

London Borough of Havering Parks and Open Spaces Service

FRIENDS OF PARKS

INFORMATION PACK

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

We all need green, open spaces to recharge our batteries. Fortunately for residents and visitors, Havering has more than its fair share of parkland and protected countryside, making it one of the greenest London boroughs. In fact green spaces cover more than half of the borough. It may therefore come as a surprise that the Council manages approximately 100 different sites varying in size from small village greens to large urban parks, such as Dagnam and Bedford's Park.

In the last few years the Council has made a renewed commitment to improve Havering's parks and open spaces by carrying out a range of refurbishment projects across the borough. It is also producing a series of strategies and management plans to guide the development of these valuable assets.

In addition to this, and in keeping with the desire to engage with local communities the Parks team is very keen to involve local groups that are representative of the their local area to work with us to manage and plan parks and open spaces in Havering.

This pack has therefore been produced in order to make the setting up of a 'Friends of Parks' group as easy and straightforward as possible.

1.2 The first 'Friends of Parks' groups

By April 2005 10 Friends of parks group had been set up. By working in partnership with us and other public bodies and funders, Friends groups, once constituted, have found that they are in a position to apply for grants from external funders to complement the Council's resources. This means that even more improvements can be made. Examples of existing Friends groups can be found in section 2.

1.3 The Council's response

The successes that have been enjoyed by the now-established Friends groups have led to more communities wanting to improve their own local park. The Parks service has listened to the requests that have been made for more information, help and support, and has developed a response to this, including:

- The production of this guide
- Help with the provision of training
- Giving advice on insurance
- Giving on-going information and support
- Allocating officers as a direct point of contact

1.4 The advantages

The Council welcomes the opportunity to work with local communities, after all, it is local people who know best about the difficulties in their local area and the potential to develop local amenities. By working together to improve the Borough's open spaces, we can combine our strengths. The Council, by contributing expertise and previous experience, local groups by bringing their in-depth knowledge of the needs of the local community; as well as inviting the contribution of specialist skills and knowledge of other partner organisations such as the police.

1.5 And finally

Setting up and running a Friends of Parks group may seem rather daunting to begin with, with so many processes and issues to consider. However, there is a great deal of advice, help and support available in Havering to make sure that your group succeeds – starting with this guide.

We wish you and your Friends of Park group every success in its aim to improve your local park for the benefit of the community and park users, and we look forward to working with you and supporting your group as it develops.

We hope that you find this guide useful. If you have any comments about the guide, or feel that any of the information is unclear, do let us know. We welcome your feedback.

2. What can Friends Groups do?

Friends groups bring together the strengths of local communities and the Council to make a real difference to local parks, enriching the lives of those who use the parks.

The work of a well-organised volunteer group can be extremely beneficial to both the volunteers and the park in which they work. Volunteers can learn new skills, meet new people and gain a sense of achievement and ownership of the park. The park itself benefits through the work the group completes which may include practical tasks, receiving funding for improvement work, or holding events to increase public awareness and enjoyment of the park.

There are several volunteer groups in existence working in the parks in Havering. Each group is different in the way it has been formed and the work it completes, but they all are effective and make a real difference.

Friends of Dagnam Park originally came together in 2003 to combat the anti social behaviour in the park. They still continue this work and have forged good links with the council and the police. Whilst the problems with anti social behaviour persist the group have branched into other areas. Friends of Dagnam Park now run outdoor guided walks and indoor-illustrated talks as well as undertaking practical conservation work in the park. Through their web-site the group distribute news, and information on history and natural history of the park is available for browsing or downloading. Much of this material is original and includes contributions by the group's supporters. The group's campaigning has been essential in achieving designation of the site as a Local Nature Reserve, which will be officially declared in July 2005.

