

# EASTER CRAIGLOCKHART HILL: COMMUNITY PLAN 2020 – 2023

## Introduction

This Plan has been prepared by the Friends of Easter Craiglockhart Hill.

This plan aims to complement the Management Plan for Easter Craiglockhart Hill Local Nature Reserve prepared by the Forestry and Natural Heritage Section of the City of Edinburgh Council. The previous Management Plan covered the period from 2010 to 2015 and a new plan is expected to be drafted during 2020. The Council plans focus on statutory requirements and environmental protection. Our Plan puts greater emphasis on usage, access, inclusion and community involvement.

The Council's Plan will cover a period of 10 years. We cannot see that far ahead so our plan only covers three years. It will be reviewed and updated annually in the light of feedback from the people who visit the hill.

We hope that the two plans will be complementary to each other and can be presented together for consultation to stakeholders.

We want to get as much feedback as possible on our Plan from people who enjoy spending time on Easter Craiglockhart Hill. This plan and a one-page summary version are on our website [www.eastercraiglockharthill.org](http://www.eastercraiglockharthill.org). Please help us by reading this report and telling us what you think should be done.

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## **The Hill**

Easter Craiglockhart Hill is one of the ‘Seven Hills’ of Edinburgh. The height of 525 feet is modest but the views from the hill-top across Fife, the Lothians and the Borders are outstanding.

Some 250 million years ago, the Craiglockhart Hills were formed by volcanic action and the distinctive grainy basalt on the cliffs and hill-top is known to geologists as Craiglockhart Basalt. The land was shaped by glaciers during the last Ice Age when the valley between Easter and Wester Craiglockhart Hills was carved out.

Two ‘heroes’ also shaped the Hill. In 1773, Alexander Monro Secundus, Professor of Anatomy at Edinburgh University, purchased a 271 acre estate which included most of Easter Craiglockhart Hill and much of what later became the sedate suburb of Craiglockhart. Monro was a passionate gardener and planted thousands of native trees across his estate – some of the mature trees in the woodlands may have been planted by him. Our second hero is John Cox, owner of the nearby Gorgie Glue works, who, one hundred years later in 1873, built a stone causeway across the Megget Burn and so created ponds for skating, curling and boating.

In Victorian times, much of the original Craiglockhart estate was sold off for housing. The southern side of the Hill became the Merchants Golf Course and a Mental Health Hospital was built on the Craighouse land to the east. However, most of Easter Craiglockhart Hill – some 35 acres in total - is relatively untouched by modern development. Little more than 2 miles from Princes Street, it is an oasis of tranquillity in the heart of a busy city.

In 2005, Easter Craiglockhart Hill was designated as a Local Nature Reserve. Swans have nested on the pond for more than 100 years and coots, moorhens, mallards, tufted ducks and little grebes all raise families despite the depredations of the local gulls. Goosanders are frequent visitors while kingfishers, herons and cormorants visit from time to time. Resident raptors in the Craiglockhart Hills include buzzards, kestrels and sparrow hawks. Occasionally a high-flying peregrine visits from the Pentlands. Woodland birds include bull finches, goldcrests, blackcaps, nuthatches and woodpeckers.

Walkers at dawn or dusk are sometimes lucky enough to spot roe deer. There are at least two badger sets and several fox dens. Other mammals include rabbits, three species of bats and more grey squirrels than foresters would wish (they cause much damage to the sycamore trees on the Hill). In 2019 the pond was even visited by a local otter!

User surveys have confirmed that the Hill is extensively used. 95% of visitors are from Edinburgh and 91% visit at least weekly. Our estimate based on these surveys is that about 200,000 visits are made over the course of a year.

In 2008, the Local Nature Reserve was one of the first green spaces in Edinburgh to be awarded a Green Flag. The high environmental and management standards of the Green Flag scheme have been met every year since then. The flag flies proudly at the Craiglockhart Terrace entrance. Each year, the Council assesses more than 150 parks, Nature Reserves and other green spaces against Green Flag standards. In 2019, these Park Quality Assessments gave Easter Craiglockhart Hill Local Nature Reserve a higher rating than any other green space in Edinburgh.

## Process

The Friends Group was established in 1998 and merged with a Nature Trail Group in 2010.

Our constitution states that our purposes are :

- a) Advancing environmental protection and improvement by preserving and protecting Easter Craiglockhart Hill Local Nature Reserve for the enjoyment of members of the public and by conserving and enhancing wildlife and biodiversity
- b) Advancing education by providing learning and educational materials and by organising educational events and activities.
- c) Promoting equality and diversity through specific initiatives to encourage people with additional needs to make greater use of the Local Nature Reserve
- d) Advancing community development by providing and maintaining community and play space and by organising community events and activities.

In furtherance of the above charitable purposes, the organisation will:.

- Consult with and involve the members of the organisation and members of the local community in the management of Easter Craiglockhart Hill Local Nature Reserve.
- Raise and administer funds for maintenance, developments and improvements.
- Recruit and support paid and volunteer workers
- Work closely with City of Edinburgh Council, the landowner, and with other relevant organisations whose interests include the protection and preservation of Easter Craiglockhart Hill Local Nature Reserve or of the environment in general.

In the years ahead, we want to promote responsible usage so that more people from the local community and from further afield can enjoy spending time on the hill. We do not want just to preserve the Hill - we aim to improve it. Over the past twenty years, the Friends Group has been able to source more than £150,000 to finance improvements.

Over the next three to five years, we will be working in partnership with the City of Edinburgh Council to look at various options for the future management of the Local Nature Reserve including the possibility of community ownership.

The Craighouse site to the east of Easter Craiglockhart Hill was first used for a Mental Health Hospital, then became a campus of Edinburgh Napier University. After the University decided to sell the site, a controversial housing development was given planning permission. A condition of the planning permission was that three areas of woodland on the Craighouse site should transfer into Council ownership and become part of an enlarged Local Nature Reserve. The transfer took place in March 2018 and significantly increased the size of the Local Nature Reserve.

