



Gala Policies Management Plan

2025 - 2035



Table of Contents

.....	1
1 Introduction	4
1.1 Site Description.....	5
1.1.1 General.....	5
1.1.2 Vegetation	5
1.1.3 Fauna	7
1.1.4 Cultural	7
1.1.5 Tenure and Access	8
1.1.6 Contacts	8
1.2 Scope and Purpose of Management Plan	8
2. Vision and Aims.....	9
2.1 Vision	9
2.2 Aims.....	9
3 The Wider Context	9
3.1 National Strategies.....	9
3.2 Regional and Local Strategies.....	10
3.3 Surveys and Assessments	10
3.3.1 Biological	10
3.3.2 Amenity	12
3.4 Conclusions.....	12
4 Future Management - Habitat and Infrastructure	14
General Site Management	14
4.1 Path Network	14
4.2 The Pond	18
4.3 The Grass Area by the Pond	19
4.3 The Meadow	20
4.5 Veteran and Notable Trees.....	21
4.6 The Site of New Gala House.....	23
4.7 The Mossilee Burn	23
4.8 The Remaining Woodland	24
4.9 Boundary.....	30
4.10 Other Infrastructure and Access Points	32
5 Community and Community Use	33

5.1 Management and Monitoring.....	34
5.2 Site Guidelines	34
5.3 Health and Safety	35
5.4 Fire.	36
5.5 Vehicles	36
5.6 Litter	36
5.7 Dogs and Dog Fouling	38
5.8 Antisocial Behaviour.....	39
5.9 Education	40
5.10 Accessibility.....	42
5.11 Cycling, Mountain Biking and Horse Riding	43
5.12 Events.....	44
5.13 Volunteers	45
5.14 Signage and Promotion	47
5.15 Social Media	48
6 Green Flag Management.....	48
6.1 Green Flag Criteria	48
6.2 Green Flag Evaluation	51
7 Ten Year Work Plan – separate attachment	055
8 Appendices- separate attachment	055



Gala Policies Main Entrance

GALA POLICIES, GALASHIELS

TEN YEAR MANAGEMENT PLAN

1 Introduction

This report and supporting documents together are intended to guide management of the Gala Policies for the next 10 years. The content has been produced in consultation with Scottish Borders Council (SBC), the local community and other user groups and was informed by a series of consultations and surveys carried out between September 2024 and February 2025.

The report includes an extensive list of suggested actions which have been identified through site survey and consultation. Implementation of activities contained in the action plan is reliant on resource input, and inevitably, delivery timescale will depend on capacity. It is important to note that none of the proposed actions are urgent but some people have offered to volunteer and it would be a shame not to respond to their willingness to engage.

The Management Plan seeks to explain the key findings and opportunities which provide the context. The actions are then listed in a spreadsheet, including suggestions for potential stakeholders in delivery and/or funding and other support.

It is likely that new ideas and opportunities will arise over the coming months, so the documents should be seen as flexible; this document is in no way meant to be final.

There is an informal group of local people who already work hard to care for the site. If this group was formalised (perhaps as a “Friends of the Policies” constituted Group, it would allow local management of the site to be undertaken in an agreed, open and responsive way. It would additionally enable the group to seek external funding. It is also suggested that delivery of the proposed site management would benefit greatly from the support of a dedicated project officer (part-time) employed to work in the Policies. The Friends could help guide the work of this project officer, who could equally support the Group in return in achieving their objectives through the Management Plan.

There is a wider group of people who already take part in voluntary work and through the consultation we have identified others who have expressed interest in volunteering. This level of interest, energy and enthusiasm is a great asset, reflective of the high value the Gala Policies has to the wider community. This collective community interest could be invaluable if nurtured and harnessed in delivering some of the Management Plan actions.

It may be decided at some point to seek ‘Green Flag’ status for the Gala Policies; this can bring wider benefits in terms of sustaining community enjoyment for all. To this end we have included some suggestions about how this might be delivered based on the Green Flag assessment criteria.

1.1 Site Description

1.1.1 General

The Gala Policies, central grid reference NT486357, occupies a wedge of land rising from the western edge of Galashiels and is largely woodland. The site has an area of 13.42 hectares, measuring approximately 600 metres from northeast to southwest and about 400 metres at the widest point along the SW boundary. Gala Academy sits beside the site and there is access to the school from the site (although this may change due to the redevelopment of the school site).

Two minor streams meet on the site (the Mossilee and the Moss Burn becoming the Bakehouse Burn) although these have been much altered, and some lengths have been canalised and culverted (a stretch of the Moss burn runs under the new school grounds). Neither water course contains any significant aquatic vegetation presumably because both are heavily shaded.

There is a modest-sized, constructed, off-stream pond on the site, fed by the Mossilee Burn. This was constructed in 1995 when spoil was needed to fill-in cellars of the demolished New Gala House. The pond suffers from some shading and accumulations of leaves (and other detritus) but has been used by local schools for pond-dipping and is a popular feature of the site.

The boundary to the southeast of the site is partly formed by Galashiels Academy and the southerly end adjoins coniferous forestry which extends up to Hollybush Road and beyond to Gala Hill, which is also used by local people for recreation. To the southwest, there are open fields, with the Southern Upland Way exiting the site at the southernmost point. The northeastern boundary is formed by Balmoral Avenue, which has a mix of private dwelling houses and flats. Gardens separate the buildings from the wood, with some of the individual fences in need of maintenance.

The highest point (circa 150m AMSL) is along the SW boundary where there is a viewpoint (looking both NE and W) and the site generally slopes down to the Northeast towards the town, although there are a number of raised areas, or “knowes”, on the site, creating interest and making the site feel surprisingly enclosed. Long Knowe, at the lower end of the site has a row of fine beech trees which are now sadly reaching the end of their lives.

The whole site is protected by a Tree Preservation Order (TPO BRC7 dated 5/10/1979).

The rock under-lying the site is classed as “Silurian and Ordovician Greywackes and Shales (Ettrick series)”. The soil is neutral to slightly acidic.

1.1.2 Vegetation

Much of the site is wooded with the tree canopy formed of a mix of older policy plantings and more recent natural regeneration. Dominant species include beech and

sycamore, both of which cast a dense shade and tend to restrict ground flora. Other species include Scots pine, larch various exotic conifers, birch, lime, oak, willow, elm and holly. There has been relatively little, if any recent planting. Some areas, especially the southern part, show evidence of having previously been wood pasture, with surviving open-grown oaks (some now qualifying as veterans). There are some fine specimen exotic species which are quite hard to see because of encroaching regeneration. Other areas were probably of plantation origin, but with more recent regeneration, especially of rather even-aged beech and sycamore which are rather thin and “drawn-up”. Some thinning might help diversify the canopy.

The species composition varies from area to area but is generally quite diverse with a mix of beech and sycamore interspersed with oak, willow, Scots , some ash and a number of exotics, some of which are notable for their size e.g. the impressive Redwoods close to eastern access point, the Noble fir north of the site of the house, and the monkey puzzle to the east of it. Close to the pond there is a stand of impressive poplar, and a little avenue of limes

On either side of the drive there are fine specimens of lime, beech, pine, etc.

The understorey is sparse through much of the site, apart from some locally dense beds of bramble (*Rubus fruticosus agg*) and Holly. There are remnants of ornamental plantings close to the house site (including box, laurel, yew and rhododendron). The latter has spread across the site and there have been previous attempts to remove it from some parts. This will be an ongoing task, because it is highly invasive. Around the pond there have been plantings of dogwood (*Cornus sanguinea*) and willow (*Salix capraea*) although these are now rather straggly and starting to shade out ground flora.

There is surprisingly little hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*) blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*), hazel (*Corylus avellana*) or rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*) and these species along with rose and honeysuckle might usefully be planted to add diversity and strengthen the shrub-layer.

The ground is largely bare below areas of dense trees. Woodland species are generally scarce but there are patches of dog’s mercury (*Mercurialis perennis*), wood avens (*Geum urbanum*), cowslip (*Primula veris*) and bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta tbc*). It was not possible to carry out a detailed survey of flora during the time of this project, but the limited species previously recorded according to TWIC and NBN are listed in annex 8.1.1. It is clear from these lists that the site would benefit from further survey. An informal survey of fungi was carried out (by Dave Maw, Nida Baltaityte, David Hardwick and Toni Coyle) during autumn 2024 and the findings from this are included in the annex 8.1.2).

It was reported to us that there is species-rich grassland immediately to the west of the boundary wall of the Policies and it seems likely that the open ground within the Policies will reflect at least some of this diversity. A full site flora survey would be valuable (as would a survey of breeding birds, insects, etc. The Wildlife Information Centre (TWIC) may be willing to run a bioblitz event which can tackle a range of wildlife types including more obscure types such as spiders, mites and lichens.

The pond was constructed when the cellars of the demolished house needed to be filled-in (around 1995) with inflow from and outflow to the Mossilee Burn. Yellow flag iris dominates much of the pond-edge with meadowsweet and other wetland plants spreading out from it. The northeast edge of the pond has a board walk platform constructed along it to facilitate access to the water, and a board walk also runs around the SW side across from the burn, but this in poor condition. The only reptilian pond species recorded is the common frog. Several dragonflies were seen during early site visits.

The grassy area that extends from the pond to the northeast is mown as general amenity grass by SBC and is a popular area for recreation. At the time of writing, it includes a single picnic table and a bench.

There is a shortage of deadwood across the site. This is a scarce but valuable habitat and one that could easily be increased.

1.1.3 Fauna

Signs of roe deer, fox and badger activity are scattered through the wood, but the number of dogs using the site means these are likely to be nighttime visitors rather than residents. Some of the older trees have high potential for roosting bats and there are records of both pipistrelle species from the site.

The wood supports a reasonable diversity of bird species, which include buzzard, great spotted woodpecker, treecreeper, jay, chiffchaff, blackcap and bullfinch. A species list is included at annex 8.1.3.

There is a good list of butterflies and moths thanks to Malcolm Lindsay (annex 8.1.4). Where herbs such as thistle and knapweed are present in the more open areas and along path-edges they will support good numbers of pollinators.

Other species records are listed in 8.1.5.

1.1.4 Cultural

The reasonably well-documented history of the site contributes to the wider cultural history of the community of Galashiels, and while there is now little evidence of New Gala House, the proximity of Old Gala House provides a good opportunity to retell the story and to explain the heritage of the woodland and the traces of the former land use.¹ Conversations with Live Borders who manage the House indicate they would be keen to engage more with future management of and connectivity with the Policies.

¹ Gala House Policies Conservation Statement April 2009 Consultants Peter McGowan Associates Landscape Architects and Heritage Management Consultants

1.1.5 Tenure and Access

The Gala Policies are owned and managed by Scottish Borders Council.

Several public footpaths cross the site, including the Southern Upland Way which enters the site from Livingstone Place close to the swimming pool and runs to the SW corner on its way to Yair. There are a number of other footpaths, some of which are designated core paths as shown on the map 2 in section 4.1. below.

The development of the new Gala Campus which is currently under construction originally included two access points to the woodlands (one of which was new) but these have since been removed. Path usage within the Policies is likely to change to some degree as the new building is completed and the old one demolished.

The main surfaced path follows the old drive to the site of New Gala House where it meets the SUW. This route is also the main access route for site management. The gate at the swimming pool entrance has recently been reinstated to restrict vehicular access to the site.

There is parking for non-residents on Scott Street and surrounding roads, but this area will be disrupted in the short-term as the swimming pool is demolished to make a new car park for the school. This development offers an opportunity to improve the entrance area to the Policies.

1.1.6 Contacts

parksandenvironment@scotborders.gov.uk

1.2 Scope and Purpose of Management Plan

The following reports are relevant to the management of the Gala Policies:

- Scottish Borders Green Space Strategy 2009
- Scottish Borders Biodiversity Action Plan 2018
- Tree safety works surveys (5-year cycle)
- Galashiels Place Plan (in development, a draft was reviewed for this plan)
- Sport & Physical Activity Strategy (at consultation stage)

This site Management Plan draws on policy documents listed above.

The purpose of the Plan is to identify issues relating to the management, maintenance and development of the site with regard to people and nature and to set out the management vision, aims and objectives.

This Plan will be available to all interested parties including elected Members, the local

community and council staff and will explain the rationale behind management policies, decisions and actions. In addition, the plan will indicate the level of resources required to achieve continuous improvement.

The Plan covers a 10-year period between 2025 and 2035 and includes detailed management proposals. The Plan is also intended to support any future ambition to achieve Green Flag accreditation for the Site.

