**Penney’s Community Woodland Annual General Meeting**

**Chairperson’s Report Sunday 22nd April 2024**

Penney’s Community Woodland is in good heart with the majority of trees healthy and maturing well, resisting the ever-frequent storms. Spring blossom, particularly apple and hazel are a pleasure and their Autumn fruits abundant. Some die back is evident and inevitable, noticeable in some crab apple, birch and rowan. Damage by roe deer continues and multiplying rabbits may kill off some of the younger trees. Molehills wreak havoc with the paths and blackthorn is monitored and removed as necessary using borrowed tree poppers and judicious spraying. However, biodiversity of plant and insect life is increasing and primroses have been planted. The habitat gradually changes as the trees mature and cast shade and the soil richness lessens, allowing new species to emerge.

The grass paths are well maintained throughout the growing season by a well-coordinated team of volunteers, despite the challenges of multiple molehills, and frequent wet weather creating very muddy paths. No-mow-May was tried and deemed unsuitable for the Woodland. We are grateful to Shane for volunteering his time and small tractor to do a flail cut on the main paths to widen them. This is maintained by regular strimming. In excessively wet weather the woodland plays an important role holding back water in the overflowing ditch. In March waterlogged paths made walking so difficult in places that users of the woodland sought alternative routes through the trees. Luckily wood chippings were donated by a local supplier Rick and this was thickly spread to alleviate the situation.

Unable to find a contractor to take on the job of replacing a substantial but relatively inaccessible length of boundary fencing, a team of our own volunteers made an excellent job of replacing a section of fencing bounding the public footpath on the south side. The area around the container has been tidied, with excess stakes removed and the remainder restacked a distance away, leaving room for the willow to thrive.

Users of Penney’s Wood are diverse and ever increasing as the Community Woodland becomes better known - walkers both local and visiting, picnickers and parents with young children. Links are maintained with Fossoway Primary School to encourage use by nursery and school children. Whenever work is carried out, people we encounter are quick to say how much they appreciate the peaceful environment and the work we do. The Fossoway Gathering also provides a useful opportunity to engage with locals, sharing information on what we do and encouraging use of the Community Woodland. Through the combination of publicity, home baking and plant sales we gathered more volunteers and raised a useful sum of money. For local involvement the highlight of 2023 was probably the party held Penney’s Wood in honour of the coronation of King Charles. The hugely successful event was organised by a small group of local ladies and hosted by the woodland.

As usual our main source of funding is erecting and dismantling stalls for the Kinross Market. We did two in 2023 and enjoy working with another local charitable organisation while earning a worthwhile sum.

Looking ahead, Penney’s Community Woodland would play an important part if Crook of Devon applies to become recognised as a Biodiversity Village, an idea being pursued by the In Bloom Group. There are possibilities for us to be actively involved and to collaborate with the Primary School. Also, at long last it seems that the small plot of ground at the Back Crook west road junction will finally have legal recognition as belonging to Fossoway Access and Amenity Project Group (now known as Penney’s Community Woodland).