In 2013, the Council carried out a comprehensive consultation with the local community about the ownership and management of these woodlands and the wider Local Nature Reserve. The outcome was that the Council committed to "working with local residents and site users to ensure community involvement in the future management of the Hill's open spaces" (CEC Corporate Policy and Strategy Report – 11.6.2013). The expectation is that, over a period of three to five years, "the community group could take on an increasing number of tasks and requirements of land management" including access improvements, habitat management, site interpretation and site presence. A community group would need to put together a sustainable Business Plan and demonstrate capacity and competence in these tasks and requirements. This Plan is one step in a process which could lead to a change in the way the Local Nature Reserve is managed in the future. With incremental growth in capacity and land management skills, a formal consultation on management options could be organised in 2021.

***Actions:***

***Maximise opportunities for learning land management skills through joint training and by working alongside Council staff.***

***Look at all options for future management and consult fully with members and local stakeholders.***

A further condition of the planning permission was that a payment of £150,000 should be made under Section 75 of the Town and Country Planning Act and "applied by the Council towards maintaining the woodland areas in perpetuity for the benefit of the Development and the wider community". This payment was received by the Council in 2018. Given the expectation of greater



community involvement in management, it is essential that community bodies are involved and consulted about the spending of this fund. The fund should be used to pay for improvements and not for existing Council responsibilities. It would be sensible to retain a proportion of the fund to be accessed by a community body in the event of a change of management responsibilities. The first expenditures from the S75 fund have been used for path improvements with priorities agreed in consultation between the Friends Group and the Council.

***Actions:***

***Confirm and consolidate mechanisms for the allocation of the S75 funds and timescales for spending.***

***Ensure that the views of the community are fully and properly taken into account in decision making.***

In April 2018, the Friends Group was awarded a grant of £42547 from the Community Led Activity Fund of the Big Lottery Scotland to cover the costs of employing a part-time Community Engagement Worker for three years. The worker came into post in January 2019 and has already made a huge contribution towards achieving the goals set out in this Plan.

The Community Engagement Worker has:

- Increased volunteer activity and land management skills through the Hill Work Squad, the Hill Watch scheme and other volunteer initiatives
- Begun to develop information and learning materials for young people and for people with additional needs
- Planned and delivered a range of events and activities aiming to be as inclusive as possible

- Boosted the social media profile of the Friends Group and promoted Easter Craiglockhart Hill as a location for sport, exercise and family outings
- Increased the active membership of the Friends Group
- Liaised with the Forestry and Natural Heritage section of the Council and with a wide range of community and environmental organisations
- Gathered feedback and consulted on activities and forward plans

***Actions:***

***Consolidate current work and plan future work to meet agreed objectives.***

***Look at options for continuing post beyond expiry of Lottery grant.***

The Friends Group exists to represent the views of the community. These views are often expressed informally. Friends and neighbours meet when walking the dog or feeding the ducks on the pond. The AGM offers a more structured opportunity for community feedback.

The Friends Group will use AGMs, events, the website and social media to get feedback about this plan and future plans. We will listen to all views and consider all ideas and try always to act in the best interests of the community.

***Action:***

***Use every possible means to get feedback to guide future plans and actions.***



## **People**

Alexander Munro was a leading figure of the ‘Edinburgh Enlightenment’ and a jovial character. He was happy for the people of Edinburgh to walk in the Craiglockhart Hills. He could be described as an early supporter of the ‘Right to Roam’.

John Cox was a showman and an entrepreneur. Skating, curling and boating were popular from the 1870’s onwards in the ponds he created. At the western end of the ponds, military bands played in a bandstand under the illumination of gas lights. An amusement park was built in the 1930’s and the lower area of Craiglockhart Woods became known as ‘Happy Valley’. There were ice cream stalls and tearooms and a dance hall and swings and roundabouts for children - it was the Disneyland of its times. As recently as the 1970’s, boats and pedalos could still be hired at the pond.

So, for nearly 250 years, Easter Craiglockhart Hill has been a destination where the people of Edinburgh could relax, exercise, have fun and enjoy the natural world. That is still the case today. People visit the Hill for many different reasons. A survey in 2015 identified some of the different groups of users.

### **Dog Walkers**

Our survey found that more than a quarter of the visitors to the Hill were dog walkers and empirical observation suggests the proportion could be even higher. Dog walkers like being able to exercise their dogs in an open and safe environment. The majority of the dog walkers live locally though some drive and park at one of the entrances. The dog walkers are an informal network and often the first to identify and report back on anything unusual or untoward on the Hill.

### **Walkers**

Most visitors to the hill come to walk and enjoy spending time in a natural environment. Some use the paths as a short-cut to other destinations such as the local shops or the Craiglockhart Leisure Centre. Some come to pursue specific interests such as bird watching or photography. There are some ‘regulars’ who visit daily to feed the swans and ducks.

Many walkers, and especially at weekends, visit because they seek peace, serenity, green space and closeness to nature. Research has proved that

spending time in ‘green spaces’ has a positive impact on mental health and well-being.

## **Foragers**

The walkers include a sub-group of foragers. They pick the brambles, and wild raspberries which grow in abundance on the northern slopes of the Hill. They harvest the apples and plums from Craighouse and from the little orchard at the Craiglockhart Terrace entrance. They gather native herbs from our small raised bed, wild garlic and even the pernicious few-flowered leek to add flavour to their cooking. There are many other edible plants which can be gathered around the Hill. A Foragers’ Walk in 2019 was well attended and identified many of the plants which can be used for medical or culinary purposes.

### ***Actions:***

***Repeat the Foragers Walk on our ‘Walks and Talks’ programme.***

***Add a Foragers Guide to our website.***

## **Cyclists**

The path from the Craiglockhart Terrace entrance to the Leisure Centre entrance is part of Cycle Route 15. Many other paths are stepped which acts as a disincentive to cycle use.

Some cyclists use the paths to commute between home and work, sometimes linking to the Union Canal path. Families with small children are frequent weekend visitors, often combining cycling with feeding the water birds or playing on our simple play structures.

There is a bike rack at the Craiglockhart Terrace entrance and cyclists use railings at several other entrances. There are, however, several entrances where there are no bike racks or suitable ways of securing a bike. The Council have a policy of not installing bike racks within a park or Local Nature Reserve but there are several internal locations where it would be helpful to cyclists to have a bike rack.

### ***Actions:***

***Work with the Council to get additional bike racks installed in suitable locations.***

***Seek permission and alternative funding if the Council is unable to provide and install bike racks.***



## **Mountain Bikers**

Significant damage to the environment can be caused by mountain bikers leaving established paths and creating their own trails. There are also safety risks to other users. Mountain biker usage has not been a significant problem on Easter Craiglockhart Hill though there is some evidence of erosion to the side of paths and of informal trails from the hill-top down through the woodlands. In the past, some ‘jump’ structures created by bikers have been removed. We could engage with mountain bikers to define what trails and structures are acceptable. It seems unnecessary and possibly counter-productive to attempt to block trails.

