon which allowed us to experiment with mowing the carefully strimmed area between the Orchard path and the Pads hedge. With the mower on its maximum height and in second gear it worked very well and we should, over time, get this area to grass.
- With a view to continuing this process the slashing and shearing of the long grass and nettles around the fruit trees continued, followed by strimming.
- The fence between the track and Little Wood was made secure, hopefully to prevent any further 'camping' in there. We do need to make an entrance from the woodland extension side for our own maintenance.
- The clearing of the playground for Fun Day was completed, paying particular attention to any nettles around the benches, as mentioned at the AGM.
- Several sycamores in the Pads hedge adjacent to the Orchard were pruned right back and covered with black bags to (hopefully) curb their growth.
- Overhanging shrubs, trees and nettles were cut back along the Orchard paths.