

Fairfield Association
Flora, Fauna and Orchard Management Group [FFOG]
Minutes of the Meeting held on Thursday 2nd April 2015 7.00 pm
at Whitegates, Sunnyside Close

Present: Graham Brandwood, Dave Brookes, David Elliott, Glenys Ferguson (Mins), Tony Finn, Ian Fraser, Oliver Fulton, Helen Hicks, Sue Nieduszynska (Chair), Ian Procter, Hilary Short, Mick Short, Chris Workman

1. **Apologies:** Andrew Brennand, Rebecca Procter
2. **Minutes of last meeting:** Approved.
3. **Matters arising from Minutes:**
 - 3.1. **Defibrillator:** Has arrived and will be on hand for the Easter Egg Hunt.
 - 3.2. **Mower:** Due for delivery 7 April.
 - 3.3. **Alder saplings:** LWT will not be re-homing these after all. **Mick** will talk to someone else who has expressed an interest. **Dave** to advertise if this proves unsuccessful.
 - 3.4. **Dogs:** Following the report relating to Fauna (FFOG January 29th, item 9.4), a local resident has been in contact to say that on four or five occasions he has challenged people with dogs in the fields in Flora. He is also kept busy clearing dog poo from the Pads footpath. Continue to monitor.
 - 3.5. **Appeal for seed collectors:** Several people, including novices, have contacted **Sue**. She will be providing guidance, referring to Natural England's target species list and following discussion with the FA's NE adviser, who will be consulted further when he visits (see item 8.9). In particular, he has re-iterated that NE must give permission before any wildflowers are sown on land covered by the Agreement.

Mick has been sowing extra yellow rattle. Graham has a stock of seeds available (sowing to be deferred until Autumn). Tony has been alerted to surplus wildflower seeds held by Dallas Road School. He is keen to involve some pupils in sowing them on the reserve and monitoring their success. And there are plans to extend wildflower sowing in Flora Field (see item 8.11). This triggered a more general discussion, with Ian proposing that a strategy is devised for developing wildflowers on the reserve (prompted by attending the training session at Preston Wheel on 6th March, see end). It was agreed that interested parties should have a walk and talk session (to include consideration of the Dallas Road School idea) on the reserve during April. **Ian P.** and **Sue** to co-ordinate and invite a small group.
4. **Loss of RSPB Adviser:** Ian, Hilary and Mick had a 'goodbye' tour of the nature reserve with Richard Storton on 31st March, They presented him with gifts as a token of our appreciation. He made a number of comments about the reserve (report circulated, plus points noted elsewhere in these Minutes). He believes that most of the 'heavy work' establishing the reserve has now been completed and the focus has now shifted to monitoring and adjusting as necessary. In future, Jon Carter will be the contact for matters relating to birds (he has already agreed to watch for nesting lapwings in Flora Field). Calum Booth is the suggested

contact for matters relating to the NE Agreement. It was agreed to invite him to the reserve in June/July, the time when Richard has previously made his annual monitoring visit (**Glenys** for Arrangements item in June FFOG).

5. **Ideas for Grant Application:** Ian has noticed that Lancaster Greenspaces received only two grant applications in their last round. They are calling for more applications, for up to £1000, in the next round (September). It was agreed to submit a bid for a workbench and extra tools to cater for the expanding number of volunteers (**Ian**). Saplings for the Flora path may be the subject of a latter bid.
6. **Lower Sowerholme:** This name for the ex-Gleesons field does cause some confusion. It could be changed given that it is relatively new and not yet on information boards etc (unlike Upper Sowerholme). On balance, it was decided to keep the *status quo*.
7. **Annual review of wildlife sightings:** Full report available. The total of this winter's flush counts in Fauna through to 2nd March 2015 is a third higher than last year at 406. [A further 48 snipe were flushed during an extra count on 1 April.] It appears that the management task of cutting about half of the marsh vegetation in November has not had a detrimental effect on bird numbers. The fields in Flora have yet to attract more than the odd snipe.

