

Friends of the Park

Start-up pack



Guidance notes for starting a "Friends" group in West Lothian

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January 2008

Acknowledgements:

Thanks to Kylie Ward, Author of Manchester City Council "Friends of" Start-up Pack
Thanks to everyone for the use of their photos: Kate Walters, Jim Saunders (WLC), Daney McComisky (WLC), Becky Plunkett, Lower Clyde Greenspace, Glasgow City Council and Greenspace Scotland. All images are copyright and may only be reproduced with permission from the owners.

Introduction

This pack has been put together as a set of guidelines for members of the community to work with West Lothian Council to set up their own “Friends” groups. This type of voluntary organisation exists to enhance and promote the use of parks and open spaces within West Lothian.

In the past, local people may have thought their local park or open space could do with some extra support and they haven’t known how they can help. Now, setting up a group can give all members of the community the chance to work with the council to develop their local park or open space in line with the needs of that community. Being a “Friend” is an excellent way of providing facilities, events and activities for your local community. Although this is sometimes hard work, the rewards are more than worth the effort.

This pack explains the basic stages of starting up a group, organising your first AGM, sources of funding which may be of use in reaching your group’s aims and objectives, a list of useful contacts and a few suggestions for activities that you could run in your park.

If you need any help or would like to ask any questions please do not hesitate to contact myself, the Community Greenspace Officer; not only will I be able to help, but I’ll be able to put you in contact with other “Friends” groups who may have experienced similar issues when starting up.

All the best!

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Starting a group

Setting up a “Friends” group takes four basic stages. Perhaps the most difficult stage is the first, which consists of finding like-minded individuals who want to become involved in a voluntary group. Stages 2 and 3 that follow should be carried out at the first Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the group. Finally, stage 4 should be completed after the first AGM.

Once you’ve met informally, you should decide a date for your Inaugural General Meeting (i.e. your first proper meeting of the Friends group) or first Annual General Meeting (AGM).

Stage 1

The first stage is to find other like-minded people to set up a group. This can seem like the most difficult and daunting stage to tackle - don’t panic!

Most groups tend to advertise an informal gathering where interested parties can get a feel for what the group would like to do.

The main aim of this stage is to gather as much interest in your potential group as possible and identify who might like to take an active role in this group. Speak to the Community Greenspace Officer

because they may already have contacts in the community who would like to become involved with such a group.

Your group will generally find that there are many people in the local community who have an opinion about the park or open space in question. Part of the work of a “Friends” group is to listen to these views and opinions and incorporate them into the development and management plans for the park.

Once you've met informally, you should decide a date for your Inaugural General Meeting (i.e. your first proper meeting of the Friends group) or first Annual General Meeting (AGM).

Stage 2 (To be carried out at the first AGM)

The second stage consists of putting together a constitution.

A constitution basically sets out the purpose of your group and explains how it will be managed. This includes the aims of the group (stating what it is that you aim to do) through to how meetings are to be run. The constitution of your group does not have to be complicated but it should reflect how you wish your group to be managed.

You don't have to start from scratch when putting together your constitution; other groups' constitutions can be used as templates. (A sample constitution, including example aims, has been included in this pack).

Once you have a constitution the group is happy with, you will need to formally adopt it at the first AGM; to adopt the constitution the group have to agree upon it, at least 2 members of the committee should sign and date it, and there should be a record kept of this.

Stage 3 (Also to be carried out at the first AGM)

The third stage consists of electing a committee. The constitution you have agreed upon will provide details of what responsibilities the committee has, how many committee members you have, etc.

A committee should consist of a chairperson, treasurer, secretary and at least 2 other members. The other members do not have to take a specific role, however groups often choose to elect vice positions, such as vice chairperson, vice treasurer or vice secretary.

Anyone can put forward another member for a position on the committee, however it should be decided by vote who actually takes a position.

It is possible for individuals to act as chairperson and secretary whilst organising the first AGM, but they must give up their position at the point where the committee are to be elected.

Stage 4 (To be carried out after first AGM)

The fourth stage is to set up a bank account. An account with a chequebook is essential for easy access to the group's funds.

