

NEWSLETTER No 77 Spring 2021

Coalie Conversations A vision for Coalie Park in Leith



An artist's impression of how it might look

At the end of the tidal flow of the river lay Coal Hill – a coal depot, railway yard and place for ship repair. Regenerated in the 1980s the area became known as Coalie Park. The area is an important 'blue and green space' and access route for the local community as well as being home to a surprising variety of wildlife. But there is great pressure on this dilapidated space and it is plagued by litter, graffiti and anti-social behaviour.

Leith is also one of the most densely populated areas in Scotland and lacks quality greenspace for its residents and wildlife. The aim of Coalie Conversations is to give us a prioritised list of projects we can take forward to make improvements which are truly wanted and needed by local people. The plans is to make Coalie Park functional as a park for a wide range of users. We want to bring together the existing spaces scattered throughout this linear 'park' by giving them functions as a series of linked 'hubs', perhaps promoting and encouraging active travel by waymarking and improving the loop route, thereby regaining a connection with the river setting.

We also need to bring the vegetation into active, positive management for biodiversity and for a sense of safety, wayfinding and placemaking. The 'conversation' ran as an online survey in February and March and preliminary results are very encouraging with 97% of respondents wanting to see change and 80% wanting improvement to be for wildlife as well as humans. The top issues were not surprisingly benches and bins but also access to the waterside and habitats for nature.

In the coming months we hope to form a 'Coalie Collective' from local people and groups who would like to facilitate change.

Visit <http://www.waterofleith.org.uk/coalie-park/> for more information

Keeping our work flowing...

2020 was undoubtedly the most challenging year the Trust as experienced in its 32 year history. The value of the river, its walkway and its sanctuary were brought into sharp focus as many thousands of city residents sought it out for daily exercise. Lockdown, easing, lockdown, easing meant we had to prioritise our work while minimising expenditure as many of our income streams dried up.

Conservation work on the river continued through 2020. 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, 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, started 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, cut back verges and over-hanging 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! For the past 6 weeks small teams of 'wombles' have been spotted in yellow vests dealing with a mountain of rubbish. The river has needed a spring clean like never before. In all we have managed to deliver over 240 tasks in the past year and 2730 volunteer hours. Small teams making a HUGE impact.

The Visitor Centre was, sadly, not so lucky. We did however manage to open the café area for a grand total of 132 days – volunteers adapted well to the covid measures and it was such a joy to welcome back our regulars. We could deliver some Outdoor Learning events for children but nothing like our usual levels, just 20 sessions all year. Resources were put online to help parents home learning and teachers taking classes outside. In the Autumn we had the time to launch the 'Kingfisher Club', a Friday afternoon nature club for local children which we will be running again this April / May.

Our Outdoor Learning Officer has been working with 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. She delivered placements at Braidburn and Kaimes schools following on from her support at the Barnado's hub in the Summer.



New look in the Centre

As the 2021 lockdown halted all activity at the Centre Trustees decided it was time for a much needed overhaul of our reception desk and café area so when we open again towards the end of April you will see a brand new bespoke desk complete with coffee machine, fridge, washing basin, chairs and tables. 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.

The Water of Leith Flotilla?



Our monthly clean-ups of the basin areas of Leith have been very successful at keeping on top of the litter accumulations in the corners and at the boom. Usually we only use the flat bottomed boat borrowed from Ocean Mist, but in March we expanded our fleet to include two inflatable kayaks, a canoe and a volunteer-made coracle. The coracle made a very handy floating skip.

Staff and volunteers were joined by Sean from Bridge 8 (Bridge 8 Hub in Sighthill is Edinburgh's first canal based outdoor activity hub) and Paul from the Granton Youth project to carry out a big sweep of the walls and maximise our time on the water clearing rubbish.

Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) Works update from Scottish Water

Work on Scottish Water's investment to improve the environment around the Water of Leith has been progressing despite the ongoing challenges of COVID and lockdown as well as a difficult start to the year with bad weather taking its toll. However, we have been told that they are on track to complete work around June at the Kingsknowe site which will mean that the diversions currently in place at Baberton Loan will be lifted. We are aware that there have been issues with anti-social behaviour around the area and we are still getting cyclists going too fast and not dismounting through the diversion. We would appreciate it if people would be considerate of all path users and take care when going past the site. Work also started at Currie Bowling Club in January and is likely to continue for a year. Other projects due to start include major works in Balerno from 10th May constructing a new CSO at Malleny Garden along with a new outfall and associated pipework. Overpumping will also be required. Scottish Water will be liaising with the rugby club and Balerno High School to help minimise disruption. This project is expected to take around 8 months. Construction is also expected to start at Gyle Park in Corstophine around mid-April and is expected to take around 32 weeks. Scottish Water would like to thank the community again for their patience and cooperation while we carry out these essential works. Visit www.scottishwater.co.uk/waterofleith for more information.