From late April until early June there were regular sightings of lapwings but essentially in Flora Field, and no more than four at any one time. At least one pair nested successfully as two chicks were found wandering on the Long Pads path. Although grey partridge are difficult to spot, there has been a steady trickle of sightings in West and Flora Fields, and also in Big Meadow (a group of six reported in February 2015).

In contrast brown hare sightings are down by a half, at 16 for the year. However, this data is dependent on people posting on the FA's wildlife blog, precluding quantitative judgements. And there may be fewer reports than in the past because the arable and its winter stubble provides more concealing vegetation than sheep-grazed slopes. [On 4th April several people independently saw hares in Flora Field. Three, possibly four, individuals. A good starting point for the coming year's review.]

Overall, the nature reserve appears to be doing well in attracting birds, even if it is not meeting the letter of the NE Agreement in terms of the species or the 'right' times and places. Introducing arable and the margins (particularly the wild bird seed plot) into Flora Field has had an immediate impact. Converting the other fields in Flora to a habitat suitable for wintering snipe and lapwing is likely to take more time.

The FA Wildlife Blog provides useful anecdotal evidence. The winter flush counts are a sound guide to the snipe population, and have been enhanced by the presence of the RSPB's Jon Carter who has the expertise to spot a larger number of other species (which have been reported via the Blog). The breeding bird survey is to be extended to Flora in 2015. This will provide robust data that can be compared over time.

It was agreed to make further efforts to encourage reporting of NE feature species, by providing identification information and promoting use of the FA Blog (**Sue** to discuss with Jon Carter and Ian N.). **Mick** will contact the webmaster about provision of a hotspot at events (for instance, the Open Garden at Carr House Farm). To improve the reporting of hares, **Sue** will contact Clare Brown and also advertise for others willing to go out at times when they are most likely to be active.

8. Management:

8.1. Rural Payments Agency remapping and field numbers: On to do list (**Dave**).

8.2. Improvement of the Long Pads path and creation of the Flora path: There has been little progress with the design work on the Flora path, with the Landscape Architect continuing to request information. Once the design is finalised, planning permission and agreement with the Canal & River Trust for a towpath access point need to be obtained. Then the – considerable! – funds required for its construction will have to be raised. **Hilary** will write a note explaining this lengthy process for inclusion in the next FA newsletter. Richard Storton has re-iterated his view that the Flora path should have a hedge, of the same height as that along the Fauna footpath, for the whole of its length.

Proposed improvements to the Long Pads are also in the hands of the Landscape Architect and will require planning permission too.

Tony raised concerns about last year's maintenance work on the Long Pads path by the County Council. It is necessary to keep it open as a right of way in the face of encroaching nettles and brambles, but it was too early in the year from the viewpoint of wildflowers and nesting birds and too aggressive for a path within a nature reserve. **Sue** will approach Tarja Wilson for advice.

8.3. Concessionary Path, LNR designation and management plan: Ann Wood (Lancaster City Council) has sent the recommendation to the Councillor for Property Services. [After the meeting Dave discovered that a positive decision has been taken, subject to call-in.] Tarja Wilson (Lancashire County Council) is also making further progress with making the Fauna footpath concessionary.

8.4. Edenbreck boundary: No land transfer yet. Installation of the temporary post and wire fence will added to the task list for the May volunteer session (**Ian**).

8.5. Resurfacing of footpaths: Volunteers from the Prince's Trust have done a satisfactory job improving the surface of the paths by the Oak and stump circles in the Orchard. They are now much more suitable for wheelchairs and pushchairs. **Dave** has asked a contractor to quote for the remaining work in the Orchard and the Fauna footpath.