Any account should be set up in the name of the group with at least 2 signatories for the account (i.e. people who are authorised to sign cheques), because at least 2 signatures will be required on each cheque. Many groups choose to have 4 people authorised to sign cheques, so that if one person is unavailable, someone else can sign in their place.

The signatories must be members of the committee, usually the chairperson and the treasurer.

After these stages are complete you will be a fully a constituted group with a committee and a bank account; the next stage is the exciting part of starting to work towards your group's aims and objectives!

If you would like any further information on any of the above, please contact the Community Greenspace Officer who will be happy to help.

Setting up your inaugural meeting (or first agm)

Setting up your first AGM can seem quite complicated if you have never done anything similar before. Below are some guidelines that should remind you of the small things that it is easy to forget.

Where should we hold the meeting?

The meeting should be organised in a building that is local to your park or green space, and as open and accessible to as many community members as possible. Remember that there will be a range of people attending your meeting including older age people, parents of young children and possibly wheel chair users. Facilities such as schools, churches and

community rooms are commonly used as meeting places as they usually offer toilets, tea making equipment, parking and easy access to the building. If your local park or green space has a building speak to the Community Greenspace Officer about using this facility.

When should we hold the meeting?

Give yourself at least 3 weeks to organise your first AGM, this will give interested parties the chance to make arrangements so that they can attend your meeting. Your meeting should be organised at a time when most people in the community are able to

attend. Late afternoon/evening meetings are good because they allow community members who work to attend the meetings. Following meetings can be held at whatever times suit the majority of your group best.

Who should we invite?

As a community group you need to involve as many people as possible, therefore your meeting should be advertised as much as possible. Word of mouth is the best form of advertising, however posters and leaflets are also beneficial if they are put in the right place. Schools, shops, clubs and the park itself are great

places to put advertising for your meeting. Some groups also choose to invite their local councillors. If you do not have a contact for them the Community Greenspace Officer will be able to provide link. The Greenspace Officer will be happy to attend some of your meetings throughout the year, as appropriate.

What do we need to do?

All meetings held by your group should have an agenda (what is to be included in the meeting) and all meetings should be recorded through written 'minutes'. Minutes do not have to be a complete copy of everything that is said in the meeting; they should

reflect the major themes which are discussed in the meetings with any action points marked against a name. Minutes should also record the names of the people who have attended and any apologies sent by people who can't attend the meeting.

A sample Agenda and Minutes are included at the back of this pack.

Applying for funding

When applying for funding it is really important that the funding body you apply to is willing to give funds for projects like yours. For example, it would not be advisable to apply for an environmental grant if you wanted to set up a sports project. By reading through the information provided with the application you will be able to work out what the funder is willing to give money for.

To help fill in your application please bear the following points in mind:

- 1 Photocopy the application first; you can fill in the photocopy without worrying about any mistakes.
- 2 Don't be too extravagant with your first bid; it is better to apply for smaller amounts of money when you first begin. Funders like to see experience of dealing with money and projects before they offer you a large sum of money.
- 3 Make a list of the funding body's aims and objectives and make statements about how your project will reach these aims and objectives.
- 4 Funders like projects which meet the needs of local people. If you have completed a piece of consultation that shows that your project will meet these needs try to refer to it in the application.
- 5 Funders also like to fund projects which include more than one group or organisation. Refer to the fact that you work in partnership with West Lothian Council and any other groups or organisations.
- 6 Before filling out the application make sure that you have a full project proposal that covers how the project will be managed. Funders like to give money to groups who are well organised and would be ready to start the project as soon as the money is available.
- 7 Try not to ramble! Include everything that you feel you need to write but write it in the shortest way possible.
- 8 Make sure you include any matched funding you have received. Equipment, facilities or staff given in kind can be classed as matched funding, speak to your Community Greenspace Officer to get a cost for these items.
- 9 Make a checklist of any extra information other than the application form that needs to be returned to the funder, such as a constitution or financial records. Tick each item as you put it in the envelope.
- 10 If you are not successful with your first bid, don't give up! Try and try again; some funders will give you an explanation of why you were not successful if you request it in writing, and you may be able to apply again.
- 11 Try to get a copy of a successful application for that funder, this will show you what kind of things the funders are looking for. Many "Friends" groups apply to the same funders so another "Friends" group may be able to offer you some help.
- 12 Finally, remember that the Community Greenspace Officer is always available to offer help and support to your group.

