

Woods Report

Open Woodland Meeting, May 2022

Key outcome:

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

Last quarter

The trees damaged by Storm Arwen have now been removed from Fawn Wood. They have been cut to order and are stacked ready for collection. The saw logs will be collected after the Fawn Wood tree thin has been completed so that everything can go out together. The damage caused to the paths is less than thought. Nev will be meeting Scott from Daggs to get a quote for repairs.

Plans

In Speedy Wood, water is continuing to cause damage to the paths on the slopes, particularly the section running alongside the Broadwoodside Road. Nev will speak to Dagg's to look at a solution using 'water bars' on an angle to the path. This will be co-ordinated with the repairs to the Fawn Wood path.

Nev intends to spray along the sides of the paths to maintain the full path width.

We have volunteer days scheduled for Saturday 28th May and Saturday 25th June. Tasks could include path maintenance and ditch clearing, but given the current demand for logs, both days might involve collecting wood fuel.

We have arranged with Lothian Conservation Volunteers (LCV) for volunteers to come on 14th August to clear the remaining ditch.

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

The Memorial bench has been positioned in a peaceful location overlooking the pond.

A water-safety ring has been bought and will be installed shortly.

SEPA came to look at the pond as concerns had been raised about the oily content of the water. SEPA have advised that these are natural oils from the soil.

We have added tadpoles to the pond and planted reedmace (similar to bulrush).

Plans

We are arranging for tree thinning work to be done in Fawn Wood in June by a forestry contractor and extracted by a horse logger. It will take about 2 weeks to thin and extract the logs. The horse logger will stay on and do a demonstration day at the end of the work.

In relation to ash dieback, we need to evaluate the ash trees over the next 2 weeks to see which trees have died and don't leaf up. The trees near the paths have already been dealt with. Plans need to be determined for how the remainder will be dealt with and this will be scheduled into safety work for next winter/spring.

The Primary 5 class at Yester Primary School are undertaking a Biodiversity survey of Station Yard as part of their John Muir Award. This is scheduled for 26th May.

Nev will review and update our woodland management plan.

Key outcome:

- Eradicate rhododendrons from the woods

Progress

A lot of rhododendron has been burned and chipped, but recent progress is less obvious to the public as the work has been done in an area less visible from the path. The work to process piles of cut rhododendron has been paused until the end of August as there are birds nesting in the piles.

Plans

We have a crossroads where a decision is needed on our next steps. We could plan to hold a big community volunteer event, where we try to clear as much rhododendron as possible at the end of August, ahead of the AGM.

Or do we want to reassess the preferred timeline for the eradication of the rhododendron or continue with a programme of cutting and chipping as we go?

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

Progress

A total of 39 volunteers have attended in-woods sessions this quarter, spread over 4 volunteer sessions and 1 family volunteer day. We have a group of 4 - 5 very regular volunteers. The wood fuel gathering days seem to attract the most interest. We have been joined by 3 new volunteers this quarter and at least 4 others have expressed interest, but have not been able to make the scheduled dates. The Family Volunteer Day had quite a low take-up with only 2 families joining. The event was held during the Easter holidays, when many people were perhaps on holiday.

Separately, we have 11 volunteers who have agreed to help with Forest School sessions. We have a rota for the P2 Friday sessions and we will try to schedule in volunteers as and when new dates are agreed with the school. We have applied for the necessary PVG documentation for the forest school volunteers through Volunteer Scotland Disclosure Services (VSDS). There is no charge for volunteers. VSDS can also process applications for paid woods staff, in which case standard PVG charges apply.

An Easter decorations event was held on Saturday 2nd April with 5 volunteers helping people, across all age groups, to make their own bespoke decorations using materials from the woods.

Plans

As we start to use more volunteers from the community, there may be training opportunities/requirements in relation to matters such as safeguarding and first aid. We also need to develop a form to capture basic details like contact information, emergency contacts and possibly references, particularly for people looking to volunteer with school or youth events.

If we are planning to do another family volunteer day, there might be benefits to trying some different approaches. For example, if a group of families could be given the opportunity to pick a suitable date, that might give us a core attendance to build on.

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

Progress

The cubs have been meeting weekly in the woods.

Venturing Out have run 2 free bushcraft sessions (1 session for age 7 - 16 and 1 session for age 12+). Both sessions were fully booked with 17 youths in total.

Plans

There are 2 further Venturing Out sessions booked for 12th June and 1st July.

As we start to get inquiries and offers from new outside organisations and individuals to run events, we need to determine an approval process. An element of this process should be an agreed protocol for determining the suitability of organisations and individuals to run events.

