

Derbyshire County Council

Countryside Service Volunteer Policy

2014 - 2019



Introduction

The Countryside Service is responsible for the management and promotion of Derbyshire County Council's countryside sites and facilities. This includes country parks and other recreational facilities, Greenways, public rights of way and a wide variety of conservation and environmental projects and initiatives.

Whilst helping to protect and enhance Derbyshire's natural and built environment, these projects and initiatives also play a significant part in offering wider tourism opportunities for visitors and the communities of the County, hence supporting the local economy and generating economic growth.

The County Council believes that volunteering is an important aspect of society and wants to make sure that opportunities to volunteer are worthwhile, rewarding and open to all.

For the individual, volunteering can improve confidence and self-esteem, increase knowledge and skills, and bring health benefits through raised activity. Volunteers make a valuable contribution to the well-being of our society and environment, making Derbyshire a better place to visit, work and live in. Local communities and economies benefit not only from improvements to countryside access and facilities, with consequent increased opportunities for tourism and economic growth, but the links created between the County Council, volunteers and other groups, can raise the 'social capital' of the community in which volunteers live.

There are many volunteering opportunities within the Countryside Service. Although the majority of volunteers are involved in practical conservation and site management, other roles include exhibition work, education, public rights of way surveys and helping at Countryside Service events.

The Council recognises that the skill and enthusiasm of volunteers makes a significant and valuable contribution to the work of the Service. In the three year period between 2010/11 and 2012/13, volunteering with the Countryside Service generated an average of 4,090 volunteer days per year. During the period of this Policy, it is proposed to increase volunteer involvement.

This Policy will standardise the way volunteers are managed across the Service and provides a base on which to build their involvement. It sets out the Council's key principles and objectives for the involvement of volunteers with the Countryside Service and provides a framework for best practice. It will be reviewed and updated as necessary, for example, to comply with changes in the law.

What is a volunteer?

Volunteers are individuals or groups who offer their time, experience, knowledge and skills without financial gain, helping to achieve the Council's objectives and provide a benefit to the community. There are many reasons why people choose to volunteer with the Countryside Service. These include a

love of the outdoors and of Derbyshire, a way to meet people and acquire new skills, and a sense of having done something worthwhile.

Certain types of unpaid work for the Council are not regarded as volunteering, for example, student placements and work experience.

The role of volunteers is to complement the work of paid staff, adding value to and supplementing the capacity of the service to undertake additional and enhanced tasks. The Countryside Service engages with volunteers in recognition of the wide range of skills which they bring for the benefit of the community.

Countryside Service Volunteers will be managed in a different way to employees. It is a flexible arrangement and the Council will only have an expectation of a preferred schedule of time commitments. There is no obligation for the volunteer to accept the role or for the Council to offer it. Unlike an employee, volunteers do not have a contract of employment with the Council or have the same responsibilities and obligations as employees.

Community-based volunteering

There are many community groups that want to help manage Derbyshire's countryside sites, Greenways and public rights of way network. These include 'Friends of...' groups, Rambler's groups and Parish Path groups. The Council will facilitate the creation of such groups and, by providing technical support and assistance, enable them to achieve mutual goals.

As these groups are working independently and are not an integral part of the Countryside Service, they are not covered by this Policy. However, they would be expected to operate to the Council's standards when working for and on behalf of the Service.

Volunteering with the Countryside Service

The Council wants to make information on volunteering easily available to everyone. Many potential volunteers enquire at the Countryside Service's sites as to the opportunities available, but the Council will also publicise volunteering roles in Countryside Service publications and on the County Council's website and social networking pages. When required, the Countryside Service will engage with potential volunteers through specific, targeted campaigns. Volunteer opportunities may also be made available in local volunteer centres.

Where a volunteering role requires sole or substantial access to children, young people or vulnerable adults, an enhanced check for regulated activity will be requested through the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) prior to the volunteer taking up their role. An enhanced check will also be required for volunteers with access to information about children and vulnerable adults.

Volunteers in roles involving vulnerable adults or children may need particular support, advice and training. Managers should make volunteers aware of the special requirements of the role and of behaviour that is not acceptable.

Derbyshire Volunteer Agreement

Volunteers will be asked to abide by the Volunteer Agreement, which will clearly set out the Council's expectations of volunteers with regard to behaviour and conduct, and what volunteers can expect in return. The Volunteer Agreement is not a legally binding contract of employment between the County Council and the volunteer. It may be withdrawn from at any time at the discretion of either party, although whilst the parties are working together, the principles are expected to apply. Neither party commits to any employment relationship being created either now or at any time in the future. However, this Agreement does not exclude volunteers from applying for jobs within the Countryside Service.

