

Making a Difference

How to Set Up and Maintain a Community Group for Parks and Green Space





Acknowledgements

GreenSpace would like to thank all those who contributed towards the production of this guide.

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incorporating the Urban Parks Forum



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GreenSpace is a not-for-profit organisation set up to help those committed to the planning, design, management and use of public parks and open spaces.

GreenSpace's vision is to create a network of easily accessible, safe, attractive and welcoming parks, gardens and green spaces which meet the needs of everyone and which contribute to the economic, social and environmental well-being of people and places, now and for future generations.

GreenSpace aims to be the UK's leading advocate for the economic, social and environmental benefits of better planned, designed and managed parks, gardens and green spaces and for their positive contribution to our economic, physical and spiritual health, to social cohesion and to biodiversity.

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CABE Space is the national champion for better parks, green spaces, streets and squares in urban areas. It aims to raise the profile of the value and benefits that well-designed, well maintained parks and public spaces bring to their local communities.

CABE Space was set up in 2003 as a unit within CABE (the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment) with support from two government departments, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS).

CABE Space's work includes commissioning research into the value of good public spaces and streets, developing the Green Flag Award scheme for parks and green spaces and running national media campaigns. In addition, CABE Space provides training and in-depth advice to local authorities that want to improve their public spaces. CABE Space works in partnership with a range of organisations, including GreenSpace.

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Foreword

Your local public parks and green spaces, whatever their size and condition, need you! They 'belong' to everyone and are used by over three million people making two billion visits each year!

Our green spaces are our green lungs, providing spaces for recreation and enjoyment, benefiting health, giving young people somewhere to go and young children somewhere safe to play. But do they? Too many areas of our green spaces are unusable wastelands of litter-strewn gang-mown grass and cracked concrete, broken down toilets and locked play equipment, often overshadowed by anti-social behaviour.

You could help change that. Green spaces need local people to use them, wisely and often. Local authorities struggle with diminishing budgets for parks as the costs of social services rise. But there are shining examples of how to reverse the decline and bring back quality, beauty, and shared stewardship to our green spaces. By forming a group, you can help sort out what needs to be done, identify needs and priorities for local people of all ages and backgrounds, understand the challenges and the opportunities, and form a practical partnership with your local authority. There is no quick fix; it takes patience and determination.

There are over a million community groups across the UK, some have been going for 20 years. There is a wealth of practical experience and advice to draw on and this has now been encapsulated in this excellent guide. It gives you the toolkit, the support - and confidence. The Case Studies are inspirational and informative.

You can make a difference, not just to the quality of your own life, but also for your family, your friends and your neighbours. It is very rewarding to see a precious green space come back into good heart, giving a focus to community spirit and activity, used well and enjoyed.

Good luck. Get out there and have a go! You really can improve your local environment.



Gilly Drummond

Association of Gardens Trusts
GreenSpace Patron



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1. Introduction

1.1 Community action

This publication is a toolkit for helping people who want to start or develop a community group aimed at improving local green spaces. It shows the benefits and mutual support that can be achieved by working closely in partnership with the local council. Other organisations, like the BTCV and Groundwork, can offer further specialist advice to community groups.

1.2 Local authorities and community consultation

As local councils modernise they are changing the way they deliver services. There will be greater emphasis on listening to communities about what they want and need, and on what they can contribute to the improvement in services.

There are nearly half a million people across the UK who are members of a parks or green space community group¹, and the important contribution that community involvement can make has been recognised for some time. There are many examples of voluntary community groups who have been involved in the management and maintenance of their local parks and green spaces for ten or twenty years. These groups have stayed together for so long because their members find the work interesting and enjoyable.

Most people are surprised to learn that local authorities have no legal duty to provide or look after parks and green spaces. It is because of this that council budget cuts have fallen harder on the parks service than other council services, like education, highways and refuse collection. GreenSpace research, including the Public Park Assessment, shows that nearly all parks and green spaces across the UK have suffered serious budget cuts and have been in decline for many years².

These cuts have meant that parks have lost many of their best-loved features, like playgrounds, paddling pools, gardens and flower beds, bandstands, fountains and other historic buildings and decorative structures. Even essential basic facilities, such as toilets, changing rooms, bins and benches can be in poor condition or have long since gone. Parks and open spaces have also lost most of their staff.

Traditional park-keepers have largely vanished and gardening skills have declined or been forgotten. Increased community involvement is seen as an important part of bringing parks and green spaces up to a high standard.

Many local councils actively encourage community involvement in parks and green spaces, and will approach the community first, and provide all the support required to enable a new group to form. However, if your local authority has not yet approached your community, this guide will help you start up and organise a group, as well as get support from the council.

1.3 Why get involved?

Park or green space groups come about for different reasons. Many of the bodies that give grants to improve parks and green spaces insist on the community being involved in the design of the project. Grant-aided projects can produce substantial improvements to parks or green spaces.

Sometimes groups form around a specific area of common interest such as a playground, sports facility, or an activity such as dog walking. Individuals may be concerned about a perceived threat to a facility or an activity and a group is formed specifically to protect their interests. From this limited and possibly short-term involvement, a more general and longer-term involvement may evolve. However, the most common reason for a park or green space group to form is a concern about the quality of the whole site, and a desire to see it improved. Community involvement will help ensure that:

- A park or green space meets the needs of the local community.
- Grant applications can be successfully developed and additional money secured to improve the site.
- Any proposed spending cuts are discouraged or abandoned.
- The community values the park or green space more highly and has a greater sense of ownership and pride.
- Increased use of the site is encouraged and misuse and abuse is discouraged.

2. Getting Started

2.1 Getting support

The best starting point is to have a discussion with local friends, neighbours and other park users about the site. This will help you to judge whether your concerns and hopes for the area are shared and supported by others. Widespread support for the idea of starting a community group to improve your local park or green space will give you confidence and credibility when you approach the council's park management team.

You should be able to count on the support of about six local people or park users, as this will establish the core of your group and make your interest difficult to ignore. While this may seem like a small number of people, it is enough to start with. Many effective community groups involved in parks and green spaces started small and expanded over the years.

If your friends, neighbours and fellow park users are not interested in supporting your idea, do not be discouraged. Even fairly small parks are visited by large numbers of people and other people outside your immediate circle may well want to be involved. People may change their minds when the group becomes established and join you (see chapter 3 'Organising your group').

Council parks officers understand that it takes time and effort to generate community interest and may still be happy to help you to attract support and form a group.

There may be other community groups in your area. It can be helpful to contact these, as there is huge value in sharing experiences and contacts. Groups may be resident or tenant associations, a civic or conservation society, or perhaps an Agenda 21 'Go Local for a Better Environment' (GLOBE) group. By contacting these and other local groups through your local authority, local library or citizens advice bureau and meeting them, you may come across people who would like to join your parks group. Other local community groups might be able to help you attract more interest by promoting your new group through their leaflets or newsletters.

2.2 The importance of a partnership with your local council

When you have identified common interests and a few other people who want to join a group you should contact the parks department responsible for managing the park or green space. It is much better to approach the council as a partner than as an opponent. By developing a partnership with the parks team you can gain access to a wide range of resources, expert knowledge, advice and support. In return, the local authority gains a commitment from the group to work together to achieve shared aims, access to local expert knowledge, greater credibility with the community, and an increased sense of community ownership and pride. An aggressive approach may make the council defensive, a situation which helps neither party and will not help to secure the improvements everyone wants.

You need to cultivate an open and honest relationship in which each partner respects the views and ideas of the other. As with all partnerships, disagreements are likely to occur, but if the relationship is built on trust and honesty there is a greater chance that conflicts will be kept brief and cause no ill-feeling. Conflicts and disagreements can sometimes spark better solutions and more exciting ideas.

The most important thing is that the community group and the local authority keep talking and maintain a positive and productive relationship, provide mutual support, and work together to achieve shared aims and objectives.

You should think through in general terms what you can offer the council, such as litter picking, reporting abuses in the park, identifying local needs and priorities, organising events and fundraising.

2.3 Contacting your local council

Contact details of the parks department are often given on signs in parks or on leaflets. They can also be found in the Phone Book or Yellow Pages. If you still cannot find out who to contact, the council switchboard will be able to connect you to the parks team.

Councils do not always have parks departments. Sometimes parks management teams are located in departments dealing with leisure services, environmental services, street cleansing, education and others. Many councils operate one team to manage the parks and another team to carry out grounds maintenance, often a private contractor. Talking to community groups would be the responsibility of the management team.

You should try to look organised and professional when you approach the council. Simple things like letter-headed paper with your group's name and logo on can make a good first impression. It is always worth writing to thank someone you have met and it is important to follow through any actions they suggest and to make sure that they know what you have done³.

It is also worth remembering that even the most efficient councils might take longer to respond than you would like and that some patience may be required. Many park teams are understaffed and under pressure. The creation of a park community group at your site may not be the highest priority for the council, who may have a Parks and Open Spaces Strategy on which it bases service delivery and prioritises actions.

If a new parks group at your site is not a current priority for the council, a good parks team will still try to support your actions and encourage you to go ahead under your own steam. They should offer advice and guidance, even if they do not have spare officer time or funds to directly help you. When you make contact the council should offer you the following:

- ❑ A meeting to discuss your ideas, in the office, at your home, or on site.
- ❑ An explanation of their approach to community involvement.
- ❑ An explanation of the current Parks Strategy and a discussion on how your proposed group would fit in with the strategy.
- ❑ An outline of any relevant plans or proposals for your site.
- ❑ Contact details of other park groups operating in your area, and an introduction to them.

An enthusiastic parks department may be able to offer the following additional support:

- ❑ A start up pack and guidance notes.
- ❑ A specialist member of staff within their team who is dedicated to looking after community groups.
- ❑ An allocation of officer time to help you.
- ❑ Help with promoting your idea through a leaflet distributed to park users and houses in the area.
- ❑ Help to organise a public meeting to test and encourage public interest.
- ❑ Help with the collection of names and the official formation of the group.
- ❑ Advice on the structure of the group, including terms of reference or constitution, and the development of a set of aims and objectives.
- ❑ An agreement between the council and the new group that defines each party's roles and responsibilities, and the scope of the work that the group can undertake with the local authority's support.
- ❑ Some initial training.
- ❑ An induction day to show group members around the park team's office, introduce the team and explain how the team and the rest of the council works.
- ❑ A small one-off start up grant.

You should ensure that all communication with the council is carried out by only one or two nominated members of the community group, and the local council should provide one officer as your contact.

This should not prevent all members of the park group from getting to know members of the parks team. This can be done informally during work tasks, at meetings and at events. The better people know each other the stronger the partnership will become.

Your local authority is a crucial partner in getting what you want in your park or green space. Once the initial contact has been established, remember to keep in regular contact to keep the momentum going. The United States organisation, Partnership for Parks, suggests that groups should invite key people from the council, like parks officers and ward councillors, to their events and put them on their mailing list. A mailing list should be set up and expanded as you learn of more useful contacts. Your list should be kept up-to-date by checking approximately every six months⁴.

2.4 What if my local council won't help?

If you are faced with an unhelpful parks department, there are still a number of options available to you. You should:

2.4.1 Question the officer's, or the department's, decision.

Do this by drawing attention to the requirement for local authorities to work more closely with the community and by appealing to more senior officers, including the Mayor, the Chief Executive, local councillors, and even your local MP.

This option will almost certainly lead to recognition of the group by the council and the offer of some support. However, forcing your way onto the local authority agenda in this way may produce some ill-feeling between the parks team and the community group. Whilst this ill-feeling would be regrettable, and may spoil the initial relationship, it can, with time and sensitivity, be overcome. Enlisting the support of more senior officers and local councillors in order to enable the group to contribute to improving a local park is a perfectly acceptable approach, provided the council's parks team were given a chance to respond positively in the first place. Your local authority will be able to provide you with the contact details of local councillors. You should focus your attention on the ones who represent the ward containing the park, or who specialise in environmental and conservation matters.

2.4.2 Go ahead with the development of the group on your own.

The more you can do yourselves, the quicker you will get a response from the council.

This approach avoids direct conflict with the council's parks department but does mean that the group may miss out on useful support and advice. It also means that your group's efforts are not sanctioned or authorised by the council and this can cause problems. In order to do practical project work or hold events on the site, you will need the permission of the council, as the landowner. Without permission your group will be unable to get insurance and may be liable for any accidents that result from your actions.

If your group does anything that the council's parks team is opposed to, they could take legal action against you, and force you to remove or reverse any work you've done, for example digging up an unauthorised footpath and replacing the grass.

The council should be much more receptive to your group after a period of constructive and positive effort on your part to improve the site.

If you have to go it alone without the support or recognition of the local authority, your on-site activities will be severely limited. You should concentrate instead on winning the council's goodwill by organising litter-picking, by reporting abuses of the park, by fund-raising, by formalising your group and by increasing membership through a publicity drive involving leaflets to the local residents and through the local press.

There are many community groups whose involvement in parks and green space started without the support of the local authority. Despite this lack of initial recognition these groups have gone on to become highly successful and eventually gain the support of the council's officers and develop a good working relationship with them.

3. Organising Your Group

3.1 Introduction

Once you have attracted the interest of six or more members, your group will generally be recognised as a valid and potentially sustainable community group. Now is the time to get organised and work out what it is that you want to achieve, what work the members of the group want to do, and how the group intends to operate and make decisions. This may not seem like a particularly interesting step in forming a community group, but it is an essential part of the process, especially if you are likely to apply for grants to fund your work. Time and care spent now in setting up the structure and operating basis of the group will help avoid difficulties later on, and give the group a much more sustainable future.

