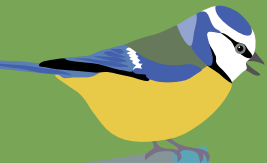


Wilder Community Green Spaces

*A practical toolbox
for volunteer groups*



Welcome to your Wilder Community Green Spaces Toolbox

Our urban green spaces are vibrant places where wildlife and people thrive. Many of our green spaces are publicly owned and so belong to us all. Local communities can, and do, play an invaluable role in bringing their passion, energy and commitment to ensure these vital places are cared for and protected.

This toolbox has been put together by the Tees Valley Wildlife Trust and is based on experiences gained through delivering our Tees Valley Wild Green Places project. It captures some of the voices of green space volunteers from small independent community groups. We hope the ideas will inspire you, that you find the tips helpful, and that it arms you with some of the tools required to make a valuable difference to people and wildlife.

This is not a comprehensive guide about everything to do with wildlife or community action, rather a friendly helping hand to give you some of the basics when starting out. It won't be an easy journey, there will be frustrations and setbacks, but we guarantee that it will be worth the sweat and tears, when you see others enjoy the bird song along nature trails that you have installed, and marvel at bees and butterflies on meadows that you have created.



Sue Antrobus

Sue Antrobus
Tees Valley Wildlife Trust

When I started a friends group I would have loved access to a guide like this. I hope that the toolkit will encourage people to start or join Friends groups, which in turn helps support wildlife and protect the green spaces that are vital not only for our physical health, but also for our mental health and wellbeing. Supporting wildlife and sharing experiences with family and friends outside in nature is a very special thing.



Scarlet Pink

Scarlet Pink
Chair Friends of Nature's
World and Copy Editor



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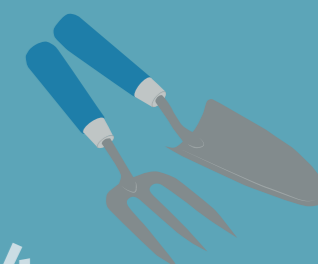
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Tees Valley Green Places project

Why our green spaces are important

The value of community action

Experiencing nature and seeing wildlife should be an essential component of our everyday lives. Not just something confined to coast, countryside and the places we visit on high days and holidays, but also in our towns and cities. Publicly owned green spaces: where we take our daily exercise, cycle to work or play after school, are vital to our health and wellbeing and can also be valuable wildlife habitats.

What is urban green space?

Green space is simply an all-embracing term for all the bits in our towns and cities that are not bricks and mortar, steel or concrete. It ranges from woodlands, copses and meadows, to more formal parks, recreation grounds, churchyards and cemeteries. Derelict and brownfield sites are included, as well as private green spaces – our gardens, allotments and golf courses. And then there are the blue spaces – ponds, lakes, canals, streams and rivers. All these can be connected by green corridors such as road verges or railway embankments. This is also often termed as the 'green infrastructure' in local authority plans.

For wildlife

There are a huge variety of species that have learned to live alongside us in our urban and suburban habitats. Some species are doing better here than in the countryside, much of which is intensively managed farmland. Suburban areas have become a stronghold

for hedgehogs, gardens provide food and shelter for songbirds, and now that the water quality of urban rivers is improving, otters are returning.

In the Tees Valley, water voles are thriving on Middlesbrough's beck valleys, seals bask on sandbanks along the River Tees, and Darlington is a hot spot for the great crested newt, while lizards have been seen sunbathing on Redcar golf courses. With a little sensitivity in how we care for our network of green spaces, wildlife can flourish, bringing nature close to your homes.

For people and communities

Wildlife and green spaces are our natural health service. There is now a large body of evidence that shows that a thriving, wildlife-rich environment benefits both our physical health and mental wellbeing. People with access to nature on their doorstep are able to lead more active, safe and happy lives.

 <p>BREATHING SPACES</p> <p>Places to unwind, an oasis of calm</p>	 <p>HEALTHY SPACES</p> <p>Inviting places which encourage us to get active and connect with nature</p>	 <p>LIVING SPACES</p> <p>Attractive spaces on our doorsteps, where people want to live and work</p>	 <p>MEETING SPACES</p> <p>Communal places encouraging communities to come together</p>	 <p>LEARNING SPACES</p> <p>Natural grounds for lifelong learning</p>
 <p>PLAY SPACES</p> <p>Places where children can have adventures and explore their natural world</p>	 <p>WILD SPACES</p> <p>Places where wildlife can thrive</p>	 <p>CELEBRATION SPACES</p> <p>Gathering places where people come together for events and activities</p>	 <p>CREATIVE SPACES</p> <p>Inspirational places encouraging creativity in an outdoor setting</p>	 <p>GROWING SPACES</p> <p>Productive places that nourish and sustain communities</p>

Community groups and volunteers play a vital role in championing and enhancing the wildlife of our green spaces. Our individual actions may be small, but collectively they make a huge difference, not only to these sites, but also in harnessing a sense of local pride and community ownership.

Why us?

Volunteers, whilst out litter picking, tree planting or running a family wildlife event, are often asked by their friends and neighbours "why are you devoting your time and energy – isn't that the council's job?" Well, yes and no. Local authorities do have a responsibility to manage and maintain our publicly-owned green spaces, and they work very hard to achieve this, despite ever-increasing pressures on their budgets. It's the tremendous added value that Friends and other volunteer groups bring that breathes life into our green spaces. Local people who use these places are often well placed to have the knowledge of the site, its wildlife and the needs of the local community.

What do green space groups do?

Every group is unique, and how it forms and what it does depends on the character of the site and the community it serves, as well as the time and experience people are prepared to devote as volunteers. Some groups set up as campaigning groups: to save a site that is under threat of development, or to lobby for a park that has gone into decline. Other groups focus on practical outdoor activities, such as regular work parties, creating and managing wildlife habitats, maintaining footpaths or caring for community gardens and allotments. There are well-established groups which have formed charitable trusts to lease sites from their local authority, and have the sole responsibility for their upkeep and development. Although most groups are more informal and work in partnership, sharing the stewardship of sites with their local authority.

What your group does may change and develop over time; the key thing to remember is that you don't have to do everything, or do it all now!

Ideas for activities

- Campaigning to save sites
- Identify community needs and priorities
- Input into decision making
- Lead walks and talks
- Research local history
- Record and monitor wildlife
- Carry out community consultations
- Bring in additional funding for improvements
- Regular work parties to maintain habitats
- Carry out litter picks
- Plant trees and flowers
- Create wildlife gardens
- Celebration events that help people enjoy the site
- Making sites more accessible
- Help people to explore wildlife



Getting to know the wildlife

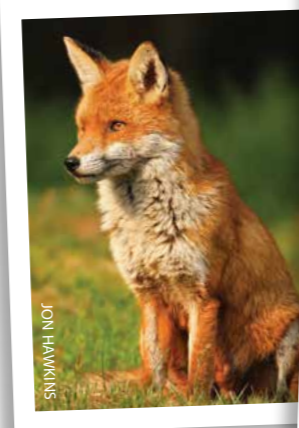
your green space supports

Many volunteers look after green spaces because they want to protect and support wildlife. Your group can make a real difference but, before you get stuck in with the hard work, spend some time finding out what wildlife and habitats are on your site. This will help you make informed decisions on how to improve the areas you are working in to benefit the wildlife living there.

The gardener in you may want to keep areas neat and tidy, but working on a wild green space requires a slightly different mind-set: working with nature, rather than attempting to tame it into submission.

A scruffy bit of grassland may be home to rare plants and insects, and the scrubby area in the corner is likely to provide habitat for songbirds or cover for a family of foxes. An old dead tree covered in ivy may be a nesting site for woodpeckers or a roosting site for bats.

The more you get to know your patch, the easier it will become to consider the species living there before carrying out any work. You certainly don't need to be a wildlife expert, as there is always help to call upon.



JON HAWKINS



GILLIAN YOUNG

Elizabeth Elliott
Member of the Darlington and Teesdale Naturalists Field Club

“ Our group carries out wildlife surveys throughout our area and we are always happy to share our records. We have members who have different specialities: from wildflowers, mosses and lichens through to fungi, mammals and birds. We have helped a number of Friends Groups in Darlington, including the Friends of Snipe Pond and the Friends of Drinkfield, by carrying out wildlife surveys on their sites. This has enabled us to share ecological advice for the care of these areas. ”



Top 5 tips: Get to know your green space

1 Check with your local authority to see if your site has special conservation status, tree preservation orders or species that are protected by law. They may also have information about wildlife habitats and previous management of the site.

2 Contact your local biological records centre and local Wildlife Trust, to see if there are any wildlife records for your green space.

3 Contact Historic England and your local history or archaeology group, to find out if your site has any special historical or archaeological interest.

4 Invite local naturalists to survey your site. There is a wealth of experience amongst local experts who specialise in different types of wildlife. They will usually be only too pleased to come and survey your site and share their findings. A good starting point are Wildlife Trusts and field clubs. They will be able to match you up with local naturalists who have the knowledge to help with your green space.

5 There are likely to be gaps in the wildlife records of your site, especially if it is a small urban green space. This is an opportunity for your group to coordinate your own surveys or be part of a national citizen science survey.



Charlie Davis
Coatham Heritage Group

“ Coatham Green is a rare remnant of coastal grassland, which we saved from becoming a development site. Once it was saved, some people regarded it as a wasteland and wanted to “make it pretty” by turning it into a park, planting trees or flattening its undulating topography. We knew through our monitoring of the wildlife that the green was already an important habitat. Now this has been confirmed with the Green being designated by the Government as part of a Site of Special Scientific Interest. ”



Coatham Green, Redcar

MAGG HADEN

Putting your site on the map

Once you start recording the wildlife your green space supports, you can share your records on national and regional databases. In particular, small urban sites are under recorded and sharing the data will contribute to the overall picture in the UK. It may even help to protect your site from development.

Five citizen science projects for monitoring wildlife

Citizen science projects are a great way to learn more about our wonderful wildlife, contribute to scientific research and gather information vital to protecting and improving our environment. Citizen science is about getting everyone, from experts to amateur biologists, school children or enthusiastic beginners, involved in science; whether it's spotting butterflies, identifying new galaxies, counting birds or collecting worms.

To get you started, here are five fab citizen science projects you could participate in as a group or get the wider community involved.

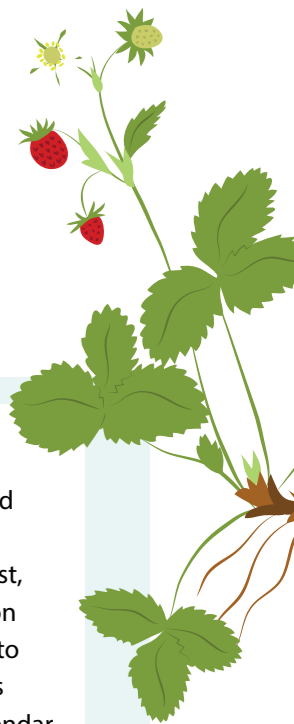
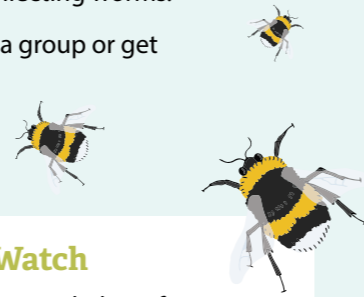
The Big Garden Birdwatch

This nationwide RSPB citizen science project, which usually takes place in January, is a great way to kick-start the year with a community wildlife activity. It is the world's largest garden wildlife survey, with over half a million people in the UK spending just one hour over one weekend counting the birds. It's not just for gardens and can be carried out in any green spaces. Community gardens, nature reserves, parks and school grounds, cemeteries and allotments can all count. Visit the RSPB website for details: www.rspb.org.uk



BeeWalk and Bee Watch

You can find out if your site is a habitat for bumblebees by becoming a "Bee Walker". The Bumblebee Conservation Trust runs BeeWalk, a survey scheme that monitors changes in bumblebee populations, and helps detect early warning signs of population declines. In order to collect this important information, volunteers pick a fixed route of 1-2 km and record what they see on each monthly walk. It takes a little patience to be able to recognise the different species, but you can upload your photographs using their Bee Watch tool and get help from an online community of bumblebee enthusiasts. As well as contributing valuable information on bee populations, watching bees is a joyful way to spend a sunny afternoon! Visit www.bumblebeeconservation.org



Big Butterfly Count

Butterflies react very quickly to changes in their environment, which makes them excellent biodiversity indicators. The national charity Butterfly Conservation has coordinated the national Big Butterfly Count for over a decade. Running in July and August, it is simply a case of counting butterflies for 15 minutes during bright weather. They have a handy chart to help you identify different butterfly species, and records can be entered online or by using a smartphone app. Visit www.bigbutterflycount.org

Nature's Calendar

If your green space is a location that you and other locals visit throughout the year then Nature's Calendar, run by the Woodland Trust, is a great way to record your observations on seasonal changes. From leaf buds bursting to blackberries ripening, let them know what's happening on your patch. The Nature's Calendar database currently contains 2.9 million records and is believed to be the longest written biological record of its kind in the UK. This data is used by researchers from across the world to explore the effects of weather and climate on wildlife. Visit www.naturescalendar.woodlandtrust.org.uk

iRecord

If you have a smart phone with a camera, the iRecord app is an easy way to get involved in logging wildlife sightings. You can register quickly and for free and, once you've registered, you can add your own wildlife records for others to see. You can also see what has been recorded by others. Records are checked by a panel of experts and made available to support research and decision-making at local and national levels. If you are unsure about your wildlife identification skills, you can ask advice on the iSpot website. iSpot is a friendly and free online community who identify wildlife and share their knowledge of nature. Once you've registered, you can add an observation to the website and suggest an identification yourself, or see if anyone else can identify it for you. As your knowledge grows, you could also help others by adding an identification to an existing observation. Children and young people in your group may especially like using these apps and websites. Check them out at www.brc.ac.uk/irecord and www.ispotnature.org

John Bell

Friends of Blue Bell Beck

“Members of the Friends of Blue Bell Beck have been trained in river invertebrate monitoring by the Tees Rivers Trust. The purpose of this is to determine the quality of the beck water by capturing and measuring the quantity of aquatic wildlife in the water under standard conditions. Measurements are made at two different sites, and the sites are given scores based on the findings, which are reported on a national database. Future measurements for the site are then compared with previous measurements. If there is a drop in the water quality, then the river authority will take action to determine the source of any pollution.”



Flowers in the grass

There are many ways that we can breathe life into our urban and suburban grasslands, from modifying mowing regimes to creating flowery community meadows. As well as benefiting wildlife, flowery grasslands are visually more appealing, bringing summer colour and texture into our lives.

There is a place for short mown grass areas. They give a neat and tidy appearance and are important for play, sport and other recreational activities. With a growing public awareness about the loss of rural meadow habitats and an appreciation of the role of pollinating insects, there is an increased desire for having natural, informal grasslands. Due to spending cuts, many local authorities are reviewing and modifying how they manage amenity grasslands. Under-used grasslands are being transformed into colourful and wildlife-rich meadows in response to a public appetite for them.

Every site is different

There has been much media attention on the plight of butterflies and bumblebees recently, but all insects need our care and attention. Around the globe, insects are dying out eight times faster than larger animals – 41% of insect species face extinction, and many face a decline in population. Habitat loss, pesticides and climate change are all contributing factors in their decline.

Ancient grasslands

Some of our urban grasslands are the remnants of rural meadows and pastures that have been engulfed by urbanisation. These are often found surviving in churchyards, golf courses or steep-sided beck valleys. These old meadows and pastures can be rare and special habitats and should be viewed like ancient woodlands, in that they are irreplaceable. At first glance they may not be a riot of colour but they usually have a rich and diverse flora. To restore them to their former glory they may simply need adjustments in how they are managed rather than the addition of wildflower seed mixes. Your local Wildlife Trust or environmental records may have wildlife records of the site or be able to put you in touch with naturalists who can carry out a survey.

Grassland wildlife

Grasslands can be good habitats for wildlife, providing food and shelter for insects, amphibians, birds and mammals.

Flowery grasslands provide nectar and pollen for our pollinating insects such as bees, butterflies, moths and hoverflies.

Longer grasses are food to the larvae of many species of insects, including meadow brown and speckled wood butterflies.

Tussocky grasslands are great for small mammals, such as voles, where they can tunnel and feed on grass seeds and small invertebrates.

Shorter grasslands are feeding grounds for hedgehogs and songbirds, such as blackbirds and starlings that feed on worms, beetles and spiders.

Seed heads of grasses and wildflowers provide food for insects, sparrows and finches.

Damp grasslands are hunting grounds for frogs and toads, who feast on insects during the night.



Meadow cranesbill



Bee orchid

Involving your community

One person's wildflower is another's weed. Long wavy wild grasses with buttercups and red clover will delight some, whereas others will say it looks neglected. The word 'meadow' conjures up a positive emotional response in most people as they visualise long, carefree summer days in fields full of flowers, perhaps with a picnic. The colourful images portrayed in the media and on seed packets can lead to unrealistic expectations.

The reality is that most of our rural semi-natural wildflower meadows are not brimming with showy flowers. Our grassland plants have a subtle beauty that you often need to get down on your hands and knees to fully appreciate. In addition, the vibrant poppies, cornflowers and corn cockles that some people think of are not meadow plants, but are associated with cultivation of crops. These are short-lived annual plants that need annual ploughing to reseed each year. If you are anticipating a riot of continuous colour you may be disappointed by the results of urban meadow projects.

Here are our tips for increasing appreciation and enjoyment of flowery urban grasslands:

- **Communicate with local people** who see and use the site. Consult from the onset and keep communications channels open so that you can respond to feedback and provide information.
- **Add temporary signage** on site to explain what is happening and how it will benefit wildlife and people.
- **Trial a small area** in the first year before embarking on a major change in cutting regimes. This will enable feedback from site users as well as seeing how the grassland responds to less cutting.
- **Retain short mown grassland** along pathways so that they look neat, and cut paths through the grassland so people can experience being in the meadow. Make long grass areas more aesthetically pleasing by having sinuous edges rather than straight lines.
- **Celebrate with meadow activities** to bring your community together to enjoy and learn about their meadow. Organise a teddy bears' picnic or family bug hunt. Host a community art, poetry or photography workshop.
- **Involve volunteers** by having a wildflower planting or seed sowing event. This is a great way to involve your wider community and an opportunity for people to learn more about the plants they are growing.



Paul Cutter
Friends of Fairy Dell

“ We created a wildflower meadow in Fairy Dell Park from part of a large expanse of mown grassland. On the advice of local botanists we chose an area that had more buttercups growing and was secluded, next to the wooded dell. We sowed yellow rattle seeds to weaken the grasses and planted wildflowers as plugs and potted plants. It has taken several years to develop, but is now awash in summer with the yellow and white of oxeye daisies, buttercups and yellow rattle. We have introduced some meadow cranesbill for some pops of purple colour. A few orchids have colonised naturally. One tip is to ensure that you have marker posts around the meadow area, this is especially important at the beginning of the season, as it will prevent the area being accidentally mown as part of the park. ”

Planning your flowery grassland creation or restoration

What already grows there?

- Find out what plants already grow there.
- Are there any wildlife records of insects, birds, amphibians or mammals?

How is the site used now?

- Is the site used now by the local community, for play and sport?
- Look for where people currently walk or run through the area.
- How visible is it from homes, offices and roads?

What are the ground conditions?

- The soil fertility and drainage type
- Is the soil acidic, neutral or alkaline? Light and sandy or heavy with clay?
- Is it dry or waterlogged?
- Note the aspect and slope – is it sheltered, shaded?

What are the adjoining land uses?

Grasslands adjoining other wildlife habitats, particularly scrub and woodland are likely to be a better habitat for wildlife, especially birds and mammals.

What resources are needed for future management?

- All grasslands need management now and in the foreseeable future.
- This will need tools, equipment and labour.
- This will need planning from the start.

Develop your objectives and plans

Are you aiming to establish a long-lasting grassy meadow with wildflowers or a quick area of colour with rapid aesthetic appeal, or something in-between? This will depend on all the information you have gathered – wildlife surveys, how people use the area, what the soil conditions are, what budgets you have and what people in your community would like.

Selecting seeds and plants

Cheap bags of seed are a tempting purchase, they are likely to contain mostly grass seeds and very few wildflowers. Quality seeds and plants are not cheap so spend some time selecting the right seed mix for your site. The leading UK companies that supply wildflower seeds and plants, have some excellent information and detailed advice on their websites about different seed mixes, sowing rates and maintenance. Don't be afraid to contact them and discuss your requirements or seek advice.



Scabious

Enriching existing grasslands

The floral diversity of an existing grassland can be enhanced by overseeding with wildflower seed, planting wildflower plug plants, or adding green hay.

Overseeding

Simply scattering wildflower seeds onto existing grasses will not work. The seeds will struggle to germinate and grow in amongst the existing dense sward of grasses. Ground preparation is key. To achieve this, mow the grass as short as you can and rake to remove any loose grass. Then make gaps in the grassland to create base soil to allow seeds to germinate. This can be done by scarifying the surface, being careful not to disturb the soil too much as this could trigger the germination of dormant seeds of thistles and docks in the soil. Seeds can then be gently raked in. If the area is small, your volunteers can trample them underfoot, or use a seed roller.

Wildflower plugs

Plugs are small plantlets, which can be planted directly into the grassland. These have small roots and can be very prone to drought until they get established. For this reason they are best planted in autumn or early spring into damp ground. They can struggle to compete with tall and vigorous grasses, so if you have fertile soil, choose more vigorous wildflowers such as ox-eye daisy, meadow cranesbill and knapweed. Plant in groups of three to five which will give a natural look.



Cowslip



Common knapweed

Creating grassland from scratch

A flower-rich grassland can be created from scratch with a seed mix of grasses and wildflowers. Proper ground preparation is the key to success. Where the topsoil is very fertile, removing the top 5-10cm will reduce the nutrients in the soil and reduce competition from fast growing 'weed species'. An alternative method, widely used on amenity grassland, is to mow the grass short and spray with a glyphosate herbicide (by a licensed person). Then a seed bed is prepared by raking or harrowing to break up the surface and remove any large stones. Seeds are best sown in autumn or spring with a mix



containing wild grasses. The recommended sowing area of a wildflower and grass seed mix is 5g/m². Rolling is essential to push the seeds into the soil so that they can germinate. If you have a small area this can be achieved by treading in with your feet.

Annual flower meadows

Sowing annuals, such as poppy, corn marigold, and corn cockle is a quick way to create a spectacular display of colourful flowers, as they grow and flower within a year. Whilst often described as meadows they are cornfield annuals which were once weeds of arable fields. They can be a good choice where a quick result is needed. Sowing is best done in spring and they need cultivated ground to grow. The annual meadow mixes

are designed to flower for one year only, so if you want to continue with the meadow the following year you will need to cut them back once the flowers have set seed and cultivate the soil to create a seedbed for them to germinate. After a couple of years, reseeding may be required.

Annual pollinator mixes

These are becoming increasingly popular after their successful use in the 2012 London Olympics. These seed mixes contain annuals from all over the world, selected for their diversity of colour, shape and form, and long flowering season. Whilst they are not native species, they do still provide an excellent source of pollen and nectar for pollinating insects. As with cornfield annuals, areas will need cultivating and resowing each year if a colourful display is to be maintained.



Cornflower



Poppy

David Askey
Stockton Borough Council

“ We have been experimenting with annual wildflowers from seed on our verges, roundabouts and other green spaces in Stockton for a few years now as an alternative to the traditional formal spring and summer bedding. They can look absolutely stunning, as well as providing a food source for insects and they are generally very well received. They do require a lot of ground preparation though and invasive 'weeds' can be a problem – which is why we have had to move some sites after a few years. They are perhaps somewhat less 'wild' than their name suggests – with a significant amount of time and investment being required to provide the kind of display that is traditionally expected in the urban environment. Stockton also has a number of sites managed for natural wildflowers such as hay meadows and rural road verges, and the annual beds are just part of a larger package of how we manage our property for the benefit of wildlife and residents of the borough. ”

Soil fertility

It is much harder to establish a flowery grassland on sites that have fertile soils, which feels counter-intuitive. It's not that these wildflowers can't grow where nutrients are abundant, it's simply that other plants, especially docks, thistle and nettles, do better. Where fertility is high, vigorous grass species such as Yorkshire fog and cocksfoot thrive, depriving other species of light, space, water and nutrients. Slower growing species can compete much better where soil fertility is lower. Trying to reduce soil fertility can be like trying to remove sugar from your mug of coffee. It may be better to choose a different location for your flowery grassland, or consider stripping the topsoil. Nutrient levels can be dropped over time by continuously cutting and removing vegetation.

