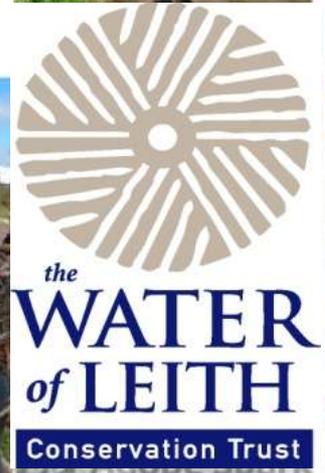




**Water of Leith
Conservation Trust
Annual Report
April 2020 to
March 2021**



Water of Leith Conservation Trust

Annual Report

April 2020 to March 2021

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.*

2020/21 was an unprecedented year for the Trust and indeed the world. When mask wearing and social distancing became the norm, the Trust was able to adapt and survive as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic continued. Overall, we delivered a remarkable 241 practical conservation tasks with small volunteer teams, managed to open the Visitor Centre for 132 days, but delivered just 22 outdoor learning sessions with young people.

This report describes the achievements over the year and our performance against targets set in the Water of Leith Conservation Trust Business Plan 2020-23. In April an assessment was made as to the potential impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the ability of the Trust to achieve its targets. Following that, revised targets were set and the rationale behind the decisions was recorded. In summary, it was assumed that the Covid-19 associated shut down would continue until the end of June 2020 with some impact felt beyond that especially with school and group bookings and corporate tasks. However it was anticipated that 'Normal' operating levels would not be possible on reopening in July, as social distancing and Covid-19 measures would further impact our outputs. In reality there was easing from July until November but schools and working with adult groups never returned. A small number of outdoor only children's events, group visits and parties took place. The Centre did not return to full opening at all, remaining closed on Mondays and on reduced daily hours from mid July to the end of December. Small but very frequent volunteer tasks commenced in June and ran to end of December, with Hit Squad only. A small number of youth and community volunteer tasks were carried out during this time. On 1st Jan, we returned to lockdown with no tasks or group work and the Centre closed.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the Trust's principal funders, City of Edinburgh Council, for their continued support and corporate sponsor Baillie Gifford. 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

The Volunteer Team & Community Action on the River

Our Volunteer Team

This has been a very challenging year for our volunteer team, with many new protocols and procedures to cope with. Conservation work on the river continued throughout. In April, we focused on the treatment of Giant Hogweed (essential work as it is a hazard to health). As spring progressed the use of the walkway was hitting heights never experienced, so small teams of volunteers worked to restore path widths to enable social distancing, repair damage and try to solve drainage problems. An easing of restrictions in summer meant we could bring back slightly larger teams of volunteers and we began the offensive on Himalayan Balsam, began a litter clear up and turned our attention to managing the meadows and habitats along the river banks. As autumn arrived, the need to maintain the path returned as we cleared leaves, mud, cutting back verges and overhanging vegetation, winter brought fresh challenges with ice and snow and of course another lockdown. 2021 meant more limits to our work with staff riding solo or with only one other, clearing ice and snow became the order of the day, sadly when the snow melted and the vegetation died back, the toll of this increased use of the river was revealed – litter! So the clean-ups began again in the spring. There were an impressive 227 tasks undertaken by Trust volunteers, amounting to 2579 hours during the year. On average there were only 4 volunteers per task. Small teams do make a HUGE impact.

Youth and Community Groups

A small number of other clean-ups/practical activities were also undertaken by 14 small community groups, those taking part contributing 389 hours to these activities.

Patrolling

As a solo activity, patrolling could continue and volunteers clocked up 205 patrols, reporting back to us on the issues along the walkway, the usage of the path and of course recording the wildlife. The average walkway use recorded an unprecedented increase of 36%

Learning & Engagement at the Visitor Centre

School Programme

Unfortunately due to restrictions, we could only deliver one class to 9 higher students. However our Outdoor Learning Officer remained busy working with the City of Edinburgh Council Outdoor learning unit to support the special schools sector, to access their local environment for study and to overcome obstacles to outdoor learning. Overall, she delivered 30 full day sessions at Kaimes and Braidburn Special Schools, and the Barnado's Hub. Resources and videos based on our most popular programmes were created and put online to help parents home learning and teachers taking classes outside. We also held two virtual CPD events for teachers.

