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WEST
GLAMORGAN
VOLUNTEERING
SUPPORT

Friends of park & allotment groups

A toolkit for volunteers



A shared resource for
developing knowledge





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Section 1: Introduction

1.1 Purpose of this toolkit

Local parks and green spaces are often some of the most valuable assets in our communities. As well as providing us with experience of the natural world, these spaces help to keep us active, happy and healthy whilst contributing to the local economy. With pressures on public funding continuing to increase, so too is the need to find more sustainable ways to manage, develop and protect these natural assets so that future generations can continue to benefit from them. The voluntary sector is well placed to provide the knowledge, skills and dedication needed to promote the sustainability of our natural environment, and this is being evidenced through increasing numbers of voluntary organisations that aim to enhance and protect our local parks and green spaces.

If you are interested in volunteering in your local park or green space, or considering setting up a new group, this toolkit will help you to think about what you need to do. You might find that only some of what is in this document applies to you or your group but it is useful to consider them all before you proceed.





Section 2: Introduction

2.1 Definition – what are parks and green spaces?

Natural Resources Wales describes how a 'green space' is land that is maintained for the recreation and enjoyment of communities in our villages, towns and cities. These green spaces can include both vegetated land – parks, community gardens, trees, woodlands, informal spaces, allotments and food growing sites as well as areas of water, such as the coastline, rivers, canals, lakes and ponds.

2.2 Local context

The Swansea Bay region, which consists of Swansea and Neath Port Talbot, has a rich and diverse natural environment that boasts Britain's first Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, a sweeping coastline, expansive forestry and impressive urban parks and historic sites of interest. According to the Charity Commission there were 103 charities operating in the Swansea Bay region in 2019 with the main purpose of the 'advancement of environmental protection and improvement.' The breadth of voluntary work these organisations undertake to support and protect our local parks and green spaces is extensive and varies from community to community. Here are some great examples of the groups operating in the Swansea Bay region:

- **Friends of Jersey Park, Briton Ferry**, was established following a public meeting called to address the run down state of the local ornamental park. Since 2016, the group have transformed the park into a well used community asset with regular events and projects such as educational sessions, play days, litter picks, pond dipping, weeding/planting days as well as community art installations which exhibit local artistic talents.
- **Mumbles Community Association** works in partnership with the Friends of Underhill Park in Swansea to improve the park and encourage community use. They have worked tirelessly and successfully raised sufficient funds for a community hub which will serve not only the sports clubs in the park but also the wider community as a whole.
- **Afan Environment Volunteers** organise regular volunteer work parties in the beautiful Afan Forest Park. The volunteers undertake a range of tasks including litter picking, clearing of invasive species, sanctuary for all types of wildlife.
- **Friends of Coed Bach Park, Pontarddulais**, run regular volunteer days to keep the park clean and attractive. They have added a new path to increase access for wheelchairs and buggies and have received a grant for new play equipment suitable for older children.



2.3 What can voluntary groups do?

Local community groups volunteer their time and energy to get involved with a huge range of different projects in their local parks and green spaces. Volunteering tasks can include;

- Practical tasks like clean-ups, tree planting and improving access.
- Organising events to raise awareness of the facility to the wider community.
- Enhancing biodiversity (e.g. creation of wildflower meadows, installing bug hotels and bird and bat boxes).
- Leading walks and talks to promote the heritage of the site.
- Producing leaflets and other educational material.
- Fundraising for improvements in the space.
- Contributing to the planning and management of the park/green space.

It is for the group themselves to decide on the level of activity they wish to undertake. Some may operate at a low level, simply informing the management of the site, whilst others can be more active, raising funds, organising events and developing new facilities. **Please note, however, that the scope of volunteer activity permitted on the land in question will be at the discretion of the landowner.**

“Because the people who live closest to the space care most deeply about it, community-led solutions often produce better quality spaces which respond to local needs and demands.”

myCommunity (2020)



2.4 Why volunteer in your local park/green space?

It is widely recognised that volunteering brings with it a whole host of benefits to the community and to the individual volunteer. Defra (2019) reports that as well as practical benefits including increased skills and employability, volunteering in your local environment has shown to bring about personal benefits, including; increased confidence, a sense of belonging within the community, improved physical and mental wellbeing and the opportunity to develop new friends and social networks.