Yellow rattle

Yellow rattle is an attractive annual wild plant. It is semi parasitic, stealing nutrients from grasses by tapping into their root supply. This has the effect of weakening grasses, enabling wildflower species to thrive. The species is very useful in helping to restore and create new flower-rich grasslands. Its seed is short-lived, so it's vital to get it fresh from a reliable seed company. It also needs to be sown in the autumn as it needs prolonged chilling through the winter to trigger its germination the following spring. Yellow rattle can be unpredictable and doesn't do well in all grasslands, especially where soil fertility is high. For success, read all the advice and instructions provided by the company who supplied your seed.

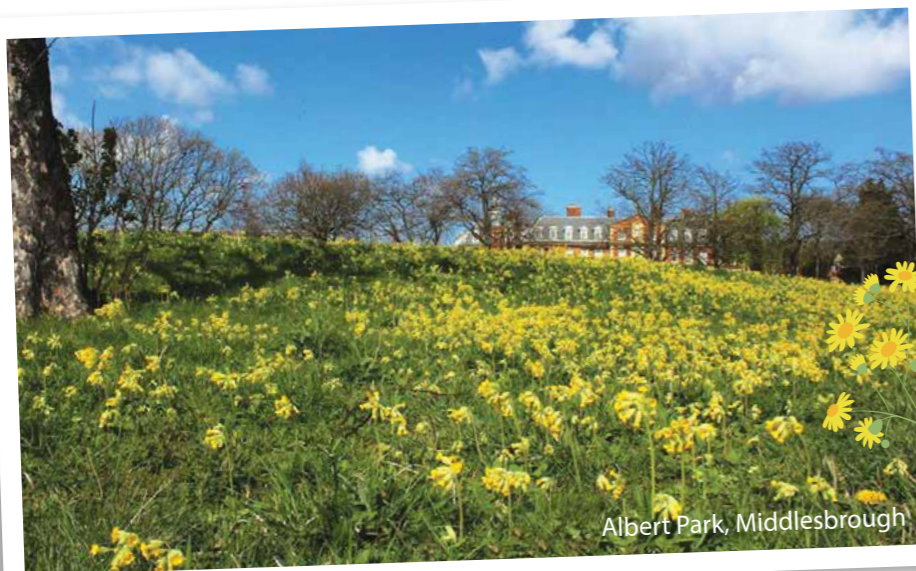


Yellow rattle

Maintaining flowery grasslands

Traditionally, rural meadows are cut for hay, grazed as pastures or a mixture of both. We need to mimic these agricultural practices to maintain a flower-rich meadow in an urban setting. This means some sort of cutting regime, without which the more vigorous grasses become dominant and out-compete the wildflowers. Eventually bramble and scrub take hold. Removal of the 'hay' prevents nutrients from building up and allows light in, enabling wildflowers to germinate.

Before embarking on a meadow creation project, it's vital that careful planning for its future management takes place. Every grassland is different – the frequency and timing of cuts will depend on your individual site, the type of grassland you are aiming for and the budget, equipment and volunteer labour that you have.



Albert Park, Middlesbrough

Katie Metcalf

Chairwoman of Saltburn Countryside Volunteers

“ We care for an ancient meadow down in Saltburn Valley. Being in the bottom of the valley, it is quite fertile so it needs two cuts a year – one in April to knock back some of the more vigorous grasses and then in September after the knapweed flowers have set seed. We arrange for a farmer to cut and bale the hay, which we pay for by various grant funding. With training from Butterfly Conservation we carry out a week-long butterfly survey between April and September, and have recorded over 20 different species. Just before the meadow is cut, we collect seed from wildflowers on the banks to scatter in the other parts of the meadow where there are not as many.”



KATIE METCALF



Tufted vetch



Bird's-foot-trefoil



Selfheal



Ox-eye daisy

Managing a newly sown meadow

During the first year of a newly-sown wildflower grassland, cutting to 5cm in height several times will enable the wildflower seedlings to compete with fast-growing grasses. After the first couple of years this can be reduced to once a year to allow the flower to set seed.

Thistles and docks are good for wildlife, although they may need some control to stop them from dominating the new meadow. One way to do this is to cut them down before they manage to set seed.

Flowery lawns

If an annually-cut wildflower meadow isn't desirable, reducing the number of cuts a grassland receives will still have benefit, especially if the soil is of low-medium fertility. Seeding or plug planting of species that are tolerant of mowing (for example bird's-foot-trefoil, selfheal, cat's-ear, red clover and yarrow) will be visually more appealing than closely mown lawns and will be a boon for our pollinating insects.

Spring meadows

These can provide a good balance inbetween having some beautiful spring flowers and a neat and tidy grass area for the rest of the year. Spring flowers are important for newly-emerging queen bumblebees and other early emerging insects, as well as lifting our spirits as we come out of winter. They can work very well in semi- shade too. Wild cowslips and primroses are a firm favourite, and cutting in late spring allows them to set seed. In more formal settings they can be interspersed with spring bulbs.

Winter habitats

Leaving some patches of rough grassland, cut on a rotation of two-three years will provide food and shelter for small mammals such as mice, voles and shrews. This will also allow many species of insect to overwinter, as eggs or larvae, to complete their life cycle and will also provide a feeding ground for songbird species. An ideal area would be next to hedges, trees or scrub or trees.

All about insects

The joyful sights and sounds of summer include glimpses of butterflies, the buzzing of bees and watching colourful ladybirds. They add colour, movement and a bit of magic to our lives. Without insects, many birds, bats, amphibians, mammals and fish would die out, as they would have nothing to eat. Your group has a fantastic opportunity to support a variety of wildlife, by ensuring that your green space is a thriving habitat for insects and other invertebrates all year round.

Why insects matter

There has been much media attention on the plight of butterflies and bumblebees recently, but all insects need our care and attention. Around the globe insects are dying out 8 times faster than larger animals and 41% of insect species face extinction and many face a decline in population. Habitat loss, pesticides and climate change are all factors in their decline.

Bees and butterflies are easy to love, but some people find woodlice harder to appreciate, spiders too scary, and flies and wasps are often associated with stings and bites. These overlooked and underrated creatures play vital roles in pollinating our flowers and crops, nutrient

recycling and controlling pests. We need them all and your group is in a unique position to pass on information and enthusiasm about insects to others, protect insect and invertebrate habitats and create new areas to support them throughout their fascinating lifecycle.

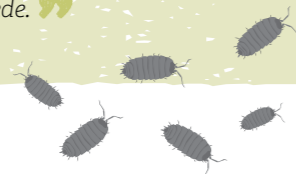
The good news is that together we can really make a difference. Public green spaces in our towns and cities – our parks, playing fields, school grounds, cemeteries and road verges, gardens and allotments – all have the potential to create an interconnected habitat for insects. Making your patch more insect-friendly will make it part of a bigger network of habitats for insects, and will benefit the many plants and animals that depend on them.



Malcolm Cummins

Chairman of the Friends of Linthorpe Cemetery and Nature Reserve

“Linthorpe cemetery has many mature trees that were planted in Victorian times. Middlesbrough Council’s Area Care team are very sympathetic to the wildlife. We have a number of dead trees which have been left as standing trunks. Last year we were rewarded by watching two families of great spotted woodpeckers set up nests and we were able to watch the sets of parents feed their young and see the chicks fledge. On our annual midsummer family wildlife day, we do a minibeast hunt in an old oak tree that fell in a storm several years ago. Now when you lift the bark, there is a city of scuffling woodlice and if they are lucky, the children see a sleeping slug or a centipede.”



Paul Cutter

Friends of Fairy Dell

“We had immense fun making a minibeast hotel with local families and it didn’t cost us a penny. The base and sides were made from pallets that a local company donated. We then cut tubes of different dimensions from waste plastic drainpipes and cardboard tubes. We found the giant tubes from a local carpet shop. We gave the children buckets to collect leaves and sticks to fill them with. The hotel was in a prominent spot in the park and we needed it to look aesthetically pleasing, so we had some timber drilled with holes and covered the top with soil and planted wildflower seeds. We also had to make sure that the structure was secured with wire mesh.”

Julia Cutter adds:

“It was lovely seeing foxgloves flowering on top of our minibeast hotel, it certainly would gain a five star review on Trip Advisor.”



Habitats for insects

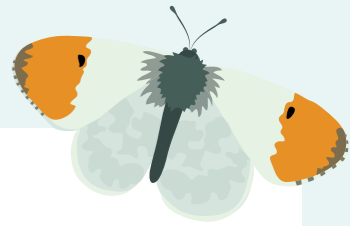
In general, the greater the range of habitats, the more they will support a diverse range of insects. If you have a large patch, aim to create a mosaic of habitats. If not, consider your patch as being part of a network of neighbouring green space.

You don’t need to be an expert to improve and create habitats for most insects and other invertebrates, such as butterflies and moths, worms, snails and slugs, spiders, centipedes, beetles, bees and wasps. You can attract them and give them a home in a variety of ways, from simply planting insect-friendly plants and flowers, to building habitats for them to live. If your site does have special or rare insects, do get advice from local experts.



Actions for insects

Actions to help insects can be as straightforward as delaying the first mowing of lawns, to allowing dandelions to flower, which provide a vital energy boost for queen bumblebees as they emerge from hibernation. Having some areas of long grass right through the summer, even if these are not full of flowers, will provide food for plant munching insects. Leaving some areas uncut throughout the year allows invertebrates to shelter and breed. Hedges, with a mix of native tree and shrub species that are allowed to flower and fruit, are a haven for insects as well as birds. Think about the overwintering habitats of insects too. Many species of insect find shelter in hollow dead plant stems or amongst the leaf litter. For example, ladybirds become sociable in winter and snuggle up together in nooks and crannies.



1 Food for pollinators



Flowers that are rich in pollen and nectar are vital to the survival of bees and butterflies.

Many other insects feed on pollen and nectar, including moths, hoverflies and many species of bugs and beetle. For insects to thrive and breed on your patch you need to consider their whole lifecycle. Whilst the adults usually are not too choosy, the larvae of many insects are fussy eaters and may be restricted to a narrow range of host plants. The caterpillars of the common blue butterfly feed on birdsfoot trefoil, whilst the orange tip butterfly caterpillar focuses on lady's smock and hedge garlic. Think about the overwintering habitats of insects too. Research food plants that will support insects throughout the year and introduce where possible.



2 Constructing minibeast homes

If your site needs time to develop natural homes for insects and other invertebrates, you can build habitats that will help provide food, shelter and nesting sites. From simple bug boxes and wood stacks, to multistorey minibeast hotels and mansions, all you need are some basic DIY skills and tools. There is a wealth of imaginative examples on the internet that you can browse for inspiration. Their design and construction make a great focus for a community activity, and an especially good project for a youth group to tackle.



3 Life in the deadwood



Deadwood plays a key role in nature, and yet it is often treated as messy waste in our urban green spaces.

Deadwood habitats range from the rot holes, dead limbs and rotting heartwood of ancient parkland trees, to the decaying trunks, branches and twigs on the ground. These provide a vast range of habitats for insects as well as fungi, mosses, lichens, amphibians, birds and small mammals. In Britain, there are over 2,000 different invertebrate species that rely on dead and decaying wood as part of their life cycle. Some are generalists, whilst others have very specific requirements.

We need to resist the urge to 'tidy up' our woodlands, parks and gardens of all deadwood. If a dead or dying tree in public places is a safety hazard, instead of the whole tree being felled, try liaising with your local authority tree officer. Investigate how much of the trunk can safely be left standing, and if there is scope for any of the felled limbs to be left on site. Where possible, avoid cutting up a fallen trunk into smaller pieces, but instead allow it to slowly decay naturally. Where this isn't practical, log piles can be considered. Place these in a variety of different places, in damp and dry locations, shady and light, as each will support different types of invertebrates.



4 Community gardens and allotments

With a little thought, community gardens and allotments can be havens for insects. It doesn't need to be a wilderness, it is possible to combine having an attractive garden, or productive plot, and still provide food and shelter for insects. The key is not being too tidy and making sure you provide a range of habitats.

Exotic flowers can be a good source of nectar and pollen, but avoid traditional bedding plants, such as busy lizzie, petunias and begonias, which have virtually no pollen and nectar. Try planting lavender and borage, which bees love. Parsley and coriander herbs, if allowed to flower, are a favourite with hoverflies. Help pollinating


insects through seasonal hunger gaps by having a succession of early, mid and late flowering plants. Pollinator-friendly bulbs that are a good early source include crocus, grape hyacinth and snowdrop. In the autumn, leaves, some seed heads and stems of perennial plants will provide shelter for insects, and the hollow stems provide a dry place to hibernate.

Encouraging beneficial insects, such as lacewings and ladybirds, that feast on aphids, will help eliminate the need for the use of pesticides. A compost heap will provide a home for woodlice, worms, millipedes and centipedes, as well as a damp winter home for frogs and toads.



5 Find out more

Delve deeper and discover more about the insects on your site and how to provide for their needs with the websites of these insect charities below. There are also many small specialist charities that specialise in specific groups of invertebrates, from snails, to woodlice, beetles and spiders.

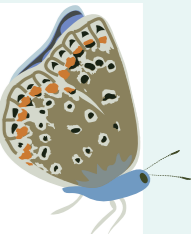
 **Buglife** is devoted to the conservation of all invertebrates. They have guides on how to manage sites for invertebrates, covering a range of habitats. www.buglife.org.uk



Butterfly Conservation is a British charity devoted to saving butterflies, moths and their habitats throughout the UK. Their website will help you identify different species and find out their food and habitat needs. www.butterfly-conservation.org



Bumblebee Conservation Trust is an organisation in the UK that monitors and conserves bumblebees and their habitat. They have an excellent shop with great informative leaflets and guides for adults and children. www.bumblebeeconservation.org



Ponds

and other watery habitats

Our ponds, wetlands, streams and rivers pulse life into our towns and cities. They can be an oasis for wildlife, providing corridors and stepping stones for a multitude of species through our urban environment. They are also a magnet for people: places of beauty, peace and tranquillity. Ponds and lakes are a visual focus in parks and nature reserves. Streams and rivers offer green walking routes where we may catch a rare glimpse of a kingfisher, or stop to watch swans gliding with their family of cygnets. Whilst the water quality of our rivers has improved in past decades, along with ponds, they are fragile habitats that need careful management to ensure that they provide healthy homes for wildlife.

The ecology of ponds

Ponds may be small, but they punch above their weight in terms of wildlife, supporting a multitude of freshwater plants and animals. They are bursting with invertebrate life: damselflies, dragonflies, mayflies, pond skaters, snails and water beetles, which in turn provide food for amphibians, birds and fish. They are also important habitats for frogs, toads and newts to breed in.

Many people have their vision of an idealised classic pond; one with lots of open water, fringed with reeds, a few waterlilies and a family of ducks. Ponds are much more complex and diverse habitats than that.

They are dynamic habitats that change over time through a process of ecological succession. Starting with open water, wetland plants and animals soon colonise. Over a period of years, the pond will steadily lose the open water as vegetation becomes established. Trees

such as willow and alder gain a foothold, drying out the area until eventually the pond disappears altogether. This is a natural process. All of these successional stages are valuable, supporting different wildlife species.

Some shallow ponds are seasonal, drying out during the summer months, and then there are shady ponds, surrounded by trees in woodlands. These ponds have specialised wildlife and, although may not look as attractive as the 'classic pond' they are important too.

Management of ponds

The ideal scenario is to have a network of ponds in a locality, of different types and various stages of succession. Digging out a vegetated silted pond should only be done after careful consideration of other options. If there is a space to dig another new pond nearby, this will result in a more valuable range of habitats.

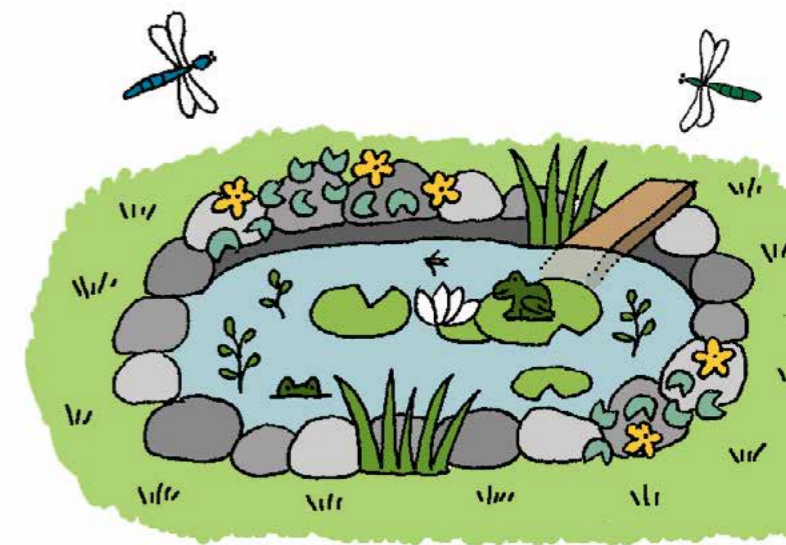
Where a pond is the focal amenity feature of a site, there will be a need for continuous management to prevent natural succession and to retain open water. It is vital to have wildlife data on your pond to inform how it should be cared for, as often sudden changes in the management, such as deepening or silt removal, can have a disastrous effect on wildlife. Phased pond works over a number of years by limited management will define pond zones, with areas that can be managed in rotation over a long period. Excessive disturbance or removal of silt may completely destroy a population of invertebrates, or disturb hibernating amphibians.

Digging out pond vegetation and silt is heavy and messy work. Hiring a machine and operator is often the best option. It is important to have an experienced contractor who is empathetic to wildlife, and ensure that they are well briefed and supervised. Tracked machines with a long reach minimise ground damage. Desilting can be an opportunity to reprofile part of a pond. The shallow water areas in a pond are usually be much richer in wildlife than deeper water areas, so having plenty of these, and a wide variety of depths will increase the diversity of microhabitats for wildlife.

Creating new ponds

In the last century, more than half of all ponds in the UK countryside have been lost. Creating new ponds in our towns and cities can help to replace some of these habitats. If your planned pond is small and in a school nature area, allotment or community garden, there are numerous guides on the design of these 'garden wildlife' ponds. Butyl rubber is the usual choice for a liner. It is vulnerable to being damaged, so it is only suitable for areas where public access is restricted as it can be easily vandalised. A Wildlife Trust booklet on how to build a pond can be downloaded at: www.wildlifetrusts.org/actions/how-build-pond

When planning a new wildlife pond, its location and future upkeep need careful consideration. Avoid the temptation to locate it in an existing damp grassland or hollow as this may already be a valuable habitat. Ponds on watercourses also tend to get silted up more quickly. Digging a test hole to see if it holds water is a good idea before excavation.



Working within the law

Do a bit of research about the rules and regulations on environmental protection, so that your conservation doesn't unwittingly break the law and damage wildlife habitats.

- If you are working on rivers or streams: check with the **Environment Agency** as you may need to apply for consent from them before you start. This is because watercourses are fragile ecosystems, and working on one section may cause considerable repercussions on flooding and water flow and on habitats downstream. This includes bank work such as strimming back vegetation or using any weed controlling herbicide. Email: enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk
- If your pond contains protected species, such as great crested newts or water voles (species listed on Schedules 5 and 8 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act), then you will need to obtain statutory consent from **Natural England** to ensure that any work will not harm the species concerned. If you are unsure if they are present, check with your Wildlife Trust for records or commission a survey. Email: wildlife@naturalengland.org.uk
- Releasing fish into ponds or other water bodies is illegal unless you have consent from the **Environment Agency**. This doesn't apply to garden ponds which have no connection to other water bodies so fish are not able to escape. www.environment-agency.gov.uk



Water quality

Water quality is the most important factor in determining how good a pond or watercourse is for wildlife. Unfortunately, water is easily affected by pollution. In rural areas this can be from pesticides and fertilisers in the run-off from agricultural land. Too many nutrients in the water stimulates the growth of algae, depleting the water of oxygen, which in turn limits the diversity of pond invertebrates. In urban areas, a common cause is oil and salt from road drains, or grey water from misconnected household drains, industrial pollution incidents or occasional sewage problems, especially after heavy rains. Materials dumped in watercourses can also be hazardous to wildlife.

Report any pollution incidents to the **Environment Agency Incident hotline: 0800 80 70 60** (24 hour service)

As a volunteer group, you can check the health of your pond, lake and watercourse without the need any scientific background or expensive kit. Invertebrates living in the water can tell us a great deal about how polluted the water may be. Some species struggle to survive in polluted waters, while others are more tolerant. This makes them a useful 'biological indicator'. For ponds, the OPAL water survey provides clear methods and help with identifying invertebrates. For rivers and streams, you can take part in the Riverfly Recording Scheme. By carrying these surveys out periodically, you can monitor the health of your waterbody so that the cause of any problems can be tackled.



Invasive non-native species

Invasive plants and animals from all over the world have been introduced accidentally to British waters. Some non-native plant species can cause problems in our nutrient rich ponds and watercourses. They can grow rapidly, forming dense mats in water, depleting oxygen and light and cause declines in the numbers of fish and other aquatic species.

Japanese knotweed (*Polygonum cuspidatum*) and giant hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*) are two plants species that are causing problems on our river banks and wetlands. Five water plants are of particular concern and they are now illegal to be sold in the UK: New Zealand pygmyweed (*Crassula helmsii*), floating water fern (*Azolla filiculoides*), floating pennywort (*Hydrocotyle ranunculoides*), water primrose (*Ludwigia spp.*) and parrot's feather (*Myriophyllum aquaticum*).

Seeds and tiny fragments of these plants can be transferred between ponds and into rivers. Ponds in areas of public access are very vulnerable due to the inadvertent introduction of invasive species caused by people releasing plants and animals into the wild from their garden ponds. In addition, accidental transfer can occur through fishing gear, and the footwear and tools of people carrying out wildlife surveys or carrying out maintenance work. The release of just a tiny fragment of plant can establish a population that can choke an entire pond or waterway.

It is vital to remove non-native plants as soon as they appear and not wait until they cause a problem, as by that time removal is often not possible. Prevention is better than cure. The Stop the Spread Campaign advocates the 'Check, Clean, Dry' approach when working on waterways (see overleaf for more information).



Ducks, geese and swans

A family outing to feed the ducks is a popular activity, enjoyed by all generations. It gives people, especially young children wonderful close encounters with birds and can start a lifetime love and respect for nature. However, most people are now aware that feeding bread to water birds is not a healthy diet. Uneaten bread causes algal blooms, allows bacteria to breed and attracts rats and other vermin.

For popular ponds and lakes, excessive feeding with any food can will attract more birds than the pond can happily support. Very high densities of geese and ducks will result in them stripping the pond of plants. Their droppings also increase the organic content of ponds resulting in a visually unattractive muddy pond of green and soupy water, devoid of plants, and making poor habitats for other pond life.

If this is an issue in your ponds, the Canal and Rivers Trust campaign 'Keeping our ducks healthy' has some family-friendly information to help your group communicate the problems and

encourage people to act responsibly. Planting some duck-resistant marginal vegetation such as the pond sedge, flag iris and reedmace, which are normally quite invasive, may help to protect pond margins.



Murky green water and algal blooms

Murky green water is usually caused by high nutrient levels in the water. This can lead to prolific growth of algae during warm summer months. Identifying the source of the nutrients is the key to solving the problem. If the pond is new, especially if it has been filled with mains water high in phosphates and nitrates, the algal population will decline as the nutrients are used up, or as other plants begin to grow. Do not change the water, as the same problem will recur. In established ponds, sudden algal growth may be the result of organic matter from pollution, high fish or waterfowl population. Common duckweed provides shelter for spawning amphibians and food for water creatures and ducks, but it can also be a problem as it grows very rapidly when nutrient levels are high. Barley straw is a simple method of reducing algal growth. Waterlogged, decomposing barley straw gives off a substance which inhibits algal growth, but does not damage other pond organisms.

