



Volunteer Handbook



Our Vision:

‘To create and maintain a continuous green space along the Blackwater River Corridor, attractive to wildlife and the community.’

Welcome!

Thank you for volunteering your time to help Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership. We believe that volunteering should be open to all and we welcome anyone who wishes to volunteer. Volunteers bring a wide range of skills and interests to our work, and are a rare and precious asset that we value, and wish to support in as many ways as possible.

The special places that we look after, the wildlife that we encourage and the access routes that we manage benefit many thousands of people throughout the Blackwater Valley, and we couldn't do it without you.

Covid 19 – agreement to participate

We are currently re-opening our volunteering opportunities, but to make it as safe as possible for everyone you will now need to book. By booking on one of our volunteering opportunities you confirm that:

- Neither you nor anyone in your household are unwell or has been unwell within the last 14 days with a new continuous cough, high temperature, or loss of / change in taste or smell. These are symptoms of Covid-19, and you must follow Government guidance on self-isolating and testing
- You are NOT **Clinically Extremely Vulnerable** (this is sometimes called “shielding” - it is likely you will have been notified of this by your GP or NHS)
- You will only book for tasks which are outdoor based and not public facing if you consider you are **Clinically Vulnerable** (this will include people aged 70 or over, or who have underlying health conditions such as diabetes, or heart disease)
- You understand that there will be physical distancing and extra hygiene measures in place during all tasks and you agree to adhere to them at all times
- Inform us immediately if within 14 days of attending a volunteer task you become unwell with a new continuous cough, high temperature, or loss of / change in taste or smell.
- You understand that in participating in a volunteer task, despite our best endeavours to make our tasks as safe as possible, there remains a risk of Covid-19 transmission

Thank you for your continued interest in volunteering with Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership.

Please note that acceptance of this handbook will be deemed to be acknowledgement of an agreement with the principles outlined above.

This agreement is binding only in honour and is not intended to be legally binding but aims to tell you what you need to know to get started and should answer any questions which arise during your time volunteering with us. However, if you do have any other questions please do not hesitate to get in touch with your staff contact.

We ask that as a volunteer you:

- Work with us to achieve our aims and objectives;
- Are reliable and give commitment;
- Discuss any problems/issues immediately with the appropriate person;
- Respect confidentiality, equal opportunities and health & safety policies;
- Attend relevant training;
- Are a positive representative of BVCP to make the tasks an enjoyable day for everyone;
- Let us know if you'd like to stop volunteering with us so we can review our opportunities;
- Comply with health & safety rules set down by BVCP;
- ENJOY YOURSELF!

As a volunteer you can expect:

- A clear volunteer support network;
- To be given tasks that are within your capabilities, and that are of benefit to both you and BVCP;
- A clearly defined outline of the role we would like you to undertake;
- To have a member of staff nominated as a key contact for each task;
- BVCP to strive to ensure equality of opportunity with our organisation;
- Opportunities to develop your countryside skills, e.g. step construction, wildlife surveys, using machinery or leading other volunteers.
- Safe working conditions.

We will also do our best to ensure that you:

- Are kept informed of changes or developments affecting you;
- Have the opportunity to be involved with decision making that affects you;
- Are able to say no to unreasonable or inappropriate requests outside the task requirements;
- Are encouraged to feed back suggestions or concerns to BVCP staff;
- Feel that your contribution is valued by BVCP staff, who are fully aware of the nature and purpose of volunteering;
- Are able to see how your contribution fits into the broader objectives of BVCP.

Induction and Training

Starting out

All new volunteers will receive an induction when they begin. This will vary depending on the nature of the role undertaken, but will include discussing the expectations of both parties and the identification of named staff contacts. As part of this process you will be asked to complete a registration form; your details will then be entered onto our database so you can receive further information about volunteering with BVCP. All information provided will remain strictly confidential in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018.

Volunteer tasks

BVCP runs a variety of conservation tasks throughout the year. Your particular skills and interests will be discussed during your induction so that, wherever possible, we can adapt tasks to suit your interest and level of experience. Refreshments are provided, but you will need to bring your own lunch. Except in extreme cases, tasks will run whatever the weather, so please ensure that you dress appropriately and pack extra layers / sun cream / drinks as necessary. Volunteer Task Programs are available via e-mail, and on Facebook or our blog. All volunteers will have a designated staff contact that they should use as a point of contact for task information, queries or problems. In addition, any member of staff can provide general information regarding up-coming tasks.

