



Protecting London's wildlife for the future

20th September 2023

Jeremy Prescott
Trustee
The Dulwich Society
94 Underhill Road
London
SE22 0QU

Dear Jeremy,

Thank you for the generous and most welcome donation of £5,000 in April 2022 for Sydenham Hill Wood (SHW) from the Dulwich Society. We are so grateful for the Dulwich Society's donation to our match funding pot which made our Big Give campaign possible and enabled us to raise £22,977 from our supporters to improve the paths in Sydenham Hill Wood. We also really appreciate that the Dulwich Society promoted the campaign through your social media channels and newsletters because it was invaluable for publicising the project to local residents who otherwise may not have been aware of our work or the project.

In Spring 2022, we collaborated on the Big Give campaign because we agreed there was a need to protect the habitats in the woods and improve the paths in SHW. Visitor numbers had increased from 189,646 in 2019 to 343,385 visitors in 2020 and this increase in people had taken its toll on species including robins, hedgehogs, bluebells, and wood anemone. The cumulative impact of lots of visitors walking on areas off the paths had increased disturbance of wildlife and there was visible evidence of the trampling of ground flora. We'd already seen a decline in birds in our monthly surveys, so we knew we needed to act quickly.



By Spring 2022, the woods were suffering from high footfall as this patch of Sweet Woodruff demonstrates

The successful Green Match Fun campaign in April 2022 gave us the resources to start replacing the paths in SHW. Since then, Sam, our SHW Project Officer, has been working with contractors to install the paths with help from our dedicated SHW volunteers. To date we have installed 413m of new paths at SHW, improving accessibility for visitors and helping woodland habitat regenerate.

We have installed the new paths in 4 sections of the woods, focusing on the highest priority areas. The new paths have improved the main path network through the woods and are preventing paths from widening and are reducing soil erosion. They are keeping people from treading on tree roots which can be very sensitive to being trodden on. They are also protecting precious wildlife habitats and during bird breeding season will help ensure birds that nest in the shrub layer remain undisturbed, like robins and chiffchaffs.

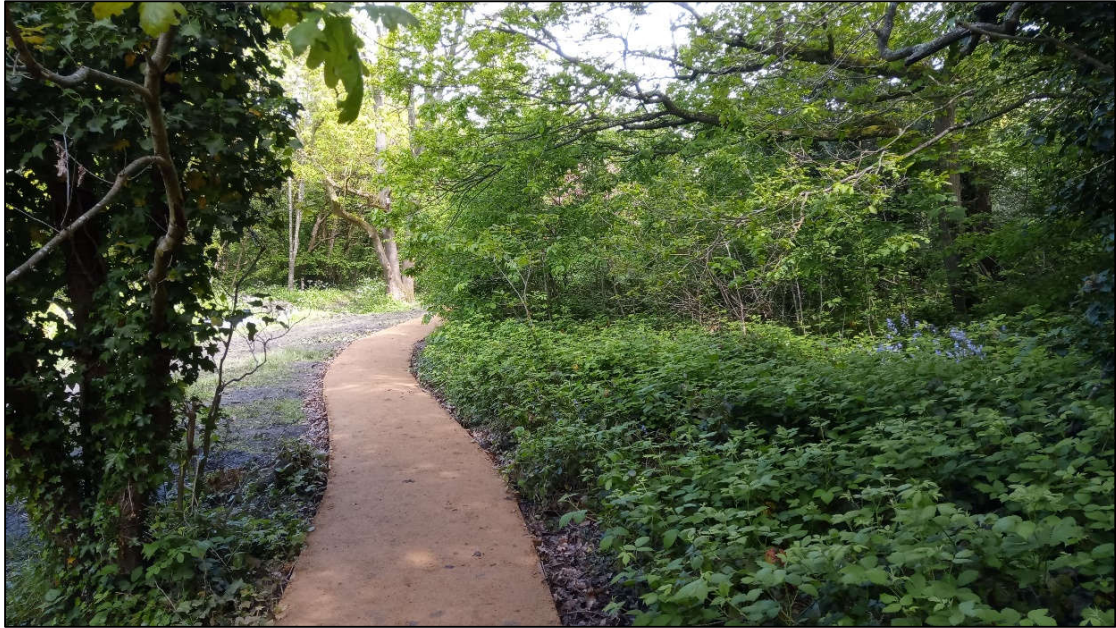
The new paths have also helped woodland plants recover from the heavy footfall and trampling by growing numbers of visitors since the pandemic. Earlier this year we spotted a nice a clump of foxgloves flowering in an area that has benefitted from the new paths. Previously, the section of path close to these foxgloves was very muddy in winter meaning people would often cut around through the area. Now there is almost no footfall there and it's encouraging to see woodland wildflowers doing well.



Foxgloves and other wildflowers are benefitting from the new paths in Sydenham Hill Wood

And we have been receiving positive feedback from our visitors. One visitor emailed us this summer and told us, "I last visited Sydenham Hill Wood 2-3 years ago and was very impressed yesterday with the work you've done there in between and our party of three thoroughly enjoyed walking around. The trails seemed much more open and accessible and there were lots of interesting activities going on explained by signs."

And last winter, a woman walking her dog stopped to speak with our staff and volunteers. She told us that the new paths had meant that her elderly mother, who is recovering from a stroke, is now able to walk in Sydenham Hill Wood again. She expressed her gratitude for making the woods more accessible.



The new paths are improving accessibility in the woods for visitors

Thank you very much for your ongoing support of Sydenham Hill Wood, Dulwich Wood, and LWT through the years. We are really grateful for all the support the Dulwich Society provides and we look forward to working together to enhance wildlife habitats, to protect the woods into the future, and to make it more accessible for everyone to enjoy.

Best wishes,

Leah McNally
Director of Learning, Youth and Communities