



# The Friends of Duchess Wood

## Friends of Duchess Wood report to Duchess Wood LNR Committee 22nd. November 2016



1. **Community liaison and representation.** FODW has continued with its tasks of engaging with and representing the local community. Most of the issues reported below are examples, but FODW has also liaised with local press, community councils, police and fire services, and other local organisations.

### 2. FODW Annual General Meeting

FODW held its AGM on 26th October in the Lomond School Sports Hall. The Convener thanked a number of people who had done so much during the year, including Cllr. Aileen Morton and the DWLNRC. Also appreciation to Bill Freeland of Community Payback which may in future come under the Dunoon office. FODW hope that the friendly and constructive relations FODW has experienced with Community Payback can be maintained in any reorganisation.



FODW accounts were approved and the previous office bearers were reappointed. Stewart Campbell thanked Margaret Paul and Kevin Johnson for their years of service as they retired from the FODW committee, and he welcomed Pete Minting and Paul Blackburn as replacement Trustees.

The formal business was followed by a reminder from Anne Urquhart about the new Access Trust paths leaflet, then a fascinating illustrated talk by Paula Baker, Site Manager of the *RSPB Loch Lomond* nature reserve which was started four years ago, and although on a much larger scale, faces challenges not dissimilar to those in Duchess Wood.

3. **Ponds.** The two small ponds created by the Friends, following agreement by the DWLNRC, have continued to develop. The ponds were mainly funded by the Amphibians and Reptiles Conservation Trust, with support from FODW. Both ponds have now filled to a satisfactory level to encourage amphibians and other creatures which benefit from a source of still water. Grass growth around the ponds and dog encroachment, particularly in the lower pond, have been problems, so the grass is being removed this month and the areas nearest the water in both ponds are being sown with yellow rattle, which should inhibit grass growth. Preparations are in hand to plant a ring of willow saplings around the lower pond early in December.



#### 4. **Basic maintenance.**

FODW has continued to carry out maintenance such as cutting back rhododendron, sycamore and other invasive species, litter clearance, tree planting, grass control, paths clearance and other basic tasks. Ditch and culvert clearing requires extra attention now that fallen leaves increase. (See photo right). Fencing and bridge repairs have also been undertaken and FODW has drawn the attention of A&BC to the partial collapse of the edge of the bridge/culvert from the car park, where emergency repairs have now been undertaken.



#### 5. **Sycamore thinning and Scots Pine replanting.**



*Sycamores marked for felling*

There has been long-standing concern (reflected in the MP) that Sycamores are crowding out native species particularly along the eastern and northern sides of the Wood. The Scots Pines area between Rhu Road Higher and the Strathclyde Court garages was identified as the most suitable area to carry out a trial thinning. The DWLNRC approved (February 2016) a trial thinning of Sycamores, utilising a wood fuel contractor. That has now been agreed with Simon Lockwood of Lockwood Forest Services (LFS). It will go ahead on 8 and 9 December with a trial felling of perhaps 50 Sycamores (and perhaps a few Beech and Ash).

Details have been agreed on site with Stuart McCracken (7.11.16), representing A&BC which provides overall management of the Wood and is responsible for safety. Tree felling will necessitate closure of the Millig Street to Rhu Road Higher footpath and LFS will cordon this off and provide explanatory notices. Users of the Wood will still be able to access it the rest of the Wood using the other entry points. On Saturday 10 December there will be a Community Woodland demonstration, open to the public, of firewood preparation / storage and coppicing, and firewood will be for sale. A contract will be signed by FODW with LFS. There will be no charge to FODW (since LFS will cover its costs by selling firewood) and it is hoped that there may be a modest gain for FODW. Scots Pine saplings for planting in the cleared area (£3 each) will be funded by £150 from the A&BC Third Sector grant.

Advance notices will be delivered by FODW to nearby households to inform them of the events.

6. **The draft draft 5-year Management Plan for the Wood** has now been endorsed by the A&BC Area Committee and FODW has informed its members that it is now active.

7. **Subsidiary role of FODW.** FODW recognises that its role is one of support for A&BC which, through the DWLNRC, has overall authority for the management of Duchess Wood, liaison with the A&BC Area Committee and Luss Estates, legal arrangements, health and safety, authorisation of events in the Wood, major fund-raising, etc. FODW therefore regards its quarterly reports (such as this one) as important for ensuring that it is operating with the approval of the DWLNRC. FODW therefore asks if the DWLNRC minutes do not simply "note" the FODW reports, but record approval of them. If there is any aspect that is not approved, FODW would welcome DWLNRC guidance concerning such an aspect.