'It's such a lovely area within the town, please do not encroach further into it with new building works, we have already lost a lot of the park. Nature and wildlife desperately need these places, as do us humans for our health and well-being.'

Survey Respondent, Gala Policies Management Plan Survey, November 2024

2. Vision and Aims

2.1 Vision

We are unaware of a current vision statement for the site, so the following is suggested:

"Gala Policies will be a valued and well-cared-for green space providing space for both local people and for a wide range of native animal and plant species. It will be easily accessible and well-used by the local community and visitors for informal recreation and the community will be integral in shaping and managing the site for recreation, nature and education. Educational use of the site will be encouraged and efforts will be made to raise awareness of the natural resources within the woodland and how these can be managed sustainably".

2.2 Aims

This vision can be expressed in the following aims:

- To maximise the biodiversity value of the woodland.
- To encourage appropriate public use and enjoyment of the woodland.

3 The Wider Context

3.1 National Strategies

At a time when climate change is starting to impact on many aspects of life and when the decline of nature is seen as a crisis, it is important that management takes these issues into account. There are a wide range of national and local Government plans

and strategies that have relevant messages (see Annex 8.2.1). These include ambitions for nature recovery, carbon sequestration, community engagement, place planning, learning for sustainability and improved well-being.

3.2 Regional and Local Strategies

Scottish Borders Council has a number of strategies which influence the management of the Gala Policies. These include the Local Structure Plan, the Green Space strategy, the Local Biodiversity Action Plan and the Borders Woodland Strategy. There is also an Urban Habitat Action Plan. The Councils' Learning for Sustainability Strategy is also relevant because of the availability of the Gala Policies to local Schools.

Learning for Sustainability is defined as follows: 'A whole school approach that enables the school and its wider community to build the values, attitudes, knowledge, skills and confidence needed to develop practices and take decisions which are compatible with a sustainable and equitable society.' This definition has been adopted in SBC. A key part of this is *"developing a knowledge and understanding of the landscape, the natural and cultural heritage of Scotland and the wider world and, while doing so, become reflective and open to new thinking and ideas"*. The Gala Policies offer an excellent opportunity for this ambition.

3.3 Surveys and Assessments

3.3.1 Biological

The structure of the woodland is the result of the actions of previous generations who used what they found and added to it according to the fashions of the times. It is quite likely that some of the older oaks germinated around the time that Old Gala House was constructed (early C17) when there are records of early planting schemes carried out by Sir James Pringle. Today, the surviving oaks represent a fragment of ancient or long-established woodland and they may support the specialist species that depend on this habitat type. Elsewhere on site the vegetation supports some old woodland plant species, most notably Dogs mercury which is usually associated with well-established woodland. The woods have a good diversity of trees (if rather fewer shrub species), as a result of both planting and natural colonisation, which suggests reasonable value for invertebrates.

The site also supports some remnants of unimproved (species-rich) grassland, mostly along paths and on the upper slopes. The good diversity of tall herb species indicates reasonable potential for invertebrates but the limited amount of survey carried out to date means there is little data to go on. There are several mature trees, some with veteran features, and these are probably the most valuable features on the site with high potential for saproxylic (dead wood) invertebrates. Dead wood is an important component of the site, and one that can easily be increased through sensible management.



Map 1 Notable Trees within the Policies

The diversity of bird species is reasonably high and although no particularly rare species have been recorded, the site supports woodland specialists such as treecreeper and nuthatch and species of conservation concern such as song thrush and bullfinch. The even-aged nature of some areas results in rather “drawn-up” trees, with reduced potential for nesting birds. This could be enhanced with some thinning and some planting of shrubby species alongside providing more nest boxes. Peregrine falcons have often nested in St Pauls Church (adjacent to the Policies) and will make use of the site for hunting.

Several of the trees have high potential for bats. The site probably supports a good diversity of insects, with again the older trees proving useful habitat. Bat roosts were found in some of the older buildings of Gala Academy during recent surveys, requiring careful management pre-demolition.

The Gala Policies are one of a number of woodland sites along the Gala Water and Tweed Rivers. The Tweed (and the main tributaries) is recognised for its biodiversity as a Special Area for Conservation (SAC), and while itself not of SSSI standard, the Policies are recognised by the Council as of local and regional importance as green space and the site has been identified as one of the projects within the Green and Healthy Environment theme in the placemaking process to develop a Galashiels Local Place Plan 2025, currently at draft stage.

There are SSSI woodlands on the other side of Galashiels (Avenel Hill and Gorge SSSI) and at Glenkinnon Burn to the SW.

The pond supports a limited range of wetland plant species, but there is some potential for greater biodiversity and the burns could be managed to enhance flood-water storage to mitigate against flooding downstream.

3.3.2 Amenity

The Gala Policies provide an important recreational resource for local residents of Galashiels (60% of survey respondents came from the immediate vicinity of Balmoral and the town centre, 83% from Galashiels as a whole) and further afield. The site is well used by the local primary schools and by students of Gala Academy along with a number of other local groups and clubs. The community survey (user interviews and online) carried out as part of this project highlighted the value of the site to local people and a strong consensus that management of the site should try to maintain it as it is rather than make radical changes. From the user survey data, people were drawn to the site for relaxation and to get some fresh air (68%), to enjoy nature, trees and wildlife (54%) and to exercise and keep fit (54%).

3.4 Conclusions

The site is of high value in a local context for its woodland habitats and associated plant and animal populations, remnant grasslands and as a significant recreational and educational resource.

In the user survey, many respondents were in favour of a management plan that focuses on maintaining and enhancing the ecological value of the Policies, rather than transforming it into a formal park or recreational space. Key recommendations included succession planting, careful path management, and avoiding habitat disruption through extensive tidying or clearing works. There were calls for more inviting entrances to the Gala Policies, particularly tidying up verges, removing rusted railings and improving the overall first impression of the space.

There is a strong sentiment to preserve the natural state of the Gala Policies whilst enhancing its accessibility and usefulness for children and families. There is an inevitable tension between leaving a site unmanaged for nature while also maintaining it for safety and access. Many people are concerned about overdevelopment or the introduction of features that could disrupt the many wildlife habitats, tranquil environment and woodland charm. Others were keen to see improved paths, more seats and better management of grass-areas.

Suggestions to diversify/restructure woodland and encourage wildflower diversity were popular, with people advocating for "untidy" areas, deadwood, and long grass which support biodiversity.

Tree care and protection of veteran oaks and other mature trees were mentioned with a focus on sustaining biodiversity through thoughtful management (e.g., succession

planting). Residents were concerned about the long-term management of the site, suggesting that a succession plan for the trees is needed to ensure Gala Policies thrives in the future.

Ideas for enhancing the space and improving wildlife habitats without significant development included limiting new paths or grassy areas to avoid disturbing wild undergrowth, which is crucial for wildlife habitats. Native tree planting, natural history education, expanding wildflower meadows and introducing more wildlife-friendly features - such as restoring natural barriers around the pond - were all suggested. People also felt that community events, volunteer opportunities and educational initiatives that foster a greater connection to the natural environment would be beneficial.

Many respondents express a desire to protect the pond area, which some believe is becoming overgrown, and to preserve its role as a habitat for local wildlife.

Ensuring that the Policies remain a safe haven for wildlife and a valuable green space for people requires a balanced approach, with a focus on maintaining its semi-natural character and making it more welcoming for everyone through careful environmental stewardship.



Gala Policies Pond

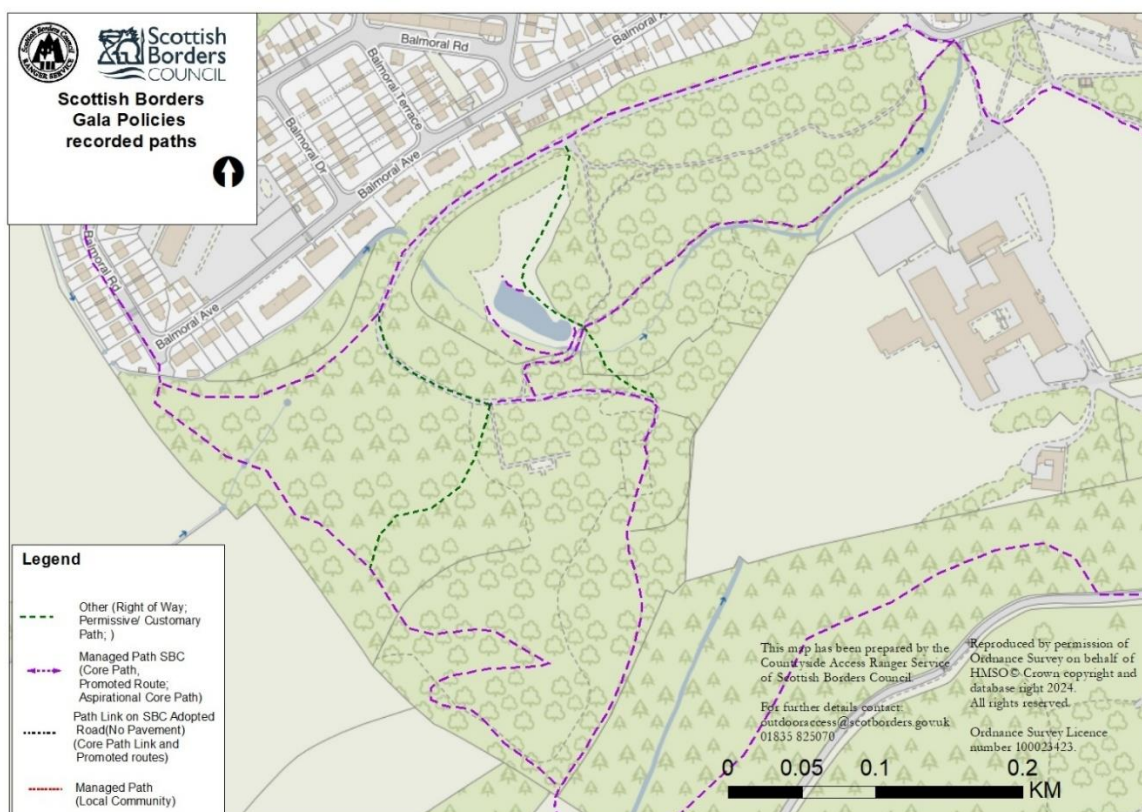
4 Future Management- Habitat and Infrastructure

General Site Management

The site can be regarded as having a number of key characteristics which include:

- Path network
- Pond
- Open area beside the pond
- Open area at the high end of the site
- Old oaks
- Site of the New Gala House
- The burn(s) and
- The rest of the site which is woodland.

4.1 Path Network

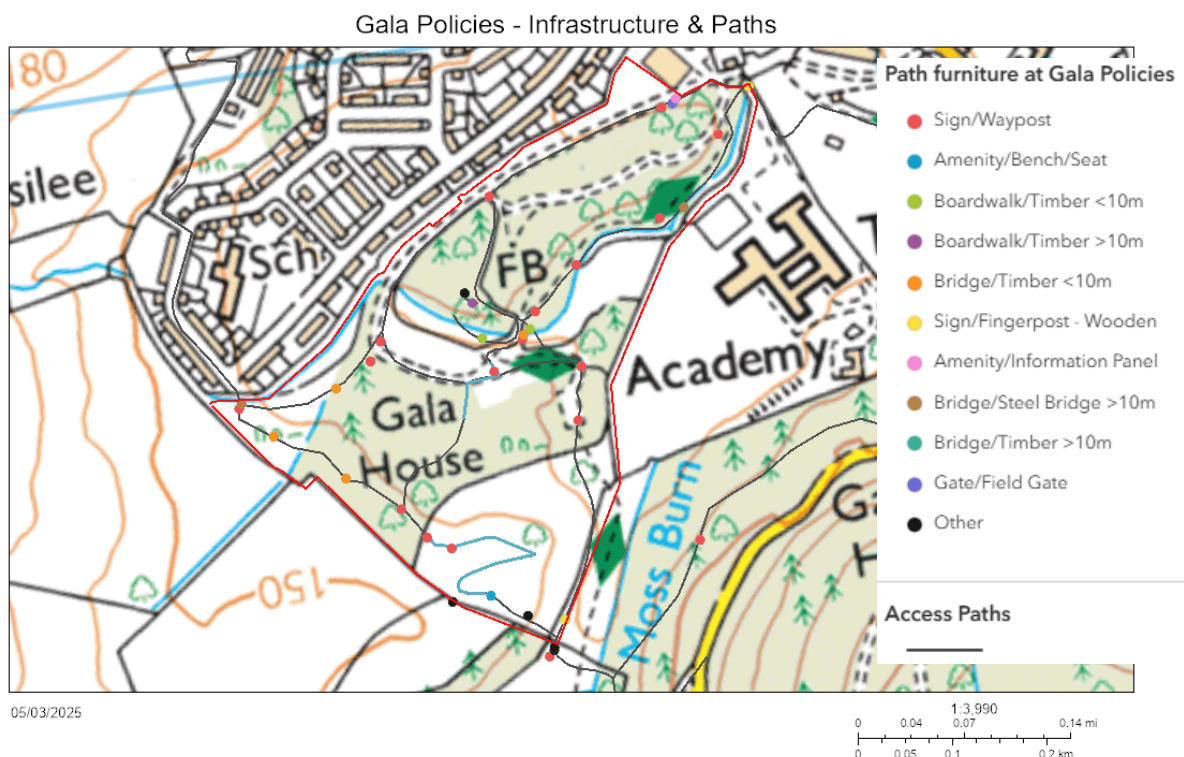


Map 2 Recorded Paths Gala Policies

Where the paths are recognised as “core paths” they are monitored and mown and kept clear by Council staff (or contractors). The old drive from the swimming pool to the pond was last resurfaced back in 2002 and was mechanically “swept” in September 2024 – removing accumulations of leaf mould and the improvement was widely appreciated. Unfortunately, the surface of this track is such that regular mechanical sweeping is likely to be damaging so ad hoc sweeping may be the best option. In the user survey it was highlighted that well-maintained paths were essential

for safety, especially during bad weather or when paths become boggy, given the high levels of use.