Community groups that volunteer in our parks and green spaces are very sociable, volunteers enjoy working in the great outdoors with like-minded people to make a positive difference in their local environment.

“Volunteering should never feel like a chore, try to make volunteer tasks fun and interesting. It’s important to have breaks where you can chat and have a drink or some food together.”

Afan Environmental Volunteers



Section 3: Are you considering setting up a new group?

If you have an idea for an environmental project in your community it is useful to consider a number of questions before setting up.

3.1 How can we get help and advice?

It is always a good idea to get advice and support – and luckily there is plenty available through your local County Voluntary Council. Both Swansea Council for Voluntary Service (SCVS) and Neath Port Talbot Council for Voluntary Service (NPTCVS) are committed to supporting, promoting and developing voluntary organisations, volunteers and communities across the Swansea Bay region.

For more information on the support available from your local CVC, contact:

- **Swansea (SCVS)**
www.scvs.org.uk
- **Neath Port Talbot (NPTCVS)**
www.nptcvs.wales



3.2 Do you have the landowner's permission?

It is imperative that you have approval and all appropriate permissions and official agreements in place from the landowner before commencing any work in your local park or green space. The body responsible for the management and maintenance of the land in question can vary and potentially include;

- **The Local Authority** – have you spoken with your local County Councillor? They can help you liaise with the relevant council department in the first instance.
- **Your local Town or Community Council** – again you may wish to speak with a local Councillor, alternatively you can contact the Clerk to the Council.
- **Natural Resources Wales** – you are encouraged to contact Natural Resources Wales to discuss your project proposal, their team will be able to make sure that the project is suitable and ask you to complete an application form.
- **Other** – it may well be that your local park or green space is under the ownership of the National Trust, a Housing Association, estate management team or even privately owned.

“It is important to remember that it is not only down to the volunteers to do things and that partnership working is essential to achieve great things.”

Friends of Jersey Park

The landowner may welcome your ideas and commit to working in partnership, valuing the efforts and contribution that volunteers can bring. It may be, however, that the green space in question is earmarked for development or is deemed not suitable for the project you have in mind. Whoever the landowner may be they will want reassurances that you are a well established group with all relevant health and safety measures plus public liability insurance in place.

You will find further advice and information on these topics in the toolkit.

Don't forget your local CVC can advise you on this process.



3.3 Is there already a group in the area doing what you want to do?

It is important to find out what organisations and projects are already available locally. Get in touch with your local CVC to discuss your project idea. They will be able to link you with established groups which may have already thought of similar ideas and be working towards achieving them. Where there is a group working towards similar aims it may be better to join in with them rather than set up a new group.

3.4 Is there wider community support?

Coordinating community environmental action takes a lot of work and is easier if there is significant volunteer commitment from local people. Many groups start off small, as sometimes it is difficult to attract people to get involved. However, it is still important to talk to local people to determine if there is a need for your project and whether there is local interest and support for your ideas. This can be done formally through public meetings or online surveys or informally just by speaking to people in your neighbourhood.

“The main advice I give to any new group is to consult, consult, consult with the local community – otherwise any fine initiatives are likely to fall at the first hurdle.”

Clydach Community Garden



Section 4: Setting up a new community group

If you have decided that setting up a new group is the best way forward then there are a number of factors to consider.

4.1 Governance

Your new group will need to establish a 'set of rules' or Governing document which outlines; what your group is called, what it aims to do, how your group will be run and who is responsible for running it. Most small groups and voluntary organisations are unincorporated organisations with a Governing document called a constitution. Once your group has agreed and signed your constitution, it is a legal document.

