



Report from the Friends of Duchess Wood (FODW) to the Duchess Wood Local Nature Reserve Committee (DWLNRC) meeting on 17th February 2015

Routine work

FODW have continued to carry out routine actions since the last meeting of the DWLNRC, such as **monthly work parties and the constant repairs, litter control, cutting and clearing work.**

New work in the Wood



Tree planting and protection

FODW has devoted time, energy and funds which it has raised both to plant new native and fruiting trees and to protect them with wire mesh to prevent deer and other damage. (See photo left.)

Bridges, culverts and horse fords

A start has been made in a programme of repairs and improvements to stream crossings and drainage. Horses on bridges can cause damage and the picture (below) shows the first horse ford (beside the bridge to the east of the pony field). FODW has made gradients on both banks more gradual. FODW is in discussions with Community Payback to replace the temporary and worn SW wooden bridge with a large culvert-type crossing in the Spring.

Besides constant clearing of culverts, FODW is improving the quality of drainage in damp areas. We have provided a narrow hidden drain around the "information area" where the DW foundation stone and the memorial to Councillor Al Reay stand – and where the new information boards will be placed.



Work has also been done creating and repairing other ditches. The photo left shows necessary drainage commissioned by FODW, near the car park.

Information boards

Babcock have completed the frames for the new information boards and the information panels. We are planning to erect the frames on 13th February and officially unveil the information boards in the second half of March. Community Payback will shortly prepare the area around the boards with an all-ability surface before the boards are put in position.

Four new map boards, devised with the assistance of Babcock, will be positioned at the four entry points to the Wood.

Various

Other work, mostly with materials funded by FODW, has been carried out jointly with Community Payback. This included refurbishment of table benches in the Pony Field, completing fencing at the car park where Japanese knotweed grows, and clearing / servicing drainage bars across the path from the car park to the Pony Field.

A temporary barrier and improved drainage have been installed on the left side of the culvert as cars exit from the car park. (A car drove one wheel into this ditch last year.)

Bat / bird boxes

FODW has had discussions and correspondence with Veronique Cassels of Lomond School and Steven Kenney, Ranger at the National Park, about assessing, repairing, maintaining and monitoring the bat/bird boxes currently in the Wood. Some are likely to need replacing. The discussions are ongoing.

Storm damage

A few trees and branches came down in the January gales. As always, the FODW first priorities are to assess possible safety issues, take action (or report to those responsible) and to clear paths to enable public access. These we did.

Two problems remained. One tree had fallen across a path – see two photos right. Fortunately a contractor hired by FODW to do other work, was unable to get his equipment through and kindly sawed the trunk of the tree without extra charge. The next FODW Sunday work party was then devoted entirely to hand-sawing and removing the branches.

A still unresolved problem is two half-fallen trees beside the car park, one currently supporting the other. These could fall and it is beyond the FODW resources to deal with these.

Before



After



Grants

FODW has the task of seeking lesser grants to assist its work, and to supplement the DWLNRC / LCG task of obtaining large-scale grants to meet the Management Plan objectives.

Since the last DWLNRC, the FODW has obtained £250 from Action Earth, £550 from Helensburgh Round Table, £100 from the Argyll and the Isles Coast and Countryside Trust and payment in kind (provision of noticeboards) from Babcock. Other applications are currently in train.



Grant certificate being held up by Stewart Campbell (FODW Chairman) and Morag Young (FODW safeguarding organiser).

All-abilities path

An urgent issue is the resurfacing of the path which is described “all abilities” but which no longer is – as the photo, right, shows, with a wheelchair stuck in the mud. It is limited to lower, ground from the car park to the Rhu Road Higher entrance. So far we have been unable to attract sufficient funds for this. FODW would appreciate discussing it with the DWLNRC.



Flower walk. FODW is in discussions with a local graphic designer, and with SNH, to produce a descriptive leaflet for the Spring Flower Walk.

Visitor numbers

The DWLNRC Management Plan notes there are about 150,000 visits a year to DW.

In 2006 an audit of green spaces in the Helensburgh and Lomond Area was carried out by Land Use Consultants. In Helensburgh town itself 57 open green spaces were examined. Of these 57, Duchess Wood was one of only four identified as “**most valued sites in Helensburgh**” (the others being the Promenade, the Skating Pond and the Blackhill Plantation) and Duchess Wood was assessed as one of just seven recommended as “**Priorities for action**”.

“**The snow test**”. Visitor numbers have not been measured recently. FODW has discussed this issue. The only indication has been periodic use of the “snow test”. This is a rough indicator, but interesting. It simply consists of going to four key sites mid-morning and assessing footprints after an overnight fall of snow. The results have always been the same. : • **Seafront Promenade and Duchess Wood** : heavily used. • **Hermitage Park** : used a bit, but not much. • **Walker’s Rest** : no footprints at all – except from birds ! All the evidence suggests that Duchess Wood is much valued.



Footprints in Duchess Wood