Most community groups are known as Unincorporated Associations. These are groups of people working together to achieve mutually agreed aims and they are not registered companies. Unincorporated Associations usually operate under a particular kind of agreement, called a constitution, which is a set of rules to govern how the group will run, what the group hopes to achieve, and how the members will work together.

Not all groups will want to formalise their structure and commit to the regular meetings, rules and processes that come with it. Not formalising the group can encourage a relaxed atmosphere and allow complete flexibility to reinvent the group whenever it suits. However there are drawbacks to remaining an informal group. The council will find it much harder to trust or publicly support your group if it has no rules, terms of reference or publicly stated aims and objectives. Grant giving bodies, including local authorities, are unlikely to support this kind of group as they cannot justify providing funds for a group that has no official statement of purpose. You might be lucky and receive individual small grants for clearly defined projects, but ongoing financial support is unlikely to be provided.

3.2 What do you call yourselves?

Although a group's choice of name is not critical to its success it does help to have a name that reflects and promotes your overall aims. When selecting a name think about how it will look when written down and make sure that the individual words cannot be abbreviated into a word that would be unwelcome.

Below are the main types of groups and organisations involved in relation to the improvement of parks and green spaces.

3.2.1 Friends Groups

The most popular choice is to operate under the title of 'Friends', as in the 'Friends of Albert Park', for example. It is a title that suggests a supportive and protective role and a commitment to bring benefits to the park, which is what most groups want. The best thing about the 'Friends' title is that it can include the group in every type of park interest and activity. It is a handy 'catch-all' title that gives the group a high degree of flexibility. In addition, the title is now well used and understood, quickly letting people know what the group is about.

3.2.2 Conservation Groups

These have a more specific, but narrower, area of interest than Friends groups. The term is often used to describe groups interested in conserving and improving the wildlife or ecological value of the site, but is also used by groups concerned with the conservation of the local heritage. Most historic parks are more than a hundred years old and of historic interest for their landscape design and park buildings, features and monuments.

3.2.3 Tenant and Resident Associations (TARAs)

These groups are usually focused on an area of housing and concerned with anything that has an impact on the lives of local residents. Whilst this guide is not about setting up resident or tenant associations, it is hoped that some of the information may be helpful to resident groups who would like to improve the quality of a local open space.

3.2.4 Park Watch Groups

These are similar to Neighbourhood Watch groups in that their main interest is park security and reducing antisocial activity, crime and the fear of crime within a park.

Once you have decided on a name for the group, you might want to consider designing a logo. They can make your letters, leaflets and posters look more professional, and are useful for creating a positive and recognisable image.

3.3 Organising a committee

A committee is elected by the members of the group to carry out work on their behalf, between normal meetings. The committee is responsible for the actions of the group so members should not act without the committee's authorisation. A committee is necessary if the work of the group is to last longer than a short one-off task. It is important to ensure that committee members cannot obtain personal financial benefit through being elected. There are three different types of committee member:

- ❑ **Elected** - most committee members are appointed by, and from, the membership.
- ❑ **Nominated** - by another group, usually when the two groups hope to form a working partnership with each other.
- ❑ **Co-opted** - brought in from outside the group because of their specific skills and knowledge.

Although the committee can have as many members as the group wants, there are three essential positions that every committee must have: chairperson, secretary, and treasurer.

3.3.1 The chairperson

The chairperson helps the group to achieve its aims, sets agendas, conducts meetings and acts as the leader of the group, ensuring its smooth operation. A good chairperson will act as a facilitator, ensuring positive discussions and involving all the group.

3.3.2 The secretary

The secretary ensures that all members of the group are kept fully informed and that they feel involved and included. The secretary looks after the group's paperwork and records, prepares papers and agendas for meetings, takes minutes of meetings, books meeting rooms, and supports the chairperson.

3.3.3 The treasurer

The treasurer looks after the financial affairs of the group by keeping accounts and accurate, up-to-date records. The treasurer is responsible for opening a bank account and paying in money, paying bills and managing petty cash and expenses payments and for making financial reports to the committee. The treasurer should be an honest, conscientious and responsible person, preferably with some experience of book-keeping and preparing basic financial statements.

3.3.4 Other positions

The marketing and publicity (press) officer communicates the aims and objectives of the group to the membership and the wider community, including the local press and other media, often through newsletters and members magazines (see section 4.3). While this position is not vital, it can greatly improve the success of a group. It helps if your publicity officer has basic desk top publishing skills and access to a computer, word processor or typewriter as well as a photocopier or other means of printing.

Other important positions include a fund raiser, deputy or vice-secretary and deputy or vice-chairperson, to assist these two busy positions and provide cover when the secretary and chairperson cannot be available. If you are thinking of developing a fully functional website for your group (section 4.3) it is a necessity for one person to oversee this, who will often be called the webmaster.

The group needs to find its own balance; too few people on the committee will result in some members being asked to do too much work and take on too much responsibility for the group; too many committee members will slow down the decision making process.

3.4 Developing a constitution

A constitution is a set of rules that defines how the group is run and becomes necessary as soon as your group starts to deal with money. There are usually plenty of model constitutions available, and the community development section of most local authorities should be able to supply you with one of these. However, the writing of a constitution gives you the chance to decide what things are important to your group, and how the group should be run. Direct copying of another group's constitution is therefore not recommended and for this reason we provide here only an outline of the main components of a constitution.

Constitutions are necessary for the following reasons:

- ❑ To ensure the group's aims and objectives are clear and agreed by its members.
- ❑ To provide mechanisms for making decisions and resolving disputes.
- ❑ To gain credibility with other organisations and bodies.
- ❑ To clarify liability and lines of responsibility.
- ❑ To ensure accountability.
- ❑ To enable the group to qualify for various grants where the awarding body insists on a group constitution.
- ❑ To enable the group to join other bodies that can help and support them.

A constitution is also vital if the group wants to apply for charitable status.

A constitution should include the following:

- ❑ **Group name**
To reflect the group's work.
- ❑ **Geographical area**
The physical boundary of the group's interest.
- ❑ **Aims and objectives**
The long-term aims and the short-term methods of achieving those aims.
- ❑ **Powers**
Identifying what a group can do to achieve its aims. These might include:
 - o Setting up a bank account
 - o Holding meetings
 - o Fundraising
 - o Hiring premises
 - o Carrying out practical tasks.
- ❑ **Membership**
Identification of who can join the group and how, the different classifications of membership and membership fees and what is expected of members.
- ❑ **Management committee**
The structure of the committee, roles of committee members, and how members will be elected to, and resign from, committee posts and roles.
- ❑ **Equal opportunities**
A commitment to treat everyone fairly and equally regardless of race, gender, age, sexual orientation, religion, and physical and mental ability.
- ❑ **Meetings**
The arrangements for committee meetings, general meetings, annual general meetings, and extraordinary general meetings.
- ❑ **Finances**
Most groups will need to open a bank account and it is important to ensure that a minimum of two unrelated group members are needed to sign cheques - it is usually the group's treasurer and chairperson who have this responsibility.
- ❑ **Ending the group**
How and why the group can be dissolved and what happens to any funds.

3.5 What are your aims and objectives?

Defining the group's aims and objectives is very important, as these define the group's interests and help to prioritise future activities.

- ❑ **Aims** are the broad, general, long-lasting goals that the group intends to adopt and keep indefinitely.
- ❑ **Objectives** are more specific and shorter-term targets intended to contribute to the group's practical achievement of its aims. Objectives should be reviewed frequently as they will change as projects develop and the circumstances affecting the group change.

The group's aims and objectives should focus on its role in representing the whole community in bringing about improvements. For example, an aim of the group might be 'to bring about improvements to the park' and a specific objective might then be 'to work with the local authority to develop an improvement plan'.

3.6 What type of work will you do?

An important part of developing your aims and objectives is deciding what type of work your group will do. This may be best achieved in phases with the group first identifying a short-term work programme, then developing a vision or master plan for the site which can be used to work out a longer-term work programme.

The creation of a vision for the site has to be done later through a partnership between the community group, the wider community and the local authority. This should be a vision for the site as the community would really like to see it, and which meets local needs. You should try to be creative as well as practical in your ideas even if not everything seems possible at the beginning. The group can get involved straight away with small practical tasks, building confidence and gaining experience while helping to improve the site and working on longer-term plans.

It is important that people in the group enjoy the work they do. You therefore need to discuss what kind of work members are willing to do. Do not be too ambitious at first. It is better to start small with tasks that can show results quickly and then increase activity as skills, confidence, experience and support grow. Be careful not to overwhelm group members with unrealistic aims. Work should be selected to suit your group and developed as membership increases.

The kind of work that groups do can vary: some are interested only in being consulted on the way the site is managed and others prefer to concentrate on practical projects.

3.7 Types of work

3.7.1 Practical work

This includes:

- ❑ Improving footpaths, cycle routes and bridges.
- ❑ Cleaning and painting buildings, gates, fences.
- ❑ Litter picking.
- ❑ Removing graffiti.
- ❑ Clearing fly tipping.
- ❑ Tree planting.
- ❑ Gardening.
- ❑ Clearing ditches, ponds and streams.
- ❑ Wildlife, flora and fauna surveys.
- ❑ Habitat creation.
- ❑ Creating wild flower meadows.

3.7.2 Developmental work

This includes:

- ❑ Organising community events.
- ❑ Organising guided walks and talks.
- ❑ Applying for grants.
- ❑ Fund-raising.
- ❑ Carrying out customer surveys.
- ❑ Running teashops, cafes, kiosks and shops.
- ❑ Developing education packs and building links to local schools.

3.8 Specific areas of work

3.8.1 Improvement work

The group should exchange ideas about possible improvements. What new facilities would the group like to see provided? What aspects of the way the park is run do not meet the standards you want? Which aspects of the site should be protected and conserved? It is important to realise that these are only initial ideas and there may be a lot of work ahead to achieve them.

3.8.2 Conserving special qualities

Many sites have their own special local character and distinctiveness provided by the landscape, the planting, or the style of architecture in or around the park. Special character might also come from the way the site is used for shows, events, sport or children's play.

Proposed changes to the site need to take account of this special character and the affection people have for the site and its traditions. For example, the loss of a single football pitch may mean that an annual football tournament can no longer take place, careless tree planting may result in the loss of a popular view, or may even result in a show-field becoming unable to host shows that have taken place for years. Any proposed changes to the site need to be thought through and their long-term effects fully considered.

This concern is perhaps more important for older sites where the landscape has been carefully designed and where patterns of use have been established over many decades. Historic parks are often an important part of the local heritage and contain individual features that reflect the development of the town or community. Historic sites can be developed and changed and new facilities successfully introduced as long as the aspects valued by the community are carefully conserved. Groups must make sure they fully understand the design and cultural history of such sites before proposing changes. They may decide that the conservation, restoration or re-creation of historic or distinctive features is as important, or more important, than the creation of new facilities.

Case Study

Restoring a site:

Name: The Tavistock Improvement Group
Location: West London

A local community association became interested in the garden and decided to campaign to improve it. Social problems relating to vandalism, drink and drug issues and prostitution were evident, and this affected the wider community as the park became a virtual 'no go area'.

They set up a committee to work on the project, and local residents and community groups were approached to nominate members. From this, the Tavistock Improvement Group - an umbrella group comprising of eight representatives from different interest groups including the local authority, the biggest social housing landlord and other residents and community groups in the area - was formed.

The park has now been regenerated with provision for all sectors of the community, including target groups, the elderly and young children, and was reopened to widespread acclaim in the community and council.



Tavistock Gardens © GreenSpa

3.8.3 Responding to a threat

Sometimes community involvement in a park or green space starts as a reaction to a threat to the site. This could come from proposed development which would mean the total or partial loss of the site, the loss of a particular facility, or from a change in the way the site is managed. In these cases residents sometimes form a pressure group to oppose the changes, often with a lot of success.

Whether successful or not, it can be worthwhile to convert a pressure group into a campaign for sustained improvement which continues after the threat has passed. Many successful park groups started out as short-term opposition groups.

3.9 Working with the council's Parks Strategy and Site Management Plans

In most cases, parks and green spaces are owned by the local authority, and they are responsible for ensuring that development and management is appropriate. Community groups must work together with the council and the wider community to develop a mutually acceptable vision.

In the early days of a group's involvement, there can be a big difference between what the group wants and what the local authority wants. Working together on a joint masterplan or improvement plan is a good way of understanding each other and agreeing priorities and a shared vision.

The council is responsible for many parks and green spaces in its area and has to balance the time and money it spends on each site. To do this, most local authorities have a green space strategy or service plan that identifies priorities for improvements and spending from its available budget. They may also have produced management plans for individual larger parks. If there is a management plan for your site you should ask to see it and, if not, you could ask to see the grounds maintenance contract and lobby the council to produce a management plan.

Case Study

Responding to a threat:

Name: Novers Park Community Group

Location: Bristol

Having heard of the possible closure of Nover's Park through unofficial routes, 12 active local residents undertook a survey of 100 houses within the park's catchment area. They found that the majority of people consulted thought that management and maintenance of the park needed to be improved; there was particular concern about the lack of any development and improvement strategy. Local reaction to the perceived threat was immediate and residents were clearly willing to defend the park against closure.

The group decided that instead of lobbying the council for better services, a different approach was necessary. They decided to approach the local authority as a union, with the intention of suggesting that the group took over the site's management. The group organised a successful presentation to the Council Committee, and obtained a commitment from the Committee to work with the group on the development of a lease agreement. It was decided to transfer the management and maintenance responsibility for the park to the community group, including an allocation of revenue funding.