Funding sources

There are many sources of funding which your group will be able to apply for. Below are some of the grants sources that are commonly used by greenspace groups.

NB. Although we make every effort to keep this information up to date, grant-giving organisations often change their funding priorities, so the information on this sheet may not be entirely accurate. Please let us know if any of the information is out of date.

For current sources of funding, please check with the Community Greenspace Officer.

Action Earth Scotland

This is a nationwide environmental campaign run by CSV (Community Service Volunteers). The campaign offers groups of volunteers £50 grants to help them get started with environmental projects.

Groups who want to improve biodiversity, plant trees and shrubs, repair local paths or collect litter are eligible to receive a £50 grant to help buy tools and

resources for their project or help with running costs or volunteer expenses. Local organisers are urged to apply early in the year.

Further information: Contact Robert Henderson on 0131 622 7766 or email rhenderson@csv.org.uk

Awards for All Scotland

This is a lottery-based grants scheme for local communities. They award grants of up to £10,000 in a straightforward way, for projects that can be completed within 1 year. They can fund projects that bring people together and enable people to take part in art, sport, heritage and community activities, as well as projects that promote education, the environment and health in the local community. Non-profit making groups with a constitution, a bank

account and a set of accounts can apply to Awards for All as well as health bodies, schools and statutory bodies. You can apply at any time and you should get a decision within 8 weeks.

Further information: Application packs can be downloaded at www.awardsforall.org.uk or by phoning 0845 600 20 40. For further advice, visit the above website or call us on 0870 240 2391.

B&Q Better Neighbourhood Grants

Staff in local B&Q DIY shops are encouraged to form 'community partnerships' with local community projects. The help that B&Q staff offer may range from volunteering, to donations of materials and money via the Better Neighbourhood Grants Scheme.

This scheme provides small grants of between £50-£500 to community groups. As support is provided at the discretion of particular stores it may help to visit your local store in person with details of what you plan to do. West Lothian store: 2 Retail Park South, Almondvale Road, Livingston EH54 6GH Tel: 01506 442200

Central Scotland Forest Trust (CSFT)

The Community Projects Fund, administered by CSFT, provides one-off grants of up to £250 to help people living within the Central Scotland Forest area improve their environment and make a positive difference for all the community. Groups must

be constituted. See http://www.csft.org.uk/get_involved/community_projects_fund for details or contact Linda McConaghie on 01501 824796 or email cpf@csft.co.uk.

Open 4 Community

The community support funding website for the West Lothian area, courtesy of West Lothian Council. Provides information on funding from grant-giving

trusts, government grants and funding specific to West Lothian community groups.

www.open4community.info/westlothiannew

Scottish Community Foundation

Scottish Community Foundation grants of up to £5,000 are available to help improve the quality of life and life chances for the people of Scotland. Their work covers a wide range of social welfare and community development activities through a number of different grant programmes. Groups must have a written constitution and a bank account in order to apply. They don't need to be registered

charities, but should be non-profit organisations with charitable aims and objectives.

Further information: visit the website www.scottishcf.org or email grants@scottishcf.org or phone the Edinburgh grants team on **0141 225 6670**.

Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO)

Produce a booklet on grant giving trusts in Scotland.
www.scvo.org.uk

Scottish Natural Heritage - Community Grants

SNH works with others to conserve and enhance Scotland's natural heritage (wildlife and landscapes) and to help people understand, enjoy and care for it. It offers grants to help community groups and organisations carry out projects which match its aims:

- Improving the conservation of species, habitats and landscapes
- Promoting public enjoyment of the natural heritage
- Increasing awareness and understanding of the natural heritage

SNH grants are based around eight themes that reflect the above aims. Any formal community group or organisation may apply. The project should enjoy the support and participation of the local community. If you are applying for less than £10,000 there are no deadlines for applications. Applications of over £10,000 have two deadlines every year on 15th April and 1st September. Community groups are eligible for up to 100% of their cash costs, and payment in advance may be considered.

