



# VOLUNTEER POLICY COUNTRYSIDE SERVICES

2024

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## **SECTION 1: Welcome and Acknowledgement**

Thank you for choosing to give your valuable time to benefit the wildlife and people of Hart. This document will provide all the relevant information you should need when volunteering with Hart District Council's (HDC) Countryside Service. However please do not hesitate to contact us should you have any further questions.

## **SECTION 2: The Role of Hart Countryside Services (HCS)**

HCS manages 17 countryside sites. The majority of which hold international, national, or regional designations on account of their wildlife interest.

HCS' responsibilities include maintaining these sites in a favourable condition for a variety of species to flourish and for future generations to enjoy.

The variety of habitats on our sites include heathland, marshland, grassland, reedbed, woodland, hay meadows and alder carr. Some of the species associated with these habitats are Nightjar, Woodlark, Dartford Warbler, Silver-studded blue butterflies, Forester moths and many more.

HCS teams aim is to enhance the biodiversity value of HDC's countryside and its managed sites in a way that promotes the sustainable, recreational, and educational use for the benefit of the community of Hart.

## **SECTION 3: Where do we work?**

HDC looks after and maintains 17 countryside sites in North Hampshire across Hart District. The service also works closely with local developers to manage and maintain Sites of Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANGs) in the area.

### **Site List:**

1. Fleet Pond
2. Hartland Country Park
3. Edenbrook Country Park
4. Bramshot Farm Country Park
5. Elvetham Heath Nature Reserve
6. Odiham Common
7. Broad Oak Common
8. Hazeley Heath
9. Hartley Wintney Central Commons
  - Includes:
    - Central Common
    - Cricketers Green
    - Causeway Green
    - Hunts Common
10. Phoenix Green
11. Queen Elizabeth II Fields
12. West Green Common
13. Stoken Green
14. Cricket Hill Pond
15. Royal Oak Valley
16. Whitewater Meadows
17. Ashwell's Copse

## Site List for Work Parties:

**Fleet Pond Nature Reserve (FPNR)** - one of the Service's principal sites, managed in partnership with Fleet Pond Society (FPS). The conservation of the various habitats in the FPNR requires regular maintenance work and the FPS holds conservation sessions on the second Sunday of the month from September to June. These are open to any members of the public who wish to attend. Meeting points will be emailed to interested persons the week before.

**Hartley Wintney Commons** including **Phoenix Green** and **West Green Common**. Public work parties will occur from time to time, as advertised on site or on the service website.

**Elvetham Heath Local Nature Reserve, Odiham Common and Royal Oak Valley** – public work parties will occur from time to time, as advertised on site or on the service website.

**Bramshot Farm Country Park** – public work parties will occur monthly, as advertised on site or on the service website.

**Edenbrook Country Park** - public work parties will occur monthly, as advertised on site or on the service website.

Corporate and / or organised groups are welcome on any of the above sites, with at least one month's notice in order to make suitable arrangements.

## SECTION 4: The Role of Volunteers in Hart's Countryside Services

Volunteers contribute hugely to HDC maximising the ranger's ability to complete tasks with much greater output. A lot of our work is only made possible thanks to the commitment of time and help offered by volunteers.

Volunteers perform a wide variety of tasks, from scrub clearance, litter picking and bridge building, engagement and education-based roles and admin tasks. Please see the volunteer role descriptions for further information.

Volunteers support and complement the work of paid staff and will not be used as a substitute for the work of paid staff or, where funds are available, contractors. Therefore, volunteers are not subject to employment rights. Volunteers can contribute to all areas of work of HCS.

HCS is happy to accommodate volunteers as individuals or as groups. A face-to-face meeting with individuals or a group organiser and relevant reference checks for community involvement may be required. The Service is flexible about time schemes and duration of voluntary work from one day a week attendance to block attendance of one or more weeks at a time. Volunteer activities usually take place during the working week however there are some opportunities available at weekends.

Volunteers will be accompanied by a Task Leader; this will be a ranger who is assigned to the Group and Site.