8.6. Tree Surgeon's progress: Andy Lee has finished this winter's work with the exception of two diseased ash in Little Wood which are hosting active bird/ bat boxes. It was agreed to ask Andy to fell these after August 31st (**Ian**). The meeting was grateful to Andy for waiving part of his bill as a donation to the FA. There has been no decision yet on thw application to the Tree Protection Officer for the sycamores bordering the Orchard and the Martins' garden.

Helen will approach Andy for a quote for repairing the nestbox located at the Sunnyside Lane end of the Pads path at the same time as he does work on her trees.

8.7. Changes to the NE Agreement: The FA's Natural England Adviser has recently incorporated a number of changes into the management part of our agreement (largely responding to questions and comments from us). The relevant section has been circulated to FFOG members, with the alterations highlighted. The field numbers now correspond to those on the Rural Payments Agency map circulated for the last meeting. The campfire area in Pony Wood has been taken out of the Agreement. This

revision mistakenly deletes birch from the planting list – our NE Adviser has agreed to reinstate it.

- 8.8. West Field grass:** Natural England has agreed that this can be cut after 1st July. After cutting, the cattle will need to be in the field regularly to maintain the desired sward height through the rest of the growing season.
- 8.9. Soil testing :** Sue will remind Ben Hibbins (NE Adviser) that he has agreed to carry out soil testing on the reserve during April/May.
- 8.10. Weed wiping:** The rush has yet to grow back sufficiently for weed wiping. Because of bird-nesting the job will have to be postponed now until after the end of July. The grant funding arranged by Richard Storton will have expired, so it will have to be paid for by the FA. Richard's view, though, is that it must be done this year to work well. He will supply Mick with the details of the contractor he was proposing to use.

However, Oliver has found a potential alternative for managing the marsh vegetation. A herd of Exmoor ponies (<http://www.exmoorpony.org>) has been grazing at Gait Barrows National Nature Reserve and elsewhere locally for many years. They are clearly very effective, need no shelter, no winter feeding and very little care. After the White Park cattle have grazed down the grass, the ponies would go in for a short time to eat the rushes. Both Richard Storton and Ben Hibbins consider this could be a realistic option. The ponies' owners are also keen to visit the nature reserve, **Oliver** to arrange. Anyone interested in attending this meeting should contact Oliver directly. Weed wiping arrangements will be kept on hold whilst this is investigated.

Graham noted that a vehicle route into Upper Sowerholme has been kept open in anticipation of weed wiping. This will need to be blocked before the cattle return to the Hay Meadow after hay-making.

- 8.11. Arable and margins update:** It transpires that the floristically enhanced grass margin (HE10) had been specified as 4m wide but sown at 3m. As a result, it fell short of the area prescribed by NE. The NE Agreement has now been changed to read "at width of 2 to 6m" (see item 8.7). Since the arable farmer's drill is 3m wide, Dave's suggestion is to create a 6m wide margin and limit it to the length shown on the Agreement map (circulated with Minutes) in order to achieve the plot sizes specified in Part 2a of the Agreement. **Mick** to liaise with the arable farmer. Any extra seed can be sown between the margin and the field boundary. **Mick** and **Ian** will hire a rotovator to turn the flat 'point' of Flora Field by the Howsons gate into a wildflower area.

Ricahrd Storton thinks that short tailed voles have established burrows in the banking below the Aldcliffe Road wall.

- 8.12. Farm visit:** Sue will contact the arable farmer before the next meeting to organise a farm visit.
- 8.13. Grazing agreement:** No progress, but will now be pursued as a matter of urgency (see item 11) (**Mick**).
- 8.14. Dealing with vandalism and unauthorised use of Pony Wood:** Sue and Mick will continue their consultations with local residents.