Visit their website at <http://www.friendsofdagnampark.org.uk>

Friends of Cottons Park formed in 2002 with the main aim of improving the playsite at the park. The group successfully obtained funding from Living Spaces to contribute to monies from the council's capital programme to install new play area equipment. The new equipment was installed in the summer of 2004 and is now open to the local community to enjoy. The combined funds allocated to the refurbishment of the playsite were enough to enable further improvements. Friends of Cottons Park are working with the council to investigate the options for these improvements. As well as the improvements to the facilities in the park, Friends of Cottons Park are working to increase the use of the park. The group have held various community events raising the park's profile and are working with Community Police and Havering detached youth workers to help younger people appreciate the park. It is hoped that whilst working in partnership with the Council the work of Friends of Cottons Park will continue to help benefit the local community in various ways.

Members of **Friends of Bedford's Park** initially met in July 2004 after advertisement by the Havering Parks Service department and Essex Wildlife Trust to form a volunteer group for the park. This was done as it was felt that local interest in the Park was significant and that the work of a volunteer group could help in the management of the site. The organisation of events helps to promote the park to the local community. After a couple of meetings it was evident that a volunteer group could be formed and the committee members were elected. The friends group continues to complete practical work improvements in the park and at the time of writing are working on a constitution.

3. How do I find out if there is enough support?

Getting funds to develop a local area, or taking on practical tasks, is only possible if there are enough like-minded people who want to see an improvement or who wish to be involved.

It is essential to canvas the views of local residents, current and potential park users and the Council's Parks team at the start of the process. This proves that there is a need for improvement, and identifies what the community view as the priorities for the area. At the very least, a group will only be effective if there are enough people involved in contributing to the decisions that are taken. Also, if external funding is being sought, then funders will expect to see evidence of consultation, as well as joint working between the Friends group and the Council.

Carrying out a consultation of local views is best approached in stages:

Stage 1 identifies the general usage of the park, what people think should happen to make the park better, and the level of interest in forming a Friends of Park group.

The types of questions that you will need to ask at this stage are:

- Do you currently use the park?
- What changes would you like to see in the park and how would this change your use of the park?
- What are your main concerns about the park?
- Would you be willing to join a group to work out a plan for the park?
- Are you willing to carry out any practical tasks in the park?

You may also want to write a letter to the local paper, or put a poster in local newsagents' windows, making residents aware that there are hopes to develop a Friends of Park group, and how they can get involved and make their views known.

At the end of stage 1 you will have a better idea about the number of people that will be available to help start up a group, and to get the work rolling. There needs to be a minimum of three people if the group is to become formalised and adopt a constitution (see the section 4 for more information about constitutions). You will also have a clearer idea about what type of Friends group this will become.

Stage 2 takes the consultation wider to get more detailed information about local use and views. By now your group is likely to have been formed, and the work can be shared among more people. At a meeting, you will need to put together a list of all the local groups of people that use/may use the park (these will form part of the "interested stakeholders" for the park). These could include:

- older people
- children
- parents
- young people
- schools
- sports clubs
- other voluntary groups in the area (i.e. scouts, brownies, carer and toddler groups, older people's clubs, etc)

You will have already identified some of the key themes for the park from your stage 1 consultation, and as this is a wider consultation you may want to develop a questionnaire to show the level of support for each type of initiative. It would be a good idea at this stage to take the help of your designated Parks Officer to make sure that your questionnaire is well constructed and for advice on how to "pilot" this part of the consultation.

If you need advice on the best way to make contact with specific groups, your designated Parks Officer will be able to help you.

4. Where do I go from here?

4.1 Contacting the Council

Havering Parks service has Officers who are responsible for the development of the borough's parks. Once you are decided about establishing a Friends group you can contact the Parks Service on (01708) 434743 to liase with the officer who deals with your park. This will be your point of contact in the Council. They will offer you assistance in setting up your group and be able to give you technical advice and support throughout.

4.2 Getting your group established

So that everyone is clear about your group's aims, it is helpful to have a constitution, or set of rules. Also, if your Friends group is planning to apply for grants, funders will ask for a copy of your constitution. We have included a model constitution at the end of this pack.

