



Friends of Duchess Wood

(Charity number SC039527)

ANNUAL REPORT and ACCOUNTS

for the period

1st July 2023 to 30th June 2024

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Section A: Details

1. Current Trustees

David Lewin (Chair)
Laura Baird
Paul Blackburn (resigned September 2023)
Nicky Brownrigg
Stewart Campbell
Martin Grafton (Secretary)
Richard Horrell
Eilean Yendell (Treasurer)
Morag Young

2. Trustees

There was one Trustee resignation during the reporting period, Paul Blackburn in September. This leaves two vacancies which we continue to seek to fill. Eileen Yendell has indicated her intention to resign as Treasurer and we are actively working to fill this gap. We are aware of the fragility of our succession plan with respect to Trustees and are working hard to improve our resilience in this area. Nicky Brownrigg is the daughter of the Financial Examiner, Terence, and any potential conflicts of interest are managed as they arise, although none have been identified to date.

3. Governing Document

The Friends of Duchess Wood is a charitable, unincorporated body. Its purposes and administration arrangements are set out in the Constitution. Trustees are appointed at the Annual General Meeting.

4. Charitable Purposes

The objectives of the Friends, as set out in the Constitution, are “to assist in the management of Duchess Wood and safeguard its benefits to the community in terms of biodiversity and quiet enjoyment by the public – including recreational and educational use”.

5. Financial Examiner

Terence Brownrigg

6. Bankers

Bank of Scotland, Colquhoun Square, Helensburgh

7. Contact Address

c/o The Secretary
17 Queens Point
Shandon
Helensburgh
G84 8QZ

Section B: Report on Activities

1. Objectives

The objectives of the charity are “to assist in the management of Duchess Wood and safeguard its benefits to the community in terms of biodiversity and quiet enjoyment by the public – including recreational and educational use”.

2. Review of progress

2.1 Administration

The Executive committee met on four occasions. The Annual General Meeting for 2021/22 was held in Helensburgh on 24th October 2023 where 26 members were present, the highest since 2018. After the formal meeting Fiona Hyde gave a short talk on the role of the Woodlands Trust in the west of Scotland.

We remain an affiliate member of The Conservation Volunteers in Scotland (TCV) group and we have arranged insurance with Zurich through them to cover our membership. We are also members of the Community Woodlands Association (CWA).

2.2 Membership

Over the year membership numbers have continued to increase and now stands at 210 households (up from 206) of which two are honorary members. This is over double the membership in June 2020 (102 households) and reflects the ongoing recruitment drive.

Whilst we continued to receive new memberships through the traditional membership leaflet, the GoCardless mobile phone-based membership scheme has continued to attract new members who pay by direct debit. However, the GoCardless scheme has the disadvantage of not allowing new members to sign off for Gift Aid and this has to be done by the Membership Secretary making direct contact with new members.

We are still keen to get more involvement from members and, as highlighted above, are still looking for new Trustees. Two newsletters were issued to members during the year.

2.3 Liaison

Contacts were maintained with Nature Scot, Community Service (Department of Justice) Team, The Conservation Volunteers in Scotland, Scotland Forestry, Community Woodlands Association, Helensburgh and District Access Trust, Helensburgh Tree Conservation Trust, Helensburgh Community Woodlands Group, Helensburgh Cricket and Rugby Club, Helensburgh Community Council, Hermitage Primary School, Lomond School, Luss Estates Company, Rhu Primary School, Blairvadach Outdoor Centre, Strathclyde Court Residents' Committee, the Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland, Police Scotland, Scottish Fire Service, the charities “we are with you” and “Rise and Rewild”, “Argyll and The Isles Coast and Countryside Trust (ACT)” and the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator.

We express special appreciation for the work of the Community Service (Department of Justice) Team and their continued assistance, where possible, during the year. Also special thanks go to Laura Baird for the preferential use of a garage near Strathclyde Court.

We have maintained close contact with the Helensburgh Community Council, particularly in respect of our respective responses to the planning application to construct and operate a Battery Energy Storage Scheme (BESS) at Ardencaple Farm.

We have had some discussions with the local representative of the British Horse Society about making the Wood more horse friendly and we produced quotes for strengthening bridges and fords. This has not progressed and we remain concerned re horses using infrastructure not currently strong enough to support the weight of a horse and on the horse/pedestrian/dog interface.

Responsibility for the management of Duchess Wood belongs to the Landowner, Luss Estates Company (LEC), with whom we have good relations which include their attendance at committee meetings on an ad hoc basis. We work to a three-year activity plan (2022 – 2024) highlighting the direction of the Friends activities for the medium to longer term and this is available on the website. It has recently been updated to show the good progress we have made across most areas. [Activities List – Friends of Duchess Woods](#) .

Iona Hyde (Woodlands Trust) visited the Wood in November and gave much helpful advice on good management of woodland including that of the concept of Coup Felling. The Community Woodland Association (CWA) has also appointed a mentor (Syd House, a retired professional Forrester) to support us in the woodland management aspects of our role. He spent a day with us in March and provided much useful advice. In January Andrew Whittaker, a horse logger from Taynuilt, visited the Wood to discuss the practicalities of timber extraction using a horse. It seems possible to do this and could be part of any future glade creation project.