9. Monitoring:

9.1. Maintenance and HLS habitat inspections: Graham's reports (available) have flagged up a number of maintenance issues: a broken strand in the fencing by the cattle crossing, algae in the southern Flora Pond requiring barley straw treatment (the straw in Alder Pond has recently been refreshed), and a further leak in the northern Flora Pond. West Scrape is holding some water, but there is clearly still a leak somewhere. Richard Storton's suggestion is to remove a whole pipe segment from the two spots already excavated and then fill the pipe ends well with lots of clay. Dave, from a look at Google maps, thinks there may be another drain. In Anna's Pool, Graham observed that more water was passing through the eel-friendly sluice than through the main sluice. This was adjusted by Richard on his subsequent visit, but still requires checking. The 'float' should be altered as required so that the eel-friendly pipe is lying on top of the water and has a small flow of water going through it and under the bund. Attaching a 2 foot length of carpet to the inside of its mouth would also help eels climb up the sluice into the pool. **(Ian/Graham)**.

9.2. Arrangements made for breeding birds and Pony Wood flora surveys: Dan Haywood has agreed to undertake the breeding birds survey again. He expects to make 3 or 4 visits (including one at dusk), starting towards the end of April. His offer to check nestboxes will be declined (Ian P. and Ian N. are keen to continue with this). **Sue** will confirm that the price quoted includes Flora, and also ask Dan to keep an eye out for hares. Martin Sherlock will be leading the Pony Wood survey (to include Little Wood) on Monday 27th April. **Sue** will circulate more details nearer the time.

9.3. Photographic recording: Chris has provided a list of photographs (circulated as a separate document) to be taken 5 times per year by David Herrod. The first set was taken in early March when they went round the site. The photos will be filed under site location and date order. Hopefully the seasonal and annual changes can then be seen. The meeting agreed that this should give excellent coverage of Fauna and Flora, and asked that the Orchard be added (**Chris**). How to store the photographs and in what format remains to be decided. As the first action, **Mick** will ask webmaster about the feasibility of using the FA's website.

9.4. Field walking: Field walking is acceptable to the arable farmer if it takes place after ploughing and before the plants start to come through. About 10 people have indicated their desire to participate, which is the ideal number from the archaeologist's viewpoint. The 9th & 10th April have been pencilled in, but there is doubt whether the field will be ploughed by then given the current weather. If it needs to be re-arranged, the date will be after 19th April to suit the availability of the archaeologist from UCLAN who is supervising (**Sue**).

10. Volunteer activities:

10.1. Reports for February & March volunteer sessions and proposed tasks: Ian's full reports are attached at the end. These include a record of the species planted by Oliver's group in Pony Wood and Little Wood on 14th March and a write up of the advice gained from the wildflower training session at Preston Wheel on 6th March. (**Sue** will chase up the 'crib notes' promised by the session leader.) The work in the Orchard detailed in the Tree Management Plan two years ago is complete bar some thinning at the south end of the Orchard path (to be added to next winter's plans). The Hedge Work Party has done a sterling job, completing this tree work in the Orchard,

providing assistance to Andy Lee, laying the eastern hedge in West Field, and completing the laying of the Orchard hedge along the Pads path.

The brash generated by hedge laying has now been chipped by a contractor. Moving the West Field chippings to mulch the 558 saplings planted in Pony Wood is the main task for the April volunteer session. Unfortunately, this contractor does not have the machinery required to flail the north hedge of West Field (FFOG 29th January item 10). In the first instance, **Dave** will ask the neighbouring tenant farmer about doing this task when he fails his own hedges.

Ian proposes starting this year's battle against the ragwort in late May. FFOG agreed with his proposals:

- spot spraying with glyphosate as a means of controlling ragwort and other 'undesirables' (especially thistle, dock and nettles).
- avoid using glyphosate where it is not necessary (for instance in the Hay Meadow where the ragwort and dock were controlled last year by digging out and where leaving nettle beds can be left in Flora for partridge cover).
- after the first phase of work using spot spraying, have some sort of 'volunteer blitz' of the wetter areas.

Ian and will consult with the Volunteer Tasks sub-group when he has thought through all the detail.

