

# Friends of Parks

**Guidelines for setting up a  
friends group in Kingston**



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## **NOTES**

This document relates to any 'friends', community or volunteer group wanting to improve a green space or playground.

To make an initial enquiry about setting up a Friends of Parks group contact Environmental Services on 0208 547 5002.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

This information has been developed to help groups and/or individuals interested in setting up a Friends of Parks group in the Kingston borough. It explains the basic stages of starting up a Friends of Parks group, from writing a constitution to promoting your group and its projects.

## **What is a Friends of Parks group?**

Friends of Parks groups play a vital role in protecting and enhancing local parks, woodlands, play areas and green spaces in the area. Working in partnership with the Council, they give residents a greater say in what goes on in their local park.

## **What do they do?**

The groups volunteer their time and energy to get involved with a huge range of different projects including:

- fundraising for improvements and events in the green space
- enhancing biodiversity (e.g. creation of wildflower meadows, installing bird and bat boxes)
- practical tasks like clean-ups and tree planting
- improving access
- contributing to the planning and management of the green space
- producing leaflets and other educational material

It is entirely up to the group what level of activity they undertake. Some may operate at a low level, simply distributing information regarding the park, whilst others can be more active, raising funds and organising events.

## **2. SETTING UP A GROUP**

### **Getting members**

The first step is to find like-minded people who want to get involved in your local green space. This might seem quite daunting but there are a few simple things you can do such as posting flyers through front doors or putting up posters. Personal contact, such as speaking to people in your green space is often the most important factor in getting the community involved.

A good idea is to have an informal gathering or event in order to attract as many potential friends as possible. Contact your Green Spaces Officer, Neighbourhood Manager and local Councillors as they may know of other people with an interest in the area, from sports teams to local schools, who you should invite.

You could also place an advertisement in the local newspaper or, better still, contact the paper and persuade them to do an article (preferably with a picture).

### **Setting your aims**

In the process of developing your group you will start to get a picture of what the main issues are in the green space.

Most funding bodies will want you to demonstrate that your project/s reflect the wishes of the majority of people. This can be done in a number of ways, such as distributing a questionnaire or holding a public event. A 'walk around' the park with council staff and group members may be a good opportunity to highlight the key issues that need to be addressed. Once you have determined what the issues are, you should establish what you are going to tackle first, identify who can help you do it and work out how much it will cost.

If the green space falls under the management of the Council, it is important that the ideas and goals of the group are in line/support the Council's plans for such space. This will ensure the group's objectives are not in conflict with the aims of the council, thus enabling collaboration in the management and maintenance of the green space.

### **3. MAKING YOUR GROUP MORE FORMAL**

Although not a prerequisite for establishing a Friends group, the next step could be to make your group more formal by setting up a committee and putting together a constitution. This is certainly required if your group is to apply for funding from the Council or most other organisations.

#### **Choosing a constitution**

A constitution explains how your group will be managed, from your aims and objectives to how your meetings will be run. It helps make sure all members are treated equally, and grant giving organisations will usually require groups to have a written constitution before they can apply for money. A sample constitution is enclosed within this pack to help get you started (Appendix 1).

You will need to formally adopt the constitution at your first AGM (i.e. everyone agrees they are happy with it). At least two members of the committee should sign and date it, and there should be a record kept of this.

#### **Setting up a Committee**

The committee helps with the running of the group. The constitution you have adopted will provide details of what responsibilities the committee has, how many committee members there are, etc. Usually there will be three office bearers (Chairperson, Treasurer and Secretary) and approximately five committee members.

The Chairperson acts as the leader of the group and is usually the main contact with the Council. They lead meetings and ensure there is smooth running of the group.

The Secretary ensures all group members are kept informed of what the group is doing. They write agendas for meetings and take the minutes.

The Treasurer takes care of the financial affairs of the group. It's good practice to have a term of office for office-bearers (1-3 years), especially the

Chair. It's also a good idea to have a 'Vice Chair' who can be trained up to fill the Chair position when the Chair has served their term or represent the Chair when he/she is unable to be present.

