

Woods Report

Open Woodland Meeting, February 2022

Key outcome:

- Maintain the all-access pathways through the woods and improve drainage

Last quarter

We have now completed the planned drainage works in order to prevent further damage to the all ability pathways. We are aware that there has been significant disruption to the woodland while this work was undertaken and would like to thank the community for their patience and understanding. With the onset of Spring and new plant growth we are hoping there will be little sign of the drainage work by the end of the season.

As many will be aware, we had significant storm damage following Storm Arwen with several fallen trees in Fawn Wood. Nev and Paul did a great job of clearing the paths at the time to ensure safety.

Plans

We need to remove the fallen trees in Fawn Wood. This work began on 8th February and will be completed by end February. Pathway repairs will be undertaken once the windblown trees have been removed. This job will be going out to tender in February.

There is one remaining ditch that needs to be cleared out on the Broadwoodside boundary to the west side of Fawn Wood. This will be done by hand as part of our ongoing volunteering activities.

As ever, we will continue with our seasonal plans to clear the pathways. More detail [can be found here](#).

Key outcome:

- Manage the woodland to make the forest more resilient, including wildlife surveys and pond creation
- Ensure the safety of the woodland by removing hazardous trees

Last quarter

At the last Open Woodland Meeting, we had mentioned that we had plans to thin Fawn Wood to improve the resilience of this area of the forest. Storm Arwen has done some natural thinning for us with 21 trees being blown down but we still need to thin several more trees.

As part of the drainage work we have created a new wildlife pond. This will create a new habitat for the woodland and help increase biodiversity.

We have identified one larger ash tree and several smaller trees that we will need to fell due to Ash dieback.

Plans

We now have the felling licence for Fawn Wood so we can make a plan to remove the remaining trees we had identified for thinning. The clearance of the windblown/hung trees is being done from 8th February and will be completed by the end of the month. We had hoped to fell the remaining trees at the same time as the clearance work to minimise disruption. However due to the availability of the horse logger, this will now have to wait until May. This work is being undertaken by horse logger, Andrew Whitaker and Jonny Younger from Hi-line Forestry.

Surveyors conducting previous bryophyte and lichen surveys commented that certain areas of wood would benefit from increased light and that this would be beneficial to those taxon groups. Going forward, we will be looking into options for thinning areas of invasive beech and sycamore saplings.

We are in the process of applying for the felling licence to fell the identified ash trees. They will be felled as part of the annual tree safety work later this year.

Biodiversity survey of Station Yard will be undertaken by the P5's at Yester Primary School as part of their John Muir Award.

The memorial bench that will be situated by the pond is under construction. The plans are to expand the stone area under and around the bench. This will give space for us to put up a safety ring and signage. Our insurers have specified that there is no need for the area to be fenced off but signage and a ring are necessary.

Key outcome:

- Eradicate rhododendrons from the woods

Progress

Debbie, Trevor and Tony from The Lothian Conservation Volunteers (LCV) have been a fantastic support and, along with community volunteers, we have cleared significant areas of the invasive rhododendron.

We've been busy with the chipper and the kiln, processing rhododendron offcuts and ash wood from trees affected by ash dieback. We've made some great charcoal from the ash wood.

Some of the charcoal has been donated to the local art club. They will use the Gifford Woods charcoal to create artworks that will be exhibited in the village.

Plans

We now need to follow up with a lot of chipper work in order to chip the rhododendron piles. We are finding that the kiln is unfortunately not working as effectively as we had hoped when burning the rhododendron off-cuts. It's possible this could be because the wood requires more seasoning. However, we may need to explore other options for processing rhododendron off cuts.

Key outcomes: run volunteer days for skills development and social opportunities

Progress

This past quarter we have run three volunteering days in the woods, engaging a core group of around 12 volunteers, including two young people. We also held a festive decorations volunteer event and sale at the Village Hall, which engaged 5 new volunteers, 5 existing volunteers, and attracted around 65 people. All activities have been a great success and the festive event helped raise £460.

In addition, three people have been coming to the woods every Wednesday for informal volunteering days. They are helping us make headway with the rhododendron.

We have promoted our Spring Volunteering programme for in woods volunteer days including three events in March and April.

Plans

We have plans to develop new volunteer experiences which will hopefully support Yester Primary in providing woods sessions to their pupils. Liz Habgood, a local Forest school leader, could work alongside volunteers who wish to assist on these class activities and to potentially become Forest School Assistants. We are looking into whether we can provide funding for this training to one, or

possibly two, volunteers and what else the volunteer opportunity will involve (for example, providing First Aid Training and PVG checks).

We are also considering offering intergenerational volunteering activities with grandparents and grandkids through the work with Liz at Forest Schools.

This next quarter, we have three out of the woods volunteer activities planned including Vi's Poetry Group, a 'find out what's in your woods' talk with Nev, and an Easter decorations event.

Key outcome: develop youth group events shaped by young people for skills learning supported by training providers

Progress

Nev met with 5 young people to discuss what they would like to see happen in the woods. The meeting was really informative and we would like to thank the young people for their involvement. They let us know that they would like to feel more included in activities and shared some ideas for consideration. This included the type of seasonal/learning events they would like to join e.g. bushcraft, campfire cooking, green orienteering and green woodworking. They also had suggestions of developments that would help them get more from their woods e.g. a trail gym, interactive QR code interpretation in woods, orienteering course, overnight DoE stays. Any developments would of course need to follow our process for Community Led Initiatives which includes community consultation before being taken forward.

