

## Lomond School Proposal for a Forest School site, Duchess Wood, Helensburgh

### **Forest School**

The aim of Forest School is to work with a range of individuals in the outdoors over a period of time, introducing responsible risk-taking and fostering achievement in all participants.

Children are supported in their learning through a holistic approach which encourages the exploration of the outdoor environment and an appreciation for nature. Forest school leaders use learning and teaching strategies which develop confidence, emotional resilience, independence, language and communication skills and increase levels of physical activity and mental well-being.

The key features of Forest School include:

- the use of a woodland area
- regular and frequent time outdoors
- an ideal tool for delivering the Scottish Curriculum for Excellence, encapsulated in the four capacities: Successful Learners, Confident Individuals, Responsible Citizens and Effective Contributors
- opportunities to meet experiences and outcomes across all areas of the curriculum
- the freedom to explore sense of self and place using multiple senses
- a high adult to pupil ratio
- qualified Forest School Leaders (Level 3 Open Award)

The use of a woodland-learning environment is complimentary, not separate to traditional classroom and playground learning and is highly child-centred. It can make a significant contribution to a pupil's environmental awareness and respect for their surroundings, including an increased knowledge of local flora and fauna.

### **Role of the Forest School Leader**

Sessions are run by a Forest School Leader who is responsible for compiling the ecological impact assessments and risk assessments of the Forest School site and activities. Responsibility is taken to ensure that child protection and health and safety procedures are adhered to and every leader is First Aid qualified. Currently, three members of Lomond School staff are undergoing Forest School training and this is fully assessed by an accredited Forest School Instructor.

### **Forest School Programme**

Forest School is not an actual place but a specific ethos. It is a way of working with learners in an outdoor natural space for an extended period of time and a philosophy built around a programme of engaging activities.

Prior to starting a Forest School programme, the Forest School leaders will:

- Explain what Forest School is and discuss what sort of activities the participants will be doing with the learners, staff, parents and those responsible for the site
- Complete an Environmental Impact Assessment to ensure that the site will not be irreparably damaged by the running of sessions

- Compile a site risk assessment to ensure the site is safe to visit
- Under the supervision of the qualified leader, groups of approximately 10 – 15 pupils will visit the site on a regular basis throughout the year, except in extreme conditions. The leader will risk assess the planned activities for each session

Lomond School propose to use the site on a daily basis between 8.30am and 3.30pm. Nursery sessions will take place in the mornings with access available for the Primary Department in the afternoons. Activities may also extend to after school sessions.

A programme of Forest School activities will typically include:

- games, such as hide and seek
- building small, temporary shelters using tarpaulins or fallen materials
- woodland art
- tying knots
- nature activities
- using Kelly Kettles (self-contained, portable devices for boiling water using twigs or other small, combustible materials)
- wood carving projects
- tool use (bow saws, loppers, billhooks and knives)

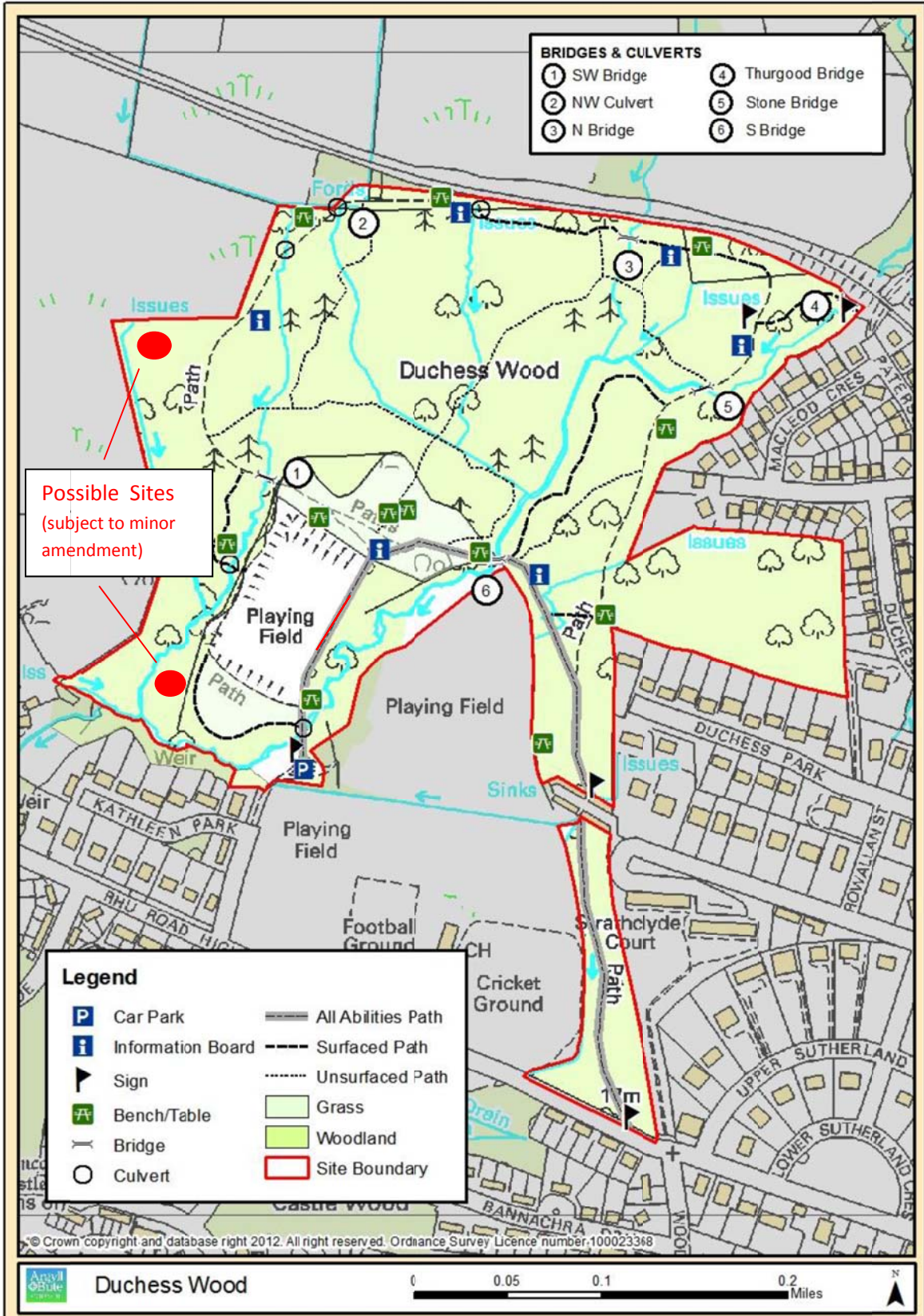
Fire lighting and cooking may be gradually introduced in time alongside strict safety policies and procedures, and all traces of any fires are removed. Fires are always small, manageable and appropriately sited.

