

# Friends of Duchess Wood

## Friends of Duchess Wood report to Duchess Wood LNR Committee April 2019

1. Maintenance has continued over the winter months. The bench at the far corner has been re-sited west of the rugby pitch, old wire netting removed from the pony field and the fence extended at the upper pond. The rail at the Thurgood Bridge has been replaced by Community Payback with materials donated by Terrence Brownrigg.
2. The Top Dogs event was held which was a success with over forty dogs and their companions attending. The excellent weather helped contribute to the success of the afternoon.
3. Community liaison and representation. FODW continued its normal role of engagement with and representation of the local community. We participated in the Drop-in event on 25 April. No group came forward enquiring about taking over management of the Wood or progressing a Community Buy-out. Most of the 20/25 attendees were residents wanting reassurance that Luss Estates weren't going to sell off the land for development and to talk about specific tree boundary and access issues they had.
4. Grants. The bid for a "Woodlands in and around Towns" (WIAT) grant which was submitted earlier along with our Woodland Management Plan has passed the first stage of approval by the Forestry Commission, and the preparatory grant has been paid to the Council. We understand the Council is considering a funding proposal to FCS under the WIAT scheme for a tree safety survey and may be able to include a full woodland survey together with recommendations for thinning and felling of, for example, areas where sycamore dominates. However we believe FCS won't have any funds available until the 2020/21 tax year for WIAT although funding applications for this period can be submitted. In addition we understood the Council's position at the last DWLNR meeting was they would not approve funding for any work given the Council would have to fund the delay in any payment from the Rural Payments Agency which could be up to 6 months after the work has been completed. This would potentially cross over into the period when Luss Estates take over management of the Wood. Clarification of all these issues would be helpful.
5. A grant of £500 was obtained from Action Earth and has covered the bulk of the cost of hard core for the new path to the upper pond, all the willow planted alongside the two new fences, the arbor round the bench at the upper pond and wigwam located to the north of the Pony Field.
6. There has been no further discussion with David Rennie of the Social Enterprise department of A&BC, but we will go back to David when we have developed a more detailed plan for Citizen Science events over the spring and summer.
7. Boundary issues and tree safety. We welcome the intention of the council to carry out a tree survey (funded by the WIAT grant – see above) and would like to have some involvement with the survey.
8. The Pony Field grass was strimmed and cleared by Community Payback prior to the Dog event.

9. We continue to be concerned re the conduct of a minority of dog walkers, particularly those walking a large number of dogs. We propose that a Dog Walkers Code of Conduct be considered for users of the wood.

10. Footfall counters. We are having difficulty resourcing any and are hoping that we can get the use of the old Hermitage Park counters.

11. Following an onsite meeting with ABC, Persimmon Homes have admitted disposing of waste in the grounds of the wood. Marina Curran-Colthart, A&B Biodiversity Officer has also visited the site. SEPA have been informed. FODW has been in discussion with the council's Biodiversity Officer and understands the intention is to see how the area recovers over the next few years. Meanwhile we continue to be concerned by the amount of polystyrene waste which is blowing from the site into the wood. It remains our opinion that Persimmon Homes should make a substantial gesture towards contributing to the wood – for example reinstating the all ability users path. An update on this issue and the possibility of Persimmon funding, for example, reinstatement of the All Abilities path would be helpful.

12. We attended the Community Engagement and Walk event at Doune Ponds which provided some useful insight into how a similar area is managed by the landowner in conjunction with the Friends group.

13. Vandalism. The Wood was subject to damage to fences, marker posts and information boards on the evenings of the 7 and 8<sup>th</sup> of April. Repairs/reinstatement will be carried out in due course and at some cost. The police have been informed and a crime report issued. Notices have been placed around the Wood asking visitors to call 101 Crime Stoppers if they see or hear anything suspicious. The Police are making patrols up to the Pony Field. The Fire Service have been contacted asking for information about how they would tackle any fires which could occur in the Wood.

Martin Grafton  
Secretary FODW  
April 2019