

# The Children's Wood Glasgow, Scotland



*An urban community informally using a small woodland in public ownership for educational purposes while campaigning to secure it from development*

This case study is one of a set written as part of a Forest Research project. Some case studies are written by the community group, others by researchers who visited and interviewed group members, but they have all been validated and endorsed by the community groups.

Forest Research developed a standard method for describing the case studies, outlined in Lawrence and Ambrose-Oji, 2013 "A framework for sharing experiences of community woodland groups" Forestry Commission Research Note 15 (available from [www.forestry.gov.uk/publications](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/publications)).

The case study comprises three parts:

1. The **Group Profile** provides essential information about the form and function of the community woodland group. Profiles were prepared following the methodology
2. The **Change Narrative** which documents key moments in the evolution of the community woodland group with a particular focus on the evolution of engagement and empowerment
3. The **Engagement and Impacts Timeline** documents milestones in the development of the community woodland group, its woodland and any assumed or evidenced impacts.

The case studies collectively provide a resource which documents the diversity and evolution of community woodland groups across Scotland, Wales and England. The method ensures that the case studies are consistent and can be compared with each other. We welcome further case studies to add to this growing resource.

For further information, and for the detailed case study method, please contact:

**Bianca Ambrose-Oji** (Bianca.Ambrose-Oji@forestry.gsi.gov.uk)

For further information about this case study, please contact:

childrenswood@hotmail.com

## 1. Group profile

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| <p><b>Woodland: The Children's Wood</b><br/> <b>Map ref: NS 570 678</b><br/> <b>Webpage: <a href="http://thechildrenswood.com/">http://thechildrenswood.com/</a></b><br/> <b>Date of profile: March 2014</b><br/> <b>Resources: Interview and site visit</b></p> |
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| <b>1. Institutional context (in March 2014)</b>                   |  |
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| <b>1.1 Ownership of the woodland(s)</b>                           | <p>The site is entirely owned by Glasgow City Council. The woodland forms part of North Kelvin Meadow located amongst residential buildings in the west end of Glasgow. The woodland area is being used informally as an "open access" area of land.</p> <p><b>Classification of tenure: Informal agreement (public)</b></p>   |
| <b>1.2 Access and use rights to the woodland(s)</b>               | <p>Access is granted to the public under the Land Reform (Scotland) Act (2003) which permits non-vehicular access in line with the Scottish outdoor Access Code. Access can be gained via two main entrances at opposite sides of the site.</p>  |
| <b>1.3 Regulations/responsibilities affecting the woodland(s)</b> | <p>There are no official legal constraints placed on the site's managers or users other than the need for safety for the public at events. Glasgow City Council challenged access to the site in July 2009 and brought legal challenges upon a group member of an earlier group using the site called the North Kelvin Meadow Campaign who were putting up a bat box on a tree. The defendant received a restraining order. There have been no subsequent legal challenges regarding access. The Children's Wood group grew out of the North Kelvin Meadow Campaign.</p> <p>Mature lime trees that skirt the boundary are subject to Tree Protection Orders.</p> <p>The minimum legal requirements for H&amp;S, historic monuments and pest and diseases management as outlined in</p> |

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|  | the UK Forestry Standard.   |
| <b>2. Internal organisation of the group/enterprise</b>      |   |
| <b>2.1 Group members, representation and decision making</b> | <p>Involvement with the group is not restricted, anyone can join. A committee of seven office bearing roles is drawn from the members who are all local residents. The group has two main functions, organising events and environmental educational activities in the site aimed at introducing children to nature, and secondly, campaigning for continued community control of the site and fighting against Council plans for it's development. There are sub groups within the committee who focus on specific tasks such as fund raising, community engagement and educational resources. Decisions about the events programme, work to be done on the land, and campaign actions are made by the committee who meet regularly on the first Tuesday of every month. The public is able to come to meetings about community events as well as the group's AGMs.</p> <p>The community is both a community of place and interest. The group primarily engages with young families (although not exclusively) who live in the North Kelvinside area, close to the location of the woodland. Efforts are made to ensure that the whole community can access the site.</p> <p>The group held its first AGM in 2013, which was attended by six people. Many decisions are taken during informal chats with community partners such as school teachers etc. The constant threat of sale of the site means decision making needs to be taken at a pace which cannot always wait for community support / consultation. The group recognise that there is a need for more community involvement in decision taking but they have to respond to developments quickly and they are also constrained by the limits of being run by volunteers. Measures such as creating a consultation page on the website are available for the community to see what's happening on the land, and to object/add input etc if they desire. The group leafleted all surrounding streets to make everyone aware of consultation</p> |
| <b>2.2 Communication and learning processes</b>              | <p>Within the group, committee meetings and informal discussions are the main method of communication. There are around 100 volunteers who get involved with the site and campaigning. Beyond the group, discussions with community partners such as schools are regular and there is a close relationship with local head teachers. Events are communicated by social media including Facebook, Twitter, the website and an email mailing list. Flyers</p>   |

