

Report to Duchess Wood Local Nature Reserve Committee

WIAT funding sub-group

BACKGROUND

The November meeting of the LNR Committee agreed to the establishment of a sub-group tasked with exploring the way forward with regards to an application for WIAT funding in respect of achieving the aims and objectives of the agreed Management Plan.

It was also agreed that this group would investigate the possibility of a wood fuel based felling trial in the lower part of the wood. The Friends of Duchess Wood had already had a positive site meeting with one contractor who intimated that the value of the timber selected would outweigh the cost of felling.

It was agreed that membership of this sub-group would be Charlie Cairns, Stewart Campbell, David Lewin and Stuart McCracken.

PROGRESS

Due to various conflicting commitments, it has proven difficult to organise a meeting which all members of the sub-group could attend, however several valuable separate meetings have occurred which allowed substantial progress to be made. The outcomes of these meetings can be summarised as;

WIAT

- There is a recognised need for the existing Management Plan to be adapted to fit the template required by the Forestry Commission. As a potential grant of £1300 exists for this, it is the recommendation of the sub-group that a consultant be employed to undertake this work, with a budget ceiling of £1300.
- Charlie will draft a brief for this work, circulating it to members of the sub-group for comment and editing before issuing the brief to selected consultants. The sub-group would then select the best value return.
- The management of the actual contract thereafter would be Charlie's responsibility, but in full dialogue with the other sub-group members. The brief itself will specify at least two meetings between the sub-group and the consultant.
- The most appropriate financial mechanism for the contract has yet to be settled. The WIAT grant for the work is paid retrospectively, meaning an initial outlay of funding before grant is received. Charlie had hoped to underwrite this from his own budget, however this is no longer possible. He is currently seeking further advice from A&BC on how best to approach this.

- Despite the possibility of some woodland management works being achieved through a wood fuel contract, it is the opinion of the sub-group that the WIAT application should initially be for WIAT funding for all eligible activities within the woodland. Any impact on Forestry Commission funding from wood fuel sales can be assessed on an individual basis as and when it occurs. However, Charlie will seek further clarification from the FC on this.

Wood Fuel Trial

- FODW had met on site with Simon Lockwood, a forester and timber merchant. Simon had indicated that one of the aims of the Management Plan, namely some felling and clearing of sycamore and straggly ash in the lower woodland, could be achieved by offsetting the cost of the felling and extraction against the value of the timber as wood fuel. It seemed likely that a modest profit could be made on the exercise.
- The LNR Committee had remitted the investigation of this possibility to the WIAT sub-group. Charlie had some initial concerns about thinning an already narrow woodland strip, and being seen to target ash. However after discussion and some site investigation his concerns have been allayed. Stuart also confirmed at a meeting that he is supportive of the work, as it is a specified aim in the Management Plan. However in reference to his role regarding maintenance and potential risk management, he would like to be present if and when trees were being marked for felling.
- The sub-group therefore was strongly in favour of carrying out this trial. A skype call was held with Simon Lockwood, during which some practicalities were raised and generally sorted out
- It was acknowledged that there would be a need for a communication plan to support the work. This would explain why the work was being done, emphasise the long term benefits of proper woodland management for biodiversity, and help make people aware of the work before it was carried out. It would target users of the wood and adjacent householders. This is a key element given the fact that the works will take 1 week to complete, meaning a closure of that part of the LNR.
- The issue of procurement has been investigated. Were the works to be contracted by the Council, a full procurement process would be necessary, meaning a competitive and timely process. However, Simon was relaxed about being contracted by the FODW for this particular work. To ease any burden caused by cash flow (for example paying for the felling first, before being compensated by the sale value of the timber), he agreed to work on the basis of effectively buying the timber standing. This results in no initial cost to FODW and with any surplus generated by the value of the timber being payable to FODW at the end of the contract.

- Simon therefore undertook to draw up contract documentation for the FODW to consider. In addition, he would apply for a felling licence and forward draft risk assessment frameworks for perusal.
- Timing is becoming critical. It is hoped that this work can begin in early March, before the nesting season in the nearby rookery.

Other issues

- FODW had made contact with the Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust, who have funding available to construct a small pond within the LNR. The proposal is that this will be immediately south of the rugby pitches, fairly remote from paths and have shallow edges sloping to a maximum 1m depth. It will be rain and groundwater fed, and unlined, therefore requiring little maintenance. It will serve to improve the range of habitats and species within the LNR. Neither Charlie nor Stuart had any objections to this proposal.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the LNR Committee

1. Endorse the approach of hiring a consultant to fit the existing Management Plan into the template provided by the Forestry Commission, to support a further bid for WIAT funding for management of the LNR
2. Remit to the sub-committee responsibility to apply for full WIAT funding on the completion of the Management Plan exercise
3. Approve the trial woodland management exercise as proposed, in particular the concept of utilising a wood fuel contractor to carry out the work. FODW would contract this work, and any profit generated would be paid to FODW for further related activities in the LNR.
4. Request that FODW develop a communication plan to keep the public and nearby residents updated of the need for the work, the timing of the work and the longer term woodland management that we hope will be funded through WIAT.
5. Approve the digging of a small pond to encourage amphibian populations to become established in the LNR.

Charlie Cairns

Lower Clyde Greenspace

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