The aims of the group should not be decided by the local authority. Indeed the group may feel that the local authority's vision for the site is wrong or too limited. In these circumstances, a first objective of the group could be to encourage the local authority to revise its vision. Ideally the local authority will welcome this interest and be open to agreeing better objectives for the site. If the visions of the group and the council are a long way apart, time and effort will have to be concentrated on changing the local authority's perspective and encouraging a revision of any existing management plan. This is best achieved through open and honest discussion. You must remember that if the group is successful in attracting grants to improve the park or green space, it will probably be the local authority that has to fund the operation and maintenance of these new facilities.

The parks department's strategy for managing its parks and green spaces will be based on the budgets and resources available. Community group involvement adds to these resources by bringing in the energy, knowledge and enthusiasm of the local population. This additional resource can be significant and encourage the local authority to be far more positive about a site than it was before.

Once you have looked at the council's strategies, plans and proposals you should have a fairly good understanding of the local authority's approach to managing your site. You should be able to choose which of the council's proposals you wish to support, and to suggest ideas which the council officers may not have considered. It is better for the group to be able to say what it wants to do, rather than the council dictating what you should do.

3.10 How to develop a vision and aims & objectives

You should work out your aims and objectives at your first meeting, which could take place at someone's home. You should let people know in advance when and where the meeting will be held and you should have someone to chair the meeting. This may be the first time a lot of the people will have met and each person should be allowed to introduce themselves and say why they want to be part of the group. The first meeting will be a brainstorming session, in which everyone gets to put forward their ideas. A brainstorming session and writing a wish-list are two good ways to start developing a vision and the aims and objectives for your group. It is best to start with a blank sheet of paper with everyone's ideas being noted on a flip chart or similar, for later discussion.

The following six methods can be used in addition to brainstorming. These techniques are designed to help communities decide what they like about an area, what they don't like, what they would like to see changed and how change might be brought about. Someone should always make a note of any ideas that come up and report them back, in summary, to a later group meeting.

3.10.1 Visiting the site

Going all round the site together makes it easy to see what is good or bad about the place. Even more helpful is to include a wide range of different people including your members, children, elderly people, council officers and councillors, disabled people and people from ethnic groups. This will produce a range of different opinions about what needs to be done to improve the site which is vital to ensuring a well-balanced vision that meets the majority of community needs and does not alienate certain sectors. It may be necessary to go round the site several times as ideas develop.

3.10.2 Looking at maps and aerial photographs

These allow people to see the site as it is today and in the past. There may be features or facilities that have been lost which people would like to see replaced.

3.10.3 Planning for Real

This is a practical exercise developed by the Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation and involves making a plan or a 3D model of your site, allowing people to fully visualise the changes. Scale models, coloured blocks or stand-up drawings on paper should be provided to represent different park items - buildings, playgrounds, groups of trees, gardens etc - and people should be encouraged to move them around so the effect of introducing new items can be appreciated. There should also be a box where people can leave anonymous suggestions and ideas which will feed into the discussion. 'Planning for Real' exercises can be expensive if full 3D scale models are used, but can be done cheaply by community groups with a bit of imagination. They are a great way to involve everyone, especially children, who can help in making the models. This process in itself is a useful form of involvement and can act as a means of consultation in itself.⁵

3.10.4 Placecheck

This is a system developed by the Urban Design Alliance (UDAL) for the improvement of public places. It can be applied to a whole neighbourhood or to smaller areas like a street, park or open space. The system uses check lists to identify improvements and detailed sets of questions which help groups to define:

- Who should be involved.
- What resources are available.
- What other methods can be used to refine ideas.
- How to tap into other available programmes and resources.
- How awareness can be raised.
- What other complementary initiatives exist.
- How an area can be made greener, safer, more pleasant, welcoming and accessible.
- How better use can be made of already available resources.

The process of working through the questions as a group helps define what people really think about the park and helps the group develop a clearer view of what needs to be changed and how the changes might be achieved.

3.10.5 What makes a place great?

The Project for Public Spaces (PPS) has created a system called What makes a place great?⁶ This system looks at four key indicators:

- Sociability.
- Uses and activities.
- Comfort and image.
- Access and linkage.

Underpinning these four main criteria are sets of measurable indicators such as crime statistics, number of women, number of children and elderly visitors and levels of cleanliness etc.

PPS also produce How to turn a place around⁷ which identifies 11 key principles to transforming any public space into a more vibrant community place (see listings on page 32).

3.10.6 ABC System

The organisation Common Ground, is promoting the use of its 'ABC' system to help groups understand what makes their area different from others. The system says there should be less emphasis on the 'rare and beautiful' and a greater appreciation of the everyday things that surround us and which help to define our neighbourhoods.

The Common Ground approach encourages communities to recognise and celebrate their own unique culture; 'Local Distinctiveness is about what small places mean to us, their detail, patina, and identity. It involves everywhere and everyday places are as vulnerable as the beautiful and rare, perhaps more so because politicians and professionals have no time to care.'⁸

3.10.7 Enquiry by Design

Enquiry-by-Design (EbD) is a planning process developed by the Prince's Foundation which brings together major stakeholders to discuss, develop and draw possible urban design and planning solutions to specific, place-based problems. This process helps reach agreement between groups that would normally hold differing opinions. Participants with different skills and knowledge of the site work in teams in workshops to investigate and understand current urban issues and future trends, creating consensus and focusing solutions.⁹

While this method is commonly used by large planning projects, the process of bringing together a wide range of stakeholders in a collaborative and inclusive consultation process is applicable to thinking about the direction you wish your park and group to move in.

3.11 How to deal with conflict in your group

Whatever methods you choose to develop your aims and objectives, they are likely to lead to a wide range of different ideas. It is likely that some members of the group will make radical suggestions that are simply not practical or feasible. While these can be destructive and waste time, it is crucial that all members of the group are given a chance to voice their ideas and concerns; it is better to accept all ideas at the start, even the less sensible ones, letting consensus opinion remove the more obscure and less well-informed ideas.

In development periods such as this, a feeling of inclusion must develop within the group otherwise members risk being isolated and may leave at a time when it is important to build support. Consensus will be reached, and this will be helped by a capable chairperson, who can let everyone voice their opinions and does not let individual members dominate the discussion or put down the opinions of others.

In order to justify the inclusion of more radical and creative ideas, it may be necessary to carry out a deeper assessment of local need, and find out how many local people would be likely to support radical change. For example, a short questionnaire could be distributed to local houses, businesses, and park users, asking people to express their views on the idea and provide some indication of how often they or their families would make use of the new facility. It is important to present this questionnaire as a test of popularity and an examination of need, and not to raise expectations or cause outrage. Perhaps the more radical ideas could be examined at the same time as less controversial suggestions, so that residents can see that there is a range of options. Radical ideas with the potential for causing widespread upset could be tested first on a sample of trusted members to prevent causing panic amongst the wider community.

Reaching agreement on the group's aims and objectives represents an important milestone in the group's development, and it is important that all members are involved in this process. Serious disagreements amongst the membership regarding aims and objectives are likely to cause major rifts and prevent the group from fulfilling its true potential. Such disagreements should be taken seriously and a determined effort made to sort them out.

3.12 Equal opportunities and other policies

In order to truly represent the local community the group will need to adopt a policy of equal opportunities and encourage diversity in all of the group's activities. Diverse communities are something to celebrate, and nothing would undermine your group's work more than an accusation that the group does not treat everyone fairly.

It is commonly recognised that ethnic minorities and women suffer from discrimination. There are many other groups that suffer too. People are treated unfairly because of their religion, their age, a disability or illness, because they are single parents or on a low income.

All local authorities and grant awarding bodies will insist that the group has adopted an equal opportunities policy and incorporated it within their constitution before they can support the group. The development of such a policy provides the group with a real opportunity to discuss the issue of fair treatment and develop a commitment to equal opportunities.

An equal opportunities policy (statement of intent) should be developed with all of the committee members of the group, to ensure all opinions and ideas are included. This will also provide a training opportunity to highlight some of the issues and to provide education on the importance of considering equality to key decision makers.

Your group should consider the following when developing an equal opportunities policy:

- Recruitment to the committee and membership of the group.
- Providing training on equality issues to new committee members.
- Ensuring work days or events are flexible enough to meet the needs of individuals.
- Ensuring that work is appropriate to individuals' needs and abilities. For example, consider providing special equipment or assistance for people with disabilities.

More established groups, with strong memberships, might consider creating an objective to improve equality of representation in the committee and membership of the group. Progress towards achieving that objective can then be monitored.

4. Widening Your Support

4.1 Increasing support

Once you have set up your community group, established your aims and objectives and formed a relationship with the council you should start to promote your group to a wider audience.

The best possible opportunity to promote the group is through a community-based event held in the park. Many parks are used as venues for events, which are often well attended by the local community. Events can show the park off as a useful community resource, and visitors that are enjoying the day and enjoying the park may want to join your group.

A very simple leaflet describing your group can be given out at the event. Ask the parks department if they can help you to produce the leaflet. Make sure there is a tear-off name and address slip in the leaflet for people to send in and take a clipboard and pen with you so you can collect names and addresses of people you talk to. Build up a distribution list; some people may be reluctant to join the group at this stage but would be happy to receive further information and consider joining later. Do not be too concerned if at this stage the leaflet does not look as professional as you would like, those who are interested in joining the group will be far more interested in your ideas than in their presentation. A couple of posters and a table or small stall is all you need.

If there are no events to join, you should consider organising one of your own. With the support of the local authority and a few members, organising a simple promotional event such as a family picnic or barbecue, should be possible and enjoyable and provide you with the ideal opportunity to recruit members. Initial events do not have to be park-orientated. Jumble sales or amateur dramatic evenings can be a good way to attract people and promote your group.

It is important to remember that communities are not just about residents. Communities also include government agencies, voluntary sector organisations, schools, shops, and businesses. Your leaflets can be distributed to all these different parts of the community. A poster version of the leaflet, displayed around the park and surrounding area will also help.

By actively promoting the group throughout the local area, you are helping to increase membership numbers and ensure that all sectors of the community know of your existence. This will help to ensure that the group is as representative of the local population as possible. A group that is considered truly representative of the whole community will undoubtedly achieve greater credibility than a group that only really represents a small sector of the local community.

Promotion of the group helps to:

- Recruit new members.
- Encourage social inclusion.
- Raise awareness of your aims and objectives.
- Attract the support of local politicians.
- Attract the interest of businesses and other local groups and agencies in the area.

You can also widen support of your community group through meetings, networking with other groups and organisations and through increasing your membership.

4.2 Meetings

As well as internal group meetings you may decide to run open meetings, for the public and other interested parties.

4.2.1 First public meeting

You should now consider holding your first public meeting to further encourage support from your local community. If you have the support of your council, they will probably be willing to help you organise, advertise and promote the event and to provide a meeting place. It may be good idea for council officers and councillors to attend, but it is important that the group, rather than the council, is seen to control the event.

Your choice of venue, meeting date, and start time is important. The venue needs to be accessible to park users and the local community, preferably within walking distance for most people or on a local bus route. You should also consider whether the venue provides disabled access and facilities. Choose the date of the meeting carefully to ensure it does not clash with local or national events which might keep people away. Avoid, if possible, evenings when popular TV programmes are on. After several attempts, one group had much more success at attracting people by avoiding the nights that *Eastenders* was broadcast. The start time will also influence who is able to attend the meeting.

If you cannot provide food and refreshments at the meeting (which can often be done relatively cheaply and donations can be asked for), then you need to allow people enough time to get home from work and eat before coming. You should also think about the value of having a relevant guest speaker to open your meeting. Your local MP may be willing to attend, or you may know of someone from a locally based community organisation. This can often give a good impression, but make sure that the meeting is led by your group.

The main aim of this meeting is to introduce the new group to the wider community and to increase your membership. It is best to keep the formal meeting to no more than an hour, followed by a 30-minute informal session to allow people to chat with group members over a cup of coffee. This first meeting gives you an opportunity to find out the wider community's attitude to the park or green space and any concerns they may have. In order to encourage participation and open up the discussion, it is worth pre-preparing a few prompts and examples. For instance, you could ask people what kind of events they would like to see in the park, or which facilities do not meet their needs.

With a little bit of preparation and care, by the end of the meeting you will have achieved some of the following:

- The wider community will know of the group's existence and have a broad understanding of the group's initial areas of concern.
- You will have contact details for several additional potential members.
- You will have a better understanding of the issues and concerns of the wider community.

4.2.2 Golden rules of a meeting

- Provide an agenda.
- Set a time limit.
- Do not allow a single individual or single interest group to dominate the discussion.
- Give everyone a chance to have their say.
- Separate fact from opinion.
- Try to respect everyone's opinion.
- Do not allow any abusive, insulting or prejudiced remarks.
- Be honest and open about bad news, and involve all members in the solution.
- Get all attendees' names and addresses.
- Send a written follow-up to keep people informed of developments.

4.2.3 Types of meetings

For most groups, meetings are a good way of getting members together to socialise, but they are also needed to ensure that the business of managing the group and its activities is successfully accomplished.

4.2.3.1 Committee meetings

The constitution should provide details of the minimum number of committee meetings that will be held in a year and the minimum number of committee members required to make a decision (called a 'quorum'). Committee meetings bring committee members together regularly to share information and make decisions. Committee members must be given at least 21 days notice of a meeting. Most groups allow members who are not on the committee to attend and participate in these meetings, but only the committee members can vote on agenda items and make decisions.

4.2.3.2 Annual general meeting

An annual general meeting (AGM) must be held every year, with the first taking place within 15 months of the group forming. A minimum of 21 days notice should be given to all group members. The AGM provides an opportunity for the committee to report the year's activities to members and for members to ask questions and discuss the achievements of the committee. The AGM is usually the opportunity for members to elect new committee members. The group's annual accounts should be presented to the membership at every AGM and the financial auditors appointed for next year.

