

BALLOCH CASTLE COUNTRY PARK REGENERATION GROUP.(BCCPRG).

ANNUAL REPORT 2022-2023.

Our group first met in February of 2022 and, with help from other community groups (especially Friends of Hermitage Park in Helensburgh & the committee at Mugdock Park near Milngavie) we started drawing in local people with a range of skills to knit BCCPRG together. A diverse committee of people who care deeply for the Park quite quickly emerged and other keen participants formed a support (or members') group that helps the Management Committee.

Each of us signed up to get involved out of a shared desire to improve the facilities within the Park, to raise funds to address the pressing environmental issues and with the long term ambition to regenerate and repurpose the Castle and Stable block. To make the Park more self-sufficient & provide employment opportunities and therefore not be a drain on the Council's budget. To protect and enhance the Park's National Tree Collection and woodlands, to reinvigorate the Park and help educate people about how to care for nature for generations to come. To address, through nature, anti-social behaviour.

We began work on writing a constitution, a stakeholder engagement strategy, a statement of aims. We set up a bank account to be ready to receive funding. We formally adopted our constitution and elected our Management Committee in September 2022.

The Park is accessible to all by public transport and has excellent paths within the Park.

West Dunbartonshire Council (WDC) hold the lease agreement with the Park's owner, Glasgow City Council, and as such are the key stakeholder for the Group. Ian Bain, Head of WDC Greenspace and Michelle Lynn of WDC Estates have engaged with our Group and attended a committee meeting. WDC Chief Executive Peter Hissett and Gail MacFarlane Head of Roads and Neighbourhood have also met with us on site at the Park. As a group representing the local community, we have very little power to make the improvements the Park needs so no progress can be made without WDC, GCC and other key stakeholders taking action.

The Group has been very active in engaging with stakeholders – WDC (Greenspace, estates and Education) Lomond Fisheries Trust, Visit Scotland, LLTNP, Royal Forestry Scotland, Countryside Learning Scotland, Loch Lomond Angling Improvement Association, CHAS, Haldane Youth Services, Police Scotland, Loch Lomond Association, Woodland Trust, Keep Scotland Beautiful, Balloch and Haldane CC, Kilmaronock CC, Strathleven Regeneration and many more. Most have walked part of the Park with us to get a fuller understanding of the issues affecting both the built and natural assets in the Park, as well as an indication of our Group's ambitions.

The Group are aware that public engagement is vital. Last year we carried out a survey to find out what people wanted from their Park. 261 people responded. The

top three asks were for a café, toilets and for the Castle to be in use. The vast majority of respondents said they came to the Park to enjoy the natural environment.

In October 2022 we carried out a visitor count at all the entrances to the Park, engaging with many people - it wasn't a particularly good day weatherwise. Scaled-up, over a year the visits to the Park number 1M people and 300,000 dogs. With the help of the Haldane Youth Services we carried out another count in May this year, on a Bank Holiday Monday and scaled-up the figure came in at 1.8M visits p/a.

After the initial count, the Group's lovely website was constructed and is maintained by Karn Bianco, who freely gives of his time - we met Karn on the day of the count in October last year, so it's definitely worth being in the Park and talking to everyone!

The first funding opportunity we applied for was The Riverwoods Investment Readiness Pioneers fund, backed by the Esme Fairbairn Foundation, in November 2022. This fund came in two parts; the first application was decided on by a public vote. Out of twelve entrants from across Scotland BCCPRG came second and the Group was selected along with four other projects to receive £4,000 to prepare a nature based Development Plan.

The Group engaged the help of a local consultant, Colin Liddell, and worked hard with stakeholders to produce this substantial document, detailing the work required to control the Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS), for native tree planting to give shade to water courses, to remove the sunken mainly plastic boats polluting the River Leven and to improve drainage in the Park leading to overall improved water quality. We worked closely with the WDC Biodiversity Officer (Gillian Neil), the Fisheries Trust and the Loch Lomond Angling Improvement Association to produce this plan.

We were grateful to the many stakeholders who supported our application.

Sadly, we were not successful in getting through to the final but the Riverwoods Team continue to support our Group and encourage us to apply for other funds.

Our participation in Riverwoods has been a great exercise – especially as we secured a strong public vote, we were able to engage with lots of stakeholders and we now hold a valuable nature restoration document that can be adapted for further funding applications.

In January of this year the Group put forward an application to become a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO) ; this was a natural next step in the Group's progression, giving us more opportunities for grant funding and receiving donations. The Group was granted charitable status on the 11th of July with a couple of changes to the constitution required. The Management Committee members are now referred to as Trustees.

Following the examples of the Management Committees at Hermitage and Mugdock Parks, we are now working on preparing and agreeing a formal Partnership Agreement with WDC which we hope will set out how we can progress together to take the actions needed to restore the Park.

In June of this year the Group took part in the excellent Lomond Eco-Fair in Lomond Parish Church. The new BCCPRG Wishing Well had its first outing there, and thanks

to the enthusiastic engagement of the Balloch Girl Guides around 100 wishes were posted in the well.

Last week was the UK Love Your Park week and the Group shared a joint event in the Park with the WDC Ranger, children enjoyed a nature quiz, and we were delighted that a number of people tried to give a donation for the Park in the Wishing Well. There is clearly a desire among local people and the thousands of foreign visitors the Park attracts every year to donate towards its upkeep. In the coming months we hope to explore ways with WDC to give Park users the opportunity to help, financially and in kind, improve both the natural and built environment of Balloch Castle Country Park.

We would like to thank all those who have helped and supported BCCPRG over the last 12 months.