The grass management mentioned above also includes the verges of the main drive, but the heavy shading of the northern section means there is minimal need for mowing this area. The southern section of the old drive is less shaded and therefore requires mowing to keep vegetation back from the path, and if resources allowed, other paths shown on map 2 above could be managed in the same way. There are a number of bridges on site (see map 3 below) and these are regularly checked by SBC for safety. (nb Active Travel and access team involvement /liaison as appropriate in relation to Southern Upland Way and other path management).



Map 3 Site Infrastructure

The section of easy access path that was surfaced as part of the previous Woodlands In and around Towns grant (WIAT) from the site of New Gala House to the viewpoint could be improved with some low-level maintenance work. It is a low gradient providing access to the main viewpoint location at the top of the Policies meadow area. The path is overgrown and requires de-turfing and the addition of whin dust to reinstate the width to 750mm as it has narrowed over time. This could be maintained with annual strimming in May, June and September. This would allow this section of route to be kept usable for many types of less-able path users. In relation to management of the meadow area this would continue to be one of the main routes for the public to use through the area.

A qualified Tree Specialist surveys the main paths and perimeter of the site for tree safety every 5 years. In the light of the changing climate and more regular extreme

weather events, it is recommended that more regular checks should be made, perhaps by the project officer and/or volunteers. Any potentially dangerous trees could then be reported to the Council.

The site has previously had a multi-use path designed for those with reduced mobility, but this has deteriorated and is no longer fit for purpose. It is suggested that the best path to promote for this audience is that which uses the old drive as far as the pond and which returns via the SUW. If this route could be upgraded for this purpose, it would provide access to the core of the site for more people (and this path is probably the most used anyway). It has been suggested that making this path wide enough to allow trishaws, buggies and dogwalkers to easily pass each-other would be preferable (some users have pointed out that on narrow paths, dogs cannot easily be kept away from passers-by, not all of whom are equally enamoured of dogs and not all of whom appreciate muddy paws). It was also suggested that users of this multi-use path could be requested to have dogs on leads – but that would imply that dogs could be off-lead everywhere else. See section on dogs below.

The network of paths on site could be described as offering three routes of increasing length for walkers. The core route being the shortest; the slightly longer route to the site of the New Gala House and the boundary walk being the longest. These three routes could be marked with simple coloured posts and shown on a site map 4 below as a way of encouraging people to use the paths. If more of these paths could be strimmed and resurfaced with stone, it would make more of them accessible to those with reduced mobility, but this would depend on resources. It is strongly recommended that descriptions of the paths are given via QR codes so people can decide for themselves whether to use them.

There is strong local support for the Policies to be managed for nature, and to this end it is suggested that some areas could be identified and “screened-off from general use by “dead-hedges”, i.e. using brash to create temporary barriers to access. This should only be done after local consultation and in compliance with public rights of responsible access under the Land reform Scotland Act.

‘Have better surfaced paths but allow other areas to be much wilder, let nature thrive.’

Survey Respondent, Gala Policies Management Plan Survey, November 2024



Map 4 SUW Variation link to pond (multi use path proposal) 4.1.1

Actions

- 4.1.1 Resurface and broaden the core loop path (from swimming pool to pond and back via SUW) so it is suitable for as many as possible (multi-use surfaced path). Path length is 800m, 400m from pond to Scott Park Bridge entrance needs resurfacing with whinstone dust and of this 200m is close to edge of watercourse and needs to be moved and widened (with small sections pushed back behind existing trees where the path is very close to water edge. Will require groundworks, hardcore, type 1 and whinstone topping)
- 4.1.2 Install 6 additional seats along this route to help those who need regular breaks.
- 4.1.3 Budget for this loop to be maintained (e.g. by sweeping) annually.
- 4.1.4 Maintain and mark other “adopted” paths as required.
- 4.1.5 Discourage creation of any other paths (using brash hedges if required).
- 4.1.6 Monitor condition of bridges and boardwalks on these paths and liaise with Council Access Team over repair as required.
- 4.1.7 Liaise with Access Team to get a handrail installed on Easy Access Route footbridge close to pond
- 4.1.8 Introduce more regular tree safety checks by staff or volunteers.
- 4.1.9 Remove turf and resurface access paths where resources allow.

4.2 The Pond

The pond is a key part of the site and provides a focus for everyone who visits. The two main paths meet here, and the combination of these would form an ideal route to promote for those with reduced mobility.

To date, management has included regular checks on the condition of the boardwalks around the pond which are now in need of upgrading. The cost of this is estimated as between £7 and £22k depending on the details (see Annex 8.6).

The pond itself has been visited by a pond specialist from Water Gems and their recommendations are appended (see 8.6). The pond has been gradually silting up since construction and is due for a clean-out. This would offer an opportunity for some redesign to make future desilting easier and increase biodiversity.

The schools (high school and primaries) have suggested an extended boardwalk along the edge would make it better for class visits of up to 30 pupils. The eastern part is currently largely unvegetated and allows easy access to dogs which is likely to be reducing the value of the pond to wildlife (via disturbance and pet pesticides). Revegetating this edge would address this to some degree.

There is a large poplar tree leaning over the path and the pond and this is likely to come down (or drop branches) at some point and again we suggest it could be felled. In fact, this is one of 5 very large poplars that may have outgrown their usefulness. These could be felled or pollarded (i.e. cut down to just a few metres and left to regrow).

The Council **Flood Protection** Officer has also considered the pond and it is possible that additional improvements could be made to allow the pond to hold more water during heavy rainfall events and thus attenuate peak flows. This would involve significant works and would depend on funding being secured. This is not considered further in this plan.

The boardwalk that runs behind the pond is reaching end of life, is no longer accessible (ending in very boggy ground) and reduces the available habitat for wildlife, as well as being a maintenance liability. We suggest it should be removed, along with the bridge that connects it to other paths. (NB. Any restriction to access to areas should be done with care and consultation to ensure compliance with public rights of responsible access under the Land reform Scotland Act). The wooden fences on either side should also be removed as they serve no purpose. There are also a number of green plastic tree guards to be removed in the area behind the pond.

The bank that separates the burn from the pond was planted with dogwood and willow which is now in need of coppicing, and this goes for the trees on the island as well. Cutting will increase light, and regrowth would create better habitat. The western end of the boardwalk is slowly sinking into the muddy wetland area where attempts have been made to increase grass for leisure purposes. Removing the boardwalk here will

help native species to regenerate. The danger sign on the island is overly large and could be replaced by a smaller version.

Actions

- 4.2.1 Develop a pond enhancement project based on advice from Water Gems.
- 4.2.2 Work with volunteers to enhance habitat around pond (removal of plastic tree guards, coppice dogwood, willow and trees on island).
- 4.2.3 Allow native plants to return to the pond edge in the boggy areas (attempts have been made to make this area into lawn but as its naturally boggy this will not be successful)
- 4.2.4 Secure funds to replace and extend pond-dipping platform, remove old boardwalk at back of pond and the two wooden screens.
- 4.2.5 Remove large sign on island and replace with more discrete signs on benches and infrastructure around pond area
- 4.2.6 Fell or pollard poplars next to pond area x 6

4.3 The Grass Area by the Pond

The grass area beside the pond is also a key focus point for the site and is well used by visitors. Current management of this area includes a grass mowing schedule and the provision of a picnic bench and a seat (recently vandalised by fire (Jan 2025)). The area is well-used for recreation. The section of easy access path that was surfaced as part of the previous Woodlands In and around Towns grant (WIAT) in this area requires annual clearance of tree branches overhanging the path.

We understand that the area of “open” grass had been gradually reduced by encroaching vegetation until recently. This was cleared during 2024, back to its previous size.

As mentioned above, the bank at the western end of the pond is very wet, and mowing is unlikely to make this drier, so this area would be better left uncut, allowing wetland vegetation to develop which would also reduce access to the water and thus enhance opportunities for wildlife. The regular mowing should seek to maintain the grass area as a place for informal recreation and to this end, it may be appropriate to increase the number of seats and picnic tables. Additional refuse bin(s) could be installed here (if a system of management can be developed) as greater recreational use is likely to increase littering.

Actions

- 4.3.1 Brief operations team on required mowing regime.
- 4.3.2 Provide an additional seat and 2 tables in this location including wheelchair friendly options
- 4.3.3 Council to look at litter management options and approaches e.g. installing bins, or no bins but messaging to encourage removal of rubbish.

'I don't think too much grass and meadow should be strimmed. Plenty places for people to go if this is what they want. Leave this type of habitat for wildlife, particularly pollinators.'

Survey Respondent, Gala Policies Management Plan Survey, November 2024

4.3 The Meadow

The other open area (i.e. not shaded by trees) is at the top of the site in the SW. If left unmanaged, this sloped area will gradually become scrub woodland which would not be a bad thing, but it could also be managed as open grassland which would offer a greater contrast to the rest of the site and could be of significant value for wildflowers and insects, especially pollinators. An annual program of late-summer cutting would reduce the incursion of tree seedlings and promote diversity of wildflowers, providing the cut material was removed. Basically, the idea would be to reduce the fertility of the soil and promote wildflower seeding. There are volunteer scything groups who might be willing to undertake some of this (or courses could be run for local people). Machinery could also be used although access is not easy and the slope is challenging.

Ideal Grassland management				
Task	Details	Who	Cost	Task due
Cut grass at beginning of season	Beginning of season cut			Annually End March
Grass management	Leave grass to naturalise for first year - no reseeding or plant plugs. Cut around edges to keep tidy.			Year 1 Spring / summer
Develop materials	QR code linking to website information – what to see spring / summer /autumn. Requires liaison with SBC communications team			Annually Spring to Autumn
Site survey	Flora survey and site assessment followed by the writing on site habitat plan. Potentially forms part of <i>Pollinators Along the Tweed</i> (PAiT) partnership – SBC, Buglife, Tweed Forum			End year 1 Summer / autumn 25
Cut grass	End of season cut and lift.			Annually

	As the slope too steep for safe cut and lift, cut undertaken by SBC team and volunteer meet to rake cuttings and gather in builder tonne bags for collection and disposal. Potentially, Buglife to arrange community event as part of Pollinators Along the Tweed project to rake cuttings			End September
Diversity	Monitoring may indicate need for additional plant species in which case consideration could be given to bringing in suitable seed			tbc

Actions

4.4.1 Introduce an appropriate cutting regime using SBC operations team, contractors and/or volunteers.

4.4.2 Commission a survey of grassland area to identify species.

4.4.3 Develop a more detailed management plan for the area based on findings.

4.4.4 Seat at top of meadow area was placed there to appreciate the view. Wild plum has grown quite tall, and suckers have increased its width. Suggest cutting back or moving seat to other side of path.

‘Is fun and there’s mud and there’s puddles.’

