CURLING RINK AREA:

CRAIGLOCKHART TERRACE ENTRANCE TO EASTER

CRAIGLOCKHART HILL LOCAL NATURE RESERVE

DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT PLAN

2013 – 2016 (DRAFT)

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* 1. **PURPOSE OF PLAN**

This plan supplements the Five-Year Management Plan for the Easter Craiglockhart Hill Local Nature Reserve (2011 to 2016) and works to the same end date.

The plan has been prepared by office bearers of the Friends of Craiglockhart Wood and Nature Trail (FCWNT) in consultation with council officers. It will provide a base for further consultation with local residents and users of the curling rink area.

The purpose of the plan is to:

* ensure welcoming access to the LNR at this important entry point
* improve the aesthetic appearance of the area
* provide a safe weather-resistant path through the area with particular attention to the needs of people with disabilities and mobility problems
* promote biodiversity
* enhance community use of the area
* increase volunteer involvement in maintenance and management

1. **SITE DESCRIPTION AND ASSESSMENT**

**2.1 Site Location**

The site is located at the north east corner of the Local Nature Reserve (See Appendix One). Road access is from Craiglockhart Terrace.

The site covers an area of approximately 900 square metres with a maximum length of 51 metres and a maximum width of 19 metres (See Appendix Two)

The path through the area is a Core Path which divides after 100 yards and continues both to the east to the Craighouse Road entrance and to the south-west to the Glenlockhart Road entrance.

**2.2 History of Use**

Curling became a popular pastime in the area after 1873 when a dam was built across the valley of the Megget Burn to create ponds for skating and boating. In 1887, the Craiglockhart Curling Club was formed and rinks were constructed where the Sports Centre and the Tennis Centre now stands.

In 1901, the rival Waverley Curling Club feued two and a half acres at the end of Craiglockhart Terrace from the George Watson’s Hospital Trust. Several curling ponds and a clubhouse were built and the club flourished for a number of decades. An early telephone system was installed to inform members when the ice was playable. However the club was wound up in 1937 because it had insufficient funds to pay the feu duty. The rink area has not been used for curling since that time.

The land was taken over by the East of Scotland Tennis Association and later by Edinburgh Corporation together with the 8 acres of Easter Craiglockhart Hill which eventually became the Local Nature Reserve. Some land was sold off in the 1970’s to create the Wickets housing development. In 1997, the City of Edinburgh Council proposed the sale of a further 1.21 acres of the former Waverley land to create an additional housing development. The proposal was resisted by the surrounding community who set up the “Save Craiglockhart Woods”campaign (which evolved into the present Friends Group). The Council eventually agreed to abandon their plans on condition that the campaign group raised money to demolish the derelict hotel on the site and to resurface the curling rink area.

The demolition was duly completed and the area to the east of the curling rink was planted with birch, hazel, rowan and gean saplings. The concrete base of the old curling rink had been used as an overflow car park by the hotel and had also been a popular playground and informal football pitch for local children. In 1998 the curling rink area was upgraded and resurfaced with whin so that it could continue to be used as a recreational area for children and as a focal point for community events.

The curling rink area is viewed as one of the most important entrances to the lower parts of the Local Nature Reserve. Informal estimates suggest that 15-20% of visitors to the Local Nature Reserve use this entrance. It was chosen as the location for the flagpole at the north-west corner from which the ‘Green Flag’ now flies. It is also the best access point to the woods for people with disabilities and a Wheelchair Accessible Trail runs to Craiglockhart Sports Centre. A Relief Map of the area designed to meet the needs of people with visual disabilities is located next to the flagpole. Between 1998 and 2011, the area was used for an annual fete organised by FWCNT to raise funds for improvements and developments throughout the Local Nature Reserve. A successful Golden Jubilee Picnic was organised in 2012. There are plans for future community events on the site including open air concerts and sponsored walks.

**2.3 Current State**

Ten years after being put down, the whin covering is now in poor condition. A variety of common weeds (mainly plantain and pineapple weed) have begun to colonise the area. There have been a number of herbicide treatments to keep the weeds under control. The whin drains relatively well but, after heavy rain, there is some puddling particularly at the entrance area and at the exit into the woods. There have been a number of complaints from local residents and other users of the area about these muddy areas and, more generally, about the unattractive appearance of the area.