### ***Action:***

***Monitor mountain bike usage together with the Council and engage with mountain bikers to ensure acceptable usage.***

## **Runners**

The Hill is popular with runners. They are under-represented in our surveys due to the difficulty of intercepting them.

The Seven Hills of Edinburgh race in July brings upwards of 600 runners to the hill-top entering through the Leisure Centre and exiting through the Craighouse estate.

We would like to encourage more use of the Hill for running and orienteering in accordance with Active Scotland and Green Gym principles.

We would need to consider the impact on the environment of these activities and avoid mass events that could cause damage.

***Actions:***

***Highlight the potential of the Hill for running on the website and in a redesigned leaflet.***

***Explore the possibility of a specific running event based on the Hill.***

***Explore whether an orienteering trail could be established.***

## **Children**

Craiglockhart Primary School started their Forest School Initiative in 2014 and meet in the woods every Wednesday. Every class in the school spends four sessions following the Forest School curriculum which combines play and exercise with learning about the natural world. The Forest School 'hub' is at the north-east corner of the Local Nature Reserve.

Little Monkeys Nursery also have a Forest School trained worker and are frequent visitors. So too are Corner House Nursery and the Activator Holiday Play Scheme run by Craiglockhart Leisure Centre. Local Cubs, Scouts, Rainbows, Brownies and Guides groups have all also spent time in the Local Nature Reserve, along with other youth groups such as Earth Calling. The Cubs built and installed a splendid bug house in 2016.

Some local residents have complained about habitat damage in the Forest School areas where the children spend their time. It could be argued that the opening up of a few areas previously dominated by nettles and brambles is of benefit to all. We could rotate the designated locations for Forest School and other organised youth activities to reduce habitat damage.

Many of the children who spend structured time in the Local Nature Reserve with their school, nursery or youth club return to play informally at weekends and during holidays or visit with other family members. We would like to provide some learning opportunities to these families at these times. In 2019, we piloted two 'Family Fun Days' with a variety of different activities - leaf printing, orienteering and raised rope courses.

We want to work with local schools and youth groups (including those in areas less advantaged than Craiglockhart) to encourage them to spend time on the hill and learn about their local environment. We plan to work in the autumn with South Morningside School and to use this pilot to generate learning material that could be used more widely and perhaps form part of a Learning Pack.

***Actions:***

***Monitor environmental damage from organised youth activities and take remedial action where necessary.***

***Pilot learning materials and environmental activities for primary age children with a view to wider distribution.***

### **People with Additional Needs**

Although people in wheelchairs can use some paths in the Local Nature Reserve, many are steep or stepped. Maps, leaflets and entrance signage convey limited information about which paths are suitable for wheelchair users and people with visual or mobility difficulties.

We have made initial contacts with some of the local services for people with physical and learning disabilities. Initial contacts suggest that the people who attend these services would enjoy spending time in the Local Nature Reserve. Education materials, using Total Communication principles, could be adapted from elsewhere. There could be opportunities for volunteer support.

There are a number of Care Homes and Sheltered Housing complexes in Craiglockhart and the people living there could also be encouraged through visits and publicity to visit the Local Nature Reserve. We would like to encourage people with dementia and their carers to spend time in the Local Nature Reserve.

Within the People Friendly Trails project proposal (Page 32) we plan to create a Gentle Trail, in order to provide an accessible route through the lower woods and around the pond suitable for wheelchair users and people with visual or mobility difficulties.

***Action:***

***Aim to be more inclusive by taking specific initiatives to encourage people with additional needs to make greater use of the Local Nature Reserve.***

## **Teenage Drinkers**

During the summer of 2017, large groups of teenagers, communicating through social media, gathered most weekends at secluded locations in the Local Nature Reserve. Large quantities of litter (mostly empty cans of beer and cider) had to be removed after each 'gathering'. Some graffiti was sprayed on fences and rubbish bins and there was some minor vandalism - wing mirrors broken and fences kicked down. The greatest concern, however, was for the health and safety of these young people. Inexperience with alcohol meant that some became intoxicated and had to be helped or carried down steep and muddy slopes by their friends. The local Community Police advised against any kind of active intervention but suggested that some drinking 'dens' could be made less attractive by breaking up fire pits and cutting back surrounding trees and bushes.

There were fewer large gatherings during 2018 and 2019 though drinking and littering continued at several sites.

### ***Action:***

***Monitor teenage 'gatherings' in the Local Nature Reserve and assess what action should be taken at specific sites.***

## Places

There are many different habitats within the Local Nature Reserve each requiring specific micro-management strategies.

### The Pond

The pond has a rectangular shape and covers an area of about 500 square metres with an average depth of about a metre. No fishing is allowed on the pond and, in any case, there are no fish worth catching despite some attempts by local anglers to introduce chub and carp. Despite the long history of boating, no boating now takes place. In a local ‘cause celebre’ in 2014 (reported on the BBC news and on the front pages of ‘The Scotsman’ and the ‘Glasgow Herald’), the longstanding kayaking school had to be cancelled, on health and safety grounds, since the resident male swan had persistently attacked the young kayakers.

Although the pond was originally built for boating and skating, it has gradually become a wildlife refuge. In 2005, the eastern shore of the pond was planted with willows and aquatic plants to provide nesting areas for water birds.



There has been much debate concerning the nesting site for the swans. For many years, the swans nested on an ‘island’ on the northern side of the pond. In 2015, the swans chose to nest at a site in the reedbed area at the south-east corner of the pond. This nest was predated by dogs or foxes and the male swan was killed.

The swans have persevered with the nest in the reedbed area and, despite the vulnerability of this location, have raised large broods of cygnets for the last four years.

***Action:***

***Monitor nest locations and nesting success.***

For many years, the swans have been ringed, measured and health-checked in the summer by Lothian and Fife Swan and Goose Study Group. Although their research studies are now complete, they continue to ring swans and cygnets in a few locations where there is strong community interest in the welfare of the swans. In recent years, we have publicised the ringing of the swans and children watching the ringing have been able to ‘name a cygnet’.