## **Annual General Meeting (AGM)**

You will need to hold an AGM to adopt your constitution and approve your committee. Thereafter an AGM should be held once a year in order to elect or re-elect committee members and present an annual report and accounts to the rest of the group's members. The number of other meetings you hold is up to the group.

All meetings held by your group should have an agenda, indicating what issues will be included in your meeting.

Minutes should be taken at every meeting to keep a record of what was discussed. They don't have to be a complete copy of everything that is said, but they should reflect the major themes that were discussed and include any action points marked against a name. Minutes should also record the names of the people who attended and any apologies sent by those who couldn't attend the meeting.

It is usually best practice to include the Green Spaces Officer and Neighbourhood Manager in the circulation of your minutes.

## **Set up a bank account**

Finally, after your first AGM, you will need to set up a bank account to manage any money the group generates from fund raising, i.e. grants or events. The account should be set up in the name of the group. There should be at least two signatories for the account, and they should be non-related members of the committee (usually the Chair and Treasurer). Several banks operate Treasurer's Accounts, tailored for small groups. Ask for an explanatory leaflet, which will guide you through the process.

## **Insurance**

It is highly recommended that your group considers public liability insurance. This will cover your group organisers and your volunteers for your legal liability to meet claims for accidental injury to your own volunteers and any third parties and their property where you, your group or your volunteers are at fault.

## **Health and safety**

To comply with Health and Safety laws your group should carry out risk assessments, put measures in place to help prevent accidents and then record any accidents as they occur. It is advisable to carry out a risk assessment prior to an event. This involves identifying hazards (e.g. using tools), deciding who might be harmed and how, and recording the findings of your assessment (e.g. the main risks and the measures you have taken to deal with them).

An example of a risk assessment can be found in appendix 2. Contact Quadron's Horticultural Development Manager (HDM) for further assistance.

Things to consider when holding an activity are:

- identify a First Aider for the event
- appoint an event co-ordinator who will know the emergency procedures and who accidents should be reported to
- make sure all children under 16 are accompanied by adults
- at the start of an event make sure volunteers are made aware of how to handle tools/equipment properly and of the potential risks associated with the work they will be doing
- no personal power tools should be brought to an event
- take care to protect wildlife if working in the countryside, parks, woodland or open spaces.

## **4. GETTING YOUR MESSAGE ACROSS**

You should tell as many people as possible about any events you are arranging or projects running. Good publicity will benefit your group by raising awareness of your work, getting your message across and gaining new members. There are a number of ways you can do this.

### **Posters and flyers**

A simple poster can be put up in parks, notice boards, schools, local shops, pubs, libraries and community centres. This will help to get people to the event. You could also make smaller 'flyers' or leaflets and distribute them on shop counters or by hand – people often respond well to a 'personal touch'. You could run a competition with your local school to design a poster for you and ask your local shop to photocopy posters and leaflets for you.

### **Local media**

Another way of informing people of your event is through your local newspaper, local information websites and radio. Papers often have 'What's On' columns which advertise details of events from small groups. You should contact the news desk at least one or two weeks before the event (or earlier if the publication is a 'monthly') so that they can put the date in their diary. Then contact them the day before the publication goes to press to ensure they have remembered your event.

### **Things you need to tell the media:**

- what's happening at the event
- when the event is taking place
- where it is taking place
- who is taking part
- why it is happening
- how it will affect local people

This information can be all put together in a press release (Appendix 3). An unusual event, celebrity participation, a good photo opportunity, or a news story is more likely to be used by the media. Sometimes the press will send a photographer and/or a reporter but this can't be guaranteed.

If no media representative attends you can send them a concise description of what happened (e.g. how many people took part and what was achieved), along with photos taken before, during and after the event. Most local newspapers will accept your photographs if they are of a good quality.

### **Newsletters**

These are a great way of informing your members and the wider community of what your group is up to, celebrating successful events, promoting upcoming activities and recruiting new members.

