

Woods Report

February 2024

Key outcome:

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

Last quarter

Some small interventions have been made around the paths to improve some areas but nothing else to report.

Plans

A path maintenance volunteer day has been scheduled for 21st April with The Green Team. Further ditch clearance and path maintenance volunteer days with LCV and local volunteers are planned once we are into spring and nesting birds restrict our other conservation work.

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

A lot of work has been done in the area between the wildlife pond and the woodland path. Trees affected by ash dieback have been removed and a large number of native trees have been planted. A further tree planting day is scheduled for Sunday 4th February. Some more felling of ash trees where the path is within the target zone will be completed before this meeting. Some further strimming has taken place to make more planting area available for new trees.

Nev submitted a grant application to the Loganair Greenskies fund to cover the £5k cost of the new trees, but unfortunately this wasn't successful.

Two volunteers attended a Tree Inspection course, using funding from the Heritage Lottery grant. The volunteers can support Nev with tree assessment.

Due to the amount of work dealing with trees affected by ash dieback, we're on the back foot keeping up with tree safety around the rest of the woodland. We still have some budget left from the agreed £2K to get on top of the ash problem so a blended approach of using contractor time to assist with ash dieback and other tree safety work will be adopted. The winter safety survey will be carried out as soon as possible, but we may end up felling well into March which will mean individual tree assessments for nesting birds. We have at least one tree requiring a bat assessment and two bat boxes which need to be moved - ELC ranger service have offered to help with this but it is time sensitive.

Plans

The Welcome Sign at the entrance to the woods is to be updated. Additional information about the location of benches and poo bins will be added. Details about the pond, including some health and safety information, will also be added. A section of the boundary by Broadwoodside will be redefined. There will be some additional information about how to financially support the woods, including a QR code.

We need to plan for the arrival of the new sign and how it will be fitted.

Key outcome:

- Eradicate rhododendrons from the woods

Progress

Plans

LCV will return on Sunday 25th February. Nev will continue spraying re-gen as weather permits.

Key outcomes:

- run volunteer days for skills development and social opportunities

Progress

Over the last quarter, we've benefited from over 400 volunteer hours, as detailed below. Several local teenagers are now attending volunteer days as part of their Duke of Edinburgh.

NOV - JAN	Task	Number of volunteers	Volunteer Hours
11.11.23	Path maintenance	17	68
12.11.23	Tree Safety work	2	8
20.11.23	Trustees Meeting	8	16
26.11.13	Wood fuel	8	32
27.11.23	Open Woods meeting	21	30
10.12.23	10 woods + 6	16	66
31.12.23	Rhodi clearance	tbc	tbc
02.01.24	Wood fuel + rhodi clearance	18	72
14.01/24	Ground clearance	17	102
26.01.24	Wood fuel	3	7
27.01.24	Tree planting	16	48
		126	449

Plans

Volunteer dates are scheduled for:

- Sunday 4th Feb (Tree Planting)
- Friday 9th & Friday 23rd Feb (Wood Fuel)
- Sunday 25th Feb (LCV, Rhododendron)
- Sunday 10th & Sunday 24th March (Wood Fuel)
- Sunday 21st April (path maintenance with The Green Team)

Key outcome:

- develop youth group events shaped by young people for skills learning supported by training providers

Progress

We now have contacts with several youth groups, including The Green Team and the East of Scotland Police Youth. Venturing Out have offered to run an event in return for their use of the woodland.

Plans

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

Progress

Holly has completed her Forest School Leader training and can now lead sessions. Holly has agreed to take over responsibility for the individual class visits that Nev has been running (dates tbc). Corinna and Chloe need to lead a block of practice sessions each as part of their Leadership Training. Corinna's 6 sessions will start on Friday 9th February and Chloe's 8 sessions will start on Friday 26th April.

Following an approach from a woods volunteer, Holly will run 6 Forest School sessions for a group of East Lothian families who are homeschooling. As this is the first time we have run a Forest School block outside of Yester Primary, Holly will run a free 'open day' so that families can understand more about Forest School. Thereafter the suggested price is £13 per session, to be sold as a block of 6 sessions only at a total price £78.