***Actions:***

***Continue to liaise with and help the Swan Group.***

***Continue to publicise the ringing and organise a ‘naming’ event.***

There have been concerns over water quality in the pond especially in times of low rainfall and there has occasionally been some evidence of algal bloom.

***Action:***

***Ensure that algal bloom and water quality is regularly monitored and reported to the Council for remedial action.***

At one time, there was an island in the middle of the pond. Thought has been given to restoring this island or building a spit from the north-west shore. This would improve the appearance of the pond by breaking up the present ‘rectangular’ shape and would improve nesting and roosting habitats for water

birds. It has been suggested that the privet hedge along the southern bank of the pond could be replaced with willow to improve nesting habitats and stabilise the bank. 'Floating islands' have also been considered.

***Action:***

***Explore whether funding could be found for islands or other features that would increase nesting habitats (see Bird Friendly Pond Project proposal on Page 32) or for replacement of the privet hedge.***

### **North-West Shore of pond**

This area lies in front of the Leisure Centre Gym. A double gate at one end marks the most used entrance to the Local Nature Reserve. This area has become the most popular feeding station for the swans and water birds.

Over the past couple of years, The Friends Group has, in partnership with the Leisure Centre, tried to make this area more attractive to visitors by:

- Filling and planting the 'ponds' in the wooden pontoons
- Digging out areas on either side of the boundary fence and planting with wildflower seeds and plugs
- Placing a wooden memorial bench beside the path
- Planting a living willow structure in the shape of a pirate ship for children to play around.

There are no interpretation boards in this area about the birds and the plants.

***Actions:***

***Seek funding sources to consolidate and extend the landscaping initiatives.***

***Plan, together with the Council, how best to provide appropriate information and interpretation.***

### **The Marsh**

There is a marsh area to the east of the pond where the outflow leaves the pond. This is an unusual and valuable habitat in the Edinburgh area. Frogs, toads, newts and leeches are found in the marsh. A survey carried out in 2015 suggested that water quality in the pond was poor and that there was a risk of shrinkage and habitat loss due to encroaching trees and shrubs. The survey was carried out at a time of particularly low water levels and these concerns may

have been unfounded. Over recent years, some of the other recommendations of this survey report have been implemented. Ponds and pools have been dug out to provide better habitats for frogs, toads and other amphibians. Greater willow-herb and other willow-herb species dominate some areas of the marsh to the exclusion of other plants such as marsh orchids. Volunteers have been deployed to pull out the willow-herb and allow other plants to flourish.

***Action:***

***Deploy volunteers to continue to create ponds and pools and to control willow-herb.***

### **The Curling Rink Area**

Waverley Curling Club constructed several curling rinks to the north-east of the Hill in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Most were gradually lost to housing developments. One, at what is now the Craiglockhart Terrace entrance, survived the longest. Though derelict for decades, generations of children enjoyed riding bikes and playing football and outdoor games on the concrete surface. In 1998, the Council proposed that a swathe of land between Craiglockhart Terrace and Lockharton Crescent should be sold to housing developers. The community opposed this proposal. The Council agreed to put the land sale on hold provided that the community demonstrated capacity to look after and improve the area. In the following few years, thanks to community donations and fundraising of more than ten thousand pounds, trees were planted, paths constructed, the out-buildings of a derelict hotel were demolished and the curling rink surface was broken up and filled in. The housing development proposals were, accordingly, withdrawn.

The curling rink area has been gradually improved over the years. Within the area are:

- A small orchard with apple, plum and greengage trees
- A raised bed with native herbs for community use
- A planter seat
- A small wildflower plot
- A living willow tunnel (known as the Magic Tunnel) and some simple play structures using recycled wood

The funding for all these initiatives was sourced by the Friends Group. All structures were built or installed by volunteers and all maintenance is carried out by the Friends Group.

From 2015 to 2017, the whin surface covering the old curling rink was used for summer evening petanque sessions. Although there were nearly 1000 attendances at the petanque sessions over the three years, numbers declined slowly and the sessions were discontinued though informal use continues.

There are a number of possible options for the future use of this space – the only open flat space in the lower part of the Hill:

- A grassed area with additional seating
- A community garden with raised beds or allotment plots
- An outdoor gym
- A playpark
- The start-point for a Trim track

Alternatively, the whin surface could just be left as it is but used:

- As a venue for concerts and theatre (perhaps during the Festival)
- For annual fetes (these were organised from 2001 to 2012)
- For a community bonfire on Guy Fawkes night (older residents remember bonfires on this site during the 1980's and 1990's)

### ***Actions:***

***Continue to maintain the existing structures.***

***Assess alternative uses for the area and consult with neighbours.***

### **The Hill Top**

This area is part open meadow and part scrub dominated by gorse, brambles and willowherb. The upper and lower meadow areas are a valuable habitat for birds and insects. A view-point to the north-east looks out over Edinburgh and Fife. The hill top is a popular destination and the views are excellent.

The meadows are mown in May and September by the Estates Team of the Council's Forestry and Natural Heritage Service and then raked by a volunteer squad from Lothian Conservation Volunteers, or the volunteer group organised by the Friends group, the Hill Work Squad.



There are three memorial benches on the hill-top - all need some repair work around the base.

There is no information or interpretation material on the hill-top. Visitors would appreciate boards describing the features across the points of the compass.

***Actions:***

***Assess, together with the Council,***

***how volunteer management of the meadow areas can best be provided.***

***Discuss with the Council what information and interpretation material could be provided and seek funding sources for this.***

### **Craiglockhart Woods**

There is mature woodland to the west of the Hill with many ancient trees. The wetter areas at the foot of the hill are dominated by birch and willow. The woodlands are managed by the Forestry Team of the Council who inspect on a regular basis. Many woodland areas present access problems for large Forestry vehicles.

There are some open areas which could be planted with native species such as oak, hazel, blackthorn, birch, hawthorn and Scots pine to counter-balance the dominant regeneration of ash and sycamore, especially with the threat posed to the woods by ash dieback. Similar action could also be taken when trees fall or are felled.

Underplanting of bulbs (snowdrops and native daffodils) and of some native plants has been carried out in the lower woods. We plan to continue these planting initiatives using our Hill Work Squad and other volunteer groups.

