

A guide to

Volunteering

**with Derbyshire County
Council's Countryside
Service**



D **DERBYSHIRE**
County Council

Improving life for local people

www.derbyshire.gov.uk/countrysidevolunteering

Foreword

Volunteering is not only a great way of giving something back to the community, it's good for the individual too. It can make you more confident, increase knowledge and skills, and bring health benefits through raised activity.

Volunteers are important to us and we want to make sure they have support and guidance: that's where this Guide to Volunteering with Derbyshire County Council's Countryside Service comes in. It will help you decide if volunteering is right for you and give you all the information you need.

So, whether you're just starting as a volunteer, or have been with us for some time, thank you for volunteering, many thanks for all your efforts: we really appreciate everything you do.



Councillor Dean Collins

Cabinet Member for Highways,
Transport and Infrastructure

Councillor Collins with volunteers from the Clay Cross group



Welcome to Derbyshire County Council's Countryside Service

We manage the County Council's countryside sites and facilities, such as country parks, Greenways and public rights of way, as well as a wide variety of conservation and environmental projects and initiatives which help to protect and enhance Derbyshire's natural and built environment.

Volunteers make a real contribution to our work and currently we have over 150 volunteers registered with us. Most are involved in practical conservation and site management, but other roles include exhibition work, education, public rights of way surveys and helping at Countryside Service events.

The role of volunteers is not to replace paid staff, but to complement their work. Volunteers add value to the work of the Countryside Service and supplement its capacity to undertake additional and enhanced tasks.

Why volunteer?

People volunteer for different reasons: some want to improve their career prospects, while others want something fulfilling to do after retirement. Many just want to give something back to society or their local area.

We really appreciate the experience and enthusiasm that volunteers bring to the Countryside Service, but this is a two-way street: volunteering can give you new skills and knowledge, build confidence and make you fitter and healthier. You'll meet new people, make new friends and it's fun too!

Who is this guide for?

This guide covers volunteers registered directly with the Countryside Service. It doesn't apply to community-based volunteer groups that may work with us such as Ramblers and 'friends of...' groups.

Whether you have been a volunteer for many years or are just thinking about applying for the first time, we want to make sure you've got all the information you need to make volunteering a safe, enjoyable and satisfying experience.

This guide will help you decide if volunteering is right for you and provides useful information on important procedures for volunteers.



Volunteer Case Study 1

"I first heard about the group from another volunteer and started back in 2014. I really enjoy volunteering outdoors, learning new things and working in a beautiful area with great people. I work in the conservation and estate management team, which fits in well with my studies for an Open University Environmental Sciences degree. It's all part of my plan to make countryside work my career."

Getting into volunteering

Volunteer roles

Role Descriptions give an overview of the kind of activities you can expect to be involved in, as well as any skills or experience needed and the time commitment expected. You can see a range of Role Descriptions on our website, but remember that not all roles are available at all of our sites.

Some common volunteering roles are:

- Estate and Conservation Team Volunteer: practical tasks on our sites, trails and rights of way, as part of a small team of volunteers.
- Ranger and Warden Support Volunteer: Assisting our rangers and wardens, often on a one-to-one basis, in a wide range of countryside management activities.
- 'Path Friend' Volunteer: Looking after your local footpaths and bridleways through regular checks and minor maintenance.
- Visitor Services Volunteer: assisting Countryside Service staff at events, festivals and in Visitor Centres.

Introductory meeting

You don't need a formal interview to become one of our volunteers, but we will ask you to come in for a chat about the role. Not everyone is suited to countryside volunteering, so this is a chance for you to tell us about yourself and why you want to volunteer. We'll also talk about the volunteering role and make sure that it's right for you and what you were expecting. If you're accepted as a volunteer, we'll ask you to complete our Volunteer Registration Form, unless you've already done so. We'll also agree a start date and tell you what you'll need to bring with you when you start: packed lunch, old clothes, strong footwear etc.

The Countryside Service Volunteer Agreement

When you volunteer for the Countryside Service, we'll ask you to abide by our Volunteer Agreement, which tells you what standards and support you can expect from us and what we ask of you in return.

You can see the Countryside Service Volunteer Agreement on the Volunteering section of our website. www.derbyshire.gov.uk/countrysidevolunteering

Do I need to provide references or have any checks made?

