

**MINUTES of MEETING of DUCHESS WOOD LOCAL NATURE RESERVE COMMITTEE held
in the SEABANK ROOM, HELENSBURGH & LOMOND CIVIC CENTRE, EAST CLYDE
STREET, HELENSBURGH
on TUESDAY, 20 AUGUST 2019**

Present: Councillor Lorna Douglas (Chair)

Attending: Stewart Campbell, Friends of Duchess Woods
Morag Bain, Friends of Duchess Woods
Andy Galloway, Local Democracy Reporter, Helensburgh Advertiser
Simon Stuart, Royal Scottish Forestry Society
Mhairi Gardiner, Development Officer, Argyll & Bute Council
Shona Barton, Area Committee Manager, Argyll & Bute Council
Ailsa Cunningham, Team Leader, Argyll & Bute Council
Marina Curran-Colthart, Biodiversity Officer, Argyll & Bute Council
Keith Robertson, Estate Manager, Lomond School

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from:-

Johann Urquhart, Principal Teacher of Lomond School
Martin Grafton, Secretary, Friends of Duchess Woods
Matt Offord, Chair, Friends of Duchess Woods
Sean McCay, Luss Estates

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were made around the table.

2. MINUTE OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING OF DUCHESS WOOD LOCAL NATURE RESERVE HELD ON 30 APRIL 2019

The Minute of the previous meeting held on 30 April 2019 was approved as a correct record subject to the correction of spelling of Stewart Campbell's name throughout the minutes.

3. DISCUSSION ON CURRENT CLOSURE OF THE WOODS

A number of questions had been submitted by the Friends of Duchess Wood and these formed the basis of the discussion which took place on this item. These questions were as follows:-

- Why the DWLNRC hasn't been consulted and been given sight of the report
- Reason why the Council have shut the Wood and whether this was really necessary
- When remedial work is going to start/complete

- Ongoing access by members of the public to the wood if the wood is really deemed to be unsafe
- Role of the DWLNRC given that the Council have by-passed it in its decision making process

The Committee heard from Ailsa Cunningham who advised that the Council is in a position that we don't want to be in as the Wood is an asset to the town. After the survey was undertaken by TD Trees, the results of the survey were of surprise but the feedback from the survey was that there were a number of dangerous trees in the Wood and the recommendation from the report was that the Wood should be closed on the grounds of public safety. There was no alternative and the Wood will remain closed until such times as these trees are made safe. The survey highlighted dangerous trees and this work will be carried out by qualified contractors meaning that the Wood will be safer and fit for purpose again. The Council has made application for WIAT funding to carry out the necessary work, but any ad hoc work carried out could jeopardise the future funding. It was noted that a copy of the report has been submitted as part of the funding application. Notices have been put up in the Wood to advise of the closure, and if the public ignore these warnings then the Council is not accountable.

The Chair advised that the Committee had agreed for the survey to be undertaken at the meeting in January as part of the WIAT funding process. She highlighted her concerns over the lack of communication in regard to the closure and in terms of timelines for any reopening of the Wood. She noted that there are a number of activities which take place in the Wood and that it is used extensively by Lomond School and other groups. It was noted that if there had been the opportunity to meet to discuss the report this may have alleviated some of the current issues.

It was noted that the decision to close the Wood was taken by senior officers in Amenity Services following review of the report by the contractors.

Stewart Campbell advised that the Friends of Duchess Wood were aware that there are a number of trees which require work and that this had been relayed to the Council. He highlighted that since no one has been able to have sight of the report, there was no opportunity to provide feedback on the survey as to whether it was realistic and accurate. It was noted that the Friends of Duchess Wood were in disagreement that there couldn't have been consultation with the Committee prior to the closure decision being taken.

The Chair advised on correspondence from Luss Estates who were unable to attend the meeting but had expressed concern over the lack of consultation and communication, their expectation of being able to see a clear timeline, concerns that the responsibility for upholding access to the Wood is not being met and that in terms of the management agreement the full liability for personal injury with people accessing the woods lies with Argyll and Bute Council.

Simon Stuart advised that when the Council are given a report which says that the Wood is unsafe and has to be closed they would have no option but to act immediately.