***Actions:***

***Assess, together with the Council, how access for Forestry vehicles could be improved and funded.***

***Promote the planting of native tree and plant species both by the Forestry Team and by volunteers***

## **Craighouse Woods**

The woodlands transferred from the Craighouse estate are mixed woodland with some good specimens of beech, horse chestnut and Corsican pine and some planted areas of pine and larch.

As elsewhere, open areas could be cleared of undergrowth and native species planted. New planting could replace fallen or felled trees. Some underplanting of bulbs and native plants would also benefit the Craighouse woods.

A curling rink was built in the Craighouse woods around 1900 for the benefit of the patients at Craighouse Hospital. It is the only intact historic curling rink in Edinburgh. Work is ongoing to clear the site of the curling rink using volunteer work squads.

### ***Actions:***

***Replant open or cleared areas.***

***Carry out appropriate underplanting.***

***Complete clearance of historic curling rink and consider uses for the cleared site.***

### **Viewpoints**

There are two recognised viewpoints on the Hill both looking out over Edinburgh to the north. There is no directional signage to these viewpoints and no interpretation information. Undergrowth often obscures the views in summer.

There is potential for a third viewpoint on the historic curling rink in Craighouse Woods.

***Action:***  
***Work with the Council to improve signage, information and undergrowth clearance around recognised viewpoints and, if necessary source funding.***



## **Wildflower Meadows**

Four wildflower areas have been established in recent years.

A small wildflower plot (about 100 square metres) was created in the curling rink area in 2014.

A larger wildflower meadow (about 300 square metres) was established in the western half of the lower meadow also in 2014.

Another small area (about 50 square metres) was established in 2016 on either side of the path at the west shore of the pond.

A fourth area was planted early in 2018 above the ‘campus’ path between the upper and lower meadows as a remedial measure following disruption caused by the laying of a water pipe to the Craighouse development.

The meadows have been sown with a wildflower seed mix. In some areas, supplementary planting with wildflower plugs has been carried out by volunteers (including schoolchildren from Craiglockhart Primary School).

### ***Actions:***

***Deploy volunteers to rake, weed, reseed and plant plugs in the existing meadows.***

***Review options either for replacement or extension of the wildflower meadows.***

## **Play Structures**

A consultation about plans for the curling rink area was carried out in 2012. People living in ‘The Wickets’ housing development and in Craiglockhart Terrace were asked their opinions about a set of proposals. Several parents of young children commented on the lack of local play facilities especially for pre-school children.

With funding from South-West Neighbourhood Partnership, funding was secured to build some simple play structures dispersed across five sites in the lower woods. The structures were designed and installed by Earth Calling – a local environmental education organisation. Council officials provided advice and guidance (and all the woodchip). Some structures – the ‘Magic Tunnel’ and the ‘Pirate Ship’ are formed from living willow. Stepping stones, balance

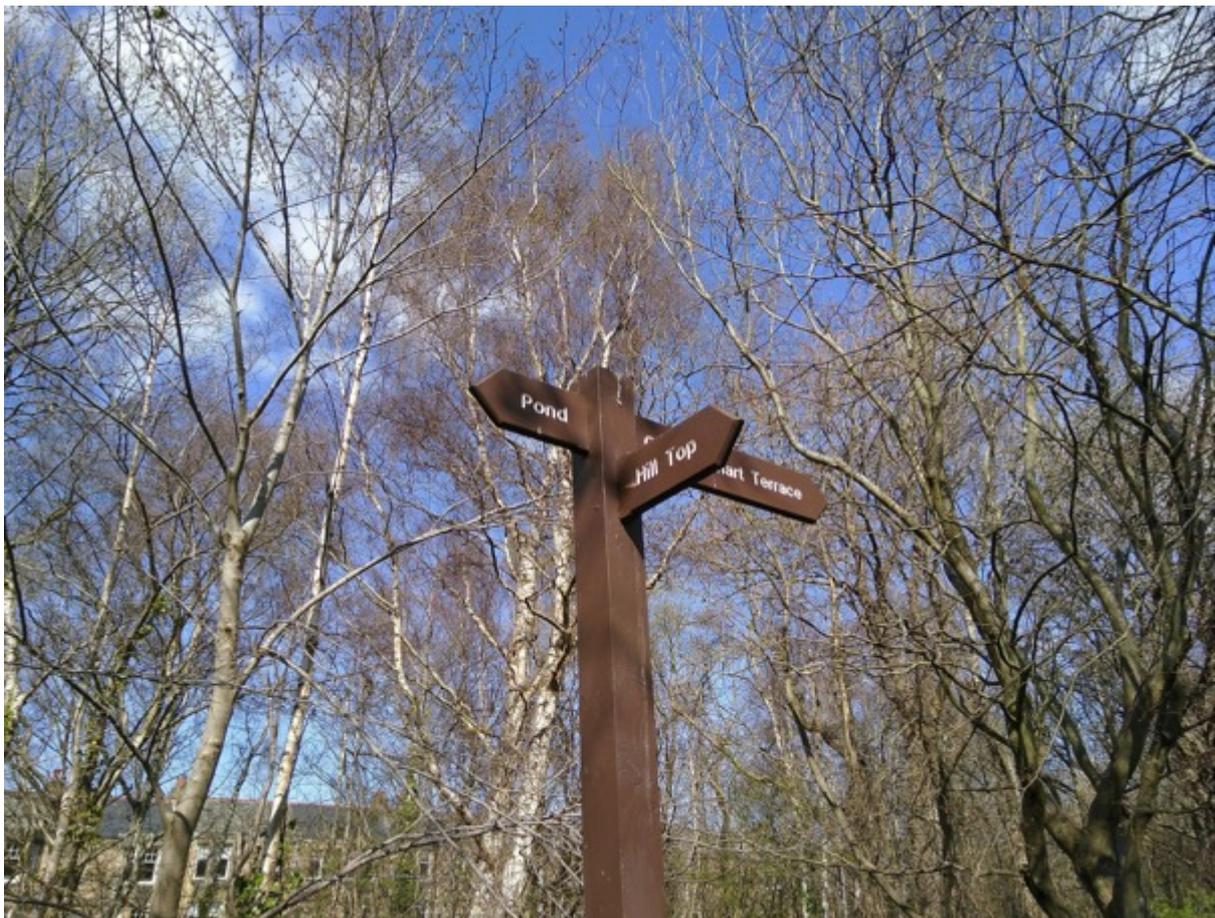
beams, ‘pixie’ seats and Magposts use natural wood often recycled from our own or nearby woodlands. The structures have proved to be very popular with local families with young children. All maintenance (wood preserver application, replacement wood, willow pruning, woodchip renewal etc) is carried out by the Friends Group.

