

17 June 2024

## **CHILD'S PLAY THE NATURAL WAY WITH THE NATIONAL TRUST FOR SCOTLAND**

- **New nature-led play area, *Little Oaks*, will be the first of its kind for conservation charity.**
- **Natural and sustainable play area created at Drum Castle in Aberdeenshire using storm-felled trees from the Drum woodland and wider estate.**
- **Free for everyone to access, the new play area encourages children and families to explore and re-imagine 'traditional' play in the run up to the school summer holidays.**

Little adventurers and big kids at heart will be able to enjoy a new kind of play experience with the opening of *Little Oaks* at the National Trust for Scotland's Drum Castle on 15<sup>th</sup> June, just in time for the summer holidays.

The one-acre play area swaps traditional playpark equipment for a more natural approach, with swings, slides and rubber matting replaced with an array of giant tree structures and carved oak sculptures to provide kids of all ages with an exciting new way to play.

*Little Oaks* is the first natural play area of its kind for the conservation charity using storm-felled trees from the wider estate to create play equipment in a more sustainable way. The new attraction, featuring a huge tree crown as a natural climbing frame, taken from a felled Lime Tree at Drum, encourages children and families to rethink conventional ideas of play and let their imaginations run wild as they climb, jump and swing their way around the new organic space.

Turning the devastating effects of recent weather events such as Storm Babet in 2023 into a positive, the National Trust for Scotland team at Drum decided to reinvent the play experience at the Aberdeenshire estate. James Henderson, Operations Manager Aberdeenshire South, explains the inspiration behind the project:

"We saw the opportunity following the devastation of the storms in the North East in previous years to make use of the timber and do something different. Moving away from manufactured play equipment and taking inspiration from the structures and opportunities for fun presented by outdoor wooded spaces, we've recreated the sort of natural features and obstacles that you'd find in a woodland, to let kids run wild and create their own way to play using their imagination.

"We tried to put ourselves in our kids' shoes and think like they do to help us reimagine the play area using these giant trees as apparatus to offer something a bit different. By creating this brilliant space, we're encouraging the next generation to connect with nature by highlighting its importance and the fact that it can be a whole lot of fun! This is a new approach to play for the National Trust for Scotland that we hope resonates with visitors and supports our work to engage families in Scotland's natural heritage.

“We’re excited to open *Little Oaks* on 15<sup>th</sup> June, which is free to access for everyone, and we encourage adults to get involved alongside their kids to make use of this incredible space and help them to negotiate the structures and obstacles in a responsible way. It’s thanks to the continued generosity of our members and supporters that we’re able to continue our work to care for, protect and share Drum Castle now and for future generations to enjoy.”

Alongside the tree crown, *Little Oaks* includes more than a dozen natural pieces of play equipment, with a gentle boat, tunnels and a daring 2m high balance beam to provide endless possibilities, excitement and challenges for kids of any ages.

The charity collaborated with local craftsman Duncan Wright from Trees R Us to create the play structures who provided opportunities for the community to get involved and contribute to the new space. A small army of volunteers assisted the Trust’s Garden team at Drum to clear the site during the winter months, shape the landscape and plant an array of trees and shrubs, that over time, will create their own unique spaces for even more opportunities to play.

Laurie Cassells, Visitor Services Manager is excited to see *Little Oaks* in use:

“We’ve really spent time thinking about the design of the one-acre site of the former playpark and the previous plantation of Sitka spruce that stood there. The gently sloping grassy meadow has been divided into three zones, with structures becoming more challenging as you head further up the field. The beauty of designing it in this way is that we can look at what’s working and keep adding in new features, it’ll be constantly evolving to keep things fresh and exciting for our visitors.

“The natural approach to designing *Little Oaks* is a first for the National Trust for Scotland and as far as we know, one of the biggest and most ambitious natural play spaces in the country. For families visiting, it’s a wonderful opportunity to enjoy this special place and create long-lasting treasured memories, and we can’t wait to see and hear that excitement and adventure this summer.”

Other Trust places across Scotland offer a brilliant selection of adventure playparks where young ones can burn off youthful energy during the summer holidays and beyond while taking in the nature and heritage of their surroundings. These include:

- The accessible Adventure Cove and Wild Woodland at Culzean Castle in Ayrshire that mirror the design of the wider estate in miniature and interpret elements of the property’s history through play.
- Weehailes at Newhailes House and Garden near Musselburgh takes inspiration from the Scottish Enlightenment, reimagining the mansion’s library as the centrepiece for mini adventures.
- The Scots Wa-Hey playground at Robert Burns Birthplace Museum in South Ayrshire features Scots language from the work of the country’s most popular poet to educate and excite youngsters through play.

- Brodie Castle in Moray, is home to the Playful Garden that takes inspiration from the Brodie family and stories from the castle to offer a unique space for play, featuring the giant Brodie Bunny, Scotland's largest rabbit sculpture at 6.5m long.
- The Isle Be Wild playpark at Brodick Castle on Arran takes inspiration from the island's rich natural heritage with its rugged appearance fitting perfectly into the estate's woodlands.

The creation of *Little Oaks* supports the National Trust for Scotland's vision to care for, share and protect Scotland's natural and cultural heritage, as outlined in its strategy launched in 2022, and contributes to its engagement objectives to provide access and enjoyment for everyone.

## **ENDS**

### **Notes to editors:**

#### About the National Trust for Scotland

Established in 1931, the National Trust for Scotland is Scotland's largest conservation charity and cares for, shares and speaks up for Scotland's magnificent heritage.

Over the last 90 years the Trust has pioneered public access to and shared ownership of some of the most magnificent buildings, collections and landscapes in Scotland. It cares for more than 100 sites, from ancient houses to battlefields, castles, mills, gardens, coastlines, islands, mountain ranges and the plants and animals which depend upon them.

In March 2022, the National Trust for Scotland launched *Nature, Beauty & Heritage for Everyone*, its ten-year strategy which sets out the ambitions of the charity over the coming decade. From speaking up for Scotland's heritage which doesn't have a voice, to improving the lives and wellbeing of people across the country, and responding to the climate and biodiversity crisis, the Trust will build on its work in recent years to grow its impact and conserve and restore more of Scotland's heritage, as it moves towards its centenary in 2031.

Scotland's largest membership organisation, the National Trust for Scotland relies on the support of its members and donors to carry out its important work.

For more information on the National Trust for Scotland visit [www.nts.org.uk](http://www.nts.org.uk).

The National Trust for Scotland is a charity registered in Scotland, Charity Number SC 007410.