

Duchess Wood Local Nature Reserve Committee

Tuesday 17 November 2015

Woodlands In and Around Towns (WIAT) grants and related actions

1. At the last meeting (18 August), this issue was discussed under Agenda Item 4 and considered Charlie Cairns' paper "Funding update/development of the Wood". In relation to action 1, the Management Plan, the draft has now been circulated. This note gives an update on the other actions identified as a result of that discussion.

WIAT

2. Members will recall that the WIAT grant scheme (which has provided funding for the Wood in the past) has been revived this year. This initiative provides grant aid for urban woodland management with the objectives of enhancing the amenity value and biodiversity of urban woodlands. Duchess Wood could benefit from aid under this scheme for activities such as tree thinning/ glade creation, footpath upgrades, signage and tree planting, bridges and small culverts. In early June FODW (Stewart Campbell and David Lewin) had a meeting with Forestry Commission staff to discuss the new scheme and how Duchess Wood might be able to benefit from it. On the following day, Charlie, Stewart, David and Alastair Macbeth met as the DWLNRC sub-committee to discuss the way ahead (Stuart McCracken was unable to attend). Charlie's paper to the last meeting and Alastair's notes summarised the outcome of these discussions. For anyone wanting to know more about WIAT, here is a link to the SG Rural Payments and Services homepage: <https://www.ruralpayments.org/publicsite/futures/topics/all-schemes/forestry-grant-scheme/woodland-improvement-grant/woods-in-and-around-towns/> . You will see that it is quite a complex matter!

3. One of the main issues to emerge from these discussions was that while parts of the WIAT scheme seemed to provide adequate funding, there was a possibility that the part covering tree felling might not meet the cost of the such operations (and see para 6 below for the latest advice). It was decided to examine whether the production and sale of wood fuel/logs from the felling operations could make up the shortfall. David Lewin approached a number of local wood fuel/log sellers and got one positive response from Iain Stewart of Stewart Timber & Forestry near Cumbernauld. A very useful meeting and site visit were held on 28 July with Iain Stewart (IS), and the information obtained is summarised in Annex 1. Iain suggested that it would be worth speaking to a specialist woodfuel/log felling contractor and put us in touch with Simon Lockwood (SL) of Lockwood Forestry Services (LFS). In addition discussions have also held with Diane Oliver and Jon Hollingdale of the Community Woodlands Association who have given advice on WIAT and the preparation of a WIAT-compatible plan. Charlie also had discussions with FCS about the acceptability of the current Management Plan as a WIAT plan, but this seems unlikely, although it should be possible to copy and paste a lot of it. Charlie also confirmed with FCS that any ownership changes after a WIAT grant had been made, would not necessarily affect any continuing WIAT grant.

4. It was not possible to arrange to meet Simon until 18 October, but this too was an interesting and informative visit; the information obtained is summarised in Annex2.

This is a link to a relatively recent article by him on "Managing small woodlands": <http://www.reforestingscotland.org/wordpress1/wordpress1/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Firewood-all1.pdf> which is also reproduced in Annex 3.

5. As a result of these discussions it became clear to us that while in the past we have thought of the timber in the Wood as having little commercial value, in fact a lot of the sycamore and ash which has been concerning us is now an ideal size for extraction and sale as logs. Based on this information, it should be possible to carry out the kind of thinning and felling in several areas of the Wood, which is a core aim of the Management Plan. This could be carried out at no net cost (although probably with upfront costs) and even make a small profit which could be ploughed back into improving and enhancing the Wood further. SL explained that the transport of trees from where they were cut to the storage/uplifting area was a particularly important factor in the economics, but considered that even the trees near the northern boundary could be extracted at reasonable cost. **Luss Estates Company have in the past indicated that they were happy for smaller scale extraction and log sales to go ahead without reference to the company, but it would be helpful to confirm LEC's views on the suggestions in this paper.**

6. The net gain from such operations might have an impact on any WIAT funding for felling, although this is not entirely clear at this stage. Further discussions have been held with FCS and the CWA, and it seems possible that if the trees could be felled at no net cost, funding might **not** be available, but the position is a little obscure. This is the very latest guidance from the FCS (2 November):

The option guidance Woodland Clearance and Extraction and the option guidance for Thinning states:

This item is only available where the net cost of the operation will exceed the standard cost. You must supply such cost projections as supporting information within your application. This should include harvesting and forwarding costs and the value of the product at roadside.