Outlined below is the sphere of activity in which volunteers would most likely be involved with.

- The majority of winter tasks, September to March, are the practical side of habitat management such as marsh clearance and reclamation, scrub clearance, felling, coppicing, and control of invasive species. Volunteers may use hand tools such as bow saws, loppers, and billhooks when necessary, following full guidance from trained personnel.
- Events and Engagement – any time of year.
- Administration tasks – any time of year.

- Gravel path construction and maintenance – any time of year.
- Hedge maintenance – autumn to winter.
- Ditch and pond clearance – autumn to winter.
- Meadow management works – late summer to early autumn.
- Clearing non-native invasive plants – midsummer to winter.
- Workshop maintenance – any time of year.
- Vehicle cleaning – any time of year.
- Fencing, way marking, bridge, boardwalk maintenance and repair, including painting – any time of year.
- Litter picking and site clean ups – any time of year.
- Livestock lookers checking grazing animals – between May and October.

All volunteers are given an induction at the beginning of their voluntary work. This covers health and safety procedures and an introduction to the tools and material that may be used during the work.

Techniques in conservation activities are demonstrated before you start.

All tools are provided, and ongoing training is given for their correct use and handling.

All tools are regularly checked and maintained; if you find a tool that is damaged in any way report it to the Task Leader who will remove it from use.

Vehicles, boats, and power tools may be used on task; however, volunteers must not operate these unless appropriately trained or certified and authorised by the Task Leader.

## **SECTION 5: Volunteer Recruitment**

HDC strives to ensure that equal opportunities are given to volunteers from a diverse range of backgrounds and abilities, and that all the information received from volunteers will be treated confidentially.

We respect and value diversity and will do everything we reasonably can to make sure volunteering opportunities are available to all (see HDC's Equality and Diversity Policy; HDC, 2020). Medical information is requested and kept ensuring compliance with our insurance and health and safety requirements, and to enable us to allocate suitable work to you. You do not have to provide details about your health conditions, but if you decline to do this, we might not be able to process your application to volunteer with us, or it may limit the volunteering opportunities we are able to offer you.

For further information, please see the privacy notice section. Please let us know in writing of any changes to your health or medical circumstances.

Prospective individual volunteers within HCS will be:

1. Invited for a taster session with one of the rangers based on the role descriptions they are interested in.
2. Asked to complete the relevant documentation and officially sign up before being able to book onto tasks according to their skills and availability. All volunteers must read and agree to the volunteer policy.
3. Receive appropriate training and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) if necessary, to fulfil their role.
4. Work within the Volunteer Code of Conduct.

Groups of volunteers i.e., from businesses or organisations will only have to turn up on the day of the arranged task and register to say they have been given the Health and Safety briefing by the Task Leader. They will be expected to follow the Volunteer Code of Conduct – SECTION 8 below and utilise all PPE provided.

## SECTION 6: Training

1. Health and Safety and practical tool talks will be given prior to all tasks being carried out by volunteers.
2. Regular volunteers will be given the opportunity to receive training on specific subject areas such as power tools, Health and Safety, and group management.

## SECTION 7: Task Format

- **A TASK LEADER** is in charge of the task and gives the group full instruction. They are responsible for the group and its activity as a whole. They will carry out a full risk assessment on the task and designate a first aider.
- **A SAFETY TALK** is given at the start of each task. Task specific hazards are identified, and other important information is highlighted. Please listen carefully; it is for the benefit of you and those working alongside you. It outlines the days' work, the Task Leader, the first aider, location of the First Aid Kit, the nearest telephone, and any potential hazards.
- **A TASK REGISTER** is then called. By calling yes and having your name ticked on the register you are declaring that you are aware of and will adhere to the instructions as provided in the above two points.
- **REFRESHMENTS** – Drinks will be available on every task. Staff should take bottled water with them and hot water to make tea and coffee, plus biscuits, milk, and sugar. You will need to bring your own lunch.
- We operate a **NO SMOKING** or vaping policy in vehicles and buildings or during high fire risk periods. There are instances where you can smoke on task, but we ask you to smoke away from non-smokers and in designated areas assigned by the task leader where available. This will be site and time of year dependant.
- You will need to wear **OUTDOOR CLOTHING** suitable for gardening. Dress according to the weather. Boots or wellies with steel toecaps are recommended. Hats, sun cream and waterproofs may all be required. We can supply items such as gloves, safety glasses and hard hats if appropriate.

