

**MINUTES of MEETING of DUCHESS WOOD LOCAL NATURE RESERVE COMMITTEE held via
SKYPE
on TUESDAY, 4 AUGUST 2020**

Present: Councillor Lorna Douglas (Chair)

Stuart Campbell, Committee Member, Friends of Duchess Wood
Martin Grafton, Secretary, Friends of Duchess Wood
Shona Barton, Committee Manager, Argyll and Bute Council
Audrey Martin, Projects and Regeneration Manager, Argyll and Bute Council
Tom Murphy, Operations Manager, Argyll and Bute Council
Kevin McIntosh, Assistant Operations Manager, Argyll and Bute Council
Sean McCay, Land Agent, Luss Estates
Andrew Galloway, Helensburgh Advertiser

1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were made by all attendees.

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of:

Eileen Kay, Argyll and Bute Council
Matt Offord, Friends of Duchess Wood
David Lewin, Friends of Duchess Wood
Johann Urquhart, Lomond School

2. MINUTES

(a) **Minute of the Previous Meeting of the Duchess Wood Local Nature Reserve Committee Held on Tuesday, 25 February 2020**

The Minute of the previous meeting of Duchess Wood Local Nature Reserve Committee held on Tuesday, 25 February 2020 was approved as a correct record.

3. FRIENDS OF DUCHESS WOODS ACTIVITY UPDATE

Martin Grafton provided a verbal update on the activity of the Friends of Duchess Wood. Mr Grafton confirmed that a lot of the period since the last meeting had been impacted by the effects of Covid19 and lockdown. With the easing of lockdown restrictions, Mr Grafton advised that activities were beginning to resume in the woods. Volunteers had been doing work on new fencing and other minor maintenance tasks, the community payback team have also been assisting by cutting grass amongst other activities. Mr Grafton noted that since the last meeting of the Committee the Friends have been in discussion with Luss Estates around their future relationship and management of the Wood.

Decision

The Committee agreed to note the content of the update.

4. LOMOND SCHOOL ACTIVITY UPDATE

There were no representatives from Lomond School available at the meeting to provide an update on their activities. It was noted that the School had been closed due to the Covid19 situation since March and would be re-opening to pupils soon, therefore it was unlikely that the school had conducted much activity within the Wood since the last meeting of the Committee. Stuart Campbell confirmed that the school have now been able to get access to the playing fields beyond the car park bridge.

Decision

The Committee noted that there were no representatives from Lomond School at the meeting to provide an update on activities.

5. DUCHESS WOOD - FUTURE GOVERNANCE AND LOCAL NATURE RESERVE (LNR) STATUS

The Committee gave consideration to a report relating to Duchess Wood providing information around future governance arrangements and detailing the position in relation to the management agreement and local nature reserve (LNR) Status.

Discussion took place around the delays caused by Covid19 restrictions in holding the final meeting of the Committee which had resulted in the meeting being held at a point when the management agreement had already expired and the frustrations that this had caused.

Mr Campbell and Mr Grafton outlined issues that they had with comments within the report around Duchess Wood's future LNR status. They referred to e-mail correspondence with Liz Pryor (Scottish Natural Heritage) and the latest guidance on selection and declaration of LNRs. Mr Campbell and Mr Grafton noted that they did not feel that the updated advice from Scottish Natural Heritage received at the end of May was reflected in the report and expressed discontent that this advice was not shared with the Friends of Duchess Wood at the time. Discussion took place around the decision made at the Helensburgh and Lomond Area Committee in December 2018 and the changes which have taken place since then. The report which had been submitted reflected this decision and outlined that the Council would not be renewing the Management Agreement further after it expired in July 2020. Members of the Committee noted that the situation around Duchess Wood has changed since the decision in December 2018 and that the Friends of Duchess Wood and Luss Estates were committed to working together to manage the Wood properly and hoped that the LNR status could be maintained. The Committee asked if the recent information from SNH might enable the decision in regard to the LNR status to be revisited. The Committee Manager agreed that she would pass the information to the Council's legal team to seek their views and would aim to feed back to the group by the 21st of August. The Committee Manager also confirmed that she would seek clarification around the process for, and timescales around, de-declaration of an LNR and feed this information back to the group.

Sean McCay advised that Luss Estates would be open to managing Duchess Wood as an LNR and would be open to discussing with the Council ways in which this may be possible. Mr McCay confirmed that a Memorandum of Understanding had been drafted between the Friends of Duchess Woods and Luss Estates in relation to the future management of the Wood and he would share this with the Council upon completion. Further discussion took place around a potential three month extension to the agreement to allow further discussion around the LNR status and for the management of the Wood to be handed over in light of the issues caused by Covid19.

Mr Campbell expressed concern that an e-mail received within the last few days indicated that works necessary to be carried out in the Wood prior to it being handed over to Luss Estates had been completed, however it was felt that there was still some work outstanding. Mr Campbell also expressed concerns around the waste bins and the area and servicing of these following the conclusion of the management agreement. The Operations Manager confirmed that he would aim to put in place a meeting and a final walkthrough with Luss Estates, and that this would also include the Friends of Duchess Wood.

Decision

The Committee agreed:

- (a) To note the report;
- (b) That the Committee Manager would seek clarification from the Council's legal team around the impact of recent communications from SNH on the LNR status of Duchess Wood and feed this information back to the group;
- (c) That the Committee Manager would seek clarification around the process for and timescales around de-declaration of an LNR and feed this information back to the group; and
- (d) That the Operations Manager would arrange a meeting and walkthrough of Duchess Wood.

(Reference: Report by Executive Director with responsibility for Legal and Regulatory Support, dated 4 August 2020, submitted)

6. ANY OTHER COMPETENT BUSINESS

Following confirmation that this would be the final meeting of the Duchess Wood Local Nature Reserve Committee in its current format, Sean McCay advised that Luss Estate's intention is that there will be a new management committee formed around Duchess Wood with relevant representatives invited to attend.

Discussion took place around parties who may be using the Wood in the future and it was confirmed that any future correspondence relating to groups who wish to do work in or use the woods was to be directed to Mr McCay to ensure that relevant insurance and risk assessments are in place and to ensure that the parties could be given the proper permissions.

Councillor Douglas acknowledged the years of work that have been put in to the Committee and noted that she had been lucky to be appointed as Chair. Councillor Douglas advised that she had enjoyed meeting all the people involved and had enjoyed her part in it and that she still delighted in walking around the Wood. Councillor Douglas thanked everyone who had been involved over the years, including Council officers and other members of the Committee. Councillor Douglas noted that the Wood was a hugely enriching facility and space for people, not only from Helensburgh but for all who choose to visit.