Friends of Duchess Wood

(Charity number SC039527)

ANNUAL REPORT and ACCOUNTS

for the period

1st July 2025 to 30th June 2026

CONTENTS

Section A: Details

1. **Current Trustees**
2. **Trustee changes during the year**
3. **Governing documents**
4. **Charitable Purposes**
5. **Financial Examiner**
6. **Bankers**
7. **Contact address**

Section B: Report on Activities

1. **Review of progress**
2. **Outlook**
3. **Thanks**

Section C: Finances

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

Section A: Details

1. Current Trustees

David Lewin (Chair)
Laura Baird (Trustee until 1st October 2025)
Nicky Brownrigg
Stewart Campbell (Trustee until 19th January 2026)
Neale Dewar (Acting Trustee from 27th March 2026)
Chris Gow (Treasurer)
Martin Grafton (Secretary)
Richard Horrell
Nora Morocza (Trustee from 19th January 2026)
Carolyn Rosie
Andrew Stocks (Trustee from 19th January 2026)
Martin Williams
Eilean Yendell
Morag Young

2. Trustee changes during the year

There were two Trustee resignations during the reporting period. This included one long standing Trustee who had held the positions of Chair and Treasurer. Two new Trustees were elected at the 2025 AGM and one acting Trustee joined during the reporting year. This leaves a full complement of twelve Trustees. We also received notice that three Trustees intend to standdown at the 2026 AGM, thus leaving three vacancies. This includes the current Secretary who has been in post for nine years. We are struggling to fill the Secretary post and until it is the duties will be split amongst current Trustees. We are aware of the continued fragility of our succession plan with respect to Trustees and office bearers and continue to work hard to improve our resilience in this area. This included appeals to members via our Website/Facebook sites and an article in the local press for new Trustees.

Details of all Trustees are now registered and available in the OSCR Register of Trustees.

All Trustees have declared they are legally fit to be Trustees and have completed the requisite training.

3. Governing Documents

The Friends of Duchess Wood is a charitable, unincorporated body. Its purposes and administration arrangements are set out in the Constitution. A rewrite of the Constitution to bring it into line with current regulations was endorsed by the membership at the 2025 AGM and formally adopted after ratification by OSCR on 1st April 2026.

There has been only one change in the year to the charity's other governing documents which is the Privacy Policy. All Governing Policies 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

Eileen Armstrong continues to act as our Financial Examiner, her second year in the role.

6. Bankers

Following the closure of the Bank of Scotland branch in Helensburgh most transactions are now conducted online. The holding branch is now the Bank of Scotland, 94-102 High Street, Dumbarton G82 1PQ.

7. Contact Address

Following the realignment of the Secretary’s roles the following is now the main contact address for correspondence with the Charity Regulator:

Mr VM Williams
Trustee Friends of Duchess Wood
44 Strathclyde Court
Helensburgh
G84 9PW

Section B: Report on Activities

1. Review of progress

1.1 Administration / Strategy

Management meetings were held on six occasions. Four were routine meetings and two were extraordinary meetings to debate and agree a plan for a more robust succession plan. The most pressing issue was to find a successor to the Secretary and how to fill the role in the interim. Whilst a permanent successor to the Secretary role has not been found yet, all the responsibilities have been spread amongst the current Trustees until a successor can be appointed.

The Annual General Meeting for 2024/25 was held in Helensburgh on 19th January 2026 where 24 members were present. The first part of the meeting was taken up with an update on major current activities and the Secretary presented the rewrite of the Constitution. This was endorsed by the members present. Following a short 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).

At the February Management Meeting Luss Estates informed the Trustees that the sale of the Wood had fallen through and that the Wood was being put back on the market for sale. Members were, and will be, kept informed as to progress in this area.

In June we met with a representative of the Rhu & Shandon Community Trust (R&SCT) who informed us they had received the offer of an anonymous, potentially very large donation, which would for the purchase by them of the field above Duchess Gait and Duchess Wood. For an update see Outlook below.

