



CASE STUDY

FALKIRK

**Working in partnership to
improve urban woodlands.**



LOCATION Falkirk and Grangemouth sit at the heart of Central Scotland, with links to east-west and north-south strategic roads and railway links.

SITE DESCRIPTION A network of over 3,000 hectares of urban woodlands and greenspace, mainly owned by Forestry Commission Scotland, Falkirk Council, Callendar Estate and Central Scotland Forest Trust.



This project demonstrates how working in partnership can achieve more than when individual organisations work in isolation. Despite the pressure on land in Falkirk, the look and feel of the area has been transformed, including a reduction in vacant and derelict land.

BEFORE WIAT

Falkirk's industry was based on iron and coal, while Grangemouth continues to be Scotland's foremost port, as well as the location of one of Europe's largest petrochemical complexes.

Local agencies had created various urban woodlands but many were of poor quality and were affected by new development. The woods were mostly managed reactively, with woodland managers responding to issues such as fallen trees on an ad hoc basis. In private woodlands, notably Callendar Estate, managers had started to experience increasing numbers of visitors, and as a result, increasing costs of improving degraded paths and addressing the impact of increasing anti-social behaviour. Fly-tipping, arson and unauthorised vehicle access were the most common issues.

Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) was becoming more active in the area and bought Callendar Wood to improve access in the woodlands. This project was ground-breaking as it was the first of its kind, and work was completed before WIAT was conceived. Funding was secured from the Millennium Forest Trust, SNH and the Falkirk Environment Trust.

WIAT ACHIEVEMENTS

Falkirk Council, Callendar Estate and Central Scotland Forest Trust (CSFT) joined forces to secure funding of around £1m for nine linked woodlands in 2006. As part of this, a five year work programme was developed, including forest management operations, creating paths, installing signage and seating, and delivering a programme of forest education and community engagement.

Additional WIAT funding was secured in 2008 to support another nine management plans and the activities needed to implement them.

Highlights include:

- Creating or upgrading 29km of footpaths;
- Installing over 100 bat and bird boxes in the woods;
- 25 community events have been organised by Falkirk Council, including litter picking, tree planting, mini beast hunts and ranger guided walks;
- Over 250 volunteers have attended events and activities;
- 11 primary schools in the area now have forest education initiatives;
- Woodland Management Plans are now in place for 18 sites, totalling 300 hectares of land and Polmont Woods and Kinneil Foreshore now have a management group; and
- 280 woodland sites, totalling 1900 hectares and 150 kilometres of woodlands paths and tracks, were audited and surveyed and captured on Geographical Information System (GIS).



TIMELINE

1993

Falkirk Greenspace Initiative established.

1999

FCS buys Callendar Wood and begins an ambitious programme of access work, rhododendron clearance and interpretation. First Community Ranger employed.

2000

Falkirk Local Plan is adopted. Its policies emphasise the significance of the Green Belt, the pressure it is coming under and the key role of the Greenspace Initiative.

2005

WIAT programme is launched.

Falkirk Council & Callendar Estate apply for WIAT funding to prepare Falkirk Urban Woodland Strategy (FUWS).



WIAT WORKS

When WIAT was launched, Falkirk Council responded by taking the innovative approach of forming a partnership with CSFT and Callendar Estate, closely supported by the Commission.

The first action was to develop an Urban Woodland Strategy to help prioritise the woodlands that would most benefit from management and co-ordinating action.

The successful, long-term working with Callendar Estate provided the project with a broader perspective on woodland management issues. The positive approach of the partnership has encouraged other landowners to become involved.

Further exemplar work based around health and well-being is being carried out at the Forth Valley Royal Hospital in Larbert, originating through the planning process, with partners: FCS, Forth Valley NHS, CSFT and Falkirk Council. The grounds and adjacent woods are being developed, with improved paths for walkers and cyclists and invasive rhododendron cleared.

A Community Ranger works on site two days a week managing the woods, liaising with community groups and local schools, and delivering the 'Branching Out' programme for mental health.

ON-GOING COMMUNITY ACTIVITY

Falkirk Council and its partners continue to deliver a wide range of community engagement activities on a number of sites across Falkirk, with a particular emphasis on:

- Planting and landscaping events and initiatives;
- Forest education initiatives; and
- Health programmes.

In addition, Callendar Estate is now actively promoted as a visitor destination, with an additional 13km of mountain bike trails built, along with the construction of a car park. The level of community participation has significantly increased with a Community Interest Company now managing the path network in partnership with the Estate and an active volunteer programme involving groups from Falkirk's secondary schools.

In 2008 Bonnyfield, a **28.7** hectare area offering natural habitat to a wide range of wildlife (formerly sand and gravel quarry) is declared the Council's **first Local Nature Reserve**.



2006

FUWS partnership formed.

Successful application made for WIAT funding for 9 woodlands.

2007

Falkirk Urban Woodland Strategy published and second WIAT application made for a further 9 woodlands.

2008

Bonnyfield, a former 28.7ha sand and gravel quarry, offers a variety of natural habitats and is declared a Local Nature Reserve.

2011

Work funded under first WIAT application completed.

2012

Falkirk Council's Greenspace Initiative wins the Scottish Awards for Quality in Planning. Kinneil Foreshore LNR declared.



LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Roughly half of Falkirk Council's woods have benefitted from WIAT investment to date. There is still a need to maintain the improvements carried out in the first nine woodlands, to ensure the benefits that the local people are now enjoying are sustained. However, there is also a need to look at the remaining woodlands.

One approach to support this would be for the woods to create a greater economic value, helping sustain their management. This could be done through producing a range of timber and non-timber products. In addition, training and employability opportunities could be expanded to support wider economic development objectives.

The continuity of WIAT provides an opportunity for the partnership to review their shared objectives, ensure the public benefits are sustained, and to start planning for the future to build on the success to date.

These solid foundations enable Falkirk to deliver against the new priorities such as the Scottish Government's woodland expansion ambitions, the revised Central Scotland Forest Strategy and the Central Scotland Green Network - that support the continued delivery of a range of benefits for local people.

In light of the success of the Falkirk Greenspace Initiative over the last 20 years, and with the emerging vision for a Central Scotland Green Network, a new Falkirk Green Network Strategy is proposed. This will review and update Falkirk Council's approach to greenspace enhancement and delivery, where WIAT will continue to offer partnership opportunities.

“incremental improvements over the last 20 years have made Falkirk a more attractive place to live”

Falkirk Council officer

If you would like to find out more about forestry in Scotland, please call 0131 334 0303 or email fcscotland@forestry.gsi.gov.uk

www.forestry.gov.uk/wiat

