



# Friends of groups: How to start and develop



## This guide explains the basic stages of starting up a new Friends of Group.

Cheshire West and Chester has a range of green spaces including parks, reservations, recreation areas, nature reserves and an abundance of

allotments. There are a number of existing Friends of Groups providing vital support across these areas however there is scope for this to be increased.

Community involvement in the regeneration and maintenance of green spaces can help create a sense of community ownership and is a proactive and positive way in which to tackle issues such as vandalism, dereliction of land and the under-use of valuable community spaces. Valuing and improving green spaces takes commitment and a lot of work; however the more of you there are the easier this will be.

### Why start a Friends of Group?

A friends of group is made up of like-minded individuals who may want to improve the facilities in their local green space area, have a call to action to address an issue or concern in the area, to improve habitats for wildlife or if their local green space is under threat.



## What can a Friends of Group do?

- meet regularly throughout the year
- address concerns or issues and identify and support common interests and needs
- helps to plan improvements for facilities
- support or run events such as seasonal celebrations at Christmas, a 'Big Lunch' or a Summer Fair
- run activities such as 'action days' or volunteer work parties to carry out planting or litter picking
- develop guided walks and talks for the wider community
- apply for funding to support the activities of the group
- help the community safeguard its green space
- be inclusive and enable a diverse group of people to participate
- get an online presence to promote the group
- create a mailing list to keep people in touch with activities, news and events.

## What are the benefits?

The benefits are endless however they may include;

- the opportunity to know more about your community
- being an active member of your community
- the opportunity to make new friends
- improving your health and wellbeing through keeping active and being outdoors
- making a positive contribution to your community.



# Starting a group

## How to set up a Friends of Group

Ideally the development of a Friends of Group should be as inclusive and diverse as the local population as possible, this includes the committee members who will be responsible for running the group. There are a few stages you will need to follow in order to establish a Friends of Group.



### Planning

The aim of this meeting is to gather as much interest in your potential group as possible. In order to get interest you may wish to advertise your planning.

meeting widely throughout the community so that other parties can get a feel for what your group aims to do. This could include; setting up a Facebook group, joining Twitter, writing an open letter to the local press about the group and your intentions, putting up posters around the area, engaging with your local councillor(s), contacting local authority rangers about your intentions.

Your group will find that there are many people in the local community who have an opinion about the park or open space in question and part of the work of a Friends of Group is to take on these views and opinions and work together with the local authority, or whoever owns or manages this land to make this happen.

## Your first meeting

Once you have established enough interest to form your Friends of Group you need to arrange the first formal meeting to discuss things such as the aims of the group, what you would like to achieve, establishing your committee, writing a constitution.



## Writing a constitution

A constitution explains how your group will be managed from the aims and objectives of the group through to how meetings are to be run. It is useful to develop your constitution early on as it will help the group to focus on why you have formed and what you hope to achieve.

Your constitution does not have to be complicated but it should reflect how you wish your group to be managed. There is no need to start from scratch as template constitutions can easily be obtained either online or from your local infrastructure charities such as Chester Voluntary Action (CVA) and Ellesmere Port and Neston Association for Voluntary and Community Organisations (EPNAVCO).

Your group will need to formally adopt the constitution at an AGM. To adopt the constitution the group have to agree upon it and the committee have to sign it.

## Forming a committee

The committee helps to run the group. How you do this will depend on the constitution you have adopted and the criteria included for your committee, however 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.

It is not necessary that other members of the committee take up a specific role but you may find that the need to do so could develop over time. Any committee member can elect another member to a position; however it must be decided by a vote.

Please note that it is possible for individuals to act as chairperson and secretary whilst organising the first AGM, but they must give up their position when the committee are to be elected.

The useful links on the next page list just some of the support available. CVA and EPNAVCO are local registered charities that can provide support to local community organisations and charities with the following:

- writing a constitution
- carrying out a funding search
- access to regular voluntary sector and community forums
- support with partnerships and collaborations
- advise in the recruitment and management of volunteers.



## Useful Links

Cheshire West and Chester  
[volunteering@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk](mailto:volunteering@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk)

The Conservation Volunteers is a national charity that provides expert advice in friends of groups  
[www.tcv.org.uk/](http://www.tcv.org.uk/)

Cheshire Wildlife Trust – Are a voice for wildlife and the environment. They deliver many community engagement projects and host the Cheshire Nature Network [www.cheshirewildlifetrust.org.uk](http://www.cheshirewildlifetrust.org.uk)

Chester Voluntary Action – [www.chesterva.org.uk](http://www.chesterva.org.uk)  
EPNAVCO – [www.eonavco.org.uk](http://www.eonavco.org.uk)

There is a national directory for conservation community groups and charities at [www.conservationgroups.org.uk](http://www.conservationgroups.org.uk)

You can promote your volunteering opportunities on to the following websites  
[www.environmentjob.co.uk/volunteering](http://www.environmentjob.co.uk/volunteering)  
[www.volunteerwestcheshire.org.uk](http://www.volunteerwestcheshire.org.uk)



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