The use of a fire circle (a circle of logs with a central fire pit) forms an integral part of Forest School sessions as a place to sit and cook. A soil assessment is carried out before the construction of the circle and training guidelines followed when preparing and maintaining the site. All rubbish and food debris will be removed at the end of each session and the area surrounding the circle returned to its natural state. Any natural materials used during sessions are gathered from the forest floor. Non-native species, such as sycamore, are generally used for any carving activities. The Lomond School Games Hall provides a base within close proximity of the woods for storing equipment and this will be taken to and removed from the site before and after every session.

As part of its strategic planning, Lomond School is fully committed to extending outdoor learning opportunities for its pupils. A Forest School site within Duchess Wood would further build on Lomond School's links with the community and enable pupils to be part of the promotion of the woods as an area for nature conservation, recreation and education. Furthermore, this initiative allows young people to actively engage with safeguarding the woodland environment, support surveys and take part in closely monitoring their impact as well as those of others. The school fully recognises the expectations of the Scottish Outdoor Access Code and the implications within the context of a Local Nature Reserve.

Lomond School would make available site assessments to the Friends of Duchess Woods and welcome visits from members and or other interested parties to their Forest School sessions. Any alteration to the use of the site beyond any agreement made would be fully discussed with the Friends of Duchess Wood prior to implementation as the initial programme naturally evolves. Any costs associated with the setting up and maintenance of the Forest School site would be met by Lomond School. This will include an annual tree inspection of the Forest School site with any associated work carried out by tree surgeons. The school holds Public Liability insurance, as well as Personal Accident insurance for all of its pupils and staff.

## LOCATION OF PROPOSED FOREST SCHOOL SITE



## **Appendix to Report**

### **Position statement relating to Argyll and Bute Council and Luss Estates**

The LNR Committee had approved the concept of the Outdoor Nursery, subject to feedback and comment from Luss Estates and Argyll & Bute Council.

#### **Luss Estates**

Contacted for comments in role as landowner. Very enthusiastic response, happy to see the scheme progress. They have suggested that, in terms of formality of paperwork, that a simple exchange of letters would suffice. They see this as being an excellent example of the positive role Duchess Wood has as a community facility.

Their only concern was around the issue of risk and liability, and this matter should be addressed in the exchange of letters. They would be content for an annual woodland survey of some description to be carried out to facilitate this.

#### **Argyll and Bute Council**

##### **Legal Services**

A very thorough response from the Argyll and Bute Council Legal Service indicated that the Outdoor Nursery would be beyond the scope of the current Management Agreement between Luss Estates and the Council. However it was further noted that the access provision with the Land Reform Act gave the school the legal right to carry out the work, and that therefore the Outdoor Nursery could proceed with the agreement of both the Council and the landowner, but without the need for an additional written, or amended, agreement.

##### **Access Team**

The Council's Access Team concurred with the viewpoint of their Legal team. However, the Access Team did suggest some sort of periodic, formal monitoring procedure to be adopted between the school and the Council, mainly to assess the impact, if any, of the Forest School on other woodland users. This could easily be accommodated within an amended proposal paper, and it is suggested that a formal communication procedure between the school and the Council is also agreed.

##### **Legal Services**

Further guidance from the Legal team was sought in terms of the level of authority required to allow the proposal to be approved. In their view, the approval of the LNR Committee would be the most appropriate mechanism. This however would be subject to continuing the current levels of maintenance, coupled with an additional annual tree inspection