1.2 Membership

Over the year membership has continued to increase and now stands at 244 households (up from 220 in June 2025 and 210 in June 2024), of which two are honorary members. This significant increase reflects the ongoing recruitment drive. The GoCardless mobile phone-based membership scheme has continued to attract new members who pay by direct debit, and 96 members use this method to pay for their membership. However, the GoCardless scheme has the disadvantage of not allowing new members to sign off for Gift Aid. When new members sign up through GoCardless, the Membership Secretary contacts new members directly, asking them to fill in a Gift Aid form. To date, over half of all FODW members (132) have signed up for Gift Aid.
We are still keen to attract more involvement from members and are looking to recruit new Trustees.

1.3 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 Trust, Helensburgh Cricket and Rugby Football 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, the charities "we are with you" and "Rise and Rewild", the British Botanical Survey, the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations 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.

Lastly, we have also been involved in discussions about the formation of a Nature Corridor and Network from Helensburgh to Garelochhead with other local woodland management and volunteer groups.

1.4 Maintenance activities

The Friends maintain an Activity Plan, although not formally agreed with LEC, which covers the work intended to be conducted over a three-year period. This is available to view on the website.

The Community Service team has carried out much helpful work, including repairs to Thurgood Bridge, path repairs and sapling planting in the tree nursery. They also installed an additional fence around the tree nursery to deter deer and cleared ditches and gullies around the Wood.

We continue to engage with Lomond School and Hermitage Primary School to provide opportunities for volunteering Discussion with the SCVO has clarified that we do not need to go through the Disclosure Scotland Process provided cleared Teachers take charge of pupils during these 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 activities such as strimming grass and bracken control. Volunteers transplanted rowan and birch saplings from the tree nursery to the area south and east of the lower wildlife pond. 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 be 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.

The Trustees authorised the procurement of a chain saw and safety equipment and funded the LANTRA certified training of a Trustee to improve our ability to respond to

smaller fallen trees and branches.

Finally, we are grateful for the work and support from Luss Estates Company (LEC) which has included action to address unsafe trees, especially after winter storms, and continuing treatment of Invasive Non-Native Species, and regularly emptying of bins twice a week. During the year LEC appointed a new factor who is now our main point of contact, and we have started to build a working relationship with him including a site meeting to discuss future projects etc.

1.5 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, and we also provide Woodland Trust leaflets on tree identification. 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 web site and the Facebook pages, now our primary method of reaching out to the public, continue to be updated and are visited regularly. To date we have 975 Facebook followers (up from 809 last year) with the website receiving less visits year on year but is our repository for key documentation such as Annual Reports and Governance documents. Two newsletters were published for members during the year.

Two of our members, Mary-Jane Selwood and Laura Baird have made their paintings and photographs available to us to produce cards which we sell through two local retail outlets. These cards continue to generate a small, but steady, income.

Following the creation of a small Trustee group to organise events we have held a number of successful events during the year.

2025

July 19 Tree ID Walk led by a tree surgeon and one of our Trustees
September 13 Foraging Walk
October 4-19 Tree Treasure Trail
October 28 Labyrinth with Jean's Bothy as part of SAMH Arts Festival
November 29 Willow Star Making

2026

January 17 Wassail with Tartan Harmony Choir attended by over 230 people and by far the biggest event the FODW has ever held
April 25 Bat Walk led by Bev Clarke
April 29 Orienteering organised by Clydeside Orienteers
May 17 Foraging Walk
June Nature Quiz created.

Our thanks to the Events Team, Nicky Brownrigg and Martin Williams, for organising these events and a few more which unfortunately had to be cancelled primarily due to bad weather.

These events attracted new visitors to the Wood, raised funds through

donations and increased the awareness of the Wood through press coverage.

A survey of members was carried out in the reporting period to seek their views and preference on potential projects. Work to improve footpaths gained the most support (see Outlook section below).

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. Maggie donated an oak bowl which we asked members and Facebook visitors to bid for and raised £125. This was the first occasion we had used this method of fund raising.

We have added several ancient and veteran trees to the Woodland Trust's Ancient Tree Inventory.

In April we had the first of two planned visits from the Botanical Survey for Britain and Ireland (BSBI) who documented the various plants they found in the Wood – a total of over 170 different vascular plants excluding mosses, lichens etc.

Lomond School had regular volunteering visits. Hermitage Primary pupils carried out work to clear invasive species and generate information about why occupants of houses bordering the Wood should not throw garden waste into the Wood.