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|                                       | <p>(hard copy) are distributed locally and word of mouth is recognised as an important communication method as well. Local and national press play an important part in publicising the campaign and events. For example, events on the site are advertised in Glasgow through various online websites like <i>What's On for Kids</i>.</p> <p>The press coverage has helped publicise some of the more high profile events that the group has organized such as hosting a herd of Cairngorm reindeer at Christmas. This has created a demand for more events of a similar profile. Given the highly politicised environment surrounding the campaign, the group is sensitive about its campaigning agenda and tries to keep a focus on positive activities that the site is used for. There has been no negative press coverage about the campaign. The Council's plans to develop the site, means relationships with the Council are often difficult for both parties to negotiate.</p>   |
| <b>2.3 Structure and legal status</b> | <p>The group initially set out with a 28 day campaign, as this was the length of time they had to object to the planning application that was submitted to the city council by the developer. Delays in the sale of the land meant planning permission was not granted and the group has continued to use the site and expand its activities. The group is in the process of becoming a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO). This is a new type of Scottish legal form that allows charities to be incorporated without having to file accounts with both Companies House and the Charity Regulator (<a href="http://www.oscr.org.uk/media/40050/cscios_a_guide.pdf">http://www.oscr.org.uk/media/40050/cscios_a_guide.pdf</a>).</p> <p>The objectives for the Children's Wood set out in their constitution are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1 Weekly playgroups, schools and events to engage with a broad community</li><li>2 Educate children and their carers in outdoorsmanship and responsibility for the natural environment</li><li>3 Protect and preserve a woodland experience in the city</li><li>4 Give space for children to explore in a safe and secure outdoor environment</li><li>5 Develop a child's confidence, wellbeing and resilience through outdoor sport play and learning, enhancing societal mobility and prospects</li></ol> |

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|  | <p>6 Build a stronger community by breaking down barriers to participation and so create a more equal society</p> <p>The Children's Wood grew out of the North Kelvin Meadow Campaign, an earlier campaign group involved with the site.</p> <p><b>Classification of legal form: Unincorporated Association</b></p>   |
| <b>2.4 Regulations/ responsibilities affecting the group/ enterprise</b> | The group is in the process of becoming a SCIO. This is to help the group to get funding as there are various funds where formal use has not been necessary.  |
| <b>2.5 Forest management objectives and planning procedures</b>          | There is no formal management plan. Because of the informal nature of use at the site, at the moment volunteers take part in litter picking, managing dog mess, and general tidying.  |
| <b>2.6 Implementing the woodland management plan</b>                     | There is no management plan to implement, but, qualified facilitators are contracted on an ad hoc sessional basis to deliver activities such as Forest School, and organisations like The Conservation Volunteers, and corporate volunteers from companies such as RBS and Santander have helped with management jobs like painting the fences surrounding the land, clearing debris between fences and building raised beds. This is funded through donations. |
| <b>2.7 Business/ operating model and sustainability</b>                  | Income is generated through donations at some of the events such as the outdoor cinema, and the hosting of the Christmas reindeer herd. Donations have also been made in return for refreshments at events and fundraising events (e.g., bake-offs). The group has very limited financial reserves.   |