Supervision

As a new volunteer, you will initially be closely supervised by BVCP staff and/or Volunteer Leaders to ensure that you receive the necessary instruction to work safely and effectively. You will not be expected to work alone, or to take responsibility for other members of the group. As your experience and confidence grows you may be asked to carry out tasks requiring lone working (e.g. wildlife surveys), or to become a Volunteer Leader; additional training will be given in all cases.

Uniform

Some BVCP uniform is available if you wish to wear it.

Health & Safety

Blackwater Valley Countryside is committed to providing an environment which offers the highest level of health, safety and well-being.

Our aim is to ensure our activities benefit the environment, whilst keeping employees, contractors, volunteers and the public safe. In order to do this we adopt a comprehensive policy on the environment, safety and health that includes:

- Encouraging a positive, pro-active safety culture;
- Ensuring that responsibility for health & safety matters is at the appropriate level within the organisation;
- Striving to identify and reduce causes of accidents, incidents and ill-health;
- Ensuring that all our machinery and tools are safe, well maintained and fit for purpose;
- Monitoring and measuring performance;
- Prioritising health & safety improvements on the basis of risk evaluation;
- Minimising the storage and use of hazardous substances;
- Striving to prevent pollution, reduce consumption of non-renewable resources and minimise waste;
- Actively managing the ecology and heritage of our sites.

All staff and volunteers shall:

- Fully understand their responsibilities and act in a safe manner at all times;
- Avoid danger to themselves, other volunteers, BVCP staff and the public by their acts or omissions;
- Support BVCP managers in their health & safety endeavours and co-operate fully in all matters concerning the health & safety of themselves and others.
- Be respectful to make the tasks enjoyable for everyone.

We all have a responsibility to act in a safe manner and ensure that no task is considered more important than the health, safety and welfare of individuals, and the protection of our environment.

Our responsibilities

All volunteers will receive health & safety guidance as part of their induction. A risk assessment will be completed prior to every task or activity to identify the site hazards, the risks associated with the tasks, to suggest ways to minimise those risks and to outline the course of action in the unlikely event of an accident.

The task leader must make you aware of any risks by giving a health & safety talk at the beginning of the task. You will also receive a 'toolbox talk' and follow up supervision to ensure that tools are being used correctly and safely.

Your health

It is up to you to inform us, and anybody else who needs to know, of any relevant health information. If you have any medical conditions or illnesses, or are taking medication that you think we need to know about, please do so by completing the appropriate section on the registration form or by informing the task leader prior to commencing the task. It is your responsibility to inform your BVCP contact if there are any changes in your health, and to complete a new form. Please ensure your tetanus protection is up to date.

You must inform us immediately if within 14 days of attending a volunteer task you become unwell with a new continuous cough, high temperature, or loss of/change in taste or smell.

Tools

Use of your own hand or power tools whilst on site is strictly at the discretion of the task leader, who will ensure they are in safe working order and that all users have undergone adequate training. Please note that you will not be covered by Hampshire County Council's insurance when using any equipment not provided directly by BVCP.

Personal protective equipment (PPE)

Some activities require specific equipment to be worn, e.g. gloves or a hard hat. This will be provided by BVCP and must be worn if you wish to take part in the activity. However, for comfort, we recommend that you purchase your own safety boots.

Insurance

You will be covered by Hampshire County Council's insurance as long as the activities you are carrying out are authorised by BVCP and you are following the guidance given. This does not apply if you are using tools that have not been provided by BVCP – see 'Tools'.

Lone Working

If you are in a situation where you need to carry out duties alone, extra caution is necessary. If this is as part of a BVCP group task, please make sure that the task leader knows where you have gone and then confirm with them that you have returned safely. Please do not volunteer individually outside of a BVCP task, i.e. to carry out a survey, without first discussing your plans with BVCP. It is essential to consult BVCP's Lone Working Policy for full guidelines on safe working in either case.

Working with children & vulnerable adults

We appreciate the help of volunteers to support tasks with young or vulnerable people, where we will all be working in a single group. Volunteers will not be given any responsibility or left without supervision while working with young people (under 18 years) or vulnerable people, unless an 'enhanced disclosure check' has been undertaken through the Disclosure & Barring Service (DBS).

Driving

If you would like to drive a BVCP vehicle, i.e. as Volunteer Leader, you will be asked to provide access to your driving licence information via www.gov.uk, and to familiarise yourself with HCC's Corporate Transport procedure. Full details will be provided.

