

DUCHESS WOOD LOCAL NATURE RESERVE COMMITTEE

10 February 2015

NOTICE OF MEETING

A meeting of the **DUCHESS WOOD LOCAL NATURE RESERVE COMMITTEE** will be held in the **BRAEHOLM, 31E MONTROSE STREET, HELENSBURGH** on **TUESDAY, 17 FEBRUARY 2015** at **10:00 AM**, which you are requested to attend.

BUSINESS

1. APOLOGIES

2. MINUTE

The Minute of the previous Duchess Woods Committee meeting held on 18 November 2014. (Pages 1 - 8)

3. LOMOND SCHOOL PROPOSAL FOR A FOREST SCHOOL SITE (Pages 9 - 12)

4. ENGAGEMENT WITH SCHOOLS/COMMUNITY

(a) Sub Group of Duchess Wood Local Nature Reserve

Minute of meeting held on 12 November 2014 (Pages 13 - 16)

(b) Update on meeting with local teachers

Verbal update by Charlie Cairns

5. FRIENDS OF DUCHESS WOOD REPORTS

(a) Report from Friends of Duchess Wood (Pages 17 - 18)

(b) Funding of Duchess Wood (Pages 19 - 22)

(c) Communication about events

6. EVENTS

(a) Fairy Tale Woods Proposal - Update

Update on the Fairy Tale Woods proposal by Robert Bell, West Highland Photography.

7. ROUTINE MAINTENANCE

Update from Amenity Services (to follow).

8. DEVELOPMENT OF THE WOOD

(a) Duchess Wood Green Gym

Report by Charlie Cairns, Area Manager - Lower Clyde Greenspace

9. ANY OTHER COMPETENT BUSINESS

10. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Councillor Aileen Morton (Chair)

Contact: Theresa McLetchie - Tel: 01436 657621

**MINUTES of MEETING of DUCHESS WOOD LOCAL NATURE RESERVE COMMITTEE held in
the BRAEHOLM, 31E MONTROSE STREET, HELENSBURGH
on TUESDAY, 18 NOVEMBER 2014**

Present:

	(Chair)
	Councillor Aileen Morton
Alastair Macbeth	Secretary of Friends of Duchess Wood
David Lewin	Trustee, Friends of Duchess Wood
Charlie Cairns	Lower Clyde Green Space
Eileen Kay	Argyll and Bute Council
Johanna Urquhart	Principal, Lomond School
Robert Bell	West Highland Photography

1. APOLOGIES

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, and introduced Robert Bell from West Highland Photography.

Apologies for absence were intimated from:-

Stewart Campbell
Stuart McCracken
Morevain Martin
Elizabeth Pryor
Audrey Martin
Charlie McIvor
Iain Wilkinson

2. MINUTE OF DUCHESS WOOD LOCAL NATURE RESERVE - 19/8/2014

The Minute of the previous meeting which was held on 19 August 2014 was approved as a true record.

3. EVENTS

(a) UPDATE ON RECENT EVENTS

Alastair Macbeth affirmed that the recent event held in the Wood by Helensburgh Amateur Athletic Club (HAAC) had been very successful and that the clear up process had been well managed..He also confirmed that the annual Zombie event had taken place without issue.

(b) ENCHANTED FOREST PROPOSAL

The Committee gave consideration to a proposal from Robert Bell, West Highland Photography in which he outlined plans to create an attraction in Duchess Wood which would be similar to the existing Enchanted Forest attraction in Pitlochry.

Further discussion followed in regards the commercial aspect of the

project and to whom the responsibility of both Health and Safety and Public Liability insurance would be incurred. Mr Bell clarified that responsibility of both Health and Safety and insurance would hopefully be delegated to a commercial organisation. He continued that marshals would be in place to supervise the operation and to ensure that no-one got lost or floundered in the Wood and a counting procedure would be instigated to ensure accountability.

He confirmed that if the proposal was agreed, then he anticipated the event would run in October/November and continue for 9 days to include 2 weekends. Access would be during the hours of darkness to maximise the effect of the creative lighting.

Mr Bell continued that ticket sales would be via internet booking with perhaps a local outlet in Helensburgh to enable people to purchase tickets. Mr Macbeth drew attention to the 4 entry points to the Duchess Wood and Mr Bell confirmed that marshals would be in place to collect tickets at these points. He addressed freedom of access issues and clarified that event access would only pertain during the hours of darkness when less people use the Wood. The Chair suggested that a portion of the Wood could be segmented for dog walker's usage if the project progressed.