Key outcome: offer school and nursery trips to enable children to learn about natural heritage and how to care for it

Progress

P2 weekly sessions with Forest School Leader Liz Doig have started. There will be 5 sessions this quarter, with the final 6th session scheduled for 10th June. Initial feedback from Liz has been very positive. We have arranged for 1 or 2 volunteers to attend each session. As discussed, we have a pool of 11 volunteers who are keen to help.

All other classes at Yester have had an initial forest school session led by Nev.

Liz Doig has prepared a Handbook on Forest Schools, which provides ideas for activities and general guidance.

Liz is currently only available on Fridays. Nev is speaking to some other potential providers, which might enable additional sessions to run on different days, or might allow us to run a couple of holiday bushcraft/outdoor experience days.

Plans

Further curriculum-linked visits are being scheduled for each Yester class in the summer term. We'll also be speaking to Yester about plans for the next academic year and we'll continue discussions with other potential providers.

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

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

Progress

- The poetry group have enjoyed 2 sessions this quarter. The meetings aim to promote a sense of wellbeing and connection with nature. People can just turn up and there is no need to book. 3 people joined Vi for the May meeting.
- The Scottish Agricultural College visited on 14th March.
- Gifford Horticultural Society have asked for a fungi foray on 14th September.
- 5 events were held, of which 3 were free, 1 was fixed price and 1 was 'by donation'. The events are detailed below.

Event	Number attending	Revenue generated
Bird Call ID session	11 adults 1 young adult	Free event by Richard English of the East Lothian Countryside Ranger Service
Birch Tapping with Buck & Birch	10 Adults, 2 young adults 2 children	£340 raised through donations. The suggested donation was £25. The only variation from the suggested donation was 1 child ticket.
Foraging walk and wildfood picnic with Mark Williams	14 adults	Tickets were priced at £85. We sold 12 full price tickets, 1 at a discounted rate of £40 and 1 free ticket offered in return for providing the catering. Mark listed the event on his social media. At least half the attendees were from the local (Gifford/Haddington) area.
Biodiversity walk	13	Free Event

Biodiversity talk	9	Free Event

Promotion for these events is taking place via the newsletter, monthly events lists on the noticeboard and social media. Free events are mentioned in volunteer emails. Are there other ways of reaching interested people, particularly those who don't use social media?

Plans

We are working our way through the ideas discussed at the last OWM, and have prioritised them in line with the number of 'votes' received. The most popular idea was an Animal tracks course and this has been scheduled for 18th June. A Botanicals workshop is being discussed with Monica Wilde, but has not yet been scheduled. A Bird Call ID session has already taken place. The next events in the list are: a Moth Breakfast, a Badger Walk & Talk and a Bat Evening.

Adult learning events/ family events	Number of 'votes' at OWM
Animal tracks and signs walk with Scottish Wildlife Trust or Tree Editions	11
Botanicals workshop with Monica Wilde	6
Bird watching with East Lothian Countryside Rangers	5
Moth breakfast with Kathy Bird	5
Badger walk and talk with Scottish Badgers)	5
Bat evening with East Lothian Countryside Rangers	5

Lichen foray with Brian Koppins	4
Nature bookbinding with Cassandra Barron	4
Fungi Foray with Nev	4
Spooky stories in the woods with Edinburgh Storytelling centre	4

Gifford Woodland will have a stall at the Yester Church Fete on Saturday 4th June, 2pm - 4.30pm.

Diane Christopherson from Wilder Outdoor Education has been in touch to arrange 3 x half-day woodland visits for a local charity, who run playschemes for children with special needs. The charity is based in North Berwick but they also run playschemes in Haddington. A few of their learners are wheelchair users so they need somewhere that has suitable access. At each 2-hour session, there will be 19 children and each will have an adult supporter. They will be dropped off and collected in 3 x ELC Community Buses. Activities are likely to centre around sensory experiences - hammocks, nature crafts, exploring with magnifying glasses/binoculars/microscope, using simple tools, fire for toasting simple snacks etc. They required a quick decision for planning the service. Given the overlap with other special needs sessions we've approved previously and the good fit with our aims to learn from and share in our woods, Roo gave this the go ahead as we won't be running any school sessions in July. That said, it further highlights the need for a clear decision making process and criteria for such requests. The confirmed dates are: Friday 22nd July 10.15am - 12pm, Monday 25th July 10.30am - 12pm, and Tuesday 26th July 1pm - 2.30pm.

We have been approached by a number of external providers about a range of different woodland activities. An agreed procedure for discussing/approving events will allow us to balance events/workflow more evenly throughout the year and feel confident in the decisions we are making and that they're in line with the overall aims of our community woods. The ideas that have been submitted are as follows.