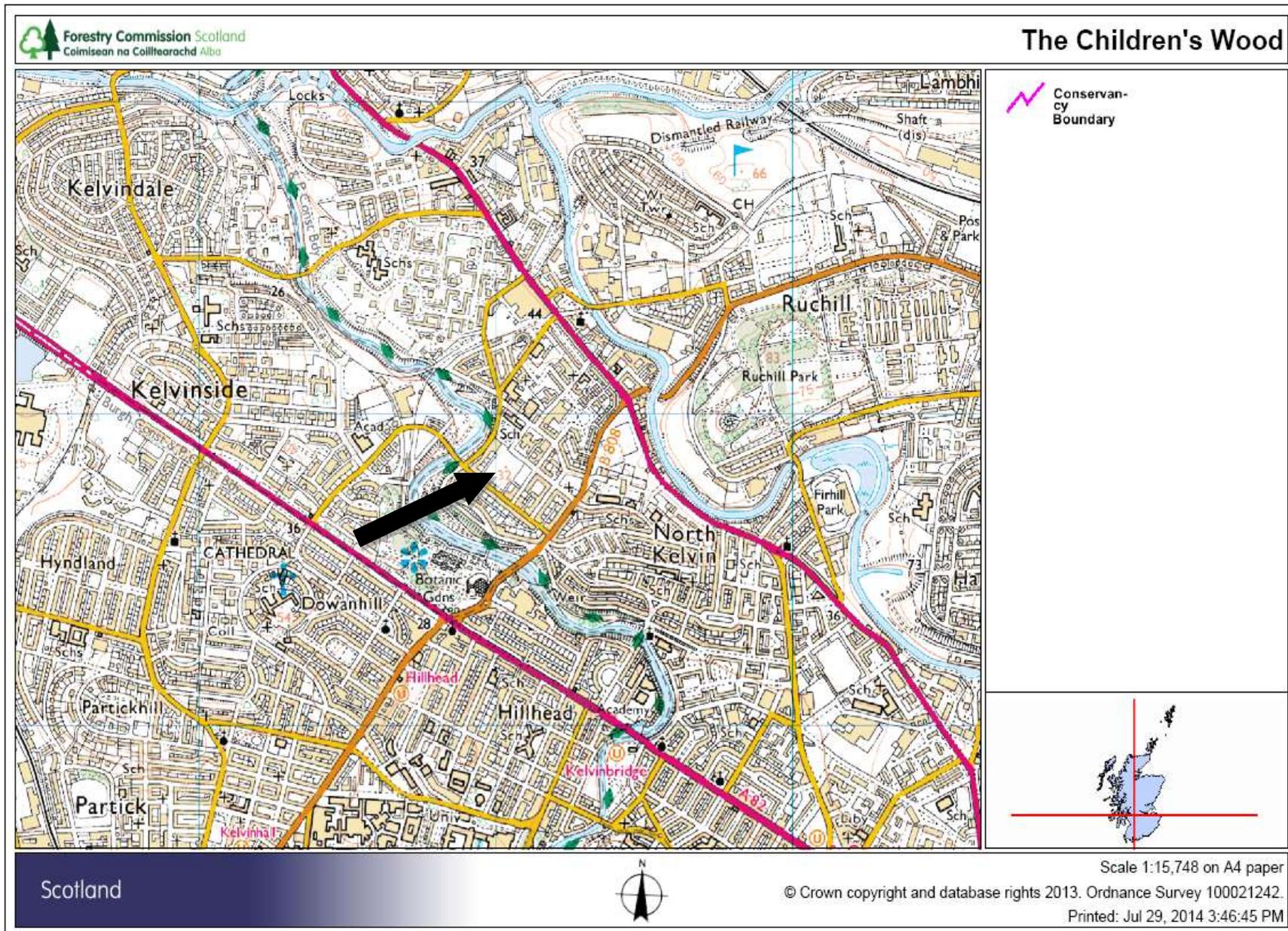
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|  | <p>The breakdown of income for the financial year 13/14 was:</p> <p><b>Grants: 65% of total</b><br/> <b>Donations: 35% of total</b></p> <p>No woodland products have been sold. However, other products made by the group such as T-shirts and bags were tried but found to be unsuccessful mainly because a lack of suitable storage space meant stock was damaged before it could be sold. The time commitment of making the items was also a barrier. The group also tries to limit how much attempted sales are made at their events as it is seen as a distraction from their main purpose.</p> |
| <b>2.8 Benefit distribution rules</b>  | <p>There are no tangible benefits (e.g. financial benefits, goods in kind such as firewood, grazing, employment) created by the group. The benefits are generated for the community and include better access and use of the site, particularly increased use of the area by and for children.</p>   |
| <b>3. External linkages</b>            |  |
| <b>3.1 Partnerships and agreements</b> | <p>There are formal partnerships with The Conservation Volunteers, Scottish Pre School Play Association, Federation for City Farms and Gardens and Community Woodlands Association and the Glasgow Council for the Voluntary Sector. The group feel that association with a range of groups strengthens their case for the land to be managed by the community, and helps build a base of legitimacy and support that helps them in their campaign against development of North Kelvin Meadow.</p>   |
| <b>3.2 Associations</b>                | <p>Urban Roots Initiative, RSPB, Friends of River Kelvin. Associations with these groups help with the promotion of events and sharing of equipment.</p>   |
| <b>4. Resources</b>                    |  |
| <b>4.1 Forest/ woodland</b>            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Children's Wood measures approximately 0.75 ha within Kelvinside, Glasgow. The site has two access points and is easily accessible given its urban location.</li> </ul>   |

