



Friends of
Duchess Wood



Friends of Duchess Wood

(Charity number SC039527)

ANNUAL REPORT and ACCOUNTS

for the period

1st July 2024 to 30th June 2025

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Section A: Details

1. Current Trustees

David Lewin (Chair)

Laura Baird

Nicky Brownrigg

Stewart Campbell

Chris Gow (Trustee from 29th October 2024) (Treasurer from 1st March 2025)

Martin Grafton (Secretary)

Richard Horrell

Norman Quirk (Trustee from 29th October 2024, resigned November 2024)

Carolyn Rosie (Acting Trustee from 1st April 2025)

Martin Williams (Trustee from 29th October 2024)

Eilean Yendell (Treasurer until 1st March 2025)

Morag Young

2. Trustee changes during the year

There was one Trustee resignation during the reporting period, Norman Quirk in November 2024 due to personal circumstances. Two new Trustees were elected at the 2024 AGM and one acting Trustee joined during the reporting year. This leaves one vacancy which we continue to seek to fill. Chris Gow, a newly joined Trustee, has kindly taken over as Treasurer. We also received notice that two Trustees intended to standdown at the 2025 AGM, thus leaving three vacancies. We are aware of the fragility of our succession plan with respect to Trustees and office bearers and are working hard to improve our resilience in this area. This included appeals to members and via our Website/Facebook and an article in the local press.

3. Governing Documents

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. Following recent legislation changes a major rewrite of the Constitution has been conducted and is currently being considered by the Trustees before being put to the membership for acceptance. Additions already introduced include checking with Trustees that they are legally fit to be a Trustee and the introduction of Trustee Training packages.

Following the introduction of the Disclosure (Scotland) Act 2020 and discussion with the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations we have determined that as we do not directly supervise or direct activities solely with children or individuals under the age of 18 or with vulnerable adults, we do not need to seek appropriate clearances. However, this does mean that we cannot accept unaccompanied children under the age of 18 at any of our events (see below).

There have been no changes in the year to the charity's other governing documents which are available for review on the charity's website.

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

Following consideration of the relationship of the Financial Examiner with one of the Trustees, along with the fact he was also a member of the Friends and had also been the Financial Examiner for some years, it was determined that this constituted a potential conflict of interest. The Friends have, therefore, appointed a new Financial Examiner, Eileen Armstrong.

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 / Strategy

The Executive committee met on six occasions. Four were routine meetings and two were to debate and agree the Friends’ strategy following the owner’s announcement in October that they were putting the Wood up for sale. The Trustees unanimously agreed they weren’t supportive of leading a community buy out of the Wood and this was put to the membership at the 2024 AGM (see below). This strategy was also presented to the Helensburgh Community Council and the Helensburgh and Lomond Area Planning Committee. We are aware that, following a closing date for offers to buy the Wood in November 2024, a commercial agreement for the sale has been agreed but progress, through the respective legal teams since then, has been slow. We are not formally aware of who the prospective purchaser is; although we understand it is a community focussed organisation.

The Annual General Meeting for 2023/24 was held in Helensburgh on 29th October 2024 where 36 members were present, the highest since 2014 (and ten more than the previous year). The first part of the meeting was taken up with the Chair presenting the Trustees’ strategy for the future of the organisation given the impending sale of the Wood. This was endorsed by the members present. After a refreshment break the constitutional agenda was followed.

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 220 households (up from 210) 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 looking to recruit 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 (who provide a mentor – Syd House), Helensburgh and District Access Trust, Helensburgh Tree Conservation Trust, Helensburgh Community Woodlands Group, Rhu and Shandon Community Group, Helensburgh Cricket and Rugby Club, Helensburgh Community Council, Helensburgh Scouts, Hermitage Primary School, Lomond School, Woodland Wise Forest 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", and the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator.

Contact was also maintained with the following Argyll & Bute Council functions: Climate Action Network, (Helensburgh) The A&BC Land and Management Network, Community Development Officer (Helensburgh), Argyll and the Isles Coast and Countryside Trust, and the Third Sector Interface. We have also been in touch with the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations in connection with recent changes to safeguarding children and vulnerable adults. Lastly, we have also been involved in discussions about the formation of a Nature Corridor and Network from Helensburgh to Garelochhead.

2.4 Maintenance activities

The Friends maintain an Activity Plan, agreed with LEC, which covers the work intended to be conducted over a three-year period.

The Community Service team has 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. Ninety saplings, kindly donated by the Woodland Trust, were also planted by Community Service personnel last March.

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.

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 additional birch, alder 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 more 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. This plantation will continue to the thinned so that, in many years time,

three or four young trees will be allowed to mature to fully mature specimen trees. Work parties are held monthly, and we are grateful to the ten or so members who regularly contribute their time to supporting routine maintenance tasks in the Wood.

Storm Eowyn resulted in the loss of several trees and large limbs, particularly a large sycamore came down at the top of the Wood blocking the path. We were particularly grateful to Andrew Donald, Chair of the HCWG who, with his chainsaw, removed the large branches enabling the path to be reopened the day after the storm.

Disappointingly, there have been some instances of fly tipping of domestic garden waste near the Patterson Drive entrance to the Wood. This has the potential to introduce non-indigenous species and disease into the Wood. We have put a poster up at this entrance asking people not to fly tip garden waste and also added this to our Facebook page to discourage fly tipping generally.

