

LAF Toolkit: Setting up a Friends of Group

Introduction

This document has been prepared to advise LAFs on how to:

- establish a Friends of Group to support their work; and
- support and encourage communities to form Friends of Groups to improve public access.



A Friends of Group (FoG) is usually set up to enable a group of volunteers to undertake practical projects. Any LAF can set up a FoG and it can include all or some members of the LAF and others from outside the LAF as well. The key to success is passion and commitment. A FoG without core members who have the time and enthusiasm to make it work will struggle to succeed.

Why would a LAF set up or encourage others to set up a FoG

- To coordinate practical activity to improve public access.
- To do practical work to improve public access on a site or across an area.
- To protect the environmental, historic and cultural heritage of a site for example by championing the need to protect a place.
- To fundraise to improve a site or an area for example providing; match funding to improve a PROW network from lottery or LEADER funds.
- To engage other local people on a site such as school children, volunteers.
- Fresh and innovative ideas.
- More community support and appreciation for local access.

Benefits to FoGs and Communities

- Increased community cohesion
- Contributing ideas to how sites/PROW networks/open access land are managed
- Keeping fit/getting fresh air
- Increased community appreciation and respect for a place

Examples of LAFs and Friends of Groups

Friends of Tees Valley Local Access Forum

The Friends of the Tees Valley Local Access Forum was formally constituted at an extra-ordinary meeting of the TVLAF in December 2011. Many months of discussion had taken place before the decision was made, and the formal agreement was made in order to support the Action Plans of each of our Appointing Authorities Rights of Way Improvement Plans.

LAF Toolkit: Setting up a Friends of Group

The Friends Group, or as it affectionately known as, 'FoG', is, at present made up of members of the TVLAF and boasts a constitution, as well as an active interest in promoting access across the Tees Valley.

The Access Working Group is tasked with guiding the activities of the arm's length Friends, and projects discussed so far include the creation of leaflets promoting the Rights of Way locally, with support from neighbouring LAFs in Durham and Redcar and Cleveland.

Source: <http://www.teesvalleylocalaccessforum.co.uk/index.php/friends-of-tvlaf>

Herts LAF

LAF members are now becoming well established on several 'friends of' groups, on committees and on management boards of various organisations in Hertfordshire, with the aim of representing and promoting access. A notable achievement has been the award of P4C funding from NE for improved access around Heartwood Forest in Sandridge.

Source (Huddle link): <http://my.hdle.it/27473462>

How to set up a FoG

- Set up a committee. The committee helps to run the group. There are certain roles such as Chair, Secretary and Treasurer that will need to be decided and it is the Chair who usually leads the group and acts as the public voice
- Agree a constitution. This sets out exactly how your group will be managed, your aims and objectives and how meetings will be run.
- Hold Annual General Meetings (AGMs): Groups will need to hold an AGM in the first instance to adopt its constitution and elect committee members. AGMs should be held each year after as a way of re-electing committee members, and to present an annual report and reporting of accounts to other members of the group.
- Set up a bank account: Once your Group is formally established it should set up a bank account so that membership subscriptions, if applicable, and other funds raised can be managed appropriately. The account should be in the name of the group and will need at least two people (usually committee members) to act as signatories each time a transaction is made.
- Insurance and Health & Safety: Every time a public activity - such as a community clear-up, tree planting or fun day - is organised, public liability insurance is needed to cover accidents on a public site. If the land is owned by the Local Authority they may already have public liability insurance so check with the landowner first. Conservation charity TCV (<http://www.tcv.org.uk/>) offer public liability to community groups through their Community Network initiative.
- Risk assessments: For each activity organised by FoGs a risk assessment is required to identify potential risks associated with the activity and put in place any measures to reduce the risks or implement help if needed.

LAF Toolkit: Setting up a Friends of Group

- Further information: A number of organisations provide information on setting up a FoG. Form a Friends of Group offers advice on how to set up a Friends of Parks Group, click on the external links below to find out more.

For more information

TCV Insurance: The Conservation Volunteers help hundreds of thousands of people each year to look after local green places. Insurance can be provided to volunteers who become members for a small annual fee. Details about the organisation, who they are and what they do are provided here:

<http://www.tcv.org.uk/community/join-community-network/community-group-insurance>

This page is intentionally left blank