

**CUMBERLAND AVENUE, HELENSBURGH:
Update on Site Condition November 2019**



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Helensburgh Community Woodlands Group
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Introduction and Purpose

Helensburgh Community Woodland Group has requested an update to the Cumberland Avenue, Helensburgh Public Consultation Report and Concept Plan 2017 (produced by Iona Hyde, Arboricultural and Environmental Consultant). The purpose of this study is to provide an assessment of the current condition of the site and the potential to implement the recommendations made in the 2017 report.

Site Condition

The following observations are based on a visit to the site on 9/11/2019:

- Public access to the site remains difficult. The boundary fence at Cumberland Avenue appears to have been recently repaired so the previous informal access point is now blocked to prevent access from the street. Access from the West King Street path remains obstructed.
- There is evidence of recent vegetation management (strimming of all vegetation) on the site immediately adjacent to the boundaries, although this appears to stop about 2/3's of the way across the site where the vegetation is now so thick it is impenetrable. Strimming has been indiscriminate and has not targeted specific unwanted species. Arisings have not been removed from the site.
- Illegal tipping of garden waste remains an issue along the Cumberland Avenue boundary of the site and adjacent to some of the properties backing onto the site at Frazer Avenue and Ardencaple Drive.¹
- There has been a considerable increase in the extent of colonization of the site by garden escapees (e.g. *Crocsmia*, *Lycestria*, *Buddleia*, *Cortaderia* etc.), which is likely to have arisen from tipping of garden waste on to the site.¹
- There has been considerable colonisation of the site through natural regeneration since 2016 at the field layer level as well as by trees, shrubs and garden perennials. Aggressive pioneer species such as bramble, nettle and willowherb are colonising the field layer. Colonisation is so dense in places that public access and use is not only restricted but prevented because of the density and extent of growth.
- Birch, grey willow and sycamore regeneration is well-established in some areas. Holly is also establishing well in localised areas.
- The replacement planting resulting from the Tree Replacement Notice is also establishing well but inappropriate siting of some of the trees and poor choice of species (cypress) has resulted in the trees creating a barrier to access approximately 2/3's the way .
- The extent of Himalyan balsam on the site appears to have spread, although it should be noted that Himalyan balsam is an annual plant arising from seed and so the distribution of the plant on site may alter from year to year.
- The north western part of the site which appears to have had the ground levels altered at some point and a significant amount of wood chip spread over it. The area is showing no signs of regeneration.
- The native woodland ground flora that is likely to have been present on the site at the time of felling is being lost through competition from aggressive weeds.
- The general appearance of the site is one of abandonment and neglect.

Conclusion

The value of the site as woodland habitat has significantly deteriorated since it was clearfelled in 2011. Although not recorded on the Ancient Woodland Register because of its small size (less than 2ha²), map evidence suggests that this site had been wooded for at least 160 years (and probably much longer) until it was felled in 2011. The disruption to the woodland habitat through felling and subsequent colonisation of the site by inappropriate species combined with an absence of appropriate management and misuse of the area (e.g. by tipping), is leading to significant and rapid deterioration of the site as a potential native woodland. The more aggressive non-native, non-woodland plants that are colonising the site are likely to outcompete the woodland ground flora which has the ability to persist on the site and in the site seedbank for some time without woodland cover and should be controlled as soon as possible to allow restoration of the site. Further delay in restoration will significantly increase the costs of restoration and on-going management to eradicate invasive species. The success of the natural regeneration and replacement tree planting that has taken place provides a positive indication that the site can successfully regenerate and, with the correct on-going management recommended in the Cumberland Avenue, Helensburgh Public Consultation Report and Concept Plan 2017, has the potential to be restored to a diverse and valuable urban amenity woodland and important green space.

IH 9/11/2019

Notes:

¹ It is an offence to cause to grow in the wild any plant outwith its native range under the Wildlife and Natural Environment Act 2011 – see <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2012/08/7367/5>. 'In the wild' encompasses both natural and semi-natural habitats in both rural and urban environments. 'Cause to grow' means that the plant becomes present in the wild as a direct result of someone's actions, even though they did not specifically plant it there.

² Only woodlands over 2ha in size were included in the Ancient Woodland Inventory (for more information see <https://data.gov.uk/dataset/345e5790-22aa-4f0a-9548-a806d81286f8/ancient-woodland-inventory-2011>).