Charlie Cairns drew attention to the implication of financial risk and stressed the importance of the Committee over viewing budget figures before making a decision.

Decision

The Committee agreed to support the 'Fairy Tale Woods' project in principle and requested that Robert Bell attend the Duchess Woods Committee meeting on 17 February 2015 with an update. The Committee further agreed that Mr Bell would attend the Duchess Woods Committee meeting scheduled for 19 May 2015 to present a full Business Plan for the Committee's formal consideration.

4. ENGAGEMENT WITH SCHOOLS/COMMUNITY

The group considered a report from Eileen Kay, Community Learning and Development which outlined the objectives of the Sub Group and highlighted relevant actions to be undertaken by group members.

Discussion followed and the Committee acknowledged the impact of transportation costs for local primary schools on their already straightened budgets. The Chair emphasised the need to promote Duchess Woods and encourage local schools to use the Woods.

Johanna Urquhart confirmed the need for schools to utilise their local environment and enquired on the possibility of the Wood being mapped for orienteering. Mr Macbeth confirmed that this exercise had already been undertaken by Lomond School.

David Lewin commented that perhaps the Fairy Tale Woods event could perhaps be a 'springboard' for local children to make more use of the Wood.

The Chair put forward the suggestion of a Schools representative on the sub-group but Ms Kay drew attention to the difficulty of teaching staff

being released during the school day to attend meetings.

Decision

The Committee agreed:

1. That the Sub-group would consider further options and bring these to the next Duchess Woods meeting scheduled for February 2015
2. That the Chair would make contact with Anne Milne, Head Teacher at Rhu to ask if representatives of Duchess Wood Local Nature Reserve Committee (DWLNRC) could attend a Head Teachers Cluster meeting with a view to determine how best to promote Duchess Wood.

5. FRIENDS OF DUCHESS WOOD REPORT

The Committee considered a report which outlined the work undertaken by Friends of Duchess Wood (FODW).

Alastair Macbeth tabled the Friends of Duchess Wood (FODW) Members Newsletter and enquired from the Committee their preference on the format in which they received (FODW) updates.

Decision

The Committee agreed

1. To note the report.
2. That both FODW reports would be included in future Agenda packs

6. LOMOND SCHOOL PROPOSAL FOR A FOREST SCHOOL SITE

The group gave consideration to a report from Lomond School which outlined their proposal for a Forest School site in Duchess Wood.

Johanna Urquhart spoke to the proposal and Mr Macbeth drew attention to the site of the proposed Forest School and stated that this was a different site to the original one. Charlie Cairns affirmed that if this was in fact the case, then the Committee may require to give this further discussion.

Decision

The Committee agreed:-

1. To support the Lomond School proposal for a Forest Schools site in Duchess Woods, in principle, subject to confirmation from Argyll and Bute Legal Department and Luss Estates.
2. That a visit to the proposed site would be undertaken by the Duchess Wood Committee early in Spring 2015.

7. DEVELOPMENT OF THE WOOD

(a) DUCHESS WOOD GREEN GYM

The group considered a report from Charlie Cairns, Area Manager - Lower Clyde Greenspace which provided an update to the group on various initiatives within Duchess Wood.

Green Gym

Charlie Cairns outlined dates for the Green Gym:

To commence	-	4 December 2014
Finish	-	12 March 2015

The leader would be Anna Hamilton.

Further discussion followed in regards what arrangements were in place to get referrals from the relevant medical professionals. Charlie Cairns confirmed that he was meeting with Sam Campbell, NHS Health Improvement Team to take this forward effectively and also to disseminate promotional material to local surgeries.

Employability Team

Charlie Cairns highlighted that time constraints with the Employability team meant they would be unable to undertake work at the bridge west of the Pony Field.

David Lewin drew attention to forthcoming work being undertaken in that area by the Community Pay Back Team and he enquired if funding could be provided to meet the cost of materials. Charlie Cairns advised that David should make contact with Stuart McCracken, Argyll and Bute Amenity Performance Manager for the local area in regards funding.

Decision

The Committee agreed to note the report.