Finally, we are grateful for the good work and support from Luss Estates Company (LEC) which has included swift action to address unsafe trees, especially after winter storms (including Storm Eowyn), continuing treatment of Japanese Knotweed, and regularly emptying of bins twice a week. We have also benefited from excellent work and advice received from LEC Contract Tree Surgeon, Archie Wilson.

2.5 Public Relations, Publications and Events.

We have maintained good relations with the local press where our position on the sale of the Wood has been reported. Our information leaflets continue to be available at the main entrances to the Wood. Additionally, we have participated in several events / meetings in Helensburgh seeking to influence the protection of green spaces in the Helensburgh and Rhu area and to create a Nature Corridor between Helensburgh and Garelochhead.

The FODW website and Facebook Account continue to be updated and is visited regularly. To date we have 809 followers (up from 755 last year). 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 two cards using photographs taken by Laura Baird, one of our Trustees. The cards continue to generate a small steady income.

Following the creation of a small Trustee group to organise events we have held a number of successful events during the year. Two Bat Walks were held: one in September and one in April, again led by Bev Clark from the Lomond Bat Club. An Information Day was also held in September where a count of visitors to the wood was carried out. Dawn Chorus and Flower Walks were held in May and a Treasure Hunt in June. Many future events, including a Tree Walk, are being planned. These are being well received and help to raise the profile of the Friends as well as generating donations from attendees.

During the year we established a relationship with Maggie Irving, a wood turner from Rosneath. We have supplied Maggie with pieces of fallen timber, and she has displayed these at events during the year.

2.6 Grants and donations

We continue to be given a number of donations from individuals, in addition to the £10.00 annual household membership fee. Donations from our Dawn Walk event came to £50.00.

We were reimbursed by HMRC £463.14 for Gift Aid donations covering tax years 2023-4.

The Bat Walk events resulted in total donations of £208.50 which were shared equally with the Bat Conservation Trust – £104.25. Please note that for the last financial year donations were £135.00, which again were shared equally with the Bat Conservation Trust – £67.50. This was recorded as a donation for £68.00 (rounded up), but this year I have listed the total donations and the amount that was shared equally with the Bat Conservation Trust under 'Income' under 'Expenditure' respectively.

Lastly, we received a donation of £470.00 to cover the cost of procuring and installing a memorial bench.

3 Outlook

Whilst we do not have a formal Management Agreement with Luss Estates Company (LEC) our relationship is good, and we have generally received positive support from their senior management team. Two planning applications, one to install a Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) facility and a second to install Holiday Accommodation (both on land owned by Ardencaple Farm) have been rejected by the Planning Authorities.

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.

1. Financial Statement

Friends of Duchess Wood	Scottish charity number: SC039527			
Financial Statement for Year to 30 June 2025			Year to 30 June 2024	
	£	£	£	£
Funds as at 1 July		6384		4391
INCOME:				
Membership	1890		1860	
Donations General	468		580	
Bench Donations	470		450	
Donation Scotland Garden Scheme	451			
Dawn Walk	50			
HMRC Gift Aid	464		667	
Card Sales	175		148	
Bat Walk	209		68	
Argyll and Islands ACT			200	
Lomond School			150	
Total Income		4175		4123
EXPENDITURE				
Maintenance – Wood, Fixings, Fencing, etc.	1261		382	
Gifts	75			
Website – Hosting, Domain & Privacy	76		156	
Admin – Printing, Leaflets, Posters, etc	488		559	
Helensburgh Parish Church / Room Rental	162		111	
GoCardless	17		10	
Garage Rental and Repairs	100		100	
Insurance	163		133	
Community Woodlands Association	70		30	
Laptop – Update / Antivirus, Backup, Storage	35		164	
Benches	1289		395	
50% Bat Walk Donation to Bat Conservation Society	105			
Greeting Cards			90	
Total Expenditure		3838		2130
Deficit(-)/Surplus for Year		338		1993
Add Opening Bank Balance		6384		4391
Closing Bank Balance		6722		6384

Notes to the Accounts for the year to 30 June 2025

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 £6722 (2024 £6384).
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 2025.
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:



David Lewin, Chair

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

Friends of Duchess Wood

Report of the Trustees for the period 1st July 2024 to 30th June 2025

Independent Examiner's report on the accounts

Report to the trustees and members of Friends of Duchess Wood

Registered Charity number **SC039527**

On the accounts for the charity for the period 1st July 24 to 30th June 25

Set out on pages to

The Charity's Trustees are responsible for the preparation of the accounts in accordance with the terms of the Charities Accounts (Scotland) Regulations 2006. 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) of the Act and to state whether particular matters have come to my attention.

My examination is carried out in accordance with Regulation 11 of the Charities Accounts (Scotland) Regulations 2006. An examination includes a review of the accounting records kept by the Charity and a comparison of the accounts presented with these records. It also includes consideration of any unusual items or disclosures in the accounts and seeks explanations from the Trustees concerning 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

In the course of my examination, no matter has come to my attention

1. Which gives me reasonable cause to believe that in any material respect the requirements:
 - 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

2. to which, in my opinion, attention should be drawn in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

Eileen Armstrong

29th Aug 25.

Eileen Armstrong BA
Independent Examiner
19 Dollar Road
Tillicoultry
FK13 6PE