It had been hoped that the area would have continued to be a focus for play and informal sporting activities for young people. This has not happened to any great extent. There are many more leisure opportunities open to young people today than there were in past decades. A kick around on a patch of waste ground is no longer an attractive option when there are Sports Centres with Astroturf pitches at Craiglockhart, Meggetland, Saughton Park and the Corn Exchange.

A slab path was laid down in 2001. It links the street pavement and the entrance to the woods in a ‘Z’ configuration. Unfortunately, many of the slabs have cracked over the years and have had to be replaced. Some slabs with relatively minor cracks remain and the path has a rather dilapidated appearance. It has been alleged that this damage has been caused by Council vehicles reversing over the slab path when carrying out maintenance or tree felling work in the Local Nature Reserve. The slabs at the furthest end of the path have been cannibalised to replace broken slabs elsewhere so the path has gradually shrunk in length. It is unfortunate that the slabs chosen for the path are ornamental in design with a raised surface. They are not particularly suitable for wheelchairs or people with mobility problems. Many people choose not to use the slab path and instead take a more direct route across the whin area. The slab path has also been criticised for not having the kind of ‘natural appearance’ that would be compatible with an entrance to a wooded area in a Local Nature Reserve.

1. **DEVELOPMENT RECOMMENDATIONS**
   1. **Path replacement and realignment**

The present slab path is neither functional nor aesthetically pleasing. It is proposed that this path be replaced with a simple whindust path.

The technical adviser for Scotland’s ‘Paths For All’ programme has visited the curling rink site and evaluated the options for path construction. Visits have also been made by FCWNT members to the demonstration paths at Oatridge College in West Lothian. Consideration was given to various kinds of bonded path which offer greater durability (but with commensurate costs). On this level site with moderate usage levels, a whindust path was considered to be the most appropriate option.

The path would be constructed in accordance with the specifications recommended by ‘Paths for All’:

* A width of 1500mm with edging at both sides
* Set on a formation tray or bed of at least 100mm on top of properly compacted Type 1 hardcore
* A whin depth of between 6 and 8mm with a cross fall of at least 2mm
* Compacted and rolled until refusal with a double drum vibrating roller
* Filter drainage to direct water away from the path to the westerly downslope with geotextile sheeting in the drain trench to reduce silt penetration

A full drawing and specification for a whindust path can be obtained from the ‘Paths for All’ website.

The path would be realigned to follow a curving route with a short spur to connect to the wooden sleeper steps in the middle of the western edge of the area. The path would continue from the end of the pavement and would be bordered on the west by a wildflower meadow and a small orchard and on the east by a whin area incorporating some petanque pistes.

This new path would:

* Ensure a secure and wheelchair-friendly route through the curling rink area without reducing the space available for community events and activities
* Eliminate, through improved cambering and drainage, the poor drainage and puddling that has caused problems in the past
* Be consistent with the existing whindust paths which continue into the woodland areas
* Be less vulnerable to damage from vehicles and equipment accessing the area for maintenance, construction and tree felling
* Help to provide an aesthetically more pleasing entrance to the woods
  1. **Wildflower Meadow**

There is an area of grass to the west of the path stretching some 20 yards from the Craiglockhart Terrace entrance. The flagpole, the Relief Map and a Notice Board are located within this grassy strip. The trees to the west are gradually encroaching upon the grass and the depth of the strip has decreased noticeably over the years. The grass was maintained for many years by FCWNT but is now maintained (though only to amenity grass standard) by CEC contractors. There have been complaints from community members about the frequency and the quality of the grass cutting.

The grassy strip presents maintenance problems and adds little amenity to the area. It is proposed that a wildflower meadow and a mini-orchard be established as an alternative to the grassed area.

Wildflower meadows have been introduced into many of Edinburgh’s parks and nature reserves and can be viewed, for example, in Harrison Park, Hailes Quarry Park, Braidburn Valley Park, Saint Margarets Park and Cammo Park.

The wildflower meadow would initially be established in the southern half of the grassed area between the Relief Map and the wooden sleeper steps.