8. ROUTINE MAINTENANCE

(a) UPDATE FROM AMENITY SERVICES

The Chair advised that apologies had been received from Stuart McCracken and outlined recent work which had been undertaken by the Amenity Services Team in the Duchess Wood.

This included:-

Japanese Knotweed had been sprayed again since the last meeting
Hire of a cherry picker for the removal of branches at the Garage location at Duchess Wood had been programmed.

The branches to be pruned back from above the asbestos roofs of the garages and lowered to ground level on site.

It had been confirmed that the afore-mentioned work would be carried out in the next 4 weeks.

Decision

The Committee agreed to note the update.

(b) HEALTH AND SAFETY ISSUES

Alastair Macbeth informed the group of a forthcoming Health and Safety Training event scheduled for February 2015.

Decision

The Committee agreed that this would be forwarded to Tom Murphy, Streetscene Area Manager for information.

(c) ADDITIONAL BIN REQUEST

Alastair Macbeth drew attention to the need for an additional bin near to the garages entry point of the Wood.

Decision

The Committee agreed that Alastair Macbeth would formally email Stuart McCracken to review this request for an additional bin.

9. ANY OTHER COMPETENT BUSINESS

David Lewin enquired if the Chair, Councillor Morton would kindly attend a photo shoot when the new information notice boards are situated in Duchess Woods. The Chair agreed to this request.

He continued that when the excavation work was being undertaken at the streams, then the area would be closed for access and the area would be marshalled.

Charlie Cairns drew attention to the number of issues which had been raised concerning dogs and suggested that the Committee should consider taking action such as running a training/awareness course for dog owners. The issue of commercial dog walkers was also highlighted and it was agreed to target this group too. David Lewin agreed to take this issue forward in the first instance, as one of his FODW colleagues was a dog trainer.

The Chair highlighted that it would be necessary to advise Network Rail of the changing usage in the Wood if the Lomond School Forest School site was formally agreed by the Committee.

Decision:

The Committee agreed that an item around the potential for taking a more pro-active approach to issues with dogs in the Wood come to a future meeting. David Lewin would be involved in taking this issue forward.

10. MEETING DATES - 2015

The group gave consideration to the proposed meeting dates for 2015.

The group agreed to the following meeting dates for 2015:-

17 February 2015 - Braeholm (venue)

19 May 2015 - Braeholm (venue)

18 August 2015 - Venue to be confirmed

17 November 2015 - Venue to be confirmed

The Chair thanked everyone for attending the meeting and providing informative updates and reports.

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Lomond School Proposal for a Forest School site, Duchess Wood, Helensburgh**Forest School**

The aim of Forest School is to work with a range of individuals in the outdoors over a period of time, introducing responsible risk-taking and fostering achievement in all participants.

Children are supported in their learning through a holistic approach which encourages the exploration of the outdoor environment and an appreciation for nature. Forest school leaders use learning and teaching strategies which develop confidence, emotional resilience, independence, language and communication skills and increase levels of physical activity and mental well-being.

The key features of Forest School include:

- the use of a woodland area
- regular and frequent time outdoors
- an ideal tool for delivering the Scottish Curriculum for Excellence, encapsulated in the four capacities: Successful Learners, Confident Individuals, Responsible Citizens and Effective Contributors
- opportunities to meet experiences and outcomes across all areas of the curriculum
- the freedom to explore sense of self and place using multiple senses
- a high adult to pupil ratio
- qualified Forest School Leaders (Level 3 Open Award)

The use of a woodland-learning environment is complimentary, not separate to traditional classroom and playground learning and is highly child-centred. It can make a significant contribution to a pupil's environmental awareness and respect for their surroundings, including an increased knowledge of local flora and fauna.

Role of the Forest School Leader

Sessions are run by a Forest School Leader who is responsible for compiling the ecological impact assessments and risk assessments of the Forest School site and activities. Responsibility is taken to ensure that child protection and health and safety procedures are adhered to and every leader is First Aid qualified. Currently, three members of Lomond School staff are undergoing Forest School training and this is fully assessed by an accredited Forest School Instructor.

Forest School Programme

Forest School is not an actual place but a specific ethos. It is a way of working with learners in an outdoor natural space for an extended period of time and a philosophy built around a programme of engaging activities.

