



CASE STUDY

WINDYHILL



Linking communities to their local woodland through a network of new paths.

LOCATION Johnstone, Renfrewshire, a few miles west of Paisley.

SITE DESCRIPTION Windyhill is a 47 hectare area of woodland and open space owned and managed by Forestry Commission Scotland.



Forestry Commission Scotland bought Windyhill to create new WIAT woodlands in 2008. The project aims to get local people using the wider network of woods and create a sense of ownership of local greenspaces. Improvements to the existing woodland, along with expanding the woodland, will provide users with a mixture of everything from urban greenspace to wild countryside within a short distance. Windyhill will link with a network of woods on the edge of Johnstone - Bluebell and Rannoch woods (36ha of semi ancient natural woodland) are on one side and Elderslie wood (20ha with unmanaged open space) on the other.

BEFORE WIAT

The town of Johnstone was formed around the house of Easter Cochrane, which was later known as Johnstone Castle. The town dates back to the late 1700s, when designs were commissioned for residential streets that now form the town centre, and by 1794, the town gained its current parish church. Whilst industrial development brought prosperity, it also brought poverty to the community due to rapid expansion resulting in numerous slums being built.

Limited numbers of locals used Windyhill, mainly dog walkers from Johnstone and people making the site part of a longer route through to the Gleniffer Braes Country Park. There is a history of wild camping on the site at the Brandy burn and this has resulted in littering, fire sites and associated damage from burning/cutting for fire wood. The site had no management plan and suffered from poor access and neglected woodland.

WIAT ACHIEVEMENTS

The Community Ranger has been working with local volunteers and the woodland warden team to achieve a number of significant improvements:

- A big decrease in the amount of litter and fly tipping. This has included creating safe fire pits to encourage wild campers to act more responsibly and reduce ground damage and fire;
- Running a 'spring clean' in Bluebell woods and leading guided walks from Johnstone to Gleniffer Braes Country Park visitor centre via Windyhill;
- Recording wildlife sightings with school groups and volunteers;
- Working with Auchenlodment Primary School, the ranger has helped to increase the children's knowledge of woodlands and their local environment. The primary seven children (aged 10-11 years) were given a series of sessions in Windyhill that helped bring a teamwork ethic and encourage responsibility in preparation for moving up to secondary school;
- Apex Scotland - a specialist organisation that works with ex offenders, young people and vulnerable adults to give them the necessary skills to help them find and stay in work - started a trial programme in November 2010. They helped to remove old fencing material, sycamore regeneration and gorse to improve sight lines on the newly installed path; and
- Clients from BTCV Scotland's Green Gym have visited the site and had a guided walk with the Community Ranger and have been involved with some hands on practical conservation tasks.



WIAT WORKS

Although it is early days in the project, plans are in place to upgrade the existing path network and create more paths, linking communities and the surrounding woodlands. The site has been cleaned up, and more work is planned to remove the fly tipping and rubbish, as well as to help spread the anti litter message.

£50,000 has been spent on upgrading and expanding the path network within Windyhill and old fencing has been removed.

Future work will include improving the entrance area to make it more welcoming for visitors.

ON-GOING COMMUNITY ACTIVITY

- The Community Ranger will continue to work with local schools and the wider community to encourage increased use through various activities including leading walks, events, school visits, volunteer days and specialist projects such as Branching Out;
- The Renfrewshire office of BTCV Scotland has been working closely with Forestry Commission Scotland at Windyhill. Through engagement with local Rangers, many BTCV volunteers have been able to enjoy visits to the site whilst also contributing to its management;
- The Community Ranger and a woodland warden are being trained by Branching Out leaders to enable them to run a Branching Out programme in 2011. Branching Out is for adults using mental health services in Glasgow. It aims to provide physical activity through health walks and allow participants the chance to learn new skills through conservation and bushcraft activities;
- The Renfrewshire Green Gym project has been up to Windyhill on a number of occasions since March 2009 and the volunteers have helped with fencing tasks and bracken control and have taken part in guided health walks; and
- In addition, local school pupils have been using Windyhill Woods. School children from Mary Russell School, who are taking part in the School Green Gym programme, regularly access the site and take part in health walks and environmental education activities. These visits provide opportunities for practical learning, education and recreation and encouraging more people to engage with their local environment in a positive way.



TIMELINE

2008

Site acquired by Forestry Commission Scotland.

Community Ranger involved with the site to liaise with the community and schools.

Woodland warden team set up to help maintain the site.

2009

Tree safety work carried out on the existing path through the mature oak / birch woodland.

Work with Auchenlodment Primary School continued with the Fantastic Forests project.

2010

£50,000 of funding for creating new, or upgrading existing paths.

As part of the Fantastic Forests project, £1,200 of funding was approved to run activities including a spring clean.

Ex offenders, young people and adults at risk begin a 12 week trial programme in conjunction with Apex.

“ The site is clean and tidy. The new path system is an asset, allowing greater access, and is proving popular with people. ”

Dean Gronan, Local resident and volunteer.



LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

“Speaking to neighbours, access is so much greater with the new path in place. Work carried out creates a safer environment for people to go into. The section of path through the woodlands is a lot drier and less boggy. All members of a local camera club can now access the site for photographing the countryside and wildlife.”

John Hood, Local Councillor.

- The site will continue to be an area for quiet recreation for the people of Johnstone and provide an attractive link to the mature woodland environment of the Bluebell woods and Gleniffer Braes Country Park;
- Visitor monitoring will be carried out using people counters. The data will be recorded and analysed to give a better understanding of how and when people are using the site;
- Visitors from Johnstone, Foxbar and Paisley will be able to choose from two formal circular walks and use new seating to relax and enjoy the outdoors;
- An interpretation / orientation plan will be put in place to give confidence to new visitors and to encourage people to use the entire path network;
- Partnership working with the local authority, conservation bodies and voluntary organisations will be a key part of raising awareness of Windyhill as a visitor destination with the benefits of a woodland environment; and
- Community planting areas will be explored with schools in the area to give the community a feeling of ownership, leading to an increase in visitor numbers.

If you would like to find out more about forestry in Scotland, please call 0131 334 0303 or email fcscotland@forestry.gsi.gov.uk

www.forestry.gov.uk/wiat