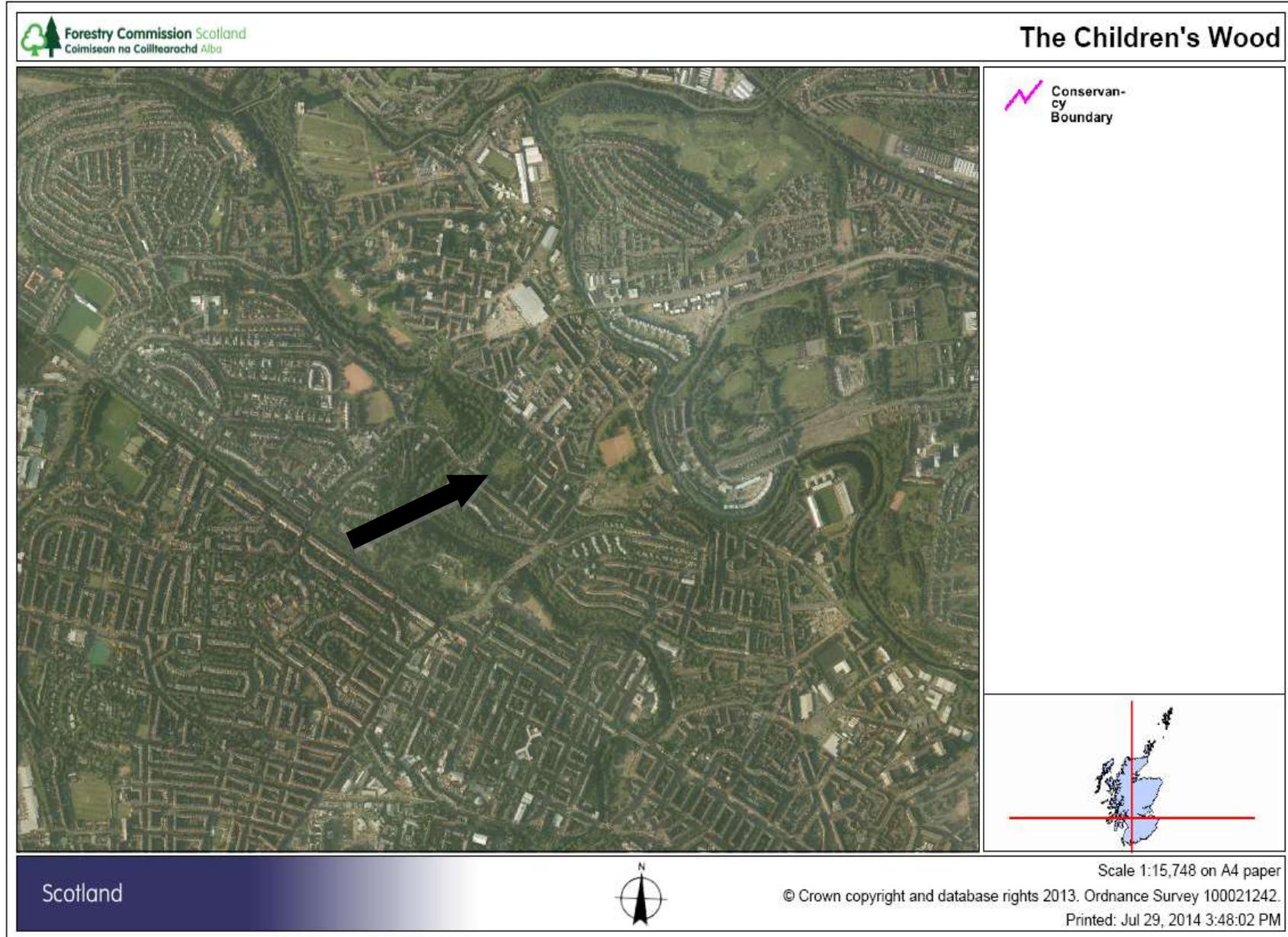
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|   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The soil type is Red Blaze / some organic build up on top layer, some areas have been rotovated. All areas are compacted.</li> <li>• The trees are predominantly even aged birch with some goat willow, sycamore, ash and lime.</li> <li>• The main wooded area regenerated naturally when the site was abandoned in 1992. There has been no mensuration of the woodland.</li> <li>• The site is approximately 66 percent open habitat, most of which has regenerated on compacted soils. There are currently no ponds or open water.</li> <li>• <b>Classification of woodland type: Broadleaved</b></li> <li>• The Children's Wood is a regenerating scrubby woodland on an abandoned meadow site. As such it has a mix of species that have not been managed for productive or any other purposes.</li> <li>• No biodiversity information about the site has been collected.</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>4.2 Woodland and group funding sources</b></p>          | <p>Some income is generated through fundraising events and donations. Grant income has been received from Red Nose Day (£975), Central Scotland Green Network (£350) and Hilton Hotel (£300). Income from the bake sale was used to train volunteers into Forest School leaders.</p>   |
| <p><b>4.3 Knowledge, skills, human and social capital</b></p> | <p>The priority of management of the Children's Wood is to secure the site's future for the community by using the site for the delivery of community activities which engage local children with natural heritage. Most knowledge, advice and information of benefit to the group is therefore concerned with how to effectively run the campaign, raise funds, and deliver community events.</p> <p>Woodland management expertise has not been a key focus of this group.</p>  |