Prior to starting a Forest School programme, the Forest School leaders will:

- Explain what Forest School is and discuss what sort of activities the participants will be doing with the learners, staff, parents and those responsible for the site
- Complete an Environmental Impact Assessment to ensure that the site will not be irreparably damaged by the running of sessions

- Compile a site risk assessment to ensure the site is safe to visit
- Under the supervision of the qualified leader, groups of approximately 10 – 15 pupils will visit the site on a regular basis throughout the year, except in extreme conditions. The leader will risk assess the planned activities for each session

Lomond School propose to use the site on a daily basis between 8.30am and 3.30pm. Nursery sessions will take place in the mornings with access available for the Primary Department in the afternoons. Activities may also extend to after school sessions.

A programme of Forest School activities will typically include:

- games, such as hide and seek
- building small, temporary shelters using tarpaulins or fallen materials
- woodland art
- tying knots
- nature activities
- using Kelly Kettles (self-contained, portable devices for boiling water using twigs or other small, combustible materials)
- wood carving projects
- tool use (bow saws, loppers, billhooks and knives)

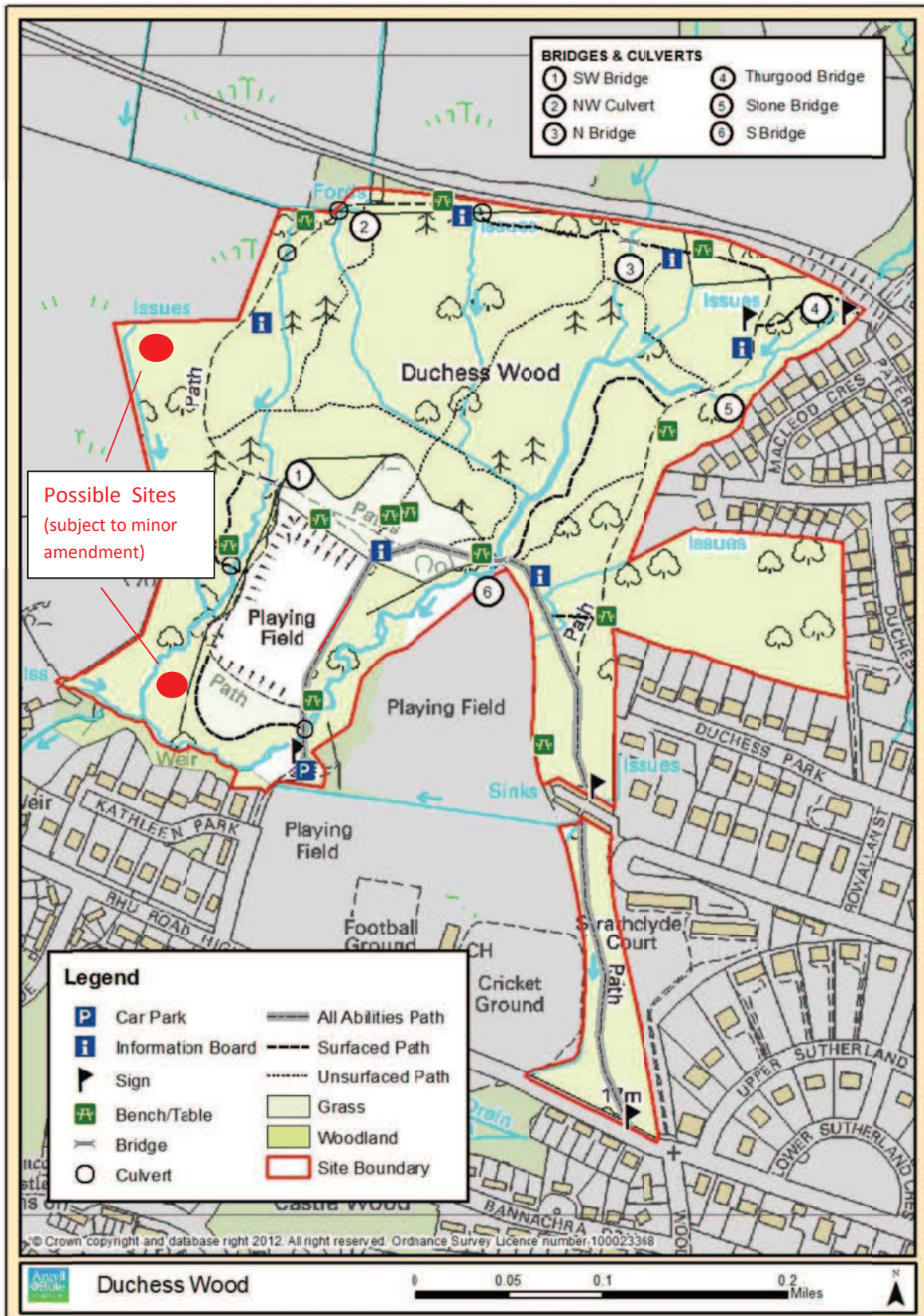
Fire lighting and cooking may be gradually introduced in time alongside strict safety policies and procedures, and all traces of any fires are removed. Fires are always small, manageable and appropriately sited.