Survey Respondent, Gala Policies Management Plan Survey, November 2024

4.5 Veteran and Notable Trees

Adjoining this area are a number of very old oak trees, some of which qualify as veterans and others as “notable” trees according to the Woodland Trust for Scotland. Ancient trees (none on this site - as yet!) are considered the most important because of their extreme age and defined as those that are in the third and final stage of their lives. **Veteran trees** are described as “a survivor that has developed some of the features found on an ancient tree, not necessarily as a consequence of time, but of its life or environment”. A **notable tree** is defined as “usually magnificent mature trees which stand out in their local environment because they are large by comparison with other trees around them. They are often taller than ancient trees and they may be fatter than many veteran trees but do not have any obvious veteran characteristics.

Many of the old oak trees show signs of having grown in quite open settings – so they have low spreading branches. Their gnarled bark and old injuries offer other species

vital habitats and bats, fungi and insects will be benefitting from their presence. In recent years, young trees have started to grow very close to these old individuals, and some are showing signs of stress as a result. Sadly, some have already given up and died. Advice from Borders Forest Trust suggests urgent “halo-thinning” around these trees would reduce this stress and allow recovery. This would mean felling any tree growing within 3 to 5 meters of the base of the individual.

Over time, the aim would be to expand this area to give the old trees as much space and light as possible but not doing it too fast in case the old tree is over-exposed to gales. It is suggested that halo thinning is done in stages every 5 years or so until each tree stands free of competitors.

It is also important to consider the next generation of oaks which need to be on hand to take over as the old ones fade away. There are some younger oaks present, but not enough. A nice project for the school and/or the community, would be to collect acorns from these old trees (or from others in the area) and to grow them on before planting them out in suitable locations around this open area (NB. oaks do not grow well in shade and need open ground to be successful). Planting them into tree boxes would be a good idea, just to avoid them being trampled over by dogs and walkers, and to ensure they are not mowed at any point. BFT might be willing to help with this project. It is understood that there was previously a tree trail in the Policies and it might be good to revive this or create a new version to promote the notable trees.

Actions

4.5.1 Apply for WIAT woodland management plan funding, which is required to unlock further Forestry Grant Scheme funds for woodland and infrastructure management

4.5.2 Contract tree surgeon to fell larger trees that are stressing key individual trees, avoiding increasing them to short-term risk from wind damage (i.e. halo-thinning.)

4.5.3 Work with volunteers to collect acorns from the old oaks for growing on in community or school nursery before planting out in open areas (suitably protected). This could be developed into a community business if a small nursery area could be secured in Galashiels and seeds from other natives were also collected. May be able to generate opportunities for biodiversity offsetting from planting new areas.

4.5.4 Enlist the services of an arborist to identify all tree species on site

4.5.5 Thinning from saplings and around notable trees could be used by high school pupils in class to make benches for the Policies. This could lessen the incidence of vandalism as young people will take ownership of their work and want to protect it.

4.5.6 Larger pieces of timber that are felled could be used as natural benches in forest school areas or placed along main trails to form balance trails and wobbly bridges for smaller children to enjoy as they walk in the woodland.

4.5.7 Schools and community competition to name the veteran and notable trees (these could then be listed by name in QR code links). This would foster a sense of community ownership and protection of the trees (incidents of burning oaks and beech).

4.5.8 Develop (or revive) a Notable and Veteran Tree Trail with leaflets and online resources.

4.5.9 Sponsor a veteran or notable tree – money collected could be used to fund community activities and events in the policies

4.5.10 Work with volunteers (and contractors) to remove regenerating saplings around all notable and veteran trees

4.6 The Site of New Gala House

The site of the New Gala House (NGH) is still apparent (just) as a number of terraces, now largely covered in birch woodland. Some bits of the former building are still detectable, but it is hard to imagine the scale of the house that stood here until 1987. It is assumed that the cellars of the old building were completely filled in in 1995 (when the pond provided the infill material) but there is a chance that further subsidence could occur, so the tree-cover is probably a good thing. The story of the NGH should not be forgotten and there is a chance to make people aware of it through interpretation either on-site or at Old Gala House (or both). Augmented reality technology could be used to show what the house looked like from a suitable viewpoint and include reference to the people who worked on site – gardeners, servants, cooks, etc. It also seems rear gates to the old house still exist locally and could be used in some way to mark the site. There is an opportunity here to engage with local artists to come up with an innovative way of telling the story.

One story that emerged during our research concerned the time that St Trinneans School in Edinburgh was temporarily housed in New Gala House during the last war. A St Trinneans festival event might offer an excellent opportunity to celebrate the role of NGH on an annual basis and provide a focus for volunteer groups and local businesses. This could also form part of an augmented reality offering on the site.

Actions

4.6.1 Develop a project (working with others such as Connecting Threads team school competition) to celebrate the NGH heritage, perhaps incorporating the old gates and use the site of the old garage for a seating area. This could be a design competition to design a memorial (using old gates) and seating area at NGH site

4.6.2 Work with others (e.g. Old Gala House, Energise Galashiels MacArts) on idea of St Trinneans Festival to celebrate former role of NGH.

4.6.3 Consider augmented reality to allow visitors to appreciate the scale of NGH and the people who lived and worked there

4.7 The Mossilee Burn

The Mossilee Burn that runs through the site is in rather a sad state (the Moss Burn which joins to become the Bakehouse Burn is largely out with the site). Originally, the Mossilee Burn flowed into the Policies from the north, but this course now lies under the housing development. The water was rerouted around the housing in a concrete culvert that rejoins its natural bed just NW of the pond. It is then piped under the old drive and re-emerges almost adjacent to the pond, where a pipe allows water to divert into the pond. The result of this is that any silt carried by the fast-flowing culverted

stream can suddenly settle out. It is this that has resulted in the gradual in-filling of the pond. The burn continues along the back of the pond and water can drain from the pond back into the burn before it continues alongside the Southern Upland Way down to the town (the Moss Burn emerges from under the Academy playing fields along this section). The water then disappears underground again.

Only a short section of the burn is anything other than heavily shaded, resulting in there being very little aquatic or marginal vegetation. The lower section has some sections of eroding banks which may require attention in future, if for example it starts undermining the SUW or blocking the grilles that protect the culverts downstream. These banks could be reinforced with stone or preferably with planting of trees (willow or alder) where light levels allow.

Because the burn runs quite steeply down to the town, there is a potential flood issue. Indeed, at the time of writing, the culvert under the drive has collapsed and requires remedial action as if it was blocked here, the water would run down the drive into town by the swimming pool where it could cause damage. The Council are considering a project that would create a more “natural” route for the burn from the top, western-most corner through the woodland to the pond. The same project could redesign the pond so that it could act as a flood retention body, holding back water at a time of heavy rain. Such a project would require quite major earth moving and therefore significant funding, but it might allow the pond to be further enhanced for biodiversity and amenity.

Actions

4.7.1 Liaise with Council’s Flood Officer to explore possibility of developing a flood mitigation project on the Mossilee Burn.

4.7.2 Work with volunteers to reduce regenerating trees (especially beech and sycamore) where they would cast excessive shade over the Mossilee burn below the pond.

4.7.3 Mossilee Burn repair/strengthen left bank of burn in gap between half-pipe and channel (SEPA advise/authorisation required under the Controlled Activities Regulations). Active Travel and access team involvement /liaison as appropriate in relation to Southern Upland Way management.

4.7.4 Encourage volunteers to remove branches from burn and drag into woodland areas (not in piles as this could attract fire starters) to create more habitat for wildlife and insects

4.7.5 Where there is sufficient light, use willow stakes to strengthen eroding edges of stream to stabilise paths

4.8 The Remaining Woodland

The remainder of the site consists of woodland. In the user survey 70% of people stated that they visited the site to enjoy the woodland, wildlife and nature watching.

Since the Council acquired the site in 1974, management has been minimal, although the site was protected by a Tree Preservation Order (TPO) in 1979. The site is currently surveyed every 5 years to check for dangerous trees (where there is a potential risk to users of the main paths or to neighbouring properties). Because of the TPO, any tree-felling requires formal permission from the Council.

Recent storms have resulted in some mature trees becoming unstable and this has required some emergency felling in the “High Wood” – opening-up quite a clearing. If resources allowed, this area could be further enlarged (providing this did not increase risk of further wind damage) and then the open space could be replanted with native species to create a more varied age structure. The felled trees will add valuable dead wood.

From a forestry point of view, minimal management has resulted in a rather even aged canopy and a lack of structural diversity in some areas. Regeneration, especially of beech and sycamore is starting to encroach on the notable trees of the site and this is both reducing their “presence” and potentially damaging those that are used to being in more open ground, especially the oaks which are starting to lose their lower branches as a result of the shading. Commissioning a tree condition survey from a qualified arboriculturist would both improve awareness of the tree species present and flag-up future tree management issues.

There has been some historic **management of rhododendron** and laurel which have the potential to become dominant. The area along the school boundary and the slope behind the pond were “cleared” five or so years ago by volunteers and a school group, but the species is still present.

At some point there has been a programme of bird nest box and bat box installation which has probably increased bird populations and provided a good focus for community engagement. Some are now in poor condition. This activity could be revived, perhaps as a school or community project. The local “Men’s shed” group might be willing to assist with this.

Tree species. The site has a good mixture of tree species, although fewer ash than one might expect and a surprising number of apparently healthy elm. Regeneration is widespread, mostly of sycamore and beech which cast a dense shade and this, along with their slow-rotting leaves tends to limit ground flora. Stands are rather even aged so some thinning would be beneficial, although care will be needed to ensure that any increase in exposure doesn’t cause wind-blow. It might be best to create small clearings, perhaps around existing tree-loss to minimise this risk. The mature beech and sycamore on site are of ecological importance, with hollowing and deadwood within their canopies, and so should be allowed to remain, with just their regeneration being controlled. There are also some other fine exotic trees on site, such as the impressive redwoods and specimen Douglas fir and Sitka spruce. These are clear reminders of the history of the site. The monkey puzzle tree, like the oaks is rather threatened by competing trees, ideally this should be protected by removing competing trees from the immediate vicinity. Some information (perhaps via QR codes) on some of the most notable trees would be valuable.

Woodland Structure. The woodland has a very high canopy, and is lacking structural diversity lower down, and so lower-growing species like hazel, hawthorns, blackthorns, elder and rowan would be a valuable addition throughout, as well as some smaller willows or alder in wetter areas. The canopy is quite closed in some areas, and planting beneath closed canopy might be difficult, so finding some more open areas and concentrating planting here would give establishing trees a better chance (removal of some beech, sycamore and rhododendron should open up spaces).

Only a small area of the Policies is officially considered native woodland (50% of the canopy or higher native species), by Scottish Forestry in the Native Woodland Survey of Scotland (NWSS) This includes the site of the NGH and the area immediately south of it. The oaks are not included presumably because the tree cover is insufficient. This might be an area to allow to grow “wilder”, with minimal interference, aside from removing any potential rhododendron or regenerating beech/sycamore.



Veteran Oaks

Invasive management. The rhododendron appears to be *Rhododendron ponticum* although it will be easier to tell when in flower. This is extremely invasive, and mature plants can produce millions of seed which will quickly spread through the woodland. Controlling all the rhododendrons would be ideal, although some people do like its presence and some compromise might be necessary. Other species of rhododendron are less invasive and could be retained close to the NGH as a mark of the sites historical use. If controlling them, it is suggested that the use of “eco plugs” should be considered. This is a direct application herbicide, but this manner of application means there is no drift onto surrounding vegetation and instead is contained within the rhododendron entirely, and so no risk to people or pets (assuming people don’t go trying to pull the eco plugs out!). Cutting the rhododendron back can work, however they do reshoot readily and so this could be an ongoing effort, with multiple cuts being required until they’re too weak to make a comeback. There is a method of removal called lever and mulch, which essentially is the entire removal of the rhododendron, which is relatively easy if you have some keen and agile volunteers, as the plant is shallow rooted in most cases and so can be gradually eased out. This might be a task suitable for suitably trained volunteers, including school children. Cherry laurel is also

present in the Policies, although at a much lower density and this too should be considered for removal. Grey squirrels are numerous and are probably having a negative impact on the site (damage to trees and predation of nests) but controlling them would be controversial and difficult. Encouraging pine martens might be worth exploring.

'Benches to sit off the paths would be nice.'

Survey Respondent, Gala Policies Management Plan Survey, November 2024

Deadwood is an essential resource within a woodland and its presence is to be encouraged. An over-tidy wood is going to be very poor for wildlife. Where felling is required or where trees fall naturally, they should ideally be retained on site, if necessary, moving them away from paths and left to rot down. Removing the deadwood from the site not only removes habitat for some species which depend on deadwood, but it also removes nutrients from the sites, depleting it overtime. If people are keen to "tidy up", they should leave deadwood within the Policies, and create deadwood piles, which can be made quite neat. Whilst this is much better than removing deadwood from site entirely, it does create habitat islands, and ideally you need to leave deadwood scattered throughout, as connectivity between deadwood habitat is just as important as habitat connectivity at a landscape scale. It will likely be a compromise between tidy and untouched when it comes to deadwood! One thing to consider when making deadwood piles is fire risk in the drier months, so these could perhaps be placed in areas which are less well used.