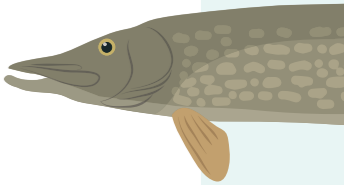
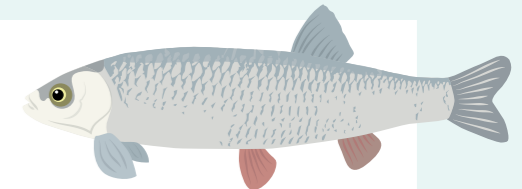
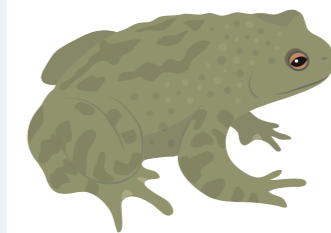


Fish

Angling in rivers, lakes and ponds is one of the most popular sports in the UK. Many ponds have been created for anglers and are stocked with fish and provide attractive features in the landscape. If the purpose of a pond is principally for wildlife, adding fish can upset the delicate ecological balance of the pond. Some species, such as the common toad, can live alongside fish, whereas others, including newts, cannot easily tolerate fish. If fish numbers are high, especially non-native, bottom-feeders, such as mirror carp and goldfish, they also stir up silt, add nutrients to the pond with their faeces and eat submerged water plants. They can decimate the populations of invertebrates.

For ponds where angling is important: creating undisturbed, shallow areas which will develop stands of emergent vegetation provides sanctuaries for invertebrates as well as nursery areas for young fish, which would be eaten by fish. The vast majority of anglers are nature lovers and conservationists. If discarded line, hooks and

litter are a problem, contact your local angling club, as they may be able to offer help and advice.



Working safely

Keeping yourself and your volunteer team safe is a priority. In addition to reading our *Staying Safe* section (page 40) there are the additional hazards associated with water that you need to be aware of, so you can put in measures to reduce the risks of accident, infection and injury. Infection from waterborne diseases can pose a health risk. Weil's disease is a bacterial infection carried in rat urine. To reduce the risk of infection, protect any cuts or grazes with waterproof plasters before working. Wash hands in hot soapy water before eating after contact with the water whilst working.

- **Drowning** can occur even in shallow water. It can be difficult to estimate the depth of the water, while mud and silt or steep banks can prevent you easily getting to safety. Never work alone in or near water, always have some people on the bank, with ropes, poles or grab lines to hand.
- **Hidden hazards** such as rusty metal or glass, can lurk under the surface of the water or in the mud.
- **Pollution** in the water can make you ill. This can be chemicals, sewage or blue-green algal blooms. Make sure you get the water quality tested if you are unsure and wear personal protective equipment (PPE).

David Preston
Chair, Friends of Maidendale
Fishing & Nature Reserve

“Maidendale is both a Local Nature Reserve and a place where people can enjoy fishing. When the area was first landscaped in 2002, two large ponds for angling were excavated, and platforms to act as fishing pegs built. Then a series of smaller ponds of all shapes, sizes and depths were dug. These were allowed to colonise naturally with plants and they are now full of aquatic life, especially dragon and damselflies, and a healthy population of great crested newts. We generally let natural succession take its course, digging new ponds to add to the network. The large pond has needed excavation work to ensure that it retains open water for fishing – it's all about balance.”



DAVID PRESTON

More information



The **Freshwater Habitats Trust** works to protect freshwater life for everyone to enjoy. Their advice on the management and creation of ponds is based on decades of rigorous scientific research. This is summarised in a series of excellent information sheets. www.freshwaterhabitats.org.uk



The Rivers Trust is an umbrella organisation for 60 Local Rivers Trusts covering England. These community-led charities are an excellent source of local information and advice on rivers and other watercourses. www.theriverstrust.org



The **Riverfly Partnership** runs the Riverfly Recording Scheme, which is a valuable tool to record and monitor the health of our rivers and streams. www.riverflies.org



OPAL (The Open Air Laboratories) is a UK-wide citizen science initiative that allows you to take part in hands-on research in our natural environment. Their water survey has now finished, but survey resources and identification guides can still be downloaded. It is well worth checking out their website for other citizen science projects too. www.opalexplornature.org/watersurvey



The **Be Plant Wise** and the **Check-Clean-Dry** campaigns provide information and advice to help reduce the spread of invasive non-native plant species in ponds and water courses. www.beplantwise.direct.gov.uk
www.nonnativespecies.org/checkcleandry

Friend or foe?

Learning to love our weeds

When it comes to our green spaces and nature reserves, it's important to think of them first and foremost as vital wildlife habitats. Nettles, brambles and thistles are amongst the native plant species that are commonly regarded as weeds. However, they are an essential part of our native flora, and support a wealth of wildlife.

The following information on the wildlife value of some of our common 'weed' species is designed to help your group come up with a balanced approach. Then even the most lopper-happy volunteers will be able to view these plants in a positive light. Sometimes 'weedy' species can become invasive if left unchecked. Here we have some tips on their control and how to prevent them taking hold in the first place.

The use of herbicides

The Wildlife Trust advocates environmentally-friendly weed management and seeking alternatives to the use of herbicides where possible. Herbicide is part of the weed control strategy for most local authorities, due to the pressure to reduce costs, and the expense that the manual removal of weeds would incur.

Whilst anyone can go into a garden centre and buy herbicides for use in their garden, the use of herbicides in public green spaces comes under UK pesticide legislation. This means that there are strict rules around their use and only people who have obtained licences through training can apply them. Our general advice is to leave herbicide usage to public bodies or wildlife and recreational charities, who have the expertise and licences.

Make use of your weeds

If nettles and brambles are a key feature of your site, you could celebrate them with community foraging and cooking activities. Nutritious nettle soup is easy to make and has proved a hit at community events in the Tees Valley, even amongst children and teenagers. Other activities for families and youth events are making nettle string and natural dyes. In autumn, foraging for blackberries is especially popular with all ages. Make blackberry smoothies and ice lollies, as well as the more traditional apple and blackberry pie. You can download recipes and activity ideas from the Wildlife Trust's Watch website (www.wildlifewatch.org.uk).

Scarlet Pink

Friends of Nature's World

“Nature's World is a wonderful mix of formal gardens and wildlife areas. As the land was left for a few years before volunteers began working there, nature had taken over. In some areas we have rare wildflowers growing through cracks in the paths and the entire site is alive with a variety of wildlife. We made the decision as a group not to attempt to get it back as it once was, and to colour code the areas into formal, semi-wild and wild which means volunteers can choose the way they prefer to work.”



1 Nettles

The stinging power of nettles makes them unpopular with children (and people wearing shorts) but they are a magnet for wildlife. Nettles support over 40 species of insect, including the caterpillars of the small tortoiseshell and the peacock butterfly. In spring, ladybirds and blue tits feed on aphids found amongst nettle patches. In late summer, nettles produce vast quantities of seeds which are food for the house sparrow, chaffinch and bullfinch.

No one wants their whole site to be covered in nettles, but, if you are able to leave some patches, do so in a sunny area, as these are more attractive to insects than shady areas. In areas where they do need to be removed, repeated cutting will

eventually weaken the plants. Although it is time consuming, digging and uprooting nettles is effective if you have a small area, such as in a community herb garden.



TAMMAY SARA ANDREWS

2 Thistles

Our much maligned thistles provide an important floral resource for pollinating insects. Many other insect species munch on thistle leaves, stems and seed heads. The downy thistle seeds are favoured by siskins, greenfinches and other seed-eating birds. Thistle seeds can make up to 40% of the diet of goldfinches.

We have several different species of thistle in Britain. It is the spear and creeping thistle that can be invasive, whereas other species are unlikely to be a problem. If thistles do become invasive on your site, they can be kept in check. Spear thistle is a good coloniser of disturbed ground. Its spread can be prevented by reducing the availability of the bare ground that it needs for its seeds to germinate. It can be uprooted and this is easiest when done in spring when its rosettes are small and the ground is soft. This method

is not effective for creeping thistle, which can regrow from just a small amount of root in the soil. This can be controlled by repeated cutting before it sets seed, which will gradually reduce the plant's vigour.



BOB COYLE



SCOTT PERREK

3 Brambles

Bramble patches are a wildlife haven and we need to make room for this under-appreciated species in our towns and cities, as well as the countryside. In spring, the five petalled open flowers of bramble produce a glut of nectar and pollen for a throng of pollinating insects. Robins, wrens and blackbirds are amongst the many different species of songbird that find protection for their nests in its spiny thickets. In autumn, the blackberry fruits provide a feast, not only for songbirds, but also for mice, birds, foxes and even badgers. Come winter, birds and mammals find shelter, as well as some insects who hibernate in the hollow stems of bramble.

Bramble is a natural understory in many woodlands and should generally be left. On grasslands and heathland sites that support rare assemblages of plants, control may be needed. Bramble's vigorous growth and extensive root system make it hard to remove by digging up, even from a small area. Regular cutting will be required. If you have a large area this is best done on a rotational basis, so that no more than half the area is cut in any one year, leaving part as an undisturbed refuge. On urban green sites that back on to people's gardens, bramble along a fence line is a natural deterrent to burglars, and therefore may be welcomed by the neighbours.



SCOTT PERREK



AMY LEWIS

4 Ivy

Our humble ivy is also a plant that divides people. It is valued by conservationists for providing an essential habitat for wildlife, whilst many others view it as a rampant weed that smothers and strangles trees. Contrary to popular belief, ivy is not a parasitic plant. It is rooted in the soil, from which it takes water and nutrients. What some consider roots are masses of tiny adhesive suckers that ivy uses for support as it climbs. These suckers do not penetrate the bark or take any nutrients from the tree.

During the winter, its intertwining, dense foliage on trunks offers shelter for birds and hibernating butterflies. In spring it provides ideal nesting locations for song birds such as robins, blackbirds and wrens. Bats can roost in its nooks and crannies during the day.

Ivy flowers may look inconspicuous, with their tiny five green petals, but they produce nectar and pollen in profuse amounts. Ivy flowers late in the year, so it is a valuable source of nectar for insects, including bumblebees, hoverflies and butterflies, when nectar is in short supply. It fruits in late winter and early spring, providing much needed fuel for birds. Ivy berries have a high fat content, so they are an especially nutritious food during this lean period.

Ivy should be left on trees to support biodiversity. The Woodland Trust and the RHS, both respected national charities, don't advocate the wholesale removal of ivy from trees, especially in woodlands. A heavy growth of ivy in the canopy of a tree can reduce its ability to withstand wind. Therefore, trees bordering a woodland footpath that has regular usage, or in a well-used park, may need the ivy removing so that the tree's health, and ultimately the risk, can be correctly assessed.



HERBIE GREGORY



AMY LEWIS

5 Ragwort

Common ragwort is a controversial plant. You only have to Google it online to see the conflicting opinions expressed. These range from it being a dangerous weed that needs eradicating, to those who are campaigning for it as an ecologically important wildflower.

Ragwort is important for wildlife. Over 30 species of insect are confined to feeding on it, eating nothing else. This includes the striking caterpillars of the cinnabar moth. Its abundant late summer flowers are also a significant source of nectar for bees and butterflies.

Ragwort is classed as an 'injurious' weed under the 1959 Weed Act and the 1983 Ragwort Control Act. Ragwort contains alkaloids that are poisonous to livestock if eaten. The living plant is usually avoided by them but it is more palatable to them when it is dry, such as in hay. Ragwort does need to be controlled in pastures and hay meadows, where animals graze. However, there are concerns raised by the insect charity Buglife and the Friends of the Earth, that confusion over the interpretation of the weed act has caused unnecessary panic about the species, and this has resulted in what they consider to be indiscriminate eradication.

It is beyond the scope of this guide to cover the detail of ragwort control, we advise that you equip yourself with knowledge from reliable websites, including that of the government department DEFRA. This will help you to decide if eradication is needed on your site and, if so, the best method to achieve this.



THE WILDLIFE TRUSTS



THE WILDLIFE TRUSTS

Getting started

Forming a Friends Group is the most popular way that local people come together to help care for their local green space – there are over 5,000 in the UK!

By carrying out regular practical tasks and organising community events, Friends Groups provide important opportunities for volunteers to work with their local authority to influence how their green space is managed.

However committed you are as an individual, there are limits to what you can achieve as a lone voice. By getting together with other people in your community, your local green space can benefit from a shared enthusiasm and energy.

This section will guide you through possible ways of starting and developing a Friends Group so you don't get too tied up with mechanics and administration, and can devote your time and energy to getting things done instead. There are many different approaches to group working, and every green space and community is unique.

Where do you start?

By chatting to neighbours and people who you see regularly using the green space you are likely to find like-minded people who are also keen to make a difference. If their response is positive, you can then contact your local council, who are likely to be able to help you to get started.

Holding an open community meeting is one way to get the ball rolling. A less formal approach of generating interest and enthusiasm is to host an informal outdoor gathering or activity with refreshments. This is likely to attract a wider range of people than a sit-down meeting, and be a more relaxed way for people to pop along and chat over tea and cake. You can discover what people think is needed, and how they would like to be involved, by doing a simple community consultation (see page 30).

If you find the idea of organising a big meeting daunting, then start small and use the snowballing method. You only need half a dozen people to sit and have a chat over coffee, and if successful, each one could invite someone they think would be interested to the next meet-up.

Can we be an informal group?

If you are a new or small group and can run without money or insurance there is no need to rush into formalising meetings, rules and processes that require a constitution. As your group develops and becomes more ambitious, it may be time to consider the benefits of having a more formal structure.

Are there benefits to being constituted?

Adopting a constitution and opening a bank account are important if your group intends to raise funds and handle money. A constitution is a short document that sets out your group's aims and objectives and how the group is managed and meetings run. Being a constituted group has many benefits: it enables everyone to understand the role of your group, provides a mechanism for decision making and resolving disputes, and opens up opportunities to apply for grants. It will also help you gain credibility with other organisations, and puts you in a stronger position to discuss with your local authority on how your green space is managed effectively.



Constitutions don't need to be long or complicated documents. There are plenty of model examples online that can be used as a guide. Rather than simply cutting and pasting from other green space groups, it is worth taking a bit of time to discuss this to gain a consensus amongst your embryo group, and develop some ideas on your group's vision, aims and objectives. This may also be a good opportunity to adopt a vulnerable adult and child protection policy (page 83).

Do we need to become a registered charity?

Friends Groups do not need to register as charities, and many small groups choose not to. If your group intends to raise large amounts of money and manage big capital projects it is worth investigating. The Charity Commission website has information on the benefits, application process and requirements for registration.

Work with your local council

Local councils are generally very responsive in listening to their communities and recognise the value of the local knowledge, enthusiasm and commitment that volunteers and Friends Groups can bring. The most vibrant green spaces are usually cared for by a strong partnership of a local council and a Friends Group.

These successful partnerships depend on building and maintaining relationship of trust and understanding. Local authority officers are far more likely to respond positively to a new group if you approach them constructively, rather than as a *Moaning Minnie* or a *Complaining Colin*. Identifying opportunities to improve wildlife habitats and maintenance issues, and

Simon Blenkinsop

Middlesbrough Council

“ In Middlesbrough we have several active Friends Groups, they make a tremendous contribution to our parks and green spaces. It is not only the huge physical volunteering work that they do and the funds they raise for enhancements but also the community events that they run and the local knowledge they have of the sites and their local communities. Our Area Care Managers have very open and honest relationships with the Friends Groups on their patch based on mutual respect. The Friends know that they will be listened to and they also appreciate that we will do our best within the budgets we have. ”

suggesting and working on practical solutions is a more constructive approach. Even small changes to how a green space is managed can have benefits for wildlife. Remember that local authorities have to balance many different recreational and community uses with ever-declining budgets. As an independent group this should not deter you from lobbying your local council if your community considers it needs more investment or if changes are needed in the park's management. Keep your elected councillors up to date as well, so that they champion your cause.

Remember: you will need to get permission from the local council if they are the landowner of the green space before carrying out any work or running activities.



Finding out what people want and what they can do

As a developing group you may already have bags of great ideas for your local patch that you are keen to put into action. Before diving in, it's worth seeking out and taking stock of the views and needs of your local community, as these are likely to be wide and varied. The more you can reach out and involve a wide range of site users, the more representative your group will be. This will make your efforts to protect and enhance your green space more effective.

Finding out what people want

How do you capture all the views of your community? This is a challenge as some people are very keen to express their opinions, whilst you may need more imaginative ways to engage some sectors of your community. Simply chatting to people you meet whilst you are out – dog walkers, people in the shop, pub, café or community centre, is a start and will give you an initial feel. Questionnaires can be useful as long as you are mindful that people have different levels of literacy, especially if they are asked to write. Posting online questionnaires on social media is an increasingly popular method. It's important to consider groups

that are often under-represented. Green spaces are vital for children and young people but they, especially teenagers, are often not consulted. Local youth workers may be able to advise and assist. If your green space is in an ethnically diverse area, contacting faith leaders and community workers may be a way to help you engage more fully. The views of current site users are important, but what about the people who don't visit? There may be reasons why they don't, so changes to a site may enable them to visit and enjoy it. Remember to collate all this information. Not only will it help you produce your group's aims, objectives and plans, but it will be valuable evidence when making funding applications.

What do you like about this place?

What could be better?

Why do you visit?

How often do you come here?

What wildlife do you see?



Different levels of involvement

People may love their local green space and be keen on joining a new Friends Group, but not everyone will want or be able to take part in regular work parties or attend meetings. A fear of being roped in for more than they can commit to can put some people off volunteering.

It is important to be able to offer a variety of ways to contribute, different levels of involvement and methods of keeping in touch. The best way to find out how people want to be engaged is simply to ask them. This can be achieved with a simple questionnaire at your first community activity or meeting.

Dealing with personal data

You will need to have contact details of members and/or people interested in your group's activities. This raises the question of issues around storing and protecting people's personal data. The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which came into force in May 2018, covers all forms of 'processing' of personal data to protect people from its misuse.

For small community groups, the responsibilities of the regulations are not as onerous as they first

appear and shouldn't cause you any sleepless nights, if you put some simple procedures in place.

- Only hold details that are relevant to the group, and only use the details for your group's agreed vision and aims.
- Securely store personal data. For example if it is digital, password-protect it.
- Make sure people know how to contact the group if they want you to remove their data from your records.
- Ensure that private data is not misused or passed on to third parties without their permission.

You will need to adopt a simple data protection policy which you can make available on any membership forms and website.

Simply chatting to people you meet whilst you are out... is a start and will give you an initial feel.



Making the most of your team

Team work and good communication are key to a focused group that gets things done. It will take time for groups to gel. Everyone will have plenty of ideas, enthusiasm and be keen to get started. It's worth taking some time to get all the ideas on the table, explore options and reach a consensus on priorities. This will help you develop a plan of action that has a broad agreement. Discussing how the group will operate, its committee, who does what and some ground rules for meetings will help make your group more effective and help avoid conflict later.

The committee

The term 'management committee' can conjure up an image of bored people in a dusty room sitting on uncomfortable chairs, debating endlessly about processes, under mountains of meeting papers. It doesn't need to be like this! You don't need to be restricted by formality and protocol when it comes to running your group. But working out who will be responsible for what and how you make decisions will help your group be more effective. Groups normally have a chairperson, secretary and treasurer. These are important roles that can involve a lot of responsibility. To share the workload, there is nothing to stop you creating additional roles for people such as vice chair, events organiser, fundraiser, safety person, task leader.

The chairperson

Role: the team leader, represents the group, acts as its spokesperson and ensures that the group runs effectively and the committee runs smoothly.

Tips

- Ensure meetings start and finish on time
- Make all members feel valued, encouraged
- Be approachable, sensitive and tactful
- Allow everyone's views to be heard, even those you disagree with
- Ensure clear decisions are reached

Getting a balance between hearing everyone's views and getting through the business at meetings can be tricky, but try to keep calm and objective.

Secretary

Role: efficient running of the group, making records of meetings and ensuring communication with members.

Tips

- Prepare agendas and ensure minutes of meetings are made and distributed
- Work closely with the chairperson to plan meetings
- Keep group records in good order
- Ensure good communications between meetings
- Respond promptly to any messages or correspondence

It's important that the secretary does not become overburdened with work. As the group grows some tasks can be split, for example having a membership secretary, and someone else sending out the newsletters.

Treasurer

Role: responsible for the smooth running of the group's finances and preparation of accounts. The overall responsibility of finances lies with the committee. It is up to the committee as a whole to decide how funds will be raised and spent, not the treasurer.

Tips

- Keep clear and accurate financial records
- Provide information on finances to help the committee make decisions
- Prepare clear financial summary information for annual meetings and reports

As the group develops and starts to receive grants, financial reports will be required. It may be that another member of the group can work with the treasurer to manage grant spending and reporting.

Resolving conflict

Being part of a group is usually fun, energising and rewarding. But it would be very unusual to have any group of people where everyone agreed on everything all of the time. People have different opinions, ideas, ways of working and expressing themselves. These differences make for lively discussions and healthy disagreements. Sometimes this can cause tensions and frustrations that bubble up into conflict. If unresolved, this can be damaging to the group, occasionally resulting in groups losing valuable volunteers or even causing groups to fold.

It's worth remembering that most groups go through rough patches. We don't have any magic solutions but can offer some suggestions that may help deal with the person who doesn't stop talking, the person who 'knows it all', the person who is just focused on one particular issue or someone who is always putting a downer on new ideas.

Very occasionally, groups may have to deal with behaviours which are unacceptable, either in meetings, on volunteers' days or in correspondence. Everyone has the right to be treated with kindness and respect. If your group allows bullying or discriminatory language or behaviours to go unchecked, it will result in stress for everyone and your members slipping away. A calm and quiet conversation with the person responsible in private may be needed, so that they understand their behaviour is not acceptable, whilst letting others know that the matter is being tackled.

Keith Ferry

Chairman,
Friends of Errington Woods

“ We don't have any committee meetings. As we work most Fridays in the woods, we take the tea break as an opportunity to plan our work programme, talk through any challenges. There isn't much you can't resolve in a site walkabout or a chat around the fire. We also have a Facebook group which helps keep in touch. Many of us have had years working in factories or offices so we just want to be outdoors. It works for us. ”



Top tip

Being a committee member, like any other skill, can be learnt and takes practice. If you don't have experience from being in other groups, or want to sharpen your skills, pick the brains of committee members of other local groups, or attend a few of their meetings. Some community development organisations also run workshops on chairing meetings, treasurer skills and taking minutes.

- Establish a set of ground rules for behaviour which can be referred to if things get heated.
- Make sure people don't feel taken for granted by showing appreciation for their work and efforts.
- Prevent resentment felt by people doing too much by sharing the workload.
- Don't avoid difficult conversations, or let disagreements fester – discuss and build consensus.
- If someone keeps repeating the same point in a meeting, reassure them that their point has been heard and noted, then turn the discussion back to the group.
- If a couple of people get into a heated discussion, summarise the points made by each, then move the focus away from them by asking what other people think about the issues.
- For someone who is continually being critical of the ideas of others, turn the question round to them, for instance “what suggestions do you have for how this could be improved?”

Getting volunteers and keeping them

Most green space groups would like to attract more volunteers. More people now volunteer than ever before in the UK, but with so many volunteering opportunities available, and competition for time with other leisure and sport activities, how does your group compete? You need to be savvy to catch people's attention, inspire them to join and then ensure you capture their hearts to keep them.

Be specific

Before putting out a general call out, have a think about what roles new volunteers could do. People are more likely to respond if they have a good idea of what they would be doing, the level of commitment needed and any skills that they would need. Whilst some people will want to get their wellies on and get stuck into practical conservation work, it's not everyone's cup of tea. Consider additional ways that people could contribute or bring their own experience, such as developing your website, designing posters and fundraising.

Demonstrate the need

Motivate people to volunteer by demonstrating that they can be part of a group that is making a real difference. Sharing success stories and photos in the press and through social media will build you a local reputation for being an energetic and effective group that gets things done.