Some roles may require character references and/or a criminal record check through the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS). This would be for volunteers working unsupervised with children or vulnerable adults, or volunteers with access to information about children and vulnerable adults. We'll tell you if the volunteer role needs these checks.

I have a criminal record - can I still volunteer?

Just because you've had a criminal conviction, doesn't mean you can't volunteer. In fact, volunteering can be a great way of moving on with your life as it can improve skills, provide references and get you out meeting people. The type of volunteering you can do may

Getting into volunteering

depend on what your conviction was for and how long ago it was, but we'll try to find something for you, if we can.

You don't have to reveal your conviction if it is 'spent' and it is illegal for us to ask if you have any convictions. However, if a volunteer role involves working with children or vulnerable adults, you must reveal both spent and unspent convictions.

If I volunteer, will I lose my welfare benefits?

No you won't: people on benefits are still able to volunteer. There are three basic rules:

- You must inform your benefits manager before you start volunteering. You will probably have to provide details of the volunteering activity and any expenses.
- You can volunteer for as many hours as you like, as long as you still meet your conditions for claiming benefits: the old rule of 16 hours per week no longer applies.
- In general, refunding expenses does not affect benefit, but anyone receiving income-related benefits must declare the expenses and keep any receipts.

If needed, we can provide a letter for your benefits manager, explaining that you're volunteering for Derbyshire County Council and are not receiving any payments except for expenses (where eligible).

Do I need to be over 18 to volunteer?

Not necessarily. Many under 18's want to volunteer, for example as part of the Duke of Edinburgh Awards. We'll try to accommodate you where possible but there can be restrictions on the activities carried out and the amount of time spent volunteering, particularly for those under 16. Also, some young people need more supervision than others and staff may not have the time available.

If it's agreed that you can volunteer, we'll produce a risk assessment identifying the level of support required and suitable tasks for you. It may be that some activities can only be observed from an agreed safe distance, for example the felling of large trees, use of plant/power tools and working by deep or fast-flowing water. We'll also need written consent from your parent or guardian.

Occasionally, a parent may wish to volunteer accompanied by their child. Again, a specific risk assessment will be required and it should be noted that supervising a child can reduce awareness of your own safety. Parents and their children may be asked to stop volunteering if Countryside Service staff consider them to be acting unsafely.

I have a health issue - can I still volunteer?

We need to know about any existing health conditions (we'll treat the information in confidence) in case you become unwell, but there are many volunteer roles you can carry out even with quite serious health conditions. Talk to us and we'll see what we can do.

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Examples include:

- Heart disease.
- Diabetes.
- Asthma.

We also need to know if you suffer from Hand Arm Vibration Syndrome (HAVS), often caused through having worked with tools that vibrate. Typical examples of HAVS are Vibration White Finger and Carpal Tunnel Syndrome. Whilst not relevant to all volunteer roles, you should tell us if you suffer from these, or similar conditions.

Volunteers from vulnerable groups

Social Services and other agencies, such as community mental health teams, often approach the Countryside Service seeking volunteering opportunities for their clients. The input required from Countryside Service staff can be considerable, even when a carer is present to manage the volunteer's individual needs. For this reason it may not always be possible to accommodate them.

Each request, whether for a group or an individual, is assessed to determine the benefits for the Countryside Service and the volunteer, as well as the level of management and support required, before a decision is made.



Volunteer Case Study 2

"I first began volunteering as part of a local Day Centre's conservation group. I enjoyed it so much that I wanted to spend more time outdoors and asked to join one of the volunteer teams in my local area and became a member in 2007. I really enjoy working with everyone. It's good fun - we have a laugh!"

Essential information for volunteers

Induction and support

When you start volunteering with us, your volunteering supervisor will give you an introduction to the role.

This will include:

- The work of the Countryside Service.
- The site/area you're volunteering in.
- Your volunteering role.
- The Countryside Service Volunteer Agreement.
- Health and safety.

Your volunteering supervisor will continue to be your point of contact for help and advice throughout your time as a Countryside Service Volunteer and will make sure you receive the support you need to carry out your role.

Most training and development will be delivered 'in house' by Countryside Service staff as part of the volunteering day. Some volunteer roles may require specialist skills, for which training will be provided when necessary.