Lastly, we retain strong links with the Helensburgh Community Woodlands Group, who manage the Castle Wood and experience similar challenges to those that we do. Together we have plans to meet with David Haggerty (Argyll and Bute Council Community Development Officer) to look at potential sources of funding and resource.

2.4 Activities

There was significant flooding in the autumn which threatened properties on Kathleen Park. Local residents and LEC carried out some temporary mitigation work and have said they will look at a more permanent solution.

The Community Service teams have carried out much helpful work including replacing all the base boards on the Chicane Bridge, repairs to Thurgood Bridge, path repairs and installation of a memorial bench. They also installed an additional fence around the tree nursery, to deter deer, and cleared ditches and gullies around the Wood.

In May 36 senior pupils and staff from Lomond School visited the Wood for an afternoon to help with laurel clearance and other maintenance tasks. This is the third year a large group of pupils has visited the Wood and again proved an enjoyable afternoon for all involved. We are engaging with the school to provide opportunities for Duke of Edinburgh award activities. Additionally, one of the grounds staff occasionally cuts some of the grass at the Pony Field for which we are grateful.

Routine work by the FODW this year has included weeding the tree nursery, cutting back invasive species, pruning, mulching and cutting back brambles at the fruit tree orchard, repairing minor damage to footpaths, drainage, fences and benches and other low-level maintenance. Volunteers planted birch saplings over the fence at the car park and birch and hawthorn saplings to the right of the path up from the car park to the Pony Field. The 100 oak tree plantation at the top of the Wood was cleared of small birch etc and brambles to make it more accessible and lower branches trimmed. In due course the plantation will be thinned to about half its current number of trees to avoid overcrowding.

Disappointingly there continues to be incidents of vandalism in the Wood. These are always reported to Police Scotland and addressed it as soon as we can. Discarded bottles and litter continue to be a problem, along with the occasional signs of fires, and our thanks go to everyone who takes a bag with them when walking in the Wood to pick up litter.

Finally, we are grateful for the good work and support from Luss Estates Company which has included swift action to address unsafe trees, especially after winter storms, continuing treatment of Japanese Knotweed, replacement of fencing at the car park and regularly emptying of bins. We have also benefited from excellent work and advice received from their Contract Tree Surgeon, Archie Wilson.

2.5 Public Relations, Publications and Events.

We have maintained good relations with the local press. Our information leaflets continue to be available at the main entrances to the Wood and elsewhere within Helensburgh. Additionally, we participated in the “Big Conversation about Environment in Helensburgh” Event in March 2024.

Fiona Baker (of Destination Helensburgh) wrote an article for her May column in the Helensburgh Advertiser which included a very positive section on the Wood.

The FODW website and Facebook Account continue to be updated regularly and visited regularly. To date we have 755 followers! Two newsletters were published for members during the year.

One of our members, Mary-Jane Selwood, produced a series of four seasonal cards depicting Duchess Wood and offered these to FODW to sell through two local outlets. We have also produced 2 cards using photographs taken by Laura Baird. The cards continue to generate a small steady income.

Two Bat Walks were held in April, led by Bev Clark from the Lomond Bat Club. Such was the success a repeat event will be held in August 2024.

2.6 Grants and donations

We continue to receive a number of donations and grants, many from individuals, including one of £200 and £50 each from two individuals for wood. We were reimbursed by HMRC £666.59 for Gift Aid donations covering tax years 2020-23. The April Bat Walk event resulted in donations of £135 which were shared with the Bat Conservation Trust. Lomond School repeated their annual donation of £150 and we received a £200 grant from Argyll and Islands ACT.

Lastly we received a donation of £450 to cover the cost of procuring and installing a memorial bench at the top of the west path

3 Outlook

Whilst we do not have a formal Management Agreement with Luss Estates Company (LEC) our relationship is good, and we receive positive support from their senior management team. We have been monitoring the planning application to install an Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) facility on land owned by Ardencaple Farm, adjacent to the Wood on greenbelt land, and are fully engaged in the consultation and planning application process. We have submitted two representations, one covering the potential impact on the Wood of the construction and operational phases and a second on the need for an Environmental Impact Assessment to be carried out.

Argyll and Bute Council adopted the Local Development Plan 2 in February 2024 and we are reassured to see the Wood has retained its designation as a Local Nature Reserve, Local Nature Conservation Site and Open Space Protection Area. The Green Belt designation remains as it was previously, but we remain concerned that there may be threats to this given the new Government's position regarding development and planning processes.

Meanwhile we remain committed to continuing to encourage use of the Wood by local schools, nurseries and others and in maintaining it as a valuable natural resource for the local community. We are regularly approached by groups looking to use the Wood, including Helensburgh Cycles looking to organise Family Bike Rides and litter picks, and Helensburgh Amateur Athletics Club organising a trail race. Whilst it is up to the Landowner (LEC) to approve these activities we often help support their applications.