4.2.3.3 Special or extraordinary general meetings

Occasionally events will occur that require a decision beyond the decision making powers of the committee. In these cases the committee should call a special or extraordinary general meeting, so that members of the group can be informed of the situation and participate in the discussion and decision making process. Special or extraordinary meetings may also be called as a result of a written request to the committee by a number (specified in the constitution) of the ordinary members of the group. A shorter notice period, usually 7-14 days, is required for these types of meetings.

4.2.4 Running meetings

Any meeting has the potential to become chaotic and unruly, and it may be wise for the group to establish a code of conduct about what is acceptable behaviour. This code should be developed by the membership of the group and all members need to sign up to the principles.

The code of conduct might include the following:

- That all members can state their views, put forward their opinions and make suggestions, without fear of personal ridicule, attack, or interruption by others.
- That all views will be listened to, but everyone has the right to disagree with another member's viewpoint.
- That everyone has the right to change his or her view.
- That the use of jargon, offensive language or remarks, is discouraged.
- That an accurate set of minutes will be produced for each meeting.
- That an agenda will be produced and circulated for each meeting.
- That members will be informed of the approximate duration of each meeting.
- That everyone has an equal right to vote on all decisions unless they have a vested interest.
- That all vested interests will be declared prior to discussion.
- That the chairperson has a casting vote and decides when a discussion has ended and it is time to move on.

4.2.5 Setting an agenda

Setting an agenda is the accepted way of ensuring that the meeting has a set of clear aims and purposes. It sets out items for discussion and puts them into a logical order so that the meeting runs smoothly without wasting time. Most agendas include the following:

- The name of the group and the date, time and venue of the meeting.
- The order in which things are to be discussed.
- Any matters arising from the minutes of a previous meeting.
- A space to allow members to raise any other business (AOB).

The agenda is normally set by the chairperson who should make sure that all members have the opportunity to add items. Each agenda item will be described in sufficient detail to allow members to understand it and be prepared to discuss it. Any relevant additional information should be attached to the agenda, so that members can read it beforehand. Guest speakers should be placed early in the agenda so that they do not have to be present for the other agenda items. Someone should be identified to lead discussion on each agenda item.

New groups holding their first meetings can find it quite hard to set agendas, but these tend to become established and repeated as a group's work develops. For the first meeting, the agenda could be agreed at the beginning, allowing members to suggest items they would like to discuss. If everyone in the group is encouraged to join in, a list of items for discussion will soon emerge.

For further meetings the agenda should be sent out prior to the meeting. Public open meetings should be advertised in advance on posters, showing the main topics for discussion. The final item on an agenda should always be 'The date of the next meeting' to provide continuity and the opportunity to decide if there is anyone who should be invited to attend. If you do need to invite someone to the next meeting, check whether any group member has his or her contact details before closing the meeting.

4.2.6 Taking notes and minutes

The taking of minutes at meetings is important as it allows absent members to keep informed about discussions and decisions. It also provides a record of decisions taken by the group and the reasons behind those decisions. This can be important later on if, for instance, a decision taken in a meeting with the support of those who were present, turns out to be unsuccessful. The minute will show that this was a group decision and not the action of an individual. Accurate, clear and concise minutes can prevent disagreements within the group about who said what or who was responsible for certain actions.

Accurate notes, made at the meeting, makes writing minutes much easier. Notes should:

- ❑ Be brief and relevant and stick to the agenda heading.
- ❑ Include relevant comments made later in the meeting - leaving spaces between notes leaves room to add later comments.
- ❑ Record decisions and note the people who are responsible for carrying out agreed actions.

Note taking is usually done by the group's secretary. If the discussion is lively with comments from many different members it can be difficult to keep up. To ensure an accurate record, the secretary should not be afraid to stop the meeting and ask the chairperson to summarise the last point before moving on to the next. Alternatively, a small tape recorder or Dictaphone can be used and notes transcribed at a later time.

The minutes produced from the notes should be brief and accurate and contain only the most important points of the discussion, the final decision and any actions agreed. Action points should be shown in a separate column with the names of the people who are to carry them out. The minutes should be written as soon as possible after the meeting while the memory is still fresh. The chairperson should check the draft minutes for accuracy before sending them out. They should be distributed to members quickly and well in advance of the next meeting, especially if there are actions to be completed before the next meeting. Minutes should be numbered to enable people to accurately refer to points in the minutes at future meetings. Minutes should be kept and stored in a safe place.

4.2.7 Feedback from the wider community

An open meeting with an exhibition will help to encourage residents and park users to come forward and express their views. This could be attached to a planned event in the park or green space. At the event, the group could mount an exhibition, perhaps in a tent, and invite people to tell the group what they like about the site, what they would like to see changed and what new developments they would support. Sometimes it works best if the council officers are not present during this exercise, or should at least take a back seat role.

4.3 Newsletters and websites

Newsletters are an excellent way of communicating with your members and a useful way of spreading the word about your community group. If you are going to produce a newsletter, you must try do so at least every quarter and make it as interesting and up-to-date as possible. To reduce costs, an e-newsletter is a cost-effective medium of dissemination. This way you send the newsletter via email to a distribution list which could include your members, local authority officers or other interested organisations.

Increasing numbers of community groups are finding that websites are an excellent method of promoting their group and keeping members and other interested parties informed. You should think carefully whether a website would be appropriate and useful for your group as it will be a time consuming project and could involve a small financial investment. The benefits can be enormous, however, and GreenSpace have produced a guidance document describing how to go about setting up your own website, which can be downloaded for free by visiting www.green-space.org.uk.



GreenSpace community website competition winner:
Friends of General Cemetery - www.gencem.org

4.4 Networking

4.4.1 Linking to other

local community groups

Establishing links with other community groups in your area can bring benefits, especially if they are also involved in parks and green space. Established groups will be able to offer you useful advice and help you avoid making any of the same mistakes they might have made. They may know of useful local suppliers, which local politicians are supportive, and local sources of grant aid. Most community groups are willing to pass on their experiences and give you the benefit of the lessons that they have learnt. They may also be willing to give you access to some of their resources such as tools, and even lend a hand with projects.

The groups in your area may also be involved in some form of parks network or forum, or an annual conference that allows groups to get together and discuss areas of shared interest. Participation in networks, forums or annual conferences is a useful way to tap into a pool of information, expert knowledge and shared resources. The best way to find out about such forums is to contact your local authority, your citizen's advice bureau and your local library.

GreenSpace's National Register of community groups across the UK who have an active interest in parks and green space can be accessed at www.green-space.org.uk. It is also striving to establish regionally based community forums for those same groups.

4.4.2 Linking to regional and national organisations

There are national and regional bodies such as BTCV and Groundwork who offer support to community groups. Joining these organisations or developing partnerships with them can offer real benefits such as discounted training opportunities, active assistance with the preparation of work programmes, improvement schemes and grant applications. A full list of these organisations can be found at the end of this publication.

There may also be other green space voluntary sector organisations operating in your area such as woodland, wildlife and gardens trusts. You can contact these groups and ask them how they might be able to help you, and discuss the possibility of working in partnership.

Case Study

Networking with other community groups:

Name: Communities in Green Space Forum

Location: Stockport

Stockport MBC took the initiative in establishing the Forum, and have since worked in partnership with all the green space community groups within the town. Through their Community Development Team, the Council provides a highly supportive role, although much of the impetus and innovation comes from the community groups themselves.

The Forum consists of approximately 30 'Friends' groups as well as other environmental, heritage and residents groups who are concerned with parks and other green spaces. The Forum is a partnership between the local authority and the friends groups and has created a communication network, through newsletters, regular meetings, training initiatives, making applications for funding and tool shares for practical work.

Networking with other community groups:

Name: GreenSpace's National Register

Location: UK wide

The National Register is a nationwide public register of the contact details of community-based groups that are actively involved or interested in the management of their parks and green space.

The Register will act as a platform to exchange experiences, ideas and skills - to be successful, groups cannot exist in isolation from one another, as there is a huge resource of information to be shared. Visiting other community groups and the green spaces they are caring for is a great opportunity to exchange ideas and keep enthusiasm going. The Register can be accessed at GreenSpace Online at www.green-space.org.uk where you can search for groups by name, town or postcode.

4.5 Membership

4.5.1 Deciding on membership and fees

A new group needs to decide where its members will come from. Existing park users and local residents are the obvious choice, but remember that some park users may live outside the immediate area. Be careful not to restrict membership to a small geographic area so that potential members are not excluded. Generally it is sensible to keep membership restrictions to a minimum.

With any community based group, it is the membership that is critical to success. It is rare for community groups to employ staff and the group is therefore dependent on the voluntary input of its members. High numbers of members will give the group a greater range of skills and knowledge, greater capacity to undertake larger tasks and more credibility with external organisations. Work can be more widely shared and there should be no need for any one individual to have to take on excessive work. Higher numbers are also likely to mean that the group is achieving greater representation of the local community and a better reflection of the local population. However, greater numbers of members will also mean that there will need to be more administration and organisation to ensure that all members are kept informed. More newsletters and copies of minutes will need to be printed and circulated, meeting rooms will need to be larger and meetings will be harder to manage.

You do not need a large number of members to be successful, but you should aim for a fair representation of the make-up of the wider community. This can mean making a special effort to attract members from minority groups and support from local businesses, shops, schools and colleges, voluntary sector organisations, care homes and agencies such as the police. All of these bodies have a vested interest in local improvements and employ people who might want to contribute to your efforts. The other factor that is likely to determine the success of the group is the energy and commitment of individual members and the ability of the members to share goals and work together as an effective unit. There are many examples of small groups achieving great things with just a few very active and dedicated members.

Case Study

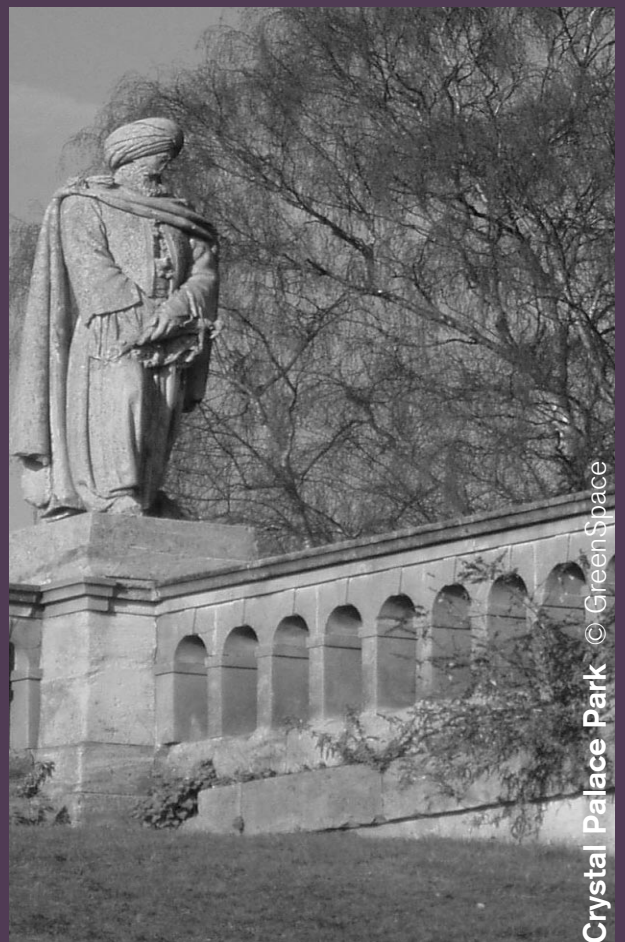
Membership policy:

Name: The Crystal Palace Campaign

Location: South London

In 1997 the London Borough of Bromley unveiled its plans to build the largest multiplex cinema in the South of England, and the largest rooftop car park in the UK on part of Crystal Palace Park, and the Crystal Palace Campaign was formed in response.

The Campaign was incredibly successful, and puts part of its success down to its open policy on membership. Phillip Kolvin, the Chair of the Campaign explains: "we were a deliberately loose grouping, allowing people to pop in with ideas, time, effort or money as they wished. As far as we were concerned, if you waved a banner, you were a member. Time spent in the Campaign was 100% directed to the end in view."



Crystal Palace Park © GreenSpace

Some members will have joined the group in order to meet new people and add to their social life. The group should encourage members get to know each other socially. Team-building occurs through on-site practical tasks but the process can be speeded up by having fun together at quiz nights, picnics and barbecues, coach trips and other social occasions.

GreenSpace research shows that on average only 20 - 30% of group members will take an active part in running the group and project work¹⁰. The others are members because they support what the group is doing but are unwilling or unable to take part themselves. The ratio of active to inactive members is probably higher for smaller groups, but it is clear that membership numbers need to be higher than you might think in order to ensure that project work can be carried out.

Groups will need to decide whether to charge subscription fees and at what level. Money from subscriptions gives some revenue to pay for hiring rooms or buying equipment and can also be used to contribute towards larger grant applications. Most grants provide a percentage of total costs with the rest of the money coming from the owner or other interested parties (this is called 'match funding' or 'partnership funding'). Another GreenSpace publication 'Claiming Your Share' provides extensive guidance and advice on making funding applications (see chapter 10 for further details).

The value of a group's contribution can be increased dramatically if it is given as 'partnership funding' towards a grant award. If a grant is awarded and provides 75% of the total amount, for example, a sum of £100 from the community group would release a further £300 in grant monies. Most grant awarding bodies will also accept the value of volunteer time as partnership funding, meaning that the value of your work can release substantial amounts of money. In some cases charging a membership subscription will put people off joining the group, and this effect will be felt most in the poorest sectors of the community, potentially leading to your group becoming unrepresentative of the local population. One way to overcome this problem is to offer discounted rates for pensioners, students, claimants or people entitled to housing benefits.

