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**MINUTES of MEETING of DUCHESS WOOD LOCAL NATURE RESERVE COMMITTEE held
in the LOMOND SCHOOL, 10 STAFFORD STREET, HELENSBURGH
on WEDNESDAY, 18 MAY 2016**

Present:

Councillor Aileen Morton (Chair)
Charlie Cairns – Lower Clyde Green Space
Stewart Campbell – Chair, Friends of Duchess Wood
Alastair Macbeth – Secretary, Friends of Duchess Wood
Morevain Martin – Third Sector Interface
Johanna Urquhart – Principal, Lomond School

1. APOLOGIES

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

Apologies for absence were intimated from:-

Stuart McCracken
Ruth Cairns

2. MINUTE

The Minute of the previous meeting which was held on 16 February 2016 was approved as a true record, subject to an amendment being made at Item 9. Dog issues and training where the words “an increased incidence of” would be removed.

Discussion took place on the format for dissemination of the minutes to the Area CPG meetings, with it being agreed that the Chair would liaise with the Senior Area Committee Assistant to ensure that appropriate signposting is put in place which would allow CPG Members to access reports and additional information if required. It was also noted that it would be beneficial for members from the Friends of Duchess Wood to attend a future meeting of the Area CPG to discuss awareness raising.

Matters Arising

Page 5; Item 9 Dog Issues and Training

Johanna Urquhart advised that there had been no reports of out of control dogs from either pupils or staff, but this could be because the school had not been using the wood as frequently of late due to the inclement weather.

Morevain Martin provided the Committee with an update on the proposed dog training event. It was noted that the dog trainer based in Cardross had advised that she would be happy to do an awareness training event. Discussion took place on a venue for this event with the rugby club car park being identified as a possibility. Councillor Morton advised that the Council environmental team had indicated that they would be happy to be involved.

The Committee agreed that Councillor Morton, Morevain Martin and Stewart Campbell would form a sub group to progress this idea.

Page 2; Item 4 Engagement with Community

Alastair Macbeth advised that the FODW were keen to work in partnership with Ruth Cairns, Community Learning and Development Youth Worker. It was agreed that Ruth's contact information would be passed to the FODW members.

Morevain Martin advised that Ruth Cairns had been working with the Third Sector Interface office to develop a summer programme which would offer volunteering opportunities in the community for young people. The programme would allow the young people to gain accreditation and to access associated trips. It was noted that the programme was looking for volunteering opportunities.

3. ENGAGEMENT WITH SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITY

The Committee heard from Alastair Macbeth who advised that the Helensburgh Advertiser were keen to do a feature article on the Duchess Woods. Alastair felt it would be beneficial to bring this idea to the Committee to allow for input from all partners. The FODW had recently commissioned a new set of leaflets and these were now available for distribution. Ideas suggested for the proposed feature article included the liaison with Luss Estates, the Forest School and work parties in the wood. Discussion took place in relation to raising awareness through other possible media interest from the Lochside Press, Lennox Herald and the Dumbarton Reporter.

Decision:

The Committee agreed:-

1. To note the update, and
2. That the Friends of Duchess Woods would co-ordinate the content with partners and liaise with the Helensburgh Advertiser.

4. FRIENDS OF DUCHESS WOOD REPORTS

The Committee considered a report which outlined the work undertaken by Friends of Duchess Wood (FODW) and the most recent Members' newsletter.

Stewart Campbell highlighted the content of the new leaflets, which were:-
Membership leaflet
Top 10 things to do in the Duchess Wood
Spring Wild Flower Walk

Discussion took place on the availability of the leaflets to the public, with it being noted that the leaflets would be available in the wood, circulated to the community via FODW members, circulated at Community Council meetings and would be placed in the local library. Johanna Urquhart advised that she would be happy to circulate leaflets via Junior School pupils.

Stewart Campbell advised that there had been a recent information weekend at which the Friends had conducted a visitor count. It was noted that there were almost 500 visitors to the wood over the weekend of which 100 were children. Stewart advised that it was the intention to repeat the census on a periodic basis. He also provided information on the successful Bug life event which had seen the identification of burrowing bees which had never been seen before in the wood.

Finally, information was provided on the recent member's newsletter. It was noted that a request for assistance had been included in the newsletter, and as a result of this and the information weekend there had been help offered by someone who can help with simplifying the website and someone to help with the camera trap.

Decision

The Committee noted the reports.

Reference: Community Engagement Report and FODW Newsletter by Stewart Campbell, (in Friends of Duchess Wood dated 12 May 2016, submitted).