The Council's Neighbourhood Bulletins can be accessed and newsworthy stories and events promoted via this means. Contact your local Neighbourhood Manager for further details.

### **Email database**

Set up a secure database of members' email addresses. This is a very quick tool to disseminate information and to attach newsletters, thus saving on stationery and delivery.

When sending an email use the blind carbon copy (Bcc) facility so that an individual's email address is hidden from the other people receiving the email.

## Websites

Friends groups are welcome to setup their own websites to promote their work and projects. Facebook and Twitter are both popular with local community groups, so setting up accounts with one or both of these could be beneficial. Alternatively some basic information can be placed on Kingston Council's Green Spaces pages.

## Events

Events are a great way to get people involved with your park and celebrate your successes. There are lots of things which you may consider, from community clean-ups to gala days, nest box building, walking groups, picnics etc. You could link your event with a national event such as Love Parks Week, International Dawn Chorus Day or National Storytelling Week.

For small scale volunteering events it is usually unnecessary to complete a Green Spaces Events Form, but you must still inform the Green Spaces Officer and Quadron's HDM that the event is taking place.

For larger events that involve food, music and/or entertainment, an events application form must be completed and submitted to the Green Spaces Officer at Kingston Council. Forms and further details can be found on the Council's website at: [parks and open spaces](#).

It is recommended that you invite the Green Spaces Officer, Quadron's HDM, the Neighbourhood Manager and the local Ward Councillors to your meetings and events.

## 5. FUNDRAISING

In the majority of cases your group will need to raise some funds to help run the group and carry out projects in the park. An example of fundraising events is a plant sale.

By building positive relationships with local organisations you may be able to get some of the things you need for free. For example, perhaps you could persuade a local café to provide volunteers with free refreshments after a cleanup event.

Quadron's HDM is available to assist with making funding applications or answering any queries you may have on this subject.

When applying for funding there are some simple points that you should bear in mind:

### **Do you know what type of projects the funding bodies will give grants for?**

It is really important that the funding body you apply to is willing to give funds for projects similar to yours. Make a list of the funding body's aims and objectives and make statements about how your project will reach these.

### **How can you prove that there is a need for your project and that it addresses the concerns of local residents?**

Work to involve your local community in decision making and keep a record of how many people you have spoken to and what they say. Surveys are an excellent way to get information from local people and to prove to funding bodies that your plans represent the needs of the local community.

### **Have you been realistic about the costs of a project?**

When potential funders assess your application they will check that your budget gives an accurate estimate of the costs of a project. For example, do not be afraid to include costs of telephone, internet, or postage. Some funders may ask you to get two or more quotes from different suppliers for large purchases. You should include information on match-funding, including an estimate of the financial value of any 'in-kind' support as well as the cost of the time volunteers are putting into the project. If you can show that you are getting support from other places you will be more likely to get funding.

### **What will happen when the project is finished?**

Don't forget to establish what will happen when the project is over. You need to show funders that you have made plans for what will happen when the money runs out. For

example, if your group wanted money to plant trees then you would need to show who will water and prune them after they have been planted.

### **Do you know when you will receive a decision on your funding application?**

Although small grant schemes often respond quickly, in some cases you may need to wait six months or more for an answer.

### **If at first you don't succeed, try again**

If you are not successful on your first attempt to get a grant don't give up. Ask the funding body why you weren't successful, and use their suggestions to develop future bids. Try and get a copy of an application which was successful, as this will help show you what kind of things they are after. Other Friends groups may have already been successful applying to the same funding body – ask them for advice.

Finally, don't be too extravagant with your first bid. It is better to apply for smaller amounts as the application forms are usually simpler. This will help build your confidence.