Groups will have to decide which approach suits them best. Those that exist in affluent areas where very little diversity in the local population is evident may decide that a subscription to join the group is appropriate. Given that something like 70% of the membership is likely to be passive, there are clear financial benefits to these groups in making a charge for membership. In deprived areas with very diverse communities, the introduction of a membership subscription may stop most people from joining the group. In these cases alternative ways of raising funds should be found.

4.6 Appealing to under-represented or minority groups

Ensuring that the membership of the group mirrors the profile of the local community and the users of the park is important. The work of the group will be much more credible if true representation of the whole community can be achieved. The community will more willingly accept any plans or proposals for bringing changes to the park if there is a feeling that all sectors have been represented in the development of the proposals.

A representative group that includes members from all sectors of the local community will enjoy wider support for specific actions. Community groups provide a voice for the community and it is louder, clearer and less likely to be ignored or opposed if it speaks for everyone.

Attracting members from minority groups can be difficult. Many minority groups are under-represented amongst park users. This is not because these groups have no interest in using parks and green spaces but because they may be afraid, or have not been actively encouraged. Ethnic groups can be encouraged to use parks through special events designed to appeal to them. For example, a country park in Essex organised barbecues for families of Turkish origin which have since become a regular event and each one attracts over 3,000 visitors.

Minority groups in your local community may be distinguished by age, gender, sexual orientation, race, religion or physical and mental abilities. Many of these groups will have regular meeting places, perhaps a specific community centre, social club or place of worship where you can advertise, and some will be represented by specific organisations such as Phab (who seek to promote the integration of disabled and non-disabled people), or BEN (Black Environment Network). It is worth making the effort to meet minority groups at a venue of their choice, where they feel most comfortable.

One of the most important aspects of involving minority groups is the ability to listen. It is vitally important that you allow minority groups the opportunity to express their feelings about your concerns and aspirations. This is the only way that you will find out why the group does not make more use of the park and why they have not yet expressed an interest in joining your group. Hopefully you will then be able to understand 'the barriers to inclusion' which can prevent minorities from using parks and green spaces, and what needs to be changed to reassure them.

Attracting the involvement of representatives of minority groups is not something that always succeeds after one approach. It may take a number of visits, invitations, conversations and meetings before mutual trust has been achieved and the minority group is comfortable about taking part in your group's activities.

4.7 Tapping into events

Instead of organising your own event to promote your group, you could tap into another event in your area. This can be a good way to reach under-represented groups as events are often held in or near parks and green spaces. Events like the ones listed below can be good places to engage people in thinking about your site, for example through Planning for Real (see section 3.10.5) or other participation exercises:

- Asian Melas.
- Diwali (Asian Festival of Light).
- International Women's Day.
- Science Week.
- Jewish New Year.
- Apple Day.
- Environment Week.
- Tree Week.
- BBC Nature Week.
- Tree Dressing Day.

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5. Practical Action

5.1 Practical issues to consider

There are a number of practical issues, many with a legal foundation, that your group needs to consider before you conduct any practical work.

5.1.1 Public liability and personal accident insurance

All groups must have insurance before carrying out physical work on site, whether with power tools or merely spades and shovels. You will need public liability insurance to cover accidents to the public and personal accident insurance to cover accidents to volunteers working on the site.

The cost of insurance depends on how often you work on the site and on the types of tools you use. You can contact an insurance broker for a quote, but BTCV offer an insurance scheme underwritten by Zurich Municipal, especially for community groups, with a range of packages starting from £135 per year. Costs increase for power tools and go higher if chainsaws are used by members (who must have been trained and hold a certificate). To save costs it might be better to leave power tool work to the council or its contractors who will have their own insurance. If you work on a community garden, the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens (FCFCG) offer public liability insurance for an annual premium of £105.00 (see section on start-up grants 5.1.6).

To take advantage of these special insurance offers, your group will have to become an associated member of the organisations; BTCV currently costs £25 for a year and FCFCG costs £20 a year.

5.1.2 Risk assessments

Risk assessments help you to limit the chances of someone being injured or becoming ill from your group's activities.

A risk assessment of your work is a way of carefully considering what might harm people, so that you can decide if you have taken adequate precautions. Failure to take precautions could cost you a lot more if an accident does happen. Risk assessments should be carried out on site, and before the group undertakes an activity, either work tasks or events.

There are five main stages to follow for risk assessments as described by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE)¹¹:

1) Identify hazards

A 'hazard' is defined as 'anything that can cause harm' (HSE). Walk around the site and note any potential hazards.

2) Decide who might be harmed and how

Remember this may be members of the public as well as group members.

3) Evaluate the risks

Decide whether or not existing precautions are adequate. A 'risk' is defined as 'the chance, high or low, that somebody will be harmed by a hazard' (HSE).

4) Record your findings

This will show others that a proper check was made, and that potential hazards and people who may be affected were considered. It will also provide evidence to show that precautions were reasonable and the remaining risk was low.

5) Review your assessment

New equipment or procedures could mean that new hazards arise, and it may be necessary to take into account that new hazard in the assessment. Generally, it is considered good practice to review your assessment occasionally to ensure that any precautions are still effective.

5.1.3 Health and safety

A health and safety policy statement should outline how your group manages health and safety. It should highlight who does what, and when and how they do it. Ideally, everyone in the group should be made aware of the policy, as well as how to identify hazards and estimate risks. Your group might prefer to allocate responsibilities for health and safety to specific members, with the main aspects being:

- To undertake risk assessments prior to work days and events.
- To remove/reduce risks prior to the task or event.
- To keep all plant and machinery in good working order and to arrange annual testing of electrical equipment.
- To assess the competency of people undertaking tasks and identify training needs.

Groups undertaking practical work and events should consider accident procedures. You could have some group members trained in first aid. Some groups invite St John's Ambulance to attend events to expertly treat individuals who become injured or ill.

Groups working in buildings should have emergency procedures for fire safety and evacuation where these are not already in place.

5.1.4 Child protection

Often groups will work with children through clubs or at events, with different levels of involvement. Groups that work with children must consider how to protect them and can develop appropriate policy statements to guide members.

If a child is to be left alone with a group member, or members, who are not their guardian, the group member(s) must undergo police checks with the Criminal Records Bureau to ensure they aren't disqualified from working with children. Check with your local authority for any additional commitments that the group must make to ensure they are appropriate to work with children.

Usually children are accompanied by adults at events. If your group is responsible for the event you could put up signs stating that adults must remain with their children. Larger events often have an area for lost children.

5.1.5 Land ownership and designations

At the early stages of your group's life you will be unlikely to have to consider issues of ownership of the land on which you work, but as your influence and range of activities increases you may be faced with some of these. You will almost certainly be working on someone else's land, most likely the local authority's. To work on the site you must have the permission of the landowner.

If you want to increase your stake in the ownership of the site, there are two issues you may well be faced with:

5.1.5.1 Leasehold

Possessing a lease for the site will mean that you effectively 'rent' the land from the owner for a given number of years (eg. 99 or 999 years). This does not mean you own the land outright but gives you the right to use the land for the aims and objectives of your group for the time period agreed.

To obtain a lease can often take a long time, but has the benefit of security as well as making you eligible for a greater number of funding programmes, and providing you with more direct control of the site. Although rent must be paid, the local authority may be able to apply a 'peppercorn' rent, to the value of £1 per year. Alternatively the local authority could consider charging you a full rental value but then paying back the rental sum to the group as part of the local authority's contribution towards the upkeep of the site. The resolution of rental value will depend on local circumstances, but the example approaches described above are reasonably common practice. The issues concerning leasing the land will not be relevant to all groups as many will not find this approach appropriate for their individual circumstances.

5.1.5.2 Planning permissions

This will be required if you plan to construct a building on site or to make a material change of use of the land or buildings. You will need Listed Building Consent to do more than straightforward repairs to a listed building and Conservation Area Consent to carry out building works and demolition, or works to trees, in a conservation area. You will also need permission from the council to work on trees with Tree Protection Orders (TPOs). If you are unsure whether any planning legislation affects your project you should get advice before you start from the council planning department.

5.1.6 Start-up grants and financial support

Your local authority may have small grants available to new groups. If they do not, they may be able to tell you about other local sources of start-up income. At a national level, BTCV offer start-up grants for new community groups of up to £100 to meet part of the costs of insurance and up to £300 to purchase tools and equipment. Both of these grants are simple to apply for and the money will be awarded relatively quickly. To be considered for these grants, your group will need to become an associated member of BTCV.

It is worth contacting your Local Exchange Trading System (LETS). LETS can arrange the exchange of equipment etc for services in place of financial payment. They can be an ideal way to avoid the costly rental of equipment, venues, catering, skills and so on.

5.2 Developing a practical work programme

5.2.1 Work programme

Guided by feedback from the public, and working in partnership with the council, the group will soon be in a position to agree a scheme of new and improved services and facilities for the park or green space. With the help of the council's landscape designers these can then be developed and illustrated on an overall work plan or improvement plan.

The first stage should be to identify who will be affected by your planned work. You should then consult these individuals and organisations, making the improvement plan available for further public comment. Consultation is a vital step in making your plan accessible and meaningful to the whole community. Be prepared to consider changing the plan in the light of comments received from consultation.

Once the improvement plan is developed and agreed, some time should be spent breaking the proposals down into manageable parcels of work. This will give a clear idea of the amount of work needed to implement each proposal and allow the group to identify and choose elements of the plan that are most readily achievable. It is recommended that the group first identify an easily achieved proposal that will bring about immediate benefits for the community.

The group can then move on to prioritise the other proposals, decide how much work each will need and who within the group will be responsible for carrying out each one. Group members will often bring certain skills from their professional lives to the work of the group. Therefore decisions should always play to the strengths and skills that exist among the community group members.

For each proposal you will need to work out:

- What other organisations need to be involved?
- What do we require from them?
- What is the cost involved?
- How will this cost be met?
- What funding sources are available?
- What is required in order to secure funds?

5.2.2 First work task

Your first work task should be something that is simple, achievable and short term. By concentrating your efforts on something that is easy to achieve, the group will more quickly demonstrate their value to both the wider community and the council. This will create a 'feel good' factor that provides motivation to group members. Any links you have made with the local media will be useful for getting positive publicity for your work. These quick and easy projects should be part of a long-term vision, a staging process, whereby short term goals complement long term aims.

BTCV's Urban Handbook provides ideas for initial work programmes. Some of the best are⁵:

Day of action

Involve as many people as possible; it is important that they can see tangible results at end of day. This is an ideal opportunity to talk to volunteers and tell them about the value of your work and group, handing out leaflets and any other publicity material you have. The day must be enjoyable and get people working together. Possible examples are stream or pond clearance, footpath improvements or arts projects, although they can be anything relevant to the site and local people.

Litter and fly-tipping clearance

Volunteers should wear protective gloves, and not remove any chemicals, asbestos or medical waste (you should contact your local authority's public health department to do this). These tasks are not suitable for young children. The Tidy Britain Group organise a National Spring Clean Week in April and provide kits of refuse bags and tabards to wear.

Bulb planting

You should organise a planting week between September and November to give the bulbs the greatest chance of success.

Family tree or shrub day

Ask members of the community and the council to donate the trees, shrubs or flowers identified in your agreed planting plan. Planting days are a good way to involve the community.

Family fun day

These are best organised with a school or youth group and are a good opportunity to develop publicity for your group and help build contacts with the wider community. A low-key event to which local people have contributed will have much more impact than an externally organised professional event.

5.2.3 Consultation and involvement

One of the primary functions of a community group is to provide a voice for the local community and represent it in a particular field of interest. It would therefore be wrong for a community group to develop ideas and plans for a park or green space without checking with the rest of the community. Plans developed in isolation can encounter severe opposition when they are made available to the public. This happens to local authorities and can happen to community groups who have failed to consult. Because they are largely made up of local residents, community groups should be in a better position than local authorities to carry out meaningful consultation easily.

5.2.4 The value of reviewing your work

When developing long-term visions and work programmes, it is essential that some form of periodic review takes place. The plan for the site will have come about through an audit process, in which the group, the council and the wider community have considered what needed to be changed to ensure a viable future for the site. The master plan or improvement plan is intended to put things right. It is important to review the success of improvements to make sure that they really are making things better.

Periodically the group should measure the success of its actions, compare the outcomes with its original objectives and, if necessary, revise and modify its master plan and work programme. For instance, in its original aims and objectives, your group may have identified a need for more activities for elderly visitors. In response, the master plan included specific provisions for elderly visitors.

You can measure the success of your actions as a group through a series of simple mechanisms. For example the amount of rubbish collected by the group in an afternoon can establish baseline data from which progress can be monitored. You could also monitor incidents of graffiti or other acts of vandalism every few months, or even conduct surveys of different user groups, such as the number of elderly visitors.

These mechanisms will enable you to complete a review of your group and its work and will help to determine the following:

- Have all of the original proposals been successfully implemented?
- If not, are they still relevant?
- If they have been implemented, have they met the objectives of providing something popular for older visitors?
- Do older members of the community now feel that their needs have been met?
- Do any feel excluded?
- Are other facilities still required, or has the objective been fully met?

Without this periodic check, it is easy for community groups to commit substantial effort to something that does not meet their needs. The greater the effort involved in achieving an objective, the more frequently the activities should be reviewed. A substantial project, involving lots of different stages, should undergo some form of review at the end of each stage, before moving on to the next stage.