Further information: Contact the SNH Forth and Borders Communities Officer caroline.crawford@snh.gov.uk tel. 01786 450 362 or view the grant details on-line at www.snh.org.uk

USEFUL CONTACTS

The West Lothian Council Locality Managers supervise the teams responsible for the upkeep and maintenance of local parks and greenspaces. They can also help with community clean-ups.

For contact details of the Locality Manager for your area, please contact the Community Greenspace Officer (01506 776542 / becky.plunkett@westlothian.gov.uk)

Below are some other agencies who give information and support to community groups:

The Communities Team at West Lothian Council provides a range of information and advice for voluntary organisations. They advise on a variety of funding issues and provide an information support service for the development of community groups.

Contact: Sharon Houston, Senior Policy Officer Tel: 01506 777128
E-mail: sharon.houston@westlothian.gov.uk

GreenSpace is a UK charity, dedicated to seeing throughout the UK a network of easily accessible, safe, attractive and welcoming parks, gardens and green spaces, which meet the needs of everyone. They are committed to supporting community groups and have a very informative and useful website. Tel: **0118 946 9060**

Email: info@green-space.org.uk Website: www.green-space.org.uk

Voluntary Action West Lothian provides support to voluntary organisations and community groups in West Lothian. They have a newsletter to keep all groups up-to-date with each other, information on funding, a meeting room, colour photocopying facilities, help with publicity design and access to training.

Contact: Richard Duffner, 19 Jarvey Street, Bathgate EH48 4EZ Tel: 01506 634115
E-mail: vawl@btinternet.com

Also see the Community Toolkit on the Skye and Lochalsh Community Voluntary Organisation's website ... **www.slcv.org.uk** for information on all aspects of setting up a community group and info on running projects.

Volunteer Centre West Lothian provides opportunities for volunteering; including arranging special events for volunteers and training. The team also offers support and advice to local organisations looking for volunteers, or who would like to offer opportunities to those with extra support needs.

Contact: 36-40 North Bridge Street, Bathgate, EH48 4PP Tel: 01506 650111 Email: volunteer@vcwl.co.uk
Website: www.vcwl.co.uk

British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV) has local groups across Britain who carry out practical conservation work in their area. The organisation also provides training, information and advice, online resources, opportunities for networking and sometimes funding for community groups. If your group takes out membership, you can have access to cheaper public liability insurance and other benefits.

Tel. Community Groups Administrator, 01302 388 842 Email Local-Groups@btcv.org.uk
Website www2.btcv.org.uk/display/newgroup or www2.btcv.org.uk/display/community_network

Sample agenda

An agenda does not have to be complicated. It should simply reflect what the group wish to cover in the meeting.

The agenda below is an example of how one could be set out and what it could contain. It is completely fictional and is not linked to any "Friends" group.

AGENDA

Friends of Pinewood Park Meeting

20th October 2005, 6.30pm

Venue: Pinewood Park Community Centre

1. Welcome, introductions and apologies.
2. Progress since last meeting
3. Consultation
4. Funding applied for
5. A.O.B. (Any Other Business)
6. Date and time of next meeting
7. Close

An agenda for an AGM would be slightly different because it would have to include a financial report for the year and election of the committee. It could also include guest speakers and a progress report from the committee.

Sample minutes

MINUTES OF MEETING

Friends of Pinewood Park Meeting

20th October 2005, 6.30pm

Venue: Pinewood Park Community Centre

1. Welcome, introductions and apologies.

Name - Community member i.e. Friend of Park

Name - West Lothian Council

Etc.

Apologies received: Names

2. Progress since last meeting

Charlotte reported that youth workers will now be approaching youths in the area and speaking to them about the "Dream Scheme".

Action Charlotte to give feedback at next two meetings.

A team of youths has been registered with the MAD scheme. They are working together at the moment to identify a project which they are interested in.

