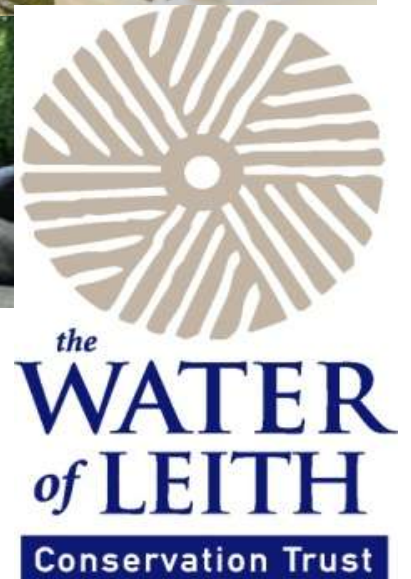




Annual Report 2021 / 2022



Water of Leith Conservation Trust Annual Report

April 2021 to March 2022

2021/2 was a transformative year for the Trust. Emerging from the trials of the Covid19 pandemic with a new-look cafe, adapted outdoor learning programmes and new ways to organise conservation tasks. We saw involvement in our work by the community return and the river was cleaner and more accessible than ever. The headlines are:

Total Volunteer Hours: 10,151

A value of £96,500 at the national living wage. Like having 5 additional full-time members of staff working on the river and at the Centre.

Number of Conservation Tasks: 317

An average of 6 per week (234 by Trust volunteers and 83 by community groups) - the most we have ever achieved in a year!!

Launched a new website:

Improving the ways people can join the Trust, donate, sign-up as a volunteer and book events.

Opened the new and improved cafe area:

Income from this volunteer-run resource has increased by a third to £35,000.

Learning sessions delivered to schools and the public: 157

An average of 3 per week.

Number of Volunteer Patrols conducted along the river: 296

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.*

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. 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 Conservation Team delivered the following conservation work to help manage the habitats for wildlife in the river corridor and improve the space for human users:

- Volunteers and staff treated all Giant Hogweed, Japanese Knotweed and Himalayan Balsam plants from Balerno to Leith –mapping the location and spread of these invasive and harmful plant species. A total of 1412 hours of work.
- River clean-up work is sadly still at the heart of our work and volunteers delivered 12 boat based clean-ups in Leith, preventing litter escaping out to sea and a whopping 1500 hours on litter picking alone.
- We were awarded Community Path Group of the Year by Paths for All in recognition of all the volunteer hours spent maintaining the walkway – in total 126 work days.
- We expanded our Biodiversity boost network to 8 sites and completed 32 habitat management tasks including training our volunteers in the ancient art of scything – a low carbon, high energy way to manage the meadows. We also planted 1000 wildflower plants and 1000 native bulbs.
- Our watchful Patrol Team gave 326 hours, recording walkway usage and wildlife and reporting issues and litter hotspots to ensure our work is targeted where it is needed

Our Volunteer Team turned out in all weathers on 234 tasks. We were also joined by 60 teams from the local community on conservation tasks and clean-ups and 23 sessions were undertaken by the Peregrine group from Tiphereth. All together over 7,000 volunteer hours were spent on the river and its walkway. Our volunteers continue to be a visible reminder to walkway users of the time and energy it takes to care for a greenspace, now and for future generations. Their service produces a ripple effect, like a stone thrown into the river, encouraging others to do their little bit to improve the river and other greenspaces further afield.

Learning & Engagement at the Visitor Centre

The Visitor Centre

April 1st saw the grand re-opening of our Centre and Cafe, following works to upgrade the facilities. The improved desk area now contains a sink, urn and state of the art coffee machine. Other works opened up the space, enabling more social distancing and improved seating for visitors. It was a steep learning curve for our returning Visitor Centre volunteer team and we have welcomed many new faces to this team. In total our Visitor Centre team gave 2888 hours keeping the cafe open daily, and in September we finally opened our exhibition space again. Income from this volunteer-run resource has increased by a third to over £35,000 – proving tea and a pee is helping to make the Trust more sustainable and this is down to our welcoming and friendly volunteers.

School Programme

Slowly but surely from May our work with schools returned. Over the year our Outdoor Learning Officer delivered programmes to 62 classes, 1123 pupils. Sessions were designed to be entirely outside, in line with Council guidance and this new approach was welcomed by all. We saw the number of high school field study classes jump to 18, included new programmes for advanced higher biology and National 5 geography students.

Community Learning and Events

Group visits to the Centre returned and we welcomed 64 groups from the community, including guided walks, hands on fun in the woods, illustrated talks and birthday parties. Events also proved popular as we ran 19 children's activities and 8 adults walks and talks. We were delighted to be able to offer four 'Wild Wednesday' sessions for families badly affected by Covid, thanks to funding from The Scottish Government. We even hosted our first funday in Leith at Coalie Park to promote our plans for the area and encourage local people to explore the area.

Biodiversity & Invasive Species

Invasive Non Native Species (INNS) Removal and Pesticide Reduction Project - INNS problems along the river were tackled by continuing the ongoing surveys and delivering a series of workdays. Overall this was a total of 79 tasks involving INNS removal. 42 were days 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 completed year four of the Napier University supported survey to look at reduced chemical use in the treatment of Giant Hogweed. A dozen tasks involved stem injecting Japanese Knotweed and 25 sessions focused on the removal of Himalayan Balsam.

Biodiversity Boost Sites and the City Network - We continued to develop our Biodiversity Boost network with 12 tasks managing the habitats of our various gardens and planting projects along the river. We have continued working on the seven meadows in our care with 20 tasks, involving species surveys with our survey team and the newly trained scything squad cutting and raking to improve biodiversity. We also attended 4 virtual Edinburgh Biodiversity Partnership meetings and contributed to 3 sessions, helping to define Edinburgh's Ecological Coherence Plan.