## 6. USEFUL CONTACTS

For further information about starting a friends group the My Community Starter website may be helpful: <http://www.mycommunitystarter.co.uk/aboutthiswebsite.htm>

For day to day management of the green spaces (access, buildings, events, graffiti) please contact the Green Spaces department on 0208 547 5002 or email [robert.waite@kingston.gov.uk](mailto:robert.waite@kingston.gov.uk)

For maintenance matters relating to grass cutting, parks trees and play areas please contact Quadron Services on 0208 546 9842 or e-mail [kingston.admin@quadronservices.co.uk](mailto:kingston.admin@quadronservices.co.uk)

For issues relating to street trees and trees on Housing sites please contact the Green Spaces department on 0208 547 5002 or email [leon.parry@kingston.gov.uk](mailto:leon.parry@kingston.gov.uk)

For project development, Green Flag, fundraising and community volunteering matters please contact Quadron's HDM on 0208 546 9842 or email [hannah.neale@quadronservices.co.uk](mailto:hannah.neale@quadronservices.co.uk)

### **Neighbourhood Managers:**

**Kingston Town - Neville Rainford [neville.rainford@kingston.gov.uk](mailto:neville.rainford@kingston.gov.uk)**

The Kingston Town Neighbourhood is made up of four wards: Grove / Canbury / Norbiton / Tudor

**Maldens and Coombe - Hannah Keates [hannah.keates@kingston.gov.uk](mailto:hannah.keates@kingston.gov.uk)**

The Maldens and Coombe Neighbourhood is made up of five wards: Beverley / Coombe Hill / Coombe Vale / Old Malden / St James

**South of the Borough - Barry Allen [barry.allen@kingston.gov.uk](mailto:barry.allen@kingston.gov.uk)**

The South of the Borough Neighbourhood is made up of three wards: Chessington North and Hook / Chessington South / Tolworth and Hook Rise

**Surbiton - Gemma Gallant [gemma.gallant@kingston.gov.uk](mailto:gemma.gallant@kingston.gov.uk)**

he Surbiton Neighbourhood is made up of four wards: Alexandra / Berrylands / St Mark's / Surbiton Hill

All of the managers above can be contacted on: Tel - 0208 547 5000.

## APPENDIX 1: SAMPLE CONSTITUTION

### 1. Name

The name of the group shall be Friends of (*insert name of park here*)

### 2. Aim

To improve the green space generally known as (*insert name of park here*)

### 3. Objectives

The group will fulfill the aim by:

- promoting the health and well-being of the residents of the area and working together as residents regardless of age, ethnic origin, ability, sex, belief or political affiliation recognising the value of our many differences
- involving local people in improving the area
- to carry out and promote both environmental improvement and practical conservation, to educate, encourage and support the local population in environmental practice by working with statutory and non-statutory agencies
- promoting sport, community recreation and play facilities
- to raise funds and receive contributions where appropriate to finance the work
- to publicise and promote work
- open bank accounts
- make rules and standing orders for categories of members and their rights
- take out insurance
- organise meetings, training courses and events
- work with similar groups and exchange information and advice with them
- take any action that is lawful, which would help it to fulfil its aims.

### 4. Membership

a. Membership of Friends of (*insert Friends Group here*) shall be open to anyone who is interested in helping the group to achieve its aim and willing to abide by the rules of the group.

b. Every member shall have one vote at general meetings.

c. The Management Committee shall have the power to refuse membership to an applicant, where it is considered such membership would be detrimental to the aims, purposes or activities of the group.

d. Registration and termination of membership. Any member of the association may resign his/her membership and any representative terminate or suspend the membership of any members, if in its opinion his/her conduct is prejudicial to the interests and objects of the association, PROVIDED THAT the individual member or representative of the member organisation (as the case may be) shall have the right to be heard by the General Committee before the final decision is made. There shall be a right of appeal to an independent arbitrator appointed by mutual agreement.

## **5. Management Committee**

a. Friends of (*insert Friends Group here*) shall be administered by a Management Committee of not less than three people and not more than fifteen members elected at the group's Annual General Meeting, Committee Members must be at least 16 years old

b. The officers of the management Committee shall be:

- the Chairperson
- the Treasurer
- the Secretary
- and such other officers of the group shall deem necessary at the Meeting.

c. The Management Committee shall meet at least twice a year.

d. At least five Management Committee Members must be present for the Management Committee meeting to take place.

e. Voting at Management Committee meetings shall be by show of hands on a majority basis. If there is a tied vote then the chairperson shall have a second vote.

f. Power to set up sub-groups and work parties as deemed necessary who shall be accountable to the committee.