Action Cath to work with the team to give support and ideas.

3. Consultation

The last draft of the questionnaire has been completed, consultation has been planned to take place at the forthcoming fun day.

Action Sam to collect names of volunteers for consultation at the forthcoming fun day.

It was also suggested by Charlotte that the Youth Workers may be able to help carry out questionnaires.

Action Charlotte to liaise with youth workers

4. Funding applied for

Bob has received the applications for Awards for All. The group discussed that funding for the Easter celebrations or Easter half term sports coaching could be applied for. It was decided that the Awards for All money should be used for the Easter half term sports coaching.

Action Bob to fill in the Awards for All application, Cath to give support where needed.

5. A.O.B. (Any Other Business)

Sam enquired about the park closing times over the next few weeks. Cath explained that the park closes at dusk every night.

Action Cath to put poster on main gates with the approximate closing time for the park.

6. Date and time of next meeting

Next meeting will be 22nd November 2005, 6.30pm at Pinewood Park Community Centre.

7. Close

Sample constitution

Below is an example of a constitution. Feel free to use any ideas you may gain from it.

The constitution can be simple or more complicated, but there are some key elements in the model given that should be included, which you can discuss with the Community Greenspace Officer. If you would like to see more sample constitutions contact the Greenspace Officer who will be more than happy to help.

1) Name

The group shall be known as Friends of Pine Road Park (herein after referred to as the Friends).

2) Aims

The aims of the Friends shall be:

- i. To create a secure environment in which everyone can enjoy the benefits of the park facilities, establishing an acceptable balance between the needs of all parks users.
- ii. To enable and encourage the local community to take an interest in the upkeep, enjoyment and protection of the park.
- iii. To work in partnership with the local authority and other relevant organisations to help in achieving i and ii above.
- iv. To ensure that all developments, activities and uses of the park are carried out in such a way as to encourage and promote environmental sensitivity.

3) Membership

- i. Membership shall be open to any person or group, within 2 miles of Pinewood Park, who supports the aims of the Friends group, as stated above.
- ii. There shall be no discrimination on the basis of age, race, religion, sexual orientation, gender, disability or nationality.
- iii. The management committee shall retain the right for adequate reasons to refuse or terminate membership of any individual, after giving the individual concerned the right to be heard by the management committee before a final decision is made.
- iv. An annual membership subscription will be payable in January each year at a rate or rates fixed annually by the management committee.
- v. Corporate members shall be such societies, associations, educational institutions or businesses as are interested in actively furthering the needs of the Friends. A corporate member shall appoint one representative to vote on its behalf at all meetings, but before such representative exercises his/her right the corporate member shall give written details of the representative to the Secretary.

4) Management committee

- i. The Management Committee shall be responsible for the management and administration of the Friends.
- ii. The Management Committee shall have the power to delegate any of its responsibilities to a sub-committee appointed by and responsible to the management committee.
- iii. The Management Committee shall consist of not less than 5 and not more than 8 individual members, plus up to 3 corporate members.
- iv. Members of the Management Committee shall be elected annually at the Annual General Meeting.
- v. At the AGM, all members of the Management Committee shall retire, but shall be eligible for re-election; outgoing members may be re-elected up to a maximum of 6 consecutive years, unless no other member is eligible or nominated.
- vi. Nomination for election to the Management Committee shall be made in writing to the Secretary at least 7 days before the Annual General Meeting. To be valid, nominations must be of fully paid up members, proposed and seconded by two other paid up members. The consent of the nominee must be obtained.
- vii. If fewer nominations are received by the deadline than there are vacancies, nominations may be taken from the floor of the meeting up to the number of vacancies available.
- viii. The management committee may co-opt up to two additional members during the year to fill any existing vacancies.
- ix. Five members of the Management Committee present in person shall be a quorum for meetings of the management committee.

5) Office bearers

- i. Within the Management Committee, there shall be the following office bearers: Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary, Assistant Secretary, Treasurer and Assistant Treasurer.
- ii. Elections for each of these positions shall be held at the AGM.