At a later date, the wildflower area could be extended into the south-west corner of the curling rink area. At present, this corner is dominated by a large cherry laurel shrub – a domestic escape or a remnant of garden planting from the hotel or the curling rink pavilion. If this laurel was removed, a planting of a woodland edge floral mix or possibly of an edible hedge would be possible. However, cherry laurel contains a cyanide derivative in its leaves and woody structure and the soil beneath the trees becomes poisoned as a consequence. It is good horticultural policy to allow three years after removal before replanting.

A suitable seed mix would be chosen in consultation with Scotia Seeds who are the suppliers for the great majority of wildflower meadows in Scotland. The seed mix would either be a grass and wildflower mix (such as the popular Mavisbank Mix) or a wildflower-only mix (such as Bee, Bird and Butterfly Mix). These mixes contain only native seeds. Scotia also offer consultancy on all aspects of establishing and maintaining wildflower meadows.

In order to successfully establish a wildflower meadow:

* The grass surface would either be removed by mechanical digger (the ideal solution since this eliminates the seed bank of weeds) or treated with weedkiller and rotovated
* A seed bed would then be established with additional topsoil and subsoil added depending on the seed mix chosen
* Sowing would be carried out in the spring (probably by hand given the size of the proposed meadow) and the ground would be raked and rolled
* A grass and wildflower meadow would be cut twice in the first year to kill weeds and annually thereafter
* Some form of edging would delineate the edges of the meadow and provide protection while the meadow became established
* Removal of weeds could be added to the tasks of volunteers on the twice-yearly clean up days
* The Notice Board would be relocated to a more suitable position probably in the area where the laurels presently stand (and ideally replaced by a larger Board which would permit better display of information about navigation, news and events)

There are few places in the lower part of the Local Nature Reserve where people can sit and relax and perhaps even enjoy a picnic. Seating of some kind (perhaps picnic benches) in the area between the two areas of wildflower meadow would be particularly welcomed by elderly users of the area (including the residents of the sheltered housing at 80-87 Craiglockhart Terrace) and by those with disabilities. It would also be useful for schoolchildren carrying out learning projects.

A wildflower meadow, once successfully established, would:

* Help to provide a more attractive entrance to the Local Nature Reserve
* Increase biodiversity and provide new habitats for bird and insect life
* Be an attractive location for much-needed seating for elderly and disabled visitors
* Offer new learning opportunities for all users but particularly for schoolchildren visiting the area (educational learning packs developed for the wildflower meadows at nearby Braidburn Park could be adapted for Craiglockhart)
* Create new opportunities for volunteer involvement
* Simplify maintenance and reduce costs

* 1. **Mini Orchard**

It is proposed that a small number of fruit trees be planted on the grassy area at the north-west corner of the area between the entrance and the Relief Map. The fruit trees would enhance the appearance of the area particularly when in blossom. The trees would, to some extent, shield the wildflower meadows from view in the winter when the flowers die back.

Planting would be restricted to native species - apples and possibly plums. Some edging would be necessary initially to protect the trees until they become established. An underplanting of Scottish bluebells, snowdrops and other native bulbs would further enhance the appearance of the orchard. Similar community orchards have been established at Leith Links and Inverleith Park.

The fruit trees would:

* Provide new ‘foraging’ opportunities for the local community – there are already brambles and raspberries in abundance plus a substantial outcrop of blackcurrants in the marshy area below the pond.
* Complement the long-established and much valued orchard on the Craighouse site and possibly act as a pilot for a larger orchard initiative in the Lower Meadow area further up the hill.
* Improve biodiversity and provide alternative habitats and food sources for mammals, birds and insects.
* Enhance the appearance of the site and create a good ‘first impression’.

**3.4 Petanque**

Petanque (or boules) is a sporting activity which has become more and more popular in Scotland over recent years. There are now 9 petanque clubs in Scotland. In Edinburgh, petanque pitches (or pistes) have been established in Inverleith Park, Leith Links and Rosefield Park in Portobello. Several of these new pistes have replaced redundant or disused tennis courts or bowling greens. Petanque is a simple game with simple rules and has proved to be popular with all ages.

The president of the Scottish Petanque Association has visited the curling rink area and has advised that the whin surface would be perfect for playing petanque. The standard dimensions of a petanque piste are 3 metres by 12 metres. There would, therefore, be sufficient room for three full size pistes playing in a north-south direction parallel to the path and for a shorter practice piste at right angles closer to the entrance (see the plan in Appendix Two).