## SECTION 8: Volunteer Code of Conduct

- Treat others with respect and thoughtfulness.
- Take care and consider Health and Safety of yourself and others.
- Work at your own pace, to your own abilities, training, and experience.
- Pay attention to the Task Leader, listen carefully to task briefings, and follow instructions.
- Feel free to make suggestions to or raise any concerns with the Task Leader.
- Offensive behaviour from volunteers toward other volunteers, staff, or members of the public is not acceptable. Offensive behaviour could result in the termination of volunteering.
- Take care of any tools issued.
- Risk Assessments to be read and signed prior to any power tool use.
- Any volunteer that decides to leave the group early or will be absent from the group should inform the Task Leader as soon as they are able.
- Enjoy yourself!

## SECTION 9: Health and Safety

Risk assessments (RA) will be carried out for each task. For your own safety and the safety of others, please comply with any safety instructions that are given by the Task Leader. The Task Leader will be working within the HDC Health and Safety Policy and the HCS Health and Safety Policy; copies of these are available on request.

While on task you must take reasonable care for the Health and Safety of yourself and other people working around you who may be affected by your actions.

### We ask that you:

- Report any accidents or near misses to the Task Leader.
- Report any damage or loss of equipment or material liable to affect Health and Safety.
- Provide details of an emergency point of contact e.g., partner or guardian name and telephone number.
- Are aware that Health and Safety is everyone's responsibility, and that each volunteer has a duty of care to themselves and others.

### Volunteers must be aware that:

- HCS appreciates that some volunteers may wish to bring their dogs with them when volunteering. It is important that volunteers seek permission from the Task Leader to bring their dog with them. There will be instances where some tasks are too high risk to allow dogs to join the work party at the same time, or perhaps other volunteers are not comfortable around dogs. Dogs must be well behaved and obedient, owners must bring a lead and means to pick up and dispose of faeces. Assistance animals are very welcome.
- Those under 16 should be accompanied and supervised by a responsible adult.
- Those under 12 years are not eligible to volunteer.
- No person will carry out work while under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
- Volunteers may use their own hand tools provided that they have been approved by the Task Leader or Countryside ranger as being suitable for the job and have been inspected to ensure that they are well-maintained and in a safe condition. The volunteer to whom they belong may be the only person to use personal tools. Volunteers are **NOT** permitted to use their own power tools.
- All HCS volunteers will be asked to give details of any medical information that might be needed if there was an emergency. This will be kept in confidence by the Task Leader and only accessed in an emergency.
- Should volunteers' actions or behaviour threaten the safety of themselves or others in the group the task leader will request the individual to stop working.
- HCS work to the HDC Corporate Health and Safety Policy and have their own Health and Safety Policy.

## SECTION 10: Countryside Hazards

Listed below are some of the most common hazards you may come into contact with when volunteering. You should make yourself aware of these before volunteering. Many jobs include cutting and handling sharp and thorny plants and volunteers should take care to protect themselves from scratches, cuts and flying debris.

1. **Tetanus** can be caught from wounds contaminated with soil. Please make sure that your tetanus immunity is up to date (a booster is needed every 10 years).

