

Water of Leith Conservation Trust Annual Report April 2017 to March 2018

The Water of Leith Conservation Trust is a registered charity SC000015 established in 1988 whose mission is: *To conserve and enhance the Water of Leith as a haven for wildlife and an educational and recreational resource for all.*

Overall in 2017/18 we delivered 349 volunteer tasks, learning days and events attended by 6297 people – nearly one every day!! Here for the community 7 days a week, we welcomed over 17,600 people to our Visitor Centre and volunteers gave 8833 hours of service to keep the Water of Leith ‘Clean, Green and Beautiful’

This report describes the achievements over the year and our performance against targets set in the Water of Leith Conservation Trust Business Plan 2017-20. We would like to take this opportunity to thank the Trust's principal funders for their continued support - City of Edinburgh Council and Scottish Natural Heritage. We also appreciate the hard work and dedication of our staff, trustees and volunteer team, not forgetting the resolute backing of our members.

The objectives of the Water of Leith Conservation Trust are to conserve the Water of Leith and its environs, promote the natural and built heritage of the river, advance education and benefit the community by:

- Raising awareness of the river.
- Providing teaching and learning services for all age groups.
- Operating the Water of Leith Visitor Centre as an educational visitor attraction and community resource.
- Encouraging the protection and enhancement of biodiversity along the river and its environs.
- Enabling volunteers and the public to take practical action to conserve and enhance the natural and built environment.
- Encouraging responsible access to, and recreational use of, the river and its walkway.
- Promoting the sustainable use and management of the river.
- Working in partnership with others.

**For more information about any of our work please contact:
Water of Leith Visitor Centre, 24 Lanark Road Edinburgh EH14 1TQ
0131 455 7367, admin@waterofleith.org.uk www.waterofleith.org.uk @WOLCT**



Conservation in Action

The Trust has its own team of volunteers (around 200 people are registered with us) and in 2017/18 they delivered an impressive **88** tasks - amounting to **844** volunteer days:

- **32 river clean-ups and conservation task** with large teams of volunteers on weekends and Thursdays.
- **18 hit squad tasks** – a fortnightly team working on habitat improvement and access issues.
- **24 Invasive Non-Native Species tasks** - spraying Giant Hogweed, hand pulling Himalayan Balsam and stem injecting Japanese Knotweed.
- **14 volunteer led conservation tasks** to clean-up small areas, maintain gardens. improve access and manage habitats.

In addition we delivered **70** tasks with local **Youth, Community and Corporate Groups** where we plan, facilitate and lead the task, amounting to **734** volunteer days. These groups deliver all kinds of tasks including; ridding the river of rubbish and invasive weeds, creating and managing habitats for wildlife and enabling access by fixing paths, fences and steps. During the year we had 12 different businesses join us for corporate tasks, some coming on multiple occasions such as Changeworks and Blackrock and others sending over 40 staff; Lloyd Banking Group and Skyscanner. This support is great for keeping the river well maintained and provides us with a much needed income stream. The Peregrines of Tiphereth joined us again this year for 18 tasks and we were delighted to welcome back The Geocachers for a clean-up and meadow task.

Our biggest project of the year was The Dean Valley Rejuvenation, funded by Tesco Bags of Help scheme. In all we delivered 10 volunteer tasks and 2 contractor workdays to restore a section of the Dean Valley near St Bernard's Well. The area was very overgrown with weed trees and ivy -- reducing the biodiversity & hiding historical features. Volunteers helped to reveal the features, plant 'garden' spaces to increase the amenity value, improve the habitats for wildlife and renovate 60 m of railings.

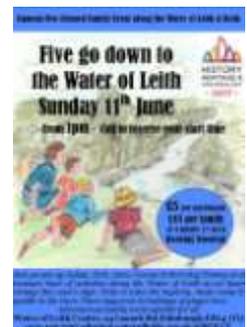
A total of 158 practical tasks, an average of 3 per week, and 5409 volunteer conservation hours.



Outdoor Learning, Youth work and Events

Working with young people represents around 70% of our activities, the highlights of which included:

- **2522 pupils from 108 school** classes engaged with our formal learning programmes including 8 classes from Special Schools, 4 early years groups and a record 17 Edinburgh High Schools working on our field studies programmes.
- **49 groups with 859 people** engaged with our informal programme including piloting new projects with 'Options for Life' and 'Positive Paths' working with youths with learning difficulties and additional needs.
- We worked in partnership with 2 local primary schools to deliver long term projects and 22 sessions through the SNH funded Learning in Local Greenspace Project. St Joseph's Primary School worked really hard on training to be tour guides for the river and Forthview Primary School began to explore their local park and how it could be used for Outdoor Learning.
- We hosted a special Outdoor Learning Day at the Balgreen Community Garden attended by 90 pupils.
- Youth Volunteering received support from the 'Greggs Foundation' enabling us to deliver 19 conservation tasks with 314 young people in partnership with organisations such as Action for Children, Venture Scotland, Roots via Edinburgh College & The Green Team.
- We hosted 19 Youth Placements, from 2 days to 4 weeks. Including 10 young people from Firrhill High School and an employability group from Forrester High School.
- 2017 was the year of History Heritage and Archaeology and with special funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund we extended our usual events programme to include 6 guided walks themed on our Herbal Heritage, Geology and Local History, and delivered 3 fabulous heritage themed family fun days. In June the Famous Five had an adventure on the river, early September we learnt of the Myths and Legends surrounding animals, rivers and woodlands and at the end of October we celebrated Summer's End with a spectacular illuminated tour through the dells. In total attended by over 500 people.
- In February we were invited to the Scottish Parliament to celebrate our work with young people as part of the SNH launch of the Year of Young People 2018. The event was a wonderful opportunity to see the contribution young people make to conserving our environment.





