



Friends of Gipton Wood

Annual Report

2023-2024

Contact us:
friendsgiptonwood@gmail.com

Find us on:



/FriendsOfGiptonWood



/friendsofgiptonwood

A thriving woodland,
for nature, the community
and the future

Foreword

*From our “non-resident President”,
Ann Wilkinson*

I cannot begin to put into words how thrilled I am that Friends of Gipton Wood is so thriving these days, going from strength to strength.



It is particularly wonderful to see family events restarting this year and attracting so many young people into the Wood to enjoy Nature. I fondly remember the events we used to run, and how they taught young people to care for the Wood.

A favourite memory is of the poster competition we ran, ‘Litter harms the Wildlife’. So many children entered posters. One, penned no doubt by a parent but illustrated by a child, read, ‘It’s fun as a rule / on your way home from school / to spread litter around / all over the ground. / But litter lout nerds / harm the squirrels and birds / and the foxes that all live around.’ It was illustrated with a large black bird lying dead on its back with its feet in the air, which caused quite a smile here and there.

I dearly hope that, through the events we are now running, the next generation will grow up to love and care for the Wood as much as we do.

I may not live nearby anymore, but I just love to watch from afar, with great respect, as you all put in so much labour of love.

About Friends of Gipton Wood

Friends of Gipton Wood is a group of volunteers helping make Gipton Wood a thriving woodland for nature, the community and the future.

We do lots of different activities throughout the year in partnership with Leeds City Council who own the Wood.

Our aims are to conserve and protect this wonderful ancient Woodland, its plants and wildlife, to engage our community with the Wood to ensure its future, and to make it safer and more accessible for everyone in our community to use.

Contents

About Friends of Gipton Wood	1
Get involved!	1
A new plan for Gipton Wood	2
Key Successes this year	2
Achieving our objectives	3
Conservation	3
Community.....	4
Wellbeing and safety.....	5
Statement of accounts	6
Statement of membership	6

A note from the Chair

A huge thank you to all our volunteers, friends to this wonderful Wood. The response to our Call to Action at the last AGM has been overwhelming, from our core, from those reconnecting with us, and from new volunteers. We set ourselves an ambitious calendar this year, it had to be to set some of our rarities on the path to recovery. We should all be so proud of our achievements this year. Thank you.

Get involved!

We are always open to new volunteers, new Friends of the Wood.

All are welcome, all ages, all experience, all ability.

Our **Volunteer Action Mornings** take place on the first Saturday of each month, 10am-12noon, meeting at the green arch at the end of Gipton Wood Road.

[illegible][illegible][illegible][illegible]

- [illegible]

[illegible]

- [illegible]

[illegible]

- [illegible]

[illegible][illegible]

- [illegible]

[illegible][illegible]

- [illegible]

Achieving our objectives

We have had a very busy and enjoyable year, doing great work, welcoming new volunteers and, of course, helping ensure Gipton Wood is thriving, for nature, the community and the future.