Your constitution will cover the way that your Friends group will work, for instance:

- Who is eligible to join the group
- How the committee is elected
- How decisions are made
- Whether the group has powers to open a bank account
- And more

It is important for all members of the Friends group to be clear about who will be responsible for running the group. This would probably be an elected committee of a small number of people – maybe between 3 and 15 – who represent the group and take decisions. The committee is responsible – by law - for running the group and making sure it achieves what it sets out to do. This is very important. If something goes wrong, or if you lose money, then the committee could be held personally liable. It is very important that the people who are interested in joining your committee are aware of this.

It is a good idea when you form your committee to have people who have skills in different areas - like finance, administration, publicity, previous experience on committees, and so on. If people don't have these skills, but are willing to learn, we can recommend suitable training courses.

4.3 Further information on setting up a voluntary or community group

Havco (Havering Association of Voluntary and Community Organisations) has produced a **Getting Started Guide** for new groups. The guide includes information such as:

- Why set up a group?

- Getting started
- Getting organised
- Formalising the structure
- Charity Registration

You can contact Havco direct for a copy.

4.4 Moving on

As well as having a constitution that covers the rules of the group, it is also a very good idea to have some written documents on three important matters; equal opportunities, health and safety and protection of vulnerable people. In fact, if your Friends group is expecting to apply for grants, funders will ask for copies of policies covering:

Equal opportunities (sometimes called diversity or equity). This shows that you have thought about the needs of everyone that wants to be part of your group, or uses the park.

Health and safety: this is a crucial matter for Friends of Parks groups as health and safety issues must be considered for every activity that is organised. The Parks Department can either advise or provide basic training and advice on health and safety issues for Friends of Parks groups. It is very important that the Friends group keeps the Parks Department informed of any practical tasks that the group plans to carry out, and of any organised events.

Protection of vulnerable people: the need for child protection matters is mostly understood, and the stories in the national press on the harm that can be inflicted on children by predatory adults, and other children, show how important it is to have a policy that protects any children and young people connected with your Friends group. In addition to this though, your group will want to make sure that all people who may be considered “vulnerable” are equally protected. So, as well as the need to protect children and young people from harm, the group may also need to think about adults with learning difficulties, and some older people who want to be part of the group, or use the park. Your policy may require people with special responsibilities to have a Criminal Record Bureau check (CRB) – this is sometimes known as a “police check”. Your lead Parks Officer can give you guidance on this, or make an appointment with Havco, who will organise the process for you.

More information on how to develop these policies is in Havco’s *Good Group Guide*, and sample policy documents are available on request. This will help you to get started. However, it is very important that your Friends group’s policies and procedures are known and understood by everyone, so that good practice becomes part of every activity.

5. What help can we expect?

There are many sources of help and support for community groups in Havering. This guide is just a starting point for people who are thinking about setting up a Friends of Park groups, with guidance on matters that need your immediate attention, for example:

5.1 Insurance

Your designated Parks Officer can advise on how to arrange insurance cover, which may be free of charge for your Friends group (provided your group attends some simple training sessions on health and safety matters).

5.2 Training

As well as the written guides that are available for you, there are other information sessions and training courses that your members will be able to attend. Often, courses are either free of charge, or at very low cost. Where there is a charge, there are sometimes sources of funding that will cover this (see the section on funding below). Typical training available might be:

Basic health and safety guidance for practical works such as litter picking and use of small hand tools such as bow saws and loppers.

Running a group: from organising a meeting, or dealing with the group's finances, to matters relating to volunteers, there are organisations in Havering that are here to help you:

- Havco
- Voluntary Community Action Havering (VCAH, Havering's volunteer bureau)
- Accounting for Community Enterprises (ACE)

Contact details for all these organisations are included in this guide, or get in touch with your designated Parks Officer to discuss how best to meet your group's needs

5.3 Funding

Your Friends of Parks group may require funding to support some of the activities you are planning to carry out. There are several ways you can raise funds, including: -

- Fundraising events
- Sponsorship from local businesses
- Collecting donations
- Approaching funding organisations

Further information about running a fundraising event, sponsorship and collecting donations is available on help sheets available from the Parks Team.

