Woods Report

November 2023

Key outcome:

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

Last quarter

There was a very successful volunteer day on 11th November to clear mud from the paths. Community volunteers joined forces with the East Lothian Police Scotland Youth Volunteers to clear large sections of the path in Speedy Wood.

An additional bin has been installed at the top of Speedy Wood, just by the exit onto Broadwoodside Road. A bin is also located on Station Road close to the entrance to the woods. These bins will be emptied by the council.

Plans

Many areas of the paths need to be sprayed to reduce/halt encroaching vegetation. Nev is trying to cover this but has been too busy with other activities. We need to appeal to volunteers to assist, as we now have a second backpack sprayer. As well as reduced volunteer capacity, the weather windows are currently extremely restrictive.

Leaf blowing may be required before spraying can take place. The two jobs will need to be synchronised and require a weather window to be achieved properly.

Although a volunteer day was allocated to removing mud from the paths in key areas, many other parts of the path still require attention.

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

Tree inspection survey for Fawn Wood was completed in September, but much of Speedy Wood still needs to be assessed. Tree safety work was scheduled for 28th October and 12th November. Some urgent work in Fawn Wood has been addressed but most of these two sessions will be taken up with making safe the areas of Speedy Wood still affected by ash dieback. We have another day scheduled with Nev and a contractor on 20th November to deal with some of the larger trees. There is at least 40 hrs work for Nev with a contractor or volunteers to deal with these ash trees, which still leaves annual tree safety assessment and safety work outstanding, to be completed over the winter months. Depending on budgets available, it may be worth considering bringing in contractors to help with this work at a cost of c£2k.

The area where the ash trees have all died, will need to be planted up quite rapidly to replace the dead trees and avoid letting the area get swamped with weeds (particularly bramble and wild raspberry - which won't die-back over winter) now that the light on the woodland floor has increased. To meet UK forestry standards of planting 1600 trees/ha, we will require approximately 1200 trees with stakes and guards. Nev has submitted a grant application to the Loganair Greenskies fund to cover the cost of the trees. They won't let us know whether our application is successful until January, which may be too late for this planting season. We should assess remaining HLF budgets, and our reserves and see whether this is something we see as a priority and whether we can afford to re-stock without external funding. The cost of 1200 trees is £5000 + vat. Loganair grant if application is successful would be £5K.

In the meantime, all existing new plantings need to be inspected to see if any have not survived, in which case the tree guards and stakes can be recovered and re-used. Nev is working with Paul to source a small number of trees here and there to replace stocks where less intensive tree safety work has been carried out and these could be useful for their protection.

A 2nd moth event was held in September which provided information about the local moth population. Some cold weather just before the event reduced the number of moths found. The following moths were recorded.

- Green-brindled Crescent
- Pink-barred Sallow
- Yellow-line Quaker
- Large Yellow Underwing
- Svenssons Copper Underwing
- Red-green Carpet
- Common Marbled Carpet
- Grey Pine Carpet
- Pine Carpet
- July Highflyer

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

Lothian Conservation Volunteers were onsite on 10th September (hosted by Carrie) and 23rd September (hosted by Ruth).

In September Nev sprayed some of the Rhododendron re-gen but there are still several areas which need attention. New chemical treatments appear to be less effective than previous ones, so we may need to revert back to the older formula.

Plans

LCV have agreed 4 more dates: 2nd December, 10th December, 31st December and 2nd January. 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 200 volunteer hours, as detailed below.

Date	Task	Volunteers	Volunteer Hours
01.09.23	Forest School P2 session 2/6	2	5
04.09.23	Chainsaw training	4	20
05.09.23	Chainsaw training	4	20
07.09.23	Fruit Tree pruning	8	8
07.09.23	Meet the Teacher event	2	2
08.09..23	Forest School P2 session 3/6	2	5
10.09.23	Rhodi clearance	6	24
14.09.23	Silent Walk/Meditation	1	1
22.09.23	Forest School P2 session 4/6	2	5
23.09.23	Rhodi clearance	10	40
29.09.23	Forest School P2 session 5/6	2	5
30.09.23	Cinema event	11	18
21.10.23	Silent Walk/Meditation	1	1
28.10.23	Tree Safety work	2	8
11.11.23	Path maintenance	12	68
12.11.23	Tree Safety work	2	8
	TOTAL	71	238

Another volunteer day is scheduled for 26th November to process wood fuel.

As part of the Heritage Lottery Funding, £4.140 was ring-fenced for volunteer training. So far £3,293 has been spent on 3 training courses for a total of 7 volunteers, as detailed below. Training is planned for Tree Inspection and Wood chipper operation (Nev is liaising with Treevolution to identify dates that would suit those that have noted interest), leaving £222 remaining in the budget.

