



Community work by the Friends of Duchess Wood

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from the Friends of Duchess Wood
to the Helensburgh Community Council
February 2016

This paper has been prepared for the Helensburgh Community Council (HCC) at the invitation of its Convener to explain the **community role** of the Friends of Duchess Wood (FODW). It does not deal with FODW's biodiversity and wildlife work, covered elsewhere.

Popularity of Duchess Wood

Duchess Wood is one of the town's most popular facilities. An independent report assessing 51 open spaces in and around Helensburgh rated Duchess Wood as one of only four spaces deemed "most valued".

Duchess Wood has been popular for a long time. Its use has increased greatly in recent years with upgraded footpaths, bridges and other improvements, with recognition of health benefits of physical exercise, with increasing interest in natural heritage and protecting biodiversity, and with growth of green networks for towns.

The Wood is designated a **Local Nature Reserve**, a **Local Nature Conservation Site**, an **Open Space Protection Area**, part of the **Green Belt** and part of Helensburgh's new **Green Network**. Local Nature Reserves are designed to protect precious parts of natural heritage, while at the same time ensuring that the public can enjoy them. Its main paths are listed **Core Paths**. Official reports have said the Wood is well managed.

Partnership is the key

This paper is about the **Friends of Duchess Wood (FODW)** and the Wood, as a low-cost but high value facility. It depends on a loose but effective partnership. This partnership mode of operation might be a model for other valued local facilities and services.

Luss Estates Company owns the Wood and has assisted other community initiatives in Helensburgh's countryside (e.g. the footpaths network around Helensburgh). Its support for Duchess Wood is appreciated.

By renewable agreements, management (but not ownership) of the Wood lies with **Argyll and Bute Council (A&BC)**. The **Duchess Wood Local Nature Reserve Committee (DWLNRC)**, currently chaired by Councillor Aileen Morton, oversees that management. A&BC provide policy continuity, legal and safety oversight, some funding and practical support (e.g. litter bin clearance and dealing with larger problem trees), and control over major events. The DWLNRC is affiliated to the H&L Community Planning Group.

The Friends of Duchess Wood (FODW) is a voluntary organisation and a registered charity. It works on behalf of the community in many ways, as explained below, but subject to the DWLNRC management policies. The Friends represent the community with two places on the DWLNRC. The Friends regard partnership working with other community organisations as crucial and appendix 1 below lists some of these. Substantial amounts of person-hours are given by volunteers each year and FODW is grateful for those. The Friends also raise funds to help maintain and enhance the Wood, as well as carrying out much practical work themselves, including day-to-day clearance and management.