## **6. Finance**

a. Any money obtained by the group shall be used only for the group.

b. Any bank accounts opened for the group shall be in the name of the group. Any cheque issued shall be signed by at least two of any three nominated signatures.

c. The Management Committee will ensure that the group stays within the budget.

## **7. Committee Meetings**

a. The committee shall meet at least twice each year.

b. The quorum for a meeting shall be five.

c. The committee shall be accountable for the members at all times.

d. All meetings must be minuted and available to any interested party.

e. All committee members shall be given at least seven days notice of a meeting unless it is deemed an emergency meeting.

## **8. General Public Meetings**

a. The committee shall call at least two general public meetings each year. The purpose of these meetings is for the group to account for its actions and consider the regeneration and development of according to the group's objectives.

b. The Chair of the group shall normally chair these meetings.

c. At least fourteen days notice of such a meeting must be given and advertised in at least five public places.

d. All meetings, including AGM's must be minuted and available to any interested party.

e. The quorum for a General Meeting is five.

## **9. Annual General Meeting**

a. The Friends of (*insert Friends Group here*) shall hold an Annual General Meeting (AGM) at not more than 15 month intervals.

b. Where possible members shall be notified personally, otherwise notice will be deemed served by advertising the meetings in at least five public places giving at least fourteen days' notice of the AGM.

c. The business of the AGM shall include: Receiving a report from the Chairperson of the group's activities over the year. Receiving a report and presentation of the last financial year's accounts from the Treasurer on the finances of the group. Electing a new Management Committee and considering any other matter as may be appropriate at such a meeting.

d. The quorum for Annual General Meeting shall be at least eight persons of which no more than four shall be committee members.

## **10. Alteration of the Constitution**

a. Proposals for amendments to this constitution, or dissolution (see Clause 11) must be delivered to the secretary in writing. The secretary in conjunction with all other officers shall then decide on the date of a forum meeting to discuss such proposals, giving at least four weeks clear notice.

b. Any changes to this constitution must be agreed by a least two thirds of those members present and voting at any general meeting.

## **11. Dissolution**

The group may be wound up at any time if agreed by two thirds of those members present and voting at any general meeting. Any assets shall be returned to their providers, if they require it, or shall be passed to another group with similar aims, or donated to the Council to benefit the relevant green space.

## 12. Adoption of the constitution

This constitution was adopted by the members present at the AGM held on:

\_\_\_\_\_ (Date)

Signed:

\_\_\_\_\_ (Chair)

\_\_\_\_\_ (Secretary)

\_\_\_\_\_ (Treasurer)

\_\_\_\_\_ (Member)

**APPENDIX 2 – SAMPLE RISK ASSESSMENT**

<b>Royal Kingston upon Thames Risk Assessment Form</b>					
<b>Department and team:</b>					<b>Assessor's name:</b>
<b>Assessment date:</b>			<b>Review date:</b>		
<b>Assessment team members (if applicable):</b>				<b>Persons identified at risk:</b> Volu Quadron staff	
<b>Manager's Name:</b>				<b>Manager's signature:</b> (accepting findings)	
Other specific assessments required: COSHH <input type="checkbox"/> , Manual handling <input type="checkbox"/> , Display screen <input type="checkbox"/> , Young persons <input type="checkbox"/> , Fire safety <input type="checkbox"/> ,					
Hazard	Type of harm	Existing control measures	Risk rating (with existing control measures)	Recommended action where risks are at an unacceptable level. Who to action and when	Risk rating (with additional control measures)

## APPENDIX 3 – EXAMPLE PRESS RELEASE

### **PRESS RELEASE**

**DATE** : For immediate release

**FAO**: Newsdesk / What's On

**TITLE:**

**EVENT DETAILS:** What's happening:

Date:

Time:

Location/ venue:

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:**

Name:

Telephone: