



Friends of
Duchess Wood

DUCHESS WOOD for the community

Friends of Duchess Wood of the community

A brief outline by the Friends of Duchess Wood
about its community role. February 2016

(Photos taken over recent years)





Community work by the Friends of Duchess Wood

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from the Friends of Duchess Wood
to the Helensburgh Community Council
February 2016

This paper has been prepared for the Helensburgh Community Council (HCC) at the invitation of its Convener to explain the **community role** of the Friends of Duchess Wood (FODW). It does not deal with FODW's biodiversity and wildlife work, covered elsewhere.

Popularity of Duchess Wood

Duchess Wood is one of the town's most popular facilities. An independent report assessing 51 open spaces in and around Helensburgh rated Duchess Wood as one of only four spaces deemed "most valued".

Duchess Wood has been popular for a long time. Its use has increased greatly in recent years with upgraded footpaths, bridges and other improvements, with recognition of health benefits of physical exercise, with increasing interest in natural heritage and protecting biodiversity, and with growth of green networks for towns.

The Wood is designated a **Local Nature Reserve**, a **Local Nature Conservation Site**, an **Open Space Protection Area**, part of the **Green Belt** and part of Helensburgh's new **Green Network**. Local Nature Reserves are designed to protect precious parts of natural heritage, while at the same time ensuring that the public can enjoy them. Its main paths are listed **Core Paths**. Official reports have said the Wood is well managed.

Partnership is the key

This paper is about the **Friends of Duchess Wood (FODW)** and the Wood, as a low-cost but high value facility. It depends on a loose but effective partnership. This partnership mode of operation might be a model for other valued local facilities and services.

Luss Estates Company owns the Wood and has assisted other community initiatives in Helensburgh's countryside (e.g. the footpaths network around Helensburgh). Its support for Duchess Wood is appreciated.

By renewable agreements, management (but not ownership) of the Wood lies with **Argyll and Bute Council (A&BC)**. The **Duchess Wood Local Nature Reserve Committee (DWLNRC)**, currently chaired by Councillor Aileen Morton, oversees that management. A&BC provide policy continuity, legal and safety oversight, some funding and practical support (e.g. litter bin clearance and dealing with larger problem trees), and control over major events. The DWLNRC is affiliated to the H&L Community Planning Group.

The Friends of Duchess Wood (FODW) is a voluntary organisation and a registered charity. It works on behalf of the community in many ways, as explained below, but subject to the DWLNRC management policies. The Friends represent the community with two places on the DWLNRC. The Friends regard partnership working with other community organisations as crucial and appendix 1 below lists some of these. Substantial amounts of person-hours are given by volunteers each year and FODW is grateful for those. The Friends also raise funds to help maintain and enhance the Wood, as well as carrying out much practical work themselves, including day-to-day clearance and management.

The Friends of Duchess Wood and community

The Scottish Government has accepted that the word “community” cannot be defined adequately. We agree. Here we take it to mean the public – both local people and visitors.

FODW serves and represents both categories of people. One way is through its membership, but its community role is wider, especially with regard to the three main Local Nature Reserve functions defined by Scottish Natural Heritage :

- biodiversity
- research and education (“education” being more than just schooling)
- access by the public for “informal recreation and enjoyment of nature”

FODW undertakes considerable work regarding biodiversity and wildlife, but that aspect is not covered in this paper. Although the primary designation of the Wood is as a **Local Nature Reserve**, its Management Plan makes clear that the Wood will be a multi-purpose community woodland, and that the Wood can accommodate a wide range of activities, as long as the LNR objectives are respected. Larger events, such as the “Zombie” run two years ago, major cross-country, orienteering and other large-scale events are managed through the A&BC events policy, but a significant number of smaller group activities, such as school visits, walking groups, nature tours, athletics training, children’s events, and Duke of Edinburgh award, take place on an informal basis, often assisted by FODW.

For almost a decade, FODW has worked with and for the community in a range of ways.

- Having a body of community members which elect its trustees.
- Carrying out / commissioning practical maintenance work in the Wood for public benefit (planting trees, control overgrowth, drainage maintenance, etc.)
- Carrying out / commissioning research and informing the public about results.
- Providing information / education for the public (newsletter, website, research summaries, information hub in the Wood, signposting, exhibitions, guided tours, outside talks, etc.).
- Encouraging athletics, walking for health, wildlife-watching and other outdoor pursuits.
- Events for children (e.g. Easter trail, Walking Theatre, wildlife learning events).
- Liaison with (and sometimes joint work with) a range of other organisations both local, regional and national. *See appendix 1 below.*
- Routine liaison with police, fire, environmental and other services and reporting problems to relevant bodies.
- Representing the community on the DWLNRC.
- Work on creating each five-year Management Plan.
- Raising and expending additional funding to supplement main grants obtained by A&BC.
- Rendering account to DWLNRC meetings, to the Friends’ AGM and to OSCR.