This document will be needed to open a bank account for your group and to apply for grants and funding. A model constitution for unincorporated associations is available from your local CVC. As your group develops you may decide to update your governance and adopt an alternative legal structure. This is particularly important if you intend to lease land or buildings, or enter into other contractual arrangements. There are different charitable structures you can choose from and your committee and group members will need to agree which one is right for you. Don't forget your local CVC can advise you on choosing the most suitable structure.

4.2 Roles & Responsibilities

In line with your Governing document, your committee will be responsible for the smooth day to day running of your group. The committee should operate as a team, draw on the skills and talents of each member, and work toward common goals to ensure success. Committee members should demonstrate a commitment to the group, have sufficient time to devote to their role and have an understanding of the responsibilities of the Committee and their role within it. Committees will often have a number of elected people on them such as a chairperson, secretary and treasurer. You may also decide to have additional roles such as a marketing officer, health & safety advisor or volunteer manager. Having clearly defined roles and responsibilities is a good way to share the workload and make the decision making process easier.

You will need to agree as a group how often the committee will meet to discuss how the group is running and where improvements can be made. You will be required to hold an Annual General Meeting (AGM) so that the membership of the committee can be reviewed if needed.



Further information is also available online: <https://thirdsectorsupport.wales/resources/charitable-status/>



4.3 Managing money & ongoing funding

There are inevitable costs associated with setting up and running a group, these can include room hire for your meetings or even printing leaflets for publicity. It is important to think about how you will raise funds to support your activities and how your finances will be managed. As soon as your group has some money you will need to identify one person who will take responsibility for keeping track of it. The Treasurer should be responsible for keeping accurate accounts, recording how much money has come into the group, where it has come from, what it is for and how it has been spent. It is important that the management committee receive regular reports on the group's financial position since all committee members hold overall responsibility for your group's money.

Having a bank account is the best way to make sure your group's money is kept safe and most high street banks offer special accounts for community groups. You will need to provide a copy of your Governing document to open your account and have at least two unrelated members of the group willing to act as signatories. **Funders usually require that you have a bank account where each cheque has to be signed by two people.*

As your group develops you might want to consider applying for external grants and funding. Your local CVC can help you identify funding opportunities. You can also access Funding Wales which is a funding search platform created by Third Sector Support Wales. It allows charities, community groups or social enterprises in Wales to find funding using a free online search engine. You can search hundreds of grant and loan finance opportunities from local, national and international sources, from small grants to large capital projects.



For more information:

<https://funding.cymru>



4.4 Policies & Procedures

An appropriate set of clear and concise policies and procedures will help guide your group's day to day running. Policies are clear, simple statements of how you intend to conduct your business and undertake your activities and they will set out guiding principles to help with decision making. Procedures describe how each policy will be put into practice by your group, they can be a separate document or a section of the corresponding policy.

Here are some suggested policies that your group should consider adopting. This is simply a starting point and it is important to identify the most relevant for your situation.

- **Health & Safety** – sets out your commitment to managing health and safety effectively, identifies who is responsible for specific actions and provides detail of what you are going to do in practice to maintain a safe volunteering environment.
- **Equality & Diversity** – a written agreement for your group about how you will avoid discriminating against people, and how you will create a safe and inclusive atmosphere for your volunteers and those who benefit from your activities.
- **Environmental** – will outline your commitment to adopting working practices that will assist towards continued environmental improvement and sustainability.
- **Volunteer Management** – will help define the role of volunteers within your organisation, and how they can expect to be treated. It can help to: demonstrate your group's commitment to its volunteer programme and its individual volunteers.
- **Safeguarding** – protecting people from harm should be a governance priority for all voluntary groups and charities. You must demonstrate that you have taken all reasonable steps to protect those who come into contact with your group.
- **Welsh Language** – in order to promote and facilitate the use of the Welsh language you should outline how you will treat the Welsh and English languages on a basis of equality as far as it is reasonable and practicable to do so.