Community Learning and Events

While the Centre was open, we delivered 11 group visits and 7 events – only to primary-aged children. We launched a Friday afternoon nature club called Kingfishers and delivered 5 sessions to 15 children. Limited fundraising events could take place but instead of running the London marathon, Charlotte, our Community and Volunteers Officer, ran 28 miles Source to Sea and raised over £6000.

The Visitor Centre

The Centre Cafe was open for 132 days July to December and we recorded only 3540 visitors. Volunteers adapted well to the covid measures and it was such a joy to welcome back our regulars. The opportunity was taken early 2021, to complete the planned reconfiguration of the reception desk into a cafe servery space and remove some elements of the internal exhibition to enable better social distancing. The enhanced covid measures will be with us for some time so we have opened up the space to allow for better social distancing and hopefully accommodating more people in the coming months. Centre-based volunteers clocked up 842 hours in the café and supporting administration.

Biodiversity & Invasive Species

Invasive Non Native Species (INNS) Removal and Pesticide Reduction Project

INNS problems along the river were tackled by continuing the ongoing survey and delivering a series of workdays. Overall a total of 59 tasks were dedicated to INNS removal. Twenty-two days were spent treating Giant Hogweed along the whole river this year, as City of Edinburgh Council deemed this essential work and did not have the resources to cover the urban section. We also managed to continue to survey the quadrats which formed part of the Napier University supported project to look at reduced chemical use in the treatment of Giant Hogweed. Thirty-two volunteer sessions involved the hand pulling of Himalayan Balsam.

Biodiversity Boost Sites and the City Network

We continued to develop our Biodiversity Boost network with 16 tasks managing the habitats of our various gardens, meadows and planting projects along the river. We have continued working on the seven meadows in our care and we completed species surveys at Bog's Meadow and Bell's Meadow, which have increased their species biodiversity by an impressive 36% and 24% respectively. They were also strimmed, scythed and raked with the aim of promoting even more species diversity along the river. We also attended 4 virtual Edinburgh Biodiversity Partnership meetings and contributed to 6 sessions, helping to define Edinburgh's Ecological Coherence Plan.

Wildlife Sightings and Survey Work

Sadly much of our survey work had to take a back foot, however it was exciting to see the Otter thesis we supported last year published, as volunteer surveys made a genuine contribution to knowledge about the Eurasian Otter (*Lutra Lutra*) in urban waterways in the UK. With lockdown many people reported wildlife sightings and wonderful encounters to us, often through social media. There were 99 records of our key species (Heron, Kingfisher, Dipper, Grey Wagtail and Otter) recorded during patrols and 54 other species of bird and insects. Our resident otter was also frequently sighted with a cub in the early spring.

Projects & River Management

The Water of Leith Management Plan

The new Water of Leith Management Plan 2020-30 was launched in April, produced by Trust Manager Helen Brown. This forms a steer for all management actions on the river by the Trust and partners. You can view or download the whole plan at www.waterofleith.org.uk/management/

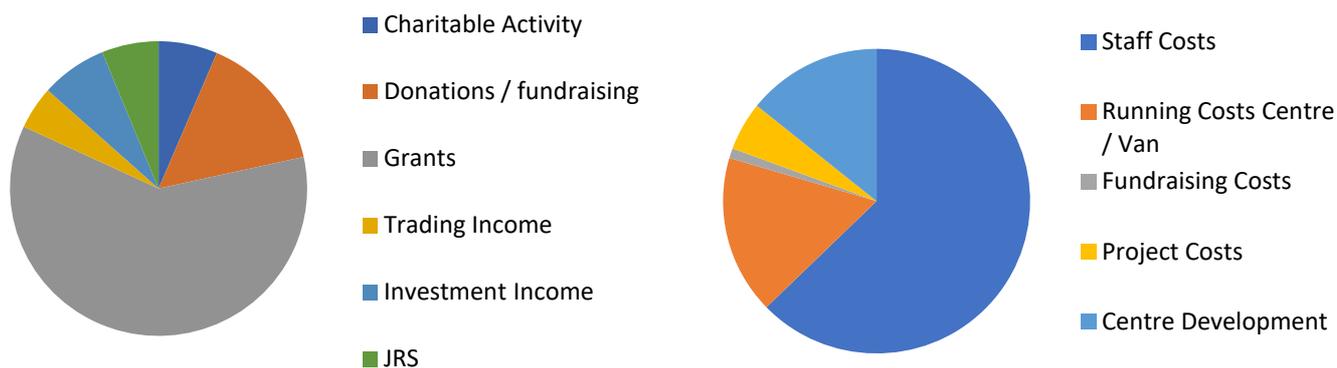
Leith Litter Agreement and Coalie Conversations