- Denise McNulty is a qualified Forest School Leader and Yoga Practitioner who is looking to offer woodland yoga at weekends in July to groups of between 4 and 8 people. The sessions would combine yoga with meditation, journaling and quiet contemplation.

- Yester Church would like to offer a woodland service. It wouldn't be a church service, but perhaps involve some food and reflective walks. They have suggested Sunday 28th August at 4.30pm.
- Liz Cunningham would like to offer a 'sketch while you walk' session for adults. Sessions would last around 1 - 1.5 hours. There would be a charge of £10 - £15 which would be donated to the woods. Liz has experience of working with different groups of people (under privileged, those struggling with mental health issues).
- Mark Williams of Galloway Wild Foods has suggested that the woodland would be the perfect location for an all ability foraging course which he's keen to offer.

As mentioned above, part of the process for deciding which events to run will also need to include protocols for assessing the suitability of providers, particularly volunteers who are not associated with any particular organisation.

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

Jill has taken over the Admin role and has settled in well. She has experienced most of the main processes around event bookings, newsletter publication, volunteer days and general admin during her first quarter.

We continue to gather data for our 'engagement spreadsheet', which aims to measure our performance against the objectives that we set out in our funding applications. To provide an objective assessment of our performance, we are exploring opportunities for external evaluation and have obtained a quote from an independent consultant Mike Nicholson. He has provided a quote based on 3.5 days work charged at £280 per day totalling £980. The cost allocated in the budget is £1250. The evaluation would determine whether we have workable systems in place to monitor progress against outcomes, ensuring that we have the data we need to evaluate the project when our Heritage Lottery Funding

comes to an end. It would also create a more robust foundation for the next phase of work after the current funding package, supporting future decision making and creating a stronger basis for any further requests for financial support, should these be required.

We have piloted different payment models for community events, using both fixed-price tickets and 'by donation' models. So far, people have been happy to pay the suggested donation, so there has been no difference between the 2 systems. Options exist for using external systems for event booking, notably a system such as Eventbrite. The principal benefits would be a clear system of revenue reconciliation and a reduction in admin time, providing a sustainable model for the future when funding may not support an admin role. Weighed against that would be the issue of potentially widening the reach of events and losing the flexibility over matters such as prioritising people on a waiting list, or targeting local groups.

We also need to consider the different models of engaging with activity providers. To date, rather than charge providers for using the woods (and in many instances, we couldn't stop them accessing the woods anyway) or pay providers to run community events for us, we've followed a model where we ask providers to provide a 'free' session for the community (which we encourage donations for) in exchange for them running their own event. This has both allowed us to support small local businesses and charities whilst also minimising our costs for community events. It's also fostered good relationships with providers with a wealth of useful knowledge and skills that we can then benefit from as a community woodland. Are we happy with this model or do we want to consider alternatives? In instances where it's us looking for the provider, we're using our events budget to pay for this.

Plans

Going forward, a summary of matters requiring further discussion/decisions is set out below.

- Decision to be made about proceeding with evaluation of reporting systems.
- Decision to be made about whether to investigate online booking system for events.
- Decision on pursuing a 'by suggested donation' approach to events rather than charging
- Review current system for donations to see whether there are better opportunities for people to donate online.
- Investigate new opportunities for promoting events to fill in a possible gap that exists between Facebook and the quarterly newsletters.
- Development of process to manage and reach decisions on event/activity/provider requests and a protocol to ensure due diligence checks on providers and volunteers.
- As part of our general management systems, a clearer system of publishing documentation (minutes of informal meetings, confirmation of project approvals) will provide greater clarity.

AOB

Campfire and mess in the welfare area. A group recently held some sort of social event in the woods and left a fire burning and lots of litter. A local resident's dog found a leftover corncob husk and subsequently required emergency surgery. It is important for us to clarify our position on what is and isn't permitted in the woods, taking into account the Outdoor Access Code. An agreed procedure will provide a constructive framework for dealing with

situations that arise. As we approach the summer months, this issue could be a useful focus for the next Open Woods Meeting.

Fruit trees. A meeting was held on 12th May with woodland neighbours to gather feedback and address any specific concerns. The project team have been working on various details, with a view to presenting a coherent proposal to the trustees for approval.

Disabled parking space. There have been a couple of instances recently where disabled people have wanted to use the woods, but have not been able to gain access to the paths as they have arrived by car. We will investigate options for a disabled parking space.

Request for more poo bins

A request has been made for more poo bins. It is easy to understand why dog walkers might request poo bins so that they can dispose of poo bags. However, we cannot allow dog waste to be collected in bins with no clear options for emptying the bins and subsequent disposal of dog waste.