Three areas in the upper woods have been identified which could be suitable for play and picnic sites similar to those already established in the lower woods.

***Actions:***

***Continue to maintain the play trail structures***

***Develop proposals for play and picnic sites in consultation with the Council (see Family Friendly Play and Picnic Areas project proposal on Page 32)***



## Problems

A small-scale 'satisfaction' survey was carried out in May 2017. The people we talked to were concerned about:

- **Access restrictions**

This was the greatest area of concern. The Craighouse entrance to the Local Nature Reserve has been fenced off since the beginning of 2016. This closes off some favourite walking routes and the entrance is unlikely to reopen for several years. However, access to the hill-top and to the 'Orchard' area has been maintained and will continue to be maintained. The Friends Group liaised with the Craighouse developers so that path closures could be anticipated and advance warning given to people visiting the Local Nature Reserve. A series of information notices about access and about the timescale and impact of works were prepared and placed at key entrances and in the Notice Boards.

*Action:*

*Continue to liaise with Craighouse Limited and with sub-contractors on matters affecting community usage so that up-to-date information and advice can be provided.*

- **Dog fouling**

This was the second greatest area of concern for those surveyed. The great majority of dog walkers act responsibly in disposing of dog waste. A minority do not. There has been criticism of the dog walking businesses which use the Hill. Often a single individual is responsible for trying to monitor a large number of dogs. The Council's Environmental Wardens have statutory powers to issue on-the-spot fines for dog fouling but have not, as far as we know, ever exercised these powers on Easter Craiglockhart Hill.

There are no dog fouling notices at many entrances and those that do exist are small, old and unlikely to have any impact.

Strategies elsewhere to reduce dog fouling have included:

- poster campaigns
- spray-painting waste with fluorescent paint
- on-site waste bag dispensers

***Action:***

***Design and implement, together with the Council, a strategy for reducing dog fouling.***

- **Litter**

By comparison with most other parks and green spaces in Edinburgh, litter is not a major problem. Litter picking is often one of the volunteer tasks on ‘Clean-Up’ days. Several local people routinely pick up other people’s litter when they walk through the Local Nature Reserve.

It is Council policy to have a waste bin at all main entrances to parks and green spaces. However, the Council’s Waste Department will not install or service bins that are more than a few yards from a road. They have also refused to install a waste bin at the Leisure Centre entrance – the most used entrance to the Local Nature Reserve. Three new entrances to the Local Nature Reserve Service will be created when the Craighouse housing development is complete.

***Action:***

***Argue for waste bins at all entrances.***

- **Paths**

Many of the people surveyed and many people consulted at the 2018 AGM were concerned about the poor state of certain paths. The path causing greatest concern at this time was the path leading from the northern side of the hill to the hill-top. This path was muddy at the best of times and, in wet winter weather, became virtually impassable. The path was reconstructed in the spring of 2019. It is now a safe route to the hill-top. Funding came in part from a grant made by Paths for All and in part from the release of S75 funds.

Concern has also been expressed about the Meadowspot path particularly after the autumn leaf fall. This path has been raked by contractors and by volunteer squads on several occasions over recent years.

Several of the paths in the lands transferred from Craighouse are in a poor state and clearly in need of improvement.

‘Circular’ walking routes could be created by improving existing paths or creating new ones.

We would aim for a balance between improving access, especially for people with mobility difficulties, and retaining the natural appearance of the area.

***Actions:***

***Work together with the Council to represent community priorities and to plan path improvements.***

***Agree how to fund improvements whether from external sources or from Council budgets (including the S75 fund)***

***Deploy volunteers to rake key paths and steps after autumn leaf fall.***

***Consider an 'adopt a path' scheme.***

***Develop path maintenance skills of volunteers with Paths for All.***

- **Disability Access**

There are intrinsic challenges in maximising disability access across the steep wooded slopes of the Hill. Many paths are stepped, often with steep risers.

The path from the Craiglockhart Terrace entrance to the Leisure Centre entrance can be accessed by wheelchair users and a ramp from this path links to the Meadowspot path which is also wheelchair accessible. Paths from Craiglea Terrace to the hill-top and across the Craighouse estate either are or could be made wheelchair accessible.

Requests have been made to improve disability access from the two Lockharton Crescent entrances both of which are stepped but there is no obvious solution.

Signage about disability access is poor with no information at entrances, on leaflets or on the website.

***Actions:***

***Improve information about disability access on signage and publicity materials.***

***Ask a disability group to carry out a disability access assessment and act on recommendations.***

- **Seating**

There is not a lot of seating in the Local Nature Reserve and frequent requests for additional seating have been made. The Park Quality Assessments have also

recommended additional seating. There is already seating on the hill-top and at the Craiglockhart Terrace and Leisure Centre entrances.

Some seating has been provided through the Council's Memorial Bench scheme. The Friends Group have provided the funds for other seating through donations or funding applications.

Possible locations for additional seating include:

- the west shore of the pond where people come to feed the water birds
- the lower meadow area where a picnic bench could be located close to the ash trees
- at the two viewpoints
- at the halfway-point on the paths to the hill-top (perhaps 'pinch' seats)

The Craighouse developers plan to restore the seating in the three enclaves along the path from Craiglea Place to the hill-top.

***Action:***

***Agree suitable locations for seating with the Council and explore funding options.***

- **Signage**

Most aspects of signage in the Local Nature Reserve are unsatisfactory.

There are no maps or welcome signs at entrances.

There is little information that would help wheelchair users or people with disability or visual difficulties.

There are not enough Notice Boards. The existing ones can hold only three A4 sheets and several are broken.

There is little interpretation signage – two exceptions are the Relief Map at the Craiglockhart Terrace entrance and the Social History Board at the foot of the pond – both designed, installed and maintained by the Friends Group.

Despite a few finger posts, directional signage is poor. First-time visitors to the Local Nature Reserve often have difficulty in navigating around the site.

We have produced detailed proposals to improve signage and submitted these to the Council.