10.2. John Muir Awards: The FA has now joined the John Muir Trust. Graham introduced the awards to volunteers at the regular monthly session on 14 March. Ten people have already signed up to start the award process, guided and supervised by Graham. It was agreed that **Graham** will report to FFOG as and when necessary, and provide a review on an annual basis.

- 11. Finalising the Flora HLF project:** The final payment cannot be claimed until a Solicitor's bill for preparation of the grazing agreement has been received (see item 8.13).
- 12. Application for designation as Local Green Space:** Lancaster City Council is seeking to identify important areas of local green space across the district. These are areas that hold a particular importance to the community, and if designated in the Local Plan would be protected from inappropriate development. Designation as a local green space (introduced by central government in 2012) focusses on the importance of identified areas to their local community. This could be because of the wildlife they are home to, their beauty, their cultural or heritage significance, the tranquillity they provide or their recreational value. Designation would provide another layer of protection for the FA's green spaces. **Sue** is preparing an application for the Orchard, Flora and Fauna and **Hilary** an application for the play area. The former will include reference to the importance of the adjacent land and the links to the estuary and the Morecambe Bay Natural Area. Sue will co-ordinate with Aldcliffe residents who are submitting a separate proposal for land between Aldcliffe Lane and Flora. Drafts will be circulated to Trustees prior to submission by 24th April.
- 13. Dallas Road School wildflower project:** See item 3.5.

14. Standing items:

14.1. Arrangements: A list of matters to be arranged/set in train during the next two months was circulated prior to the meeting.

Glenys will contact Keith Taylor to arrange this year's survey of the Orchard fruit trees.

Sue will commission the early survey of wildflowers in Hay & Carr House Meadows for May, as well as the later survey for July (prior to haymaking). She will also contact Gail Armstrong about the promised bat survey of Pony Wood.

Ian will re-establish contact with Renewable Ripley group and develop his programme for tackling undesirables and invasive aliens.

Survey of the beetle banks is in hand (**Chris**, see item 14.3)

14.2. Financial control:

Item 3.1– Bill for £1200 for mower expected imminently ((**Ian**))

Item 3.2– Invoice for £720 for defibrillator submitted (**Hilary**)

Item 8.6 – Invoice from tree surgeon for £1300 (lower figure reflecting donation and outstanding work) (**Ian**)

Item 10.1– Bill for brash chipping £900. (The price agreed reflects the work done by volunteers in moving most of the brash in Big Meadow to a dry section of the field with access for vehicles.) (**Ian**)

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Dave has promised to circulate his annual spreadsheet soon.

14.3. Organised events for notification to the FA:

- Field walking in Flora Field provisionally scheduled for 9th/10th April or after 19th.
- Wildflower survey of Pony Wood led by Martin Sherlock on evening of Monday 27th April. Time and meeting place tbc.
- Times for the invertebrate survey cum bioblitz on Thursday 4th June and Thursday 30th July will be 6.30pm to 8.30pm.
- Jon Carter has proposed leading another bird walk - no further details yet.

15. AOB: It was noted that there had been talk of planting other fruit trees in the Orchard in place of diseased apple trees that have been taken out. Also, after the soft fruit hedge was pruned radically last year, the intention was to add extra saplings. **Glenys** to follow this up with Keith Taylor.

16. Date/place of next meetings: Thurs June 11th, 7pm Whitegates Sunnyside Close (to avoid clash with NLNG invertebrate session in Nature Reserve on 4th). 23rd July to give break in August. 2nd Sept to revert to usual first of month, and give a good starting point for future meetings every two months (i.e. Sept, Nov, Jan, Mar, May, July) if that is the decision taken at the AGM.

Ian Procter's Report on Volunteer Activities:

(NB Late addition to January report: 28th January 7 volunteers for the Hedge Working Party (HWP))

2nd February 2015

Following on from the Survey of Gates reported to FFOG on 29th January two volunteers made all the recommended repairs, plus lubricating all the locks.