Future liaison with HCC

FODW would be pleased to maintain and increase its links with the HCC. If any HCC councillors would care to become members of the Friends (£10 a year per household) we would be delighted. We would also welcome practical assistance. FODW will shortly be specifying those aspects of its work which need extra support. In the meanwhile, FODW is looking for a volunteer to assist the Membership Secretary and some additional IT help. FODW would be happy to provide further information. We will shortly make available our new information and membership leaflet. Might that and this paper (or an adaptation of it) be considered for inclusion on the HCC website for a limited period of time?

We can be contacted at at the Secretary's email at al.macbeth@btinternet.com or at enquiry@duchesswood.org.uk Our website address is www.duchesswood.org.uk

Appendix 1 : Liaison between Friends of Duchess Wood and other organisations

The Friends of DW has liaised with and sometimes worked with the following at different times.

LOCAL

Duchess Wood Local Nature Reserve Committee
 Helensburgh Community Council
 Rhu and Shandon Community Council
 Argyll and Bute Council planners
 Helensburgh and District Access Trust
 [The A&BC Employability Team]
 Community Payback
 Helensburgh Tree Conservation Trust
 Helensburgh Community Woodlands Group
 Friends of Hermitage Park
 Helensburgh Green Belt Group
 Helensburgh Study Group
 Helensburgh Cricket and Rugby Club
 Helensburgh Athletics Club
 Kathleen Park Residents' Association
 Walking for Welfare
 Local press
 [Helensburgh Natural History Society]
 Local schools
 Love Loch Lomond

REGIONAL and NATIONAL

Scottish Government
 Argyll and Bute Council
 Scottish Natural Heritage
 Lower Clyde Greenspace
 Greenspace Scotland
 Community Woodlands Association
 Forestry Commission Scotland
 Scottish Wildlife Trust
 Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland
 Buglife
 Plantlife
 Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
 The Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust
 Office for the Scottish Charity Regulator
 Friends of Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park
 John Muir Trust
 Paths for All Partnership
 Argyll and Bute TSI
 Argyll and the Isles Tourism Cooperative
 Universities

Appendix 2 : Background

Origins of Duchess Wood

The Wood was owned by the Dukes of Argyll in the 19th century and was probably named after Ann, Dowager Duchess of Argyll, who came to live at Ardencaple Castle in 1847 on the death of her husband. The castle was near the waterfront at the west of Helensburgh, but all that remains today is a tower above Ardencaple Drive and its woodland, including Duchess Wood. The estate was sold to the Colquhouns of Luss in 1862, and it remains in the ownership of Luss Estates Company today. Community use of Duchess Wood before it became a local nature reserve in 1998 was extensive, and older Helensburgh residents recall playing in it in childhood.

Origins of the Friends of Duchess Wood

Duchess Wood became a Local Nature Reserve in 1998, the 25th to be created in Scotland and the first in Argyll and Bute. There are now 72 in Scotland.

An initial community group was set up in March 2003 by several organisations, but on 4th. July 2007 the **Friends of Duchess Wood** (FODW) was inaugurated with Sandy Kerr as chairman. Its constitution states that the Friends may :

- arrange meetings, exhibitions, talks, surveys and training courses
- organise / carry out practical environmental projects
- raise and expend funds
- liaise and work in partnership with other organisations and individuals
- collect, disseminate and exchange relevant information
- publicise their activities by any appropriate means
- buy, hire or borrow any equipment, tools or other items required to fulfil the objectives
- acquire and hold land or property

The Friends of DW is also committed to the three Local Nature Reserve aims of :

- biodiversity
- research and education (“education” being more than just schooling)
- access by the public for “informal recreation and enjoyment of nature”

To represent the community, the Friends have two places on the authority-run DWLNRC. Both the Scottish Natural Heritage and the Lower Clyde Greenspace assisted in creating the current arrangement.

Thus a constructive partnership was formed between A&B Council's DWLNRC with policy-making, financial and management responsibilities for the Wood, and the Friends, representing the community and carrying out day-to-day tasks and assisting with management.