Reporting Accidents

Please report any accidents or near misses to the task leader.

How to report a suggestion or concern

BVCP aims to make all volunteering experiences positive and enjoyable, and to treat all volunteers fairly, objectively and consistently. We value your feedback as a way of striving to improve the opportunities we offer volunteers, and encourage two-way communications as a means of preventing problems before they arise. However, we realise that difficult situations sometimes do arise, and if this is the case, please do get in touch.

1. Please discuss your ideas or any complaints with the task leader on the day. We are more than happy to adapt the task to suit volunteers; many issues can easily be addressed on the task.
2. If you do not feel your feedback has been dealt with on the task, please get in touch with BVCP (details on the first page). The Volunteer Co-ordinator will listen to your comments, and then reply within a month to allow for investigations and absences
3. If you are unhappy with the response, then please contact the Senior Ranger, who will examine the matter and respond within a month. Their decision is final.

How we resolve a complaint about a volunteer

We strive to make volunteering with BVCP a positive and welcoming experience. If volunteers put themselves or others at risk, or are not respectful, BVCP aim to resolve to issue swiftly and confidentially.

1. Any inappropriate conduct will be dealt with swiftly on the day by the task leader or Volunteer Co-ordinator (depending on how their complaint was received). They will discuss the issue with all parties, listen to their points of view and see if there are any external factors affecting their ability to carry out the task or their attitude. The task leader or Volunteer Co-ordinator will then discuss the issue and explain why the volunteer's actions cause a problem, e.g. choosing not to wear the PPE provided, or how their behaviour could make others feel discriminated.
2. In the unlikely event that the matter hasn't been resolved, the Volunteer Co-ordinator will have a formal discussion with the volunteer. The Volunteer Co-ordinator will identify any extra support or supervision we can offer, and agree a timescale for the volunteer to change their actions.
3. If the volunteer still poses a risk to themselves or other people, or is not respectful, they will be asked to leave by the Volunteer Co-ordinator. If they wish to appeal then the Senior Ranger will investigate and reply within a month, whose decision is final.

There are some occasions when volunteers can be suspended immediately while an investigation is carried out. For example: causing substantial danger to themselves or others, swearing at other people, theft or being under the influence of drink or illegal drugs. The case will be investigated by the Volunteer Co-ordinator to see whether it is suitable for them to return as a volunteer.

Social Media Policy

Social media plays a vital role in our communications with the public and our partners. As volunteers you may be privy to sensitive information; it is vital that you are discreet, and never share any information that the public/our partners would not otherwise have access to. We want to protect our staff and volunteers, and our reputation.

In order to do this we ask all volunteers to:

- Not post disparaging or defamatory statements about any staff, volunteers or BVCP on their personal social media accounts or on any BVCP or HCC social media pages. If you have a concern or suggestion, please follow the procedure outlined in this handbook overleaf;
- Gain consent from any individuals that appear in images you wish to post;
- Never tag or mention any vulnerable adults or young people under the age of 18;
- Not set up social media sites on behalf of BVCP;
- Not reveal or publish any sensitive information about BVCP, its partners, staff or volunteers. This includes full names, ages etc, details of projects, site security information, financial details etc;
- Not engage in topical conversations or debates on BVCP social media pages. Our followers will often leave comments, ask questions or make complaints. BVCP staff have been trained to deal with all social media responses and it is never appropriate for volunteers to respond, comment or add detail.
- If you are unsure of what you are about to post, please seek advice from your BVCP contact.

Views expressed by BCVP staff on their personal social media pages do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of BVCP.

If you need to discuss an issue with a member of staff, please speak to them directly or contact them on 01252 331353, or at blackwater.valley@hants.gov.uk.

Data Protection & Confidentiality

We seek to ensure, under the Data Protection Act, that our records are kept in accordance with the Act, and that staff and volunteers abide by it.

All necessary volunteer details will be held on BVCP's database and will be accessible only to designated members of staff. You may, on completion of the correct procedures, have sight of all the records held under your name.

You must not disclose any information given to you in confidence to any person. You must not pass on the details of staff or other volunteers without their prior consent.

Please also note that the principle of confidentiality remains after you have completed a task or are no longer a volunteer for BVCP, and you should not disclose sensitive information obtained whilst a volunteer under any circumstance.

Thank you for volunteering with us