



## **RESPONSE OF LOCALLY-KNOWLEDGEABLE EXPERTS TO MCPHILLIMY REPORT**

HCWG asked a number of locally-knowledgeable experts to comment on the Castle Woods Management Report which it commissioned from Donald McPhillimy B. Ecol. Sci. (Hons. Forestry) M.I.C.For in 2015. Their comments, which are summarised in this document, reflect the personal views of the experts concerned and do not necessarily represent the official policy of the organisations to which they belong.

### **Marina Curran-Colthart (Biodiversity Officer, Argyll & Bute Council)**

I have added a few comments to Donald McPhillimy's report in terms of liaison with Duchess Wood LNR Management Group, opportunity to extend the Local Nature Reserve Designation and review the current Management Plan to include restoration activities at Castle Wood which could be devised and managed by the Helensburgh Community Woodlands Group. Mr. McPhillimy has produced an insightful report with sensible recommendations.

### **Stewart Campbell (Friends of Duchess Woods)**

Castle Wood, like Duchess Wood, was part of the woodland parkland around Ardencaple castle, and we have Ordnance Survey maps from the 1860s (before Rhu Road Higher was constructed) showing Castle Wood and Duchess Wood as contiguous woodland. Looking round the two woods today, the similarities in their compositions are obvious, with large and old oak and beech dominating over birch, alder, willow and other wet woodland species. The understorey and flower populations also reflect their common ancestry. One of the aims of the Argyll and Bute Biodiversity Action Plan is the retention of scarce habitat, and the development of greater continuity of habitat, and in both these respects, a properly managed Castle Wood would greatly enhance the overall woodland habitat in the west of the town.

In addition, since the facilities in Duchess Wood have been improved, it has become very popular for walkers; from the wildlife view, perhaps too popular – FODW suspects that our working figure of 100,000 visits a year is now a significant underestimate. Having an accessible and managed Castle Wood could help relieve some of this pressure, and enable both woodlands to develop a better balance between access, education, and habitat protection.

The Friends of Duchess Wood would be delighted to see Castle Wood become properly managed again, and the report by Donald McPhillimy indicates clearly how that can be achieved and describes the essential inter-relationship between Castle Wood and Duchess Wood. The two woods would complement each other and together would give a more substantial woodland habitat to the town, for both residents and visitors. I would challenge anyone to walk through

both woods at any time of year - in spring and summer when the primroses, bluebells, and wood sorrel are in bloom and the trees are in leaf in forty shades of green; or in the autumn and winter when the leaves have fallen and tits, redwings and jays can be clearly seen - and not think that this was something worth keeping and enhancing.

**Catherine Kennedy (Woodland Officer, Forestry Commission Scotland)**

Donald McPhillimy's description of the site in his report accurately reflects the current condition of the woodlands and that the management proposals contained within the plan, including managing invasive non-native species and enrichment planting of trees, would help contribute to sustainable management of the woodland.

**Sandy Kerr (Helensburgh Tree Conservation Trust)**

I am impressed by the work done by the Group in saving this piece of woodland. Like McPhillimy, I think it would be sensible to see the Community Woodland as part of an ecological corridor including Duchess Wood. Both sites have much to benefit from that. The problems lie not so much in the silvicultural and forest practice fields as in the legal and administration sides. Ideally, the management would either be united or very closely matched in order to obtain maximum benefit.

**Elizabeth Pryor (Operations Officer, Scottish Natural Heritage)**

I acknowledge the fact that the site is classified as ancient woodland on the AWI and would hope that the planning authority would take heed of this in any assessment of impacts to natural heritage interests

From the report, it appears that community ownership would be the most beneficial option for the local natural heritage interests and of course, preservation/ enhancement of the natural heritage will directly benefit local people. So, to this end, we would support this option.