There is already a wooden sleeper boundary along the eastern perimeter below the ‘Wickets’ houses and this sleeper boundary could be extended along the southern perimeter in front of the yew trees. A sleeper boundary along the western perimeter of the petanque area could be dispensed with since any such boundary would create a hazard for cyclists, would inhibit wheelchair access and would be vulnerable to damage from Council vehicles.

The Craiglockhart Leisure and Tennis Centre has been approached and asked whether they would be prepared to publicise the existence of the petanque pistes to users of the Centre and to make petanque balls available for hire. The distance between the curling rink area and the Centre is about 400 yards.

Petanque playing could be further promoted by:

* Organising a demonstration game or competition to mark the opening of the pistes (the Scottish Petanque Association would be happy to do this)
* Encouraging petanque playing by local schools. Some might choose to purchase their own sets of petanque balls. Craiglockhart Primary School’s Forest School meets every Wednesday in the adjacent woods. Oxgangs Primary School, Steiner School and George Watson’s College are also frequent visitors to the area.
* Informing petanque players throughout Scotland of the new pistes through the Scottish Petanque Association’s networks and website
* Publicising the availability and the potential of petanque through disabled networks.
* Encouraging local street and family competitions through the FCWNT website and networks in the hope that this and other promotional activities could eventually lead to the formation of a petanque club.

Petanque would be a suitable use of the whin surface at the curling rink area since:

* The cost of creating the pistes would be minimal and maintainance costs of the area might even be reduced since the activities of the petanque players would reduce the spread of weeds
* The use would be consistent with the historical use of the site by the community for sporting activities
* There would be no disruption to the site in terms of the underlying archaeology
* There would be no free standing structures vulnerable to vandalism
* The whin area would remain as a community space which could continue to be used for community events such as fetes, picnics and open-air concerts
* An additional participatory option would be created for wheelchair users

* 1. **Rejected development ideas**

During the compilation of this Plan, visits were made by FCWNT members to a number of other parks and green spaces to look at a range of different initiatives. Among the options considered but rejected were playparks, skateboarding facilities, basketball hoops, enclosed mini-football pitches, trim tracks, outdoor gyms, sensory gardens and raised beds. It was considered that these options were not appropriate in a woodland setting and unlikely to be supported by the majority of local residents.

**4.MAINTENANCE AND VOLUNTEERING**

It would be essential to ensure that the curling rink area does not again deteriorate. The proposals detailed above do not require greater maintenance input in the longer term (and may indeed require less) though the establishment of wildflower meadows may require some additional short term input.

FCWNT already organise two ‘Clean Up’ days per year. The major emphasis during these days has been litter picking though this is not a major problem across the Local Nature Reserve.

It is proposed that:

* The frequency of Clean Up days increase from two per year to three per year
* The tasks expand to include weeding of the whin area and the wildflower meadows and removal of leaf mould and tree detritus from the paths throughout the Local Nature Reserve.
* Conservation Volunteers are enlisted to help with these tasks at least once a year (perhaps in the winter when there is the greatest need for the removal of leaf mould). Conservation Volunteers already have a close involvement with the Local Nature Reserve though their focus has mainly been on the meadow areas at the top of the hill and on the pond.
* The schoolchildren from Craiglockhart School who attend the Forest School in the woods on Wednesdays incorporate some simple maintenance tasks into their activities.

**5. PLANNING AND FUNDING**

* 1. **Relationship to Easter Craiglockhart Hill Local Nature Reserve Management Plan**

The LNR Management Plan sets out a comprehensive plan for the preservation, maintenance and future development of the entire Local Nature Reserve.

