

Friends of Duchess Wood

Spring Newsletter 2025



Sale of Wood

Following Luss Estates advertising the Wood for sale last year the sale went to a Closing Date in November. We understand that there were two bids and, whilst we do not yet know who the winning bid was from, we understand it to be from someone minded to manage the wood in a similar manner to that it is currently. Since then progress in completing the sale seems to be slow but we will keep you updated as and when we are informed of any developments.

New Trustees

Three new Trustees have recently joined the Executive Committee. Christ Gow and Martin Williams were voted onto the Committee at the AGM in October and, since the, Carolyn Rosie has also joined as an Acting Trustee. Due to personal reasons Norman Quirk, due to take over as Treasurer from Eilean Yendell, has had to resign from the Committee. We are glad to report that Chris Gow has taken on the role of Treasurer and has recently completed the handover from Eilean. However concerns remain over the fragility of succession planning for office bearers and other key members of the committee.

There remains one vacancy for a Trustee on the Executive committee and if you are interested in taking up a role please contact the Chair, David Lewin.

New Financial Examiner

Following many years in the role Terence Brownrigg has stood down as our Financial Examiner and will be replaced by Eileen Armstrong who has considerable experience in this role. We were pleased to be able to present Terence with a small gift to recognise our grateful thanks for his support over many years.



Annual General Meeting

The 2023/24 AGM was held on Tuesday 29th October 2024 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, the Chair gave a brief to members explaining the rationale as to why the Committee were not recommending that the Friends engaged in a Community Buy-out of the Wood from Luss Estates. There was general acceptance of this view.

The 2024/25 AGM will be held on Monday 3rd November at 7:30pm in the Helensburgh Parish Church Hall. Further details will be promulgated nearer the time.

Recent Committee Meetings

Since the last newsletter three 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. Additionally, the Secretary (Martin Grafton) gave a brief on the impact of changes to Charity Regulation (see article on Constitution).

The bank account balance on 20th February was £6443.43. Membership stood at a healthy 220 households.

Storm Damage

The Wood suffered some storm and flooding damage during the winter, particularly by the severe Storm Eowyn in late January. Several organisations help make the Wood safe but we are particularly indebted to Andy Donald in helping clear blocked paths. David Lewin presented Andy with a small gift in appreciation of his support.



Events

The Committee has set up an Events Group to co-ordinate events being held in the wood in order to promote its role in promoting quiet enjoyment and biodiversity.

Two events have already been held: an Information Day on 13th April and a Bat Walk on 19th April.

The Information Day resulted in 10 new members! Also a count of visitors to the Wood was conducted which showed a 10% increase in visitors since 2016 (40% increase for dogs). Extrapolating this shows the annual number of visitors to the Wood to be between 60K and 80K showing its value to the local community as a natural amenity.

Twenty people attended the bat walk with Bev Clarke again doing an excellent job and, although on a cold evening the bats were late coming out, and informative and enjoyable evening was had by everyone. The Friends receiving £100 in cash donations (which will be shared with the Bat Conservation Trust).

Two further events are already planned: Wildflower walks from 18 Duchess Park on 11th May (which will be open as part of Scotland's Garden Scheme that afternoon), and a Tree Themed Treasure Hunt for families on 8th June. Members have already been informed of these events and will always get priority places. Further events will be held later in the year and if there are any themes or activities you'd like us to include please contact nickyfodw@gmail.com with any requests or suggestions.



Maintenance Support

Regular monthly working parties were held and thanks to those members that joined in helping to keep the Wood in a safe condition. Work done has included planting saplings on the bank opposite the rugby pitch, clearing out the gullies alongside the path up from the car park, renewing tape around the tree nursery to deter deer and preparing the tree nursery for new saplings arriving from the Woodland Trust in early March.

Lomond School continue to provide good support to maintenance in the wood. We have recently had 3 visits from 17 x 10year olds who have raked out gullies, cleared the orchard of cutting left after pruning, started to build a willow barrier over the burn at Duchess Gait and finished cutting up and stacking the ponticum etc in the recently cleared glade.

Meanwhile, during several visits, Community Payback dug holes in preparation for transplanting saplings from the nursery, carried out repairs at the Thurgood Bridge, cleared blocked gullies and using their motorized barrow, moved some cut timber from the upper path down to the Millig St entrance.

Nature Corridor

The Friends have engaged with the Helensburgh Community Woodland Group and the Rhu and Shandon Community Trust in writing to the local Community Councils requesting that they consider protecting and enhancing, in the next Local Place Plan, the nature corridor running from Castle Wood in Helensburgh to Rhu and Shandon.

Merlin Birdsong App

For those that can't tell the difference between a woodpecker and a cuckoo there is a very useful and informative app that will tell you the breed of bird from recording its song. The Merlin Bird ID App has been developed by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. It is free to use and a useful tool to help identify birds in the Wood.

Constitution

The Friends of Duchess Wood constitution was written in 2007 and has had only minor amendments since then. Following the introduction of new legislation last year - the Charities (Regulation and Administration)(Scotland) Act 2023 - it was felt time to refresh the Constitution with a complete review and rewrite which is being led by the Secretary, Martin Grafton.

The new legislation is giving greater powers to the OSCR (Scottish Charity Regulator) and gives guidance on who can (and can't) be Trustees, the role and training of trustees. Decision making (AGM, EGM, Voting, Internal Disputers etc.). Some of these requirements have already been adopted informally by the Executive Committee (Training and Fitness to be a Trustee Declarations). OSCR also intend publishing a register of Trustees and also putting the Annual Reports of Charities in the Public Domain - ours is already published on our web site.

The draft constitution is already with the current Trustees for comment. It is intended that the Secretary will provide a brief on changes at the next AGM after which copies will be sent to all members. Members will then be asked to vote on adoption of the new Constitution at the 2026 AGM after which, following approval by OSCR, the constitution will be adopted on 1st January 2027.

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

Chris Gow (Acting Treasurer) e.m.yendell@googlemail.com

Morag Young (Membership Secretary) moragyoung@ymail.com

Laura Baird, Nicky Brownrigg, Stewart Campbell, Richard Horrell, Carolyn Rosie (acting), Martin Williams and Eileen Yendell.

YOUR VIEWS

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

Website - www.duchesswood.org.uk

Facebook - www.facebook.com/FODW1/

Charity number SC039527