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## 2. Change Narrative

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### 1. Group History. Moments of change, motivations and engagement

The site known as the Children's Wood (CW) and North Kelvin Meadows occupies a disused sports field in Glasgow's West End. The site is owned by Glasgow City Council and was abandoned in 1992. Scrub woodland subsequently regenerated across part of the area, and the wooded area is now the focus of the activities of the Children's Wood Group, although the whole site is often locally referred to as either the Childrens' Wood or North Kelvin Meadow.

The North Kelvin Meadow Campaign (SCO41346) was formed in 2008. Their focus was to prevent the sale of the site and to engage with the community by promoting the use of the open (non-wooded) areas for recreation. The NKMC had achieved this but little had been done to build a strong and cohesive community around the site, which was needed to drive a campaign to oppose its sale.

The Children's Wood group was started 2011 but didn't constitute formally until 2012. It was started by a group of local residents whose private properties back onto the site (**informal enjoyment** to **group formation**). The group initially formed to campaign against the sale of the site by Glasgow City Council for property development. After constituting, the group began the application process to become a SCIO.

The main motivation for establishing the Children's Wood was to carry on the campaign which was originally started by the North Kelvin Meadow Campaign. Many people including parents and teachers were still unsure about using both the wooded and open areas of the space, over fears that access was not permitted and the site itself may be unsafe. Furthermore, very few people ventured into the wooded part of the site, preferring to spend most of their time in the open meadow area. The group therefore decided to focus their activities on the wooded area, in part to demonstrate to the community and Glasgow City Council the value of the entire site and not just the meadow area, but also because the wooded area was seen by the community as highly desirable for education and children's events. The CW aimed to strengthen the sense of community by organizing events targeted at children (**group formation** to **active engagement**). Not only was this likely to mobilize many local families and have a positive effect on well-being of children spending most time indoors, it also built upon a legacy of the

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site being used by children: formally when it was a school sports ground in the past, and informally since it was abandoned as a school ground. The aim was to increase the perceived value of the space, focusing on the benefits that the space could deliver for education and child development. The main activities are therefore providing outdoor playgroups for children, providing outdoor learning sessions with internally trained Forest School leaders, and promoting the site as an educational resource.

The group was formally constituted in 2012 and began the process of applying to become a SCIO. Because campaigning is a big feature of the group's activities, they feel they are constantly evolving in response to the developing legal situation.