The option guidance for Felling Only –doesn't say anything about costs but states:

....available for the clear felling of trees (greater than six metres in height) or woodland to waste (i.e. timber left on-site) where the removal of a tree crop meets the objectives of the Woodland Improvement Grant – Habitats and Species or Woodland Improvement Grant – Woods In and Around Towns options

You should also keep in mind the individual large tree items which might still be tree surgeon job – also attract some funding-if linked to a tree safety survey.

So it might be that funding support for felling/thinning could be obtained for parts of the plan (for example the uneconomic felling of large sycamore near a boundary) or if other factors were taken into account.

7. It is important to bear in mind that other elements of WIAT funding, for example for paths and bridges, would not be affected and that we can press on with pursuing this source as soon as we can.

8. FCS is keen for a WIAT application to be submitted for Duchess Wood and has encouraged us to apply for the available grant of £1.3k for the preparation of an Urban Woodland Management Plan. As Argyll & Bute Council holds the SGRPID registration for the Wood with FCS, it is the Council that would apply for the WIAT funding. Given that this would involve work being carried out then the grant being paid at a later stage, it will probably be essential for the Council's weight to be behind the process.

The way forward

9. We should be able to get the £1.3k grant to help draw up the WIAT management plan, but this grant itself needs to be applied for. **How could the preparation of an application for this grant best be taken forward?** Is Lower Clyde Greenspace in a position to lead on this on behalf of the DWLNRC, with support from FODW and the Council? Or could we look to employing say Simon Lockwood's company to act as an agent on behalf of the Council (they have done this for others). Given the relatively small size of a likely contract it might not be subject to tendering processes. Advice from A&BC procurement services would be helpful.

10. If such an application were successful, **how could the preparation of the plan best be taken forward?** The same points apply – could LCG take this on or would we look to external support?

11. Looking further ahead if the WIAT grant application was successful, **how would the work best be managed?** Acknowledging the experience and expertise of LCG and Charlie in particular, FODW sees value in perhaps looking to a hybrid arrangement involving both LCG and an external contractor; LCG being able to link directly into Council systems and resources and an external contractor being able to link directly to buyers of woodfuel/logs. We do not want to end up in a position where we have paid for lots of trees to be felled and then find nobody wanting to buy them; this was a point heavily emphasised by FCS in our recent discussions.

12. In the longer term, (and thinking particularly of any Community Empowerment Act implications) it is worth thinking of the possibility of employing a management agent to look after the wood as a whole. LFS charge £25/30 per hour for services as an Agent. This compares to a Chartered Forester costs of £70/hour. **Again any thoughts on this would be welcome.**

Testing the water now

13. More immediately, given all this information, we suggest that there would be value in "testing the water" now by A&BC entering into a contract with Simon Lockwood and Iain Stewart to carry out an exercise to thin sycamore and ash trees in the section of Duchess Wood between Rhu Road Higher and Millig Street to develop a better understanding of the practical implications of thinning/ timber extraction and cost/ income flows. This exercise would involve thinning approximately 100 sycamore and ash trees in the section of Wood between Rhu Road Higher and Millig Street. Care would have to be taken in selecting trees at the western edge by the cricket pitch, and the eastern edge by Strathclyde Court. Another major factor is the rookery in the pine trees, so advice would have to be taken on when and how the trees could best be felled so as to create least disturbance. While no healthy pine trees would be felled, it might be that unstable or diseased pine trees would be identified which might need to dealt with.

14. It is anticipated that approximately 60/70t (tonne) timber could be removed which would be stored inside the lower fence adjacent to Rhu Road Higher. Felling / storage would take 2/3 days. The timber could then be loaded onto a HIAB equipped lorry at the roadside on Rhu Road Higher outside normal peak traffic times. The net income from such an exercise might be £1000 with proceeds being used for woodland enhancement or maintenance.

15. The information from this exercise would be used to be assess the practical implications and suitability of a full WIAT grant application for Duchess Wood, and whether and how a felling grant might be applied for as part of a broader WIAT application.

Conclusion

16. A lot of information has been generated over the past three months, and while this note suggests possible strategic directions, **we suggest it would be helpful if the DWLNRC Subgroup could meet again in the near future to work out the practical implications**, which would then be communicated to the Committee and feed into a new WIAT Plan. It would be essential for A&BC to be represented in these subgroup discussions (and possibly Luss Estates).