Lastly, we have installed footfall counters at the Milling Street and Car Park entrances. This showed over 38,000 visits to the Wood in the first half of the calendar year; which translates to some 76,000 visits a year confirming how well the Wood is used by the Community and visitors to the town. However this excludes visits to the Wood entering and returning through the Patterson Drive and Duchess Gait entrances.

1.6 Grants and donations

We continue to be given a number of donations from individuals, in addition to the £10.00 annual household membership fee, for which we are always very grateful.

We also wish to acknowledge Alison Rutherford ending her membership after many years of support and our appreciation of her generous parting donation of £50.00.

We were reimbursed by HMRC £382.64 for Gift Aid donations covering tax years 2024-5.

Retirement gifts totalling £150.00 were for Stewart Campbell and Laura Baird, in recognition of their many years of loyal and invaluable service acting as trustees.

Please note the inclusion of new item called 'Bank of Scotland Charges' under 'Expenditure'. This follows BOS' decision to start charging small amounts on their charity accounts for cash transactions.

Please also note the inclusion of new item called 'SumUp' under Expenditure. This represents the small deduction taken from any donations collected via our new portable SumUp card reader.

The increase in our insurance premium with Zurich represents the added cost of cover for one of our trustees now being fully qualified for chainsaw usage in the Wood.

The increase in our 'Website' Expenditure includes an ad-hoc five-year hosting renewal fee for our website.

Our first Wassailing Event resulted in donations of £357.57, our Foraging Walks donations of £100.00, our Wonderful World of Trees Event donations of £90.00, our Family Quiz donations of £9.00 and our Bat Walk event donations of £40.00. Half of the Bat Walk donations were, as usual, shared with the Bat Conservation Trust (£20.00).

Lastly, we received a generous donation of £125.00 for a beautiful commemorative oak bowl – kindly given to us by local wood-turner Maggie Irvine – that we put on offer to our membership.

2 Outlook

Whilst we do not have a formal Management Agreement with Luss Estates Company (LEC) our relationship remains cordial, and we have generally received required support from their senior management team. We remain grateful to them for clearing the waste bins twice a week.

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 and a Glasgow based orienteering group. Whilst it is up to the Landowner (LEC) to approve these activities we often help support their applications. We remain active in the promotion of events in the Wood,

Despite the Wood being remarketed by Luss Estates in March there is no information they have received any bids. However, the R&SCT continue discussions with the anonymous donor and Luss Estates about a possible purchase of the Duchess Gait Field and Duchess Wood and once more is known we will communicate it to the membership.

Projects. Following the membership survey earlier in the year, and in line with the wishes of those members who responded, a tree trail has been planned to be installed in the Wood with a series of posts with a QR code plaque on top positioned close to specimen trees. The QR code links to the Woodland Trust website and provided information specific to the tree. Up to 15 posts are provisionally planned to be put in place. Posts will be dotted around the Wood over the autumn period.

Also, FODW has paid for new inners for the car park bins.

However, the project to upgrade the path to the lower wildlife pond has not been carried out. During discussions with Luss Estates about this work they informed us as the path crossed land leased to Lomond School, they would need to give their permission. At this time and given the uncertainty about the long-term ownership of the Wood, we think it unlikely this path upgrade will be progressed.
As an alternative paths project, a trial has been carried out to cover a section of exposed roots on the top path with wood bark from a local sawmill. We are evaluating this as a possible long-term solution to this issue. Bringing many tonnes of aggregate

into the Wood and transporting it to this location would be difficult and very expensive which is why we are investigating more creative solutions which may also involve rerouting the path.

In July the owner of the garage we lease Laura Baird arranged to have the asbestos sheeting on the garage roof replaced and the shed made watertight. We made a contribution to the cost of doing this and are grateful to Laura for the continued use of it.

Repairs to several of the smaller benches are being carried out volunteers and have continued with monthly work parties. We also repaired the fence at the car park following the collapse of a massive oak tree which also crushed the field gate which LEC have informed us will be replaced. In addition, the oak trunk which has value will be planked in situ in due course. LEC has informed us the field gate which was crushed in this incident will be replaced. Our thanks to LEC for speedily arranging for the tree to be cleared away and the path reopened.