The use of a fire circle (a circle of logs with a central fire pit) forms an integral part of Forest School sessions as a place to sit and cook. A soil assessment is carried out before the construction of the circle and training guidelines followed when preparing and maintaining the site. All rubbish and food debris will be removed at the end of each session and the area surrounding the circle returned to its natural state. Any natural materials used during sessions are gathered from the forest floor. Non-native species, such as sycamore, are generally used for any carving activities. The Lomond School Games Hall provides a base within close proximity of the woods for storing equipment and this will be taken to and removed from the site before and after every session.

As part of its strategic planning, Lomond School is fully committed to extending outdoor learning opportunities for its pupils. A Forest School site within Duchess Wood would further build on Lomond School's links with the community and enable pupils to be part of the promotion of the woods as an area for nature conservation, recreation and education. Furthermore, this initiative allows young people to actively engage with safeguarding the woodland environment, support surveys and take part in closely monitoring their impact as well as those of others. The school fully recognises the expectations of the Scottish Outdoor Access Code and the implications within the context of a Local Nature Reserve.

Lomond School would make available site assessments to the Friends of Duchess Woods and welcome visits from members and or other interested parties to their Forest School sessions. Any alteration to the use of the site beyond any agreement made would be fully discussed with the Friends of Duchess Wood prior to implementation as the initial programme naturally evolves. Any costs associated with the setting up and maintenance of the Forest School site would be met by Lomond School. This will include an annual tree inspection of the Forest School site with any associated work carried out by tree surgeons. The school holds Public Liability insurance, as well as Personal Accident insurance for all of its pupils and staff.

LOCATION OF PROPOSED FOREST SCHOOL SITE



Appendix to Report

Position statement relating to Argyll and Bute Council and Luss Estates

The LNR Committee had approved the concept of the Outdoor Nursery, subject to feedback and comment from Luss Estates and Argyll & Bute Council.

Luss Estates

Contacted for comments in role as landowner. Very enthusiastic response, happy to see the scheme progress. They have suggested that, in terms of formality of paperwork, that a simple exchange of letters would suffice. They see this as being an excellent example of the positive role Duchess Wood has as a community facility.

Their only concern was around the issue of risk and liability, and this matter should be addressed in the exchange of letters. They would be content for an annual woodland survey of some description to be carried out to facilitate this.

Argyll and Bute Council

Legal Services

A very thorough response from the Argyll and Bute Council Legal Service indicated that the Outdoor Nursery would be beyond the scope of the current Management Agreement between Luss Estates and the Council. However it was further noted that the access provision with the Land Reform Act gave the school the legal right to carry out the work, and that therefore the Outdoor Nursery could proceed with the agreement of both the Council and the landowner, but without the need for an additional written, or amended, agreement.

Access Team

The Council's Access Team concurred with the viewpoint of their Legal team. However, the Access Team did suggest some sort of periodic, formal monitoring procedure to be adopted between the school and the Council, mainly to assess the impact, if any, of the Forest School on other woodland users. This could easily be accommodated within an amended proposal paper, and it is suggested that a formal communication procedure between the school and the Council is also agreed.