5.3.1 Funding Organisations

There are many organisations that distribute funding to support a wide variety of projects, including the kind of activities that you might want to deliver. Funding organisations include Government Departments and Agencies, the Lottery and Charitable Trusts. Some examples of funding schemes that may be useful for the Friends of Parks groups include: -

- Veolia Cleanaway Havering Riverside Trust. The Cleanaway Trust was established for the benefit of the London Borough of Havering. It supports activities that conserve and improve the environment as well as providing facilities in the interest of social welfare and for leisure and recreation. Generally grants awarded are for less than £30,000.
- Ford of Britain Trust. The Ford of Britain Trust offers funding to registered charities or similar to support projects concerned with various issues, including the environment, that will benefit local communities. Grants of up to £5,000 are available for one-off capital projects.
- B & Q Better Neighbourhood Grants can offer up to £500 of B & Q Materials to community groups who are within a 20 mile radius of a store.
- Action Earth. Is a volunteering campaign to enable people to take part in practical conservation projects. Support of £50 is available to help cover volunteer expenses and purchase equipment.

There are many other organisations that could be approached for funding depending on the nature and size of the particular project concerned. Each of these funding organisations has its own aims, objectives, rules and regulations that you are expected to meet. In addition, competition for the limited funds available can be extremely fierce. To help you identify and access funding for projects in Havering the Council has established the External Funding Service.

5.3.2 External Funding Service

The External Funding Service can help you with many aspects of project development as well as applying for funding. The services they can offer include: -

- Providing information regarding funding opportunities through a monthly Funding Focus Bulletin and a Small Grants Directory
- Conducting searches to identify organisations that could be approached to fund a particular project that you might want to develop

- Support for organisations developing projects, including help to produce a project plan and with completing application forms
- Help to ensure that monitoring systems are in place to meet funding organisations requirements
- General funding surgeries for any other application problems

Contact details for the external funding team are listed in the Contacts Section of this pack.

5.4 Links and informal support

Your designated Parks Officers can put you in touch with other Friends of Parks groups who could be a huge help as you develop your group and activities. There are also occasional informal get-togethers between Friends groups, where you can get to know members of other groups, and share knowledge and experiences.

5.5 Help sheets

The Parks Department is developing help sheets for Friends of Parks groups, which will be available during 2005. Help sheet topics will include:

- **Running an event:**
 - who to liaise with
 - what to consider
 - how to advertise your event
 - health and safety
 - risk assessments
 - useful contacts
- **Fundraising**
 - Events
 - Individual donations
 - Getting business support
 - Selling raffle tickets and street collections – the law
- **Marketing and promotion**
 - Building relationships
 - Press releases
 - Your own website
 - Designing a poster
 - Getting your message across (radio and other local news)

5. Contacts

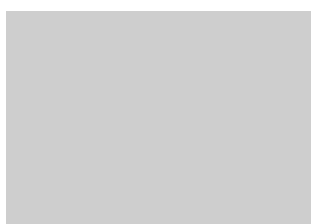
<p>Main contact for Friends group working in Parks Guidance on opportunities of a group Support the group</p>	<p>Parks and Open Spaces Cultural and Leisure Services The Stableblock Langtons House Billet Lane Hornchurch RM11 1XJ Tel. 01708 434743</p>
	<p>External Funding Service Regeneration, Policy & Planning Town Hall Main Road, Romford RM1 2BD Tel. 01708 432795</p>
	<p>Community Engagement Regeneration, Policy & Planning Town Hall Main Road, Romford RM1 2BD Tel. 01708 432492</p>
	<p>HAVCO - Havering Association of Voluntary and Community Organisations Community House 19/21 Eastern Road Romford Essex RM1 3NH Tel: 01708 742881 Fax: 01708 744373</p>
<p>Develop and promote volunteering Provide information and can help 'recruit' volunteers for a specific role or project</p>	<p>VCAH – Volunteer Community Action Havering Unit D6 Romford Seedbed Centre Davidson Way Romford RM70AZ Tel: 01708 746120</p>
<p>Training for practical tasks</p>	<p>BTCV- British Trust for Conservation Volunteers Thames Chase BTCV, The Forest Centre Broadfields Farm Pike Lane, Cranham UPMINSTER RM14 3NS Tel: 01708 641 880 Fax: 01708 640 581</p>

