

Friends of Park Groups: Guidance for establishing a Friends Group within Solihull



Love Solihull Parks



Solihull
METROPOLITAN
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What is a Friends Group?

Friends of Park Groups are established as independent voluntary local user groups with the purpose of promoting and improving their local park or green space.

The group can be involved in:

- Making sure the community's voice is heard in the management of the park
- Fundraising for improvements and additional facilities
- Organising events in the park
- Undertaking practical tasks like litter picking and tree planting
- Park patrols – identifying and reporting any issues within the park
- Helping in the management of the park
- Promoting the park to the wider community

The group needs to consist of dedicated people who are able to work together to achieve the goals, aims and objectives of the membership.

Check for existing groups

Before starting a Friends Group contact us so that we can let you know if there is already a Friends Group established for your park.

There can only be one group for each park and even if the group no longer appear active we will need to contact them to determine their status.

It may be that the existing group are in need of new members and you are just what they have been waiting for!

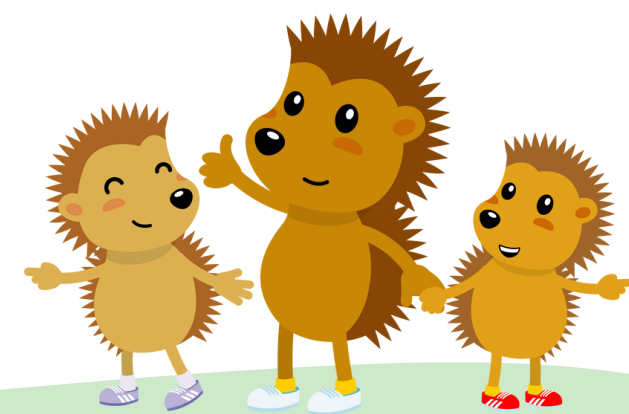


Starting a new group

There are two main ways that groups can get started:

① An individual person or a group of people have ideas for a park/green spaces and would like to play an active role in its management. They then recruit like-minded individuals to get involved. A minimum of 3 community members is needed to start an official group, in order to fill the main committee positions of a chair, secretary and treasurer and to be able to work with the Council.

② An existing group, like a Resident Association decides to add a parks project group to its activities. Groups like this already have a formal structure and communications system in place and potentially some existing financial support. They will create a sub group as part of their group committee.



Generating interest and recruiting members

Encourage the sharing of photos, stories and memories about the park on social media.

Ask for people's views of the park, what do they like about it? Is there anything they would like to see improved?

Produce a poster to promote the setting up of a Friends Group asking for anybody interested to get in touch.

Once there has been some interest registered set up the first meeting. The initial meeting may only consist of 5-10 people but once the group starts being active more people will hopefully want to join in and get involved.

TOP TIPS!



Writing a constitution

A constitution is a set of rules that defines how a group is run.

Purpose of a constitution

It is useful to create a constitution fairly early on in the development of the group as it will focus the group on why you are forming it and what you would like to achieve. We can offer more support to constituted groups given the increase in funding opportunities provides.

A constitution usually contains the following information:

- Group name (i.e. Friends of ... Park)
- Geographical area covered by the group
- Aims and objectives
- How the aims and objectives will be achieved e.g. fundraising, practical tasks
- Membership – Are there any fees? Who can become a member?
- Management committee – structure of committee, roles of members, how members get elected to posts
- Equal opportunities statement
- Meetings – How they are to be arranged?
- Finances
- Relevant rules that group members should abide by
- Ending the group – How and why the group can be dissolved and what happens to any funds?

To support you we can provide a model constitution from another group if required.

First steps for the group

Collate ideas, issues and aims of the group, taking into account everyone's opinion. Consider the practicalities of each idea: cost, maintenance, community impact.

Identify each members' skills and interests as well as those with an enthusiasm to be part of the decision making process.



Forming a Committee

A committee is elected by the members of the group to carry out work on their behalf between normal meetings.

Purpose of a Committee

- It helps to formalise the group (which helps get it recognised by relevant bodies)
- It ensures that the work involved in running the group is shared between a few people, rather than all falling to one person.
- It tends to make a group more organised
- Improves access to funding pots

Standard Committee roles

Required roles are:

- Chair – leader and co-ordinator of the group
- Secretary – does the paperwork, keeps members informed, keeps up to date mailing list, takes minutes
- Treasurer – looks after financial affairs of group – bank account, petty cash, financial reports

Other potential roles:

- Publicity and marketing officer
- Events' organiser
- Fundraiser
- Someone to organise practical tasks

Sometimes some of the tasks are dealt with by sub-groups e.g. funding, publicity, events.