Nev met with the Duke of Edinburgh Support Teacher at Knox Academy so hopefully we will now have more students joining us in the woods to complete their awards.

7 youth groups visited the woods this past quarter; 5 groups from Venturing Out, 1 from Wilder Outdoors and one visit from the Cubs.

Plans

As soon as it gets lighter, the Cubs will be back in the woods and we have plans for a night walk and other activities.

We can take forward some of the youth group ideas that fit within the existing project. Other ideas would need to be pursued using our process for Community Led Initiatives that would involve wider consultation with the community.

Venturing Out have booked more sessions in the woods next quarter for kids with Additional Support Needs. We are also investigating the potential for collaborating with Venturing Out to offer activities identified by the young people as things they would like to see happen.

We are also looking into potentially offering some Forest School playgroup sessions and the possibility to offer a woods 'summer camp' during the school holidays - 1.5 hour sessions each day across a week.

Two students have now completed their DofE Awards - 1 gold, 1 bronze.

[Key outcome: offer school and nursery trips to enable children to learn about natural heritage and how to care for it](#)

Progress

We had one group of Primary 6 school children visit the woods last quarter. We have been working with Forest Schools Leader, Liz Habgood, to run a programme of events with Yester Primary School.

Progress

Yester Primary's P6 class will be coming back in March. The P5's are also about to come and do a biodiversity survey for the fruit trees site as part of their John Muir activity.

We are finalising plans with Mrs Mercer, Headteacher at Yester PS, to integrate woodland activities into the Curriculum. Key ideas include:

- Forest school for P2's on Friday morning,
- Focussing on seasons and seasonal changes with P1's
- Exploring debating skills around eco issues and thinking about impacts of food webs/resource hierarchies and rewilding with the older pupils.
- Exploring historical subjects such as Paul's tree ring historical workshop, coppicing etc.
- Developing literacy by encouraging pupils to help out with the woodland newsletter and content.
- Exploring links with the Nurture Groups within the school for pupil wellbeing.

Liz Habgood has said she would happily run activities on Friday mornings and occasional other activities. She is also open to supporting lesson planning with the teachers. We are also keen to involve volunteers in these activities.

Key outcome: provide events for local community groups to benefit from the woodland, increase wellbeing and enjoyment

Progress

Further to discussions at the last OWM, Vi has developed plans for the Poetry Group and this is now going ahead with a meet up every quarter.

Adam has been liaising with the Art group, as above, and we are excited to see the charcoal drawings using woods charcoal.

We've been in touch with the Gifford 1st Cubs and they are looking forward to using the woodland for activities when the weather changes.

Potential to restart the playgroup with some Forest School sessions in the woods.

Plans

We are planning to reach out to local community groups to invite them to collaborate with us on activities in /related to the woodland. These include:

- Gifford Horticultural Society
- Edinburgh Natural History Society
- North Berwick Historical Society
- Gifford Church
- Gifford Lunch Club

All ideas are welcome.

Key outcome: develop adult learning events to increase skills and knowledge that will help us care for our woods

Progress

Events we've hosted this year include a fungi foray and chainsaw course.

Plans

We have been developing the Project Planner to identify activities that might be of interest to the community in the coming year. These include:

- Lichen foray with Brian Coppins
- Guided woods walk with Nev
- Animal tracks and signs session with Scottish Wildlife Trust/Treeditions
- Foraging workshop /herbal workshop with Judith Lamb or Mark Williams
- Bird watching foray (East Lothian Countryside Rangers) - May
- Mosses foray with David Long
- Nature bookbinding with Cassandra Barron
- Botanicals workshop with Monica Wilde
- Moth breakfast with Kathy Baird

- Bat Evening with East Lothian Countryside Rangers
- Badger walk and talk with Scottish Badgers
- Fungi Foray with Nev
- Spooky stories in the woods

These ideas are not extensive and we would welcome suggestions from the community. We would welcome your feedback on whether these external provider events should be held free of charge, or for a suggested donation, or priced per ticket.

Buck and Birch will be running a birch tapping event in March. The session will be run at a suggested donation price per ticket, and limited to 12-14 people.

Our next educational session will be Nev's talk and guided walk in the woods.

Key outcome: to ensure the sustainability of Gifford Community Woodland for future generations and find ongoing ways to cover the costs of woodland management and community engagement activities

Progress

We have now completed development of a new website for the woodland where we can promote activities and events, and encourage sign up to the Friends scheme, donations and legacies. There is also a 'sign up to our newsletter' button on the website that encourages community members to subscribe to read news, and hopefully engage with woods activities.

Plans

We are exploring whether to offer the option of online signups to the Friends Scheme to make the sign up process easier. This would involve a small % cut

going to the company managing subscriptions but could increase the number of donations and encourage regular giving.

We plan to continue offering ongoing training to volunteers. Recently, Gordon Steele kindly stepped in to host a volunteering session in the woods while Nev was away. The day went brilliantly and we are exploring how to offer training to volunteers (such as First Aid) to enable more volunteers to host activities.

We've been developing a more thorough reporting system so that we can keep track of community engagement and hopefully see the benefits of all our hard work and volunteer involvement.

As above, we are looking into developing Forest Schools Training for woods volunteers as well.

We are also exploring how to future proof our sustainability by charging for educational events and activities.

The newsletter has just been distributed and we will continue to distribute a quarterly newsletter to encourage community engagement.

We are also in the process of recruiting a new administrator as Onie has to leave us at the end of March.