4th February 2015

The HWP continued work on the Orchard / Pads footpath hedge. 7 volunteers.

11th February 2015

7 volunteers turned out for the HWP maintaining progress on the Orchard / Pads footpath hedge.

14th February 2015

On a pleasant Saturday morning 28 volunteers participated in the regular volunteering session plus 4 working to repair equipment in the playground, an impressive total of 32!

- We made a start to removing bramble from hedges
 - Between the Orchard and the Pads footpath
 - Between Big Meadow and the Pads footpath
 - Along the southern boundary of the Paddock
 - Between the School field and the Fauna path (Brash to be removed next time)
- Repairs were made to the living willow fence alongside School Pond and further willow saplings planted.
- Further pruning of apple trees
- Timber was carried from the West Field to the shed for use in the new fence (still five lengths in the field, plus some tidying to do).
- The bird friendly and wildflower margins in Flora Field were carefully measured.
- The strip lynchets in Flora Field, now serving as 'beetle banks' were marked out with stakes so that the plough can easily identify and avoid them.
- A start was made on removing saplings growing in the Aldcliffe Road wall after consultation with a Council official. The agreed health and safety protocols were followed.

18th February 2015

8 volunteers for the HWP. This morning we finished actual hedge work for the winter, completing the laying of the hedge between the Orchard and the Pads footpath. We also cut up the fallen elder near the Towneley footpath and created a woodpile there for firewood for local people. We began this year's instalment of the Tree Management plan agreed in the autumn of 2013 (FOG Minutes 10/10/13).

24th February 2015

After consultation with local residents and with the Council and their provision of safety advice and signage, two volunteers cut down the self seeded small trees growing adjacent to our wall in Aldcliffe Road. The brash was tipped over the wall. Two issues arising:

- What to do with the brash? As we are engaging a contractor to chip the brash in West Field it seems a good idea to include this material with that job. Ian to contact the contractor.
- The Council's advice is to poison the tress stumps to stop regrowth. There are an awful lot of them and any other option will involve a lot of work. Advice followed.

25th February 2015

The HWP met with 4 volunteers attending but before moving on to tree management we moved the brash in Big Meadow which was obstructing the cow path. Apparently 'the old lady' would have been obstructed by the path being blocked and in danger of becoming isolated.

Our tree management was limited by chain saw problems but

- We made a start thinning the alders near the Towneley Close path. The plan is to remove the thicker stemmed growth and leave the thinner.
- We pruned back two beech trees at the North West corner of the apple Orchard.
- We made more progress on pruning the apple trees.

Late February 2015

A volunteer encased barley straw in wire netting containers and placed them in the Alder Pod to combat algae. The protective cover of the outlet pipe was also replaced to protect birds.

4th March 2015

Five volunteers formed the Hedge Working Party. Our main task today was to act as safety banksmen and assistants for Andy Lee (tree surgeon) as he worked on three trees in the Orchard (removing one of the boughs of the multi-trunked sycamore near the Towneley path, reducing the beech near the Towneley path and reducing the old sycamore). Andy mentioned to us that he has received permission from the Tree Protection Officer to do the proposed work in Little Wood and will be getting on with this.

We also cut down more of the alder near the Towneley path and some of the excess oak and beech near the Martin's house (as in the approved plan).

6th March 2015

Five volunteers visited the Preston Wheel where the Lancashire Wildlife Trust is enhancing the route with wildflower planting. Chris, our 'guide and tutor' gave us an introductory talk and then we assisted him in sowing a wildflower mix on a prepared bed. Here, in a rather random list, are some of the lessons we learnt.

- The provenance of plants is never a straightforward matter. Chris likened it to a continuum with an SSSI at one end and an urban roundabout at the other so you have to judge the degree of constraint according to the context. In the discussion we mentioned Eric Greenwood's book *Flora of North Lancashire*. Chris recognised this as a standard reference. Ian has a copy and we could use this as a baseline – it does state whether plants are native to the area.
- Chris's preference was for autumn sowing of wildflower mixes but as the day's sowing indicates early spring is not too late.