Plug the benefits

Rather than thinking just about what your group needs, look at the flip side of the coin and consider what volunteers are looking for. Promote the many benefits of what your volunteering opportunities offer, such as learning new skills, getting exercise, meeting new people.

Arrange taster activities

Taster sessions are a great way for potential volunteers to come and see what your group does and have a go themselves without commitment. Having a range of short activities, such as making a bird box, sowing wildlife seeds, as well as a site walk will enable people to see how much fun volunteering with you can be. It can also dispel any misconceptions that they may have.



Flexible friends

People have busy lives with lots of demands on their time. Child care, elderly relatives, shift work, and other hobbies can be some of the barriers for potential volunteers. Consider varying the time/days of some of your volunteer work sessions and meetings or advertise roles that volunteers could do on their own or with their family and friends. Having family volunteer sessions where people can involve their whole family is becoming more popular, enabling parents or grandparents to spend quality time as a family whilst doing something worthwhile for wildlife.

Micro-volunteering

The fear of long-term regular commitment can scare people off volunteering. Whilst some people enjoy the sustained involvement in a weekly or monthly volunteer day, others may prefer flexible volunteering sessions. One way to enable wider involvement in caring for your green space is to have occasional community volunteer tasks or drop-in volunteer days.

This could be, for example, planting 2000 bluebell bulbs or 200 trees, or spreading 20 tonnes of gravel on footpaths. This can be an effective way of completing a large task and attracting a wider diversity and greater number of people. If someone has a positive experience doing a small volunteer project with your group, they may consider getting more involved in the future when they have more time.

Be inclusive

This is about thinking about barriers to volunteering and how to overcome them. Does your current volunteer base reflect the make up of your community? If not, how can you make your group and site more appealing to people who aren't currently engaged? Do you have opportunities that can be done by people with physical limitations? Think about how you can portray your group so that people know that you welcome people of all ages and backgrounds. Talking to community leaders is a good way to start, as they can act as ambassadors for you. Simple things like photographs showing the diversity of your volunteers can speak louder than words.

Why do people volunteer?

For some people, it may be about a passion for nature and a drive to protect your local green space, so that wildlife can thrive and be enjoyed by all. But there are many reasons that motivate people to give up their precious time to volunteer.

The feel-good factor of making a difference is important for most volunteers. Just as important, and sometimes more so, is the opportunity to meet new people and develop friendships with people who may have similar interests. Being a valued member of a team and a sense of belonging are key reasons why people look to join volunteer groups, which is why it is important to always be welcoming, regardless of how frequently or infrequently a volunteer helps out.

Fresh air, exercise and simply being outdoors in nature are what many are looking for. Young people who are developing their careers are particularly interested in volunteering opportunities where they can learn new skills and gain experience... as well as have fun.

Volunteering is officially good for you! There is now stacks of research that shows that volunteering increases our sense of wellbeing and improves our health. So, think about promoting these benefits when you are advertising for new volunteers.

Ways to recruit

Word of mouth

Word of mouth remains the most successful way to attract volunteers. Encourage all your volunteers, friends and family to spread the word. Your volunteers are your best ambassadors as their enthusiasm will shine through. Ask them to share photographs of themselves volunteering on social media. Other local groups may ask you to give a talk, these offers should be snapped up, as well as tables at local events where you can promote your green space and encourage people to join you.

Advertise

Don't just assume people in your community know about your group or that you need volunteers. Use all of your communication tools to promote your group and ask for volunteers. For example, if you have a website, have a page explaining what volunteers can do and how to contact you. The same for your newsletters. Keep your social media pages up-to-date by regularly highlighting the work you are doing, and showing volunteers looking active and happy, along with invitations for people to join you.

Advertise with volunteering organisations

Local volunteer centres are great at matching up people with volunteering opportunities, so let them know what your group does and what you can offer prospective volunteers. National Volunteer Week, celebrated in the first week of June, also raises awareness about the benefits of becoming a volunteer, and the diverse

volunteering roles that are available. It's a good hook to showcase your group's work. Many towns and cities hold a volunteer recruitment fair, which can be a good opportunity to chat to people who are seeking out volunteering opportunities.

Younger people are searching online to research volunteering. There are now myriad websites where you can advertise for free. It's worth having a look at *Do-it* and *Time Bank* websites for starters. It is important to be clear about what volunteers will do, what skills you're looking for and to highlight what you can offer in return by way of a good experience.

Corporate volunteers

Private businesses, especially national ones, are increasingly looking for volunteer projects to tackle for their team away days. Some companies also give their employees an allowance of paid time off annually, which they use to volunteer at a charity of their choice. Their motivation is to develop their workforce and raise the profile of their business both with customers and future employees. Your site can gain, not just from the extra pairs of hands but from the promotion that the company will provide. Whilst welcome, it can be time consuming for your group to arrange and find suitable team projects for them, so don't be afraid to ask the company for a contribution towards tools and materials or an exchange of skills. They may have skills and resources in their company in business management, IT, graphics or be able to help you by printing posters or leaflets.

Keeping volunteers

Whilst recruiting volunteers is one challenge, keeping them is another and equally important to pay attention to. Unless new volunteers are warmly welcomed, feel valued and enjoy the experience they are likely to go elsewhere. Here are some tips.

Respond quickly

Don't delay. If someone expresses an interest in volunteering, get back to them straight away. You want them to know how much you value their interest and need their help, so returning a telephone message or email, even if it's to say thank you and that you will get back to them shortly, is a good start.

Be welcoming

This may sound obvious, but needs highlighting as it is often cited as a reason for new volunteers not returning. Put yourself in their shoes – if a person comes along and doesn't know anyone they could be feeling nervous. If the group has a clique at its centre that seem to know each other really well, new people will feel excluded. It may be that there is someone in your group who is especially warm and friendly, who could make new people feel at ease and introduce them to other volunteers.

Have enough to do

As a volunteer there is only one thing worse than too much to do, and that is not enough. People's time is valuable and they don't want to feel like a spare part. When planning work days, ensure that there is enough work to go around and that new volunteers have clear instruction about what they will be doing, and any help that they may need to get them going.

Being valued

We all need to feel valued for our work, and this is especially important when we are not being paid. A heartfelt thank you at the end of a work session or meeting is important, so that everyone knows that their time and effort is appreciated. When caring for green spaces it's easy for groups to feel like an invisible workforce. Posting photographs of volunteers at work on social media, and showing before and after photographs in newsletters, gives the wider community a chance to recognise the results of what local volunteers do, and enables them to show their appreciation.

For more tips on developing and maintaining your team of fellow volunteers see *Maintaining Momentum* on page 52.

Opportunities for growth

Learning new skills and knowledge is a great motivation to keep people volunteering. This can include learning alongside experienced volunteers, hearing about wildlife from a local botanist or bird watcher, organising a training session on butterfly identification, or surveying wild mammals. The key is to find out what your volunteers are interested in.

Having fun

Even the most routine activities can be made fun with good company and a clear understanding of the purpose of the work. Try to make sure that volunteers can swap activities to make their experience more varied. And, of course, tea breaks are a good chance for a rest and a chat.

Involvement in decision-making

Whilst most new volunteers may be happy to be given assigned tasks, no one wants to be bossed about. Having control over what you do and how you do it is important. New volunteers will bring with them new ideas, and whilst some will not fit with your group or green space, it is well worth listening to what they have to say as they can offer a fresh perspective.

Volunteers do come and go, and often this is simply because their lives change. A new job, exams, ill health or new care responsibilities can mean that a volunteer is no less committed to the cause, but they are not able to keep up their level of involvement. Look at ways in which they can continue to support you – micro-volunteering – and they may be able to return. This is especially important for volunteers where poor health becomes a barrier. As well as being unwell, they will be missing the outdoors and friendships. Involve them in other ways, or keep in touch via social media, or have them as a group elder who can pass on their knowledge and wisdom.



Working with others

As a group of volunteers working on a green space, you may think that you are expected to do everything yourself. This is not the case. You may decide it is sometimes worthwhile to branch out and work with others who are able to help you achieve particular goals. It can be really useful to work with other groups and will create a network of people who not only contribute to supporting your green space but can also spread the word about your group and the work you are doing.

Partnerships

Partnership working enables groups, organisations and agencies to achieve more together than they would individually. Small groups, especially new ones, can benefit from access to skills and expertise, reach a wider audience and secure additional funding that may require partnerships. Partners can also provide mutual support to maintain enthusiasm and commitment to a project.

Whilst partnerships are valuable, working in them isn't always easy. The additional communication and more complex decision-making processes required, takes extra time and effort. Managing differing priorities and loss of identity can also result in conflict.

Openness, respect and trust between different partners are essential ingredients for an effective partnership. By developing a shared vision and agreeing the roles and responsibilities of each partner, there is less scope for misunderstandings. Good and regular communication is the key to maintaining relationships. All partnerships are different and most are informal. For large projects with substantial budgets, consider having a written partnership agreement.

Contractors

In some cases, it may be worthwhile to employ contractors for jobs that are too large, or require specialist equipment and skills. For example, for digging out a new pond or major path works consider having a contractor with skilled machine operators. When seeking quotations, have a clear written statement of what you want to achieve, any specific designs, the timescale and any special requirements. This will enable contractors to give you reliable and comparable quotations. Investigate the history of the contractor: see if they have a good reputation and experience of completing similar projects. For any works on public land it's vital that

Susan Antrobus

Tees Valley Wildlife Trust

“ We found that being members of the Roseworth Community Partnership was really valuable in our project to bring wildlife to the Roseworth ward in Stockton. Local councillors, churches, schools, police, a library and family centre are members as well as Thirteen Housing and the Residents Association. It enabled me to regularly meet everyone in one go and get their feedback on involving local residents in environmental projects. As a result, green spaces are a part of their community plan, and wildlife engagement projects are also helping to deliver the



STOCKTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

health and wellbeing projects of other partners. ”

at all stages the landowner is involved as they may have a mechanism for approving contractors, and health and safety rules that need to be adhered to. A site meeting of all parties before work commences is vital in sorting out all the practicalities. Contractors will need to supply evidence of their public liability insurance and copies of risk assessments and method statements.

Employing artists and community workers needs just as much thought. The preparation of an artist brief which outlines the work, time commitments, and outcomes is a starting point. You could approach your regional Arts Council office or local authority Arts Officer for assistance or advice.

David Preston

Chair, Friends of Maidendale
Nature and Fishing Reserve

“ We employed a company to carry out excavation works of our ponds and lakes. At the site meeting we were able to discuss how the work would be achieved, access to the site and where the spoil was to go. Their tracked diggers and skilled operators enabled the work to be carried out quickly and without damage to the footpaths. We always had a volunteer present on site to close any footpaths and act as an additional banksman. ”



DAVID PRESTON

Local forums

Local and regional green space forums provide a collective voice and communication hub for Friends and like-minded community groups who look after parks, wildlife sites, cemeteries, allotments and other green spaces. Most local authority areas have one, and although they all have their own identity, they usually have the same key aims of being a network to protect and enhance public green space. They are often important advocates of the value of parks and green spaces to decision makers, and work to influence local authority policy and spending on parks and green spaces. Becoming a member of one will also enable your group to be part of a network that can share ideas, experiences and best practice.

Anne Dawson

Friends of Bluebell Beck



“ When I became Group Secretary, I attended the Middlesbrough Parks and Green Space Forum. At my first meeting I felt that all the other groups were more well established and knew what they were doing, and we were very new and small. However, I soon realised that people were on hand to offer encouragement, friendly advice and practical support. I've also learnt that it's really important to be able to share successes and challenges and even failures, and enjoy the sharing of techniques and attending workshops together. ”

National networks

Being a member of a national network can enable your group to access a wealth of online toolkits and publications, telephone advice as well as updates on funding sources, best practice and news summaries. Often there are also opportunities to take part in conferences, workshops and webinars.



Middlesbrough Parks
and Green Spaces Forum

The National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces (NFPGS) is the umbrella organisation that works to share learning, develop good practice, and strengthen grassroots organisation, coordination and co-operation throughout the UK.

The Conservation Volunteers (TCV) have a Community Network that supports thousands of local conservation and green space groups. Membership enables groups to access discounted public liability insurance, and a resource library of practical conservation handbooks, as well as valuable updates on grants and other funding.

The National Federation of Cemetery Friends (NFCF) is open to any group of volunteers working to conserve a cemetery, churchyard or burial ground. The Friends meet annually, hosted by a member group in a different location every year, with the added incentive of a guided walk around the host's cemetery.

Staying safe

You will all want to do great things to protect your green space, connect with the local community and support wildlife, but making sure that your volunteers are working safely and covered by insurance is a priority. It will give you peace of mind so you get on with the fun stuff!

It is the responsibility of your group's committee to ensure that your volunteers work safely during all of your activities. This is to make sure that your actions, from tree planting to guided walks, don't harm volunteers, other participants or members of the public.



It is more important that your group stays safe than it is to achieve your task

Safety responsibilities can feel very daunting for you and your committee, and may put some volunteers off from taking on leadership roles in community groups. Whilst being blasé about safety isn't an option, excessive worrying about it is not helpful either. Our experience, working alongside parks and green space groups in the Tees Valley, is that when groups set aside time to consider, discuss and plan safe working, put in

IMPORTANT: The information on these safety pages is not a comprehensive statement of safety procedures. It is intended as an introduction to safe working.

a set of practical procedures and follow them, everyone gains peace of mind. This has enabled groups to effectively focus on the job in hand, and still have fun. If you are a new group this can feel like a big task, but once you put safe practices in place, over time it becomes second nature to your group's volunteers to follow them.

First aid

There are questions that we are often asked: *Do we need someone with first aid training on every work activity? What level of training do they need? What about larger community activity days?* There isn't a simple or quick answer. Your responsibility is to ensure first aid assistance is available and that it is appropriate for those involved. The requirements of first aid assistance will depend on your risk assessment. For example, the level of risk of your activity, its location and the level of training and ability of people involved. The Health and Safety Executive website is the place to visit to view the current directives on first aid. The St John Ambulance website is a user-friendly, online resource, for up-to-date information on what a first aid kit should contain and advice on working out your first aid training requirements.

It is good practice to make sure some of your key volunteers have first aid training. Some may already hold current Emergency or First Aid or First Aid at Work certificates, so it's worth checking. If not, contact your local volunteer centre, college or local authority for courses, as these may be free, or they may provide funding.

At the beginning of activities make sure that everyone knows who the designated first aider is, and the location of the first aid kit.

Safety checklist for practical work activity

- Complete a **risk assessment** and share with key volunteers.
- Have an **allocated person** to be responsible for overseeing safety during the activity.
- Ensure **mobile phone** is fully charged and contains any key numbers.
- Have a **checklist** of all tools and equipment that have been packed.
- Make sure you have a **first aid kit** and everyone knows where it is and who is the appointed first aider.
- Use appropriate **personal protective equipment** for the work e.g high vis vests, gloves, safety boots.
- Consider the **physical fitness** of you and your team by assigning manageable tasks and encouraging plenty of rest breaks.
- Start the activity with a **safety talk**.
- Be realistic about what you can achieve** – it is better to do a few short sessions than exhaust your volunteers (accidents are more likely to happen when people are tired).
- Check the **weather forecast** – you could take breaks or shorten the activity if people are getting cold, and have plenty of cold drinks available if hot.
- Consider the **safety of others** visiting the site whilst you are working.
- Leave the site **clean and tidy** – ensure that your work doesn't leave any hazards for visitors, and that you have collected up all your tools and equipment.
- Have an **emergency procedure** – know the access points for ambulances for example.

Welfare kit

Making up a welfare kit and keeping it in your rucksack is something that The Tees Valley Wild Green Places team have for their activities. It's amazing how often it comes in handy. Please do make sure it does not contain medication of any type.



Reporting accidents

Following safe working practices should keep you safe, but accidents can happen. Don't wait for an accident to know the proper procedure for reporting it. Find this out from your local authority health and safety team. Even minor accidents need reporting. Whilst your group

is unlikely to need an accident book, you will need to report these accidents to the responsible organisation. This is likely to be the local authority if you are working on publicly owned green space. Serious accidents need to be reported immediately, as the responsible organisation will need to report these to the Health and Safety Executive.

1 Identify hazards

A hazard is anything that may cause harm on site:

Outdoor hazards may be rough ground, insect stings, bacterial infection, ponds and streams.

Created hazards are a result of your activities; e.g. injury from using tools or food poisoning due to poor hygiene in food preparation.

2 Who may be harmed?

This is anyone who may be affected: volunteers, members of public, passers-by, children or other vulnerable groups.

3 Evaluate the risks

Consider how likely it is that each of the hazards identified will occur and what would be the result, so helping you decide what control measures to put in place. For example, taping off a section of footpath from visitors whilst repairing it, volunteers wearing high vis jackets, making sure tools are stored carefully so people don't trip over them.

4 Make a record and share

Using a template is a focused way to carry out and record your risk assessment and an effective way of keeping a written record on file. Templates can be downloaded from the HSE website and adapted to suit your activities. Think of the written record as a thinking and communication tool, not an end product. Sharing the risk assessment with the volunteer team is a vital stage. It's no use having them all on your laptop if no one sees them, so make sure you print them off and pass around.

5 Regular review

Sites and activities change, therefore you need to review your risk assessments regularly to make sure they are still valid. It's also a good way to refresh everyone's memory, so that they continue to take responsibility for their safety.

Carrying out risk assessments

Risk assessments are the cornerstone of safe working.

Your group will need to carry them out for all its volunteer activities: from tree planting, to guided walks and indoor meetings. This need not be a complicated process, or create lots of paperwork. The hazards and risks associated with green space groups are usually easily identified. Putting in measures to control risks just needs thought and common sense. The main thing is to have a system in place and ensure that all your volunteers follow it.



What is a risk assessment?

Risk assessment is about identifying potential hazards, who may be harmed, the level of risk posed by each hazard and putting in place actions to reduce the risk.

It is likely that there are members of your group who are familiar with carrying out risk assessments through their work experience and other volunteer roles. Having one or two people in your group who become responsible for doing risk assessments, and ensuring the actions are carried out, is a good way of ensuring that your group works safely.

Get insured

Making sure all volunteers are covered by insurance is a priority.

What is public liability insurance?

Public liability insurance covers your group if someone is injured, dies or has their property damaged due to your group's activities.

Does your group need it?

The short answer is yes.

It is not a legal requirement, but in today's litigious society it's considered essential. Local authorities have a duty of care, which requires anyone working on their land to have public liability insurance. Some grant-giving bodies need to see evidence of cover before they award funding.

Unfortunately, accidents do happen, even to the most careful of groups. A simple accident, such as a dog walker tripping over your tools in a park and breaking a leg, can result in a claim for thousands of pounds. Public liability insurance offers financial protection in the event of a claim brought against your group for damages. Even if you are found not negligent, the cost of defending your case can be high, and public liability insurance will cover any costs.

Check with the local authority if the green space that you are working on is covered by their public liability insurance. If volunteers are working directly under the supervision of a council officer, this is likely to be the case. Some local authorities have a registration system for volunteers which may also provide insurance cover. If your group always works in partnership with another group, especially if it is a larger one, their insurance may cover you if they are organising the work. The important thing is to check and, if in doubt, to arrange insurance for your group. It's worth it for the peace of mind that it will give you.

Paying for insurance

This is an annual expense, so forward planning is needed. If you are applying for grants for projects, see if you can work a proportion of public liability insurance costs into the grant application. Alternatively, have a look at our fundraising ideas pages.

Five things to consider

- 1 Every community group is different so **ensure that the insurance company understands what your group does**, so that the policy covers all your activities. For example: guided walks, litter picks, park fun days. If your group uses power tools, make sure the insurer knows the details.
- 2 **Read the small print.** For example, is there an upper or lower age limit for volunteers? This could be a real issue, especially as you won't want to exclude anyone who wants to volunteer on the basis of their age.
- 3 Check that **the policy explicitly mentions volunteers.** Their definition of general public may not extend to volunteers.
- 4 **Decide how much cover you need.** Most policies range from £1-10 million, which sounds a lot. If working on local authority land, check with them the amount that they require.
- 5 Shop around for the best deals but **make sure that you are comparing products that provide the same cover.** We suggest that you approach companies who specialise in insurance for community groups. They will be used to supporting small groups that involve volunteers and carry out similar activities. The Conservation Volunteers (TCV) has a community network membership scheme which offers discounted insurance.

Once you are insured

There's no substitute for safe working practices but, if these fail, a good public liability insurance is a vital safeguard for you and your group. It is important that you do risk assessments for your activities and events. Also keep copies, as this is likely to be a requirement of the insurance policy. It may sound obvious, but do ensure that the group treasurer has a reminder for the insurance renewal date in their diary.

Tool safety

Volunteer work days are often practical, so will involve using hand tools, such as spades, bowsaws and loppers. Whilst these are tools that people are generally familiar with using in their own homes and gardens, their use in parks and green spaces requires additional care and attention. Making sure that tools are well maintained and used correctly is your group's responsibility. This will ensure the safety of your volunteers and site visitors.

Use of power tools and machinery

To use power tools and machinery, such as strimmers, chippers and chainsaws, on publicly owned land, the person operating them generally needs to have training, assessment and monitoring. The requirements for specific tools and equipment vary, as do local authority policies for their use by volunteers so this will need carefully checking out.

Our ten point tool safety checklist

- 1 **Have a nominated person** responsible for tools and their safe use.
- 2 **Keep all tools well maintained** so that they are clean, sharp and fit for use.
- 3 **Instruct volunteers** on how to use tools properly and safely.
- 4 **Transport tools carefully**, ensuring people don't carry too much.
- 5 **Ensure volunteers wear suitable clothes**, have sturdy footwear and the appropriate PPE (personal protective equipment) for the tools they are using.
- 6 **Remind volunteers to work at safe distances from each other** and to be aware of site visitors.
- 7 **Guide new and less experienced people** by pairing them up with more experienced volunteers.
- 8 **Don't leave tools lying around** for people to trip over.
- 9 **Monitor the team** throughout the work, ensuring that volunteers rest and take breaks when tired.
- 10 **At the end of the workday check that all the tools are returned**, ensuring that none are left on site.



Keith Ferry

Chairman of the Friends of Errington Woods, near New Marske

“As we work every Friday in the woods, our volunteers are experienced in using tools in our tree thinning and footpath construction work. When we have work placement students coming to join us, one of us will work alongside them and assist them so they get the hang of using the tools. Especially with bowsaws and billhooks, it's about seeing what experience they have and then giving them tips on how to use the tools both safely and effectively.”

Eddie Rutherford

Friends of Linthorpe Cemetery and Nature Reserve

“We use petrol powered strimmers to cut our meadow areas and to maintain a mosaic of scrub habitats and to stop bramble growing over footpaths and headstones. Several of our volunteers received training in how to maintain and use tools safely from the Area Care team at Middlesbrough Council. Each year we have refresher training too.”



Sue Antrobus

Tees Valley Wildlife Trust



“If I am leading a workday, I do a safety talk at the beginning and run through all the tools. I find young people are great at taking this on board but sometimes older people think that I am insulting their intelligence by stating the obvious. To get around this I often get these volunteers to describe and demonstrate to the rest of the group. I have become more confident at correcting people who are not working safely, and with experience I have learnt how to do this sensitively, so that their pride isn't hurt.”

Grab a grant... and other fundraising tips

Does your group have a great idea for a project? Do you have enthusiasm and volunteers but could do with the money to make it happen? Applying for funding can be a daunting task, particularly if you've never done it before. At first glance, some forms can seem long and complicated, but don't let that put you off.

It's not unusual to feel out of your depth when you see a funding application for the first time, but completing it on behalf of your group is a real achievement... and it really does get easier with practice. If you lack confidence with writing, don't be afraid to ask for help from other members of the group. There may be someone who will work with you, or proofread and provide feedback.

This section offers advice and guidance to help with the application process. It will give you the tools to turn your ideas into potential funded projects that will benefit the community, enhance green spaces and support wildlife.

Before you start

It can be hard to know where to start, but before you dive in with fundraising it's worth thinking about what you want the money for and if you have a clear purpose. Do you need funding for the project to go ahead? Are there any materials/facilities that can be sourced for free? Can your group afford to match-fund?

