



Friends of Duchess Wood

Spring Newsletter 2024



Your Wood Needs YOU!

Current membership stands at 201 households, a fall of 4 since October 2023.

We continue to struggle to recruit two new trustees to fill vacancies on the Executive Committee. If you are interested in helping, please contact either the Chair (David Lewin), Secretary (Martin Grafton) or leave a message on the contact page of our web site – www.duchesswood.org.uk

Additionally, we hold work parties on the last Sunday of every month (2pm meet at garages at end of Millig Street) to which all members are welcome.

Geocache

Geocaching is an outdoor treasure-hunting activity that uses GPS-enabled devices. In geocaching, participants navigate to a specific set of GPS coordinates and then attempt to find the "geocache," (usually a container or marker) at that location. The apps are available on Apple Store and Google Play and currently there are two geocaches in Duchess Wood.

Storm Damage

The Wood suffered some storm and flooding damage during the winter. Several times torrential rain caused water levels in the burn and ditch at the car park to rise to levels which necessitated closing the car park on at least two occasions. Also a number of large trees came down in the gales, including a veteran lime tree off the east path.



We are grateful to Community Payback who, amongst other jobs, repaired a section of path at the top of the Wood that had been eroded by heavy rain.

Annual General Meeting

The 2022/23 AGM was held on Tuesday 24th October 2023 at 7:30pm in the Helensburgh Parish Church Hall. After the normal agenda of the Executive Committee presenting the annual report and accounts, and a short break, there was a short talk by Iona Hyde on the work of the Woodland Trust in the west of Scotland. 26 members attended, the highest since 2018.

The 2023/24 AGM will be held on 29th October and further details will be sent out in the autumn.

Recent Committee Meetings

Since the last newsletter two committee meetings have been held. Topics of discussion included liaison with the landowner (Luss Estates) particularly on wood management, storm and flood damage and general maintenance activities. The bank account balance on 29th February was a healthy £6016.72.

Mentoring

Syd House, an experienced Forester (now retired) who was allocated to FODW through the Community Woodland Association's mentorship programme, walked around the wood accompanied by a number of Trustees and members. He held a wash-up session in the Cricket and Rugby Club clubhouse after the event.



Amongst other topics we discussed how to create glades for replanting in areas where trees were old and not growing well and how to manage the oak plantation at the top of the Wood. FODW are very grateful for Syd's visit and his input both during and after his visit.

Bat Walk(s)!

Bev Clarke from the Loch Lomond Bat Group lead two very engaging bat walks for FoDW. The first walk was on a very wet evening, so the bats sensibly stayed in their roosts. Unlike the sun, Bev's enthusiasm and passion for bats shone through, so participants still learned a lot about these fascinating mammals. Bev kindly offered to return a few days later and luckily it was a dry evening. After another interesting talk, the group set out with bat detectors and soon heard the bats' clicks and little squelching sounds as they caught insects. It was a really fun evening, enjoyed by all ages. We hope to run more bat walks in the late summer.



Dunbar Community Woodland

Anyone visiting the other end of the John Muir Way in Dunbar may be interested in visiting the Community Woodland there – Lochend Woods, just off the "Asda Roundabout": www.dunbarwoods.org/. It is a very interesting comparator to Duchess Wood. It is similar in size, in composition and in history, though it has more conifers, including a clump of yew trees. The Community Woodlands group has recently been able to purchase a substantial planing saw and has had no planning difficulty in locating two shipping containers in the wood as their base. It is well worth a visit if in the area.

Burgh's Big Conversation

Members of the FODW took part in Helensburgh's Big Conversation where local groups came together to talk about what can be done to improve our environment and community with the aim to make the area cleaner, more sustainable and climate friendly.

Council Issues

Argyll and Bute Council have adopted the Local Development Plan 2 which confirms Duchess Wood's status as a Local Nature Reserve, local nature conservation site and part of the Helensburgh Green Belt (one of eleven green belts in Scotland). This has been constructed in accordance with the Scottish National Planning Framework 4 – in which Policy 8 gives guidance for the protection of Green Belt designated areas when considering planning applications. This is particularly relevant for the proposed Energy Storage Scheme application by YLEM.

Wildlife in wood

As members living in Strathclyde Court will no doubt appreciate, the number of rooks' nests in the pine trees has increased substantially – up from around 80 pre-Covid to around 140 this year.

Members may remember the visit by Suzanne Burgess from Buglife to the wood in 2016, when she identified a solitary bee nesting just off the path to the west of the "navy pitch"; this was one of the most common in the UK (though unrecorded in this area) – Gwynne's Mining bee (*Andrena bicolor*). After what has appeared to be a thin few years, there are now a number of their distinctive holes under one of the oak trees.

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 Luss Estates Company 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:

David Lewin (Chairman) david.lewin26@gmail.com

Martin Grafton (Secretary) martin.grafton@outlook.com

Eilean Yendell (Treasurer) e.m.yendell@googlemail.com

Morag Young (Membership Secretary) moragyoung@ymail.com

Laura Baird, Nicky Brownrigg, Stewart Campbell, and Richard Horrell.

YOUR VIEWS

The FODW email address is admin@duchesswood.org.uk.

Website – www.duchesswood.org.uk

Facebook – www.facebook.com/FODW1/

Charity number SC039527

Proposed Battery Energy Storage Scheme

As many of you may well know YLEM, a Manchester based renewable energy company, plan to install a 50MW Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) on a 0.5ha of greenbelt land owned by Ardencaple Farm. The proposed site is adjacent to the West Highland Railway Line and very close to Duchess Wood.

The consultation period ended at the end of March and our submission, forwarded to the council before the closure date, can be seen on the news page of the FODW web site www.duchesswood.org.uk/news/.

It is understood that the council hope to make their determination by the end of June 2024 although, given the number of objections submitted, this may be delayed.

Benches

On 31st March the Holland family donated a new bench which was placed at the top of the west path, close to the burn. The bench is in memory of Simon, Husband to Sally and Father to Matt, Rebecca and Jacob. Simon was ex RN and Babcock.



Gift Aid

Making a Gift Aid donation or subscription increases the value of your financial contribution. We recently received £343 from HMRC. Please consider signing up for this if you can.