



## Newsletter - March 2018

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As we enter our seventh year, this Newsletter is intended to not only report on what has been happening but more importantly to look ahead to what we should now be aiming at. I am pleased to say that we remain in good shape, as shown in the accompanying sections.

From when we started out we have consistently pursued very much the same targets with, as to be expected, varying degrees of success since – a mixture of encouragement and what we still hope is only delayed fulfilment. In 2016 we produced a Management Plan which sets out the main areas of activities which we believe will support our objectives and is an important step in reinforcing our credibility with prospective funders. This can be viewed on our website [www.friendsoftheriveralmondwalkway.org.uk](http://www.friendsoftheriveralmondwalkway.org.uk)

The Management Plan lists in detail all our aims but for the sake of brevity our realisable hopes could be compressed to these –

- To repair the surface of the muddy sections of the path and improve drainage.
- Continue to improve the quality of the landscape, weeding out and replanting as necessary, using work parties with volunteers, to remove and control invasive species.
- Improve vistas of the river, including creating access to the river at Peggy's Mill
- Nurture and further develop the Community Woodland
- To promote the replacement of the current temporary Salvesen Steps with a disability compliant structure.
- To complete the installation of a coordinated scheme of information boards
- To extend public access further up the river towards Kirkliston
- To retain and augment a strong and informed membership base
- To maintain and develop positive working links with the Council's Natural Heritage Service, other Friends Groups, local schools and our partner local organisations.

### **State of the Paths – Mud Glorious Mud!**



The sharp-eyed will not have missed that repairing the Walkway's paths was at the top of our list of aims. Putting to rights the bad state of these is not only the usually voiced top priority of our members but also the area where we have perhaps done the least! This is not to say that we have made no impact. One of our first real successes was to persuade the Council to up-grade the Strathalmond section which was in a desperate condition; this has held-up well. We have also cleared and widened the path on the most-used section from the Boat Club to Cockle Mill and improved access from the Queensferry Road. None of this disguises the fact that the long sections each side of the Salvesen Steps remain a muddy

experience for much of the year (not quite rising to the level of our picture – but getting there).

Improving the Walkway surface is neither easy nor cheap but we are determined to tackle it. Unfortunately, there has always been a reason why this could not be done. The prospect of replacing the Steps has been a perpetual lurking 'spectre' as heavy construction traffic would destroy any implemented path-work.

Therefore it has never been the right time to do this for the last six years. It is now our view that if at the end of this year firm plans to replace the Steps are still not in place that work should start on the path regardless thereafter. The Natural Heritage Service has tacitly agreed to this course of action. We naturally hope that the construction of the Steps replacement will take place and that some path repairs will be part of the job.

## Membership

A strong membership is of vital importance as it gives us real 'clout' in all the areas covered in this Newsletter. We now have 315 members from 195 households - it would be nice to get to 220 households as a next step. Membership renewal notices have been issued. It would be most helpful if members would renew promptly and of course encourage anyone else to join us as well. They can contact us via our email [friendsoftheriveralmondwalkway@gmail.com](mailto:friendsoftheriveralmondwalkway@gmail.com)

We are also very grateful for all the donations we receive, but as we like to acknowledge them it's important that we have accurate contact details - 'phone number and most importantly e-mail address. House number and Postcodes are also required for us to be able to Claim Gift Aid where you've kindly offered it. The Gift Aid provides valuable additional income at no additional cost to you. We are committed to retaining securely all membership information. This will never be supplied to third parties and as a policy only two of our Trustees have access to data.

## Replacement of the Salvesen Steps

The obstacle posed by the Steps to so many, on what is a core path, has been a running sore for a long time – predating our six year involvement. After a six month closure the Steps were re-opened in June last year. The scaffolding replacement is only intended as a temporary measure and its open slats have not met with the approval of all, particularly dog walkers.



The prospect of a disability compliant replacement around the rock face has existed for many years. There have been many delays and disappointments along the way with long gaps between numerous surveys and plans. However, there have been exciting grounds for encouragement over the last fifteen months or so. First, the temporary replacement was agreed with the help of high-level Political and Official Council support. Second, this same support was extended for progressing the preparation of plans for a bypass solution. Third, a substantial sum has been reserved for this scheme. Very recently, authorisation has been agreed for an engineering consultant to prepare an outline costed design to be completed this financial year. It is then hoped that the way will be clear to take the project to tendering stage and on to actual construction. We are most grateful to the Council for this recent progress, particularly to the Natural Heritage Service who have been very active on our behalf. Much can of course still go wrong, but we are more optimistic now than for some time.

## Fish Passage up the Weirs

The RiverLife Project, part of the River Forth Fisheries Trust and supported by SEPA, CEC, the Scottish Government and the National Lottery, are responsible for improving fish passage up the Almond. A major stage was completed in mid-February when the new fish ladder at Fair-a-Far Mill was installed.



This is good news indeed as there have been delays along the way with extra excitement (probably not for the Contractors) when the access causeway was washed away three times! But all's well that ends well.

