

## **Friends of Duchess Wood Autumn Newsletter 2019**

FODW is a voluntary, non-political local community group and a registered charity. It works co-operatively with other groups such as Community Payback, The Access Trust, Branching Out and a range of other bodies especially Argyll and Bute Council's Duchess Wood Local Nature Reserve Committee which is responsible for the wood. We are grateful to them for the contributions they make to the successful running of the wood.

Membership of FODW costs £10 per household per year and requires no obligations although volunteers to help with simple maintenance tasks are always welcome.

Current FODW Trustees are: Matt Offord (Chairman) Martin Grafton (Secretary) Bill Hassall (Treasurer) Morag Young (Membership Secretary) Paul Blackburn, Rachel Bailey, Stewart Campbell, Richard Horrell, David Lewin and Pete Minting.

### **YOUR VIEWS**

On the website use the **Contact** button to email any comments or queries to FODW

Website – [www.duchesswood.org.uk](http://www.duchesswood.org.uk) Facebook - @FODW1

Charity number SC039527

### **Annual General Meeting**

The 2019 AGM will be held on Monday 18th November at 7:30pm in the Helensburgh Parish Church Hall. Any motions members wish to be discussed should be sent to the Secretary at [martin.grafton@outlook.com](mailto:martin.grafton@outlook.com) or at 17 Queens Point, Shandon G84 8QZ, signed by two members, by 21st October.

### **Woodlands in and around Towns (WIAT) Grant**

Having accepted our Management Plan for the woods the WIAT grant has been approved by the Forestry Commission and £1300 passed to the Council. This funded the tree survey recently carried out. Meanwhile this allows access to other Scotland Forestry funding although as the wood is closed, future funding requests are focussed on remediation work identified as needed by the survey.

### **Waitrose Tokens**

FODW was one of the three Waitrose charities selected for their Green Token Scheme – “Supporting Communities” in June. £350 was raised and been received.

### **Police Scotland**

We have met with representatives of Police Scotland concerning the local Police Scotland Youth Volunteer Scheme. This group would like to carry out maintenance tasks eg clearing grass from around young trees / drainage ditch and gully clearance over the autumn /winter when they are less busy with events marshalling duties and the Wood reopens.

## **The Wood Closed!**

In mid-June, following a tree safety survey carried out for Argyll and Bute Council (A&BC) council officials decided to shut the wood to all access. They did this without reference to Luss Estates, FODW or the Duchess Wood Local Nature Reserve Committee. Despite several requests for a meeting and for information it was only after a Freedom of Information (FOI) Request was submitted that the survey report was provided. It highlights 97 hazardous trees. Despite the report recommending that work was needed with 2 – 4 weeks the council have not yet started any work whilst they apply for funding from the Woodlands In and Around Towns grant scheme.

The FODW have grave concerns re the way the closure of the woods has been managed. The fact that A&BC have taken upon itself to close the wood without consulting the Local Nature Reserve Committee is of grave concern, as is the lack of communication which would have helped us keep you informed. Despite the council putting up notices, most of which have been removed, the wood continues to be visited by members of the public and it calls into question the ability of the council to protect individuals from perceived dangers. It is of particular note that after over three months closure work has still not started to make the wood safe.

We continue to press the council and highlight our concerns through the local press about the inaction and will continue to lobby for early reopening of the wood. However it is our fear that, if the Council's current approach continues and given the council have no funding it will be sometime in 2020

## **Vandalism in wood**

Following an increased presence by the police we have seen a significant reduction in vandalism since the spate of incidents earlier in the year although some information / map boards have been damaged and broken glass left lying on the ground.

## **Management Agreement**

Following their decision to relinquish their role in managing the wood A&BC held a "drop in" event in the Civic Centre so that interested parties could find out about the wood and how they might get involved in its future. As expected interest was sparse with only 20-25 individuals attending. Most attendees criticising the council for their position and wanting reassurance that Luss Estates wouldn't seek to develop the site. Meanwhile, along with other stakeholders, we continue to hold discussions with both Luss Estates and A&BC on the arrangements for management of the wood post summer 2020. In researching other management models Luss Estates and FODW recently attended a Community Engagement event at Doune Ponds, which was very positive about landowner/Friends cooperation and this is being followed up by further meetings. Letters of support for FODW and the role plays in the local community have been received from Helensburgh Green Belt, Helensburgh and District Access Trust, Branching Out, Garelochhead Riding for the Disabled Group and Rhu Primary School (amongst others).

## **News in brief**

### **Persimmon Homes**

Following the unauthorised dumping of waste in the woods by Persimmon Homes the waste has been removed. FODW has been in discussion with the council's Biodiversity Officer and the intention now is to see how the area recovers over the next few years. It is possible the site could recover as a woodland meadow! We were also concerned by the amount of polystyrene waste which was blowing from the site into the wood. It remains our opinion that Persimmon Homes should make a substantial gesture towards the wood – for example reinstating the all ability users path - and we continue to pursue this. A path has now been made along the top of the site although it has already been subject to erosion. Meanwhile we are concerned re the number of trees on the

boundary which might come under pressure from new occupants of the houses.

### **You Tube Film**

Daisy Harris has made an excellent short film about the wood. It can be accessed at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xeDW4gQGDj8>

The film was specially commended in the 'forestry and land management' category in the "Why invest in nature?" short film competition 2019, the category sponsored by Scottish Woodlands.

### **Maintenance**

Main efforts have been in rectifying damage caused by vandals such as damaged map and information boards, broken fencing by the canyon and lower pond gate. Following the closure of the wood in June there have been no further working parties and there are no plans to hold any until access is restored.

### **Bats**

Following our acquisition of a bat detector we have detected the common noctule, or the Lesser noctule (as well as the soprano and common pipistrelles). We have also seen bats hunting during the day by the ponds