Legal Services

Further guidance from the Legal team was sought in terms of the level of authority required to allow the proposal to be approved. In their view, the approval of the LNR Committee would be the most appropriate mechanism. This however would be subject to continuing the current levels of maintenance, coupled with an additional annual tree inspection

Present	Eileen Kay Veronique Cassels Charlie Cairns Alastair MacBeth	Argyll & Bute Council Lomond School Lower Clyde Greenspace Friends of Duchess Wood	
Apologies	Stewart Campbell Gemma Peace(will not attend further meetings) as Lomond School will be represented by Veronique Cassels	Friends of Duchess Wood	
Items from previous meeting	<p>Liaison roll with Primary Schools: Eileen Kay will be the liaison link for the Helensburgh and Lomond Schools to help promote the Duchess Wood and the activities which are offered by the FODW.</p> <p>Distinction between sub group and all school meeting: Discussion took place regarding the role of the sub group. It was agreed to bring this to the meeting on the 18th November 2014 to clarify with the chair the role and duration of the sub group.</p> <p>Purpose of local Nature Reserve: Alastair wanted to clarify the purpose of the nature reserve and to minute that importance of the work carried out in the wood which is biodiversity, education and research and tranquil recreation. Alastair also wished to clarify the FODW would continue with its existing educational work.</p>		
Actions from Minutes	<p>AMacB Made contact with David Robertson of the Forestry Commission and spoke with him regarding the Educational Resource and who would now be the contact person who could assist with the update of the Education Resource. It was left that if the subgroup needed assistance then David would give the contact person. It was decided that if would be appropriate to speak with the representative from the Forestry Commission and Alastair was tasked with doing this.</p>		AMacB
	<p>Gemma contacted Mrs Hughes from Rhu Primary who was on the initially development group for the resource. Mrs Hughes informed her that the task had taken 18months to complete and had been funded through the Forestry Commission and Lower Clyde Green Space It was also highlighted that there was no measure of how well the resource had been used by schools .Mrs Hughes indicated that with the Curriculum for Excellence now being the driver in schools that the resource in its format is now outdated.</p> <p>As a result of these findings Alastair asked the group if it would be correct for the FODW to take down the related Marker Posts as they were not in the best of condition. The group agreed that this was acceptable.</p>		
	Eileen- checked the electronic copy of the Educational Resource and found that it was exactly the same document that Alastair had brought in a paper format.		
	Veronique – had viewed Riding Sawmill Video and in principle there was nothing wrong with it. However in its current video format not many schools would be able to access it. There may have been changes since the video was made and Veronique was asked to enquire from the		VC

	Sawmill if the content was still relevant.	
	Eileen had e-mailed Gemma and Veronique the photos that Alastair had sent reference the school children's visit to Duchess Wood.	
Further Discussion Points	<p>EK/CC/VC had brought some possible website links which could be used by schools to access resources and give ideas of awards which young people could undertake if they carried out activities in the wood. This is an option which could be considered rather than the Education Resource pack which is in place at the moment.</p> <p>Alastair indicated that the DOE was not on the web links and also that there appeared be a gap regarding how the secondary school would be made aware of the opportunities available through using the wood.</p> <p>Eileen indicated that the list was not exhaustive and that if this was the route that would be used to promote the educational resources for the wood that all links would have to be investigated and Charlie suggested that a member of the FODW could highlight areas where specific projects could be carried out and this could be given with the link and brief overview of what each link was.</p> <p>As a result of the discussion EK will ensure the Bill Campbell Youth Service Worker for Hermitage Academy is made aware of the resources and opportunities which are available to young people through activities in the wood. EK will also highlight the wood to Nona Thomas (DOE) Co-ordinator for Argyll and Bute.</p> <p>CC agreed to take all of the links suggested and to divide them into appropriate sections e.g. awards, good practice examples.</p>	EK CC
Promotion of Duchess Wood	It was noted that in reality Duchess Wood needs to be promoted to schools and schools should be made of the wood as a resource to which could support them to allow young people to access accredited awards and outdoor learning opportunities.	
Local schools Use of Duchess Wood	<p>The sub group believe that a member of staff from one of the local Primary school should be asked to part of the group to support the group to ensure that if they did take of option of the on line link resources, it would be tailored to the needs of the schools and fit in with the Curriculum for Excellence.</p> <p>Eileen to investigate the possibility of an education representative joining the group.</p> <p>Eileen had spoken to some schools regarding their use of Duchess Wood</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kilcreggan- never used the woods- transport costs would be a barrier • Garelochhead-have used the wood in 2003/2005 as part of a project-costs were covered by a grant- transport costs would be a barrier at this time • Rhu- have used the wood recently Mr Dickie has been to the wood twice in recent times • Luss- have never used the wood because they have their own wood behind the school-if they were to use Duchess Wood-transport costs would be a barrier. 	EK
Insurance/risk Assessments	Alastair highlighted the amount of paper work that was needed for commercial use of the wood and wondered how the schools deal	

with this.
Veronique gave an overview of the risk assessments that schools have to carry out before using a place such as Duchess Wood. VC will e-mail the members of the group out a copy of CFE Outdoor Learning risk assessment.