Solving problems

For the most part, volunteering is a positive experience. However, on rare occasions things can go wrong and we have a problem solving procedure to deal with these situations.

If you have any concerns, you should speak to your volunteering supervisor who will make every effort to resolve things fairly and without bias. However, if you feel the matter hasn't been settled satisfactorily, you can make a formal written complaint, following which a meeting will be arranged to discuss and hopefully resolve the issue.

On rare occasions there may be concerns over a volunteer's performance, attitude or behaviour. Again, this will be dealt with fairly and not in a confrontational or accusatory way, in order to identify any issues and agree steps to address them. This could include extra support, supervision or training. However, if concerns can't be resolved, we may have to end the volunteering relationship.

Full details of the problem solving procedure can be seen on the Countryside Service Volunteering section of our website.

Leaving Derbyshire County Council's Countryside Service

We realise that personal situations change and that volunteers move on. We're happy to provide a reference or statement of achievement and may also ask for feedback on your volunteering experience.

Essential information for volunteers

Expenses

We don't normally pay expenses for travelling to and from the volunteering base and we try to match volunteers to their closest Countryside Service site. In exceptional circumstances we will pay travelling expenses from home. For example, if you're unemployed or on benefits and couldn't otherwise afford to volunteer.

We will reimburse expenses if you incur travelling costs as part of your volunteering role, or when attending training that isn't at your normal volunteering base. Wherever possible we transport volunteers in Countryside Service vehicles.

There is no tax liability if only genuine out-of-pocket expenses are paid and the payment is at a reasonable rate - i.e. mileage rates within limits set by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC). You do not need to declare these expenses to HMRC.

Any expenses should be agreed in advance with your volunteering supervisor. You'll be given a claim form to fill in with the date, time and details of the journey, including the mileage. Expenses are paid directly into your bank account so you'll need to provide your bank details.

At the volunteering base, you will usually use staff parking areas. If you have to use a Countryside Service public car park we'll give you a 'day pass' to display in your windscreen.

Insurance

Like staff, Countryside Service Volunteers are covered by public liability insurance and personal accident insurance. These policies cover volunteers up to the age of 80. If you're over 80 and wish to volunteer, we will talk to our Insurance Section to see what's possible. There is no lower age limit for insurance cover, but death benefits are greatly reduced for minors and young students in full-time education.

Volunteers need not be under close supervision in order to be insured, but you must be carrying out duties in which you have been trained or instructed: you should not carry out unauthorised actions or duties outside of the Volunteer Role Description.

Driving vehicles

Volunteers are insured to drive our landrovers and vans, subject to the following checks and controls:

- You must have an appropriate licence, which will be checked by your volunteer supervisor before the vehicle is first driven and then at least annually.



Volunteer Case Study 3

"I enjoy volunteering as it allows me to meet people and face new challenges. It also gives me a sense of achievement and greater confidence...should have done it years ago!"

Essential information for volunteers

- You will receive a vehicle induction and be made aware of relevant policies and procedures - e.g. vehicle checks, use of mobile phones, safe loading and driver behaviour.
- Your driving will be assessed by the volunteering supervisor or another competent member of staff.
- You should not undertake some driving operations without additional training and instruction - e.g. off-road driving. Some operations, such as towing a trailer, also require additional driving licence categories.
- You will also receive a letter outlining procedures, safe practice and what you can, and can't do.

If you need to drive your own vehicle as part of your volunteering duties, you will have your driving licence, MOT and insurance checked at least annually. Although volunteering is usually classed as 'Social, Domestic and Pleasure' rather than as 'Business Use', you should still inform your vehicle insurer.

Equality and diversity

Derbyshire County Council believes that no one should be treated less favourably than anyone else because of their gender, marital status, age, race, ethnic or national origin, religion or belief, disability or sexual orientation.

We respect and value diversity and will do everything we reasonably can to make sure volunteering opportunities are available to all. We aim to provide an environment in which everyone feels equally valued and will not tolerate discrimination, harassment, inappropriate behaviour or language. Derbyshire County Council's policy on equality and diversity can be found at www.derbyshire.gov.uk/council/equalities/equal_opportunities

Confidentiality

As a volunteer, you may come into contact with confidential information. You should not disclose or discuss such information with anyone outside of the Countryside Service.