2. **Dog faeces** whether visible or not, volunteers should be aware of dangers from soil contamination.
3. **Wasp's nests** are common, and volunteers should be aware that they might come across one on site. Please report any found to the Task Leader. If you have an allergy to any stings from insects let your Task Leader and colleagues working nearby know.
4. Do not overexert yourself in **hot weather** and make sure that you drink plenty of fluids.
5. Please wear sun block when necessary. In **cold and wet weather** wear warm clothing and waterproof trousers and coats.
6. **Weils' disease** is a bacterial infection carried in rats' urine, which contaminates water, and can be present on lake, river, and canal banks. The bacteria are absorbed by the mucus membranes of the mouth and eyes and also through the skin via minor cuts. Treat all water as if it is contaminated.
7. **Lyme disease** can sometimes be transmitted to humans when bitten by a tick from a deer or a sheep. Ticks can be picked up from tall vegetation such as bracken. When working in such areas, make sure you have tucked your trousers into your socks and that your cuffs are fastened. Always check for Ticks on yourself when you get home.
8. The **sap** from certain plants can cause itching, rashes and in severe cases blistering burns, especially when combined with exposure to sunlight, including Hemlock Water-dropwort, Hogweed and Ragwort. Some plants are also poisonous to eat.
9. **Adders** can be found on heathland areas; volunteers should inform the Task Leader if any are seen.

## SECTION 11: Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

HCS will provide volunteers with all the PPE necessary to carry out tasks safely, and to ensure that it is in good condition and suitable for purpose.

- The Service holds a selection of various sized work gloves, but it is recommended that volunteers bring their own gloves.
- Hard hats are available if the task RA dictates.
- Some RA may state a need for steel capped boots and or eye protection.

### Basic precautions

While out on task we recommend that you:

- Wear gloves.
- Wash hands before eating, drinking, or smoking and vaping.
- Cover any cuts.
- Wear clothing that covers arms and legs.
- Wear safety glasses or goggles to protect eyes from splinters and debris.
- Make sure that your Tetanus immunity is up to date.
- Bring any medication you may need in an emergency with you (such as antihistamine if you are allergic to wasp or bee stings) and make sure that the Task Leader is aware.

## SECTION 12: Administration

### Grievance and Disciplinary Guidelines

Offensive behaviour from volunteers toward other volunteers, staff or members of the public is not acceptable. Offensive behaviour will result in the volunteer in question no longer volunteering with HDC. Volunteers must be aware that when they are working on behalf of the Council, they are representing the Council's name, prestige, and values to the public.



## **Expenses**

At this time, the Service is not in a position to offer expenses.

## **Insurance Cover**

Whilst working as a volunteer for the HDC you are insured under HDC's combined liability insurance.

The vehicles used by HCS can be driven by staff only. Drivers of HCS business vehicles must have a current and appropriate driving license, which will be checked annually by the HCS Senior ranger.

## **Liability**

All volunteers do so entirely at their own risk. HDC shall not be liable for any injury, damage or loss to volunteers or their property that might occur as a result of their volunteering, other than in respect of any injury or loss arising as a result of HDC's negligence. For the avoidance of doubt, nothing in this clause shall exclude or limit HDC's liability for any liability that cannot be excluded or limited by law.

## **Monitoring and Review**

Input from volunteers and staff is welcome at any time as this helps in evaluating the document's relevance and usefulness. The Senior ranger will review this policy annually.

## **General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)**

Volunteer records and photos will be kept in accordance with the UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018 and are revised and updated annually, and any redundant information will be destroyed. RAs and training records will be kept electronically and reviewed every three years.

In addition, volunteer email addresses will be stored securely within an electronic emailing list whilst they are an active volunteer. If the persons were to no longer be a volunteer the information would be deleted.

Volunteers can opt out at any time and their details will be permanently erased. Please email [countryside@hart.gov.uk](mailto:countryside@hart.gov.uk) to be removed from the list. Volunteer details will only be used to make contact to notify of future volunteer work dates, cancellations or any information concerning their role as a HDC volunteer.

Details will not be shared either internally within HDC, or externally to other organisations.

By signing up to the volunteer policy you are confirming that you have read and understood our [Countryside Services: privacy | Hart District Council](#).

## **FOIA and EIR**

Information you provide that does not identify you personally may be published or disclosed in accordance with access to information regimes, which include the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act 2018, and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004.