Agenda	It was agreed that EK would e-mail the sub group members a week before the next meeting to ask for agenda items	EK
Date of next meeting	Wednesday 21 st January 2015 10.00am Kirkmichael Centre	

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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

Argyll and Bute Council: Duchess Wood Local Nature Reserve Committee

Queries about the financial position in relation to work in the Wood

Paper by the Friends of Duchess Wood (FODW)

Introduction

1. This paper is the result of FODW's continuing uncertainty about the current financial arrangements for Duchess Wood (DW). This issue has been discussed on a number of occasions, but some issues remains unclear, and this uncertainty is inhibiting action. We would be grateful for further discussion and clarification.
2. We have re-examined the management documents for DW and the minutes of the DWLNRC since its inception. There are three main financial elements:
 - a. The Argyll and Bute Council notional fund (at the last information, £13,500) earmarked by Argyll and Bute Council (A&BC) for Duchess Wood and transferred between financial years.
 - b. Grants to support the 5-year Management Plan, in two categories: major grants sought and managed by A&BC through its agent LCG, and minor grants obtained by FODW.
 - c. Day to day support by A&BC from normal running costs, and from FODW from its own funds

Some background

3. The Management Agreement (signed 10.12.10)

It is worth recalling that the current Management Agreement requires the Authority to undertake, at its own expense, the works specified in Part II of the Schedule. These include (in summary) the maintenance of the car park, various works of woodland management, maintenance of the footpaths; enhancement of facilities, and inspecting trees for signs of disease or damage.

4. The Management Plan (approved 9.10.12)

The Management Plan sets out a wide range of work to be undertaken to deliver the broad requirements of the Management Agreement.

5. The Funding, Implementation and Delivery Plan (never formally approved?)

This sets out in detail the major projects and subsidiary works that will help deliver the Management Plan.

6. Suggested Work Activities (rev 18.2.14)

This paper detailed specific actions which could be undertaken by the different groups active in the Wood.

Maintenance

7. Work in the Wood mainly falls into the categories of maintenance and enhancement, and they frequently overlap. Considering maintenance first -

8. Over the last year or so, A&BC has

- a. Continued to uplift from the rubbish bins
- b. Filled potholes in the car park
- c. Dealt with a partly collapsed tree root plate beside the northern path
- d. Dealt with pine trees in the NE corner of the "hammerhead", at the corner of Duchess Drive and MacLeod Drive; a part fallen tree half way up the east path; a tree which fell onto the Thurgood bridge; and with a tree which fell across the southern path leading to Rhu Road Higher.
- e. Worked towards eradication of Japanese Knotweed
- f. Through Lower Clyde Greenspace initiated two TCV Green Gym events.

9. Before the signing of the new Management Agreement in December 2010, the late Cllr Al Reay reached an agreement within the Council that in addition to more routine work, a sum of £14,000 would be set aside to support maintenance work in the Wood. This was to be a one-off sum but could be carried across financial years. This sum was then supplemented by £3,500 transferred from LCG.

10. At the DWLNRC meeting on 6 August 2012, the Chair reported that this fund was now "notional money" which could be drawn on as needed to meet management requirements for the Wood. A register of expenditure was being maintained and would be circulated. FODW expressed concern over the nature of this fund and the continued lack of clarity over how it should be managed. The DWLNRC meeting on 8 November 2013 considered a report from the Service Development Officer outlining the fund "which was created to allow for maintenance required on an exceptional basis", and setting out clearly the sums which has already been spent (on culvert work and contractors for storm damage work). The paper confirmed that the overall budget then stood at £13,500. The paper also summarised some of the work which it was anticipated would be undertaken, and the meeting agreed that further clarity should be sought on what constituted "exceptional". In addition the meeting agreed that the maintenance of the culvert and the all-abilities path should be paid for by the Council.