4. Thanks

Thanks go to all the Trustees on the Committee, to the members of FODW, and to the public who have backed our work and carried out practical tasks, where possible, throughout the year. Grateful thanks are also extended to the individuals and other organisations mentioned above whose help has supported the continuing maintenance and enhancement of the Wood.

SECTION C: FINANCIAL

1. Financial Report

Friends of Duchess Wood		Scottish charity number: SC039527			
Financial Statement for Year to 30 June 2024				Year to 30 June 2023	
	£	£	£	£	
Funds @ 1.7.23		4391		6042	
INCOME:					
Membership	1860		1840		
Donations General	580		315		
Bench Donations	450				
Paths grants / Donations					
Donation Scotland Garden Scheme			211		
Argyll and Islands ACT	200		850		
Lomond School	150		150		
Amazon Europe Core			25		
Archaeological Walk			90		
HMRC Gift Aid	667		309		
Card Sales	148		157		
Bat Walk	68				
Total Income		4123		4151	
EXPENDITURE					
Maintenance – Wood, Fixings, Fencing, etc.	327		1471		
Groundworks and paths			2823		
Website – Hosting, Domaine & Privacy	156		96		
Greeting Cards	90		23		
Admin – Printing, Leaflets, Posters, etc	559		723		
Helensburgh Parish Church / Room Rental	111		93		
GoCardless	10		8		
Garage Rental and Repairs	100		150		
Insurance	133		150		
Community Woodlands Association	30		30		
Laptop – Update, Backup, Storage	164		235		
Award					
Benches & fittings	450				
Sundry					
Total Expenditure		-2130		-5802	
Deficit(-)/Surplus for Year			1993		-1651
Add Opening Bank Balance			4391		6042
Closing Bank Balance			6384		4391

Notes to the Accounts for the year to 30 June 2024

1. Accounting conventions: The accounts are prepared under the historical costs convention and in accordance with the Standard of Recommended Practice (SORP) Accounting for Charities, and applicable accounting standards.
2. Investments: No investments are held.
3. Taxation: The Friends is recognised by HMRC as a charity and is not liable to taxation.
4. Trustee remuneration and expenses: No Trustee receives any remuneration.
5. Reserves: As a result of activities in the year under review The Friends now hold funds of £6384 (2023 £4391).
6. Financial Reserve Policy: There is one bank account which embraces one unrestricted fund. This records our activities and represents the free reserves of the charity as at 30 June 2024.
7. Risk Management Policy: The trustees have assessed the major risks to the operations and finances of the charity and are satisfied that systems are in place to mitigate exposure to major risks.

Approved by the trustees and signed on their behalf:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David Lewin". The signature is written in a cursive style with a period at the end.

David Lewin, Chair

2. Independent Financial Examiner's Report to The Friends of Duchess Wood

APPENDIX 3



		Independent examiner's report on the accounts							v2
Report to the trustees/members of	Charity name	Friends of Duchess Wood							
Registered charity number		SC039527							
On the accounts of the charity for the period	Period start date	Day	Month	Year	to	Day	Month	Year	
		1	July	2023		30	June	2024	
Set out on pages		9 - 10						(remember to include the page numbers of additional sheets)	
Respective responsibilities of trustees and examiner	The charity's trustees are responsible for the preparation of the accounts in accordance with the terms of the Charities and Trustee Investment (Scotland) 2005 Act and the Charities Accounts (Scotland) Regulations 2006 (as amended). The charity trustees consider that the audit requirement of Regulation 10(1) (d) of the Accounts Regulations does not apply. It is my responsibility to examine the accounts as required under section 44(1) (c) of the Act and to state whether particular matters have come to my attention.								
Basis of independent examiner's statement	My examination is carried out in accordance with Regulation 11 of the 2006 Accounts Regulations. An examination includes a review of the accounting records kept by the charity and a comparison of the accounts presented with those records. It also includes consideration of any unusual items or disclosures in the accounts and seeks explanations from the trustees concerning any such matters. The procedures undertaken do not provide all the evidence that would be required in an audit and, consequently, I do not express an audit opinion on the view given by the accounts.								
Independent examiner's statement	In the course of my examination, no matter has come to my attention [other than that disclosed on the attached page*]								
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> which gives me reasonable cause to believe that in any material respect the requirements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> to keep accounting records in accordance with section 44(1) (a) of the 2005 Act and Regulation 4 of the 2006 Accounts Regulations, and to prepare accounts which accord with the accounting records and comply with Regulation 9 of the 2006 Accounts Regulations have not been met, or to which, in my opinion, attention should be drawn in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached. 								
Signed:							Date:	30 October 2024	
Name:	J T P Brownrigg								
Relevant professional qualification(s) or body (if any):	Member ICAS								
Address:	Ardentigh Glenoran Road, Rhu Helensburgh G84 8JU								

*Please delete the words in the brackets if they do not apply. If the words do apply, set out those matters which have come to your attention on the following page.