Spending a bit of time researching and planning your project will save a lot of time and effort later. It will mean that you have all the information at

your fingertips when it comes to applying for grants and approaching potential sponsors.

It's also worthwhile building partnerships and so you are not working in isolation on a project. Demonstrating collaborative working really does help when it comes to applying for a grant. If the project does involve other organisations, groups and schools, then make sure they are on board by providing you with letters of support to send along with the application.

Be realistic about what you want to achieve as it's better to do something small and well, rather than apply for something you are unable to deliver.

Here are some suggested questions for your group to discuss. *Why is this project important? What will be the result? What will be the impact? Does the budget include everything? Is the timescale realistic? How much will it actually cost? How long will it take? Does your group have the capacity to deliver it and are there partners who can assist? Who will do the work? Do you need permission from the landowner/planning authority? How will it be maintained?*

It's a lot to think about, but planning is a recipe for success!

Jeanette Bowen

Friends of Fairy Dell in Middlesbrough

“Our first large grant was an award of £38,000 by the National Lottery Heritage Fund for our 'Pathways to the Past' project. With this money, we had an archaeological work dig, a series of medieval themed workshops and events, a leaflet about the history of Fairy Dell and an interpretation panel. This was all new to us, so on the advice of the lottery grants officer, we used some of the money to commission a project manager. All the planning work for the grant application gave us a clear framework to deliver the project. As the treasurer, it felt like a huge responsibility, so I was glad to have help from someone with more experience. By keeping a photographic record of all the activities, and asking all the participants to carry out participant surveys, we were able to complete monitoring.”



Alan Conroy

Friends of Stainton and Thornton Green Spaces

“We were disappointed when we were turned down by the BIG Lottery. We had planned to improve the network of footpaths in our Quarry nature reserve. I passionately believed that these footpaths, field drains and grass cutting equipment were important. I looked back at what we submitted and I realised that whilst the footpaths would benefit the village in accessing this wonderful green space, I hadn't demonstrated this need and the impact that the improvements would mean, especially for older, less mobile people. I had a good read of the criteria and made sure I clearly explained the value of the work in a new application. We were successful and we are now busy carrying out the work.”



Finding out what's out there

There are thousands of grant bodies and charitable trusts out there offering money. They all have different priorities, eligibility and ways of applying, which can be a bit confusing at times. There are national databases such as Grant Finder and Funding Central, which have substantial subscription fees. So, if you would prefer to avoid fees, then most local Voluntary Development Agencies and some local authorities have a subscription. There is likely to be a friendly grants officer who can help.

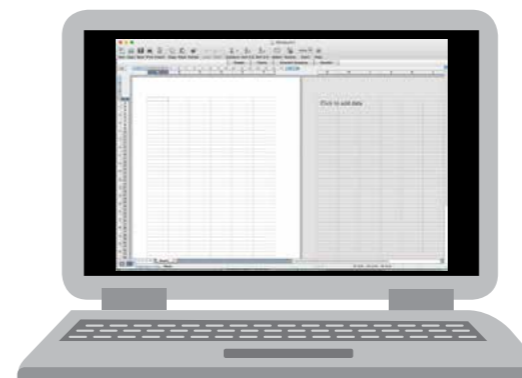
What if they say no?

We have all experienced that sinking feeling of a grant rejection, and you wouldn't be human if you didn't feel disappointed that your project isn't considered to be worthwhile. It could be that your application didn't match their criteria, so always ask for feedback. It could simply be that their grant pot was oversubscribed. Applying for grants is a highly competitive process. Grants are usually considered by a board of experienced people, who carefully check each application against their grant giving criteria. So try to step back and look again at your project and other places to apply for money. Some lottery funders give advice on how to improve your application, so you can reapply.

Once you have the cash

Before you start celebrating, make sure you have accepted their offer, filled in any additional paperwork they have asked for and thanked them. Remember, they are not giving this money away as a gift. You have agreed to deliver a project in return for their funding, so ensure you spend the money on what was stated in the application, and keep a record of the finances and receipts. Make sure the rest of your group, especially the group treasurer, understand what is required. You may also need to keep a record of volunteer hours carried out. Think of this as the start of a relationship, so nurture it with good communication. Credit the funder where you can, use their logo on posters and social media. Keep them updated with photos and invitations to any special events or launches. They may not be able to attend but they will appreciate being asked. Make sure you have put any deadlines for monitoring reports in your diary and get them in on time. Most grant funders welcome further applications and you will be demonstrating that you are a safe pair of hands.

Don't panic if your project doesn't go to plan or is taking longer than predicted. Honesty is the best approach. Let your grants officer know and suggest a revised plan. Sometimes a wet spring, vandalism or a supplier going out of business can cause delays. Your grant officer will be able to advise you and this is all part of building up trust.



Top ten tips: Applying for grants

Applying for grants takes time and energy, so stack the odds in your favour. Here are ten top tips from the Tees Valley Wildlife Trust. Putting the kettle on at regular intervals helps too...

1 Is this the right grant pot for you? You may have a fab project but check first that your group and project are eligible for the grant you are looking at by carefully reading their criteria and guidelines.

2 Do your homework! It's worth spending a bit of time researching the grant funder before you apply. Have a good look at their website, browse any case studies they have and read their annual reports. This will give you a good idea of their mission and objectives and enable you to identify how your project will match them. If it isn't a good match, then don't waste your time by applying.

3 Start small with a small grant fund, especially if you are a new group. Grant providers are more willing to risk granting small amounts of money to new or small community based groups. The application process is simpler too! By successfully delivering a small grant project, you will be able to demonstrate to future funders that your group are credible, able to deliver and financially viable. This track record is important as grant officers do talk to each other!

4 Don't be afraid to ask questions. Many funders welcome contact, especially the National Lottery. If you need clarification, are unsure about your eligibility, or how to answer a particular question, then there is no harm in asking. It will save your time and theirs.

5 Your funder doesn't know your group or your project. You will need to make a strong and persuasive case on why your group deserves their investment. Can you demonstrate there is a need for the project and support from the local community? If possible, back this up with evidence such as a community consultation or letters of support from other local organisations. Quote local authority or government policies if it addresses these, such as health and wellbeing. All this doesn't have to be dry, do feel able to inject your own enthusiasm and ideas that make your application stand out. A snappy title helps too.

6 Say how you arrived at your figures. Funders will want to know that your project is value for money, so it's helpful to break down your budget into items and present them clearly. Try to be as accurate as possible, using catalogue price lists or quotations. Don't underestimate the costs involved, so do your research and make sure you include hidden costs, such as VAT and delivery. Consider match-funding with money the group has already raised. This will increase the value for money and some grant funders allow you to count volunteer time as match funding too.

7 Be specific and write clearly. Imagine you are explaining to a friend (who has a short attention span) what the group wants to achieve with the project and why. You want to grab their attention, get them enthused about the project and prevent them from nodding off. Outline clearly how you will achieve these goals and how you will demonstrate the impact that the work will have. Try to avoid technical jargon, rambling or vague statements such as, "We will improve the wildlife of the park by planting trees and wildflowers" and instead use something like, "We will create a small copse by planting 20 trees of native species, and plant 300 mix of wild plants in the meadow area, shown on the accompanying plan." If you consider how many applications a grant officer must look at in their working week, make yours easy for them to understand by keeping sentences short, concise and using subheadings and bullet points.

Remember, you are not attempting to write 'War and Peace'. Make it easy for yourself by keeping it simple, and if there is a word limit, make sure you stay within it.

8 Have all your key documents at hand. Many grant bodies ask for copies of your constitution and bank account details. They also may ask for your annual accounts, child protection policy or public liability insurance. Having the latest copies of these electronically filed away in a folder, will mean that they are always at your fingertips for every application that you make.

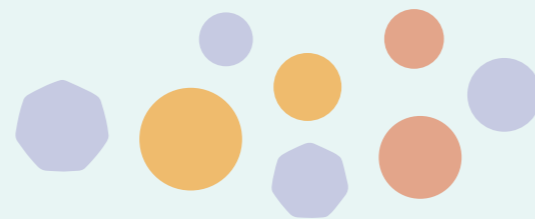
9 Say how your project will be sustained once it is completed. Can you demonstrate that your project will have a lasting impact? Be clear of what will happen once the project is complete. The grant provider will want to know if any physical improvements will need to be maintained and, if so, who will do it?

10 And finally, check and double check! Save yourself a lot of stress by leaving enough time before the closing date to have a critical friend read through your application. Ask them to check for consistency, spelling and to make sure that your figures add up. Ensure you have answered all the questions, and attach any documents that are required. Finally, don't forget to sign and date your application. (It's amazing how easy that is to forget!) Remember to retain a copy of your grant and it's always worth checking that they have received your application, so check your junk mail box just in case the acknowledgment has been sent there.



Adrian Harris
External funding officer
at Redcar and Cleveland Council

“ I send a newsletter out to community groups, schools and charities with the latest news on grants pots and other funding pots. I am also available for people to contact me, so we can do a search through Grant Finder to match them with potential funders and then give extra advice and assistance with their applications.”



Crowdfunding campaigns

Crowdfunding is a relatively new way of raising funds, helping more community groups to successfully raise their profile as well as their funds. Read on if you fancy giving it a go.

What is crowdfunding?

It's a way of generating income from a large number of people (the *Crowd*) who each contribute a relatively small amount, via the internet. It can be a good way to raise money quickly for a project and raise the profile of your green space.

How does it work?

Crowdfunding campaigns are run through websites called platforms. You identify a project you need funding (your *Campaign*), set a target amount of money that you need and a time frame by which to complete it. You then place your project on a crowdfunding platform as a *Donation campaign* and, using social media, encourage people to visit the project on the platform and donate money. You can choose either a 'Keep it all' (your group keeps all the funds that are raised) or an 'All or nothing' model (you will only get to keep the amount raised if your target is reached).

Crowdfunding will certainly raise the profile of your project which is great, but be prepared for public scrutiny that may result. As we know not everyone is kind on social media, so you may get negative comments. Such as "What's the point it will get vandalised?..." "This money could be better spent on x, y or z instead" or "Isn't that what I pay my taxes for?" Be ready with your upbeat positive responses!

John Throw

Chairman of the Friends of South Park

“People were devastated when our toddler play equipment was vandalised and burnt. It was such a popular feature of the park, and well used by families with small children. The charity Groundwork helped us to set up a fundraising crowdfunding campaign. The campaign really brought park users together, and as a result Darlington Council matched the funding that we raised. My advice to anyone considering crowdfunding is to choose a project to which people have an emotional attachment – it has to be something close to people's hearts. An unexpected outcome of the campaign is that one of the young boys involved in the vandalism, got involved with doing some volunteer work in the park.”

Is it successful?

Crowdfunding can work well for small projects, but it's not easy money. Although there are no guarantees, careful planning and a focused effort increases your chances of success.

Five tips for success

1 Have a simple, clear project

People are more likely to donate money to something tangible that they will be able to see. For example a new noticeboard, picnic benches, or fruit trees for an orchard.

2 Set a realistic target

Cost your project accurately, and don't be too ambitious with your target, especially if it's your first crowdfunding campaign. If the target seems unachievable, it will deter people from donating. If you exceed your target, you can always have add-ons e.g. more fruit trees, to encourage more donations.

3 Plan your marketing

Plan your marketing campaign before the launch. Consider your audience, what key messages will engage them and how you will publicise them through social media.

4 Keep updating

Keep up momentum once the campaign is launched. Do this by keeping the 'crowd' updated through the campaign on the progress, say thank you to people who are donating, and encourage them to share with their friends on social media.

5 Build on success

Celebrate key funding milestones, such as a halfway point or a certain number of donors signed up, and share photos of what the funding will achieve. Once you have reached your target, it's vital that you keep people updated with what your group has achieved with their kind donations. This can be done on social media or crowdfunding site, either by photos or a special celebration event. You may also recruit some new volunteers this way too.

Sociable ways of making money

Fêtes, bingo, quiz nights and sponsored activities may seem a bit of an old fashioned way to raise money, but they do work. They also provide ways for people in your local community, who are not able to volunteer, to support your group's work. Another plus is that, unlike grants, these funds are unrestricted which means you can use them for your group's routine running cost such as covering insurance, room hire, printing or tools. They can also be a great deal of fun, providing a sociable way to raise the local profile of your group's work.

Mags Hayden

Chair of Coatham Heritage Group

“We hold a few Quiz Nights with Pie and Peas throughout the year. They are really well supported by our community, with over 60 people enjoying a sociable evening. We find that it is an easy event to organise. We book the room and bar of our local cricket club, and arrange good quality hot pies and peas from our local butchers to be delivered and served on the night. We have recruited a quiz master who gives up his time for free to do the quiz for Coatham Heritage Group. We also hold a raffle, where all of the gifts are donated. This really does bring in quite a bit of extra money on top of the ticket sales. Not only do we raise around £300 per evening, but Redcar Cricket Club benefits from people buying drinks, and it's a great chance for everyone to bring their friends and family and have a good chinwag.

The money that we raise is spent on making Coatham Green a better place for visitors to enjoy the wildlife, flora and fauna of this unique landscape. We have bought bespoke seating from a local community group called 'The Men's Shed'. We pay to have the grass cut in certain areas of the Green. We have bought plants and flowers to go into raised beds and tubs on the perimeter. We have put money towards bigger projects such as the fencing, paths, signs and noticeboards.”



Mark Bennison

Chairman of Friends of Drinkfield Marsh

“We have started holding a summer fête on the green space next to the nature reserve. We have been lucky with donations – the local allotment groups provided some fantastic locally grown fruit and veg to sell, and people donated cakes and items for the tombola. The badge making, arts and crafts, rubber darts and hook-a-duck are very popular with families. We also laid out a nature trail for people to follow around Drinkfield Marsh. We have found that we can raise a few hundred pounds, and we get people from the neighbouring housing estates attending and finding out more about the nature reserve, and how the volunteers care for it.”

Support from local businesses

Small businesses are best approached for donations of tools and materials rather than cash support. Some major chains also have a policy of supporting local community groups. Don't be shy about using any connections you have with shops or businesses – a letter or email outlining your project, what you are looking for, and how you will promote their donation is a good start. Ideally arrange to visit them in person, so you can enthuse about your project. Once you have received a donation, maintain your group's relationship with them by writing to them, thanking them for their support and letting them know how your project went.



Maintaining momentum

There is a real buzz about starting a new group and getting stuck into an exciting project. Saving a wildlife site, transforming a park or creating wildlife habitats is hard work yet deeply motivating. Weeding herb gardens, strimming by footpaths and repairing fences, are all important, but can seem like endless tasks. The energy required and the routine work of running a group – newsletters, grant applications, and committee meetings – can become tiring. So how do you maintain momentum, ensure volunteers come back for more and keep your group on track to continue to achieve great things?

Same old, same old...

As well as maintaining existing projects, many groups find that having a new mini project each year keeps them moving forward. One way to get inspiration is to have an away day: visit other sites for inspiration that can translate to your patch. Snap up any free training workshops that may be on offer, to keep growing the skill base of volunteers.

When it comes to running events, it's worth adding some variety. Even if you had great success in the past with your Easter egg hunt, bat walk or history ramble, it's important not to repeat the same events too often. Try a teddy bears' picnic, outdoor photography workshop or herbal walk instead. This will keep you and your volunteers on your toes and continue to attract people to enjoy your site and your activities.

Reassess, revamp and re-energise

It is likely that the priorities of the group will change and develop over time, as local situations change, and as your group develops more skills and confidence. In addition, new volunteers will bring fresh ideas and it's important to be open to new ways of doing things. It's easy to dwell on problems and challenges, be worn down by the negative and forget to celebrate successes. An activity we have found successful is to set up a 'Re-assess, Re-vamp and Re-energise' session. To help you navigate people through this and focus attention, here are some pointers for group discussion:

What have been our top three successes? Three challenges? Three things we have learnt? Three long term priorities? Three things to achieve next year?

Dorothy Humphreys

Secretary of the Friends of Linthorpe Cemetery and Nature Reserve

The Tees Valley Wildlife Trust organised a trip for members of Middlesbrough's Parks and Green Spaces Forum to visit parks and nature reserves in Darlington and meet Friends Groups there...

“ We were invited on a magical mystery minibus tour, and it certainly was. The Darlington volunteers were so welcoming and inspiring. It was also reassuring that they faced some of the same challenges we did. There was certainly lots to talk about on the bus back, we were buzzing! ”



It's amazing how simply stopping, stepping back and reviewing what you have done can help you all develop a refreshed plan of action that the whole team is signed up to.

Looking after yourselves

Volunteering is good for our mental health and sense of wellbeing. However, the responsibility of being a committee member can sometimes cause stress and anxiety. Be kind to yourself; anything worthwhile isn't easy and not everything we do goes right all the time. In our enthusiasm, we can take on too much and struggle to deliver when we need to balance this with work and family life. As a group chairperson or secretary, it can feel that you are being cheerful and enthusiastic for your team, keeping everyone happy, but with no one looking after you. If you are feeling like this, be reassured that plenty of volunteer leaders experience it too. We find that talking with leaders from other groups can be beneficial. A chat over coffee with someone in a similar role can really help. They can remind you of why you are doing this, of your successes and be a listening ear to the challenges you are experiencing. And when the roles are reversed you can return the favour. If you feel overwhelmed and it's all too much, instead of throwing in the towel, consider seeing if some of your role can be shared, or if someone can hold the reins while you take a break for a few months.

Have some fun

Please don't forget to have fun! You are all volunteers and need to enjoy what you do. Working outdoors amongst wildlife has its own rewards, but there are also benefits in allowing time for leisurely tea breaks (with cake) and social activities. These don't have to be going down the pub or a meal out, just as enjoyable (and cheaper) are trips to nature reserves and museums, a Christmas quiz night or summer BBQ.

How Tees Valley Friends Groups have fun

The Friends of Errington Wood finish their final woodland task day of the year with food cooked over the fire. All volunteers, past and present, are invited to their outdoor feast and seasonal sing-song. The Friends of Linthorpe Cemetery have several visits during the year to nature reserves and museums across the region, and the Friends



David Preston

Chairman of Darlington DOVES



Darlington DOVES forum members came to the aid of one of their member friends by taking part in a summer evening walkabout at Maidendale Nature Reserve.

“ It was helpful to see the nature reserve I know so well through fresh pairs of eyes, by people who shared the same spirit of looking after wildlife for local communities. This gave us new ideas for potential ways forward. One outcome was the commission of an access and structures survey that outlined priorities for repair and upgrading, design plans and budget estimates. This will be invaluable evidence when applying for funding. ”

of Fairy Dell mark volunteers' birthdays with celebration cake at coffee time on their Tuesday task mornings.

When to call it a day

Groups don't need to last forever. If your group was set up to achieve a specific goal and that is complete, there may not be a reason to continue. It may be that you lose key volunteers over time, and there are not enough people to run the group, despite recruitment campaigns. In this case it may be that instead of trying to do all the activities that you once did, you focus on fewer priorities that you have the capacity to achieve.

If your group is coming to a natural end, or is no longer sustainable, it is natural to feel a sense of loss, sadness, guilt and even failure. But instead of fading away, you could have a celebration event or final newsletter looking back at all that the group has achieved. The experiences and friendships that you and your volunteers have gained are not lost, and there will be opportunities to contribute the skills you have gained elsewhere. It may be that, in a year or so, people will emerge with a new drive and energy and start a new group, like a phoenix out of the ashes.

Visitor information and interpretation

Attractive entrance features, well-designed noticeboards, lively interpretative panels and informative leaflets are likely to enhance the enjoyment of visitors to parks and green spaces. They can give your site a strong identity, which will enable people to learn about what makes it special and deepen their understanding and commitment to the place.

Your approach will depend on the character of the site, the interests and needs of the local community and the capacity of your group. All this takes a lot of effort, money and commitment, but by devising a long-term plan you can tackle one aspect at a time. If you are a new or small group, consider partnerships with other organisations who can work with you to help turn your ideas into reality.

Entrance signs and features

We all know that first impressions are important. Let visitors know that they are entering a treasured green space that is loved and cared for by its community. A freshly painted front door and hanging basket makes a house look inviting, and it's the same principle for the entrance to a site. A distinctive and attractive sign will welcome people but, if you haven't yet raised the funds for new entrance features, simply painting faded fencing and regular litter picks will have a big impact.

Consider the character of the location and make sure you reflect this, so that any gates and signage and benches are in keeping. This doesn't stop you having designs that are distinctive and imaginative. You can celebrate what's special about your site through the design and materials of the signage, railings and gates.



You want people to treat the place with respect, so when it comes to signs aim for positive messages, which are often more effective than bombarding people with instructions or lists of bylaws. For example; *Dogs and their owners are welcome, please clean up after your dog; Enjoy the flowers and leave for others to enjoy; Help wildlife by taking your litter home.*

Deborah Blakey

Roseworth Librarian

“ Our Library Friday Friends Group had a fab time creating mosaics for our wildlife garden. It was an activity that everyone could have a go at and we are really chuffed with the end result. It was a real team effort. They are really proud of the garden and are keen to show new visitors their work. Our once bare courtyard is now a magical garden, providing a tranquil haven for visitors to read outdoors. ”



Noticeboards

A noticeboard is an effective way to keep visitors, especially regular locals, up-to-date with site information and news. It's worth investing in a robust, well-made noticeboard with hinged, lockable cabinets, glazed with shatter-proof polycarbonate.

Posters of events, notices of meetings, invitations to events and volunteering activities can all be displayed. Having seasonal information and photographs of what birds or plants to look out for, or drawings by local school children, can really involve regular visitors. Letting people know that volunteers help care for the site usually results in people treating it with more respect, and it is less likely to suffer from antisocial behaviour. A cabinet full of faded posters and outdated information will not give a good impression, so it's worth having a volunteer to be the 'noticeboard monitor.'

Sculpture, mosaics and trails

There are many imaginative ways to celebrate your green space and engage visitors in the heritage of the area. A brass rubbings trail can encourage families with young children to explore the whole site. Decorative gates, railings or seating can be made that relate to a site's history and wildlife. Sculptures can be focal features and the perfect photo opportunity for families. Mosaics and murals can be used, especially in urban settings, to bring colour and fun to buildings and walls. If you have ideas but lack the expertise in your group, you could team up with a local arts organisation, or seek help from the community development officer in your local council. They will bring with them arts project management skills and experience of commissioning artists. A community arts project is a great way to reach out into your community and engage with people who are not currently involved in your green space.

