

Callander Woodland Group

A new Callander Woodland Group (CWG) group, supported by CCDT, was set up in early 2022 to collaborate with Forestry and Land Scotland (FLS) in development of their Land Management Plans for Callander Woodlands. These include Coilhallan, Callander Crag (upper part) and Easter and Wester Torrie (on the Thornhill Road). Lower Callander Crag is owned by Stirling Council.

[See map](#)

[See aerial view](#)

CWG will also organise volunteer practical sessions to improve the management of and access to the woods. In response to community input specific projects will be considered to balance recreation, protection and enhancement of habitat for animals, plants and trees.

CWG is not looking to purchase any woodland for community ownership; all will remain in the ownership of FLS which therefore retains responsibility for safety, annual inspections and delivery of their Land Management Plan. Practical volunteer sessions will be restricted to use of hand tools only, bigger tasks remaining with FLS. Without a doubt we won't be able to please everyone and a balance between differing interests will be needed. The intention is to primarily address aspects identified by and for Callander residents, although visitors will inevitably benefit. Any changes will ensure that the wildlife habitat is preserved and/or improved.

A Steering / Coordinating group of local volunteers currently includes:

Lesley Hawkins (Chair), Sue King (Secretary), Roger Watt, Mike Luti, Steve Field, Rob Latimer, Nicola Luti and Gwen Raes. A member of the FLS Planning team is invited to all meetings. We are supported by an additional number of experts in various fields from wildlife to water management with woodland management supported by FLS. Several subgroups have been set up to develop detailed plans covering topics such as Ecology, Amenities and Communication. The initial emphasis has been on Coilhallan Wood, for which there are previous surveys, but inclusion of all three woodlands will allow consideration of 'zoning' for different uses, depending on their location and content.

Representatives of CCDT and CCC are welcome to attend meetings and receive minutes and updates which are also included in the Ben Ledi View, CCDT Newsletters and on local Facebook groups.

FLS has invited up to 6 people to be closely involved in the development of the next 10-year Callander Land Management Plan (LMP). These volunteers will consult with the wider Callander Community, feed opinions into the LMP and provide feedback to the community. This will start in autumn 2022. Comments from previous drop-in sessions about Coilhallan will be updated and Upper Crag and Torrie Woodlands included. Individual groups such as schools and scouts have been contacted to find out how they currently use our woodlands and what they would like to see in future. Plans will have to be realistic, within funding and manpower constraints, and be consistent with FLS strategy. As part of the planning process FLS will also organise public drop-in sessions for community input and buy in to the draft plan.

The initial achievement has been setting up a group of trained, practical volunteers. We are extremely grateful to Callander's Landscape project for tutoring us in early practical sessions and for passing on the hand tools and PPE used in their volunteer sessions. Thanks also to CCDT for providing insurance cover.

Good progress is being made on clearing vegetation from path edges and removing non-native species such as rhododendron, piri-piri burr and rogue tree saplings in Coilhallan since this is well-used and no maintenance was done during buy-out negotiations. Other woodlands will be included in the work plan as priorities are agreed.

We will be setting up a dedicated website soon where we can post information and the public can add comments on how they use the woods, what they like and what needs improving. This will feed into our discussions with FLS on the next Land Management Plan for their Callander woodlands.

If you have any constructive comments or are interested in joining the group, to offer practical help, other expertise or making an input to FLS future woodland plans, then please get in touch on Callanderwoodlandgroup@gmail.com.

Volunteer Practical Group Progress

To date the emphasis has been on Coilhallan Wood which is well-used but had not been regularly maintained during community purchase discussions. Also the community input from that process is available as a starting point.

The first task undertaken was clearance of vegetation from the sides of the Arboretum Loop Path, named from the from a previous FLS/McLaren project to plant 5 fenced enclosures with trees representing different continents. This path is particularly narrow and overhanging gorse and broom had made it virtually impassable and painful!

BEFORE



AFTER



The second area addressed was the area of beech trees by the A81, opposite the High School. Storms Arwen and Barra had blown down many trees which blocked the footpath by the side of the Mollands houses and the bottom area used in the past by the Nursery and Primary schools. Removal of the bigger trees is the responsibility of FLS but will have to take its turn in the very long list of storm-damaged areas. However, FLS has helped by cutting up some trees in training sessions which allowed our volunteers to clear the lower area for school use.

BEFORE



AFTER



The third area to be cleared is the main track through the wood, running down to Invertrossachs Road car park.



Again vegetation from the sides of the path and in the ditches has been removed, including regenerated tree seedlings, a small amount of rhododendron and pirri-pirri bur. This is an invasive non-native plant from New Zealand which has mainly been brought in from quarries with road materials and overwhelms native plants. Unfortunately, it spreads very quickly along the ground by rooting runners but also its burs stick to animal hair/fur, socks etc to be transported throughout the wood. Vigilance from users is important as well as its physical removal.



Pirri-pirri bur creeping foliage



Pirri-pirri burs

Small bird boxes have been installed by the local SWT group in the ancient woodland at the west end of Coilhallan.

Future tasks

Planning of practical volunteer tasks is prioritised by level of benefit but also timing has to take into account issues such as summer bird-nesting season.

In Coilhallan sessions will continue to clear the sides of the main track and the spur towards Ben Gullipen up to where it meets the wall with Cambusmore estate. This will improve visibility for a busy path used by walkers and bikers and will make visible a pond within the fenced area re-planted in 2014.

Also in Coilhallan rhododendron will be removed from within the woodland but a pragmatic view will be needed for the area above the caravan park which provides a huge seed bank.

With help from FLS, the core team will visit the Upper Crags and Torrie woods to get a better understanding of their potential use and work needed. The work plan can then be extended to include all three woodlands.

Community consultation and feeding opinions into the new FLS Land Management Plan is needed for 4-6 months from summer/autumn 2022 but more volunteers are needed to make that happen. While the FLS plans are at quite a high level, the community is generally interested in the detail so CWG must ensure those views are consistent with the Land Management Plan.

Updates in the BLV and on local media sites will continue to include a plea for more people to get involved across all aspects of the Woodland Group.