There are a number of trees which have deadwood within the canopy, and at least one large oak which does seem to have died entirely, which will create valuable standing deadwood habitat. In time this will be full of woodpecker holes and probably plenty of bats and nesting birds as it naturally hollows-out. Ideally these trees should be left wherever possible, unless considered a liability (which in the case of the dead oak is likely due to its proximity to the path). In these cases, if necessary to bring them down, the dead wood should be left on site. Because deadwood is not an infinite resource, monitoring the deadwood inputs over time will be necessary, ensuring the supply is continuous and people don't begin to tidy up again! There is some useful guidance on deadwood in the Buglife leaflet "Scottish Invertebrate Habitat Management: Deadwood. The invertebrate Conservation Trust. Buglife. 2011".

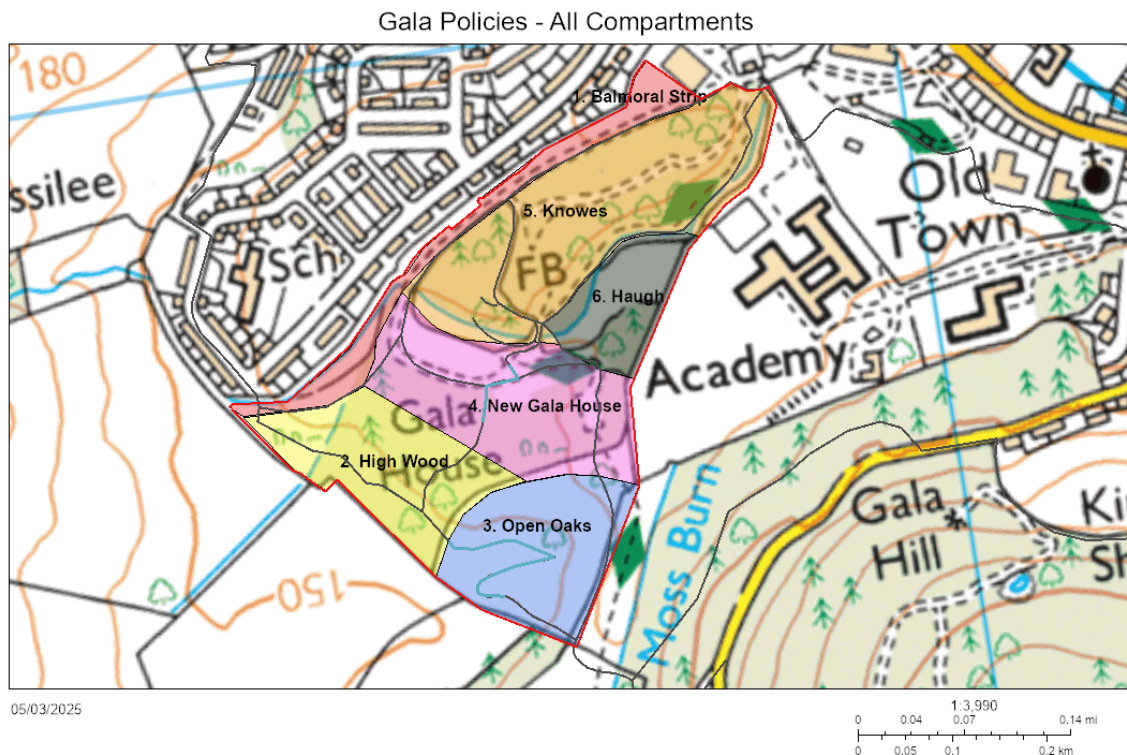
https://cdn.buglife.org.uk/2019/08/Deadwood_0.pdf:

"When developing a woodland management plan, it should aim for as close to a semi-natural volume of deadwood for that type of woodland (e.g. 60 – 100m³ per ha would be ideal for boreal forests, while levels in excess of 200 m³ per ha should be aimed for in broadleaf forest). However, any deadwood is better than none".

There is not a lot of ash on the site, but where ash die-back occurs, it may promote regeneration of tall herb and scrub (including bramble) habitat and/or new tree planting opportunities.

Because much of the woodland is rather even aged and straight stemmed – there is less opportunity for bird nesting and bat roosting than one might expect. Adding nest boxes and bat roost boxes (something which has been done before evidenced by many old boxes) would be a potential school or community project.

It is suggested that the site is broken down into a smaller number of woodland compartments as shown below.



Map 5 Woodland Compartments (see also individual maps in Annex 8.4)

1. The **Balmoral Avenue strip** (north of the drive and extending to the top corner). This northern boundary adjoins back gardens. It is suggested that the aim here should be to gradually promote smaller and less dense tree species at the expense of larger ones. This would have the additional benefit of screening views of the buildings from the wood. Trees to be encouraged would include Holly, Rowan, Hazel, Hawthorn, Blackthorn, etc.
2. **High Wood**. The northwest corner of the site is an area of high canopy woodland which would benefit from some additional under-planting of shrubby species (such as hazel, rose, rowan and honeysuckle). It would also be beneficial to take opportunities that arise to create small felling coups (perhaps where trees either fall or need to be felled for safety reasons). Creating such areas would allow some new planting to be undertaken in these clearings. Oak

might be included in this – as it will not regenerate in shade. Maximising the amount of deadwood should also be an ambition.

3. **Open Oaks.** The southern corner is where the old oaks need to be the main objective. Here thinning around the old trees is a priority but it is also important to ensure that the next generation of oaks is established and as mentioned above collecting acorns for growing on and planting out in this more open compartment would be a good school or community project. The grassy areas can be managed to encourage herb-rich grassland, with scattered oaks. The southeastern boundary wall is itself a strong feature as are the mighty beeches that sit just beyond it. This bit of woodland is not part of the site, but would make a logical extension to it should the owner be willing to allow it.
4. **New Gala House.** The area around the NGH might lend itself to minimal management as there is so much natural regeneration taking place (including some oaks). The birch woodland will gradually convert to other species, and the long-term aim should be to favour a good species mix. This will probably require some thinning of sycamore and beech which will potentially dominate. The vestiges of formal planting that persist here (laurel, rhododendron, box, dogwood, etc) will need some monitoring to ensure they do not become invasive.
5. **The Knowes.** These raised areas have some lovely mature trees and some areas of younger regeneration, mostly of beech and sycamore. Some of the larger trees are nearing the end of their natural lives, and some have fallen in recent years. Efforts should be made to maintain a mix of species, thinning regeneration where it is too dense and adding species where there is no local seed source. Again, the value of deadwood (standing or lying) should be stressed for its importance for wildlife. There is Rhododendron spreading in this area which should be controlled where possible.
6. **The “Haugh”** and school boundary. This area has a slightly thinner canopy and better ground flora, and efforts should be made to maintain this – by thinning regenerating beech and sycamore. This will also improve the development of bankside vegetation along the burn and reduce erosion. Adding willow and alder here may be valuable.

Actions

(see 4.5.1 above - Apply for WIAT woodland management plan funding, which is required to unlock further Forestry Grant Scheme funds for woodland and infrastructure management)

4.8.1 Work with volunteers (and contractors where necessary) to remove rhododendron (and other invasive non-native plant species INNS) from woodland unless it clearly relates to NGH. Monitoring INNS should be an ongoing activity. Rhododendrons could be chipped (to remove risk of people making fires from brash) and used to surface woodland paths

4.8.2 Work with others to develop a program of bird and bat box construction, installation and monitoring. Pine marten boxes might also be appropriate if a secluded location can be found.

4.8.3 As part of a site interpretation proposals, mark notable trees with QR codes allowing information about them to be shared.

4.8.4 As part of the halo-thinning work referred to above, thin around other notable trees on site (specifically the monkey puzzle).

4.8.5 Take any opportunity to create one or two small clearings on site – perhaps around fallen trees or where rhododendron has been removed, where the canopy can be thinned to allow under-planting of oaks and enhanced ground-flora.

4.8.6 Dead wood is vital for biodiversity and efforts should be made to retain as much as possible – ideally standing. A project could be developed with the school or volunteers to monitor the amount of deadwood on site to see if it meets the minimum target of 20m³ per hectare.

4.8.7 Along the Balmoral Avenue boundary, efforts could be made to reduce regeneration of beech and sycamore and to planting some small stature trees to act as a better screen

4.8.8 Investigate the opportunity to work with the neighbour on the SE boundary where the fine veteran beeches stand just over the historic wall.

4.8.9 Across the site opportunities should be taken to plant appropriately sourced native trees species not currently common on the site (including rowan, hazel, blackthorn, hawthorn, rose, honeysuckle, etc). These should be encouraged at the expense of beech and sycamore regeneration which will tend to reduce ground flora. Another potential project for community or school group. Nb Woodland Trust may be able to provide tree packs.

4.8.10 Education around deadwood and why it needs to be left onsite (1500 species rely on deadwood) could be covered via a QR code reference and encouraged in school and neighbourhood engagement. BFT has some useful materials. This could be an outdoor classroom topic for primary and high schools

4.8.11 Opportunity for school and community groups to collect native seed (oak, rowan, hazel, blackthorn, hawthorn, rose, honeysuckle, etc) and grow on to replant

4.8.12 There are a number of old rope swing ropes hanging on trees which should be removed were practicable

4.8.13 Grey Squirrel control could be considered, but is likely to be difficult in such a public space. Squirrel sightings should be reported to the Saving Scotland's Red Squirrel website (<https://scottishsquirrels.org.uk/squirrel-sightings/>)

4.8.14 Commission a tree condition survey of the whole site to identify tree species present and future tree management issues.

4.9 Boundary

There is a fence along the north-west edge (actually a range of fences) mostly in reasonable condition although some sections adjacent to the burn may soon need attention.

There is a drystone wall along the south-western edge, some of it in poor condition – especially where there are access points into the fields beyond. Reinstating this wall would be a nice project but potentially expensive. Some repairs might be undertaken

if they could be used as a rural skill training opportunity? The cost of some of this work could be included in the WIAT application.

There is a fine wall along the most distant part of the south-eastern boundary alongside the SUW. This runs out before the school boundary where there is currently a gap into the school grounds. A wire fence then bounds the Policies as far as a semi-formal gap close to the school. This access is in poor condition as the route descends quite a steep and slippery slope before crossing a narrow (green) metal bridge. It is recommended that both these access points should be closed. The bridge currently links to an informal path and could potentially be moved to a more suitable location upstream. Access to the school grounds may have to be closed in the short-term anyway for safety reasons as works begin on demolishing the old school. By the time the works are complete, traditional use may have been largely forgotten.

The area by the gas sub-station in the northern corner is need of tidying and upgrading (e.g. removal of barbed wire, improved path surfaces). The meter cabinet by the swimming pool gate is unlocked and may be a safety issue. It is certainly an eyesore.



Tumbled wall at top of Meadow (see 4.9.7)

Actions

4.9.1 Work with others to reinstate lengths of the boundary wall (Borders College or trial skills training events for high school pupils in dry stane dyking which is a dying skill).

- 4.9.2 Work with volunteers to improve access points through this wall (stone moving!)
- 4.9.3 Work with Council and school to reinstate school boundary fence.
- 4.9.4 Work with Scottish Gas or whoever to enhance the gas infrastructure on site.
- 4.9.5 Make entrances more visually appealing especially at the top entrance from Balmoral Avenue (gate fixings and barbed wire could be removed and new fencing installed, bridge painted, slabs levelled etc).
- 4.9.6 Liaison with tenants/homeowners along Balmoral Avenue boundary should seek to ensure fences are in good repair.
- 4.9.7 Meadow area boundary wall onto council owned field. Wall has been tumbled and access to field is over large wall stones (unsafe surface). Move stone and install a gate and posts. Wall is also down on side owned by neighbouring landowner – suggest discussion with landowner to install a gate to their field (well used shortcut to SUW)
- 4.9.8 Chicken wire to be replaced and timbers stabilised on wooden footbridge close to gas substation on Gala Circuit path
- 4.9.9 Small section of boardwalk over temporary stream from field run off close to boundary wall on Gala Circuit Path could be replaced by a culvert (no maintenance)



Balmoral Avenue Entrance (see 4.9.5)

4.10 Other Infrastructure and Access Points

Throughout the site there are remnants of metal fences that date from the New Gala House era. Some of these have deteriorated to the point that they are dangerous (sharp-edged and potentially trip-hazards). Consideration should be given to removing them once they get to this stage, but generally the suggestion is that these vestiges of the past should be left as reminders of the site's heritage and included in any future site interpretation.