6) Meetings

- i. An inaugural General Meeting will be held and subsequently, an Annual General Meeting will take place annually thereafter.
- ii. The Management Committee shall give at least 21 days' notice to members of the Annual General Meeting each year and at least 7 days' notice of other meetings.
- iii. The Management Committee shall meet as required but not less than four times per year, the timing of which will be decided by the Committee.
- iv. An Extraordinary General Meeting may be called by the management committee giving at least 21 days notice to the membership.
- v. On written request from at least 25 per cent of members, an Extraordinary General Meeting may be held. This must take place no more than 30 days after receipt of the demand.
- vi. In the event of equality in the votes cast at an Annual General Meeting or Extraordinary General Meeting the motion will fall.

7) Procedures

- i. The Management Committee shall keep adequate written and photographic records of all meetings, projects and events.
- ii. A quorum at Management Committee meetings shall be five of those eligible to be present and shall be eleven at the AGM.
- iii. Decisions shall be made by a simple majority of those present and eligible to vote. The Chair will have an additional vote if required in the event of a tie.

8) Declaration of interest

- i. It shall be the duty of every member who is in any way, directly or indirectly, interested financially in any item discussed at any meeting of the Friends (including any meeting of any committee or subcommittee) at which s/he is present to declare such interest and s/he shall not discuss such item (except by invitation of the Chair) or vote there on.

9) Financial arrangements

- i. All monies raised by the Friends shall be applied to further the aims of the organisation, and for no other purpose. No office bearer or other member shall be paid or given any sum of money except in so far as the payment is for reimbursement for outlays actually incurred for the benefit of the Friends.
- ii. A bank account shall be opened in the name of the Group and four office bearers shall be authorised to sign cheques, with two signatures required on each cheque.
- iii. Full financial records shall be kept and financial statements produced annually and on request of the management committee.
- iv. The accounts shall be examined annually by an auditor or appropriate Independent Financial Examiner (not a management committee member) authorised by the management committee, and a financial statement presented at the AGM.
- v. The financial year will run from 1st January to 31st December.

10) Amendments to the constitution

i. Any amendments to this constitution shall be made after giving all members at least 21 days notice of the proposed alteration and if two-thirds of members present and eligible to vote are in favour of the change(s).

11) Dissolution

i. If the Management Committee decides it necessary or advisable, an Extraordinary General Meeting shall be called. Twenty-one days' notice of this meeting shall be required and the purpose of the meeting shall be clearly defined in writing to all members whose addresses are known to the management committee. If a decision to dissolve the Friends is confirmed by a two-thirds majority of those present and eligible to vote at the meeting, then after the satisfaction of all debts and liabilities, the assets shall not be paid or distributed to members of the friends, but shall be given to another organisation with similar aims as the members present decide. The Friends shall then be dissolved.

Adopted by

Name:

Committee Role:

Signature:

Date:

Name:

Committee Role:

Signature:

Date:

**A Few Ideas for Things To Do in Parks ... remember these are just suggestions!
(contact the Greenspace Officer for further details, useful contacts or other help)**

Festivals

Gala days, Fun days, Music events, Sports days
Halloween events - night-time walks, creepy treasure-hunts
Easter events - egg rolling, Easter egg hunts
Diwali – lanterns in the park
Chinese New Year – lanterns, parades

National/International Schemes to link in to

Love Parks Week
National Storytelling Week
International Dawn Chorus Day
National Treeplanting Week
National PlayDay

Practical projects

Community clean-ups
Planting – trees, bulbs, wildflowers
Nest/bat-box building
Removing invasive plants
Painting murals

Educational activities

Bat detecting
Pond dipping
Minibeast hunts
Herbal walks

Exercise

Walking groups
Frisbee teams
Football teams
Circus skills
Rounders

Other things

Picnics
Bark and leaf rubbings
Nature trails

Information about your park

Making leaflets about the park / creating a website,
Recording people's stories of the park, Making information boards



westlothian.gov.uk

NETs and Land Services
Whitehill House
Whitehill Industrial Estate
Bathgate EH48 2HA