***Action:***

***Review, together with the Council, all aspects of signage and agree improvements.***

- **Invasive species**

There are not, at present, significant problems with invasive species in the Local Nature Reserve. Small stands of Japanese knotweed in the lower woods were eliminated by spraying in 2014. A larger stand in the transferred woodlands was treated by the Craighouse developers in 2016.

Few-flowered leek is a recent non-native invader and may crowd out the wild garlic which grows in the same locations. There does not appear to be any effective management strategy at present to control few-flowered leek which does at least die back quickly. There is a window of opportunity to dig it out in the spring before it sets seed and this has been attempted at one location.

Other conspicuous non-native species include variegated yellow archangel, rosebay willowherb and Michaelmas daisy but none present control problems.

***Actions:***

***Dig out few-flowered leek in key locations***

***Monitor invasive and non-native species and report for treatment if necessary.***

## Publicity and Promotion

- **Website**

Our website – [www.eastercraiglockharthill.org](http://www.eastercraiglockharthill.org) has been redesigned and upgraded several times. Regular news stories and information about events and activities are posted.

Several sections were rewritten during 2019 but some sections (such as the Environment section) need to be rewritten and some other sections should be added (a section on Donations for example)

There is no facility on the website to make a booking or a payment for events and activities.

As consideration is given to future management options for the Local Nature Reserve, the website has been used more for consultation and feedback rather than simply for information. Visitors to the website have been asked for their views on this Community Plan and a short summary version has been highlighted on the website.

***Actions:***

***Maintain information flow on website but with more emphasis on feedback and member input.***

***Rewrite some sections and add new ones.***

***Introduce a booking and payment facility for events and activities.***

***Measure ‘hits’ on website to assess impact.***

- **Facebook**

A Facebook Page was started in 2016. The volume of posts has steadily increased (especially since the appointment of the Community Engagement Worker) and the number of followers is now over 400.

Reciprocal arrangements with nearby groups and community organisations allow us to publicise their events and activities and vice versa.

***Actions:***

***Work to increase Facebook input and coverage.***

***Continue to network with other community groups and organisations.***

- **Newsletter to members**

Regular e-newsletters are circulated to about 300 of our 400 members.

New members are recruited at events and activities and by informal contact.

***Actions:***

***Continue to circulate newsletters to alert members to events, activities and new developments.***

***Increase membership through leafleting, posters, website promotion and asking existing members to recruit new members***

- **Posters**

Posters are used to advertise events and activities. Some posters are placed in the four Notice Boards scattered around the Local Nature Reserve. Others are tied to railings or gates at entrances or access points. It would be easier and less unsightly if snap-frames could be provided at these locations.

Community Notice boards at Sports Centres, supermarkets and the local undertakers are also used to publicise activities and events.

Posters could also be used as part of a strategy to reduce dog fouling and to encourage dog owners to act responsibly by keeping dogs on a leash around nesting sites.

***Actions:***

***Plan with the Council how snap-frames could be provided and funded.***

***Design and produce posters for specific purposes.***

- **Flyers**

Flyers have been printed giving basic contact information about the Friends Group. These could be used for a door-to-door campaign in chosen locations where membership levels are low.

***Action:***

***Distribute flyers at key locations and on a door-to-door basis.***

- **Leaflets**

The text and photos for the 'War Poets Trail' leaflet were provided by the Friends Group with design and printing carried out by Edinburgh Napier

University. The leaflet is available to people who visit the War Poets Collection at the Craiglockhart campus of Edinburgh Napier University. The leaflet is also handed out at events and activities.

***Action:***

***Distribute 'War Poets Trail' leaflets and reprint/ redesign as required***

The 'Nature Trail' leaflet was first designed some twenty years ago. The maps and text need to be redesigned not least in view of the expansion of the Local Nature Reserve resulting from the transfer of the Craighouse woodlands. People increasingly use social media and the internet to plan activities but there is still a need for a well designed leaflet. A new leaflet could place greater emphasis on using the Local Nature Reserve for leisure, exercise and sporting activities. The Local Nature Reserve could be marketed as a community 'Green Gym' in line with the Scottish Government's Active Scotland strategy. If a network of themed and waymarked trails can be established, a leaflet would map the trails and indicate which are suitable for people with disabilities using the Paths for All Grading system.

***Action:***

***Redraft the text of the leaflet, redraw the map and explore funding sources (see People Friendly Trails project proposal on Page 32)***



## Plans and Projects

- **Volunteers**

Voluntary work on the Local Nature Reserve has taken many shapes and forms:

We have organised a considerable number of ‘Clean-Up’ days which have involved local members of the community in a huge variety of tasks

From 2015 to 2018, the staff of Craiglockhart Leisure and Tennis Centre tackled a range of practical tasks on their ‘Green Team’ days.

Lothian Conservation Volunteers rake and improve the upland meadows during sessions in late spring and early autumn

Other volunteer contributions have come from ‘The Dirty Weekend’ (Edinburgh Universities Conservation group), from the Community Payback team, from the Green Team, from corporate groups, from local Scouts and from Duke of Edinburgh Award students.

The volume of voluntary work has increased as the area of the Local Nature Reserve has expanded and as more land management tasks have been devolved from the Council to the Friends Group. A ‘Hill Work Squad’ has been recruited and had more than 30 members by the summer of 2019. The squad members are invited to monthly sessions over the course of the year with tasks varying



according to the season – planting and pruning in the spring, strimming and meadow management in the summer, leaf clearing and path improvements in the autumn. A continued phased devolution of maintenance responsibilities is planned with advice and training from the Forestry and Natural Heritage section of the Council.

Dog walkers and other regular visitors to the Local Nature Reserve have always reported anything unusual or untoward either to the Friends Group or to the relevant authorities. This has been formalised into a ‘Hill Watch Scheme’. Members of the scheme are provided with briefing sheets which tell them how and when to contact other services such as the Council, the SSPCA and the Community Police. They could, for example, report directly about fallen or dangerous trees, fly-dumping, fire raising, vandalism and injured or dead birds and animals.

***Actions:***

***Review volunteer inputs and responsibilities with the Council.***

***Identify tasks suitable for corporate groups and aim to attract and facilitate more such groups.***

***Encourage membership of the ‘Hill Watch Scheme’ service, analyse and act upon reports and update briefing sheets.***

***Co-ordinate the ‘Hill Work Squad’ team of volunteer workers and discuss with the Council how maintenance tasks can be devolved further.***

- **Events**

Various different events have been organised over the years.