There is an old fence line (separate from the school boundary fence) close to the point where the Bakehouse Burn enters a culvert which seems to serve no obvious purpose, and which might be usefully removed or rationalised at some point.

At the smaller gate to the left of the main entrance there is some metal from old dog waste bin placement that could cause injury and needs to be removed.

There are a number of informal access points through the SW boundary wall which could be either closed off or made better. We understand these mostly allow access to the field beyond for dog exercise, but there may be scope to extend these to create additional walking routes linking to the SUW or to Gala Hill.

Actions



4.10.1 Identify and remove sharp sections of old metal fencing

4.10.2 Rationalise/repair fencing that allows access to school grounds at top of Gala Academy playing fields (see also 4.9.3 this section is 3m).

4.10.3 Remove old dog waste bin fixtures at side entrance by Scott Park Bridge

4.10.4 Steps down from meadow on SUW require repair and maintenance, upgrade or rerouting options: 1. Repair and maintenance to replace 6 risers, 4 pegs and remove sludge. 2. Renew total length of steps and make into box steps – currently half box steps. 31m length timber and stone construction (there is a stone pile on the old NGH driveway that could be utilised). 3. Create a 100m gentle gradient zig zag curved path up the slope with handrail. Involve Active Travel and Access team as appropriate.

Steps down from Meadow (see 4.10.4)

5 Community and Community Use

'It is a lovely, cherished space that is great for wellbeing. I used to visit daily as a child to play, and now I visit when visiting my parents. It is a great place to escape and offers some wonderful artistic inspiration. Could be good to work with local artists in a similar way to Creative Coathanger to create more permanent artistic art installations to tell the story of the woodland and the nature that can be found there.'

Survey Respondent, Gala Policies Management Plan Survey, November 2024

5.1 Management and Monitoring

There is sufficient need for ongoing management and monitoring work on site to occupy a dedicated project officer working part time (suggested 21 hours a week). A job description has been drafted and funding needs to be sought to realise this. The role would enable the delivery of several actions:

- The establishment of a “Friends of the Policies” group to help deliver many management actions and help monitor site management and this could be bolstered through a regular “user-survey” to capture local views and concerns.
- Supervising and managing volunteer activity.
- A monitoring scheme for the site would be a good way of engaging local people and establishing a baseline from which change could be monitored. Monitoring of birds, insects, plants and other wildlife groups would be useful in informing site management and involving the local community. This could be via a bioblitz type event with follow-up activities.
- Reinstate a programme of nest box building (for birds and bats) and monitoring.
- Review the management plan annually.

BFT and Bright Green Nature were approached to see if they would consider facilitating a part time project officer if funds could be secured. Neither said they would rule it out. Other options include a freelance position, or through another local body such as community council

A full list of potential projects with outline costs is included in the accompanying spreadsheet and these could form the basis of an annual work plan.

At present some small amounts of community funds are applied for by volunteer groups and administered by the Community Council. Larger amounts could be applied for if a constituted community group with a bank account were in place for this.

There are opportunities for some income generation opportunities, which would help continued upkeep of the site and infrastructure. For example, a QR code linked to encouraging donations; a sponsor a tree, bench, nestbox or boardwalk board campaign. If volunteers are willing to take on the administration of such schemes they may generate worthwhile amounts.

Actions

5.1.1 Work with partners and volunteers to create a steering group for the Project Officer post

5.1.2 Apply for funds to employ a project officer for the site

5.1.3 Establish a ‘Friends Of the Policies’ Group for the site.

5.2 Site Guidelines

53/11% of survey respondents were concerned that there are no clear written policies for the site, 70/15% were concerned about the lack of adherence to the Scottish Outdoor Access Code and 156/33% felt people should be encouraged to follow the Code. Guidance is available on a range of topics and the website and links could be usefully promoted www.outdooraccess-scotland.scot

At present there is no obvious guidance as to what can and should not happen in the Gala Policies. A set of guidelines has been developed and can be found in 8.2.4 The guidelines cover all aspects of site use including litter, fires, motor vehicles, dogs, horses and cycling. It is suggested that the guidelines are displayed at the main entrances to the site (perhaps on a printed metal sheet to minimise vandalism) and online at the SBC website.

Actions

5.2.1 Display site guidelines at main entrance, side entrance by bridge to High School and Balmoral Avenue entrances and online. Provide online links to site guidelines and promote the Scottish Outdoor Access Code.

5.2.2 Work with community council, schools and local groups to promote site guidelines

5.2.3 Work with schools to enlist young community champions and junior ranger program. Local programme to help instil a sense of ownership and responsibility so young people make better choices around littering, setting fires, throwing objects into the pond, etc., and promote positive climate actions such as tree planting, bug hotels, bird and bat box building and installation.

5.3 Health and Safety

Any SBC employee or contractor is required to have appropriate training and up to date certificates for the machinery they use on council land. All equipment is checked regularly to ensure its safe to operate. Safe working practices are followed at all times (cordoned off areas, PPE, etc.,) and risk assessments are carried out to protect workers and the general public. All operatives are insured for the work they undertake. In the interests of public safety, all of the above measures must be a prerequisite for the use of any and all machinery used on site.

Concerns were raised by survey respondents regarding partially fallen trees and branches over paths that might present hazards. There was also mention of unsafe discarded objects, such as barbed wire, bottles and discarded needles which pose a risk to both people and animals.

Several people suggested that the main paths (the old drive) needed upgrading and more regular maintenance. Whilst preserving the natural woodland was important, there was recognition that well-maintained paths were important for safety, especially after bad weather when paths become boggy, given the high levels of use.

The pond was mentioned as an area needing attention, with some residents suggesting the boardwalk should be made safer for children as it can be slippery and is beginning to collapse.

Other health and safety concerns were raised by members of the public. These can be found in sections 5.5 vehicles, 5.6 litter, 5.7 dogs and dog fouling and 5.8 antisocial behaviour.

Actions

5.3.1 Promote council contact number(s) so people know how to get in touch with the correct department to report any dangerous items such as fallen trees and discarded objects

5.3.2 Regular drive clearing could alleviate issues with main drive

5.4 Fire.

While forest fire in the Policies is unlikely, grassfires are possible in dry periods and lighting fires can cause damage to trees (several examples of this are visible on site), habitats (e.g. scorching to soil caused by disposable BBQs) and infrastructure (setting fire to signs, benches, bins, etc). Guidance is available on this issue at www.outdooraccess-scotland.scot. It is recommended that the policy should be no fires anywhere on the site. That way everyone knows fires are not allowed and a degree of self-policing can be expected.

Actions

5.4.1 Promote the no fire approach via site signage, Community Councils, social media and local schools

5.5 Vehicles

Many people highlighted the issue of vehicles and mini scooters in the Policies (124/26% of respondents were concerned about unauthorised vehicles/mini scooters entering the Policies) and felt that this should not be allowed on the site. The Council has recently reinstalled the gate at the drive entrance making access less easy. Another potential entry point is the vennel from Balmoral Avenue though it would be difficult to resolve without reducing accessibility for all.

5.6 Litter

'I think upkeep needs improving and regular litter picking session + more easy to access bins. But overall, it's nice to have a slightly undisturbed area in the town to clear the mind.'

Survey Respondent, Gala Policies Management Plan Survey, November 2024

Volunteer groups currently organise regular events to pick litter from the site and waterways and some users also gather litter on their walks which helps to alleviate some of the issues. GA is also incorporating litter picks as part of their outdoor education programme.

The broken fence (where people exit school grounds to go over small green bridge) is a particular problem area and the path here is steep and slippery. As mentioned above it is recommended that this access point could be closed off. The optimal time to do this would be just before site work starts on the demolition of the old Gala Academy (circa October 2025) as the entire area will be fenced to secure the site whilst demolition and building new pitches takes place. Pupils will not be able to access the area so easily and this may have a positive effect of changing well-established routes to school especially if the green bridge was relocated further upstream.

The majority of respondents (285/60%) felt litter was a problem on the site (301/64% thought there needed to be more litter and dog waste bins) and that there was a need for better litter management.

The community felt that the existing amenities should respect both human and wildlife needs, with special attention to preventing both general and food litter as the latter was believed to have detrimental effects on wildlife.

Actions

5.6.1. Work with school to better manage littering at key points around site. This may include additional bin provision at school exit points, on school grounds so these can be emptied by janitorial staff.

5.6.2 Implement a "Bin it /take your litter home" campaign.

5.6.3 Tackle pinch point where pupils leave the academy across the green bridge on the Bakehouse Burn (into the Policies) as litter is thrown throughout this area and goes into the watercourse.

5.6.4 Maintain regular volunteer litter pick events and link to litter picking scheme in high school (this is being actioned at time of writing - high school have ordered litter picking equipment).



Littering Pinch point (see 5.6.3)

5.7 Dogs and Dog Fouling

Dog walking is a major activity (252/53% of survey respondents said they used the Gala Policies for dog walking and 234/50% said they liked walking their dog in the Policies). A significant portion of respondents (172/36%) expressed concern about dogs not being kept under control by their owners.

One of the most common practical concerns in the user survey was the presence of dog waste on site (252/53%) and the need for clean, safe spaces, especially when schools or families bring young children to the Gala Policies. In the free answer section of the survey, some described dogs as intimidating and sometimes dangerous, causing fear and potential danger, especially for children, joggers, and those who have previously had negative experiences of dogs.

Parents expressed anxiety about uncontrolled dogs posing risks to toddlers and limiting the freedom of children to play safely. Some mentioned hostile behaviour from dog owners when confronted about their pets or dismissing their concerns with remarks such as "the dog won't hurt you." Concerns were raised about dog waste in public areas, which detracted from the environment's usability, cleanliness and safety.

301/64% of respondents requested more dog waste bins. This was reviewed as part of the management plan process. There are currently 3 bins at the site entrances for both general rubbish and dog waste. There are no obvious additional locations for further placement because of the difficulty of emptying them. Bins can also be an arson risk. There was a previously a dedicated dog waste bin at the entrance to the Policies by the bridge into Scott Park, but this was vandalised and only its exterior casing remains attached to the fence.

Some users noted the challenges of walking with dogs without proper waste disposal options close at hand. Bins would be best located at entrances to the Policies (and ideally by the pond, but this might be difficult to manage).

If it were possible to install recycling (plastics, paper, tins and glass) bins at all 3 main entrances (Swimming Pool, top of Balmoral Avenue and Scott Park Bridge) this could allow the general waste bins to become mainly dog waste bins but again, the issue of any new infrastructure being vandalised has to be weighed against this.

Some users suggested that stronger actions are needed from the council to address this issue, such as better enforcement of rules particularly around irresponsible dog ownership. Scottish Borders Council Responsible Dog Ownership page <https://www.scotborders.gov.uk/environment/dog-fouling> outlines the Dog Fouling Scotland Act 2003 (dog fouling is an offence and can be subject to a fixed penalty).

A designated dog-friendly area (e.g. fenced dog park) could help relieve these issues but would require careful planning. The Policies could be a testing ground for a regional 'Well Behaved Dogs Welcome' campaign to promote responsible ownership and provide a series of free training events for dogs and owners to curb dog fouling, and better control of pets. The Dogs Trust has some very useful information on their site <https://www.dogstrust.org.uk>

Actions

5.7.1 Promote good dog management as part of the Councils wider education role which includes erecting 'No Fouling' signs and posters, primary school/community talks and educating dog owners in responsible dog ownership

5.7.2 Host events and a campaign for the promotion of 'well-behaved dogs welcome' scheme

5.8 Antisocial Behaviour

46% of survey respondents mentioned antisocial behaviour as something they don't like about the Policies, and it was the top answer (41%) to the question 'What concerns you most about Gala Policies. Much of this behaviour happens after dark when few people are on site and includes incidents such as vandalism, lighting fires, drinking and drug use. Some people believed that much of this behaviour was centred around young people but there is no hard evidence to support this.

Locally, it may be possible to engage local groups such as TD1 Youth Hub to extend their community outreach walkabouts into the Policies (they regularly walk the town in the evenings talking to and assisting young people). Education sessions for all ages on their custodianship of the environment may alleviate some issues going forward, particularly if programmes can be implemented that provide a sense of ownership. Recent work with high school students through youth conversations and support of the Outdoor Ranger Programme have begun positive dialogues and it is recommended that these are continued by SBC staff and increased, if funding can be secured for a project officer.