Quita Owen

Secretary, Friends of the King
George V Playing Field, Guisborough

“ Our new nature rubbings trail around our nature area has been very popular with children. A local artist worked with pupils from Chaloner Primary School to draw pictures that were then cast in metal and mounted on wooden posts. The accompanying booklet is available free from the Swim and Fitness centre next door. The children's artwork also appeared on our interpretation panels. ”

Alan Liddle

Chairman of the friends of Stainton
and Thornton Green Spaces



“ We have been caring for a tree planting site on the edge of our parish for around thirty years, and now it is a thriving young woodland. Still many people in the village didn't know it was there. Over the past five years we have worked in partnership with the Tees Valley Wildlife Trust installing signs, interpretation panels, and a community noticeboard. With grant funding from Tesco we were also able to develop a nature rubbings trail and a set of wooden sculptures made by a local artist. The number of houses in the parish has grown from around 500 when I moved here in the 1980s to over 1,200 today. Many of these are homes for young families. It's been great to see them enjoy the woodland and the trails. I would say there is at least a tenfold increase of visitors to the woodland. ”



Noticeboards

- ✓ Can change content regularly
- ✓ Informative to regular site visitors

- ✗ Initial investment costs
- ✗ Need to ensure location doesn't detract from the beauty of the site

Interpretation panels

- ✓ Attractive way to enable visitors to learn about the site
- ✓ Informative for new visitors
- ✓ Can have QR codes for people to find out more in-depth knowledge online

- ✗ May need planning permission
- ✗ Static, so of limited interest to regular visitors

Printed leaflets and booklets

- ✓ Enables visitors to learn about site using pictures, maps, photographs
- ✓ No vandalism issues
- ✓ Can be accessed by people who are unable to visit the site

- ✗ Vital to ensure distribution to reach target audiences

Trails

(e.g. brass rubbing trails)

- ✓ Appeals to families with children
- ✓ Can involve local school in designing the trail

- ✗ Possibility of vandalism or theft

Laminated posters

- ✓ Useful to promote events and news
- ✓ Quick and easy to produce yourselves
- ✓ Minimal costs

- ✗ Need constant replacing
- ✗ Quickly look tatty if not replaced
- ✗ Prone to being ripped down

Permanent art features

(outdoor mosaics, metal and wood sculptures, decorative benches)

- ✓ Can provide a unique sense of place
- ✓ Provides additional interest, fun, wonderment and joy for visitors
- ✓ Very accessible for children
- ✓ Opportunities to engage community in their creation – increased local ownership

- ✗ Need to consider location carefully – ensure sympathetic to character of the site and interests of local people
- ✗ Vulnerable to vandalism
- ✗ Good funding and project management skills needed

Guided walks and participatory events

(poetry walks, photography workshops, bug hunts, art and craft events, wildflower walk, dawn chorus event, bat evenings)

- ✓ Provides opportunities to deliver creative and engaged experiences
- ✓ Can build a sense of place and build community ownership
- ✓ Brings people in community together in a fun and sociable way
- ✓ Can tailor to suit needs and interests of participants

- ✗ Needs a lot of time and energy to plan, publicise and deliver

Digital resources

(website, multimedia, videos)

- ✓ Opportunity to present a story which has detailed information on wildlife, history and photographs
- ✓ Can be accessed by people who are unable to visit the site
- ✓ Videos can be made easily on mobile phones

- ✗ May need specialist expertise to develop and maintain

Social media

(facebook, instagram, twitter)

- ✓ Can provide links to website for more detailed information
- ✓ Can keep regular users up-to-date with activities, news and snippets of information
- ✓ Enables interaction with visitors – 'two way street' communication tool and opportunity to share photos

- ✗ Needs continuous effort by volunteers to put up regular posts
- ✗ Requires constant monitoring to respond to comments and messages



Writing and designing interpretation panels and leaflets

Even if you know a lot about your green space, writing and designing leaflets and interpretation panels is not easy. Check within your group, there may be a graphic designer or writer amongst you. If you have raised the funds don't be afraid of commissioning specialist designers and artists to help.

Be focused

Be clear on what you want to communicate. You won't be able to include everything, so decide on a theme and concentrate on what is special about the place. Consider your audience and what may capture their imagination. Hidden history or folklore, for example, rather than a complete chronology of history and wildlife.

Less is more

You will need to be ruthless with your word count, especially on an interpretation panel. The recommended number of words for an A1 panel is only 200. You are just highlighting key information that will pique a visitor's interest.

Maps

Maps can be incredibly useful in helping people explore the site and highlight interesting features. There are so many different styles that you can adapt. Pictorial maps, bird's eye views and annotated aerial photographs can be used, to make your map visually attractive and user-friendly.

Good visuals

Photographs and illustrations are vital – they can say so much more than words, and draw people in to read the text. Take time to source high quality, high resolution photographs. Historical photographs relating to the site can help people link to their local history. A few afternoons at the local archives may unearth some treasures. Illustrations can be very useful too. They can be used to tell your story and visually lift the text.

Be inclusive

To help communicate with all your community, it is best to adopt the principles of universal design. This is about designing products and buildings to be used to the greatest possible extent by everyone, regardless of their age and ability. Consider readability, for example having uncluttered design and page layout, with good colour contrasts. Avoid combinations of colours that are difficult to distinguish by colourblind people (red and green together). Other guidelines to improve readability are: not putting type over photographs or patterned background; not using whole sentences of capital letters or italic type; and not using shadows on text. Justified paragraphs of text are also harder to read. Consider using symbols or spot illustrations.

And finally...

Don't forget to acknowledge your partners and funders with their logos. Many funders will have guidance on how their logo should be displayed. This information will be on their website or in the grant offer letter. Ensure that you have permission to use your selected photographs, maps and illustrations, and acknowledge their source.

Top tip

Before you start, have a good look at signs and leaflets at places you visit. With fresh eyes critically appraise their signage, panels and leaflets. Think about what you like, what you would want to avoid and collect ideas that could translate to your site. Making a montage of these is a great way to kick off a discussion with other group members. Look at typeface, style, use of images and colour, themes and maps, as well as the materials they have used.

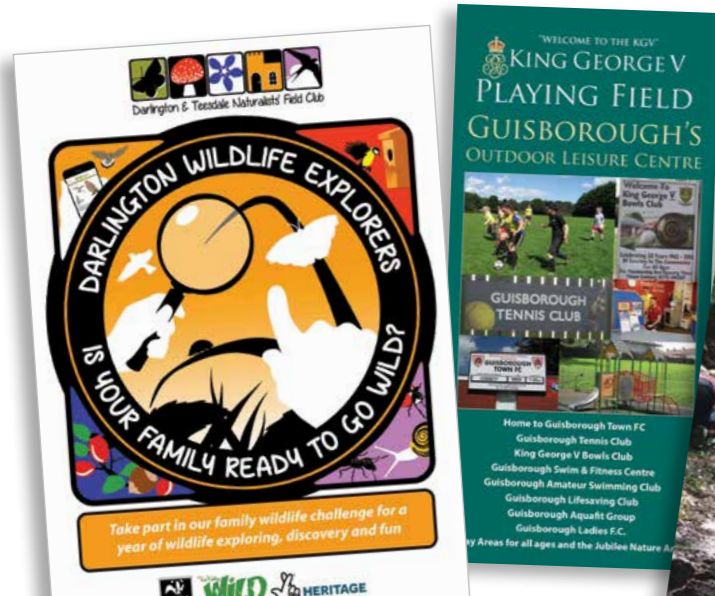


Errington Woods

One panel explains how the Friends of Errington Wood are restoring the woodland by thinning conifers to allow broadleaved species to thrive. An additional panel describes the site's hidden history with an artist's interpretation of an iron age settlement, and archive photographs which show men working in the ironstone mines.

Coatham Green

Coatham Heritage Group worked with a Teesside University Student, Amy Fodor, to research the fascinating history of this coastal grassland. A second panel describes the special wildlife of the green, which includes lizards and slow worms, helping people to appreciate the value of the site.



Drinkfield

The birds of the marsh attract a lot of interest, especially the waterfowl. Two interpretation panels enable visitors to put a name to the species that they see. All of the photographs on the two interpretation panels were taken on the marsh by local photographers.

Tackling vandalism, theft & antisocial activities

We hope that the fear of theft and vandalism does not deter you from improving your local green space. Our public spaces can be vulnerable to vandalism, antisocial behaviour and criminal damage. Whilst there are no magic solutions, here are some suggestions for reducing the likelihood, and how you can respond if your patch is targeted.

Keeping up appearances

Well cared for parks and green spaces are far less likely to suffer vandalism than places that look neglected. This is based on research of the 'broken window theory', which argues that people's behaviour adapts to the environment around them, with one broken window leading to another if it is not repaired. So, keeping your patch clean, and responding to any damage or graffiti straight away, will foster good behaviour. Vandalism is a crime that's cumulative. If an area that has been hit by vandalism is not quickly repaired or cleaned, further recurrences are more likely, as is other antisocial behaviour and criminal damage.



Simple actions can send a positive message that your patch is well-loved by your local community. These include: regular litter picking; cleaning of noticeboards and interpretation panels so that they are free of dirt and algae; ensuring any paintwork is in good condition and removing any graffiti as soon as it appears.

Involving the community

Community ownership and local pride has a big impact on how visitors treat parks and green spaces. You can develop this by involving as many people in your local community as possible in events, activities and volunteering projects. Whilst it is unlikely that the people who engage in vandalism and theft will join in, they will be aware that it is their neighbours who are involved. This social pressure can deter antisocial activities.

A well-used green space, visited by people of all ages, is less likely to become a target of antisocial activity. Seeing other people will also reassure visitors, especially women and older people, that the site is safe for them. If antisocial behaviour happens during the evenings or night, when other visitors are not around, liaise with your police and your local authority enforcement team to target this activity. You should always report criminal and antisocial activity, as these statistics are used by the police to prioritise their future time and resources.

Good design and materials

Whilst there is no such thing as vandal-proof interpretation panels, bins or benches, carefully considering materials and design is important. Recycled plastic that has the appearance of wood can be a good choice, especially in areas where wood

is likely to be burnt or metal stolen for scrap. The dilemma is the choice between investing in expensive vandal-resistant interpretation panels, which can still be damaged by determined attack, or to go for cheaper panels than can be replaced more cheaply if damaged. If you are applying for grants to cover costs, it's worth adding a contingency to cover repair or replacement. When designing signs and interpretation panels, try to avoid pale coloured backgrounds or areas of blank space, as these can be targeted by graffiti artists to leave their 'tags'.

Location

Carefully consider the placement of interpretation panels, art features, bins and benches. Place them by main entrances and areas that are overlooked by roads or housing, rather than secluded areas that are hidden from public view. Aim to install new features in term time, rather than the beginning of the school summer holidays.

A bad reputation lasts

It's understandable that after vandalism or theft, people share their upset on social media, especially if it leads to local intelligence that can help. However, we suggest

that you think carefully before broadcasting the news far and wide. People tend to remember bad news more than good, and it can overshadow all your good work, leaving people feeling dispirited and less likely to visit the site. An alternative is to repair or remove any damage quickly, and post a positive news story about how volunteers have rallied round to help. It's also worth carefully monitoring comments on your group's social media posts, ensuring that any offensive comments are removed.

Avoid the blame game

Children and young people are very upset by vandalism too. It's only a tiny minority that cause damage, so be really careful about comments such as, "children of today". Most young people care deeply about environmental issues and don't always get the recognition they deserve for the positive contributions they make to the community. Your group will be able to help redress the balance by highlighting the good things young people do to support your green space.

Make contact with your local colleges and youth organisations and involve them in your work. Ensure the efforts of young people are publicised so that the wider community know about their positive actions.

Anne Dawson

Secretary of Friends of Blue Bell Beck

“ We were so proud of our sculpture trail at Blue Bell Beck. It was the result of several months of fundraising and planning. So, when one day the following year we found that someone had poured gloss paint over some of the sculptures and set about our family of foxes sculpture by hacking off the ears and snout, it was truly heart-breaking.

Our volunteer team met on site and after much weeping and stamping of feet, someone found one of the wooden ears of the fox sculpture in the undergrowth. After a good search we found other pieces and then worked with glue and nails to fit the family of foxes back together. One of our volunteers modelled a new snout from clay. This was followed by days of stripping the paint and carefully sanding and varnishing. Now they are as good as new. I am really proud of our team. Whilst we were enraged and upset, we didn't give up and allow the vandals to win, as we know the sculpture trail was enjoyed by so many local families. We have now received funding from Community Chest which has enabled us to print and publish an illustrated booklet containing a story about the fox family and their adventures along the beck. ”



Organising a community litter pick

A community litter pick is a surprisingly enjoyable activity. It can really bring a community together and is a great way to meet people, get fresh air and exercise, while at the same time looking after your green spaces and supporting wildlife.

From the tiny tots fascinated by 'litter grabbers' to teenagers helping out older family members, people of all ages and backgrounds are often willing to give an hour or so to help out with a community litter pick (especially if a cup of tea and a chat is part of the activity).

Our parks, green spaces, road verges, rivers and beaches can be blighted by litter. Litter makes a place look uncared for. It affects people's feelings of wellbeing and safety, as well as being a hazard to wildlife and our pets. It wastes millions of pounds of taxpayers' money each year to clear up, money that could be spent on vital services.

Organising a community litter pick may not solve the problem straightaway, but it can really galvanise the community into taking action and spread a positive message that dropping litter is socially unacceptable.

Keep Britain Tidy's research has found that litter leads to more litter. People tend to litter more when litter is already there, almost as if the presence of litter gives people permission to drop more.

A step-by-step plan

Running a community litter pick is usually straightforward and is a good sociable activity to get your group started. The key to success (as always) is planning ahead and good communication! Our step-by-step guide will help ensure that your litter pick runs smoothly and safely, and is enjoyed by everyone.

Beforehand

Choose a spot – if you haven't already got a 'grot spot' to tackle, you could use social media to find out where local people think should be targeted. This could be a local park or green space, footpath, beck valley, or nature reserve. It's worth concentrating your efforts in a specific area with clear boundaries. Make sure it is not too large or your volunteers will be too spread out.

Ensure you have the landowner's permission to access the land. Check with the local authority first, if they don't own the land, they may know who does.

Carry out a site survey. Doing a risk assessment will enable you to consider the main hazards and decide on measures needed to protect volunteers. Drug paraphernalia, asbestos and other hazardous waste needs to be professionally removed beforehand. Check your site for unsafe areas such as steep, slippery or unstable banks, where people may slip or fall. Check for thorny bushes and places where glass and other harmful items may be hidden in the undergrowth.

There is a comprehensive risk assessment template on the Keep Britain Tidy website that can be adapted to your site and group.

Check if your activity has public liability insurance cover – see our insurance section (page 43) if you are unsure of what you need and why.

Decide on a date, time and meeting point. It's worth checking that you are not clashing with another local event, national sporting fixture or royal wedding! Select a meeting point that is well known. Keep your litter pick to a maximum of two hours, so you can work as a team and all be involved in the end result. Counting the bags of rubbish collected gives a real sense of achievement. It is amazing what can be achieved in a short space of time with a small group.

Contact your local council. If it is on public open space that they own or manage, the council is likely to support your venture. They might even agree to dispose of the material collected on the litter pick. Make sure you give them plenty of notice of the date, and choose



a location that is accessible for their vehicles to collect the waste. We advise against the use of skips, as it may be tempting for people to fill with their own waste, even before your litter pick takes place.

Rally your volunteers – get the message out in your community in as many different ways as possible. Posters and social media are great, but think of them as an addition telling as many people as possible. If you have a big litter pick to do, or a large area to cover, invite local groups to lend a hand. Scouts, guides, sports groups, residents associations, local businesses... there is no harm in asking! And don't forget to rope in your own friends, families and neighbours.

Invite a local celebrity to come along, this will really give your litter campaign a strong profile. Perhaps a local sports person, home grown TV star or local TV/radio presenter. Don't forget to invite your local councillors to come and support, or even your MP if it's a big campaign. It will all help to create a buzz around your event and raise the profile of your group's hard work.

Gather your litter picking gear

– most local authorities will have equipment for community groups to borrow that will include litter grabbers, high vis vests, protective gloves and collection bags.



Brief your team – ensure that you are not responsible for everything by sharing the load. Gather a few key people who you can share tasks with, and ensure everyone understands the plan and risk assessment. This will make the day run smoothly, especially if lots of people turn up.

On the day

Be there on time with your key volunteers and equipment to welcome people. Introduce yourself and communicate to everyone what the task is and the boundaries of where you will be working. You will need to demonstrate how to use the litter pick gadgets and run through the safety talk.

Point out who the first aider is and where the first aid kit is located.

Have someone signing people in at the beginning and when they leave – this is good practice, especially having an emergency contact number for volunteers.

Ensure you have a key volunteer to welcome and brief people who arrive after the start.

If you have a large number of volunteers, consider dividing into teams, and try to ensure that people don't work alone. It's safer to work as a group and more fun too.

Litter picking is a great activity for children, but should be supervised by a responsible adult. Young children can be tasked with pointing out the litter for others to collect.

Try to separate waste into recyclable and non-recyclable items (this may not always be possible).

If you are working on a green site, encourage people to be careful not to disturb wildlife habitats, and not to collect natural materials such as logs and rocks.

Don't forget to take photos and videos. This is easy to forget when you are busy coordinating activities, so it's worth asking for a volunteer to document the event. Do make sure that people are happy with you photographing them first. A great way to finish is with a group photograph of volunteers and the collected rubbish.

If someone has luggage weighing scales, record the number and weight of bags, and of course give a massive thank you to everyone who took part!

Afterwards

Message your local council contact as soon as you have finished, so they know how much waste there is to be collected and its location.

Let your community know what a success the event was. Get your photographs on social media, and contact your local newspaper and radio. If you have collected emails of volunteers who took part, you could email the photographs to them to thank them.

Seth Pearson

One Darlington Partnership

Once a month, employee volunteers from Darlington Cares meet on the Town Square on a Friday, litter pick for an hour and a half then meet back at the pub for a Pie and a Pint (or soft drink and something healthy) paid for by a different business sponsor each month. The scheme has removed over 1000 bags of rubbish from the Town Centre. Darlington Borough Council support by providing litter picking equipment and ensuring Street Scene vans are available to pick up the bags of litter.

“The secret to its success is that it's fun! Often a particular litter pick will have a theme: On 4 May, the litter pick was Star Wars themed (May the Fourth be with you). The August Pick Pie and a Pint which was focused on children attracted over 80 participants. Children were served free ice cream at the end of the litter pick. More and more people are bringing their children, who thoroughly enjoy the sessions and become enthusiastic litter pickers, spreading the message about litter through the generations.”



Join a litter campaign

Why not time your local litter pick so that it can be part of a wider campaign. The increased publicity may result in more volunteers. The 'Great British Spring Clean', coordinated by Keep Britain Tidy, takes place annually and is the country's biggest mass-action environmental campaign. Community groups, just like yours, host clean-ups, and in 2019 over 56,000 volunteers took part. Registering your event with them will gain you publicity and some great free resources, templates for posters, press releases and risk assessments. Your county or town may also have a campaign to tie into.

You are wasting your time mate!

Most people will congratulate you for being community heroes but there may be a few who dismiss your work. You may receive comments such as, "You're wasting your time mate" or "That's a job for the council, that's what we pay our taxes for". Don't get too disheartened, keep smiling and it's worth making a note of some positive responses so that you are prepared.

Get tough on fly tipping

Fly tipping is a growing issue and one that's hard to tackle. If it is safe to do so, see if you can find any material such as names and addresses in the dumped material or any information on who dumped it. You can pass this information to your local council's enforcement team who can follow the matter up. Prosecutions of fly tippers usually get picked up by local media and are a good deterrent.

Make it fun

Think of how to make your litter pick more fun. You could incorporate some little competitions, such as who can find the oldest crisp packet or the most unusual item of litter. Certificates for children always go down well, and if you can get stickers or badges that's even better. A sociable way to finish is with refreshments (ensuring clean hands of course) or retiring to a community venue for tea and cake... or a pub for a pie and a pint as they do in Darlington!



Equipment check list

- Litter bags
- Gloves
- Litter grabbers
- High vis vests
- Hand sanitiser
- First aid kit
- Mobile phone (make sure it's charged up)
- Wheelbarrow
- Shovel/spade
- Luggage weighing scales
- Signing-in sheet and pen
- Stickers (a nice idea for children)

Sue Antrobus

Tees Valley Wild Green Places Manager

As part of the national Great British Spring Clean in 2017, the Tees Valley Wild Green Places Project worked with the Roseworth Community Partnership to lead an anti-littering campaign on the Roseworth housing estate in Stockton-on-Tees.

“It was a real challenge to motivate people to get involved, so we called in the 'Lord of the Bins' theatre group. During the week the dynamic duo performed promotional assemblies in Rosebrook Primary School and St. Gregory's Academy. Children were encouraged to enter a 'litter poster' competition, with prizes donated by McDonalds and the Wildlife Trust. Lord of the Bins also popped along to McDonalds and walked round the Redhill shop, engaging people in litter related banter. Roseworth residents and volunteers from Tesco took part in a jam-packed day of family fun when Lord of the Bins arrived in Roseworth at the weekend for a litter pick. This was followed by a Funky Junk craft workshop and refreshments, donated by the local Tesco store.”



Carl Quatermain

Local councillor for Redcar and Cleveland Council

“I had an office on the seafront at Redcar and was getting so frustrated about the masonry and litter that I could see from my window. In the end I decided to stop moaning and get off my backside. I set up the community action group FRED (Friends of Redcar) and soon realised that, once I had started the ball rolling, there were many other people who had felt the same way. In 2013 we involved residents, the council and politicians to tackle the detritus left on Redcar beach, following the building of the sea defence. Now five years on, hundreds of volunteers have cleared many tonnes of rubbish from our Redcar coastline and further inland on monthly litter picks. We have installed litter pick cabinets on the sea front, so that people can carry out their own beach cleans whilst enjoying the beautiful coast. We continue our work planning our activities to fit into national campaigns, including Surfers

Against Sewage and the Marine Conservation Trust, so that we can be part of a national voice.”

The group's success has inspired neighbouring villages and towns to set up their own litter action groups, and encouraged many to think carefully about their use of single-use plastics.



Get your community planting trees

Everyone agrees that we need more trees and, while it's tempting to plant them wherever there's an available space, it is important to choose the right species, the right place and the right aftercare to ensure success. Trees are good for wildlife, good for people and good for the planet, and getting together to plant trees can be a joyful community action. This guide will help you choose what trees to plant and where.

Ten steps before you dig

1 To plant or not to plant?

Whilst it's never been more important to plant trees for the future, other habitats are valuable for wildlife too. If your site has ancient grassland, heathland or wetland, these are important habitats and should not be planted with trees. Your selected site may have species protected by law or have archaeological remains. If you are unsure, check with your local Wildlife Trust and county archaeologist. Trees may be naturally regenerating, if so, be patient and let nature take its course.

2 Get permission to plant

This may be obvious but sometimes it can be difficult to find out who the legal landowner is. Once you have established this, ensure you have their permission in writing. If you are planning to plant trees next to a watercourse, you will need to contact the Environment Agency to find out if you need their permission.

3 Put in a care plan

Putting plans in place for aftercare before you plant is the best guarantee that your trees will thrive. Weeding in the first few years is vital. Watering may also be needed, depending on the size of tree stock that you choose.



4 Choosing what species to plant

A good way to find out what will grow well on your site is by looking around the area and seeing what tree species are thriving. Copy nature where you can, especially if in a rural location. Consider drainage of the site, exposure to wind and pollution. Dig down and have a good look at the soil too. If it is shallow, compacted, or rich in clay, you will need to select carefully. For example, willow and alder do well on damp ground, and hawthorn is very hardy where soil conditions are poor. The Woodland Trust website is a good starting point for researching the characteristics of native broadleaved trees. If you want to maximise value for birds, you can choose trees that have seeds and berries in autumn. If you are thinking about foraging, consider crab apple or wild roses for their hips, and willow for basket weaving.



5 Make a planting plan

A good starting point is to produce a map of the site, then you can plan what to plant and where. Find out from your local authority if there are any underground services, such as electricity cables, gas and water pipes. Mark on any overhead cables, built structures and footpaths. Try to envisage what the trees will look like in 20 and 50 years' time. This will enable you to ensure that there is enough room for their growth. Remember that tree roots can be extensive, up to twice the spread of the tree canopy.

If you are creating a copse or small woodland, you can make the results look more natural by planting in wavy lines and varying the spacing between trees. By planting small groups of the same species together, you can reduce competition. Pick a selection of fast and slow growing species. For example: oak grows slowly, whereas birch and rowan grow more quickly. Plan to create woodland glades by leaving some areas empty. As the trees grow, these will develop into sheltered sunny places for wildflowers and butterflies. You can soften the edge of a woodland by planting native shrubs, such as hawthorn, guelder rose and wild roses.

6 Selecting the right size of stock

The choice of bare rooted whips, cell grown, to semi standards, standards and heavy standards can be daunting, and each have pros and cons. Generally, the younger and smaller the tree when you plant, the cheaper they are and the quicker they will become established. Small bare rooted stock is inexpensive and great for larger tree planting projects and is unlikely to need watering. Cell grown trees are increasingly popular. The roots are contained and protected by compost, so that the young fibrous roots suffer no drying out or damage by transplanting. Although they are usually only around 20cm tall, survival rates are higher than bare rooted trees. Standard trees are relatively expensive to buy and will need staking to support them. They require more skill to plant and will need regular watering during the first few years. They may be a good option if you only have a few trees to plant, are creating an avenue or need to create an immediate impact.