<p>Best practice resource for the voluntary sector, providing a wealth of free advice on subjects from trusteeship to employment law.</p>	<p>National Council for Voluntary Organisations</p>
<p>Promotes volunteering Advice on funding and training</p>	<p>Volunteering England (London) Regents Wharf 8 All Saints Street London N1 9RL Tel: 0845 305 6979 Fax 020 7520 8910 Email: information@volunteeringengland.org www.volunteering.org.uk</p>
<p>Training Nation-wide volunteering events</p>	<p>Community Service Volunteers (CSV) Head Office 237 Pentonville Road London N1 9NJ Switchboard: 020 7278 6601 information@csv.org.uk</p>

SAMPLE CONSTITUTION

This Constitution can be used as a guide. Please tailor this sample to reflect the character of your particular group as every group will be different. If you would like further advice regarding your constitution please contact the Parks Service

***Constitution of Friends of (insert name of park)
(and logo, if appropriate)***



1. Name of the Organisation

The name of The Group shall be “The Friends of *name of park*”, hereinafter also called The Group.

2. Aims of The Group

The aims of The Group are to:

improve the recreational facilities and amenities within *name of park*;
promote social and sporting activities and to create a safer environment for all of the community;
uphold equal opportunities and work for good relations amongst all members of the community.

3. The Executive Committee

3.1 Only members of The Group aged eighteen years and over shall be eligible to serve as a Committee Officer.

3.2 An Executive Committee shall be elected to carry out the business of The Group.

3.3 The Executive Committee shall be made up of a Secretary, Chair, Vice Chair, Treasurer, and up to 4 general members.

3.4 All Officers and Members of the Executive Committee must use the park and/or believe in furthering the aims of the 'Friends of (*insert name of park*)'.

3.5 All Officers and Members of the Executive Committee shall be made up of members who are entitled to voting rights (see membership section).

3.6 The committee must be elected at an Annual General Meeting (AGM).

3.7 All nominations for committee posts must be proposed and seconded before being put forward for election.

3.8 Officers shall carry out the duties given to them by Friends of (*insert name of park*) Meetings.

3.9 The Executive Committee shall meet once a month, and no less than ten times a year.

3.10 Minutes of Executive Committee meetings shall be available to all members.

3.11 If a vacancy occurs by death, resignation or disqualification among the Executive Committee Officers of The Group, the Executive Committee shall have the power to fill this post from among its members.

3.12 All Officers shall hold their post until the conclusion of the next Annual General Meeting of The Group and shall be eligible for re-election.

4. Membership

Membership of The Group shall be open to:

4.1 Individuals aged eighteen years and over who use the park and are interested in supporting the aims of 'The Friends of (*insert name of park*)', who shall be known as Full Members

4.2 Clubs, groups and societies which use the park and are interested in supporting the aims of 'The Friends of (*insert name of park*)'. Each club, group or society shall appoint one individual person for nomination as a member to represent it and vote on its behalf at meetings, who shall be known as an Affiliated Group.

4.3 Representatives from statutory bodies, and any person under the age of eighteen years may be invited to join, and shall be known as Associate Members.

4.4 Members must actively seek to represent the various needs of the area, and will not discriminate on the grounds of age, gender, nationality, colour, political opinion, marital status, race, religious opinion, sexual orientation or disability.

5. Members voting rights

5.1 Individual Full members shall be entitled to one voting right.

5.2 Affiliated Group members shall be offered one voting right.

5.3 Associate Members will not have any voting rights.

6. Termination of Membership

6.1 The Friends of (insert name of park) Committee shall have the right, for good and sufficient reason; to exclude any individual member from The Group (including any elected officer), provided that the member shall have their case considered by the Committee before a final decision is made. There is no appeal following a final decision.

6.2 Any member of The Group may resign his/her membership by giving written notice to the to that effect.

7. Equal Opportunities

7.1 The Group will treat all qualifying members equally, whatever their race, colour, ethnic origin, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, age, HIV status, physical or mental disability, political opinion, state of health, appearance, marital status or family circumstances.