Gaps in the fencing around the school currently provide shortcuts through the Policies to less-used areas where some people have taken to lighting fires. This is of particular

concern around the heritage and notable trees. In the short term (with a view to it becoming permanent) the area at the back of the school will be fenced off whilst the old building is demolished and new sports pitches constructed. If the fence line around the sports pitches could be repaired during this time it would likely stop people from accessing the Policies at those points and thus reduce the risk of further arson. The change of “desire-lines” (as people will be directed towards the swimming pool area to exit the school grounds) could have a positive and lasting effect on the older sections of woodland.

Managers at other woodland sites have used trail cameras to identify and tackle serious antisocial behaviour.

Actions

5.8.1 Approach local youth groups to see if they would be willing to extend their rounds into the Policies

5.8.2 Encourage and broaden education sessions in schools about protection of the environment, wildlife, etc., to promote thoughtful use of sites.

‘I work for SBC at Balmoral Primary school ELC and we love going over to the policies with the children as it is on our doorstep. However, there needs to be more dog poo bins as when we do forest school we have to clear an area before we begin. An area for the children to sit and enjoy the policies would be lovely too to encourage families close by to use it more with their children as a lot of families in that area don’t use the outside facilities often.’

Survey Respondent, Gala Policies Management Plan Survey, November 2024

5.9 Education

The Gala Policies are seen as a valuable educational resource for local schools and children as they provide many opportunities for young people to connect with nature, learn about wildlife, and engage in practical, hands-on learning in the natural environment.

Teachers and staff from local schools (St Margaret’s RC Primary, Balmoral Primary and Gala Academy) expressed a desire for increased opportunities for educational programs, such as outdoor learning, and better facilities to support such activities (e.g., safe, screened-off areas for Forest Schools, natural benches from fallen timber, rudimentary, natural looking shelters for bad weather and an improved pond-dipping area to accommodate up to 30 pupils). It would be important to ensure that these spaces are safe and free from hazards such as dog mess, glass and litter. In the user survey, 150/32% would welcome an outdoor learning space on the site and 196/42% supported a more accessible board walk around the pond. Providing educational tools

like a web resource accessed through QR codes and viewing areas at the pond could make the space more engaging and informative for children and school groups. The Gala Policies Tree Trail 'Policy Pigeons' <https://galatreetrail.wordpress.com/stops/> uses eight markers around the site that link to a tree trail that provides fun, nature-based activities for young children.



Gala Policies Tree Trail

In the user survey, people appreciated how the Gala Policies bring the community together, both as a space for relaxation and for educational activities, and there was a desire for continued collaboration and community involvement with local schools and groups to ensure its future. Teaching children how to use the space responsibly, instilling values about nature, wildlife, and community-care could help nurture a future generation of users/visitors who better appreciate and take care of the area and feel a sense of custodianship for the Gala Policies. It is suggested that if funding can be secured for a project officer, they liaise with Gala Academy and the local primary schools on how the site can be managed to enhance its value as an educational facility.

Many user survey respondents referred to the wildlife value of the Gala Policies and would like to see more all-ages educational initiatives and activities on site (178/38% of survey respondents would welcome opportunities to learn practical conservation skills such as wildlife identification, wildlife surveys, habitat protection and tree planting). This could be an important part of any SBC staff/project officer role.

Actions

5.9.1 Identify area for forest school and use fallen/felled timber from site to install benches, screens could be made from brushwood to keep out dogs (this could be a

temporary area at the top of the site along the boundary wall as an outdoor education area will be included in the new Gala Academy site)

5.9.2 SBC staff/project officer to liaise with schools and friends' group (see volunteers' section below) to identify opportunities for educational activities to be run in the Policies

5.9.3 SBC staff/project officer to work with volunteers to create a range of educational activities for site users around conservation tasks.

'Love the Policies, my whole family grew up using the Policies. The only thing I'd love to see is accessible path for wheelchairs and mobility scooters. My father loved his walks around the policies but unfortunately he relies on his mobility scooter now to get him about and misses going through the policies as there is not maybe paths he can use without damaging his scooter.'

Survey Respondent, Gala Policies Management Plan Survey, November 2024

5.10 Accessibility

The semi wild nature of the Gala Policies makes it difficult for some users (wheelchairs, mobility scooters, walking frames and parents with child buggies and prams) to access fully and whilst some people would like more accessible amenities there was also a strong call to retain the wild nature and woodland paths within the site.

It is suggested that a multi-use surfaced path connecting the driveway to the SUW via the pond area would allow users to access the main areas of the Policies with greater ease. Cycling groups, like Cycling Without Age Scotland, expressed interest in using the Policies for their Tri-shaw rides, which take elderly residents out during the summer. A circular route via the pond could accommodate this. A slightly wider path would also give more passing room for people with dogs. To encourage longer walks, the multi-use surfaced path could be extended to go up behind the pond onto the original drive and back down through the SUW.

Improving accessibility in some key areas would allow all members of the community, including people with disabilities, health issues, families with young children, and elderly residents to better enjoy the space. Seats and wheelchair-adapted benches could be placed along the route alongside speaking signs and QR codes for navigation to assist those with hearing and sight impairment

In the user survey, 220/47% would like improved, more navigable paths, 148/31% better access for wheelchairs, walking frames, mobility scooters, prams, and buggies. 129/27% requested more seating to provide rest areas along walking routes especially in scenic areas, to allow those with health issues or the elderly better access to frequent rest stops.

Actions

5.10.1 Install fully accessible benches for the grassy area by the pond and speaking signs along the proposed upgrade of SUW multi use path. Placement of new amenities could be explored by involving local charities and community groups and asking them where they would be most useful

5.10.2 Install further benches on wider routes (ask potential user groups about spacing).

5.10.3 User groups such as Cycling Without Age Scotland may require gate access for Tri-shaw rides. Suggest providing a contact number for such groups to obtain temporary access to the site.

5.10.4 Run a “sponsor a bench” scheme and offer wider opportunities to make a donation. Funds could be used by community groups to host community events and help with delivering wider actions at the site - see schemes at <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/support-us/give/dedications/> <https://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/parks-greenspaces/presentation-seats-tree-donation>

5.11 Cycling, Mountain Biking and Horse Riding

In the user survey 89/19% thought that an offroad bike area would be a welcome addition to the Policies and groups, like Cycling Without Age Scotland, expressed interest in using the Policies for their Tri-shaw rides, which take elderly residents out during the summer but improvements to the paths would be required.

There was some support for creating a mountain bike pump track aimed at young people or a skills area to help them learn the basics before progressing to more advanced trails at places like Gala Hill, Ladhope, and Glentress. A few respondents thought this could provide a safe space for young cyclists and attract families.

However, on a site with limited paths, there is a risk in promoting bike (or horse) access. Paths inevitably receive more wear and thus require more maintenance and the potential for friction between user groups could become an issue. There may be better sites to promote for such recreational use and it may be that a suitable space could be found within the school grounds or Scott Park or the proposed bike trails at Langlee and Ladhope which are part of the Galashiels Place Planning suggested improvements. It is recommended that access for cyclists and horses is not promoted.

It is understood that the Gala Braw Lads festival use locations near or in the Gala Policies during the Braw Lads Gathering at the end of June / early July each year <https://www.thebrawlads-gathering.co.uk/annual-events>.

The Outdoor access code <https://www.outdooraccess-scotland.scot/> makes it clear that responsible access is a right so effort should be made to ensure that where people do cycle or ride, they do so responsibly

Cycling Code of Conduct <https://www.cyclinguk.org/article/cycling-guide/off-road-cycling-code-conduct>

Horses Code of Conduct <https://www.bhs.org.uk/go-riding-and-learn/riding-out-hacking/how-to-plan-a-ride/responsible-riding/>

Action

5.11.1 Monitor site usage by cyclists and horses and consider how best to manage if this becomes an issue.

5.12 Events

The types of events people were keen to see in the Gala Policies included volunteering, family-focused, educational and recreational activities.

Those who expressed an interest in **volunteering** on site (93/20%) were interested in site upkeep and maintenance (68/14%) and nature and wildlife conservation (54/11%). 32/7% were interested in making bird boxes, creating wildlife habitats, and ranger training. All of these activities could be developed into regular events onsite and could even be organised by volunteers as some people were interested in organising activities and events 16/3% and fundraising 12/3% themselves.

Family oriented activities and events such as pond dipping and nature days were popular with survey respondents (200/42%) closely followed by wildlife (birds, bat trees, pond, wildflowers, etc.) guided walks and talks (199/42%). 178/38% were interested in conservation events and activities such as wildlife surveys and habitat protection whilst 149/32% favoured health focussed activities such as fun runs.

Many people (147/31%) supported community events like litter picks and fundraising, local history and heritage events (137/29%) and arts, crafts and cultural activities (116/25%). The proposed interpretation of New Gala House and the possible installation of more site interpretation may present new event opportunities (ideas around treasure hunts or “sleuthing” competitions linked to the St Trinneans legacy).

Other events for the policies could include **educational** events such as heritage skills courses (such as drystone dyking, scything, making bird/bat boxes), family friendly days such as community picnics and the presence of New Gala House might lend the site to hosting a St Trinneans Festival.

The Policies are already used for some **recreational** events such as orienteering and cross country running; it should be made clear to organisers of such event that they should clear-up afterwards – removing and disposing of all markers, especially when they are plastic. Groups wishing to use the site for events should book these through the Councils booking portal –

<https://www.scotborders.gov.uk/events-venues/planning-event/2>

Actions

5.12.1 Develop and run a program of activities throughout the year and promote them to local people and through partner networks.

5.12.2 Work with relevant organisations to hold an annual event such as a nature festival and community picnic; a fun run, a St Trinneans Festival (of the Ronald Searle variety to make it fun whilst acknowledging the historical link).

5.12.3 Liaise with potential creative industry partners to explore engagement with the site through arts-based activities. This could be everything from the mentioned music/film events to a musical / poetry walk around.

5.12.4 SBC have insurance cover for any events/activities hosted by SBC. All other parties must have their own insurance, risk assessments and have booked the green space event/activity through the SBC booking system (SBC would need to check insurance and risk assessments are in place to accept any booking).

5.12.5 Family activity days such as pond dipping, bug hotel construction and wild play sessions

5.12.6 Practical conservation days and events to make bird and bat boxes, bee posts, tree planting, etc.,

5.13 Volunteers

The considerable volunteer effort to maintain and improve the area is highly valued and the user survey comments revealed a strong sense of community pride for the Gala Policies. There was recognition and appreciation for all volunteer-run initiatives, such as maintaining tracks, clearing waterways and litter picking.

In the user survey 27/6% stated that they already volunteer in the Policies and a further 93/20% said they would be interested in volunteering. With so many people interested in volunteering across a range of roles (e.g. 68/14% were interested in maintenance activities, 54/11% in nature and wildlife conservation and 32/7% in activities to enhance the site such as making bird boxes) supervision and direction would be required.

Initially this could be undertaken by a site project officer (if funding can be secured – conversations underway with potential funders) and in time, through the establishment of a constituted ‘Friends of the Policies’ Group.

It is suggested that Site guidelines are established to help to keep all volunteers and members of the public safe in their enjoyment of the Policies. With such guidelines in place, all volunteers would be clear as to the codes of conduct and health and safety requirements that are in place, in line with other SBC volunteer groups working in green spaces.

SBC have in place volunteer risk assessments covering all tasks volunteers may perform and all will be given appropriate training and PPE, including safe use of all tools. As part of this it is advisable for volunteers to work in buddy groups (minimum of 2 people) for maintenance and public facing tasks and to avoid lone working on the site. For other tasks, such as species monitoring on a walk around, this is less of a

requirement, but still advisable. As a minimum all will have access to a mobile phone in case of emergencies.

SBC green space and park volunteer documents can be found in the appendices. These include:

8.3.3 Volunteer Policy

8.3.4 Volunteer Agreement

8.3.5 Volunteer Application Form

8.3.6 Volunteer Evaluation

8.3.7 Volunteer Exit Questionnaire



Repurpose old toilet block in Scott Park for volunteer use (see 5.13.4)

Actions

5.13.1 Ensure all volunteers have completed sign up paperwork, volunteer code of conduct, read the site guidelines, had an appropriate induction for the range of roles they will perform and appropriate PPE.

5.13.2 Agree schedules of works so tasks are completed to plan and within the timescales for those actions. If a range of volunteer programmes are running ensure they are aware of each other's activities e.g. school volunteer parties and Policies volunteers.