HLF Training Priorities	Unit Cost	Provider	Number	Total Cost	Completed
Outdoor First Aid	£ 181.20	First Aid Training Cooperative	1	£ 181.20	Oct 22
Chainsaw Crosscutting and Maintenance	£ 250.00	Alan Scott	4	£ 1,000.00	Sept 22
Chainsaw Maintenance, Cross-cutting, Felling and Processing Trees up to 380mm	£ 1,056.00	Treevolution	2	£ 2,112.00	Aug 22
LANTRA Woodchippers (Operation & Maintenance)	£ 264.00	Treevolution	1	£ 264.00	
LANTRA Basic Tree Inspection Training Course	£ 180.00	Treevolution	2	£ 360.00	
			Total	**£ 3,917.20**	
			HLF Budget	£ 4,140.00	
			Remaining	£ 222.80	

In addition, 2 woods volunteers are currently completing Forest School Leader Qualifications (which includes a compulsory Outdoor First Aid course). These courses were funded by the Scottish Government's Flexible Workforce Development Fund.

A woods volunteer recently attended an online First Aid for Mental Health training course. The volunteer reported that it was a great opportunity and that she felt like she had learnt a lot about the topic.

1 local teenager is volunteering with the woods as part of her Duke of Edinburgh Award

Plans

Next quarter, volunteer days have been scheduled for Saturday 2nd December (LCV), Sunday 10th December (LCV), Sunday 31st December (LCV) and Tuesday 2nd January, 10.30am - 4pm.

Key outcome:

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

Progress

The East Lothian Police Scotland Youth Volunteers (PSYV) joined the volunteer day on Saturday 11th November. Venturing Out continue to run ASN sessions in the woods. East Lothian Junior Rangers came to the woods on Friday 27th October for a fungi foray and came back on Friday 10th November to help out with path maintenance to say "thank you".

Plans

We will continue to engage with youth volunteer groups to provide practical woodland volunteering opportunities.

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

Progress

We completed a 6-week block of Forest School sessions with half of the Yester P2 class. Nev has led visits for all other six classes.

Plans

Two further blocks of Forest School sessions will take place next year. We will aim to start the 1st block on Friday 9th February (to be led by Corinna) and the 2nd block will run after the Easter holidays. A community member has approached us to see if she could carry out her 8 week mandatory block of sessions to complete her training (some training providers suggest 8 weeks, but the FOLA assessment is only based on 6 weeks).

It is currently costing £80 per session for a Forest School Leader, so £480 per 6-week block. That is based on 2 hours teaching, 1 hour set up/tidy and 1 hour prep per session. Admin and Management time is also needed. The woods will speak to the school about funding options for Forest Schools once the HLF funding is finished.

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

The AGM in August was well attended with 30 members of the community joining the trustees. After a short formal part, the meeting divided into small groups to consider future priorities. These are set out at appendix 2. We ought to give the voice of the community due consideration. We propose that a subgroup of trustees cross reference the list of suggestions with our community led initiatives tool, to see which ideas might be worth pursuing. The AGM concluded with delicious food and drink from Buck & Birch.

Nev ran a Fungi Foray for 20 people on 9th September, raising just under £600 for the woods. Nev also ran a second fungi foray for the Gifford Horti in return for a donation to the woods.

The cinema event on 30th September was well attended. Over £200 in donations was raised and several new 'Friends' signed up on the day. Although a rewarding community event, we should be mindful that the costs and time resources incurred well exceeded the income. The Gruffalo and Stick Man cost £70 each to licence. Wonder would have cost £153, but the distributor kindly allowed us to cancel without charge (ordinarily the full licence fee is payable if the screening is cancelled on the day). There was some difficulty with equipment on the day. The film club's old projector wouldn't work with the DVD player, but luckily a local resident was able to lend their personal projector. The film club's new projector is fixed to the ceiling and can't be borrowed.

Silent Walk/Meditation sessions continue to run monthly and have been scheduled through to December.

Dorothy Lyle ran a 2nd Moth event in September with 14 people attending.

Plans

Gifford Art Group intend to run another Charcoal Art Challenge and hope this will be an annual event.

We've completed the events set out in the Heritage Lottery Funding application.

	3-year Target	Yr 1 total	Year 2 total	Yr 3 Q1	Yr 3 Q2	Total	% Target completed
Volunteer Days	60	27	29	4	3	63	105%
School Trips	60	18	27	7	8	60	100%
Youth Groups	24	23	23	6		52	217%
Adult Learning Events	18	5	11	2	5	23	128%
Local Community Group Events	15	5	6	3	1	15	100%
Whole Community Events	9	5	5	1	2	13	144%

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

Friends Scheme New friends signed up and some people increased their donation following publication of the newsletter. There were also new sign ups at the cinema event.

Forest School Summer Camp. We ran a 5-day Forest School Summer Camp for 15 children (aged 6 - 10) in July. Camp places were sold on a 'donation' basis, generating revenue of £750 against total costs of c.£600.