It is important that you put in place policies and procedures that are appropriate for your group. If you require any help and advice with developing policies and procedures, then please contact your local CVC.



4.5 Health & Safety

When you start thinking about health and safety, it is easy to become overwhelmed and worry about what could go wrong. Health and safety in a community group means all the ways that you and your group think about the welfare of volunteers, members, participants, and the general public. It is about working together to make sure you have done everything you can to prevent avoidable accidents and protect people from getting hurt. Your group's activities should be risk assessed in advance. The definition of a risk assessment is a systematic process of identifying hazards and evaluating any associated risks, then implementing reasonable control measures to remove or reduce them.

Risk assessments should follow the process of:

- Identifying the possible risk (i.e. slips and trips, lone working, manual handling).
- Identifying who might be at risk (i.e. volunteers, the public or staff).
- Identify measures you will put in place to reduce each risk (i.e. ensure that there is a check of the area for all potential slip and trip hazards at the beginning of each session, providing manual handling training for volunteers).
- Identifying who will be responsible for ensuring these measures are put in place and when by.

4.6 Insurance

As a group you are responsible for all your members' actions when carrying out activities on behalf of your group. It is essential that you obtain public liability insurance to mitigate any claims from members of the public (including volunteers) for injury, loss or damage caused as a result of negligence. A minimum cover of £5 million is usually recommended. It is, however, worth checking with the landowner as to what they require to ensure your volunteers and the public are protected whilst running events or undertaking other activities in your local park or green space. You may also want to consider having insurance for your group's tools and equipment and covering them against fire and theft while they are being stored.

Don't forget you have a special responsibility for your group's volunteers and you need to ensure that you have sufficient cover for your volunteers – both for their age range and for the roles they will carry out. Check with your insurance company what your volunteers are covered for, and ensure that you communicate this to your group members. Keep Wales Tidy are a popular option for Community Group Insurance.



Check out their website for more information: <https://www.keepwalestidy.cymru/groupinsurance>

“Don't forget that risk assessments are a continuous process and should be reviewed on an ongoing basis during the lifetime of your project.”
Clydach Community Garden



Section 5: Other things to consider

5.1 Biodiversity

Have you considered how your project activity will impact on the biodiversity of your local park or green space? Biodiversity encompasses the variety of life on earth – plants, animals, fungi and even microorganisms like bacteria that make up our natural world. Each of these species and organisms work together in ecosystems, like an intricate web, to maintain balance and support life. Biodiversity supports everything in nature that we need to survive. For example, it provides us with food, it can help to clean our air and water, and cool our towns and cities. This helps reduce the risk of water shortages, flooding and overheating, and in doing so provide resilience to climate change.

Unfortunately, biodiversity continues to decrease at an alarming rate. Your group has the potential to reverse this trend, by protecting and enhancing the biodiversity in your community. For further advice and information on biodiversity in your area, contact your Local Nature Partnership. They are on hand to offer both practical advice as well as support in strategic planning to ensure that your voluntary work contributes to a healthy, resilient and nature-rich Wales.



To contact your Local Nature Partnership Coordinator visit:
<https://www.biodiversitywales.org.uk/>

5.2 Community Asset Transfer

The Welsh Government recognises the importance of community assets and has a specific commitment ‘to work with communities to help maintain local facilities that bring people together, including green spaces, helping communities take ownership of assets in their local area when this is the best option’. The law gives local authorities and some other public bodies the power to transfer land – where it promotes social, economic and environmental wellbeing. Asset Transfers mean that the community can own and manage facilities that might otherwise be underused, neglected or even closed down.