Our current aim is to ensure that RiverLife properly restore the path and car park which have been in an excessively muddy state for an extended period.

Although work on Dowies Mill Weir is not planned to start until 2019, we continue to put the case forward that the Weir cannot be removed without ensuring that the water level at Cramond Brig is maintained. The project management have assured us that this will be achieved but have until recently been a little coy as to how this apparent contradiction will be resolved. We have now seen preliminary drawings of one option which involves installing a barrier of large stones nearer to Cramond Brig than the existing weir and consultations have been promised once more specific plans become available.

### **Extending the Walkway towards Kirkliston**

Currently, walking further up the river is not possible as the way is blocked on one side by the Airport and on the other by the MOD at Craigiehall. For some time we have promoted a plan to gain access through the MOD site up to the 'green path' by the railway bridge which would then facilitate access to Craigie Woods, Craigie Farm and on to Kirkliston. This we believe would be of significant public benefit. We have surveyed the route, which presents no great problems and been in friendly discussions with the MOD. We hope that there will be a breakthrough this year as the MOD is vacating the site, thus removing the previous security restrictions. Our first aim is to simply clear the way for pedestrian passage – a more ambitious path would entail deeper pockets than we are likely to be able to employ. These sorts of negotiations are not straightforward but if we achieve any success, we will be sure to let it be known.

### **Community Woodland**



Most of the trees have thrived on the rich soil and the relatively sheltered location. The informal hedge along the top of the bank has grown well and we may top the bushes to encourage thicker growth.

The wood chips supplied by the city have been enough for the happy band of volunteers to almost complete the path network. This is important because the paths define the different compartments to allow easier identification of the trees.

Formal access up the slope from the Walkway is by the wooden steps built by John Crutchfield at the Peggy's Mill end of the site. The large beech tree being taken down at the upstream end is where another set of steps might be located in the future but it is a high bank - a possible design is under consideration.

In April or May the weed species through the site will be strimmed to reduce the competition with, and to enable easy access to, the trees.

We would hope to have further educational visits to the woodland area by the primary school children, beavers, scouts and possibly pupils at the Royal High School.

### **Work Parties**

Over the last year our trusty volunteers have continued to maintain the walkway to keep it clear of encroaching vegetation. Some of the clearance has resulted in the need for a bonfire or two. We try to utilise some of the brash for habitat piles which is useful to insects, birds and small mammals but there are times that there is just too much material and no suitable place for habitat piles. The last bonfire, just before Christmas was found to be exceptionally good at reheating mince pies.

Earlier in the year we reduced the soil heap by the boat yard and planted seeds, plants and bulbs. We are waiting to see what thrives and what does not as it is a dark and damp area.

Other work has taken place in the Community Woodland and the area by Cockle Mill, this is reported elsewhere.

The future work parties will focus on:-

- General maintenance and control of the invasive species (this is an on-going battle but one we are winning although will not end).
- We are planning to improve the drainage at Peggy's Mill and build steps down to the river for easy access.
- We have agreement with Natural Heritage to remove some of the saplings along the river bank between the Brig and the Salvesen Steps. This will involve a lot of cutting, dragging and piling. We will let you know shortly when this will be.
- We have asked Natural Heritage if some aggregate could be delivered to enable us to improve the path condition around Haugh Park.

Thanks again to our hard working volunteers who enable us to keep the walkway maintained.

## Cramond Primary P7s

Through a chance meeting last year, an opportunity arose to work with P7 pupils at Cramond Primary to plant a wildflower garden alongside the river opposite the Falls Café at Cackle Mill.

An area of around 60 square metres was marked out, treated to clear it of existing vegetation and (temporarily) fenced off to protect it from people and animals. Before Christmas, Isla Browning helped the children to start planting plants and sowing a seed mix containing plants whose flowers are nectar rich to attract moths, butterflies, honey bees and bumble bees.

The project is part of the 'Me and My World' module of the Junior Award Scheme for Schools (JASS) which involves the P7s, who are working towards their silver award, spending 12 hours 'working for the good of the community and the environment'. This work will create an area which we can all enjoy, and benefit from, in future. As the plants (hopefully) grow, the P7s will be able to observe them and watch what wildlife they attract and learn about the importance of pollinating insects. The project has been made possible thanks to a grant from the Almond Neighbourhood Partnership within CEC.



## Cramond Heritage Trail

FRAW have been working with our partner local groups on the development of the Cramond Heritage Trail. This is now nearing completion. The Trail is intended to raise awareness, appreciation and understanding of Cramond's social and industrial heritage amongst the local community and its visitors.

Orientation boards, fingerposts and waymarkers have been installed. Interpretation boards are awaiting installation including the illustrated example for Fair-a-Far Mill.

FRAW have just been awarded funding from Edinburgh Airport to enable the installation of a further interpretation board to illustrate the area's plant life and sign showing historical information at Cramond Brig.

A Historic Cramond app, enabling virtual exploration of Cramond's history, has also been developed by St Andrews University in collaboration with Cramond Heritage Trust - access via [www.cramond.scot](http://www.cramond.scot) website.