5.13.3 Ensure risk assessments for each task and a buddy system are in place (no lone workers) when using any equipment or tools or when taking part in public facing activities such as events.

5.13.4 The disused toilet facility in Scott Park could be repurposed for the use of project officer/volunteers and to create a tool store for the Policies. The facility could

provide a place for volunteers to meet and could house a toilet, kettle and sink facility, small seating area and tool store. People could use for changing into outdoor clothing, etc., Alternatively, a lorry/shipping container could be purchased and situated in the new car park (swimming pool) area for tool storage and volunteer use.

5.13.5 Train volunteers to become local guides. This could be a paid for service with funds going back into the community for local projects

'The policies are brilliant. There's also an amazing walk beyond the policies that takes you on the Hollybush Circular, more signage for that would be great.'

Survey Respondent, Gala Policies Management Plan Survey, November 2024

5.14 Signage and Promotion

The site is well known by local people, but it is not obvious to visitors to the town. Connectivity from the town centre and from Old Gala House would help make more people aware of it. Appropriate signs at site entrances would be beneficial in explaining the site and the ongoing management to people, enhancing the visitor experience and increasing community involvement.

In the user survey 140/28% of people requested better information and signposting about the site to include identification of wildlife heritage trees. 138/29% would like more information about New Gala House and wider site heritage.

It is suggested that more use could be made of QR code plaques for any new and replaced signage as these are cheap to produce, less likely to be vandalised and easy to use as the majority of people now have a smart phone. This could be achieved through use of the SBC existing website and update programme as part of the Parks and Environment Section.

A notice board could be installed at the main site entrance but kept low-key perhaps using QR codes to link to more information. QR codes could also be placed at key locations (e.g. veteran/notable trees, site of NGH, meadow, etc) linking to further information and perhaps on some of the existing finger posts dotted along the SUW.

The current place plan for Galashiels is looking at improving signage around the town and there is an opportunity to ensure the Policies are mentioned and included in these plans.

Actions

5.14.1 Support delivery of actions identified in the Galashiels Place plan, including connectivity to the town, attractions and green spaces

5.14.2 Develop information and QR codes for the site and host on SBC website Low-impact posts with QR codes could be installed at key locations on site (notable trees, NGH, pond etc).

5.14.3 Develop a welcome sign for installation at the main entrance with links via QR to information about the site. This could include a map of the site showing paths and basic info about distances and terrain. This should be with the involvement of the Council Active Travel and Access team.

5.15 Social Media

It is recommended that a 'Friends of the Policies' social media page should be established and used to promote activities and initiatives, share photographs of wildlife sightings, community events and to provide useful information to all users and visitors. The page could be linked to other Galashiels initiatives, tourism and wildlife pages. It is suggested that the management of an official page be part of a project officers' role with assistance from volunteer community moderators.

Actions

5.15.1 Open an 'Friends Of the Policies' page on social media

5.15.2 Offer training to local people on how these pages can be moderated and develop guidelines for best practice

5.15.3 Ideally the existing group pages will agree to transfer to one main page for the Policies to stop confusion around sources of information, etc.,

6 Green Flag Management

6.1 Green Flag Criteria

The Green Flag Award scheme recognises and rewards well-managed parks and green spaces, setting the benchmark standard for the management of recreational outdoor spaces across the United Kingdom and around the world.

It may be beneficial to seek Green Flag status for the Gala Policies at some point in the future. To facilitate this, we have considered the site with regard to the criteria used for this scheme. The 8 broad criteria used for the Green Flag assessment are:

1. **Welcoming Place:** Spaces should be inviting and accessible.
2. **Healthy, Safe, and Secure:** Ensure the safety and well-being of visitors.
3. **Well Maintained and Clean:** Maintain high standards of cleanliness and upkeep.
4. **Environmental Management:** Promote sustainable practices.
5. **Biodiversity, Landscape, and Heritage:** Protect and enhance natural and cultural heritage.
6. **Community Involvement:** Engage the community in the management and use of the space.
7. **Marketing and Communication:** Effectively promote the space and its benefits.
8. **Management:** Implement robust management practices to ensure long-term

1. Welcoming Place

The main access to the site at present is rather disrupted by construction work for the new school. Works to demolish the swimming pool will continue to disrupt this entrance for some months yet but when the work is complete, there will be an opportunity to improve this access and make it more welcoming. The setting is impressive, with the group of fine wellingtonia trees. The current information panel is in need of updating. The access points from Balmoral Avenue could also be improved, especially the northern-most access. Once onto the site, the general atmosphere is very welcoming, and people are very friendly.

2. Healthy, Safe, and Secure

Our survey shows that the large majority of users feel safe while visiting the Policies.

3. Well Maintained and Clean

Generally, the site is well managed, with the minimal infrastructure generally well cared-for. Litter is sometimes a problem (especially during school terms) but there is a volunteer group that does regular litter-picks, and it is hoped that the number of waste bins will be increased in future. Dog mess is sometimes an issue, and this would be helped if dedicated bins for dog-waste could be installed (see section on dogs above).

4. Environmental Management

There is a program of grass cutting managed by the Council which keeps paths clear and the grass area by the pond mown. The site has otherwise been largely allowed to look after itself for many years, with minimal volunteer input and a five - year cycle of checks on tree health to identify dangerous trees. Details of proposed future habitat management are given below.

5. Biodiversity, Landscape, and Heritage

As above, the site has had minimal active management in recent years, but the plan sets out a number of suggestions for enhancing natural and cultural heritage. See above.

6. Community Involvement

There has been an active group of volunteers for many years, and it is hoped that this will continue and grow going forward. The ability of the Council to do more than minimal maintenance is unlikely to change, so volunteers are vital for monitoring and for some “policing” roles. It is clear that local people are willing to play a role in this, and many have contributed to the development of this plan.

7. Marketing and Communication

The Policies are well known by local people, with a surprisingly high proportion having been using the site for 20+ years. It is also known about by people further away and many travel some distance to enjoy a walk here. This suggests that promotion is

already quite effective. The site is also used by a wide range of groups including schools, fitness clubs, mother and toddler groups, language groups etc, suggesting that the health and well-being benefits are already appreciated. Sharing this information more widely would likely encourage others to consider using it too.

8. Management:

As mentioned above, management has been light touch in recent years, but this plan may result in more management activity in the future.

A more detailed assessment of these Green Flag Criteria is given in the table below.

Colour of heading indicates possible grading at present (green/amber/red)

- Red – Does not meet the requirement with major issues identified by judges
- Amber – Meets the standard but with some minor areas of concern raised by judges
- Green – Meets the standard with no concerns raised

If a site is graded red by assessors, the scheme reserves the right to ask the site to suspend flying the flag until they can demonstrate that the issues have been addressed.



The Meadow

6.2 Green Flag Evaluation

1. A Welcoming Place	Issues identified	Action required	Who?	When
Is the site welcoming?	Entrance signs are a bit tired but opportunity to redesign as part of Gala Academy works. Info on accessibility of paths needed and an enhanced all-ability trail to be developed.	Replace old signs. Upgrade circular path and add seats to enhance accessibility. Disabled parking place needed?	SBC/ Morrisons	25/26
Is the site easy to find?	Signs to site will be enhanced as part of Gala Place Plan. Car parking available.	Liaise with Gala Place team	SBC	asap
Is the signage in good condition?	Simple trail marks could be upgraded and QR codes for interpretation.	Liaise with volunteer group.		
Is the site accessible to all users?	Previous all-ability access routes are rather worn and in need of upgrade.	Agree a suitable route, surface accordingly and then promote as such.		

2. Healthy, Safe, and Secure	Issues identified	Action required	Who?	When
Are facilities on site in good and safe condition?	Boardwalk by pond needs upgrading and reducing (remove from rear of pond). Bridges on site need regular checking.	Pond works required.	SBC	
Did you feel safe during the visit?	Most people feel safe, although some are put off by groups of youths, antisocial behaviour, uncontrolled dogs 71% of those surveyed felt safe.	Liaison with school?	SBC// Community Groups / Community Police / Project Officer	
Are dogs being controlled and the site free of dog fouling?	Free-running dogs are encountered and dog fouling can be an issue. 53% highlighted dog mess as an issue	More dog waste bins would help and promotion of better dog control?	SBC/Friends	

3. Well Maintained and Clean	Issues identified	Action required	Who?	When
Is litter, waste and recycling managed?	There are waste bins at main entrances to the site but not within it (e.g. by the pond).	Consider on-site bins.	SBC	

Is there a good Standard of vegetation maintenance?	Grass by pond is mown by SBC operations team, other paths, including the main path to NGH by SBC. Other paths are currently mown by volunteers without a plan.	Agree paths to be mown and let others naturalise.	SBC	
Is there a good standard of horticulture maintenance?	Not really relevant? Grass maintenance is OK although should not be extended into wetland habitat by pond.	As already being maintained	SBC	
Is there a good Standard of arboriculture maintenance?	Trees on main paths are checked for safety every 5 years by SBC.. There are potentially dangerous trees away from paths on the site.	Woodland Management Plan required by Woodland In and Around Towns (WIAT) scheme will inform and help manage this. Funding being sought through WIAT	SBC	
Are buildings and infrastructure such as walls, paths, steps and structures in good condition?	Boundary walls are in poor condition (especially along SW boundary). Fences along northeast side are mostly OK. School boundary fence is OK, but there are gaps which should be repaired.	Address via WIAT and/or liaison with Gala Academy.	SBC/GA	
Is equipment used by the public and staff in good condition?	Picnic table and seat by pond are OK. There is space for additional furniture near pond. Seat at high viewpoint is ok but additional benches would be appreciated by those with reduced mobility. Some informal "tree-trunk" seating areas would be used by school groups.	WIAT application may allow additional furniture to be installed.	SBC/Project Officer	

4. Environmental Management	Issues identified	Action required	Who?	When
Is there evidence that the site is managed to have a positive impact on the environment?	Mature woodlands with a mix of exotic and native species provide good habitat. Volunteer efforts have created wildlife habitats There is scope to enhance an area as a wildflower meadow which would improve value for pollinators/ insects. Scope to improve interpretation of wildlife. Some bird boxes around the site.	An application for WIAT funding would llo the woodland to be brought into better long-term management as well as improving some of the paths and boundaries and site interpretation.	SBC / Project Officer / Friends	

5. Biodiversity, Landscape, and Heritage	Issues identified	Action required	Who?	When
Are heritage and/or landscape features in good condition?	The Policies are the partial artifact of NGH and the grounds that were laid out around it and some of the landscape features remain such as notable trees and some vistas. There are some veteran trees on site which are being impacted by natural regeneration.	Halo thinning of the old oaks and some other notable trees should be carried out asap. The pond could be improved if recommended action is taken.	SBC/friends	
	There are limited records of species from the site and further survey would be valuable	TWIC Bioblitz event?	Project Officer	

6. Community Involvement	Issues identified	Action required	Who?	When
Is there evidence of community involvement and engagement?	There has been good community involvement for many years but recent conflict arose due to different opinions about management priorities.	To avoid future conflicts, this plan will hopefully guide future priorities and allow all interested parties to engage. A more formal "friends" group is proposed and this could be supported by a part-time Project Officer if funds allow.	SBC / Project Officer / friends	
Is user feedback positive?	The recent survey demonstrated that most site users are very positive.	Perhaps plan to repeat the user survey in a couple of years?	SBC/Project Officer	

7. Marketing and Communication	Issues identified	Action required	Who?	When
Is there evidence of marketing and promotion, including events? e.g. notice boards, in buildings, website & social media.	Facebook pages relating to the site have been useful but have recently been used to voice disagreements in an unconstructive way.	Recommendation is that a new online forum is established and managed by the proposed Project Officer	SBC / Project Officer / friends	

8. Management	Issues identified	Action required	Who?	When
<p>It will be managed to Green Flag Award standard and assessed against the Award criteria. It will be managed using a plan which is responsive, realistic and achievable, in partnership with its community, as well as other stakeholders and third parties</p>	<p>There is strong interest from the community to play a role in site management based on this plan and there is also a role for a part time Project Officer to help facilitate this.</p>	<p>Establish a part time Project Officer post. Establish a friends of the Policies group willing to help implement this plan.</p>	<p>SBC</p>	

Overall, in our opinion, green flag status is unlikely to be awarded at this time, but it would not take a lot of effort to reach the required standard.

7 Ten Year Work Plan – separate attachment

An excel sheet has been developed for the workplan and is attached as a separate document

8 Appendices- separate attachment

See separate document