The initial aims and objectives of your group should also be reviewed periodically. It is likely that your priorities as a group will change and develop as your group does, and these should be debated as a group in brainstorming sessions as with the original aims and objectives (see section 3.10). Unless there is a major development within your area of work, there is no need to do this more frequently than every year.

6. Conclusion

This guide has covered the basics behind setting up and running a community-based group in its early days and has hopefully provided you with the initial confidence you need to get out there and make a difference to your local environment.

It is vital that you keep the momentum going and continue to develop a positive relationship with the local authority, other organisations and groups. A highly motivated group of citizens can achieve great things when they are determined.

As well as the vital support your local authority can provide you as a group, there are numerous organisations that will be able to offer help and advice when you are developing and maturing. The Community Networking Team at GreenSpace will be happy to advise and help. We also produce an online newsletter 'Community Green Place' that is sent out every other month. If you would like to subscribe to the mailing list, please email your details to community@green-space.org.uk.

Your community group can become a member of GreenSpace. If you would like details about how to become a member, please telephone 0118 946 9060. Membership details are also available on GreenSpace Online, www.green-space.org.uk.

Other publications are available from GreenSpace Online, where you can also find out about future publications which will be concerned with the continued development of your group.

It is vital that you keep the momentum going and continue to develop a positive relationship with the local authority, other organisations and groups.

A highly motivated group of citizens can achieve great things when they are determined.

7. Further Resources

This following contact list provides the contact details of a wide variety of national organisations which support and advise community groups working with urban parks and green spaces. If you want to contact local organisations, please ask your local authority who will hold this information.

Active Community Unit (ACU)

The Active Community Unit, formerly the Voluntary & Community Unit, aims to promote voluntary and community activity and to support a healthy and cost effective voluntary sector.

T: 0870 000 1585

F: 0207 273 2065

E: public.enquiries@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk

www.homeoffice.gov.uk/inside/org/dob/direct/acomu.html

Adept

Adept specialises in community involvement, capacity building and neighbourhood renewal. It conducts project activities, training, and consultancy, in ways that allow these different kinds of work to support and inform each other. Adept provides community development, training, research and consultancy services to local partnerships, local authorities, voluntary organisations, community development agencies, community groups and others.

T: 024 7623 0606

E: info@adept.org.uk

www.adept.org.uk

Association of Charitable Foundations

The Association of Charitable Foundations (ACF) is the UK's national support organisation for grant-making trusts and foundations of all types. ACF receives no government funds. It is entirely dependent on its members, who pay a subscription according to size. Over 300 independent trusts and foundations, large and small, have joined - with total grant giving of more than £1 billion per year.

E: sue@acf.org.uk

www.acf.org.uk

Association of Gardens Trusts

This is a national organisation representing 32 County Gardens Trusts actively engaged in conserving, researching, documenting and caring for our heritage of parks, gardens and designed landscapes.

T: 020 7251 2610

E: agt@gardenstrusts.org.uk

www.gardenstrusts.org.uk

Black Environment Network (BEN)

BEN works to integrate social, cultural and environmental concerns in the context of sustainable development. In order to achieve this, they work across diverse sectors. Current themes integrate the areas of natural environment, the built environment, heritage, social justice, health and housing.

T: 01286 870715

E: ukoffice@ben-network.org.uk

www.ben-network.org.uk

Black Training & Enterprise Group (BTEG)

BTEG was established in 1991 as a project within the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) to provide a vehicle for ensuring that Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) develop and implement effective action plans to effectively engage with local black organisations.

www.bteg.co.uk

British Association of Friends of Museums (BAFM)

BAFM is an independent organisation established in 1973, for Friends, volunteers and supporters of museums, galleries and heritage sites. BAFM represents 200,000 friends and volunteers across the UK. They offer a friendly and practical network of support from people with first hand experience of running Friends organisations. They act as a clearing house for common problems and are a central source of information about Friends for Friends.

Much of the information in this website can be translated to the challenges faced within urban green space.

www.bafm.org.uk

British Association of Settlements and Social Action Centres (BASSAC)

Bassac is driven by a desire to find local solutions to national problems. It values innovation in neighbourhood action and a focus on people rather than problems. Because people and communities have many needs, Bassac supports and promotes a multi-purpose approach to community development. Seeking to realise the full potential of each community, Bassac supports members to develop unique solutions to the specific circumstances of their neighbourhood.

T: 0207 735 1075

F: 0207 735 0840

E: info@bassac.org.uk

www.bassac.org.uk

British Urban Regeneration Association (BURA)

BURA was formed in 1990 to provide a forum for the exchange of ideas, experience and information for the emerging regeneration sector. BURA has now become the leading independent organisation in the field of regeneration. The strong and influential membership reflects the growing knowledge and expertise that BURA has at its disposal.

T: 0207 539 4030

F: 0207 404 9614

E: info@bura.org.uk

www.bura.org.uk

BTCV

BTCV is the UK's largest practical conservation charity. Founded in 1959, they have helped over 130,000 volunteers take hands-on action to improve the rural and urban environment. BTCV is a national organisation with local offices around the country.

T: 01491 821600

F: 01491 839646

E: information@btcv.org.uk

www.btcv.org

CABE Space

As a new unit of the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment, CABE Space will campaign to raise the quality of urban space, including parks and other green space. The unit will promote and develop skills training, disseminate good practice and provide help and advice to local authorities on delivering improvements to the public realm.

T: 020 7960 2400

F: 020 7960 2444

E: enquiries@cabe.org.uk

www.cabespace.org.uk

Charity Commission of England and Wales

The Charity Commission is here to give the public confidence in the integrity of charities in England and Wales. They are a UK Government organisation responsible to the Courts for their decisions and to the Home Secretary for the way they use their resource.

T: 0870 333 0123

www.charity-commission.gov.uk

Charities Direct

CharitiesDirect.com is owned and maintained by CaritasData utilising the information on the National Charities Database, the largest charities database of its type in the UK.

T: 0207 566 8210

F: 0207 566 8238

www.charitiesdirect.com

Charities Partnership

Charities Partnership have been fundraising free for charities, voluntary organisations, schools, and pre-schools since 1993. They have assisted over 2,000 fund raising events to date.

T: 01322 228482

F: 01322 228482

www.charitiespartnership.com

Charity Times

This is an online monthly publication for charity professionals.

www.charitytimes.com

Citizens Connections.net

CitizensConnection.net is the biggest website in the UK for active citizens - packed with advice for people who want to make a change. CitizensConnection.net aims to help ordinary people do extraordinary things. This could mean volunteering for two hours a week, campaigning about an issue that you really care about.
T: 0207 608 8100
E: JDSEnquiries@justdosomething.net
www.citizensconnection.net

Civic Trust

The Civic Trust promotes progressive improvements in the quality of urban life for communities throughout the United Kingdom. It is Britain's leading charity devoted to enhancing the quality of life in Britain's cities, towns and villages: the places where people live, work, shop and relax. They are responsible for the administration of the Green Flag Award Scheme, which represents the national standard for parks and green spaces across England and Wales.
T: 0207 930 0914
F: 0207 321 0180
www.civictrust.org.uk

Community Neighbourhood Site

This site is dedicated to support voluntary and non-profit making organisations. Apart from a wealth of invaluable information, they also offer on-line quality training and an impressive selection of information materials and services, which you can download or order from their 'Products' section. They can also provide services at your place of work.
www.e-hq.co.uk/info/innova/1st.shtml

Charities Information Bureau

Supporting voluntary organisations and community groups in funding their work and supporting funding advisors and agencies in giving funding advice.
T: 01924 239063
F: 01924 239431
E: funding@the-cib.demon.co.uk
www.cibfunding.org.uk

Commission for Racial Equality

The Commission for Racial Equality is a publicly funded, non-governmental body set up under the Race Relations Act 1976 to tackle racial discrimination and promote racial equality.
T: 020 7939 0000
E: info@cre.gov.uk
www.cre.gov.uk

Common Ground

Common Ground is internationally recognised for playing a unique role in the arts and environmental fields, distinguished by the linking of nature with culture, focusing upon the positive investment people can make in their own localities, championing popular democratic involvement, and by inspiring celebration as a starting point for action to improve the quality of our everyday places.
T: 01747 850820
F: 01747 850821
www.commonground.org.uk

Communities Against Drugs

This online toolkit on drug related crime is one of a series of twenty-two designed to help all those involved in crime reduction and community safety to work as effectively as possible. It brings together information on the latest developments, research findings and promising approaches to tackling drug related crime. It includes tools for identifying problems, developing responses and monitoring progress as well as highlighting practical measures to make communities safer.
Drug Prevention Service
T: 0207 217 8631
F: 0207 217 8230
E: Public_Enquiry.dpas@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk
www.crimereduction.gov.uk/toolkits/dr00.htm

Communities Online

Communities Online aims to address issues of sustainability, regeneration, social inclusion and healthier economies by focusing on the use of new communications technologies in communities and neighbourhoods.
E: information@communities.org.uk
www.communities.org.uk

Community Action Network (CAN)

CAN's essential function is to link its members via an electronic network, supported by other forms of communication, including face-to-face meetings. CAN's web site is developing easy to use links to other relevant sites and its extranet (communications network) is based upon e-mail, electronic conferences and notice boards.
T: 0207 401 5310
E: canhq@can-online.org.uk
www.can-online.org.uk

Community Development Foundation (CDF)

CDF is a leading authority on community development in the UK and Europe. It is a non-departmental public body supported mainly by the Active Communities Directorate of the Home Office with substantial backing from local government, charitable trusts and the private sector.

T: 0207 226 5375

F: 0207704 0313

E: admin@cdf.org.uk

www.cdf.org.uk

Community Foundations Network

A community foundation is the one-stop solution for those who want their giving to be for the lasting benefit of their local community. Gifts in cash, trusts, bequests, shares or property all help create permanent endowment funds, whose earnings meet local needs while respecting donors' wishes.

T: 0207 713 9326

F: 0207 713 9327

E: network@communityfoundations.org.uk

www.communityfoundations.org.uk

Community Matters

Community Matters is the nationwide federation for community associations and similar organisations with over 1,000 member organisations across the UK. Community Matters has played a key role in promoting and supporting action by ordinary people in response to social, educational and recreational needs in their neighbourhoods and communities.

T: 0207 837 7887

F: 0207 278 9253

E: communitymatters@communitymatters.org.uk

www.communitymatters.org.uk

Community Planning

Growing numbers of residents are getting involved with professionals in shaping their local environment. This website is an essential starting point for everyone concerned. It provides easily accessible how-to-do-it best practice information of international scope and relevance.

T: 01865 483139

F: 01865 483998

E: rudi@rudi.net

www.communityplanning.net

Council of Ethnic Minority Voluntary Organisations (CEMVO)

Both Black and Minority Ethnic Communities and the Minority Ethnic Voluntary Sector (MEVS) suffer from a lack of resources, not only in terms of money but also in the involvement of ethnic minority professionals (as trustees, volunteers, staff and donors) and an involvement and participation within the policy and decision-making process. Their organisational mission is to redress this by developing resources for Black and Minority Ethnic Communities in the United Kingdom. In order to do this, the Council of Ethnic Minority Voluntary Sector Organisations (CEMVO) and the Ethnic Minority Foundation (EMF) have been established.

T: 0208 432 0307

F: 0208 432 0317

E: enquiries@emf-cemvo.co.uk

www.emf-cemvo.co.uk

Criminal Records Bureau (CRB)

The CRB achieves its purpose by providing a service called Disclosure. This is a carefully regulated one-stop shop service that enables organisations to gain access to important criminal and other information for recruitment and licensing purposes. If your group is planning to run events or activities with children, you will have to be checked with the CRB.

T: 0870 90 90 811

www.crb.gov.uk

Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA)

The aim of DEFRA is to promote sustainable development, which means a better quality of life for everyone, now and for generations to come, including a better environment at home and internationally, and sustainable use of natural resources; economic prosperity through sustainable farming, fishing, food, water and other industries that meet consumers' requirements; and thriving economies and communities in rural areas and a countryside for all to enjoy.

T: 08459 33 55 77

F: 020 7238 6609

E: helpline@defra.gsi.gov.uk

www.defra.gov.uk

Directory of Social Change (DSC)

This organisation gives advice and support to voluntary organisations. The long-term vision is to be an internationally recognised, independent source of information and support to voluntary and community sectors worldwide. They help voluntary and community organisations to thrive through advice on: how to raise the money they need; how to manage their resources to maximum effect; how to influence the right people; what their rights and responsibilities are; and how to plan and develop for the future. The DSC also speaks out on issues affecting the sector through the media, public platforms and membership of government and advisory groups working for and within the sector.

T: 0207 391 4800

F: 0207 391 4808

E: info@dsc.org.uk

www.dsc.org.uk

English Heritage

English Heritage works in partnership with central government departments, local authorities, voluntary bodies and the private sector to conserve and enhance the historic environment, broaden public access to heritage and increase people's understanding of the past.

T: 0870 333 1181

F: 01793 414926

E: customers@english-heritage.org.uk

www.english-heritage.org.uk

English Nature

English Nature champions the conservation of wildlife, geology and wild places in England. They are a Government agency set up by the Environment Protection Act 1990 and are funded by the Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA).

T: 01733 455101

F: 01733 455103

E: enquiries@english-nature.org.uk

www.english-nature.org.uk

Environmental Campaigns (ENCAMS)

Environmental Campaigns (ENCAMS) is an environmental charity, which aims to achieve litter free and sustainable environments by working with community groups, local authorities, businesses and other partners. It is the charity that runs the Keep Britain Tidy campaign.