7 Where to buy from

Pests and diseases pose a serious threat to our trees and woodlands, which is increasing due to the international trade of trees. You can limit the risk of spreading pests and diseases by ensuring you know the source of the trees that you are buying. Always go to a reputable tree nursery and ask for evidence of where the tree seed comes from and where it was grown. The Woodland Trust has established the UK and Ireland Sourced and Grown Assurance Scheme (UKISG). This is a voluntary initiative for forest nurseries. It identifies the provenance of stock to buyers and provides assurance that trees have been raised from seed sourced and grown solely within the UK and Ireland. Visit their website for a list of the qualifying nurseries.

8 Consider the need for tree guards, stakes and mulching

If you are planting cell grown or small bare rooted whips you won't need stakes. If there are rabbits or deer in the area, they will still need protecting from grazing by tree guards or spirals. As these currently contain plastic, it is worth checking if you really need them. Mulching a metre around trees with a good depth of wood mulch or a tree mat, will reduce competition from grasses and give your trees a head start. The cost of these vital extras can be as much as the trees, so you will need to build them into your budget.

9 When to plant

Whilst pot grown trees can be planted all year round, it is vital for bare rooted trees to be planted whilst they are dormant. This is normally between November and February. Planting any tree during the summer will increase the need for watering so if you can, plan to get your trees in during the autumn.

10 Organise your community tree planting

You are now ready to start planning your community planting. Getting your local community actively involved in planting the trees will mean that they are more likely to survive.



Top tips for a successful community tree planting event

Community tree planting is a great way to bring people of all ages together in the fresh air, to do something positive for their environment. Our top tips will help you make your tree planting event an enjoyable and satisfying experience for everyone...

- **Choose a date**, preferably autumn through to spring. But do be prepared to postpone if the ground is frozen on your chosen planting date, as this will drastically reduce the survival rates.
- **Recruit your volunteers** by spreading the message throughout the community. Contact local clubs and schools, and plug the event on social media. Make sure the date, time and meeting point are clear. Say Let it be known that people can plant a single tree or stay longer.
- **Invite any special guests.** Who would you like to plant the first tree? It's unlikely that Chris Packham is available, but it could be someone your community really values, such as a popular school crossing patrol warden, supermarket manager or sports club captain. Remember to invite them well in advance.
- **Plan for safety.** As with any practical task involving volunteers, ensure a safe and enjoyable visit by carrying out a site visit, a risk assessment and checking your insurance cover.
- **Gather your tools and equipment.** As well as your bag of trees and tree guards, it's good to have a list of everything else you may need and get them together the week before. Are volunteers bringing their own spades and trowels, or will you need to provide them? Don't forget protective gloves, first aid kit and antiseptic hand wipes. If staking trees, a hammer, nails and a penknife are always useful.
- **Any community event is made more sociable by including refreshments.** This may simply be flasks of hot chocolate with biscuits. If someone has a camping stove, a big pan of homemade soup and cheese scones are very popular, especially on a cold November day. If any volunteers would prefer not to dig, they can be in charge of the refreshment table.
- **Make your tree planting memorable**, especially for children. Consider making tree planting certificates, stickers or badges. Have pictures of the trees to be planted with photographs of their leaves, to give people a greater connection to the trees that they have helped to plant.
- **On the morning, get on site before people arrive** and ensure you mark exactly where the trees are being planted and which species, otherwise your planting plan will go out of the window. This can be done with canes or stakes with coloured electric tape.
- **Welcome volunteers at the start:** introduce yourself, thank people for coming and let them know what trees they are planting. Run through safety points and flag up key volunteers who can help them during the event. Do not assume that everyone will know how to plant a tree, for some people it may be the first time! So demonstrate how to plant a tree, or get your special guest to plant one.
- **During the event it is likely that people will pop in late**, so ask a key volunteer to work with them. Have some experienced volunteers who can demonstrate how to plant trees. If you have people who like digging holes, ask if they can dig for people who are less physically able.
- **Throughout the planting ensure that people treat the trees gently, with tender loving care.** In winter young trees look like sticks with roots, but are very sensitive to being damaged by careless handling. Ensure that roots do not dry out – this can happen in a few minutes on a cold, windy day.
- **Don't forget to take photographs**, chat to people about the trees and make sure everyone is enjoying themselves, including yourself. Before people leave, request to take a group photograph, say thank you, and hand out certificates for children.
- **At the end, go around the site and check that each tree has been planted properly** and stakes and tree guards are secure. Common mistakes include planting too deeply or not deep enough. Check that all the tools and equipment have been collected in.
- **Relax at home with a cup of tea** and don't forget to put your photographs on social media, write letters or emails to thank people, and let any funders know of the day's success.



Sources of help

The Woodland Trust gives away hundreds of thousands of trees to schools and communities each year and has subsidised trees for landowners. Their website is a fantastic resource for information about tree species. It has everything you need to plan, plant and care for the tree packs they provide. If you are a school or working with children, their educational resources are very engaging and easy to download and print.

The Tree Council is a UK charity and umbrella body bringing everyone together with a shared mission to care for trees. *National Tree Week* (28 November – 6 December) is the most well-known annual tree celebration, marking the start of the winter tree planting season. Just as important is their *Tree Care Campaign* (31 March – 21 September) which raises awareness of the easy ways we can all help our local trees thrive. We recommend their website for their detailed, step-by-step guide to planting and caring for trees.

Karen Harley

Chair of the Roseworth Big Local Trust

“ We worked with the Tees Valley Wildlife Trust to create our own mini woodland on our estate by planting over a thousand trees in 2017. The Trust organised each class from the two local primary schools to come and plant trees through the week, which they really enjoyed. Then at the weekend we had a community tree planting day. We made it a real celebration of trees, with lots of fun tree-related activities, such as: hook an acorn, guess how many acorns in the jar, as well as willow weaving. Our Mayor was the guest of honour, cutting our special tree woodland cake. We had a competition to name the wood. It's now called Railway Wood, as when we planted trees, the people in trains on the railway line next to the wood, waved to us. We did not use tree guards or spirals, as this would be a target for vandals. During the first two years some trees were uprooted by vandals, but we helped the Wildlife Trust to replant these on a second tree planting event. ”

Tackling vandalism

It can be heartbreaking when trees that you have lovingly planted are uprooted or vandalised. The best form of protection against vandalism is encouraging as many people in your community to feel a sense of ownership towards them. This takes time, but knowing that volunteers, especially children, have planted the trees, does have an effect on making vandalism less socially acceptable. If your trees are vandalised, it's worth remembering that it is a tiny minority of people who have done this and that most people do appreciate your efforts to improve their community. Our tip is to plan for some loss by vandalism and replant as soon as possible and reassure your volunteers that you are not giving up. See page 60 for more on vandalism.



Organising small community events

Events in parks and green spaces are a great way to bring people together. Seasonal celebrations, family wildlife extravaganzas, sports days, dog shows, medieval festivals are just some ideas that can help your site become the green heart of the local community. Good planning and communication are the secret of any successful event whatever its theme or size. Each location and event is unique, requiring different levels of planning, management and permissions, but the general principles are the same.

Before you start

Before you get down to the nitty gritty of organising the event, it's worth taking stock with your group and discussing ideas so that there is a clear vision for what you want to achieve, who it's aimed at and its scale. Here are a few suggested questions to get your discussions started: *Will the event have a theme? Who will it appeal to? How will it promote your group? Is the site suitable? How will you ensure the site will not be damaged? How will it engage new visitors? What budget will it need? Are there opportunities for fundraising? Will booking, licences and permission be needed? Who can work with your group to help out?*

Your events team

The key to a successful, safe and enjoyable event is a teamwork. Setting up an events team to share the workload right from the beginning is a smart move. Appointing an Events Manager who has overall responsibility for planning, will ensure that everything is well coordinated. This may feel like overkill, but we can assure you that having a system in place will

prepare you and make the whole thing less stressful. As you plan more events and establish a system, it will get easier, we promise! The first event is always hardest, so start small and as you and your team get more experienced, get more ambitious.

Permissions and licences

If your green space is owned or managed by the local authority you will need written permission to host an event. This may seem like red tape, but they have a duty of care to ensure that the event is safe and doesn't damage the site or clash with any other planned activities.

We suggest that you make contact with the responsible officer to discuss your event proposal as soon as possible. They will be able to guide you through the procedures and advise you of any licences that you may need. Small events are unlikely to need masses of paperwork.

Larger events will need a longer lead-in time to plan, and the preparation of an Event Management Plan. This will need to be submitted well in advance as, for larger events, it will likely be considered by a Safety Advisory Group (SAG), made up of officers from the parks, traffic management as well as the police and fire services. Remember that the advisory group is there to help you have a successful, safe and fun event. They want parks and green spaces to be enjoyed as much as you do.

Funding and budgets

Local businesses, shops, pubs and local branches of supermarkets are often keen to sponsor events. They may also be able to offer raffle prizes, refreshments for volunteers and staff to help steward. Approach them early in the planning so that you know your budget and you can acknowledge them on the event promotion and publicity. Your parish, community council or local

Jane Rollo
Chairwoman of the Friends
of Ward Jackson Park

“ We first started our Easter and summer events to attract more people to enjoy our wonderful Victorian Park. At first we used grant money to pay for these, but as they grew we were able to raise money at the events, that was then used to pay for the next event. We buy in different activities – the puppet shows are always popular and we have had the local owl centre visiting, magicians and a bubble man. The Wildlife Trust also do a wildlife craft store, as do the Friends of Hartlepool's Green Spaces volunteers, so there is something for everyone. A commercial fun fair also comes and they donate money to our funds. In the past few years, the funds we have raised have also helped restore the park bandstand, and we now have traditional bands who are keen to come and perform at our events. We have found the police cadets really helpful, they come along and help us setting up our gazebos and tables, provide stewarding and assist with directing the vehicles of stallholders. ”



authority may have small funding pots for events that you can tap into. You may be able to raise money too with tombolas, sales of bird boxes and craft items, although it will be hard to predict how much they will raise. Hiring marquees and portaloos can be very expensive, as the group raises more funding, you could consider investing in a robust gazebo.

Putting together an Event Management Plan

Putting together an Event Management Plan will help you keep track as you organise the event by keeping all the relevant information together, and enable you to

share it with the events team and partners. Its contents will depend on the scale and type of event and the requirements of your local authority. They usually involve the following headings: risk assessment, site layout, insurance details, emergency procedures, contingency plan, first aid arrangements, vehicle and traffic management, catering, waste management, toilet facilities.

Looking after your team

Having a confident, informed and friendly team of volunteers stewarding the day makes the difference between a damp squib and a buzzing brilliant event. All team members need to know what's happening



Jeannette Bowen

Friends of Fairy Dell Festival Organiser

“ We were quite a new group when we held our first summer fun day. We wanted to get more local people to see what a fabulous place Fairy Dell was. It went well and we kept being asked if we were having one next year... that was over a decade ago! They have grown over the years, with over 1500 people attending last year's festival. We have kept the same feel, of simple outdoor family fun. Since we installed an outdoor gym we have included a greater theme of fun fitness, combined with wildlife and environmental activities.

It takes us several months to organise, with several meetings as there is so much paperwork needed. Sometimes I do think, why am doing this? But on the day when you see so many families enjoy our Fairy Dell, well, it makes it all worthwhile. And it has got easier, we have a great team of volunteers and now we are more experienced we are like a well-oiled machine. That's not to say that it isn't a bit nerve wracking in the week leading up to the festival. You can't plan the weather and you worry that people may not come. But when you greet happy families coming through the gates, we all start to relax and enjoy looking after our guests.

As our festival is around four hours we get in catering providers which means that people stay longer to enjoy more of the activities. The portaloos is a big cost but it's vital as we have no toilets in the park. This may sound like a small thing, but remembering to pack enough loo roll is very important, you don't want to run out. You'll also need plenty of bin bags! It's a long day for our team, we are on site early, and are on site packing up long after everyone has gone. I always make sure that we have plenty flasks of tea and snacks to keep us all going, and soon afterwards we go out for a meal in a local pub to celebrate. ”



DAVID EVERITT

DAVID EVERITT

and what their specific roles are. Our tip is to have a briefing a week before, and on the morning of the event so that there are opportunities for questions and everyone is up-to-speed. They need to be confident about what to do in an emergency, and that they can get help from the Event Manager if needed.

If you are the Event Manager you are likely to be feeling task-focused and apprehensive on the day of the event, but it's vital to make time to greet your volunteers and thank them for their valuable time, so that they know they are a valued team member. Your calmness and friendliness will help set the tone of the day.

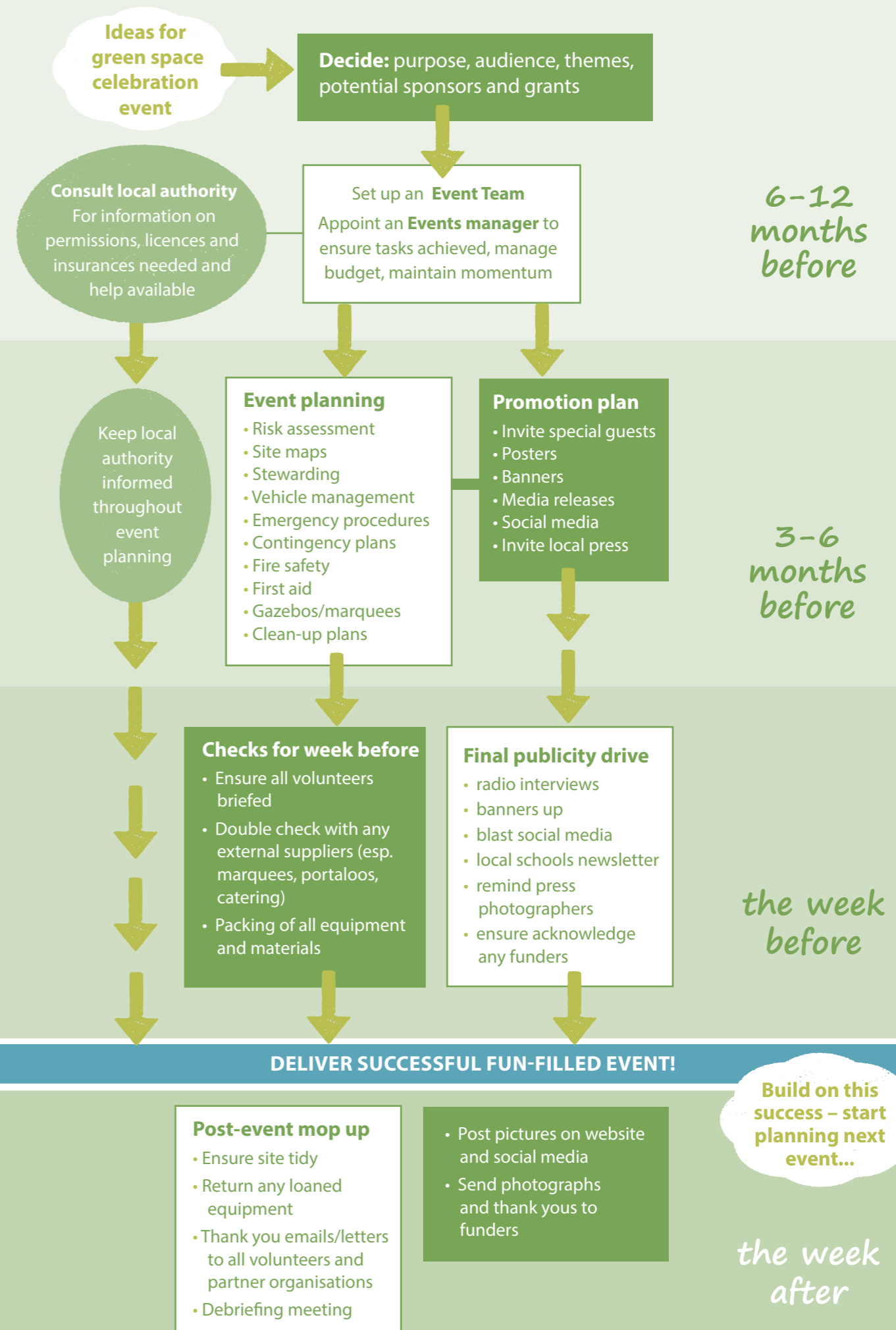
Ensure that stewards are clearly visible with high vis vests or t-shirts with logos. The setting up and clearing up are often the hardest part of day, so having different people to help at the beginning and end, can be helpful. You are all likely to be busy throughout the day, so having pre-packed drinks and snacks for you

and the team is a great way to keep energy levels up and everyone focused. Do remember that people may want breaks so that they can rest or enjoy the event themselves.

Promoting your site and group

Having a welcome table near the entrance and enthusiastic volunteers to welcome guests is a great way for visitors to find out what is happening. By displaying leaflets, photographs and flyers of future activities, visitors can learn more about the site. It's also an opportunity to find out people's views and aspirations for the area, promote your membership and recruit volunteers. The table can act as the 'nerve centre' by being the first aid point, and where volunteer refreshments are kept.

Four stages of planning an event



Involving your wider community

Although our 'public' green spaces belong to all of us and are free to visit, there can be unseen barriers, both physical and social, that mean they are not always accessible to everyone. To ensure that your green space is a wildlife asset for all to enjoy, you need to be able to reach out, listen and respond to the needs of all sectors of your local community.

Involving the widest possible range of people will bring better ideas and solutions, based on their different interests, skills and experiences. Actively involving people – for example in community action events, arts and community activities – will help build a strong local pride and sense of ownership of the green space.

Knowing your community

Consider the geographical area around your green space. You may live there, but how well do you know your wider community? Who currently makes use of the green space? And who could but doesn't?

Any geographical community is not one homogeneous group. Even within a small area, there will be a diverse mix of people who live or work there: people at different life stages and with different interests, needs and aspirations. We can think of our communities as sets of overlapping circles with 'communities of interest' such as young people, retired people, students and more. These 'communities within communities' all share a common need for a better natural environment, but their needs and interests may be very different.

Why does it matter?

If your group can achieve a diverse membership, you will do a better job of engaging with, and representing the needs of, your different local communities.

Your group will also have increased credibility if it is representative of your wider community. The result will be that more people will want to join, and you will be able to attract further funding from sponsors and funders.

If you are planning work to 'improve' your site, it is important to give everyone an opportunity to feed their ideas into the development of these projects at an early stage. For example, creating a wildflower meadow where youngsters play football on an evening is unlikely to be successful but, by engaging with youth groups, you can

Tree planting at Tilery Park by North Shore Academy



find out where they usually play and get their ideas for where a wildflower meadow could go. This relationship could develop, so that you go on to work with these young people to attract funding for goal posts in their kick-around area.

Of course, not everyone will want to get involved, but it is still important to reach out, listen and respond to the needs of your whole community.

To sum up: reaching out means that your group's work will achieve local commitment, be stronger in the long term, and be a louder voice when it comes to protecting and influencing the management of your site.

Perhaps the biggest plus is that your group and green space will flourish, and your neighbourhood will feel a friendlier place, where people are more likely to exchange smiles and greetings, feel less isolated and be proud of where they live.

Get talking

Whilst posters, newsletters and social media are useful, nothing beats simply talking as a communication method. Talking and listening doesn't cost anything but does need an investment of time and energy and requires patience.

It can be a bit scary, especially if you are a naturally shy person, to approach groups and people who you don't know. But, when people know that you represent a green space or wildlife group, there is often a fund of goodwill that can make it easier. You really don't need

Try to go out and meet these wider communities, rather than waiting for people to come to you...

to be chatty and confident, as listening is the key skill you need. It is one of the most important aspects of involving other people, especially minority groups. This is the way you will learn about the feelings, concerns and aspirations of people that you reach out to.

Sometimes, small things can go a long way, for example: some carefully placed seats will enable people with limited mobility to take rests on walks, and keeping vegetation short next to footpaths will help some people feel safer. After talking to particular groups, you might hold an event with their community in mind: for example, celebrate a different culture's cuisine in a community allotment or garden, or host a teddy bears' picnic for families with young children.

Try to go out and meet these wider communities, rather than waiting for people to come to you. Find out about what's important to them and explain what your group does and then explore possible ways to work together. It may take time to build a relationship, especially with under-represented or minority groups, but we can promise you it's worth it, to have a vibrant green space that is cared for and cherished by your whole community.

Two activities to help your group reach out

Use your personal networks

As a group, make a list of all of the groups that you know about in your area and check if any of you have existing contacts. This could be a parent and toddlers group, youth clubs, photography group, retired men's club, different faith groups, women's groups, Men's Shed, running group etc. It is often surprising to find out that, between you all, you already have many links into your community. These networks will help you reach out further. Often in a community, there are people such as local authority councillors, faith group leaders, local librarians and community workers who have their finger on the pulse. They will be happy to help put you in touch with people in their network.

Different people, different needs

As a group discussion, make a grid and add as many different sections of your community as you can think of. Then, for each of these groups, think about what can make it difficult for these people to visit the green space or get involved with your group's activities. You may want to split into pairs and each take some of the squares. This is a good starter for a discussion on what you can do as a group to make it easier for them to get involved. Putting yourselves in other people's shoes won't give you all the answers, but it's a good place to start, before you take the next steps.

People with reduced mobility	People who live alone	People with mental health needs	Ethnic minority groups	Parents with pre-school children
Families with children	Single parents	People who do shift work/gig economy	People who commute	Retired people
People with dementia	Carers	Dog owners	Students	People belonging to faith communities
Blind and partially sighted people	People with hearing difficulties	People who have just moved to the area	People who have lived here a long time	Middle aged people
Primary aged children (5-11)	Young people (11-18)	NEETs (young people not in education, employment or training)	People not in employment	People with learning difficulties
People who are involved in sport	Cyclists			

Sensing the Wild – a case study

Volunteers from green space groups in the Tees Valley have been sharing their love of nature with blind and partially sighted people as part of the **Sensing the Wild Project**. This partnership between Going For Independence, Tees Valley Wildlife Trust and local Friends Groups, involved taking visually-impaired people into green spaces, such as woodlands or parks, to explore nature using their senses. With funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, volunteers focused on four Tees Valley wild green spaces. With help from active volunteer Friends Groups, they were able to build lasting relationships between all involved and the nature in their local environment.

Volunteers from the Friends of South Park, Linthorpe Cemetery and Nature Reserve, Ward Jackson Park and Errington Woods received training to increase their awareness of different sight loss conditions and practical tips on how to successfully assist and guide blind people. This enabled them to plan outdoor workshops, and support visits to their parks and woodlands that took place through the four seasons.



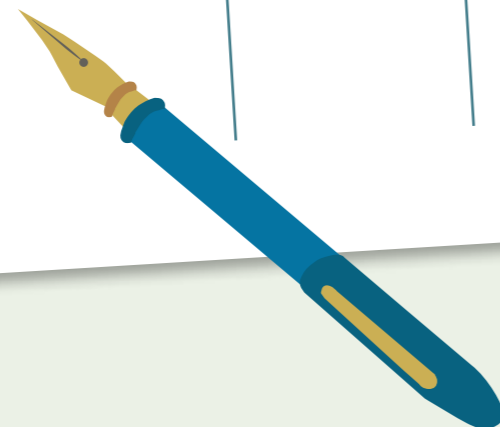
Leigh Nicholson
Project Coordinator,
Sensing the Wild Project

“ It was heart-warming to see how much effort the green space volunteers put into the walks and workshops. They rose to the challenge and their personalities shone through as they shared their enthusiasm, knowledge and stories of these parks and woodlands. Memories were reignited by some playing with conkers and one lady from Poland learnt the game for the first time as it is not a custom in her country. Roasting marshmallows over an open fire was a special treat on our winter walk in Errington Woods, where many people could recall the bandstand from their childhood. We are now making sound podcasts with the volunteers for our blind and partially sighted participants. ”

Marie Hirst
Friends of South Park,
Darlington

“ I can safely speak for all our volunteers and say that we enjoyed this as much as the blind and partially sighted people who we were supporting. The training offered us a real understanding of their needs and gave us confidence. We were a little nervous on the first walk, and I think it must have been a bit frightening at first for blind people too, being supported by people that they didn't know. But everyone soon relaxed as we all enjoyed listening to bird song in the park on the first session. We soon got to know each other and so the second walk, in autumn was even more enjoyable. ”

ALL PHOTOS: GOING FOR INDEPENDENCE



Family wildlife activities

Parks and green spaces are hugely important for our mental health and wellbeing – this goes for children too. We all know that children are happier and healthier when they are close to nature. They are physically active, sociable and often fascinated by what they see around them. The free outdoor space your group provides can be a valuable resource for families.

