



Friends of Gipton Wood

Annual Report

2024-2025

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

Foreword

*From our "non-resident President",
Ann Wilkinson*



This last year, the Friends of Gipton Wood have gone from strength to strength.

As well as the Volunteer Action Mornings, there are many who work in the Wood when they can, sometimes unnoticed. It all goes to create an invigorating environment that is such a huge benefit to all.

This year our volunteers have also been out helping, hosting and answering peoples questions at events large and small, our own and those put on by others, always with good will, good humour, and great home-made cakes!

I am so proud of all that has been accomplished this year, remembering how we started on such a daunting task 25 years ago.

Great effort has gone into clearing rubbish from the adit and removing non-native species to name but a little. All making more room for our beloved bluebells that made our Wood famous years ago, when people came from miles away to pick great bunches, risking the ten shillings fine for picking them!

My grateful thanks go out to all of you. I have decided to step down this year, but I will continue to watch the videos and photos from my cosy cottage in Wales and I thank God for you all.

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.

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A note from the Chair

A huge thank you to all our volunteers, Friends to this wonderful Wood, for another fantastic year. It has been lovely to welcome new volunteers and to see the strength and impact of our work in the Wood continue to grow. Our ambitious programme of work is raising our profile and gaining recognition as we deliver for Nature and the community. It is well deserved and only possible through your ongoing support. Thank you!

Get involved!

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

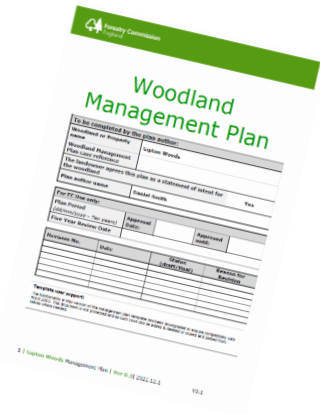
All are welcome, all ages, all experience, all abilities.

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.

A plan for Gipton Wood

Friends of Gipton Wood have a Management Plan for Gipton Wood agreed with Leeds City Council (LCC) for 2023/24-2027/28. This sets out eight shared objectives for the Wood and the parameters for how we can work in the Wood.

As a group, we have three objectives set out in our constitution. The eight Management Plan objectives fall under these as follows:



1. Promote the conservation and protection of the Woodland

1. To conserve an ancient managed oak woodland, the bluebells and ancient woodland flora.
2. To restore the Woodland as an ancient managed oak woodland through minimal interventions.
3. To improve and protect the Woodland's features and boundaries.
4. To conserve the Scheduled Ancient Monument.

2. Involve the local community in the Woodland

6. To improve knowledge about the Woodland and inform those who use it.
7. To engage the community about the Woodland.

3. Promote the wellbeing and safety of those using the Woodland

5. To improve the accessibility and safety of the Woodland.
8. To increase use of the Woodland by the community to connect with nature.

The three priority objectives for 2024/25 were:

1. To conserve an ancient managed oak woodland, the bluebells and ancient woodland flora.
2. To restore the Woodland as an ancient managed oak woodland through minimal interventions.
3. To improve and protect the Woodland's features and boundaries.

Our Calendar of Activities was set against these priorities using the proposals set out in the Management Plan and this Report reviews our progress and achievements.

Key Successes this year

1. We have extended our preservation of the density of native bluebells in the north-east corner of the Wood by pulling a further patch of brambles.
2. We have removed all non-native Cherry Laurel from the Wood and started work to remove other non-native species, especially Snowberry.
3. We have thinned saplings to manage the regeneration of more vigorous trees to encourage Oak regeneration and increase light to the woodland floor.
4. We have kept the Wood clear of litter and flytipping, notably clearing the gully or adit at the south end of the Wood.
5. We have successfully run our Rhythm of Nature series of family events to engage the community with the Wood.
6. We have increased community ownership by planting oak trees with local children.

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. This year we passed a milestone, removing all Cherry Laurel, which is particularly damaging, from the Wood. This is a significant step forward. We have now started removing Snowberry and other non-natives, clearing two large patches of Snowberry already.

In July, we continued our work of last year, pulling Brambles from another 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.



Gipton Wood has historically been managed as an Oak woodland, and many of its features are due to this history. Our Management Plan 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, focused on an area where a large beech had fallen and where thinning would promote stronger regeneration in response to the new lease of light. Saplings were marked in advance to ensure we only removed what was necessary. With further record turnouts at both sessions continuing the trend from last year, 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.

In October we undertook the Great Gully Clean Up, clearing rubbish from the gully, or adit, at the south end of the Wood. Due to the steep sides and thick undergrowth, this is not an area that our litterpickers frequent, and unfortunately residents backing onto the Wood have discarded rubbish over their back walls. A trailer-full of large items, carpet, mattresses, and many black binbags later, this is now an area restored to Nature. We'll work with local residents to keep it that way.



Community

This year we again ran our popular Rhythm of Nature series of family events, to high acclaim thanks to Dora's efforts, bringing families into the Wood and connecting young people with Nature and the Wood. In June we explored the magic of midsummer, with elderflower juice, woodland craft and den building.

In September, our Summer Party brought out the crowds again, with craft stalls, woodland activities, campfire, cakes and a barbeque bringing summer to a wonderful close. Thank you to our wonderful volunteers for delivering flyers and crewing stalls.

In December, our Wreath workshop proved popular again, with a fabulous array of winter creations made from evergreens within the Wood. In March families enjoyed some early Spring sunshine, celebrating the daffodil and toasting marshmallows.

We also ran our annual Bluebell Walk in May and Fungi Walk in October. Both events were well attended, learning from Steve Joul about the wealth of flora and fungi we have in the Wood.