T: 01942 612639

F: 01942 824778

E: information@encams.org

www.encams.org

Experience Corps

The Experience Corps is an independent, non-profit-making company, funded by a grant-in-aid from the Home Office, set up to encourage all people, aged 50 and over, to offer their skills and experience to benefit others in their local communities.

T: 020 7981 2500 or 0800 10 60 80

F: 0207 981 2600

E: info@experience-corps.co.uk

www.experiencecorps.co.uk

Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens (FCFCG)

FCFCG is the main national organisation involved with supporting community gardens and city farms across the city. They also have expansive knowledge and experience of allotments. If you have such a site, or are planning to start one, this organisation can offer you valuable advice and support.

T: 0117 923 1800

F: 0117 923 1900

E: admin@farmgarden.org.uk

www.farmgarden.org.uk

GreenSpace

One of the UK's leading advocates for the economic, social and environmental benefits of better planned, designed and managed parks, gardens and green spaces and for their positive contribution to our economic, physical and spiritual health, to social cohesion and to biodiversity.

T: 0118 946 9060

F: 0118 946 9061

E: info@green-space.org.uk

www.green-space.org.uk

Green Space Learning Network

This network is facilitated by the Countryside Agency's Doorstep Greens team. The aim of this network is to try to provide a resource base for people who are managing green spaces close to homes and give an arena to professionals who work in green space management.
<http://greenspace.net.countryside.gov.uk>

Greenspace Scotland

Greenspace Scotland is a new organisation, which has been established to provide a national lead on local action to improve the environment within and around urban settlements in Scotland.
T: 01786 465934
E: info@greenspacescotland.org.uk
www.greenspacescotland.org.uk

Groundwork UK

Groundwork is a federation of 50 trusts in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, each working with their partners in poor areas to improve the quality of the local environment, the lives of local people and the success of local businesses. Groundwork work in certain areas of high deprivation across the UK. Their regional offices can be found on the main website.
T: 0121 236 8565
F: 0121 236 7356
E: info@groundwork.org.uk
www.groundwork.org.uk

Health and Safety Executive (HSE)

The Executive ensure that risks to people's health and safety from work activities are properly controlled, a site crucial if you are setting up a community group and wish to carry out practical work days.
T: 08701 545 500
F: 029 20 859 260
E: hseinformationservices@natbrit.com
www.hse.gov.uk

Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF)

The Heritage Lottery Fund enables all of us to celebrate, look after and learn more about our diverse heritage. From our great museums and historic buildings to local parks or recording and celebrating traditions and customs, HLF grants open up our nation's heritage for everyone to enjoy.
T: 020 7591 6042
E: enquire@hlf.org.uk
www.hlf.org.uk

International Tree Foundation

This organisation works towards a world richer in trees, by planting, preserving and educating people on the value of trees worldwide. In the UK, ITF members work in their local communities. On a global scale, ITF tree planting grants help the world's poorest environments and societies.
T: 01342 712536
F: 01342 718282
E: info@internationaltreefoundation.org
www.internationaltreefoundation.org

Learning Through Landscapes

This organisation campaigns for children's rights to decent school grounds and help makes school grounds better places.
T: 01962 846258
E: schoolgrounds-uk@ltl.org.uk
www.ltl.org.uk

Legal Services Shop.com

This site provides a range of free legal information on thousands of topics using their free lawyer service. This is a vast database of law which is written by solicitors/barristers and provided on this website for free. Bear in mind however that there is no free follow-up service, if your particular query is not covered, or you need further explanation, or you wish to speak to a solicitor, these services will incur a charge.
T: 0870 241 6465
F: 0207 278 1001
E: enquiries@judicium.com
www.freelawyer.co.uk

LETSLink UK

LETSLINK UK keeps the only comprehensive national database of Local Exchange Trading Systems throughout the UK and has put thousands of people in touch with their nearest local LETS.
T: 01985 217 871
E: lets@letslinkuk.org
www.letslinkuk.net

Local Heritage Initiative (LHI)

The Local Heritage Initiative helps communities bring their local heritage alive. It helps them care for the special features that make each locality as unique as a fingerprint. It gives communities funds, advice and support to do this.

T: 01242 521381

E: lhi@countryside.gov.uk

www.lhi.org.uk

National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners (NSALG)

NSALG has its roots as far back as 1901, when the Agricultural Organisation Society was established with the aim of co-operation amongst agriculturists and the organisation of smallholdings and allotments. It provides a united voice and action to protect and preserve a traditional way of life. With today's emphasis on protection of the environment, increased leisure facilities, attention to a healthy way of life and the recognition of organic growing, the Society has an organisational structure spreading the length and breadth of the country.

T: 01536 266576

F: 01536 264509

E: natsoc@nsalg.demon.co.uk

www.nsalg.demon.co.uk

National Association of Cemetery Friends

The formation of a number of groups of volunteers with the common aim of conserving their local cemeteries led, in 1986, to the founding of The National Federation of Cemetery Friends. Many of the Cemetery Friends started as pressure groups to counter owners' neglect of a cemetery or proposals for inappropriate use. Often those who were successful continued their interest by monitoring the owner's maintenance and restoration work and, if given the opportunity, helping in a practical way.

E: info@cemeteryfriends.fsnet.co.uk

www.cemeteryfriends.fsnet.co.uk

National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux (NACAB)

The Citizens Advice Bureau Service offers free, confidential, impartial and independent advice.

E: adviceguide@nacab.org.uk

www.nacab.org.uk

National Association of Councils for Voluntary Service (NACVS)

NACVS is the national association of CVS (Councils for Voluntary Service). Over 280 CVS are currently members, with the network spanning both urban and rural areas of England. They help to promote effective local voluntary and community action through their member CVS, by providing them with a range of support services.

T: 0114 278 6636

F: 0114 278 7004

E: nacvs@nacvs.org.uk

www.nacvs.org.uk

National Association of Volunteer Bureaux (NAV B)

NAV B is the membership organisation for a national network of over 400 Volunteer Bureaux throughout England. Volunteer Bureaux assist people to become volunteers, work with organisations seeking volunteers and act as local volunteering development agencies.

VDE T: 0121 633 4555

F: 0121 633 4043

E: info@vde.org.uk

www.navb.org.uk

National Centre for Volunteering

An essential on-line resource for volunteer managers, potential volunteers and anyone seeking up to date information on volunteering.

T: 0207 520 8900

F: 0207 520 8910

E: volunteering@thecentre.org.uk

www.volunteering.org.uk

National Community Forestry Partnership

Community Forestry is a revolutionary environmental regeneration idea, which is sweeping the country. The Community Forests are radically changing landscapes and modern day town and city life, shrouding urbanisation in a veil of trees and lush greenery, softening the hard edges of contemporary development and breathing new life into tired neglected land.

T: 01684 311880

F: 01684 311370

E: secretariat@communityforest.org.uk

www.communityforest.org.uk

National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO)

The National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) is the umbrella body for the voluntary sector in England.

www.ncvo-vol.org.uk

National Playing Fields Association

Protecting and improving playing fields is the core work of The National Playing Fields Association (NPFa). There is currently no statutory protection for playing fields so the country's irreplaceable recreational heritage is constantly at risk. The NPFa believes they deserve better protection.

T: 020 7833 5360

E: npfa@npfa.co.uk

www.npfa.co.uk

National Urban Forestry Unit (NUFU)

This organisation promotes the role of trees in urban sustainability. The site provides information about the UK's National Urban Forestry Unit and its work. It also provides links to other sites of interest, including urban and community forestry projects throughout the UK.

T: 01902 828600

F: 01902 828700

E: info@nufu.org.uk

www.nufu.org.uk

Nature Net

Naturenet is a voluntary enterprise to provide a good resource for practical nature conservation and countryside management on the Web.

www.naturenet.net

Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation (NIF)

NIF is a national charity specialising in community participation, training and development. Working with local authorities, housing associations, voluntary agencies and community groups, they offer an independent, quality service to improve the well-being of communities. The group believe that the people who live and work in a neighbourhood have the ideas, skills and experience to be centrally involved in shaping the future of their own communities. All their work is to one end, that local people play a full part in planning and implementing effective regeneration in their own neighbourhood.

T: 0870 770 0339

F: 01952 591771

www.nifonline.org.uk

New Deal Urban Environment Taskforce

Jobseekers who don't find work during the Gateway period will be able to move on to a New Deal option. One of the options available involves spending up to six months working with the Environment Task Force. The step by step guide to New Deal for 18-24 year olds shows you how the option can help you make the most of your time on New Deal and find work.

T: 0845 606 2626

www.newdeal.gov.uk

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM)

ODPM was created as a central department in its own right in May 2002. It is responsible for policy on housing, planning, devolution, regional and local government and the fire service.

It also takes responsibility for the Social Exclusion Unit, the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit and the Government Offices for the Regions.

T: 0207 944 3000

E: scdu@opdm.gsi.gov.uk

www.odpm.gov.uk

Open Spaces Society

The Open Spaces Society protects common land and public rights of way. If you know of a blocked public path or encroachment on common land, or you want to register a 'new' green, they can help you, once you have joined the Society.

T: 01491 573535

E: hq@oss.org.uk

www.oss.org.uk

PEP

PEP is a national, not-for-profit company. They work with statutory and voluntary agencies and with local communities, to improve services and make sure they meet the needs of local people. They provide advice, hands-on project work, training and research services - based on years of experience. Their vision is in line with government objectives to tackle social exclusion, support neighbourhood renewal and build sustainable communities.

T: 0161 877 3223

F: 0161 877 2992

E: info@pep.org.uk

www.pep.org.uk

PLAYLINK

PLAYLINK works with local communities to support provision of high quality opportunities for children's play that are stimulating, inclusive, and fun. It also supports local play service providers across the country, promoting and disseminating the values and playwork practice learnt in the free play environment of adventure playgrounds.

T: 0207 820 3800

F: 0207 587 0790

E: info@playlink.org.uk

www.playlink.org.uk

Prince's Foundation

The Prince's Foundation for the Built Environment is an educational charity established by The Prince of Wales to teach and demonstrate in practice those principles of traditional urban design and architecture which put people and the communities of which they are part at the centre of the design process.

T: 020 7613 8500

F: 020 7613 8599

E: enquiry@princes-foundation.org

www.princes-foundation.org

Project for Public Spaces (PPS)

PPS is a non-profit organisation dedicated to creating and sustaining public places that build communities. They provide technical assistance, education, and research through programs in parks, plazas and central squares; buildings and civic architecture; transportation; and public markets. Since their founding in 1975, they have worked in over 1,000 communities in the United States and around the world, helping people to turn public spaces into vital community places.

E: pps@pps.org

www.pps.org

Quest.net

The Quest Trust aims to support local activists improving the quality of life in communities in the UK. They do this by enabling people to share information and ideas about successful economic and social regeneration effectively, in particular to promote and encourage resident-led, local solutions.

T: 01225 466222

F: 01225 315904

E: Richard@quest-net.org

www.quest-net.org

Sensory Trust

The Sensory Trust provide information on accessible and therapeutic design, run projects, put people in contact with other organisations, highlight sources of help and examples of good practice, run conferences and training and produce publications. Their main aim is to help improve the design and management of green space so that it is both accessible and attractive to people of all ages and abilities.

T: 01726 222900

W: www.sensorytrust.org.uk

Sport England

Sport England is responsible for providing the strategic lead for sport in England to deliver the government's sporting objectives. The organisation develops the framework for the country's sporting infrastructure and distributes Lottery funding to where it will deliver most value for sport.

T: 020 7273 1500

E: info@sportengland.org

www.sportengland.org.uk

Thrive

Thrive promote and encourage the use of gardening in therapy, rehabilitation, leisure, education and useful employment for people with any kind of disability or mental health problems, and for the elderly. They publish 'Growth Point' and over 100 information leaflets and run an information service for blind and visually impaired gardeners.

T: 0118 988 5688

F: 0118 988 5677

E: info@thrive.org.uk

www.thrive.org.uk

Timebank

TimeBank is a national volunteering campaign raising the awareness of giving time through voluntary work, inspiring a whole new generation of volunteers. They aim to raise the profile of volunteering and help people get more out of life by making it easy for them to give time to their local community

T: 0207 401 5420

F: 0207 401 5421

E: feedback@timebank.org.uk

www.timebank.org.uk

Tree Council

The Tree Council's aims are to improve the environment in town and country by promoting the planting and conservation of trees and woods throughout the United Kingdom; to disseminate knowledge about trees and their management; and to act as a forum for organisations concerned with trees, to identify national problems and to provide initiatives for co-operation.

T: 0 20 7407 9992

E: Info@treecouncil.org.uk

www.treecouncil.org.uk

Urban Design Alliance (UDAL)

UDAL is a group of leading professional and campaigning bodies. It promotes awareness of how urban design can help make healthier, more sustainable, and safer towns and cities. Their aim is a radical improvement of the quality of urban life.

T: 020 7251 5529

F: 020 7251 5529

E: info@udal.org.uk

www.udal.org.uk

Urban Forum

Urban Forum is an umbrella body for community and voluntary groups with interests in urban and regional policy, especially regeneration. The aims of Urban Forum are to provide a strong voluntary sector voice on urban and regional policy and the promotion of sustainable regeneration initiatives.

T: 0207 253 4816

F: 0207 253 4817

E: info@urbanforum.org.uk

www.urbanforum.org.uk

VolResource

VolResource aims to make it quick and easy to get to useful information on anything to do with running a voluntary organisation (whether a community group, charity or other non-profit body), acting as a useful resource site.

E: info@volresource.org.uk

www.volresource.org.uk

Wildlife Trusts

The Wildlife Trusts partnership is the UK's leading conservation charity exclusively dedicated to wildlife. Their network of 47 local Wildlife Trusts and our junior branch, Wildlife Watch, work together to protect wildlife in towns and the countryside.