5. PROGRESS REPORT ON PONDS

The Committee heard from Stewart Campbell who provided a progress report on the 2 ponds which have recently been put into the wood. The ponds were dug with assistance from the Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust. The majority of the costs had been covered by the Trust, but the remainder had come from FODW. The path at the bottom end of the rugby pitch is much improved, but the upper pond path is not yet surfaced due to problems with access for the equipment and the proposed work to sort out a new culvert. The upper pond had held water immediately and this had remained constant with tadpoles being moved into this pond. Special clay liners had been purchased for the lower pond, but it had not held water despite the special lining. The pond has now been filled with assistance from Scottish Fire and Rescue and is slowly holding more water as time passes. Most of the manual work had been done by the Community Payback Team.

There is still an issue with dogs swimming in the ponds, to mitigate this temporary construction type fencing has been put up around the ponds with notices around the area to advise of the reason for this. It is intended that appropriate plants and shrubs will be purchased and these will be planted to create a more natural barrier. It was suggested that this would be a good article for the Helensburgh Advertiser.

Decision

The Committee noted the update.

6. DRAFT FIVE-YEAR MANAGEMENT PLAN - OCTOBER 2016-SEPTEMBER 2021

The Committee gave consideration to the draft 5-year Management Plan. Stewart Campbell advised that he had received useful feedback on the Plan and had incorporated changes in the latest version.

Decision

The Committee agreed:

1. That the plan would be circulated again to Members to allow a further opportunity for any additional comments;
2. To approve the plan subject to any minor amendments made following the additional consultation period;
3. That the draft plan would be used in support of the WIAT application, and
4. That the finalised Plan would be submitted to the August meeting of the Helensburgh and Lomond Area Committee for approval.

(Reference: Draft Management Plan by Stewart Campbell, Chair Friends of Duchess Wood dated 15 May 2016, submitted).

7. WIAT FUNDING APPLICATION

The Committee considered an update on issues relating to the Woodlands In and Around Towns (WIAT) application. Charlie Cairns updated the Committee on the progress of the application. The sub group had met on a couple of occasions and the application process was now progressing. The project brief has been circulated and has now been sent to 3 Consultants asking them to provide tender returns back by 1st June 2016. At that point an evaluation exercise will be completed and the contract awarded. It is anticipated that first part of the exercise and the appointment of the consultants will be completed by mid-Autumn, so it would be possible for an application to be completed and submitted at some point later in 2016. It was noted that the initial costs for the first piece of work would require to be underwritten, Charlie advised that he would check with Stuart McCracken in relation to this.

Decision

The Committee noted the update provided on the WIAT application.

8. ARGYLL AND BUTE COUNCIL MAINTENANCE AND FINANCIAL UPDATE

The Committee gave consideration to reports from the Amenity Performance Manager which provided information on the maintenance regime for the wood and also an update on the financial position. Members noted that there had been a delay with 2 pieces of work due to be contracted out, namely the work at the West Highland Line and the trees overhanging the garages at Strathclyde Court. Stewart Campbell advised that the situation at Strathclyde Court was giving cause for concern and this work needs to be a priority. The lack of progress with these 2 specific contracts was also reflected in the financial report which did not account for the cost of these works. Councillor Morton provided an update on the staffing changes in the Amenity Team, with it being noted that Ailsa Cunningham would hopefully become more involved with the wood.

Decision

The Committee agreed:

1. To note the report, and
2. To highlight the concerns relating to the outstanding works to the Amenity Performance Manager.

(Reference: Report by the Amenity Performance Manager dated 13 May 2016, submitted).

9. MEETING DATES

The Committee gave discussion to future meeting dates, noting that the previously agreed dates now clashed with the meetings of the Helensburgh and Lomond Area CPG.

Decision

The Committee agreed that meetings of the Committee for the remainder of the year would be held on:-

Tuesday 23rd August 2016

Tuesday 22nd November 2016

Meetings would commence at 10am and would take place in the Seabank Room, Helensburgh and Lomond Civic Centre.

10. ANY OTHER COMPETENT BUSINESS

The Chair opened the meeting for Any Other Business and the following issue was raised:-

Alastair Macbeth provided an update on the proposed application by Persimmon Homes to build houses on the original Dobbies Garden Centre site, highlighting that there had been a recent half day pre-application consultation event held at the Ardencaple Hotel which was very well attended. Alastair advised that a letter has been sent by Helensburgh Community Council to the developers raising a number of concerns. Discussion took place on the access arrangements from the new development into the wood which had also been highlighted by the Access Trust.

The Committee noted that they may want to make comment on some aspects of the Persimmon application once it is formally submitted to the Council.

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