We also participated in the revival of the Geldhow Valley Green Fair, where Geldhow Valley Road is closed for the day with events and stalls lining its length. We had a wonderful day talking to local residents and celebrating woodlands with leaf rubbings and information about the Wood.

In October 2023 on Oakwood Day, children planted acorns with us. In January 2025, we were thrilled to welcome many of those families back to plant their oak saplings out into the Wood. Families planted around 30 saplings out, mostly Oak, with some Sweet Chestnut and Horse Chestnut as well. We talked to them about the sense of ownership we hoped this would give them, and hope to see many of the families back in the Wood looking out for their trees in the future!

This year we have also invested in a new website for Gipton Wood, working with a local web developer to design an accessible, dynamic and interactive web presence to help us further engage the community, our volunteers and potential funders and supporters as we look towards our programme of projects in support of our Management Plan over the next few years. This site will have information about the history of the Wood and the group, ways to explore the Wood with maps to download, information about our events, blogs and a 'Nature library' full of the species we have in the Wood, and more. We're very excited to launch this with Friends at our 2025 AGM taking it public in May 2025.



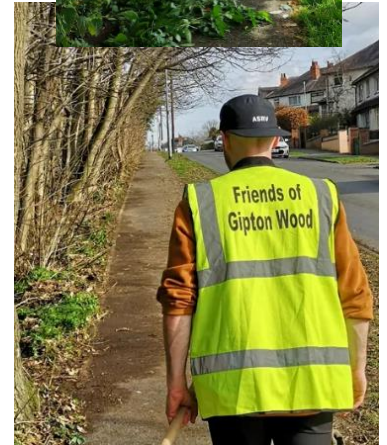
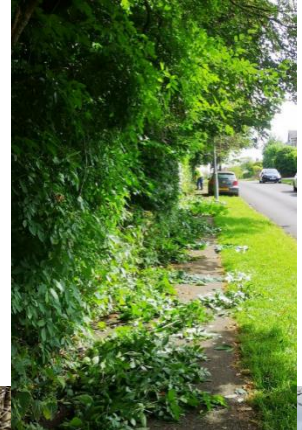
Wellbeing and safety

We have continued to maintain the paths and boundaries of Gipton Wood 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 continue to work with the Council to build plans to improve a number of paths in the Wood to make it more accessible.

We continue to have trouble with quadbikes and dirt bikes driving dangerously in the Wood, making people feel unsafe and churning up the paths. We have now completed an access audit with the Council and determined the requirements for access controls, which we hope to have installed next year, subject to funding. We will reinforce the Copgrove Road boundary with dead hedging in lieu of logs being available to replace those that have now rotted.

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. We have joined with Litter-free Leeds and had an excellent session with them in March at our Spring clean, filling their striking purple bags, of which we now have a good stock! There have been some small instances of flytipping, all of which our volunteers have dealt with quickly.

Our volunteers have continued to clear paths to maintain access and make fallen limbs safe when they have fallen and where they are able, or else reporting to LCC to get them dealt with as quickly as possible.



Statement of accounts

In the financial year 2024-25 we have run a surplus of £261.23 to invest into activities next year. Our accounts have been checked and validated by an independent accountant.

	FY 24-25	FY 23-24
Starting balance April 1 st	£2,709.76	£1,422.86
Income	£1,674.48	£2,688.25
Grants	£1,399.39	£2,307.85
Donations	£275.09	£380.40
Expenditure	£1,413.25	£1,401.35
Equipment	£412.53	£984.35
Events	£126.29	£103
Insurance	£249.39	£314
Website	£625.04	-
Surplus	£261.23	£1,286.90
Closing balance March 31st	£2,970.99	£2,709.76
Held in Reserve	£500	-
Available balance	£2,470.99	-

Value of assets

Tools - Approximately £250, including bowsaws, loppers, long arm loppers, helmets, safety vests, wheelbarrow, brushes. Kept securely in a tool store

Display boards – Approx value £25. Kept securely.

Printer and ink - £25

Commentary

Events costs and donations received on the day were approximately even.

Equipment included payment of the insurance policy, further tools and materials to build a tool store.

Website costs were the deposit paid to the design company, a new domain name (fogw.org.uk which is paid for two years)) and hosting the website for a year.

Grants were for the website (Climate Action Leeds) and MICE funding from the local ward councillors for the annual public liability insurance.

Notes

Lloyds Bank have introduced a £4.25 per month charge for our account, so a decision was made by the committee to transfer to a Virgin Money Charity account which is free of charges, offers a debit card and payment of cash into a post office. The added benefits of having a debit card and being able to pay cash in at the post office will make management of funds easier. The account is app based and held by the Treasurer and Chair.

Donations are still mainly in cash but payments on the card reader during the summer fayre have effectively paid off its initial cost. Charges by SumUp, who operate the card machine, are 2%.

On our reserves policy, a decision was made by the committee to keep a minimum of £500 in the account to ensure payment of insurance and web hosting for 2 years.

Planning for 2025-26

We have commissioned an ecology consultant to advise on increasing ecological value in the Wood which will start in April. Part of the cost is covered by a donation from REAP and hopefully a successful application to Morley Glass.

The final payment for the website design will be made on completion which will happen in May. We will also draw down a grant from the Council's Community Committee.

Large donations will be handled on the website in future.

Statement of membership

Over the course of the year, the group has attracted 11 new Friends.

The list of Friends now stands at 97. There are 46 members of groups within our WhatsApp Community.

Our social media presence has been one of the main reasons we are attracting new Friends. We have 578 followers on Facebook (up 34) with posts reaching on average 1000 people every month and around 300 engagements with our posts each month. We have 116 followers on Instagram (up 32) with posts reaching around 90 people every month.