Derbyshire County Council will ensure that any personal information you supply us with is treated in confidence. We must have your permission to store and use your personal information, in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998. Volunteers give their permission for us to use and store information that is confidential but it will not be shared without their explicit permission to do so.

Your information will not be passed onto any organisation for the purposes of marketing or sales. You may request a copy of the information held on you by making a written request to us at any time. You may also request to have your information deleted at any time.

You can find out more about our data protection policies and procedures at www.derbyshire.gov.uk/working_for_us/data

Health and safety

Derbyshire County Council recognises that it has a duty of care to its volunteers and takes all reasonable steps to safeguard their health and safety. We carry out risk assessments for all volunteer roles and tasks, and ask that you follow any measures that may be in place to ensure the safety of yourself and others. If you are in any doubt about safe practice, discuss things with your volunteering supervisor.

You will receive health and safety guidance relevant to your role at induction and throughout your time with us. However, the following pages give guidance on key areas.

Fire procedures

You will be made aware of the fire and evacuation procedures you need to follow for the visitor centre or office at which you're based. This includes the location of fire exits, alarms and fire extinguishers.

Computers and display screen equipment

If your volunteering role involves using computers, you need to make sure that the chair, keyboard, monitor and desk are properly adjusted for you. Your volunteering supervisor will go through this process with you when you start in your volunteering role. If, as part of your volunteering role, you use computers for most of the day and you volunteer for several days each week, the County Council may pay for an eyesight test and subsidise the purchase of suitable spectacles.

Personal protective equipment (PPE)

You will be provided with any PPE you may need for your role and, where necessary, trained in its use. PPE may be issued to you personally (you should return it if you leave your role) or issued from an equipment pool as required. If you are provided with PPE, please look after it and make sure that you use it.



Volunteer Case Study 4

“Having moved to Chesterfield in 2013, I investigated the possibility of voluntary work in the immediate area. It didn't take long to discover my local volunteer group and the work they do along the canal and Trans-Pennine Trail. I have learnt so much over the last two years, from woodland management to local history and the geography of the area. Of course, there is the added benefit of not needing to go to a gym each week!”

Health and safety

Clothing and footwear

You should dress appropriately for your volunteering role and have wet weather gear for outdoor roles. Volunteers in practical conservation and estate management roles should wear clothes they don't mind getting dirty. Some of our sites may be able to provide overalls for particularly messy work!

Footwear should be suited to the task. Normally this will be walking boots or similar sturdy boots with good grip, but for some tasks safety footwear with steel toecaps may be needed. Your volunteering supervisor will tell you when this is the case. Most sites have a pool of safety boots and safety wellingtons which can be disinfected before use.

Manual handling

In many volunteer roles you may need to lift and handle heavy loads, though machinery is used whenever possible. Your volunteering supervisor will guide you in this and arrange training if necessary, but basically:

- Work within your personal limits.
- Bend your knees when lifting, not your back, and look up as you start to lift.
- Don't twist or overstretch.
- Share heavier loads with others.

Specialist tools and equipment

We'll tell you if a volunteer role requires the use of special equipment and where necessary we'll train you to use it and provide appropriate PPE.

It is unlikely that we'd ask you to use power tools such as chainsaws and brush cutters, but sometimes volunteers have these tools and offer to use them. Before using these tools you would need to show us current certification and evidence of refresher training (typically NPTC/Lantra), have appropriate PPE and demonstrate your competence to the volunteering supervisor. We would also need to check that the tool complies with current standards and is in safe working order.

Accidents and first aid

Even with the best health and safety procedures in place, accidents can still happen. All of our offices and visitor centres have first aid kits and staff trained in first aid. Outdoor task leaders carry first aid kits and are first aid trained.

If you are injured, or have a near miss, get treatment and report the incident to your volunteering supervisor. They will complete an accident report form with you and, if possible, take action to reduce the likelihood of similar incidents occurring again.

Further information

You can find out more about Derbyshire County Council's Countryside Service and volunteering in the following ways:

- Visit **www.derbyshire.gov.uk/countrysidevolunteering**
- Email us at **countrysideservice@derbyshire.gov.uk**
- Telephone us on **01629 533302**
- Talk to staff at your preferred site.

