

MINUTES of MEETING of DUCHESS WOOD LOCAL NATURE RESERVE COMMITTEE held in the SEABANK ROOM, HELENSBURGH AND LOMOND CIVIC CENTRE, 38 EAST CLYDE STREET, HELENSBURGH on TUESDAY, 13 NOVEMBER 2018

Present: Councillor Lorna Douglas (Chair)

Attending: Melissa Stewart, Area Governance Officer, Argyll & Bute Council
Mhairi Gardiner, Development Officer, Argyll & Bute Council
Sean McCay, Land Agent, Luss Estates
Stewart Campbell, Chair of Friends of Duchess Woods
David Lewin, Committee Member, Friends of Duchess Woods
Johann Urquhart, Principal Teacher of Lomond School

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were intimated from:-

Martin Grafton, Friends of Duchess Woods
Ailsa Cunningham, Technical Officer, Argyll & Bute Council

2. MINUTE OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING OF DUCHESS WOOD LOCAL NATURE RESERVE HELD ON TUESDAY, 21 AUGUST 2018

The Minute of the previous meeting held on 21 August 2018 was approved as a correct record subject to the addition of the words “urban woodland” before management plan, at paragraph 2 of item 5 (Duchess Wood WIAT Application).

Arising from Item 2 (Minutes) the Area Governance Officer invited FODW to pass an email to her for onward distribution to Head Teachers regarding the Lost Words book.

Arising from item 5 (Duchess Wood WIAT Application) the Development Officer clarified that the WIAT was approved on 6th July 2017, it being suggested that this sign off was obtained in 2018.

3. ARGYLL AND BUTE COUNCIL MAINTENANCE UPDATE

The Area Governance Officer explained that Amenity Services had indicated that due to other commitments they would provide a written report for this meeting but that this had not yet materialised.

Decision

The Area Governance Officer would make further contact with the Technical Officer to obtain an update and would circulate this to the Group.

4. FRIENDS OF DUCHESS WOOD REPORT

The Committee considered a report which provided an update from Friends of Duchess Wood (FODW) on progress since the last meeting took place.

In addition to the report, Stewart Campbell added that they had been gifted with a new seat from the owner of “Kevin”, a former user of the woods who had sadly passed away. An arbour to shelter the seat would be purchased from grant funding received from Action Earth. He provided updated timescales for the work being carried out by Branching Out, recognising that they have provided much appreciated support.

David Lewin provided information on a tree survey carried out on trees within a 5 metre radius of the boundary, to the East side and to the North, adjacent to the railway. Three hundred trees were in this area, some were not in good condition and others were leaning over the railway line.

Stewart Campbell provided further information in regard to his contact with the Planning Officer and the upcoming meetings with the Council’s Biodiversity Officer.

David extended the thanks of the FODW to the community payback team who had recently cleared the drainage at the weekend.

Decision

1. To endorse the contents of the submitted report.
2. That FODW would send a copy of the survey to the Area Governance Officer for circulation to the Group along with a calling notice from the recent AGM.
3. To note the appointment of the new Chair, Matt Offord, who would participate in future meetings of the DWLNRC.
4. The Chair, on behalf of the Committee, thanked Stewart for his hard work as a volunteer with FODW, commenting that his time and commitment was to be admired.

(Ref: Report by Friends of Duchess Woods Secretary, Martin Grafton)

5. DUCHESS WOOD WIAT FUNDING

Mhairi Gardner, Development Officer, spoke about 2 funding streams – The Woodland Improvement Fund and the Sustainable Management of Forest Fund - outlining the work required to progress applications. She advised that an operational plan was required, which David was in the process of drafting for FODW and that further feedback was required from Amenity services to inform this plan.

David commented that he had approached the Forestry for some clarification as to the requirements but they had not responded to his request. He would meet with Mhairi next week to discuss this and would also be looking for some help with mapping.

Mhairi advised that all the funding streams being pursued would issue retrospective payments meaning there would need to be a fund to pay before these costs were claimed back.

The Committee discussed whether, in light of the current discussions about the Management Agreement, there was merit in progressing with an operational plan at this time given the uncertainties as to whether the council would pull out of the Management Agreement when it expires. Mhairi responded that the WIAT could be transferred and it was agreed that on this the work should progress.

6. SUB-COMMITTEE - OPTIONS UPDATE

The Chair advised that the Helensburgh & Lomond Area Committee would receive a report at their December meeting regarding the future of the Management Agreement. The outcome of this would be fed into full Council where the decision regarding the Management Agreement would rest.

The Chair explained the difficult financial situation that the Council was in, commenting that there may need to be a focus on statutory functions when determining budgets.

The Committee thereafter had a frank discussion regarding some of the hypothetical situations should the Council withdraw from the Management Agreement with FODW confirming that they would continue to work with Luss Estates (and Vice-versa) and while they weren't in a position to take forward a community buyout, they would like to continue to help out where they could.

Members of the Committee expressed a desire to see the Committee report when available and it was agreed that the Area Governance Officer would provide a link to the report once the agenda had been published.

7. DOG FOULING

The Chair advised that she had sought information from the Head of Governance and Law regarding concerns about dog fouling and professional dog walkers, previously raised by the Committee. The advice received indicated that this would be a matter for the Planning, Public Services and Licensing Committee to consider, that it would be costly to introduce and there were questions regarding how this would be policed. It was considered that this would not be worthwhile to pursue.

The Chair commented that her favoured course of action would be to educate on responsible dog ownership with a voluntary code of conduct being put in place, promoted both by FODW and the Council. This would not cost the Council or dog walkers and having spoken with some dog walkers, seemed to be welcomed.

It was suggested that the voluntary code could be launched at the Top Dog event and the Chair agreed to circulate the information she had obtained to the Group.

8. DOG EVENT

The Chair advised that she had had difficulty in getting the trainer booked for the event although other participants were available. She commented that if she could not obtain this confirmation by next month either an alternative trainer would be approached or the event would need to be cancelled

9. ANY OTHER COMPETENT BUSINESS

Stewart Campbell reported that the FODW website was being moved to another web host in the next day or so and asked that if any of the Group had problems accessing the site that they let him know.

Stewart commented that the Council had information on Duchess Woods on their website but that this was now out of date. It was agreed that the Area Governance Officer would pass on Stewart's details to the Website Manager as a simple discussion would resolve the issue.

10. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was agreed that the next meeting of the DWLNRC would take place on 29th January in Lomond School. Due to a clash of day with the Luss Estates staff meeting it was agreed that future meetings of the Committee would now take place from 10.30am.