

**MINUTES of MEETING of DUCHESS WOOD LOCAL NATURE RESERVE COMMITTEE held
in the LOMOND SCHOOL, HELENSBURGH
on TUESDAY, 29 JANUARY 2019**

Present: Councillor Lorna Douglas (Chair)

Attending: Melissa Stewart, Area Governance Officer, Argyll & Bute Council
Mhairi Gardiner, Development Officer, Argyll & Bute Council
Sean McCay, Land Agent, Luss Estates
Johann Urquhart, Principal Teacher of Lomond School
Martin Gardiner, Secretary – Friends of Duchess Woods
Matt Offord, Chair – Friends of Duchess Woods

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Donald McAllister and Ailsa Cunningham, both of Argyll & Bute Council.

2. MINUTE OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING OF DUCHESS WOOD LOCAL NATURE RESERVE HELD ON 13 NOVEMBER 2018

The Minute of the previous meeting held on 13 November 2018 was approved as a correct record.

Arising from item 9 (Any Other Competent Business), Melissa Stewart advised that this work was ongoing and that she had recently been in touch with Stewart Campbell to progress this matter further.

3. ARGYLL AND BUTE COUNCIL MAINTENANCE UPDATE

Ailsa Cunningham had intimated her apologies on the morning of the meeting and no update regarding the budget, or involvement of the Service, was provided.

Matt Offord flagged the boundary concerns previously identified by Friends of Duchess Woods, commenting that this would be a big issue in terms of the decision recently made by the Council not to renew the Management Agreement when it expired. The main issue was in regard to the East boundary as there are trees and branches which have the potential to cause damage to properties in this area. Sean McCay commented that it was important that the Council meet their obligations in terms of the existing agreement.

4. FRIENDS OF DUCHESS WOODS

(a) Introduction of Matt Offord, Chair of Friends of Duchess Woods

Matt Offord introduced himself to the Group advising that he had been elected Chair of Friends of Duchess Woods (FODW) at the 2018 AGM. He spoke of his history with FODW having served 10 years on the Group

as a volunteer, including a phase as interim Chair. He commented that the view expressed at the recent Helensburgh and Lomond Area Committee that the woods were “nice to have” was disappointing to FODW as their opinion is that this is an important part of the amenity of the Town.

The Chair thanked Matt for his introduction.

(b) **Update on Recent Activity**

The Committee considered a report which provided an update from Friends of Duchess Wood (FODW) on their activities since the last meeting took place.

Martin highlighted 3 aspects of the report to the Committee. The first regarding boundaries (noting that this had been raised earlier); the second regarding recent incidents of malicious damage and movement of benches; and the third which was an incident with a boisterous dog resulting in personal injury to a lady.

Following a request for an update on discussions with Persimmons, the Chair advised that no decision would be made on the way forward until a report had been received from SEPA. The Council’s Biodiversity Officer, Marina Curran-Colthart was involved in the matter and would be invited to attend the next meeting in the hope that she could provide an update on any long term implications.

It was noted that Luss Estates had not been contacted by the Council regarding this matter and agreed that Sean McCay’s details would be passed to Marina.

Decision

To endorse the contents of the submitted report and provide contact details for Luss Estates (and a minute of the meeting) to the Council’s Biodiversity Officer.

(Ref: Report by Friends of Duchess Woods Secretary, Martin Grafton)

5. UPDATE ON WIAT FUNDING

Mhairi Gardiner, Development Officer gave a brief verbal update on the WIAT advising that she had been liaising with David Lewin (FODW) regarding Forestry Commission (FC) funding. She had advised David that FC funding was now fully committed until April 2020 and that this would be the earliest that any funds utilised could be claimed back.

Mhairi invited the Committee to agree to use around £700 from the Urban Woodland Management Plan (UWMP) monies to enable a survey to be carried out, advising that a procurement process would require to be undertaken by the council. She confirmed that the funds used would be claimed back.

Decision

The Committee agreed to authorised the use of approximately £700 for the purposes of conducting a site survey, noting that the expenditure could be reclaimed from 1st April 2020.

6. FUTURE OF DUCHESS WOODS

Mhairi Gardiner, Development Officer, tabled a report for consideration of the Committee.

Discussion followed on the report recommendations with concerns being expressed that there was no obvious group who may be interested in a community buyout or entering into a Management Agreement with the landowner. In terms of gauging interest it was agreed that the engagement event was worth progressing, subject to being clear about timescales, attendance etc (and an invitation being extended to the MOD).

Decision

The Committee agreed:

1. To note the contents of the tabled report;
2. To take the actions outlined in paragraphs 5.5 to 5.8 of the tabled report;
3. To take an active role in publicising the opportunity, engaging with interested parties and supporting the actions identified at decision 2;
4. That the MOD be invited to the engagement event; and
5. That the Development Officer would circulate proposals for the event to members of the Committee for feedback/approval.

(Ref: Report by Development Officer, dated January 2019, tabled)

7. TOP DOG EVENT

The Chair provided the Committee with an update on the plans for the Top Dog Event which would take place on 31 March 2019. She advised of the plans being put in place and the agencies and businesses that had offered their support. Last year's event had been a success and it was hoped that this year's event could build upon that. A gazebo was required for use on the day and the Chair invited the Committee to ask around to see if one could be borrowed for the day.

Decision

It was agreed that event feedback would be an item on the next agenda.

8. ANY OTHER COMPETENT BUSINESS

Mhairi Gardiner, Development Officer, advised that she had received contact from a group who were keen to conducting some monitoring of Red Squirrels in Duchess Woods. None of the Committee had encountered any Red Squirrels but it was agreed that Mhairi could pass contact details onwards to facilitate contact.

9. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was agreed that the next meeting of the DWLNRC would take place on 30th April 2019 at 10.30am within the Seabank Room, Helensburgh & Lomond Civic Centre.