## **SECTION 13: What you can expect from us:**

A designated Task Leader will be assigned to each task and is responsible for:

- Completing the site and task **Risk Assessment**.
- Giving a **Safety Talk** at the start of the task describing the specific hazards of the day and identifying the First Aider.
- An attendance **register** will be called, and participants names will be tick off, checking they have the correct emergency contact details. **Volunteers calling yes confirm** that they are present and are aware of the above two points.
- Providing training in countryside management techniques and tool use.
- Supervising volunteers whilst out on task. Any volunteers who decide to leave the task early must notify the task leader when they leave.

#### **All Task Leaders will:**

- Work to the HCS Volunteer Policy.
- Be members of staff or will have completed The Conservation Volunteers (TCV) Volunteers Leadership Training course (or similar) or have relevant work experience.
- Volunteer task deputy leaders will work alongside the HCS Countryside ranger whilst out on task.
- Consider first aid requirements and ensure that a first aid kit is available on site.
- Ensure that only a maximum of 10 volunteers take part in a task per leader.
- Appoint a second assistant task leader where there are more than 10 volunteers on a practical task.

## **SECTION 14: Social Media**

### **Guidelines for responsible use of social media**

The following sections of the policy provide volunteers with guidelines and recommendations for using social media responsibly and safely. HDC recognises that the internet provides unique opportunities to participate in interactive discussions and share information on particular topics relevant to our work. This policy aims to protect individuals volunteering with us in any role and to encourage you to take responsibility for what you write, exercise good judgment and common sense.

This policy deals with the use of all forms of social media, including Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram and all other social networking sites, and all other internet postings, including blogs. Volunteers may be required to remove internet postings which are deemed to constitute a breach of this policy.

Volunteers must not post disparaging or defamatory statements about:

- HDC, HDC staff, our clients, volunteers, or members past or present, suppliers and vendors; and other affiliates and stakeholders.
- Volunteers should also avoid social communications that might be misconstrued in a way that could damage HDCs business reputation, even indirectly.
- Volunteers are personally responsible for what they communicate in social media.
- Remember that what you publish might be available to be read by the masses, including colleagues, volunteers, future employers, and social acquaintances for a long time. Keep this in mind before you post content.
- A photo consent form must be obtained prior to posting images of people and text which may identify them on social media.
- HDC does not permit tagging of vulnerable adults or anyone under the age of 18.
- There is no obligation for volunteers to link their personal social media to any HDC social media.

- Volunteers are not permitted to set up social media accounts on behalf of HDC.
- If you disclose your affiliation on personal accounts as a volunteer of HDC, you must also state that your views do not represent those of HDC. For example, you could state, “the views in this posting do not represent the views of HDC.” You should also ensure that your profile and any content you post are consistent with the image you present to those you work with as part of your volunteering role.
- You are responsible for the security settings of any social media sites you use and should ensure they are set to the appropriate level if you wish to limit who can see your information.
- Remember that you **must respect confidentiality at all times** and protect confidential information. You should be mindful of Data Protection issues, if in doubt speak to the lead task ranger.
- Confidential information includes things such as unpublished details about our work, details of current projects, future projects, financial information, or information held on our supporters, staff, or volunteers.
- Avoid posting comments about sensitive HDC related topics. Even if you make it clear that your views do not represent those of our organisation, your comments could still damage the council's reputation.
- If you are uncertain or concerned about the appropriateness of any statement or posting, refrain from making the communication until you discuss it with your volunteer supervisor.
- If you see content in social media that disparages or reflects poorly on HDC or our stakeholders, you should report it to [countryside@hart.gov.uk](mailto:countryside@hart.gov.uk) or to your task leader.

## SECTION 15: References

[Our policies and procedures | Hart District Council](#)

## SECTION 16: Want to know more?

For further information about any aspect of volunteering not covered here, please do not hesitate to talk to the Task Leader or other staff members, who will all be happy to help.

### Contact Information:

**Tel:** 01252 622122

**Email:** [countryside@hart.gov.uk](mailto:countryside@hart.gov.uk)

**Website:** [www.hart.gov.uk](http://www.hart.gov.uk)

**Twitter:** [@HartCouncil](https://twitter.com/HartCouncil)

**Facebook:** [/HartDistrictCouncil](https://www.facebook.com/HartDistrictCouncil)