Stewart Campbell

David Lewin

FODW

6 November 2015

Annex 1. Information from Iain Stewart (IS)

IS confirmed there are stands of both sycamore and ash suitable for felling and conversion to wood fuel and have value. The current price paid for timber such as sycamore is £40/ t roadside or £50 delivered to a sawmill. Hard woods like sycamore are desirable particularly for supply to the domestic market for use in wood burning stoves. He said there was sufficient timber in the Wood to make a felling operation worthwhile but extraction was the issue. A felling licence from FCS would be needed and details of the approximate number of trees, species, reason for felling and remediation plans would need to be included in an application.

The most cost-effective extraction process is to place a timber harvester into the a wood which fells the trees, strips off branches and cuts to a standard length for loading on to an articulated lorry which would be positioned as close to the harvester as possible. However given the limited access points to the Wood and the impact of this process on an amenity wood such as Duchess Wood his initial conclusion was this type of operation would not be practical.

The alternative is manual felling and extraction using a vehicle such as a mini forwarder (which carries the sections of trunk from the stump to the storage area). These types of vehicle could operate on the type of paths in the Wood and cope with the sloping terrain. IS said that it was important to use a contractor with specialist experience of felling trees for woodfuel/logs, and volunteered to speak to Simon Lockwood, a felling contractor with whom he had worked and who had experience of working in sites such as Duchess Wood. Essentially the felling contractor cuts and extracts the timber to a roadside where it can be bought by the woodfuel/log contractor. Sale of timber can be done in several ways. Electronic auctions are popular or alternatively tendering. Timber can be sold standing or extracted.

IS commented that a good chainsaw operator should fell a typical DW sycamore/ash tree, trim off branches, and cut into manageable lengths in about 15/30 minutes. He thought that some of the larger sycamore trees were possibly too big now and present a challenge for felling and extraction.

Annex 2. Information from Simon Lockwood (SL)

SL agreed that Duchess Wood has extractable timber and all parts of the Wood were accessible with the type of equipment operated by LFS. LFS could offer a range of services including:

- A simple commercial arrangement thinning sycamore and ash mainly for wood burning stoves and buying the timber.
- Woodland management activities including grant applications for activities such as footpath upgrade, culvert installation and replanting after felling. (LFS have been successful in obtaining Post Code lottery funding for various timber woodland related activities).
- A complete long-term woodland management service.

LFS are involved in various timber based activities including log supplies for wood burning stoves, timber for specialist uses such as house building, saw mill operation and woodland management in the UK and Europe.

The current retail price for hardwood firewood logs is about £80 for a large bag containing about 330kg or about £240/t. Prices have increased significantly as old stock from the 2010 to 2012 winter gales has been sold off while there has been a significant increase in the number of wood burning stoves. Cut medium size sycamore and ash trees for logs is valued at £40/t roadside with cutting and extraction costs £20/22/t depending on the distance from the lorry loading point which could generate a profit of around £20/t. Pine for planking is worth about £55/t. A substantial burr oak trunk can be worth about £3k and a 10/12ft length of ripple sycamore £300- £500.

The typical felling rate is 2 to 3 trees per hour depending on size. Trees for logs are normally cut to 10ft lengths. Larger sycamore trees, say over 1 metre diameter are difficult to handle. The branches can be used for logs but the lower timber can only be used for chock timber (ie the production of wedging chocks, eg for large vehicles) and is of limited value.

The section of the Wood from the garages down to Rhu Road Higher probably contains c 75t (equivalent to 3 lorry loads) of extractable timber for logging excluding any pine. The section of the Wood north from the garages and to the triangle contains roughly 120 sycamore of various sizes plus about 60 ash trees. SL's view was that both these areas and the Wood generally would benefit hugely from thinning the sycamore and ash, particularly multi stem trees.

Felled timber cut to length has to be stacked prior to loading with a Hiab equipped vehicle. For Duchess Wood this could be an area of hard standing/ storage adjacent to the Rhu Road Higher entrance. Loading could be direct to lorry parked up on the road, or off road if it was possible to create a gated area of hard standing. This location would probably have to be used for storage and

loading timber from all parts of the Wood as the access by the garages isn't suitable for lorries and the car park is too far away. In the upper part of the Wood, adjacent to the railway line, Network Rail has to be informed of any trees felled within 2 tree lengths of the track (with the implications we have discussed before about line closures).

After a walk around the Wood, initial estimate was there was probably 250t of extractable timber for logs worth about £10k with extraction costs of about £5k. This is timber reasonably close to the main paths and not within the centre of the Wood which wasn't walked. SL advised that thinning would ideally be carried out over a period of 2/3 years to avoid undue disruption and visual impact on the Wood for visitors - accompanied of course by consultation with members and information for visitors. Replanting with native species would follow. Brash is normally left stacked to rot down.