Family-friendly, wildlife-themed activities are a great way for families to discover and enjoy the local wildlife on their doorstep and meet other people in their neighbourhood. Children have a lot of energy and imagination, so choose activities that can stimulate them both mentally and physically, as well as inspiring a sense of magic and wonder. Organising a wildlife event for families is similar to any other events, just with an increased emphasis on fun and safety.

Fun for all ages

Aim to have activities that will appeal to all ages, from tots to teens. This can be done by having a range of different activities or levels. Encourage older siblings to help younger children, as they are usually very keen to be given the responsibility of handing out equipment and helping with craftwork. It's easy to forget how short children's legs are, so think carefully about a route and ensure that it's accessible for pushchairs. A handy tip is to make sure you have a bag of cuddly animal toys and some chubby crayons for toddlers.

Keeping safe

As with all events, carry out a risk assessment of the site and activities (see page 40) Children are more active and less aware of hazards. Their inquisitive playfulness makes them more likely to have accidents, suck fingers that have been in the soil and put things in their mouth. Keep the safety talk at the beginning sharp and short, and remember to bring a packet of hand wipes.

The unpredictable British weather can make planning hard. Unless it is very windy or torrential rain, most activities should be able to go ahead, although you may not get many families turning out. When preparing for your event think about parts of the site that are more sheltered for when it's cold and windy, or shaded if hot and sunny. A gazebo is great if showery (as long as it's not blowing a gale) and can keep your materials and equipment dry too. Be aware that children can overheat or get cold very quickly, but it's often adults who get cold as they are not as active.

Involving children in your safety talk makes them think about the dangers that are there and those that aren't, such as lions and tigers!

Prepare for late arrivals

Make it clear in the publicity if the event has a set start time or if it's a drop-in session. One to two hours is a good length for an event which isn't a drop-in, any longer and families with small children will need to leave before the end. Bear in mind that it can be challenging for parents to get a family of children ready so be prepared for late comers, as well as the eager family who arrive well before the start. Overcome this by having a few short extra activities to do at the beginning, such as a quiz or a box of natural treasures to look at. This will mean that when you start properly, people will not have missed the introductions or safety talk. If it is a drop-in event, having one or two volunteers to welcome people as they arrive and help them join in with the activities is really helpful.



Involving everyone

Aim to run family events, rather than activities just for the children. Many parents and grandparents will be there because they are interested in wildlife themselves. Involve them in the fun. Some may need a little encouragement to overcome their shyness, but reassure them that adults can have fun too, and enjoy hunting for minibeasts or doing wildlife craft work. This may also spark ideas that keep families exploring and discovering nature when they next go outdoors.

Child protection

It is vital that the children attending family events are accompanied by a responsible adult. This needs to be stated in your publicity. Ensure that they are responsible for their children throughout the event. It's important if you are taking photographs to have permission for these. This can be achieved by asking people when they sign in at the beginning. It is vital that all your volunteers understand their responsibilities for child protection. An introduction on the protection of children is given on page 83. However, do not let this put your group off running family events, as they are worthwhile and fun for you and your volunteers as well as the participating families.

Don't forget refreshments

It's well worth investing in some strong, plastic re-usable beakers and a catering thermos flask. During the colder months, mugs of hot chocolate make an easy and cheap warming treat for both for children and adults. In the summer, a supply of cold water and squash will keep everyone cool and refreshed. Gathering around to have drinks gives people an opportunity to socialise and make friends. Older children make willing volunteers to pass around hand wipes and biscuits. Clearly display any refreshments on offer, and ensure that any hot drinks are handed to adults to give to their children.

Dress for mess

Not having weatherproof clothes and footwear can really impact on people's ability to fully enjoy the activities you organise. Advertising your events with 'dress for mess' or 'wrap up warm' can remind parents to equip their family.

Bear in mind that especially in urban areas, not everyone has wellies and waterproofs or is comfortable getting their clothes muddy.

Caring children

Children are never too young to be involved in activities that nurture nature. Children are more aware than ever of environmental issues. By enabling them to take part in actions to care for local wildlife in their local environment, you will be fostering a sense of pride and belonging. From simple seed sowing, planting spring bulbs and making bird feeders, to getting involved in litter picks, tree planting and building bird boxes, these are all good activities that can be accomplished with adult help.

Help from your Wildlife Trust

The Wildlife Trust has a fantastic online library of wildlife themed activities, nature spotter sheets and ideas for crafts, quizzes and games. There is something for all interests, seasons and habitat. These are all available to download free at the Wildlife Watch web pages www.wildlifewatch.org.uk

If you are based in the Tees Valley you can join the Tees Valley Wildlife Trust's equipment loans library. Membership is free to community or green space groups. Pond dipping and bug hunting equipment, nature spotting guides, as well as nature trails and themed activity packs are available. If you are not lucky enough to be in the Tees Valley, contact your local Wildlife Trust and see if they can loan you equipment to get you started.



Six fab family nature activities

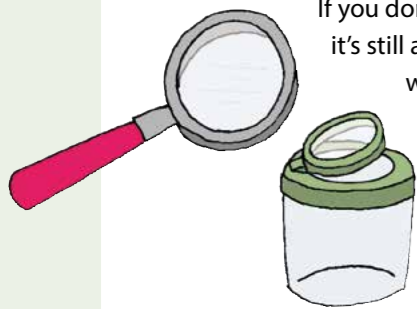
Going on a natural treasure trail, discovering minibeasts, modelling with clay, foraging for blackberries and creating natural art, are some of the tried and tested activities that families with children of all ages enjoy. We all learn best by doing, and these activities focus on exploring and experiencing the natural world. Here are some simple activities which are always firm favourites. They can be adapted and expanded to suit your site, your group and the season. Good planning is important, but be prepared to be flexible, allow scope to stop and look at an unexpected furry caterpillar or continue a craft activity for longer if everyone is engrossed. It's hard to know in advance how long these activities will take, so it's always worth having one or two alternatives up your sleeve just in case.

Minibeast hunt

Minibeast hunts are a great way for children to get up close to wildlife. It's a marvellous hands-on activity that can involve all family members. Not only will they learn about the diverse life cycle of insects, they will also develop their observation skills and foster a care for small creatures.

Don't let your lack of entomological knowledge stop you organising a minibeast hunt. You don't need to be able to name the species that children discover. There are over 30,000 different species of beetles, bugs, bees and other invertebrates in Britain, and many don't have English names! In other words, no one is expecting you to be an expert. See if you can loan a friendly local naturalist for an afternoon to come and help, or provide access to identification charts and downloaded phone apps to help.

If you don't have access to a specialist kit of sweep nets and magnifying bug boxes, it's still amazing what you can find with a home assembled kit. Plastic take away trays with holes made in the lid are great for a closer look, spoons and paint brushes to gently scoop up finds, and a magnifying glass for a closer investigation. Encourage everyone to be kind and gentle, returning their minibeasts back to their natural homes after investigation



Nature spotters

Nature spotter sheets are a great way to focus the attention on wildlife. Children love ticking off what they have found. The Wildlife Trust's website has a wealth of seasonal spotter and nature detective sheets to choose from. From butterfly spotters and signs of spring to hedgerow nuts and berries and autumn leaves – they are simple to download and print, ready for use. All you need to provide are pencils and, if you can, clipboards.



Blackbird



Blue tit



Bullfinch

Pebble pets

Painting pebbles for others to find and re-hide is a popular craze, and a great motivation for getting children outdoors.

You can turn this into a group activity with a wildlife theme, simply with a bag of pebbles and some permanent marker pens. They can make pebble pets; frogs and ladybirds are ideal, or for older children they can write slogans to inspire people to be kind to nature and each other. They can take these home or you can put the group's facebook/twitter address on the back so that when people find them they can post a photograph online. This will help to get regular traffic to your social media pages too.



Scavenger hunt

A fun activity for all ages, and adaptable to every green space, from local park to woodland nature reserve. It's a great way for children to explore. Remember to keep some finds simple for younger children, with some more challenging items for the older ones. Old egg box containers are handy for children to keep their finds, but always make sure that they know not to take anything that nature will miss. There are plenty available online but it's more fun to make your own. That way it fits your location and season. Consider all the senses – for example, a soft feather, a spiky leaf, a smooth pebble... the possibilities are endless.



Nature's rainbows

This is a creative way to explore and record the variety of colours, shades and textures in nature. They are so quick and easy to prepare and are very easy to use. You simply need thin card cut into oblongs. Cover each with a strip of double-sided sticky and hand them out. The challenge is to discover and gather as many of nature's colours as they can. They do this by peeling the extra backing off the tape on their card and then choosing tiny pieces of leaf, petal, bark, grass etc. to stick on. The key is to keep the cards small, this will ensure people only collect tiny fragments. For a more challenging activity you can restrict the selection to just green. Everyone will be amazed at how many different shades and textures of green they can find. At the end of the event, gather everyone together, so that they can lay out their rainbow palettes and everyone can enjoy seeing what has been collected.

Clay Creations

Clay is a messy but fun material for children to play with – they can use it to mould and shape it to anything their imaginations want it to be. A large bag of natural air-drying clay can be the basis for several different absorbing creative activities that encourage children to explore. In spring, a ball of clay can be softened to make pretend nests, with children collecting twigs, soft mosses and other natural materials, to nestle clay eggs in. Sculpting faces from clay to place on tree trunks is a great choice for wooded sites. They can be scary or friendly, using natural materials from the forest floor.



Making clay hedgehogs is good for autumn. Children mould clay into hedgehog shaped bodies and then search for natural items to make spines and faces. Everyone's hedgehog will be unique depending on what they use- small sticks, seed heads, acorns, pine cones, berries. Remember to give adults a ball of clay too and remind them they are not too old to share in the fun. **Top tip:** pack plenty of hand wipes for afterwards, and be sure to get the pale coloured, not terracotta, clay to ensure stain-free clothes.

Involving young people

It has become obvious in recent years, that our young people are an environmentally aware generation. This is clearly demonstrated by the rise in veganism and calls for action to combat climate change. It can be hard for them to find opportunities to turn their ideas into actions, but your group can provide an opportunity for them to get involved with protecting wildlife and their local green space. Many friends of green space groups are run by older people who bring a wealth of knowledge, life experience and long-term commitment to the site they look after. Often, when these skills are combined with the energy and alternative perspectives of young people, it can provide new and exciting opportunities for the group, the community and the site.

Involving schools

Your green space can be a wonderful teaching resource for local schools. School staff have a tight curriculum to deliver, so don't be too disappointed if they don't respond to your offers of involvement in the first instance. It's worth contacting the school to set up a meeting. That way, the staff can discover what your group and the site have to offer. It is also an opportunity for you to find out from the teachers what barriers they face, and discuss activities which could help them deliver the national curriculum. It takes a lot of planning for the school to get parental permissions, ensure children are suitably dressed and that they have enough staff and parents to enable out-of-school visits.

See if any of your group members have children or grandchildren at the school. This can be a good introduction to teachers who are especially enthusiastic about wildlife. Bear in mind that the teachers probably won't live locally, so may not know the site or how to walk safely to it with pupils. It may be that once they have been introduced to the site and its scope for outdoor

education that they organise their own visits in the future. Get to know the school's administration staff, as they can be really helpful in promoting any family events you have in newsletters and social media sites.

Seeking students

University and college students can bring a fresh perspective to your group's work. They will be focused on their studies and gaining experience for their CV, so specific time-limited projects are of more interest to them. As well as biology and environmental science students, who can carry out ecological surveys, consider other specialities. For example, students studying graphic design, history, photography and film making. It's vital that the students have support and encouragement, but have scope to develop their own ideas.

Youth initiatives

Many youth projects and schemes are looking for practical environmental projects to involve their participants. The National Citizenship Service has a community volunteering element, as does the Duke of Edinburgh Scheme and programmes run by the Prince's Trust. They are usually looking for projects that can be started and completed by a group of young people over a specific number of days. It can be challenging finding a suitable group project at the right time of year and the funds for materials. Laying a new footpath, making a minibeast hotel and bat boxes or painting a bird hide are some good examples. It's important that the young people can see a real difference in a before and after photographs and can feel a sense of pride in what they have achieved. This is important, if not more so, than the actual finished result.

Cubs, Brownies, Girl Guides and Scouts

These clubs can be very worthwhile to work with. They are usually very well organised with capable outdoorsy leaders and helpers who are eager to involve their pack in wildlife exploring, conservation and adventurous outdoor activities. Doing a few linked indoor and outdoor sessions on a theme such as hedgehogs, conserving butterflies or caring for birds can contribute to one of their badges too.



Child protection

As a society it is our moral duty to protect our children from harm and neglect. Any individual or group with contact with children has a responsibility to keep them safe. It isn't always easy to know exactly what this "duty of care" requires volunteers to do. Confusion over responsibilities and fear of getting it wrong can be a barrier, deterring green space groups from sharing their love and knowledge of wildlife, which our young people gain so much from.

First a few definitions...

Safeguarding refers to the processes of keeping people safe from abuse and promoting their wellbeing, where a child or adult is unable to protect themselves from abuse.

A **child** refers to all children, and it includes a young person who has not yet reached their 18th birthday.

An **adult at risk**, or **vulnerable adult** is any person who is aged 18 years or over and at risk of abuse or neglect because of their needs for care and/or support.

It is advisable to state that children are welcome to come along to your group's work or activities accompanied by a parent, guardian or nominated responsible adult. For youth projects always ensure that they come with a responsible adult leader. Under no circumstances should any child be placed in a situation where he or she is working alone with an adult.

Do we need DBS checks? is a frequent question that volunteers and groups ask. A DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) check is what used to be called a CRB check. The decision about whether or not someone needs a DBS check will depend on the type of work they are going to be doing and its frequency. Many volunteers won't need DBS checks at all if they do not have sole charge of children or vulnerable adults.

Any volunteers who fulfil the criteria outlined below should have an enhanced DBS disclosure carried out:

- where the children are being left in the charge of the volunteer(s) and where there is a likelihood they would be left alone with groups of children,
- supervising or regularly working with work experience students
- supervising or regularly assisting groups with vulnerable adults

Your local volunteer bureau or local authority children's services section can advise you on what is relevant to your group members and activities. The NSPCC website is also an authoritative and helpful online resource.

Policies and procedures

It is good practice for your organisation to have a safeguarding policy for children and vulnerable adults. You don't need to write this from scratch – ask other groups for copies to use as a starting point, or look at examples online that you can adapt. The important part is to discuss it as a group.

Remember policies and DBS checks alone don't protect people from harm. It's vital that everyone in the group understands their responsibilities and knows what to do if they have concerns. It's always better to speak out rather than miss an opportunity to stop abuse.



Harnessing social media

Social media is an effective communication tool. Ensure that your group harnesses its power to champion your local green space, share information and grow support for your group's activities.

What platform?

Social media is a catch-all phrase covering online services and tools used for publishing, sharing and discussing information. It works like an online 'word of mouth' because people can quickly share information with their networks of friends, who can then share it with their networks of friends. There is now a bewildering number of platforms and social media tools available. Technology is changing so quickly that there will always be new opportunities to consider. Base your decisions on what platform to use by finding out what networks the community is using. Currently Facebook, Twitter and Instagram are the most widely used, so we recommend focusing on one or two of these.

Need help?

If your group is struggling with social media skills, this could be a good new volunteering opportunity for someone with digital skills and a flair for promotion and marketing. It is worth seeing if there is any free local training on offer. Digital workshops and support are often available from community centres, libraries and local charities.

Linda Gell

Friends of Drinkfield Marsh committee

“Having a Facebook group page has been a really useful way for local regulars and visitors to communicate with the committee. It's also heart-warming to see the many beautiful photographs of wildlife that people share and hearing how much they enjoy the Marsh and appreciate the hard work that volunteers do to care for it. Our committee keep close contact with each other via WhatsApp. This is great to keep momentum between meetings, and it also enables us to discuss any questions or suggestions that people send us on Facebook before making a public response.”

How it works

- Get messages out quickly and effectively to a large number of people
- Spread awareness about your site
- Enable people to share wildlife sightings
- Can inspire people to take environmental action
- Celebrate the work of your volunteers and funders
- Publicise events, volunteer days and meetings
- Recruit volunteers
- A useful tool for fundraising
- Promotes discussion and feedback



facebook

A quick guide for **Facebook** newbies on profiles, pages and groups...

You will need to set up your own personal **profile** to be able to start a Facebook page or group or post events for your green space group.

You can then create a **page** for your group. This is a bit like a profile but it's for your group rather than for a person. Think of this like a virtual noticeboard. It will mean that your group can post pictures, videos and text. People can then 'like' and/or 'follow' your page. The more they like, share or comment on your posts, the more the more updates they will see about it when they look at their own Facebook newsfeed.

Another option is to set up a Facebook **group**. This is more like a forum or chatroom that Facebook users can join. It means that everyone who has joined can share photographs and posts – this can be a valuable tool for community input and discussion. When you create a group, you can decide whether to make it publicly available for anyone to join, require administrator approval for members to join, or to keep it private and by invitation-only.

It is a good idea to have a **public page** to share events and information and also a **private group** just for volunteers, which enables you to share practical information about task days and photographs.



Twitter is a social networking site in which you can post 280 character status updates, otherwise known as **tweets**, that can be seen by anyone who has chosen to follow you. Within the tweet, you can link to other articles or videos. A tweet can be **re-tweeted** or passed on as it is or mentioned in another user's new tweet. A tweet goes viral and trends when there is a lot of activity around it.

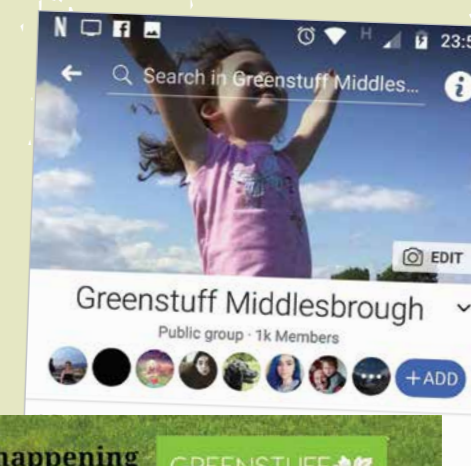


Instagram is a social networking service built around sharing photos and videos. It is a useful platform for your community to share photographs.

Martyn Walker

Middlesbrough Greenstuff

“I had never been on Facebook until Acklam Meadows became under threat from a housing development. My kids helped me get going to create a Facebook group. Within a week we grew to over a thousand members. This really boosted our campaign, to know we had such a groundswell of support. It also enabled people to volunteer their skills. We soon had the professional services of a graphic designer, a printer and many others, which meant we were able to run a very visible and professional campaign on and off social media. Twitter was invaluable too, reaching a different audience. Through Twitter we received advice and encouragement from people and groups from around the UK. Now the Middlesbrough Greenstuff and Beyond Facebook page has around 5,000 members. Most of the posts now are photographs celebrating the wildlife of this green haven in Middlesbrough that we worked so hard to successfully protect.”



1 Use pictures and videos

Don't limit yourself to words. Pictures of wildlife and people will be more engaging. Consider making short videos at your events and workdays on your phone to share online.

2 Keep posts short

Most people will not read long posts, so be short and snappy whilst using a friendly conversational tone.

3 Think before you send

Take your time – read back through your post or comment to make sure it is really what you want to say. Remember you are representing your group, not yourself.

4 Make regular and varied posts

Maintain people's interest by adding posts of different activities and wildlife sightings. Ask open questions to get discussions started. Evenings and weekends generate more engagement from people. You can 'schedule' posts in advance by writing them, and tell Facebook to post them later.

It's perhaps best not to be confrontational with your posts i.e. shaming anti-social behaviour or vandalism. Make your page for positive community actions only.

5 Have more than one administrator

This shares the work, and ensures that if one person leaves the group that the group still has access to the page. If you have set up a Facebook group, ensure your members are prepared to act as moderators. They will be able to approve membership (and remove and block members), review posts and comments within the group.

6 Respond to comments and messages

Acknowledge people who comment on posts by liking their comment or responding. Respond to messages sent to your page promptly – a good reason to have more than one administrator.

And don't forget the real world – get outdoors in your greenspace, listen to bird song, feel the sun on your back and chat to people face-to-face!

7 Use the events function

This will enable people to register their interest in any events or activities that you are hosting, and mean that their Facebook friends will see the events post. Once someone has registered that they intend to go, or are interested, it will add the event to their Facebook calendar, which is a good reminder for them. You can ask your group members to invite their friends. If you are working in partnership with another group or organisation make them 'co-hosts' of the event. This will mean people who are members of their Facebook page will also see your event.

8 Engage with local pages and groups

Your new Facebook page will not have hundreds of followers straight away, so a good way to engage with more people in your locality is to ask other local community pages to share or post them and to add them to your town or region-wide groups.

9 Intervene early with keyboard warriors

You may have written well thought out, friendly posts but people may make unkind comments or be rude to you or others commenting. If this is the case, it's important to act quickly. If you have a Group page, it's worth having a Code of Conduct that your group has agreed, and pinning this to the top of your Group page. If need be, remind people of these rules and remove anyone who persists in making unpleasant comments. Act immediately on any hate speech or aggressive language. To avoid a long thread with lots of comments you could politely comment "*I think everyone's had their say here – let's agree to disagree and park this discussion for now*" before turning off notifications.

10 Don't make important decisions online

These need to be made by your group at meetings not on Facebook. It is important to acknowledge ideas or suggestions on Facebook, but not to be pressured into making immediate decisions online. You can let them know that it's on the agenda for the next meeting, and perhaps invite them along to get involved.



The Tees Valley Wildlife Trust thank all the partners, community groups, volunteers and funders who helped make the Tees Valley Green Places project (2014-2020) a success.

The Wildlife Trust had the privilege of working with community groups across the Tees Valley. They put their hearts and souls into making their parks and green spaces a better place for their communities and wildlife. Their enthusiasm and commitment has made this publication possible.

Community groups

Coatham Heritage Group
Cleveland Naturalists Field Club
Crooksbarne Residents Association
Darlington and Teesdale Naturalists Field Club
Darlington DOVES
Friends of Blue Bell Beck
Friends of Drinkfield Nature Reserve
Friends of Errington Wood
Friends of Fairy Dell
Friends of Hartlepool's Green Spaces
Friends of Linthorpe Cemetery & Nature Reserve
Friends of King George V Playing Field
Friends of Maidendale Nature & Fishing Reserve
Friends of Nature's World
Friends of Rockwell Nature Reserve
Friends of Seaton Park
Friends of Sixfields
Friends of Skelton Pond
Friends of South Park
Friends of Stainton & Thornton Green Spaces
Friends of Stewart Park
Friends of Summerhill
Friends of Ward Jackson Park
The Meadwings Residents Association
Station Road Residents Association
Roseworth Friday Friends
Roseworth Residents Association

Partners

Askham Bryan College
Darlington Borough Council
ERIC (Environment Records Information Centre North East)
Going for Independence
Groundwork North East
Hartlepool Borough Council
Middlesbrough Council
Nigel Dobbyn
Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council
Rosewood Primary School
Roseworth Big Local
Roseworth Community Partnership
Stockton Borough Council
Teesside University
Tees Valley Nature Partnership
The Northern School of Art

The National Lottery Heritage Fund
Garfield Western Foundation
Natural England
Newcastle Building Society
Roseworth Big Local
Stockton Borough Council Public Health
Tesco Bags of Help
The Wildflower Society
Thirteen Housing
Tree Council
Woodland Trust





We are the Tees Valley Wildlife Trust

We create and care for wildlife homes in 15 nature reserves across the Tees Valley.

We campaign to protect species and habitats locally and by working with others across the country.

We share our passion for wildlife with children and adults of all ages at a range of events and through our learning resources.

We help people in poor health and with special educational needs get connected to nature.

But we can't do any of this without the vital support of our members...

By becoming a member of Tees Valley Wildlife Trust, together we can act for our wildlife now and ensure it's here for future generations to enjoy. 100% of your contribution will be spent locally to benefit local wildlife, people and places close to your heart and your home.

www.teeswildlife.org

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£10 + p&p

Order at:

www.teeswildlife.org

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