The role description

A written role description will be provided for all volunteer roles. This gives a clear overview of the activities volunteers can expect to be involved in whilst volunteering and helps to prevent confusion or misunderstanding. The role description will identify the activities to be carried out by the volunteer and the skills or experience needed. It will also identify what the volunteer can expect to get out of the role and the time commitment expected.

Induction, support and training

Derbyshire County Council recognises that whilst volunteering can be satisfying and enjoyable, it can also place greater demands and responsibilities on individuals.

Also, as volunteers may be perceived by the public as representing the Council, they will be expected to abide by Derbyshire County Council policies and procedures whilst on County Council premises, or undertaking any of their volunteering duties. The Council will therefore ensure that all volunteers receive appropriate induction, support and training to carry out their role and work within relevant policies and procedures.

A nominated employee will address their needs for advice, guidance and training. The nature of support will vary depending on the volunteering role: a full-time volunteer may have different requirements to a volunteer undertaking a weekly or monthly supervised task. Employees that support volunteers will receive relevant training where appropriate.

There will be a review with the volunteer, initially after three months and then annually for regular volunteers, to make sure that both parties are getting what they want from the volunteering arrangement. This is an opportunity to consult and involve volunteers on issues concerning their volunteering activities. Reviews will be short and informal, but a brief written record will be kept identifying development needs etc.

Confidentiality and data protection

Some aspects of the volunteer's role may be confidential. Issues around confidentiality will be discussed with the volunteer during the induction process. The volunteer will also be made aware of the Council's policies on confidentiality and data protection, and will be expected to comply with them.

Personal information about volunteers will be maintained in line with Derbyshire County Council's data protection procedures and confidentiality guidelines.

Insurance

Volunteers registered with and supervised by Derbyshire County Council's Countryside Service are insured for personal injury and are covered by professional and public liability insurance, in the same way as employees. However, the insurance will not cover unauthorised actions, or actions outside the volunteer's role description.

Friends groups, access groups and other volunteer groups working without charge and at the request of the Countryside Service are also covered by the Council's insurance.

Reimbursement of volunteer expenses

Derbyshire County Council recognises that volunteers should not lose out financially because of their volunteering activities. The Council will provide a clear procedure for the reimbursement of eligible out of pocket expenses. Eligible expenses incurred during the course of volunteering duties and training will be reimbursed, but only in exceptional circumstances will the cost of travel from home to the volunteering base be reimbursed.

Equality and diversity

Derbyshire County Council intends to draw on as wide a pool of volunteers as possible. Volunteers from all backgrounds, including those from the protected characteristic groups defined in the 2010 Equality Act, will be treated with respect and encouraged to work within the County Council's equality and diversity policies.

During the induction process, it will be made clear to the volunteer that they should treat all employees, clients, other volunteers and members of the public with respect, regardless of their backgrounds and beliefs, and that volunteers should expect the same in return.

Volunteers will be expected to accept and adhere to the equality and diversity policies in terms of their treatment of people they come into contact with as a result of their volunteer role.

An Equality Impact Analysis has been carried out on the Volunteer Policy and the following actions identified:

- Any literature about volunteering should be in an appropriate format/language and address the potential barriers to volunteering by the Protected Characteristic Groups. It should also promote the benefits of volunteering. Any images used should dispel the perception that the countryside is mainly for white/middle class people.
- When people from protected characteristic groups enquire about volunteering, every effort will be made to find them a suitable volunteer role. They will be assured of a safe and supportive environment in which to volunteer and encouraged to work within their own limits.
- Carry out a periodic review of how the Service is engaging with the volunteers (potential or actual) from Protected Characteristic Groups to ensure that this work remains high profile.

Problem solving

Derbyshire County Council aims to resolve any problems or difficulties that volunteers may have, whilst placed within the organisation, fairly and quickly. Issues should be brought to the attention of the appropriate manager for resolution.

Health and safety

Derbyshire County Council's health and safety policies and guidance set the standards for a safe and healthy working environment and must be followed by volunteers at all times. Health and safety information will be made available during the volunteer's induction and for reference as required throughout the placement.

Derbyshire County Council is responsible for the health and safety of its volunteers. A risk assessment will be undertaken for each volunteer role. Necessary personal protective equipment will be made available, either on loan or provided without charge as appropriate.

Volunteer handbook

Volunteers will receive a "*Volunteers' Handbook*" providing all the information they need to commence volunteering with the Countryside Service. The handbook will be tailored with local area detail.

Further information

Contact Steve Cresswell, Countryside Officer, on 01629 539660.
Steve.cresswell@derbyshire.gov.uk