T: 0870 036 7711

F: 0870 036 0101

E: info@wildlife-trusts.cix.co.uk

www.wildlifetrust.org.uk

The Woodland Trust

The Woodland Trust is the UK's leading charity dedicated solely to the protection of our native woodland heritage. The Woodland Trust was founded at a time of emerging consciousness about the crisis surrounding the UK's woods. Their mission now, as then, is to conserve, restore and re-establish the country's woodland.

T: 01476 581111

www.woodlandtrust.org.uk

8. References

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Ockenden, N. & Moore, S.
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www.green-space.org.uk
- 2** Public Parks Assessment (2001)
Tibbatts, D. & Bramhill, P.
GreenSpace
www.green-space.org.uk
- 3** Shell Better Britain Campaign Information Sheets (2003)
www.sbbc.co.uk
- 4** Partnership for Parks (2003)
www.itsmypark.org
- 5** Urban Handbook, a Practical Guide to Community Environmental Work (2002)
Agate, E.
BTCV
www.btcv.org.uk/handbooks/index
- 6** What Makes a Place Great? (2000)
Madden, K.
Project for Public Spaces
www.pps.org
- 7** How to Turn a Place Around (2001)
Project for Public Spaces
www.pps.org
- 8** Common Ground
ABC System
- 9** The Princes Foundation (2003)
<http://www.princes-foundation.org/index.asp>
- 10** Community Networking Project Final Report (2003)
Ockenden, N. & Moore, S.
GreenSpace
www.green-space.org.uk
- 11** Five Steps To Risk Assessment (2003)
Health and Safety Executive
www.hse.gov.uk

9. Further Reading

A Better Place to Live: a guide for community groups to local action on sustainable development (2003) Chris Church
Community Development Foundation
ISBN 1 901974 47 2

BTCV conservation books
<http://handbooks.btcv.org.uk/handbooks/index>

Building Community Strengths: A resource book on capacity building (1997) Steve Skinner
Community Development Foundation
ISBN 0 902406 78 7

Changing Where We Live: a guide to working with community groups to create green and sustainable communities (2003) Chris Church and Charlie Garratt
Community Development Foundation
ISBN 1 901974 48 0

Community Development and Networking (1995) Alison Gilchrist
Community Development Foundation
ISBN 0 902406 91 4

Community Gardening Starter Pack
Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens
<http://www.farmgarden.org.uk>

Community Involvement in Parks
Richardson, I, & Baggott, I.
ILAM information Centre - Factsheet 98/6

Community Start Up, How to Start a Community Group and Keep it Going (1995) Pinder, C.
National Extension College & Community Matters

Compact Community Groups Code of Good Practice
NCVO (2001)

Just About Managing: Effective management for voluntary organisations and community groups (1998) Sandy Adirondack

The Minute Taker's Handbook (2002) Lee Comer & Paul Ticher
Directory of Social Change
ISBN 1 900360 99 3

Occupying Community Premises and Managing Your Community Building
Community Matters

The Compact Between the Government and the Voluntary Sector
NCVO (2001)
Media Briefing Sheet

The Urban Handbook
Agate, E.
BTCV

Voluntary Agencies Directory 2004 (2004) NCVO
ISBN 0 7199 1629 1

Voluntary But Not Amateur: a guide to the law for voluntary organisations and community groups (2000) Duncan Forbes, Ruth Hayes and Jacki Reason
LVSC

Five Steps to Risk Assessment
HSE Books

10. Further Publications by GreenSpace

Claiming Your Share (2003)

A 52-page two-colour publication, Claiming Your Share is GreenSpace's first publication targeted specifically at community groups working with parks and green spaces. Claiming Your Share helps these groups find their way through the frequently confusing maze of funding options, as well as providing extensive details and links to over 110 funding bodies and support organisations. Claiming Your Share uniquely unravels the jargon of fundraising, describes the main types of funding available, gives advice on organising an approach and provides practical tips on what makes a successful application.

ISBN: 0-9542663-3-1

(£5 members, £9.99 non-members)

Your Parks (2002)

A remarkable publication promoting the many benefits that parks and green space provide in today's society. 'Your Parks', a 20-page full-colour publication, is written to highlight the value of parks and green space and further push them up the political, cultural and ecological agenda. Whether or not you are currently aware of the many benefits provided by parks and green space, this publication will increase your knowledge base.

ISBN: 0-9542663-2-3

(£2 members, £3 non-members)

Parks & Greenspace: Engaging the Community (2002)

A forward-thinking publication designed to encourage local authority park managers and park departments to embrace the prospect of increased community involvement in the management and maintenance of public parks and green space. This 200-page two-colour publication is accompanied by 20 in-depth case studies highlighting truly innovative approaches to community involvement and partnership working. A must-have on the desks of any organisation who wants to successfully engage the community.

ISBN: 0-9542663-1-5

(£55 members, £80 non-members)

Public Park Assessment (2002)

A 144-page full-colour publication, the Public Parks Assessment is the first major report on the state of the nation's public parks. It has produced major findings on: land types; land use; finance; condition and trend in condition; the effectiveness of conservation designations; visitor numbers and much, much more. A must-have publication for all those concerned with public parks and green space.

ISBN: 0-9542663-0-7

(£27 members, £37 non-members)

To order any of the above publications, please telephone 0118 946 9060 or visit GreenSpace Online at www.green-space.org.uk. All prices include postage and packing.

11. Community Network

GreenSpace's Community Network is a resource designed specifically to be used by community groups working with parks and green space across the UK.

Funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), the Community Network unites for the first time all the community-based organisations across the country who have an active interest in parks and green space.

The network promotes communication between groups, provides a base to disseminate examples of good practice drawn from around the country and acts as a support system to help raise your capacity.

Objectives

1. To research the resources and abilities of existing community-based groups across the UK.
2. To increase the efficiency and ability of such groups to function effectively (capacity-building).
3. To build a National Register of the contact details of such groups.

Contact

If you would like to know more about the Community Network, would like to get involved, or are in need of advice, the team can be reached at the contact details below.

A: Caversham Court
Church Road
Caversham
Reading
Berks
RG4 7AD

T: 0118 946 9060

F: 0118 946 9061

E: community@green-space.org.uk

W: www.green-space.org.uk

Appendix 1

(a) Changes to local government

Local government services have been undergoing a process of fairly continuous reform ever since the introduction of Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT) legislation, which was implemented by most local authorities between 1988 and 1990. The latest reforms are intended to promote a 'joined up' approach to service delivery and place customers and communities at the very heart of service delivery.

Traditionally, local authorities have perhaps been viewed as fairly anonymous and lofty organisations that delivered services from an elevated position. There has in the past been a tendency for local authorities to adopt an 'expert-led' culture, with plans and strategies developed in isolation, by staff considered to be experts because of their training and qualifications.

Part of the problem with this approach is that the development and delivery of services, instead of being based on an ideal vision driven by customer and community needs, and what could be achieved, is more influenced by problems and restrictions. Local authority staff are acutely aware of budgets and the limitations of available resources, of technical or design problems and of standards and legislation. In an environment that is dominated by controls and restrictions, creating visionary and creative plans that focus on ideal ways forward is hard. Changes to services have often been reactive, responding to changes in legislation, or available budgets or similar forces. As a consequence, changes have been designed to enable service delivery to continue under the new conditions, rather than improve or expand; they are evolutions of that which was provided previously, with slight modifications rather than fresh approaches.

Opportunities for stopping and reviewing the way things are done are rare, and weak areas of service delivery can end up being perpetuated or even made worse. Resulting improvement programmes and strategic plans might be achievable, and sensible, but often disappoint end users and fail to deliver the things that the customer considers important. A great deal of valuable officer time is spent trying to convince disappointed customers that the plans and schemes that are devised by the experts are the most appropriate, and then in trying to address unforeseen problems that occur during implementation of the schemes, or dealing with the complaints that then arise as a result of service failings and shortcomings.

Community involvement can help parks departments to move away from reactive service development and towards a proactive or interactive development of services. Community involvement helps to define what is required of the service, and then concentrates on how this might be achieved. Customers tell parks departments what they are doing right and what they are doing wrong, they tell them what needs to be changed and what needs to be conserved. This should be the starting point for the development of any public service. The limitations that have previously driven service development should only be considered after a clear understanding of what customers need and want has been reached.

(b) Community Strategies

The Local Government Act 2000 introduced a programme of reform designed to strengthen the links between local authorities and local people.

Part I of the Local Government Act 2000 places on local authorities a duty to prepare 'community strategies', for promoting or improving the economic, social and environmental well-being of their areas, and contributing to the achievement of sustainable development in the UK. It also gives authorities broad new powers to improve and promote local well-being as a means of helping them to implement those strategies. Part I of the Act came into force on 18 October 2000.

Councils, in partnership with government, business, the voluntary sector and others, have a vital role to play in improving the quality of people's lives. Councils everywhere need to provide vision and leadership for their local communities, and to deliver high quality services to their local people.

Modern councils succeed when they put people first, when they work and take decisions in a culture of openness and accountability to local people. They succeed when there is trust between them and their local community. Within this culture they build and support partnerships to develop a vision for their locality and to contribute to achieving it. They strive for continuous improvement in the delivery of local services.

A Community Strategy is a plan for the future. It provides a long-term vision and co-ordinates the actions of the public agencies, private sector organisations, and voluntary sector or community-based organisations, to meet the needs and priorities of local communities. The development of the Community Strategy should be undertaken in partnership with those same organisations.

The aim of a Community Strategy is to look forward ten to fifteen years and make plans to enhance the quality of life of local communities. It should contribute to the achievement of sustainable development in the UK through action to improve the economic, social and environmental well being of the area and its inhabitants. At a local level, it is a master plan, designed to ensure a more 'joined up' approach to delivering a range of better planned and delivered services.

(c) Local Strategic Partnerships

A Local Strategic Partnership is a single body that provides an overarching framework within which specific individual partnerships operate. It is the joining together of organisations to define and tackle the issues and problems that matter most to local people.

The Government expects that every local authority area should be covered by an LSP that brings together the public, private, business, voluntary and community sectors to identify the top priorities of the community and to work with local people to address them.

The Government does not specify the geographical boundaries of LSPs, but they are encouraged to involve a combination of local, sub-regional and regional organisations.

By giving all local people a chance to say how they would like services delivered, and encouraging them to help deliver services, opportunities for creating improvements will occur. By bringing people together, the role of an LSP is to assist local government to achieve the following aims:

- To look at what services and developments to services are needed.
- To look at the best way of providing the required services.
- To look at how the local community will be involved in running and developing the area.

The fundamental principle that underpins the development of the LSP is that local authorities must work in partnership with the local community to bring about improvements.

(d) Best Value

Best Value legislation has replaced CCT legislation and has already been fully implemented in most service areas. Best Value requires services to undergo a complete review process every five years. The Audit Commission independently assesses the review and awards a score to services that is based on current performance and the likelihood of improvement.

There are four fundamental principles, known as the four Cs, that underpin the Best Value review process:

- Challenging why and how the service is made available.
- Comparing performance with others (including non-local government providers).
- Competing - the authority must show that it has embraced the principles of fair competition in deciding who should deliver the service.
- Consulting local service users and residents on their expectations of the service.⁴

The level of consultation needed in order to meet the requirements of Best Value and achieve a positive assessment is significant. It is not sufficient for a local authority to simply keep customers informed of their actions and periodically carry out customer surveys or opinion polls. Consultation has to be meaningful and continuous, leading to an open and honest two-way communication channel. The local authority is expected to act upon the customer feedback that it receives, and having acted, they are then expected to reassess the situation and measure and review the effectiveness of their actions.

(e) Green Flag Award

The Green Flag Award Scheme represents the national standard for parks and green spaces across England and Wales. It is an independent award that aspires to give voice to public expectations about what parks can and should offer. It aims to set standards for management and to promote the value of parks and green spaces as social places as well as places for walking, play, informal sports and for contact with the natural world. Although the Award was set up for public parks there is now a recognition that a wider range of green spaces needed to be included if the quality of public green spaces across the country is to be improved.

The Green Flag Award Scheme encourages park departments to work with, and help set up, park Friends groups; community involvement is one of the criteria used to assess whether the site merits an award. In many cases, it is the community group that encourages the parks department to apply for the award. Many community groups are finding that the scheme is a useful mechanism for encouraging higher standards of maintenance and management. It can also help to encourage local politicians to take park services more seriously.

(f) Planning Policy Guidance 17

Planning Policy Guidance note 17 Sport, Open Space and Recreation [PPG17] provides advice to local authorities in England and Wales on how the planning system should operate in assessing needs for sport and recreation provision, and safeguarding open space with recreational value. Local authorities must take PPGs into account in preparing their development plans. Such guidance may also be material to decisions on individual planning applications.

The guidance places great emphasis on the need to link open space to the needs and aspirations of the local community. When assessing the value of the open space, the local community must be extensively involved. Furthermore, it is not good enough to assess the site in its current condition and level of facilities: the local authority has to ask whether or not the site has the potential to be of higher value to the community, if it were to be improved and marketed better.



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Making a Difference is a toolkit for people who want to start, or develop, a community group or friends of group aimed at improving parks and green spaces.

It shows the benefits and mutual support that can be achieved by working closely in partnership with your local council and other organisations.

Covering the basics involved with setting up and running a community-based group, **Making a Difference** will provide you with the initial confidence you need to get out there and make a difference to your local environment.

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world; indeed it is the only thing that ever has”

**Margaret Mead, Social Anthropologist
(1901- 1978)**



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