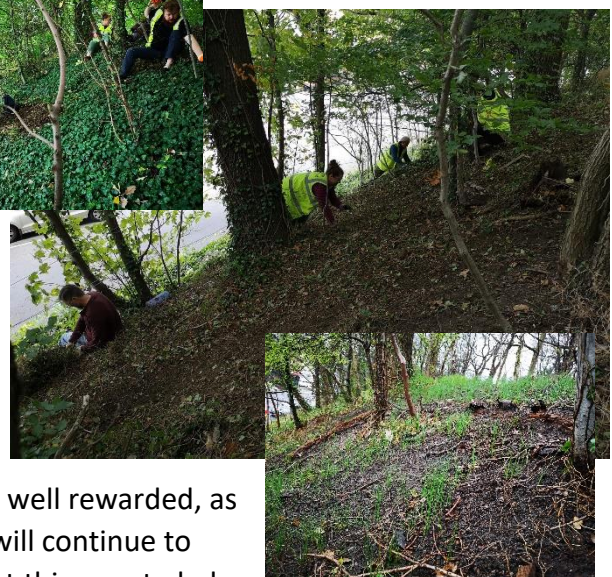
Conservation

One of the key proposals in the Management Plan for restoring the Woodland is the removal of invasive and non-native species. Cherry Laurel is particularly damaging, its dense, evergreen cover completely overshadowing the woodland floor, creating large holes in the bluebell cover. Continuing our work from last year, across four Action Mornings our volunteers cut, dug out and broke up over 40 plants, big and small, and have now cleared over 90 per cent of the Cherry Laurel in the Wood. This is a significant step forward. While we will need to keep an eye out for any regrowth or new plants, we can now move on to removing the Snowberry and other non-natives in the Wood.



In July and August, we fulfilled another Management Plan activity, pulling Brambles from a large area in the north-east of the Wood to preserve the density of the Bluebells. It was agreed that we would only do this in specific areas as Brambles are a very important habitat for small birds like Wrens, but it is also clear that their encroachment has a negative impact on the Bluebells. Thanks to the large turnout of our volunteers, we made great progress, and are being richly rewarded this year with a renewed density of Bluebells in this area.

There are many types of Ivy in the Wood, many of which have been introduced over time. This means we have a few varieties that very happily cover the ground with a dense, but suffocating cover. Managing its spread is another key activity in our Management Plan to conserve the ancient woodland flora, as, while this is again good habitat for many insects, it spells disaster for some of the ancient indicator species, like the rare Field Garlic (different to Wild Garlic). Our small remaining patch has been in the decline, so last October we pulled up the Ivy in the area. Hard work well rewarded, as the Field Garlic has come up strongly this year. We will continue to carefully manage the area, planting bulbils we collect this year to help increase the population in situ, and then looking in future years to plant elsewhere in the Wood to increase the population further.



Gipton Wood has historically been managed as an Oak woodland, and many of its features are due to this history. In our Your Gipton Wood survey, the community were very clear that they wished Gipton Wood to be conserved as an Oak woodland, and this was also a priority for the Friends. Our Management Plan therefore sets out plans to thin saplings in the wood, to increase light to the woodland floor to help ancient woodland flora (in lieu of what large herbivores would naturally have done), and to thin the regeneration of more vigorous trees that would otherwise out-compete the Oaks.

In November and February we undertook this work after careful communication and advertising to the local community in advance of both sessions, so that there was understanding of what we were doing and why. A section of the Wood was chosen where saplings were particularly crowded, and saplings were marked in advance to ensure only what was necessary to take out was removed. With record turnouts at both sessions (clearly a popular activity!), we easily completed the thinning in this area. Similar activity will be undertaken next year to continue this work in other parts of the Wood.

The laying of the hedge on the Oakwood Boundary Road has also been continued, with Graham and Chris doing another excellent job on the next section.



Community

The Friends once again attended the Oakwood Farmer's Market in April to promote the group and its work, engage new volunteers, and advertise our AGM and Bluebell Walk.

This year we have also taken part in the reinstated 'Oakwood Days', running a stall to advertise our presence, and activities in the Wood. At the May event, we ran our Bluebell walk, with an excellent turnout listening and learning from Steve Joul about the wealth of flora we have in the Wood. At the October event we ran an acorn planting in the morning, with over 200 acorns and beech nuts planted, and then Steve lead a 'Funghi Foray' in the afternoon, attracting a large crowd.



This year we have introduced a seasonal series of family events which have proved very popular. We will be continuing these 'Rhythm of Nature' events in the future, as they have proved a great way to bring families into the Wood and to engage young people with Nature and to help them to learn to treasure this wonderful natural resource on their doorstep.

We started with our Summer Party in September, the last hoorah before the return to school, with crafts and forest skills, a nature

trail, cakes galore and barbeque. Huge thanks to Juliette and Dora for leading the different activities and helping to organise it. Thanks to the efforts of our volunteers delivering leaflets in our neighbourhood, we had over 120 people come along, exceeding all expectations (and amounts of sausages!).