For more than a decade, a popular annual fete was held in the curling rink area. There were pony rides, a tombola, cake stalls and jazz bands.

Our programmes of ‘Walks and Talks’ began in 2017. They have been well attended with more than 200 participants in the 2017 programme. The 2019 programme included a Woodland Knowledge walk, a Foraging Workshop, a History Cruise along the Union Canal, a Woodland Mythology Walk, a War Poets Remembrance Walk and a Funghi walk.



Other recent events have included:

Family Fun days in the summer of 2019 with drop-in activities for primary age children.

Spectating at the annual swan ringing with young spectators invited to 'name a cygnet'.

Events like this bring the community together and reinforce the value of Easter Craiglockhart Hill to the surrounding community.

***Action:***

***Plan a programme of events, co-ordinated by the Community Engagement Worker, to increase community interest and participation.***

- **Projects**

Over the years, many projects have been designed to make use of funding opportunities. Often, these sources can only be accessed by voluntary organisations like ourselves. Funding sources have included:

- The Community Fund of South-West Edinburgh Neighbourhood Partnership
- The Action Earth Fund of Volunteering Matters
- Edinburgh and Lothian Greenspace Trust
- Scottish Natural Heritage
- SusTrans
- Craiglockhart Community Council
- Waste Recycling Environment Ltd (WREN)
- Paths for All Active Travel and Community Paths grants
- The National Lottery Community Fund

More than £150,000 of grant funding has been secured over the past couple of decades.

At the AGM in June 2019, these four ‘Friendly Projects’ were presented for consideration:

### **1. The dementia-friendly hill**

*A high proportion of older people live locally (some in Care Homes or Sheltered Housing) and some will have dementia. Signage is poor throughout Easter Craiglockhart Hill and seating is limited. This makes it difficult for people with dementia to enjoy spending time on the hill. Our activities and events are not designed with people with dementia in mind.*

*We could:*

- *Improve signage, especially in accessible areas, so that people with dementia can better understand where to go and what to see*
- *Install handrails and ramps in key locations*
- *Design part of the curling rink area at the Craiglockhart Terrace entrance specifically for older people and people with dementia: amenities could include specialised fitness equipment for low impact exercise, a small relaxation garden with sensory planting, a few small raised beds for gardening and plenty of seating*
- *Introduce outdoor exercise classes (e.g. tai-chi) or outdoor craft activities suitable for this group*

### **2. Family-friendly play and picnic areas**

*Four years ago, we created some small play areas in the lower woods. These are popular and well used by schools, nurseries and local families. The play structures use natural materials like living willow and recycled timber. Now that woodland areas around Craighouse have been transferred into Council ownership, we could do something similar in the Craighouse Woods on the upper part of the Hill. This would be of particular benefit to all including families on the eastern side of the Hill who live at some distance from play parks.*



*We have identified three suitable locations for play and picnic areas.*

*In these areas, we could:*

- *Clear away any undergrowth and build simple play structures designed for pre-school and younger children. We could again use living willow (perhaps build a maze) and*

*recycle fallen timber to create stepping stones, balance beams and other simple play structures*

- Chain saw felled trunks to create seating and climbing opportunities*
- Include benches and picnic tables for parents and families*
- Include some interpretation signage giving information about nearby plants, trees and wildlife*

### **3. People-friendly trails**

*We noted that directional signage around Easter Craiglockhart Hill is poor with only two outdated maps and a few fingerposts to help people navigate. People with mobility difficulties have no way of knowing which paths are suitable for them. There is very little that describes the animals or the birds or the insects or the plants or the trees on Easter Craiglockhart Hill. Or the wonderful views from the hill top.*

*We suggested we could create a network of themed trails – the Bird Trail, the Wildflower Trail and the Tree Trail, for example. Each trail would take a different route around the Hill and walkers would be guided by symbols or coloured waymarkers. At half a dozen or so key points on each trail, there would be some simple information. This information could be provided on a small snapframe display or on QR codes.*

*A route suitable for people with mobility problems would avoid steep paths but include some elements of the themed walks.*

*We could engage a chainsaw sculptor to carve fallen and standing trunks (perhaps into woodland birds and animals) and so create a Sculpture Trail. The Trails could be publicised by maps at entrances, on a rewritten leaflet, on our website and on social media.*

### **4. The bird-friendly pond**

*We noted that Craiglockhart Pond was built for recreational uses like boating and skating but has evolved into more of a wildlife reserve. Nesting habitats are however limited. Two sides of the pond are eroding and the rising water table makes paths muddy across the top of the pond. Privet (which is not a native species) grows between the path and the water edge on one side of the pond.*

*We suggested we could:*

- *Plant willow and other water-loving plant and shrubs along the side of the pond with a view to eventually replacing the privet*
- *Build a barrier fence along this same side using woven coppiced wood to protect nesting birds and keep dogs out of the water*
- *Build up the shore at the top of the pond using gabions (wire cages filled with stone) to stop erosion and create new nesting habitats*
- *Introduce 'floating islands' in suitable areas of the pond to further increase nesting habitats*
- *Install an Interpretation board at the top of the pond with information about our resident birds*



The members consulted at the AGM considered that there was merit to all four project proposals. The proposal for People Friendly Trails received the highest approval rating.

In August 2019, a funding application to the Paths for All Community Paths Grant was approved. This funding should make possible a network of themed and waymarked trails with waymarker discs, interpretative material on snapframe posts and a trail leaflet.

***Actions:***

***With volunteer input, create a trail network.***

***Seek funding for the three other 'Friendly Projects'.***

***Continue to identify projects in consultation with the Council.***

- **Income Generation**

Future management options would be dependent on financial viability and sustainability. Options to increase revenue income would include:

- Membership fees and covenants
- Encouraging legacies and bequests
- Sales of merchandise

- Sponsorships
- Charges to corporate bodies
- Set or suggested fees for walks and activities
- Income from events
- Crowdfunding

***Action:***

***Plan an income generation strategy to steadily increase uncommitted revenue income.***

## **Conclusion**

Thank you for reading this Community Plan. It sets out what we have done in past years, what we are doing right now and what we hope to do in the future.

We welcome all comments and suggestions.

Easter Craiglockhart Hill is a wonderful community asset that needs to be protected and cherished. It is already a lovely place. Help us to make it even lovelier.

Photo credits: Caroline Loudon, John Forbes