To understand why this work is so important here is an update from our Project Officer, Johnny about the work he and volunteers have been conducting dealing with issues from CSOs : *Over the last fortnight we've pretty much been in waders constantly working along the banks removing wet wipes, sanitary towels, plastic bags and everything else that gets flushed down the toilet or blown into the river. A lot of the focus has been in the downstream half of the river at Leith, Gorgie, Saughton, Murrayfield, and Coates due to the way gravity works in taking the worst downstream The reason for so many wet wipes is from discharges out of the combined sewer systems (CSO). CSOs are designed to collect rainwater runoff, domestic sewage, and industrial wastewater all in the same pipe. Most of the time, they transport all the wastewater to a sewage treatment plant where it is treated and then*

discharged. During periods of heavy rainfall or snowmelt, however, the wastewater volume in a CSO can exceed the capacity of the sewer system. For this reason, CSOs are designed to overflow occasionally and discharge excess wastewater directly to nearby streams, rivers, or other water bodies. These overflows contain not only storm water but also untreated human and industrial waste, toxic materials, and debris. Having had a Google question moment whilst pulling my 999th wet wipe from a bramble, Google reckons it can take up to 100yrs for a wet wipe to decompose in a landfill and even compostable ones take at least 6 weeks to break down in a compost bin, let alone air drying on the side of a riverside branch. Thus if you notice any by the side of someone's toilet feel free to remind them to bin them instead of flushing and stick to the three P's only :

Pee, Poo and Paper – our river depends on it



Let's avoid this disgusting scenario

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, following a very successful trial of one we had borrowed from Sustrans Bike Library. A grant from the Community Climate Asset Fund through Keep Scotland Beautiful has been invaluable and the new bike, received in February has certainly been pulling its weight. LED lighting has now replaced all of the expensive halogen lighting in the exhibition and the majority of the rest of the lighting units are now LED throughout the building. Additional insulation has been added and we estimate this will save us around £1500 p.a. and 5.2t CO₂ – thank you to Tony and Goff for their support. 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 eco-system**
- ◆ **Helping nature adapt**



Community Climate Asset funded bike

Dells Bridges and Dean Path Update

Sadly the pipe bridge and Redhall Mill bridge in the Dells are still out of action and we are supporting the council with a number of funding bids to see these replaced. To add to the disruption at Kate Mill Haugh by Scottish Water there has also been a tree fall which has eroded a section of path on the south bank, putting it out of action. We advise walkers heading downstream to remain on the board path until after Redhall Mill or if heading upstream of the Centre cross the river at Bogs Mill bridge to the north bank and continue on that bank. Local signs should be in place to guide you.

Covid-19 has had a great impact on the construction work necessary for the re-opening of the Dean path however we are pleased to report that a contractor has been appointed and that work will start shortly. It is anticipated that the on-site time for the construction work will span approximately 26 weeks which will see a completion around end of October 2021.



Great spotted woodpecker



Golden Eye



Kingfisher



Sparrowhawk

Bird Life

Springtime and bird life go hand in hand, from the early morning chorus to attract a mate and mark a territory to nest building and the frantic feeding which comes with rearing young. The fine spring plumage and lack of vegetation on the trees and bushes also means it is a wonderful time of year to watch our feathered friends.

Our social media has been awash lately with wonderful photos - breeding kingfishers, hunting sparrow hawks, watchful cormorants, dancing dippers, curious robins and of course nest building swans.

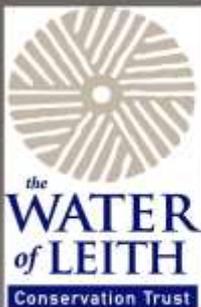
With 66 species recorded on the Water of Leith there is a great diversity to look out for.

What birdlife have you spotted?

(Photographs by Dave Stewart)

Leave a gift in your will and help keep our work flowing....

The Water of Leith Conservation Trust works with volunteers to maintain the walkway, create and manage habitats for wildlife and enable everyone to enjoy and learn more about this precious natural asset for Edinburgh. Each year the Trust has to raise considerable funds to protect the Water of Leith. Donations and legacies help us achieve our aims.



To include a gift in your Will all you need to do is give your solicitor our name, address and registered charity number, as follows:

The Water of Leith Conservation Trust, 24 Lanark Road, Edinburgh, EH14 1TQ. Scottish Charity Number SC000015

Another valuable and positive way to celebrate the life of a loved one is to ask for donations instead of flowers at their funeral

www.waterofleith.org.uk admin@waterofleith.org.uk
or call in confidence on 0131 455 7367

Events Update

At the moment we have not planned any events for adults this summer as it is not clear when restrictions will allow gatherings.

However we are delighted to welcome children back for activities in the woods and river over Easter.

Keep up to date with our events :

www.waterofleith.org.uk/summer/

Water of Leith Visitor Centre
24 Lanark Road, Edinburgh, EH14 1TQ
www.waterofleith.org.uk Tel 0131 455 7367
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