The plan notes that:

“To ensure the Local Nature Reserve is welcoming and accessible to all, care will be taken in providing good and sympathetic signage as well as maintaining a good path network”

“A high standard of cleanliness will be maintained by regular maintenance and litter sweeps”

Biodiversity will be promoted through habitat management”

“The site will be promoted to as wide an audience as possible” (Section 1.3)

The Management Aims include commitments to:

“Maintain the aesthetic value of the site”

“Provide educational opportunities for the local community, schools and visitors.. … (and to) continue and increase community involvement” (Section 3.1)

The section on Encouraging Responsible Public Access notes that:

“It is important to continue to monitor the condition of all the paths in the area and to identify and arrange repairs/remedial work as necessary or to identify where there is the need for more significant upgrading work and possible funding sources”

This ‘Micro Plan’ for the curling rink area will contribute to the overall aims of the Management Plan by improving access and aesthetic appearance, promoting greater biodiversity and increasing community involvement through volunteering and recreational opportunities.

* 1. **Relationship to Green Flag criteria**

The Green Flag Award scheme is the benchmark national standard for parks and green spaces in the UK. 48 parks and green spaces in Scotland have been awarded the Green Flag. Easter Craiglockhart Hill Local Nature Reserve first achieved Green Flag status in 2008 (one of the first sites in Scotland to do so) and has retained the Green Flag ever since. The flagpole is situated in the curling rink area at the north-west corner.

There are eight criteria for judging a site:

***1 .A welcoming place***

The approach or entrance to the site should be positive and inviting with good and safe access, good signage and equal access for all members of the community.

***2. Healthy, safe and secure***

The site must be a healthy, safe and secure place to use or traverse. Appropriate health and safety policies must be in place.

***3. Clean and well maintained***

Issues of cleanliness and maintenance must be addressed with appropriate policies on litter, vandalism and maintenance

1. ***Sustainability***

Maintenance methods should be environmentally sound and there should be an environmental policy.

1. ***Conservation and heritage***

Particular attention should be paid to the conservation and management of natural features, wildlife and fauna.

1. ***Community involvement***

The management of the site should actively pursue the involvement of members of the community including the provision of appropriate recreational facilities

1. ***Marketing***

A marketing strategy should be in place and the site should be promoted as a community resource.

1. ***Management***

A management plan or strategy should be in place to address the above criteria and should be regularly reviewed.

The Management Plan for the whole of the Local Nature Reserve already demonstrates how these criteria are being met. This Micro Plan for the curling pond area reinforces the overall plan and clearly conforms to all Green Flag criteria.

* 1. **Relationship to CEC Plans and Priorities**

The Edinburgh Public Parks and Gardens Strategy (2006) falls within the overarching remit of the Open Space Framework. The Strategy applies also to Local Nature Reserves. The Strategy is currently under review and will soon be updated.

The six current goals are:

Goal One: To highlight and interpret Edinburgh’s heritage

Goal Two: To conserve the natural habitat and wildlife

Goal Three: To realise parks’ potential in supporting healthy living

Goal Four: To put parks at the centre of community identity and planning

Goal Five: To improve the landscaping and visual appearance of parks

Goal Six: To develop the resources and structures required to implement the strategy

This Development Plan clearly conforms to these goals with a particular impact on Goals Four and Five.

Other relevant Council strategies include:

* The Urban Nature Conservation Strategy which outlines management requirements for specific wildlife sites
* The Biodiversity Action Plan (2010-2015)
* The Access Strategy (2003) which sets out a framework for developing inclusive access for everyone who lives in, works in and visits Edinburgh
* The Edinburgh Core Path Plan (2008) which states “*the aspiration for all Core Paths is to work towards a situation where they* *are all safer, appropriately signposted, accessible and well-maintained”.*

This Development Plan aims to protect wildlife habitats, enhance biodiversity, improve disabled access and meet the stated aspirations for Core Paths.

**5.4 Funding Opportunities**

FCWNT have often, in the past, used their own funds as seed money to lever much greater funding from statutory and external source. It would be anticipated that similar strategies would be followed to ‘add value’ to these proposals. Some of the funding bodies which might provide assistance with the costs of the proposals are listed below:

* The Community Grant Fund of the CEC South West Neighbourhood Partnership has been a great supporter of FCWNT over the years providing funding for major path works, nature trail markers and for a history board.
* The Tesco Community Awards Scheme provides one-off donations of between £500 and £4000 for equipment and resources that directly benefit children, the elderly and children with disabilities in the communities around their stores (many local people use the curling rink area as a shortcut to the nearby Tesco Express store)
* Grow Wild Funding offers grants of £500 to £5000 to groups who want to create transformational wild flower sites in their local area
* SNH Community Action Grants of £1000 up to £20,000 are aimed at getting more people involved in outdoor recreation, volunteering and outdoor learning
* Get it Sorted Together, sponsored by City of Edinburgh Council together with the Edinburgh Evening News, offers up to £500
* CSV’s Action Earth grants offer funding of either £250 or £500 specifically for projects involving volunteers in Local Nature Reserves
* The Central Scotland Orchards Grant scheme offers funding up to £500 to communities that wish to establish, manage and use small scale orchards

**6. COMMUNITY CONSULTATION**

FCWNT have been concerned for some years about the state of the curling rink area. In the summer of 2008, the members of FCWNT were asked, through the FCWNT newsletter, the website, the ‘Canalside’ magazine and through a leaflet circulation, to suggest how the area might be improved and developed.

Only two responses were received. One response advocated the restoration of the original curling rink on grounds of archaeological interest. This was not thought to be feasible. The other response noted the absence in the area of play facilities for children and argued that a playpark should be created on the site. It is certainly true that there are few local playparks. However, a playpark would involve substantial capital expenditure, would impact on the amenity of neighbouring houses and could be regarded as inappropriate in the setting of a Local Nature Reserve.

A further consultation exercise to take these proposals forward would have the following elements:

* Door-to-door consultation would be carried out by members of FCWNT with the immediate neighbours of the site living in ‘The Wickets’ and in Craiglockhart Terrace. A one-page summary of the proposals would be prepared for this exercise.
* The plans would be profiled on the FCWNT website with links to the full proposal
* The one page summary would be displayed on all four notice boards
* Laminated sheets containing the one page summary would be pinned up at the exit and entrance of the curling rink area
* The ‘Canalside’ magazine would be asked to run a feature article about the proposals
* The Community Council would be advised of the proposals and asked for comment.
* Copies of the proposals would be forwarded to local councillors.

The Development Plan would be amended in the light of the various comments received.

**7.DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME**

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **TIME** | **TASK** | **RESPONSIBILITY** |
| **Winter 2013/14** | Scrape back, dust and roll curling rink whin surface  Remove laurel tree at path junction  Refurbish timber steps at first junction  Trim hedge below ‘Wickets’ houses  Crown lift trees to west of grassed area  Start consultation with local community | Natural Heritage Service, CEC  FCWNT |
|  |  | FCWNT |
| **Spring 2014** | Complete consultation with local community  Agree divisions of funding responsibility and submit funding applications  Arrange rental of petanque boules | FCWNT  FCWNT+ Natural Heritage Centre  FCWNT + Craiglockhart Sports Centre |
| **Summer 2014** | Reconstruct and realign path  Replace and reposition notice board  Install boundary boards for petanque pistes  Organise demonstration petanque competition  Publicise petanque within community  Summer ‘Clean Up’ | Natural Heritage Service  Natural Heritage Service  Natural Heritage Service  FCWNT + Scottish Petanque Association  FCWT  FCWNT  FCWT |
| **Autumn 2014** | Prepare ground and carry out planting for Mini Orchard  Plant undercover of bulbs  Provide protection for bulbs and saplings  Winter ‘Clean Up’ | Natural Heritage Service + FCWNT + volunteers  Natural Heritage Service  FCWNT+ Conservation Volunteers |
| **Spring 2015** | Strip out soil in existing grassed area for first phase of wildflower meadow and replace with suitable soil mix.  Sow wildflower mix  Provide protection of sown areas  Further promotion and publicity for petanque  Spring ‘Clean Up’ | Natural Heritage Service  FCWNT |
| **Summer 2015** | Install seating  Weed wild flower meadow  First cut of meadow | Natural Heritage Service or FCWNT  FCWNT + volunteers  Natural Heritage Service |
| **Autumn 2015** | Second cut of meadow | Natural Heritage Service |
| **Winter 2015/16** | Winter ‘Clean Up’ | FCWNT+ Conservation Volunteers |
| **Spring 2016** | Strip out soil in south west corner for second phase of wildflower meadow and replace with suitable soil mix.  Sow wildflower mix  Provide protection of sown areas | Natural Heritage Service |
| **Summer 2016** | Summer ‘Clean Up’ | FCWNT |