7.2 The Group will apply a commitment to equal opportunities when deciding who serves on the Executive Committee.

8. Finance

8.1 All money raised by or on behalf of The Group is to be used only to further the aims of The Group.

8.2 The Treasurer shall open a bank account in the name of "The Friends of (*insert name of park*)". The Treasurer must have relevant experience or have attended an appropriate training course. Where necessary, training will be given to other members of the Committee.

8.3 Cheque signatories will be nominated by the Executive Committee (one to be the Treasurer and two other Officers of the Executive Committee)

8.4 All cheques and instructions to The Group's bankers shall require two of the agreed signatures.

8.5 The Treasurer shall have the accounts audited/checked by a Finance Officer or a Treasurer of a community group, law centre or council for voluntary service at the end of the financial year. (31 March).

8.6 The accounts shall be made available to members at the Annual General Meeting.

9. Annual General Meeting (AGM)

9.1 There shall be an inaugural meeting held in (*insert date*) and an AGM within 14 months thereafter at which the Committee will report on its work and present a statement of accounts.

9.2 The AGM shall elect a new Committee for the next year. All nominations must be proposed and seconded before being put forward for election.

9.3 The AGM shall have the opportunity of recommending amendments to the Constitution. These will be proposed and seconded before the amendments are voted on.

9.4 The Secretary will notify all members of the date of the meeting not less than fourteen days before the AGM, either by making an announcement on The Group's website, notice board, previous minutes or by telephone.

10. Other General Meetings

10.1 There will be a General Meeting every two months open to all people who use Cottons Park and who also believe in furthering the aims of the Friends of Cottons Park Committee,

10.2 A Special General Meeting open to all members will be held if twelve or more members entitled to vote submit in writing a request for such a meeting to the Secretary. The Secretary shall arrange for the meeting to take place within fourteen days.

10.3 The Secretary will publicise in advance all general meetings. This to be done by sending out agendas with dates and times to members that have attended or sent their apologies to any of the previous three meetings.

11. Rules and Procedures at all meetings:

11.1 Members shall, at all times, conduct themselves in a reasonable manner at meetings, and will be excluded if they contravene the objectives of

11.2 The Group, or bring it into disrepute. Exclusion will be by a majority of those present and voting at any quorum committee or general meeting.

11.3 Before voting any member may propose an amendment which must also be seconded.

11.4 All decisions arising from questions raised at any meeting shall be decided by a simple majority of those present and entitled to vote thereat.

11.5 Only members present at the meeting may vote.

11.6 No Member shall exercise more than one vote, but in the case of an equality of votes the Chair shall have a second or casting vote.

12. Minutes

Minute books shall be kept by The Group of all Committee and General Meetings.

13. Quorum

13.1 No General Meeting or Annual General Meeting shall take place if less than one third of the total number of voting members is present.

13.2 No Executive Committee meeting shall take place if less than a third or 5 members of the Executive Committee, whichever is the lesser, are present.

14. Changes to the Constitution

14.1 The constitution can be altered at an AGM or at a special general meeting called formally for that purpose.

14.2 Any suggested changes to the constitution must be handed to the Secretary 14 days before the AGM.

14.3 Changes to the constitution must be agreed by two thirds of the members present at the meeting.

15. Dissolution

15.1 The Group may only be dissolved at a Special General Meeting called for that purpose and must be advertised fourteen days before the meeting.

15.2 A proposal to dissolve The Group shall take effect only if agreed by two thirds of the members present at the meeting.

15.3 Any property or funds remaining after all debts have been paid shall be donated to community groups or charities within the Havering area.

15.4 Minutes of the final meeting must be sent to all members.

16. Adoption of Constitution

This Constitution was adopted as the Constitution of 'The Friends of (insert name of park)' at a General meeting held at (insert location of meeting) on (date).

Signed: _____ Signed: _____
(Chair) (Secretary).

Name _____ Name : _____
(Printed) (Printed)

Date: _____