

# Friends of Duchess Wood

## Friends of Duchess Wood report to Duchess Wood LNR Committee 20 August 2019

1. The FODW have grave concerns re the way the recent closure of the woods (due, it appears, to unsafe trees identified during a tree survey) has been managed. The fact that A&BC has taken upon itself to close the wood without consulting the Committee ignores the Council's own procedures, and is remarkably insensitive to the reality of the management of the wood, as is the lack of communication which would have helped us keep members informed. As a minimum it is considered that the report should have been made available to the committee so that a discussion could have been had as to the best way forward to address any issues identified. Despite the council putting up notices, most of which have been removed, the wood continues to be visited by members of the public and this calls into question the ability of the council to protect individuals from perceived dangers. It is of particular note that after eight weeks' closure (at time of writing – 13 Aug 19) work has still not started to make the wood safe. FODW has, to date, not seen any evidence to support the radical step of closing the wood.
2. As a result of the closure of the wood there have been no work parties or work carried out for the past two months. Further work is needed around the wood, and the recent heavy rain has resulted in a lot of the ditches and gullies filling with sediment. We have also noted that the Lomond School rugby pitch has not been cut in this period.
3. We have raised £350 from the Waitrose green token scheme - Supporting Communities.
4. David Lewin met with representatives of Police Scotland concerning the local Police Scotland Youth Volunteer Scheme. This group would like to carry out maintenance tasks for example clearing grass from around young trees / drainage ditch and gully clearance over the autumn /winter when they are less busy with marshalling duties at events and the Wood reopens.
5. 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 that this first stage grant was used to pay for at least part of the recent survey, the results of which have been used to justify closure of the wood. We understood that the Council was considering a funding proposal to FCS under the WIAT scheme for a tree safety survey which might be able to include a full woodland survey together with recommendations for thinning and felling of, for example, areas where sycamore dominates. However we have no up to date information on this, and 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 management of the wood might revert to Luss Estates. Clarification of all these issues would be helpful.

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

7. Following an onsite meeting with ABC, Persimmon Homes 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. We were also concerned by the amount of polystyrene waste which is blowing from the site into the wood. It remains our opinion that Persimmon Homes should, in addition to creating the woodland corridor and the link to the existing path network to which they have already committed, make a substantial gesture towards improving the wood – for example by reinstating the all-abilities path. An update on this issue and the possibility of Persimmon funding, for example, reinstatement of the all-abilities path would be helpful.

8. Vandalism. The Wood was subject to further damage to fences, marker posts and information boards after the early April events. Police Scotland continue to provide good support in patrolling the area.

Martin Grafton  
Secretary FODW  
August 2019