**Penney’s Community Woodland**

**Chairperson’s Report April 2022**

This report covers the period from May 2021 to April 2022, a time of varying Covid restrictions. However, meetings did take place, often in the woodland, and work parties were arranged and rearranged to avoid bad weather. The group participated successfully in The Fossoway Gathering, raising our profile, adding to funds and more importantly gaining new volunteer helpers. Penney’s Community Woodland continues to be very popular with locals and is in regular use for outdoor learning by Fossoway Primary School and Nursery.

The majority of our trees are thriving and the woodland takes on a more natural appearance as plastic tree guards are removed and native species such as wild raspberries emerge. It is concerning that many crab apples have succumbed to canker, several birches have die-back and some Scots pines are not thriving. Inevitably deer graze on some of the bark and young growth. But these inroads are to be expected in any young woodland. Invasive scrub (probably blackthorn) has been removed from the North and West of St Thomas’s where it had become problematic and will be managed as it reappears. On the plus side winter pruning revealed that birds are beginning to nest in the woodland and in summer the undergrowth supports a range of butterflies, bees and moths. Most importantly regular users of Penney’s Wood report the pleasure it gives them to walk through the woodland and note the changing seasons.

A successful funding application to Fossoway Community Benefit Fund has resulted in a contract being awarded to a local contractor to replace fencing along the south and south-west boundary, securing and defining our boundaries and giving a smart appearance. Funding is also supporting our purchase of an electric strimmer. It will be used to clear access to the noticeboard and benches, path edging when necessary, and to trial cutting defined areas of heavy undergrowth to encourage new species.

The issue of excessively bumpy areas of path has yet to be resolved. Increased footfall combined with wet weather and molehills have taken their toll. It was also identified last summer that the side paths need a wider cut as tall vegetation falls over the path when wet. The steps up to the west gate have been reset securely by volunteers and the gate restored to working order.

Willie Thompson and the volunteers on the mowing rota do an excellent job maintaining the paths and adapting to changing conditions. Last year they monitored growth in No-mow May and increased the frequency of cut mid-season. We are grateful to Shane and Audrey Johnstone at the local garage for kindly donating the fuel required.

We continue to monitor the ditch. A watercourse inspection by flood advisers confirmed that the woodland acts as a flood plain and should hold as much water as possible. In excessively heavy or prolonged rain the ditch overflows but we are advised not to clear or deepen it as vegetation is beneficial to slow the flow. Bridges were also deemed fine.

Future Plans:

* There are still tree guards to be removed, young trees to be checked and spot weeded and consideration given to replanting in the cleared area by St Thomas.
* The trimming of defined areas where the undergrowth is very dense will be trialled.
* A strategy for flattening the bumpiest paths needs to be agreed and carried out when the ground is firm.
* Now that we own machinery, health and safety protocols are being prepared for users and should be implemented.
* Penney’s Community Woodland is committed to producing a 5 and possibly 10 year plan.