- Chris mentioned two sources of wildflower seed mixes and advice: the National Wildflower Centre (Liverpool) and a firm called Emorsgate Seeds which specialises in wildflowers.
- Wildflower meadows can either be of annuals or perennials (or a mix of the two). However, Chris pointed out that annuals rarely re-seed themselves satisfactorily so annual re-seeding is necessary.
- In the case of perennials his practice was to cut the tops off plants during the first year to strengthen the roots system.
- Chris reinforced what we have heard from elsewhere about patience! Our soil in Lancashire will retain nutrients for many years despite taking off the crop (which MUST be done). Parasitic plants will assist in the process but it all takes time.
- As well as Yellow Rattle Chris mentioned Red Bartsia and Eyebright as parasitic plants reducing the grass.
- Apparently different seeds have different longevities, many will remain potentially active for many years but some have a very short potential – he used Yellow Rattle to illustrate – it has a ‘shelf life’ of only a few months – a shame as we have a bag in the shed!
- We should remember how Chris organised the sowing of the seed. He split the large bag of seed into 20 small bags (about the size of a sandwich bag) and mixed the seed with horticultural sand. Then he marked out the area to be sown into 20 plots and each sandwich bag was spread evenly in each plot. This is a simple and effective way of ensuring even coverage.
- Chris made an interesting point about why soil fertility has to be reduced – it is not that wildflowers won’t grow on rich soils, rather rich soils give the advantage to ‘undesirables’ such as coarse grasses, dock, nettles etc. They squeeze out the wildflowers. So as well as reducing the fertility, the undesirables should be removed. (Thought from Ian – some undesirables are desirable! Nettle beds for insects and for cover for birds such as partridge. Must distinguish between what we are aiming for in different locations).
- Chris does not see the need for soil testing – just check out which plants succeed. If we do soil test it needs to be done properly with a lab analysis, not just a kit from the garden centre.
- The two wildflower beds we were shown had both been prepared by a) applying a herbicide to clear the ground of everything but primarily the undesirables, b) laying down quite a thick sandy topsoil – I am not sure quite what it was. I don’t think either of these practices is suitable for our hay meadows. Again the importance of removing the undesirables was stressed.
- However, although we don’t want to be preparing beds in the fields we could use smaller patches in which we sow seed or use plugs.
- Chris is to send us some ‘crib notes’ he has developed. (Have they arrived?)

Note by Ian: having attended this session I think we should consolidate by having a discussion about how we are to proceed developing wildflower meadows over the next few years. There is already a wildflower group which could act as the forum and clarify just what we are doing.

6th March 2015

Just a note here that members of the Association attended the closing event of the Princes Trust project in the Orchard. The project has made an excellent job of relaying two sections of path (in the Stump and Oak circles) with a finer and smoother surface. As a pilot this indicates the worth of proceeding with other paths in the Orchard and Fauna. Thanks to local residents for providing water supply and a site for a Portaloo – which can be used again if we need it.

7th March 2015

Thanks to Oliver and Penny for donating two sets of metal shelves which are now installed in the shed.

9th March 2015

A volunteer attended the latest meeting of the Lancaster Greenspaces Forum. This began with a tour of Newton Beck Woods, an area of woodland owned by the Council but sadly neglected. Simon Gershon and Paul Bullimore, Community Forester, are trying to get a 'Friends' group started. The meeting then commenced in the Ridge Community Centre, attended by 11 people, around the theme of 'Writing Management Plans'. A lot of discussion of TPOs. It was agreed that the Group should compile a list of local experts who are willing to offer advice. Next meeting: 27th April, Happy Mount Park on 'Enhancing for Wildlife'.