Biodiversity and management of access and greenspaces

Participation in the improvement of the Water of Leith and its environs by volunteers is detailed above, but in addition to practical tasks we also patrol and survey the river and contribute to actions in the Edinburgh Biodiversity Action Plan and the Water of Leith Management Plan; highlights of the year include:

- **259 volunteer river patrols** were carried out and issues reported
- 3 community garden sites and 3 wildflower meadows were surveyed, cut and raked to increase their biodiversity.
- Working with Butterfly Conservation Trust we hosted a Pollinator Training Course, followed by a survey and worked to gather seeds to propagate for summer planting.
- Bird boxes were built by volunteers and placed along the river.
- 9 otter and 70 kingfisher sightings recorded.
- 12 miles of river walkway maintained with 4 additional access improvement projects carried out, including fitting non slip strips, and repairs to handrails and railings.
- We continued to liaise with the appointed contractor and the community as Phase 2 of the flood prevention scheme drew to a conclusion at Murrayfield. We were delighted to be able to access the river again by January 2018.
- Path closures continued along the Walkway with the main issues being the Dean Valley landslide closure, Saughton Park closed for its £5million make over, Bonnington was closed due to an unsafe wall and work at Belford was needed to repair the ramp and bridge.

Our work to tackle **Invasive Non Native Species (INNS)** moved on significantly as we joined forces with Napier University to investigate alternative methods of treatment for Giant Hogweed which will reduce chemical usage by the river. Between Balerno and Slateford 781 plants were mapped and four different methods of control piloted. In addition we continued to stem inject Japanese Knotweed and hand pull Himalayan balsam with volunteers. In preparation for the 2018 summer, a volunteer surveyed the whole river for Himalayan balsam. Our innovative work on INNS will be widely shared on the Edinburgh Biodiversity network.

Awareness Raising at the Centre and Online

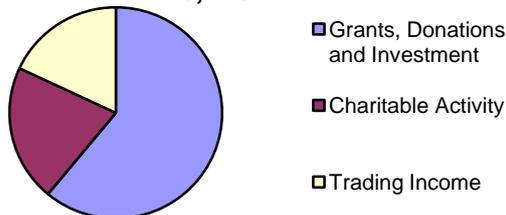
The focal point for all our work remains the Visitor Centre. 17,674 people learnt more about the river by popping in to see us this year and 3424 voluntary hours were given at the Centre working on reception, administration, maintenance and fund-raising. The highlights of the year include delivering a record 34 public events enjoyed by over 1200 participants and hosting dozens of workshops and training courses, including nature inspired Art, Knitting, Butterflies and Rust Fungus. We welcomed the support of 307 members in 2017/18 who in addition to showing their support for our work attended a busy programme of winter talks and summer guided walks.

Social media and the web are now very important tools for raising awareness of our work and encouraging action by Edinburgh citizens. By the end of March we had reached over 4500 twitter followers, 800 facebook likes and 1200 blog subscribers. The audio trail and walkway app also continue to be popular with visitors to the river.

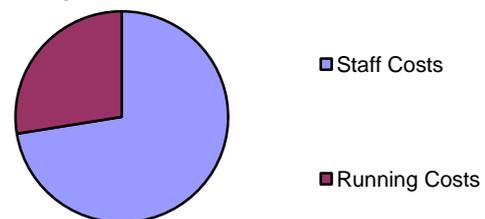


Funding and Financial Summary

Income - £126,723



Expenditure - £116,691



The charts represent a summary of our unrestricted accounts for the year ending 31st March 2018 – full independently examined accounts including restricted funds are available on our website. The accounts show a surplus of £10,032, thanks largely to a significant legacy and a rise in income from corporate tasks. It also follows a deficit in the previous year of £7070. The Trust retains a reasonable reserve of £122,398. The Trust would like to extend its thanks to all its members, donors and funders, especially:

- City of Edinburgh Council – Services for Communities
- City of Edinburgh Council – Children and Families
- Scottish Natural Heritage
- Heritage Lottery Fund
- Greggs Foundation
- Tesco – Bags of Help

Trustees:

Ian Anderson (Chair)
Bryce Morrison (Secretary)
Bill Alexander
Ron Hill
Karen Young
David Hudson
George Hunter OBE
Pat Dawson
Philippa MacDonald

Staff:

Trust Manager - Helen Brown
Volunteers Officer - Charlotte Neary
Trust Administrator - Sandra Boyle
Education Officer - Ruth Prince
Centre Assistant - Kit Russell

Future developments

The Trust Business Plan 2017-20 is available to view on our website. April 2018 will see the launch of our Community and Wildlife Project generously funded by a private donor and the following Charitable Trusts; The Mushroom Trust, The Pump House Trust, The Craignish Trust, and the Cruden Foundation. This has enabled us to employ a new 'Project Officer' and will mean even more volunteer tasks on the river with a focus on Youth work, INNS and Community engagement. Small charities meet fresh challenges each year, and attention will also focus on the provision of sustainable income streams. Should you wish to discover more about the work of the Water of Leith Conservation Trust or receive a copy of the Business Plan visit our website or contact us: Water of Leith Conservation Trust, 24 Lanark Road, Edinburgh, EH14 1TQ. Tel: 0131 455 7367 admin@waterofleith.org.uk