Keith Robertson from Lomond School advised that there were a number of signs up and red tape put in place and questioned if the Wood was so unsafe how these had been put up. He asked if there could be the opportunity for suitably qualified personnel from the school to have access to the Wood. He noted that the School is currently

faced with a legal and insurance conundrum as they cannot instruct employees to have access to the Wood. Currently there is no rugby or cross country being offered in the School and the forest schools programme cannot take place. Information is key and with co-operation there could be a suitable compromise agreed. At the moment the School is in breach of its lease with Luss Estates due to not being able to have access through the Wood.

In regard to the Terms of Reference it was noted that the Council can act without decision from the Committee if the matter relates to safety.

The Committee noted that the priority should be to get access made available for the School. All were in agreement that the way forward is to ensure that the Committee is kept up to date with all information.

Decision

The Committee agreed:-

1. That a request would be made on behalf of the Committee to the Council for a copy of the report from TD Trees to be made available and circulated;
2. That if the report is available then a meeting is arranged and attendees should include the Chair, Luss Estates, Friends of Duchess Wood and Lomond School, with an update on this meeting to be provided to the next meeting of the Committee; and
3. Once a decision is received in regard to the WIAT application that a timeline for work to be carried out is drafted and circulated to the Committee.

4. ARGYLL AND BUTE COUNCIL MAINTENANCE UPDATE

Ailsa Cunningham advised that once the remedial works are completed to make the woods safe that Amenity Services will undertake any other repairs as necessary. It was noted that it would be good to have an update on the bridge position for the next meeting and that the recent vandalism in the park will require work to repair.

Decision

The Committee noted the update provided and agreed that an update on the bridge would be provided at the next meeting.

(Ref: Verbal update by Amenity Services, Team Leader)

5. FRIENDS OF DUCHESS WOODS ACTIVITY UPDATE

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

Stewart Campbell highlighted the award of £350 from the Waitrose Green Token Scheme, and advised that a decision was still to be made on how this funding would be utilised. Stewart also advised that he was still working to source footfall counters for the Wood, with Ailsa Cunningham advising on contact details for the Hermitage Park staff.

The report also referenced the recent difficulties with Persimmon Homes dumping spoil in the Wood. The Council's Biodiversity Officer, Marina Curran-Colthart was in attendance and provided an update on the current position. It was noted that Persimmon Homes have removed the spoil from the site and it had been agreed to leave the ground for the moment to see if it would regenerate. Marina advised that when the spoil had been removed the ground had been turned over with a number of bluebell bulbs being noted. In response to a question regarding possible community contribution as a result of this incident, Marina advised that Persimmon Homes were open to discussions around what this could entail and advised the Friends of Duchess Woods to make contact with them to discuss.

Decision

The Committee agreed to endorse the contents of the submitted report.

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

6. UPDATE ON WIAT FUNDING

Mhairi Gardiner, Development Officer gave a brief verbal update on the position with the current applications. As noted previously an application has been submitted to assist with the costs of the remedial works required in the Wood. Mhairi advised that the Council has also submitted an application for Sustainable Management of Forest Funding and that this was an annual payment of £1119.90 covering the period from 2010 to 2024. It was noted that funding awards were retrospective.

Decision

The Committee noted the update and that updates would be provided to future meetings.

(Ref: Verbal Update from Economic Development Officer)

7. ANY OTHER COMPETENT BUSINESS

Stewart Campbell advised of a request from Network Rail to put some of the tree cuttings from work around the West Highland Line across in the Duchess Wood. It was noted that the Council was happy with the proposed action.

Simon Stuart provide the Committee with a brief overview of the work carried out by the Royal Scottish Forestry Society. He advised of an ongoing project whereby they hoped to have a network of around 150 areas of wood across different areas to enable good practice to be shared around different types of woodland models. He noted that there were many different types of models with woodlands across the country. The Society would come to visit woods and have a discussion around the management arrangements and the type of woodland. It would be the intention to then revisit the woods after a period of 5 or 10 years to see how the management plans are working. The aim is to spread knowledge across Scotland.

It was agreed to invite Simon to a future meeting once the Wood has been reopened.

8. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was agreed that the next meeting of the DWLNRC would take place on 19th November 2019 at 10.30am within either the Lomond School or Helensburgh & Lomond Civic Centre.