Different forms of community engagement have evolved since the group started. The committee meets regularly and the public is welcome to join some of the meetings. On a less regular basis, meetings with local organisations and schools take place. The group has also made efforts to engage with other site users such as dog walkers by hosting a dog show, and different age groups by supporting a local outdoor cinema run by students.

The group's activities started with a core group of local residents but they soon found they were overwhelmed by the level of support and attendance at events. At the West-end Festival events alone (an annual event in Glasgow's West End), 50 people volunteered. Engagement has evolved to include local schools which now use the site independently. A number of other local community organisations also engage with the site (TCV, RSPB, Nature in Nurture playgroup, Woodcraft Folk, Maryhill Mobile Creche, Dunard afterschool club, Homeschool group, Glasgow Clyde College, German Kinderclub, Garrioch Roots, Cinema Club), and a mailing list and group website have now been established.

Recently, the group participated in a study by Glasgow University's School of Psychology examining the link between spending time in green space and attention for learning. The findings supported the hypothesis that children's attention span was significantly higher after playing in the Meadow and Wood than after being in the classroom or in their concrete playground. In 2014, The Children's Wood won a Greener Together Award from Greener Scotland. The group hopes that the outcome of this study and the award can be used to support their case.

As the status of the woodland site is currently in dispute there remains is limited support from the Council to formalise any relationship around management and use of the site with the group.

## 2. Challenges, barriers and opportunities for change: Key issues in evolution

### Facilitating factors

- The **support from local people acting as volunteers who help with the delivery of events, schools and a number of organisations** has been important in raising the legitimacy of the campaign.
- **A student placement from Glasgow University's Community Development course** has helped to start a Growing group and a maintenance group on the land, which extends to other groups within the area. Ultimately they would like to incorporate all existing groups that use the site into one large group but this will only happen if they succeed in securing the site for the community.

### Barriers and Challenges

- The group does not have formal support by the landowner, which is the local authority. The lack of a formal use agreement or letter of comfort from the landowner results in **limited opportunities to raising grant income**. Related to this, there is also **no access to support and advice from local authority representatives**. But perhaps the biggest barrier of all is that the group has **no influence on decision making about the woodland**. Previous court action by Glasgow City Council over a member of NKMC accessing the site to install a bat box on a tree is illustrative in this regard.
- The urgent need to campaign, combined with constraints on available volunteer time, means that **the group is not always able to consult with the community as much as they would like to** on decision making. This could come at the expense of community support of the project and participation in activities.

- The group only has **limited expertise on the management of the trees and woodland**, although the advice has been available from friends and colleagues over tree safety issues and what potential the site has for silvicultural improvements should the group's status change.

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### 3. Evolution of Income

Income streams for the group has been limited to donations from the community and local businesses, the sale of refreshments at events, and accessing small grants which have not required evidence of any use agreement between the group and the site's owners. The lack of such an agreement has been seen as a seriously limiting factor in the group's ability to generate income. The intention in the future is to focus efforts on applying for more small grants which will be used to expand the group's output of events.

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### 4. Woodland history and change: Benefits and impacts before group involvement

Records show the site has always been open space. It was purchased by Glasgow City Council in 1939 and was used as a sports ground for the local school between 1946 and 1992. The school closed in 1992 and the site was abandoned. Although it initially remained in use by local people for sports and recreation the condition of the space declined to the point that it was no longer suitable as a sports ground. From 1996 onwards, local people started to sow grass and planted some trees, as well as doing the occasional litter pick. It is assumed that the area which is now woodland used to be tennis courts while the meadow area used to be a running track.

In 2008, local people were consulted on four different proposals to build a large number of flats on the woodland site. Many people were dismayed and appalled at having no alternative to development, which prompted a resident to deliver 540 questionnaires to local people asking them what they wanted to happen to the land. Eighty five people responded to the questionnaire. All the respondents were against selling the land for flats. The results were sent to the Council, which rejected the findings out of hand as they wanted the revenue from the sale. They pointed out that the revenue from the sale would be used for many good purposes such as renovating the nearby football pitches off Maryhill Road. North Kelvin Meadow Campaign

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was formed to lobby for the land to become a community green space. Local residents started by clearing the land of litter, installing a litter bin, planting flowers and 470 bulbs, installing raised beds, mending fencing, installing compost bins, and putting a door and shutters on the old brick building which is now used as a store room.