Other activities

Website Our existing website is based on WordPress and is technically demanding to maintain. We have considered various options and decided a new website based on an easier to maintain platform (Squarespace) will enable us to refresh the website and make it easier to maintain in the medium / long term. A small team of Trustees has agreed to manage and implement this project and we will keep members informed of developments.

GoCardless issue We have also experienced some issues receiving payments from GoCardless which centres on around 30+ members whose direct debits were collected once but were not taken the following year, mainly in 2026. We are actively pursuing this issue with Go Cardless and are in touch with those members affected. It appears the problem centred on a link downloaded from the GoCardless website and incorporated into posters on the Notice Boards which only resulted in one payment and not repeat payments.

Apple crop 2026 One of our Trustees suggested the apple harvest from the Duchess Wood orchard could be offered for donations in the Shelter shop. The apples were picked mid months and the distribution of them via Shelter raised £30 split between Shelter and FODW. Whilst not a large sum it raises the profile of Duchess Wood in the community.

Wood based activities An app based (Adventure Lab) scavenger hunt around the Wood has also been developed aimed at families/children. This is in addition to a number of geocaches already in place around the Wood with more to follow.

Botanical survey The BSBI returned in July for their second visit and found more plants which they have recorded bringing the total found to 226 again excluding lichens and mosses etc. The results of the survey are on the website.

Forthcoming events The Events team have been active planning a repeat of the very successful Wassailing event in January 2027 and looking to hold a mid-summer

event next year. We have decided to focus on two big events primarily although will still hold bat and foraging walks as these are very popular.

Hermitage Primary School Their Project on invasive plants and garden waste dumping resulted in good press coverage and the pupils who took part received a John Muir Discovery award in recognition their work.

We have experienced some technical issues with our website and are investigating how these may be addressed.

The Events team have been active planning a repeat of the Wassailing event in January 2027 and looking to hold a mid-summer event next year. We have decided to focus on two big events primarily although will still hold bat and foraging walks as these are very popular.

3. 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: FINANCES

1. **Financial Statement**

Friends of Duchess Wood	**Scottish charity number: SC039527**			
Financial Statement for Year to 30 June 2026			**Year to 30 June 2025**	
	£	**£**	**£**	**£**
Funds as at 1 July		**6722**		**6384**
INCOME:				
Membership	1880		1890	
Donations General	848		468	
HMRC Gift Aid	383		464	
Wassailing Event	358			
Commemorative Oak Bowl Payment	125			
Foraging Walk Events	100			
Card Sales	90		175	
Wonderful World of Trees Event	90			
Admin Expenditure Refund	69			
Bat Walk	40		209	
Charities Trust Payments	36			
Family Quiz Event	9			
Bench Donations			470	
Donation Scotland Garden Scheme			451	
Dawn Walk			50	
Total Income		**4028**		**4175**
EXPENDITURE				
Maintenance – Wood, Fixings, Fencing, etc.	1578		1261	
Admin – Printing, Leaflets, Posters, Stationary etc.	799		488	
Chainsaw Course & PPE	724			
Wassailing Event (Choir Hire and Sundry Expenses)	347			
Website – Hosting, Domain & Privacy	303		76	
Insurance	224		163	
Helensburgh Parish Church / Room Rental	169		162	
Gifts	150		75	
Garage Rental	100		100	
HADAT Donation	100			
Wonderful World of Trees Event (50% Donations to Mairi Louise Wilson, Book Payment & Speaker Fee)	75			
Community Woodlands Association	40		70	
50% Bat Walk Donation to Bat Conservation Society	20		105	

GoCardless	17		17	
Bank of Scotland Charges	4			
SumUp	2			
Laptop – Update / Antivirus, Backup, Storage			35	
Benches			1289	
Total Expenditure		**4652**		**3838**
Deficit(-)/Surplus for Year		-624		338
Add Opening Bank Balance		6722		6384
Closing Bank Balance		**6098**		**6722**

Notes to the Accounts for the year to 30 June 2026

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 £6098 (2025 £6722).

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 2026.

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:



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

Friends of Duchess Wood

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 25 to 30th June 26

The Charity's Trustees are responsible for the preparation of the accounts in accordance with the terms of the Charities and Trustee Investment (Scotland) Act 2005 and 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 21st Sept 2026.

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