11th March 2015

Five volunteers formed the HWP. We re-affirmed the Site Specific Risk Assessment for tree felling and pruning in the Orchard site. We reviewed the plan for the area to the south of the Towneley path and decided to leave the aspen poplar/sweet chestnut/walnut group and just to prune lower branches of the 'crooked oak'. It may be wise to thin these in the future but it seems premature. We felled an aspen poplar, a silver birch and a multi-stemmed chestnut as well as finishing off the thinning of the white alder. We collected suitable timber for replacement Stump Circle stumps, fence and hedge posts. Other timber we logged and left in the wood pile for the public. Brash cleared. Early finish because of heavy rain.

14th March 2015

20 people came along for the Volunteer Saturday, plus three specialists working in the playground on repairing equipment. Total = 23. A dry and pleasant morning.

- i. The Orchard dogwood was pruned back severely as advised and the brash neatly cleared back.
- ii. We continued clearing the bramble alongside the Fauna path, clearing the brash into the Big Meadow ready for chipping.
- iii. Good quality timber was moved from the West Field to the shed for use on the fence there.
- iv. The replacement seating stump was fixed in the Stump Circle.
- v. A new bat box, donated by local children, was fixed to the large ash tree in the Stump Circle. (A further box is in the shed awaiting fixing in the Triangle. Now collected).
- vi. A grass and wildflower seed mix was sown in the cleared area near the stump circle following the procedures learnt at Preston Wheel (above).
- vii. Snowdrops gathered in the green from a local source were planted in Little Wood. ***
- viii. A selection of locally indigenous, shade loving plants was planted in Pony Wood. Wood avens, wood anemone, wild arum, wild strawberry, carex pendula, sweet woodruff, primrose. (We are hoping to source ransomes later). ***
- ix. Self seeded saplings of hazel, willow and sycamore were cut back in the Towneley path area of the Orchard.

In the refreshment break Graham introduced the John Muir Trust Award scheme. Nine volunteers signed up to start the Award process.

***** Oliver's detailed record of the planting in items vii and viii above.**

Here for your records is my report on our group's wildflower planting.

1 Little Wood. We planted all the snowdrops (a lot!) [...]. We separated them into fairly small clumps and managed to put some in most of the more open areas between the trees. They are clearly visible at present, as their leaves are both long and light green. Hopefully they will settle in and flower well next year.

2 Pony Wood back fence. We decided that the primroses, wild strawberry and cuckoo pint / lords and ladies should all be planted along the old wall by the eastern fence line - they are hedge foot plants which like drier soil. They were planted in small groups of each type starting at the S end. Unfortunately the two people working furthest north [had to leave] early before I could check how far they got. I suspect not all the way to the northeast corner but can't be sure how far short they finished.

3. Most of the remaining plants - all the wood avens, sweet woodruff, wood anemones (only a few of these unfortunately [...]) and some of the sedge were planted in mixed groups among the mature trees in the centre and south end of the wood - we kept well away from the campfire circle.

4. We planted some of the sedge in a couple of groups among the new tree planting, believing that it would benefit from more daylight until it gets established.

We marked the groups in sections 3 and 4 with one post each in the centre, with a piece of tape knotted round it, thinking this would be adequate and less conspicuous than police-tape style fencing off. Sections 1 and 2 are pretty much continuous so we didn't think it worth marking them.

18th March 2015

4 volunteers formed the HWP working on tree management in the Orchard, namely felling excess silver birch, reducing an alder to one main stem, uplifting three field maple and pollarding a willow. All timber was cut up into manageable logs so that the public were not tempted to use chain saws in the publically accessible Orchard area. This completes the work of the HWP for the winter. Many thanks to Ken, Graham, Keith, Glenys, Paul, Martin, Ann, Chris and Oliver who have formed the core of the group.

Mid March 2015

Volunteers moved hedging brash from the wet area of Big Meadow to the drier area where it is more accessible for the contractor and thus should save time and money. Some of the Aldcliffe Road brash also moved to a more convenient location.