Costs were: £480 for a Forest School Leader (4 hours per day + 4 hours prep at £20 per hour); 2 management hours and 3 admin hours. The admin tasks are simple, but require regular email management over a 3 - 4 week period to advertise camp, take bookings, ensure consent forms are completed for each

participating child and arrange volunteers. To give local families booking priority, the camp was set up as a 'private' event on Eventbrite. We advertised locally through the school and facebook and then issued a password to enable people to book. £30 was spent on equipment.

Use of the Welfare Area for children's parties. A policy on children's parties has been agreed. The welfare camp can be booked for a maximum of 1 party per month from March to September for up to 15 children. No drop offs/transport allowed in the woods. Woodland staff member must be booked to supervise any fire at a cost of £50 per hour.

Greenskies Funding Application The woods has applied for £5,000 from the Loganair Greenskies Fund to cover the cost of planting 1,200 native trees in Speedy Wood. A decision is expected in January 2024.

Plans

Heritage Lottery Funding final instalment The final 10% (£11,701) is due to be paid next year. 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.

Forest School sessions for homeschool network. We've received an enquiry about the possibility of providing forest school sessions for homeschooled children. Holly has a meeting on 10th November to get further information.

AOB

3 new trustees have been appointed: David Dawson, Carrie Sanderson and Tristan Swan.

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 24/4/24)	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)

AGM Feedback Summary

The meeting divided into small groups to consider 3 questions.

1. ***Act ivities: Is there anything we should be doing more or less of?***
   - Fewer 'elephant's graveyards' (ie stacks of cleared rhodi, etc)
   - More to encourage or help wildlife into and around the pond.
   - More animal-cam videos and posting on website of these.
   - Using social media to educate e.g., what's available to see this month in the woods/what to look out for - and then reference on noticeboard.
   - Use the newsletter and facebook/website for lost/found items
   - Attract more people, but balance this with the interests of the local community
   - Encourage people to grow primroses on their window sill (at home) and then have a primrose planting day - to encourage interest.
   - More events eg, Concerts, things in Cinema area or School Area. [Since AGM, Chris Tolley (a composer in the village) has bumped into Karine Polwart who lives fairly locally in the woods, and suggested this and she is up for it apparently. Think he would / could play too
   - Forest School for Adults, teaching about the woods etc.
   - Tree Identification & birdsong guides:
   - Social Prescribing (Social prescribing is when health professionals refer patients to support in the community, in order to improve their health and wellbeing)
   - Following the advice of the Woodland Trust means we are not always planting the right species and size of trees.
   - Make greater use of the Marquee options for Film Shows, etc (less susceptible to weather issues)
   - Make an outdoor gym circuit (respondent had been on holiday in Sweden & had enjoyed these)

2. ***Income: How else can we generate income and fill the gap?***
   - Put on educational courses on woods related topics.
   - Guided tours of the woods pointing out trees, butterflies, flowers etc for a fee
   - A photography competition with entry fee
   - Continue with grant applications to relevant bodies- maybe Creative Scotland for creative activities.
   - More school holiday activities that are charged for.
   - Metal detecting / treasure hunting
   - Donation boxes in local businesses. It was suggested that we should seek donations outside the immediate area, as other groups are also looking for money and we are all targeting the same residents.
   - Use the noticeboard to encourage donations.
   - Advertise more in the cafes and shops with the QR code.

- Book sales (paperbacks) with teas
- Cake afternoons - picnics in the woodland
- Organise a monthly lottery. Although there may not be sufficient size in the local community to make this worthwhile and it would require buying a licence at a cost.
- Make fire dampers / brooms from the bracken die back
- Organise father and son camping nights (seemingly we have done these in the past)
- Set up alternative evening entertainment when it is Yester Fireworks as there are insufficient tickets for everyone to attend the firework display. Suggestion was for a campfire with sausages.
- Weddings, even if just a couple each year
- Coulston do amazing cookery / foraging events.
- Dinner in the woods at tables where you are served (possibly using Buck & Birch)
- Be a demonstrator / consultant to others, ie get paid for showing other woodlands about how we have gone about things?
- A big Friends Push
- Better communicate & help people understand the tax efficiencies & benefits of making legacies in their wills
- Put on ticketed Woods concerts, choirs, etc, with home baking & refreshments for participants

3. Most importantly... What matters to you most about our woodland in the coming years?

- Keep paths accessible and maintained
- Children should be the top priority
- Education.
- Forest Schools
- Maintaining biodiversity and wildlife
- Must replant - we are not keeping up with the loss of trees
- Number 1 must be to keep safe. Ensure every box is ticked.
- Could we do less Rhodi battles...would that enable a situation where (if required) it could be "woodland with less management". But everyone did realise that this would be a backward step in the long-term...