Local authorities are considering alternative approaches to managing and financing their parks and green spaces. Involving communities and community groups can range from full transfer of ownership, to shared management with the local authority retaining some responsibilities. Whatever the agreement, the success of a transfer to a community group can hinge on a well thought through business plan, a lack of experience or insufficient research and preparation has potential to turn an asset into a liability.

If your group is considering taking on legal responsibility for the management of your local park or green space it is imperative that you seek advice. Contact your local CVC in the first instance, also check out the guidance from the Welsh Government:



<https://gov.wales/community-asset-transfer-cat-guidance-applicants>



5.3 Recognition of your work

The prestigious Green Flag Award is a benchmark for parks and green spaces in the UK and beyond. In Wales, the award scheme is run by Keep Wales Tidy with support from the Welsh Government and recognises that having a good quality environment can have a big impact on the health, wellbeing and economy of our local communities.

A wide variety of green spaces can apply for the Green Flag Award, from small urban parks to large country parks, university campuses, housing estates and even cemeteries. The Green Flag Community Award has been specifically designed to recognise the achievements of voluntary groups who manage local green spaces which can include allotments, woodlands, local nature reserves and community gardens.



For further information on the Green Flag Awards and details on how to apply visit:

<https://www.keepwalestidy.cymru/Pages/Category/greenflag>



Section 6: Conclusion

Wherever you are in the Swansea Bay region, there's a nearby park, community garden, woodland or other green space that has the potential to bring the community together and create a sense of identity and belonging. Spaces that are well-designed, well-managed and well-used play an important role in keeping our communities happy and healthy.

Whether this toolkit has encouraged you to join an established group or inspired you to start a new group in your area we wish you luck with your future volunteering. Your efforts and commitment to enhancing and protecting your local park or green space will undoubtedly safeguard these community assets for future generations to enjoy.

Useful Links:

Swansea Council

<https://www.swansea.gov.uk/parksatoz>

Neath Port Talbot Council

<https://www.npt.gov.uk/1447>

Natural Resources Wales

<https://naturalresources.wales/?lang=en>

Town & Community Councils

Swansea

<http://democracy.swansea.gov.uk/mgParishCouncilDetails.aspx?bcr=1&LLL=0>

Neath Port Talbot

<https://democracy.npt.gov.uk/mgParishCouncilDetails.aspx?ls=12&SLS=5&bcr=1&LLL=0>

National Trust

<https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/>

Wales Biodiversity Partnership

<https://www.biodiversitywales.org.uk/>

Local Nature Partnerships Wales

<https://lnp.cymru/>

Wales Environment Link

<https://waleslink.org/>

Wildlife Trusts Wales

<https://www.wtwales.org/>

Woodland Trust

<https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/>

Keep Wales Tidy

<https://www.keepwalestidy.cymru/>

Plantlife Cymru

<https://www.plantlife.org.uk/wales>

Canal & River Trust

<https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/>

National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces

<https://natfedparks.org.uk/>

Social Farms & Gardens

www.farmgarden.org.uk

National Allotment Society

<https://www.nsalg.org.uk/>

Room To Grow

<http://roomtogrow.wales/>

The Orchard Project

<https://www.theorchardproject.org.uk/>

Swansea Community Green Spaces

<http://swanseacommunitygreenspaces.weebly.com/>

Swansea Community Growing Network

<https://swanseacommunitygrowing.weebly.com/>

Friends of Swansea's Parks Forum

(Facebook group)

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/swanseaparksforum>

West Glamorgan Volunteering Support is a multi-agency project creating shared resources to develop the knowledge, management and coordination of volunteers and volunteer involving organisations across the Swansea and Neath Port Talbot areas. It has been funded through the Welsh Government Volunteering Recovery Fund.

The project partners are:

Neath Port Talbot Council, Neath Port Talbot Council for Voluntary Service, Swansea Bay University Health Board, Swansea Council, Swansea Council for Voluntary Service and West Glamorgan Regional Partnership.

**For more information visit:
www.westglamorgan.org.uk/wgvs**