Plans

The woodland needs external funding to maintain and/or further develop the provision of forest school sessions and outdoor education generally. It would be more efficient to seek a larger grant to cover at least 3 years of Forest School (3 blocks per year + ad-hoc sessions). An annual Summer Camp and homeschool sessions should pay for themselves but funding could be used to offer free places. Liz, Corinna, Holly and Chloe will meet to collate ideas about any additional forest school/outdoor ed options that could be included in a funding bid. They will aim to submit their 'vision' statement by 15th March.

Key outcome:

- provide events for local community groups to benefit from the woodland, increase wellbeing and enjoyment
- develop adult learning events to increase skills and knowledge that will help us care for our woods

Progress

Silent Walk/Meditation sessions continue to run monthly.

Plans

The SRU are bringing their Community Project Management students to the woodland on 27th February.

Buck & Birch have provisionally scheduled sap tapping courses on Saturday 23rd and Saturday 30th March. If there is a lot of interest, they're looking to add the Sundays as well. They've previously run a tapping course for the woods.

However, due to the fact that many people in the local community have already been on the course, it has become very difficult to sell places. Last year Buck & Birch had to sell all the places for the woods course through their own mailing list. Instead of offering an entire course for the woods, they've suggested sharing 25% of ticket sales with the woodland, whilst offering a 50% discount on the ticket price for the woodland volunteers and members.

Opportunities for other events either with Buck and Birch or other providers are being explored as a potential income stream - these events would have to be marketed outside the community to make them financially significant but a fine balance will have to be maintained to prevent the community perceiving the woods as being "too busy".

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

Greenskies Funding Application The woods applied for £5,000 from the Loganair Greenskies Fund to cover the cost of planting 1,200 native trees in Speedy Wood. The application was declined. No feedback given.

Tesco Stronger Starts Funding. Following an approach from Green Space Scotland, we're working on a Tesco Funding application, where we would take part in the Haddington Tesco store blue token customer vote during April - June. The closing date for the application is 12th February. The vote involves 3 groups: the group that gets the most votes receives £1,500, 2nd place £1,000 and 3rd place £500. The fund's current priority is helping projects that support young people's health and wellbeing, so we are looking for funding to support Forest School, which costs just under £500 per 6-week block.

Plans

Heritage Lottery Funding final instalment The final 10% (£11,701) is due to be paid in June. The deadline for submitting the completion report and independent evaluation is 30th June 2024.

Fallago Rig Funding The final payment of £8,333 is due to be paid in June 2024.

AOB

Roo, Jill, and Nev have been working on a five year plan with income and expenditure set against outcomes, which will be presented at the Trustee's Meeting.

Appendix 1: Housekeeping Schedule

DUE DATE	TASK	ADDITIONAL INFO
January	Agree dates for Trustees Meetings, Open Woods Meetings, AGM and intended newsletter publication dates.	Quarterly meeting cycle is currently Feb, May, August and November
March	Annual Confirmation Statement due 28th March annually (with 2-week window for completion)	Online via Companies House (c.£13 pa). Reminder email goes to Roo.
April	Woods Insurance Policy Renewal (current policy expires 12/4/24). 2024 renewal was £866.37.	Email renewal. Policy currently with Keegan & Pennykid. Encompass Charity Scheme: Policy No - RKK958436. Reminder email goes to Graeme.
May	Arrange Forest School Summer Camp (if going ahead)	Forest School Leader + 2 volunteers per day.
June/July	Tree Inspection	Completed bi-annually (June/July & Dec/Jan).
August	Give notice of AGM	Courier Advert and noticeboard
August/September	Update Directors details to reflect any changes made at AGM	Online via Companies House
December	Trustees Annual Report to be submitted to OSCR	Currently done by Roger
December/January	Tree Inspection	Completed bi-annually (June/July & Dec/Jan)