11. FODW pointed out other commitments which had been made in the past and a further joint visit to the Wood took place in September 2014 when four priorities were identified:

- a. The trees overhanging the Strathclyde Court garages (both sides)
- b. The three large ash trees (and possibly others) beside the back garden fence of No 22 Duchess Park
- c. The dead sycamore beside the bench at the top of the east side main path (topping and taking off branches)
- d. The erosion of the downstream roadway over the culvert leading north from the car park

None of this work has yet been undertaken, and it would be useful to have a further update on any proposed work and any difficulties which have emerged in the management of the budgets. Other longer term issues were also discussed such as general boundary issues, including the stability of the pine group in the NE corner of the hammerhead area, and some of the pines in the main pine area north of Rhu Road Higher, especially those close to Strathclyde Court; and clearing some of the sycamore-dominant areas (although this work includes elements of enhancement).

12. The question of the all-abilities path has exercised FODW a great deal, and although a commitment appears to have been made at the November 2013 meeting that this would be taken on by the Council, nothing appears to have happened. Because this is maintenance of an existing facility it has been difficult to identify other funding sources although FODW has recently secured a part contribution to the reinstatement of the path and is still actively searching for others. The all-abilities path is important for all wheelchair/baby carriage users and those with restricted mobility; the flower walk which FODW has devised and marked also mostly follows this route.

13. The replacement of the SW bridge has also been the subject of much discussion and in the autumn it seemed that a new bridge might be the best solution. However further site visits to evaluate the topography and consideration of the needs of horse riders has convinced FODW and Community Payback staff (who could carry out the work) that a culvert here would be the best option. When a bridge was being considered, Council staff agreed to share the material costs with FODW. Now that a culvert is seen as the best solution, the costs of infill material and stone for the facing are the main barriers to progress, and again it would be helpful to know if this cost could be met from Council funds. This issue is important if the Wood is to be used for a light display and would also improve access for an outdoor nursery.

14. More generally, FODW has been concerned that it has funded what is effectively maintenance work from its own funds or small grants – for example the reinstatement of the steps on either side of the Thurgood Bridge and the fencing beside the car park. Most of these tasks could not have been undertaken without the assistance of the Community Payback team. Perhaps if the mechanisms for securing Council support were clearer, this would not have been necessary.

15. In summary then it would be helpful to understand the position in relation to whether the Council fund can support the following action (it is assumed that Knotweed eradication will continue):

- a. Deal with all the priorities in para 11 above**
- b. Reinstate the surface of the all-abilities path**
- c. Provide the materials for the construction of a new culvert over the burn in the SW corner**
- d. Deal with other sensitive boundary issues.**
- e. Although the car park surface was improved last year, it continues to deteriorate and a more permanent solution is needed (and this is a specific condition in the Management Agreement).**

Enhancement

16. Although enhancement is an integral part of the Management Agreement, A&BC has always said that any major enhancements can only be done with external financial support, and the excellent network of paths which exist in the Wood and around Helensburgh are testament to the success of this policy in past years. However many of the earlier sources of funding appear to have dried up and other potential sources such as the National Lottery appear not to be available because the Wood is privately owned (though publicly managed). It has also been accepted that major grants would be sought by LCG acting on behalf of A&BC.

17. The Management Plan recognises the need for professional forestry advice in establishing the best action to improve the Wood, and FODW believes that this would still be a valuable input. This has been emphasised by the most recent high winds which have brought down more trees in the Wood, and the cumulative effect of the many storms since May 2011 is that parts of the Wood look increasingly unkempt and unmanaged. In one small area (one of those identified as a possible glade) 15 quite substantial trees are now lying fully or partly down, and just to the south another 15 have fallen. The Wood is well in excess of the three fallen trees per hectare minimum suggested to help promote biodiversity.

18. The Management Plan, the Funding, Implementation and Delivery Plan, and the Suggested Work Activities paper all recognise and support the major objective of returning the Wood to a more native composition through selective felling and replanting, and areas for the creation of glades have been clearly identified. But this work cannot be undertaken without significant financial support (indicative costs were obtained earlier). **It is not clear to FODW whether any major sources of funding are available. It would be helpful if LCG or Council officers could confirm if any such sources currently exist or are about to become available again, and if any do exist, what action is being taken, or needs to be taken, to try to secure funding for a major woodland management and enhancement initiative.** FODW would support any such initiative; much of the work that FODW undertakes is effectively day-to-day management of the Wood and enhancement of its facilities.

19. We would be grateful for further discussion and clarification.

Stewart Campbell, Chair FODW

5 February 2015