In December, we held a winter wreath making workshop. A big thanks to Dora and our Ranger Louise for supplying decorations and willow for the frames. A lot of fun was had weaving and building the wreaths from scratch, and of course, all using material from the Wood, including the laurel that our volunteers had been felling that very morning!



In March we held a Spring-themed session, but the luck we had had with the weather at the two previous events didn't hold. There was still a good turnout, but while some explored the wet Wood, most stayed under the shelter of Dora's tarpaulin by the firepit, baking dough balls on the end of sticks and dipping them in fresh wild garlic butter – delicious!

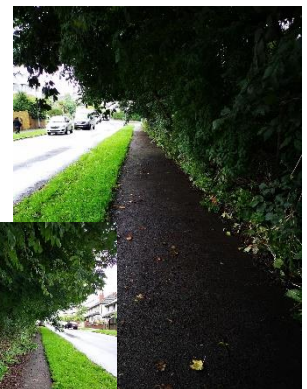
Wellbeing and safety

Building on our work last year to clear back the edges of all the tarmac paths and the Copgrove Road pavement, we have maintained them this year, keeping them cleared back and free of leaf litter and moss so that they are safer. We also cleaned all the benches, bins and lampposts in the Wood to keep it looking welcoming and cared for. We are forming plans to improve a number of paths in the Wood to make it more accessible.

We have had quite a lot of trouble with quadbikes and dirt bikes driving dangerously in the Wood, making people feel unsafe and churning up the paths. We have been in close contact with the Council about ways to control access to the Wood appropriately, and will be looking to install suitable barriers as soon as possible. We are also ensuring that new boundary logs are installed at the same time, so that there isn't a way to go round the entrance barriers.

It goes without saying that our volunteers have continued to diligently clear the Wood of litter, either during walks in the Wood, or as part of our Action Mornings. There have been some small instances of flytipping, all of which our volunteers have dealt with quickly.

We have had another winter of strong winds with two large trees coming down and numerous large boughs. Our volunteers have continued to clear paths to maintain access and make fallen limbs safe where they are able, or else reporting to LCC to get them dealt with as quickly as possible. In particular, a large Sycamore fell one Sunday lunchtime in March, blocking the Green Arch entrance and the main route taken by schoolkids through the Wood. An impromptu callout saw a brilliant response with the path reopened within a few short hours.



Statement of accounts

We have received several grants to support our work in 2023, as well as receiving considerable donations from our community through our events.

We are particularly grateful to our community for their support through the CoOp Community Fund this year, choosing us as their local cause. This money is being directly invested in our work to achieve our objectives, for new tools and to run our series of family events.

Starting balance April 1 st 2023	£1422.86
Income	£2687.27
CoOp Grant	£2150.85
MICE	£157.00
Donations	£379.42
Expenditure	£1,398.35
Tools, equipment, signs	£923.99
Events	£160.36
Insurance (2 years)	£314.00
Closing balance March 31st 2024	£2711.78



Highlights

- Income mainly from a CoOp Community Fund grant through collections at three local shops.
- Local councillors generously funded our insurance cover through their Members Improvements in the Community and the Environment (MICE) fund.
- Donations at events and privately outstripped expectations.
- Major expenditure on new tools for site work which were much needed.
- SumUp machine has been purchased which will allow us to take card payments for donations.
- Account is now managed fully online with volunteers' costs being paid by direct transfer. Copies of receipts being stored on Google Drive.
- Spend on events is being covered by donations and charges for food at Summer Fayre.

We are making plans for further fundraising in 2024/25 to fund work to improve paths and the ecological value of different aspects of the Wood.

Statement of membership

Over the course of the year, the group has attracted 24 new Friends.

The list of Friends now stands at 86. There are 44 members of the WhatsApp group.

Our social media presence has been one of the main reasons we are attracting new Friends. We have 544 followers on Facebook (up 40) with posts reaching on average 800 people every month and around 250-300 engagements with our posts each month. We have 84 followers on Instagram with posts reaching around 90 people every month.