The 'Partnership Agreement on litter and debris accumulations in the Leith basin area', continues to work well and we delivered 7 boat-based clean-ups and hosted a virtual meeting of the group. A project to transform Coalie Park got underway with a 'Coalie Conversation' online public consultation event over 2 months. The 'conversation' ran as an online survey for Feb and March and preliminary results are very encouraging with 97% of respondents wanting to see change, 80% wanting improvement to be for wildlife as well as humans. Not surprisingly the top issues were benches and bins but also access to the waterside and habitats for nature.

Carbon Reduction Goals

Cutting costs and emissions is a goal in our latest Business Plan and we were delighted to receive funding this year to extend our investment in the lighting and insulation work at the Centre and to purchase our own cargo bike. A grant from the Community Climate Asset Fund through Keep Scotland Beautiful has been invaluable; overall, the lighting and insulation work should save around £1500 p.a. and 5.2 tonnes of CO₂. In addition, we were donated 420 trees from TVC's 'I Dig Trees' programme and these have been planted in a number of suitable places along the river. The Trust acknowledges the challenges and responsibilities which come with climate change and intends to apply the following key principles to its operations over the coming years: Reducing Carbon Production, Locking Up Carbon, Creating a Healthy Ecosystem and Helping Nature adapt

Governance and Financial Summary



The charts represent a summary of how our accounts were apportioned for the year ending 31st March 2021. Unrestricted income for the year was £108,401 and unrestricted expenditure was £117,358. With funds of £338,262 brought forward from 2019/20 and a net gain on our investments of £11,364, this leaves the total funds of the Trust at £319,635. Within the restricted or Project Fund income was £43,622, with an expenditure of £36,460 (when you exclude the Visitor Centre Development which was transferred from the unrestricted funds) which leaves a surplus on £7,162. However we had £15,000 brought forward from 2019/20 and so this fund total stands at £22,166 to fund our Community and Wildlife Project and Habitat Project for 2020/21. During the year Trustees chose to invest part of our reserve improvement works in the Centre, including the transformation of the cafe area and continued lighting upgrade to reduce our carbon footprint and utility bills; this represents the Centre Development cost. We also received support from the government's Job Retention Scheme.

During the year the Trustees continued the governance review process and brought in new policies and procedures. For the first time in the Trusts history, our AGM was held online over Zoom, where the updated Articles of Association were approved. Details of our governance, Trustees and full independently examined accounts are available on our website finances and can be found at www.waterofleith.org.uk/the-trust/

The Trust would like to extend its thanks to all its members, donors and funders, especially:

- City of Edinburgh Council – Parks and Greenspaces
- City of Edinburgh Council – Communities and Families
- Baillie Gifford
- KPE4 Trust
- The Folio Trust
- Visit Scotland (Covid support)
- Keep Scotland Beautiful
- Virgin Money
- Sustrans, Alpkit and Volunteering Matters for donation of tools, plants and PPE

Our Community and Wildlife Project was generously funded by a private donor and the following Charitable Trusts; The Mushroom Trust, The Russell Trust and The Cruden Foundation

Future developments

The Trust has a Business Plan 2020-23 which sets out the operational objectives & provides more detail on annual activities and emerging programmes. The Plan sets out the 2021/2 Performance Targets and associated budget. In addition to identifying essential tasks to be undertaken during the year, quarterly reports provide information on progress towards meeting the targets - both financial and operational - set by the Trustees. During the year a Risk Register was produced by the board and is reviewed quarterly, to further support our vision for the future. The impact of the Coronavirus outbreak will be felt throughout the coming year, however as restrictions ease we anticipate more normal activities will resume.