| Time Period | Owner/Manager        | Objectives / Benefits (and evidence)                       | Major operations  | Access and use rights                |
|-------------|----------------------|--|---|--------------------------------------|
| 1939 - 1992 | Glasgow City Council | School sports ground                                       | Creation of tennis courts and running track   | Access restricted to school children |
| 1992 - 2008 | Glasgow City Council | Derelict land, finding private funding to develop the site |   |                                      |
| 2008 - 2011 | Glasgow City Council | Finding private funding to develop the site                | NKMC undertakes some maintenance activities: litter picks, installing a litter bin, planting flowers, installing raised beds and compost bins, repairing fencing. | Land Reform Act                      |

## 5. Woodland history and change: Benefits and impacts since group involvement

There have been no silvicultural operations in the woodland other than the felling of one tree which was deemed dangerous by a friend. The main activities in the woodland have been promotion of the site and engagement activities. The benefits of these activities are demonstrated by very good attendance, and a shared understanding amongst the community that the site is providing a dense urban community with a free natural space to use for education and as a community hub. The committee feel this is especially valuable following a local survey of children in Glasgow that indicated there was very poor provision for outdoor play and interaction with the natural world. Evidence of the benefits of these activities is illustrated by the rising number of

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people who attend events and the growing popularity and use of the site by more groups. The wider community have benefitted from the site's maintenance and upkeep.

The group report that there has been a stream of benefits between initially engaging with the community and group membership. A community has grown around the Children's Wood which they report has been of most benefit to the children who use the site and have access to wild green spaces that they would otherwise not have. There have been numerous educational benefits to children in the wider community through school visits to the site. The social aspect of the woodland group has helped build links between different sectors of the community.

The demand for the site's use has been continually surprising. The group were not prepared for the level of demand that exists for more activities to be hosted there.

| Time Period | Owner/Manager        | Objectives / Benefits (and evidence)        | Major operations                                       | Access and use rights |
|-------------|----------------------|---|--|-----------------------|
| 2011 -      | Glasgow City Council | Finding private funding to develop the site | General maintenance activities by the Children's Woods | Land Reform Act       |

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## 6. Future Plans

Much of the future of The Children's Wood depends upon the outcome of the proposed sale of the land by Glasgow City Council to developers. The timescale for the proposed sale is constantly changing, making it difficult for the group to plan. In the short term, the group intends on continuing to campaign against the site's development by demonstrating its value as a community asset. They aim to do this by demonstrating the benefits of the woodland for the development and education of children and showing the importance of the site in providing a sense of community.

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Provided a formal use/management agreement, lease or purchase could be arranged in the future, the group would like to establish one overarching umbrella group which incorporates the Children's Wood, the NKMC and any other new groups that may form on the site, incorporating a more representative cross section of the community. They see each individual group still existing, but bound together by an all encompassing larger group. There are also short term plans to engage with more sectors of the community and to encourage more use of the site. A new vegetable growing project is being set up by the group and other parties in an attempt to appeal to a wider range of users and to strengthen engagement with the community.

The group aspires to carry out woodland management on the site should their status change. In the short term, this will probably be done by committee members who are undergoing Forest School training and by asking advice from knowledgeable friends and associates. In the long term, in case the group gains some kind of decision making powers, they would like to manage the woodland and open habitat much more intensively, taking into account the views of the local community. Management activities would most likely be focused at improving the species diversity and woodland structure. There are also plans to develop a community café.

### 3. Engagement and impacts timeline

| Year   | Event   | ENGAGEMENT                            | Reasons (Barriers and challenges)  | Changes /Impacts and outcomes Social (evidence) | Changes /Impacts and outcomes Woodland (evidence)  | Changes /Impacts and outcomes Financial /Economic (evidence) |
|--------|---|---------------------------------------|--|---|--|--|
| 2011   | Formation and constitution of the Children's Wood   | INFORMAL ENJOYMENT to GROUP FORMATION | <p>To campaign to keep the site in community control.</p> <p>To use the site for the delivery of activities to engage the community with natural heritage.</p> |   |  |  |
| 2011 - | Outdoor playgroup starts, committee members attend Forest School training and provide classes | GROUP FORMATION to ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT  | To strengthen sense of community, increase child well-being and build a rationale for the campaign against development   | Increased sense of community                    | Creation of benches, small informal paths and tree decorations, small-scale silvicultural management | Funds raised from bake sale, donations and grants (accounts) |