

Friends of Duchess Wood

Friends of Duchess Wood report to Duchess Wood LNR Committee 21st August 2018

1. Following a very quiet winter, maintenance teams have been back in action. Wooden planks have been replaced on the Thurgood Bridge and the Community Payback team has been busy refurbishing tables and benches which are now back in situ. This includes four new benches obtained from the James Street Community Garden. FODW has accepted an offer of an additional bench to be placed in the Wood to commemorate a regular dog visitor. Further trimming and cutting back around paths has continued.
2. A plan by the Venture Scouts to visit the Wood in late June, collect brash and burn it, cooking food in the embers, was cancelled at the last moment due to the very dry conditions in the wood and risk of fire.
3. Community liaison and representation. FODW continued its normal role of engagement with and representation of the local community. FODW has also liaised with local press, community councils and other local organisations.
4. Grants. The bid for a “Woodlands in and around Towns” (WIAT) grant was submitted earlier along with our woodland management plan and is now under consideration by the Forestry Commission. An update on the position at the meeting would be welcome.
5. We have been liaising with several groups over putting in a footpath to the upper pond to provide a viewing area. This includes the Argyll and Clyde Coast and Countryside Trust (ACT) who have approached us to see if there are any projects we would like work experience teams to carry out now they have a management team in place in Helensburgh/ Lomond. We are also talking to our regular contractor who has assisted in numerous projects. FODW believes that to protect both ponds from dogs and to enable the ponds to stabilize that we need to fence both ponds. Limited fencing will be needed along the line of the new upper pond path, a circular fence around the lower pond, where we will try to replant a willow barrier protected within the fence.
6. FODW has met with the Project Manager for Community Links Scotland to discuss how the organisation might be able to support action in the Wood. They have particular experience in supporting studies and funding applications for the transfer of assets to local communities. At the last meeting the question was raised about possible support from David Rennie of the social enterprise department of A&BC, and FODW sent its main documents to Mr Rennie, but no response has been received. Again, an update would be welcome.
7. Branching Out has submitted a positive “end of term” report and we will meet with Branching Out before the meeting to discuss the points they raise.
8. Boundary issues. We are aware that the Strathclyde Court residents remain concerned about trees overhanging their premises, and dead or diseased trees near the boundary. Within the last week, a tree (a Goat Willow) has fallen towards the boundary of the last house in Duchess Park. When reported to A&BC there seemed to be confusion about the role of the Council and FODW in dealing with this tree, but in the end, Council

employees made it safe. However FODW inspection of the tree has shown that it was one of three main stems and the other two are also showing signs of disease; indeed one of the remaining two is only being prevented from falling into the garden of the property by an adjacent ash tree. Separately, in the NW corner of the Wood in the middle of July, a very large branch of one of the old beech trees largely broke off and is now held partly supported on the ground and partly by the thin section of bark still attached to the tree. Although FODW dealt with the immediate path clearance need, the whole branch will need to be taken down at some point as separation of the branch from the tree by any mechanism could lead to the branch falling close to the nearby path. A discussion on boundary issues would be helpful.

9. Professional dog walkers. Visitors have raised issues with FODW over the past few months about professional dog walkers with 5 dogs or more using the Wood on a regular basis and sometimes having only limited control over all the dogs. Mention has been made in the past about a form of licensing scheme, but FODW is unsure of the current position. Experience is mounting that such a move might be necessary.

10. FODW attended an event organised by the “Helensburgh Making Places” initiative on 8 August, having been unaware of the project until receiving a flyer in the Community Advertiser. We will respond to the initiative’s survey, but remain a little uncertain how this initiative is to be taken forward. The role of green spaces is a major theme, and we will try to ensure that Duchess Wood is included in this.

11. We are still hoping to be able to strim and clear the pony field of grass by the end of the summer and Community Payback may be able to assist.

12. Earlier in the summer, one of our members cutting back growth in the Wood noticed some ash trees that appeared to be dead or dying. His son who has knowledge of the problem, said that he thought it was suffering from Chalara ash die back. Since then we have noted a number of other young ash trees in different parts of the Wood which have died or are dying. We can’t be certain that this is dieback, but it is only noticeable on young ash trees which appear to be the usual site on which the disease appears. We understand that this is reportable to the Forestry Commission – presumably by A&BC?

13. We intend taking a more active role in Citizen Science projects, particularly in the Bat Conservation Trust, Buglife, Plantlife, and Butterfly and Moths Conservation Trust areas. We have commissioned our new bat-detection equipment and we will also hold another visitor count over the summer.

14. FODW Annual General Meeting. The FODW AGM for the year 2017-18 will be held on Wednesday 17th October 2018. This will be held in the Helensburgh Parish Church Halls. Please note that this is a change from the date given at the last meeting.

Martin Grafton, Secretary, 8th August 2018

Beech tree



willow tree



Base of willow tree



stem of willow supported on ash tree