Wildlife Sightings and Survey Work - The Survey team returned to the field this summer, focusing on species counts in the meadows and recording plants which had re-colonised the quadrats as part of the Giant Hogweed work. The team received two specialist training sessions on wildflower identification and mosses and bryophytes. There were 166 records of our key species (Heron, Kingfisher, Dipper, Grey Wagtail and Otter) recorded during patrols and 54 other species of bird and insects. The team also recorded walkway use and over the 326 patrol hours, 10,859 walkers, 1555 cyclists, 1129 runners and 3854 dog were recorded (sadly so was 556 discarded poo bags meaning there is one discarded poo for every seven dogs). And finally volunteers spent a memorable day creating eel ropes from straw and twine, to enable eels to climb over the weirs and barriers in the river.

Projects & River Management

Coalie Park - Over the year we consulted on and produced an impressive Improvement Plan for Coalie Park in Leith and hosted a unique fun day at the park in September. This master plan finalised in January aims to transform a neglected and rundown part of the walkway. Follow our progress at www.waterofleith.org.uk/coalie-park-project/

Spiling at Roseburn - March saw a great project at Coltbridge to reinstate a section of river bank using a traditional willow spiling technique. Volunteers join specialists from Earth Calling and Friends of the Pentlands to create 25m of new and reinforced banking which will soon become a habitat too.

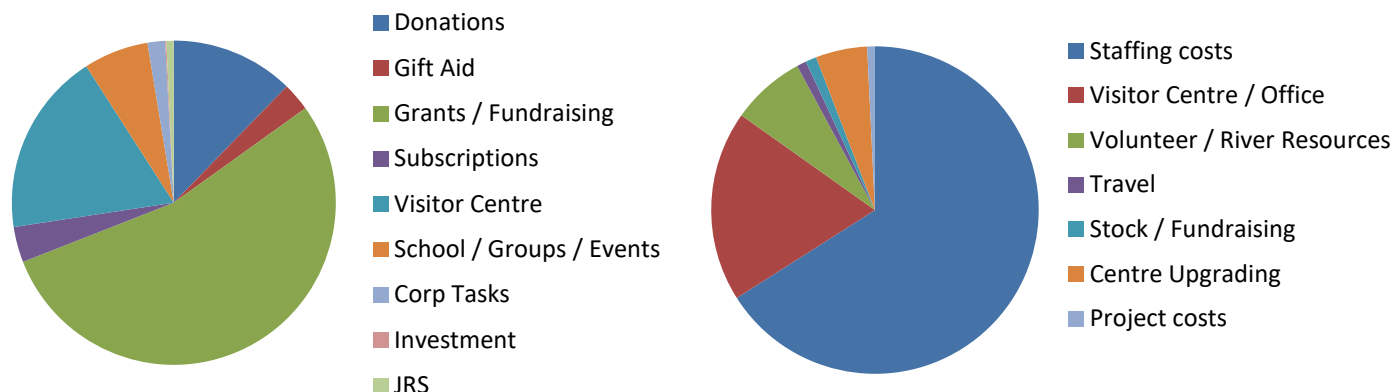
The all new www.waterofleith.org.uk

In September we launched the new-look website, a beautiful new space where users can discover more about the river, walkway and work of the Trust. We updated the ways people join the Trust, donate, sign-up as a volunteer and book in on events, cutting down on admin time and providing a better, more secure service to our supporters. We were delighted to welcome the support of 37 new members through the site and we now have 1300 e-news subscribers.

The Water of Leith Management Plan

The stakeholder management group from the river, The Water of Leith Action Group, met twice during the year and focused on the delivery actions within the Water of Leith Management Plan 2020-30. We need to appreciate the work our river does for the city and its residents – providing a recreational space, a home for wildlife and fish, sanitation, flood alleviation, nutrient and water cycling, cooling, and carbon storage to name but a few. However, this summer our river has been under great pressure and its beginning to show, with repeated sewer breaches, water loss into the sewer network, sustained low water levels and algal blooms in Leith and at the reservoirs. These are symptoms of an over pressured catchment and climate change. Work will continue to focus on these key principles: 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 2022. Unrestricted income for the year was £146,766 and unrestricted expenditure was £135,655. With funds of £319,635 brought forward from 2020/1 and a loss on our investments of £302 and a net movement of funds of £14,058 'taken from the Legacy Fund to support expenditure on the Visitor Centre and website', this leaves the total funds of the Trust at £316,386. The restricted, or Project Fund, stood at £22,166 at the end of 2021/2, income for this year was £41,227, with an expenditure of £65,170 and with the aforementioned transfer of £14,058, this fund total is £12,281.

During the year the Trustees continued the governance review process and brought in new policies and procedures, they also chose to invest part of our reserve in continued improvement works in the Centre and a development of a new website. Once again our AGM was held online over Zoom. Details of our governance, Trustees and full independently examined accounts are available on our website 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
- The Barfil Charitable Trust
- Visit Scotland (Covid support)
- Aberdeen Asset Management, Local Giving, Paths for All, The Wildflower Trust, Volunteering Matters and private donors for donation of tools, plants, PPE and training for volunteers

Our Community and Wildlife Project was generously funded by a private donor and the following Charitable Trusts; The Hugh Fraser Foundation, The Mushroom 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 2022/3 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. The impact of the Covid19 outbreak will be felt throughout the coming year, however with restrictions easing we anticipate more normal activities will resume. During the year a Risk Register was updated and reviewed quarterly by the Board on an ongoing basis. In August work will begin to develop future strategy for the Trust to provide a direction and priority projects for the next five years.