Committee members are usually elected at an Annual General Meeting (AGM) at which, a review of the year will also be discussed.



Case Study: Friends of Damson Parks

The Friends of Damson Parks was set up as a constituted local community group in 2013 to improve Damson Lane Park and nearby Elmdon Coppice, a Local Nature Reserve with a small area of informal open space and children's playground. One of the main aims of the Friends of Damson Parks has been to increase the number of people using Damson Lane Park by providing new tarmac footpaths, holding community events and improving facilities.

With Coppice Junior School adjoining the site many local residents and children use the Park as a route to and from school. When the Friends of Damson Parks first formed as a group their top priority was to install a tarmac footpath linking Wilberforce Way to Coppice Road that would provide a route for children from the Damson Parkway estate to get to School safely in all weathers. This stretch of footpath was funded and installed by Jaguar Land Rover during Spring 2014. At the end of the project Jaguar Land Rover donated 10 x Field Maple trees which were planted either side of the footpath as an avenue.

Following on from the success of the footpath linking Coppice Road to Wilberforce Way, a second stretch of footpath, funded by Solihull Council, was installed in June 2014 providing a new link from the entrance by the canal to the children's playground. Two further successful funding applications made by The Friends of Damson Parks to The Veolia Environmental Trust and Birmingham Airport work enabled works to create a footpath linking Coppice Road to Damson Lane to be completed in June 2015. The Mayor of Solihull visited the site to mark the start of this project on 26th May 2015 and this stretch of footpath was officially opened by the Mayor of Solihull on 8th August 2015.



The Friends of Damson Parks did not stop here and Lottery 'Awards for All' funding in 2017 enabled the footpath to be extended towards the main entrance and car park.

The circular footpath route around the Park was completed in Spring 2018 following another successful funding application to Veolia. The new paths and improved entrances quickly resulted in more people using the Park.

In 2018 four pieces of outdoor gym equipment were installed with funding from Active Citizens, One Stop, Tesco and Waitrose match funded by Solihull MBC's Public Realm Team.

Each year Silhillians are invited to nominate people who have helped to make the community a better place. At the 2018 annual Civic Honours Awards Ceremony the Friends of Damson Parks were recognised as one of the Borough's unsung heroes.

The Friends of Damson Parks are continuing to work on additional funding applications for new projects including playground improvements, whilst hoping to maintaining a Green Flag Award for Damson Lane Park.

The group's recent priorities have been tree planting and additional play equipment.



Total Funding Secured: £80,000

- JLR £16,000
- Birmingham Airport £2,500 (2015) and £3,000 (2017)
- Veolia £17,000 (2015) and £30,000 (2018)
- Lottery Awards for All £10,000
- Tesco £1,000
- Fundraising from events (i.e. dog shows, quiz nights) £3,000 +

They are currently looking at securing funding for an accessible roundabout.



Setting up a bank account

It is important to have a bank account, even if you will only be handling small amounts of money at first. Several banks offer accounts for community groups where you pay small or no bank charges.

Ask to see an adviser who knows what they are talking about and stress that you are a voluntary group with charitable objectives (but not a registered charity).

What you will need:

- Proof of identity and addresses of officers
- Evidence that the group exists and has a constitution
- An initial deposit.

You will need two signatures to authorise cheques. The normal arrangement is to have three or four 'named' signatories which the bank or building society recognises, with just two needed to authorise cheques.

Ideas to help generate further interest

Hopefully the group will have their own ideas but some of these activities have worked well with other groups:

- Logo competition involving local schools
- Guided walks
- Regular litter picking or clean up tasks
- Get your own branded clothing to make the group more visible to the community
- Set up a social media account to continue community conversations about the area, update this regularly with progress and activities of the group.
- Network with existing Friends Groups for support and ideas



How can we support?

- We will work with your group to achieve aims and objectives and ensure that they are reflected in any management plans for the park
- Provide explanation for current practices
- Promote the group to encourage new members
- Support with funding bids and organising events
- Link you with other community groups and volunteers that can assist with your projects, including corporate groups.
- Provide the funds to cover the group's first year:
- Membership to The Conservation Volunteers Network
<https://www.tcv.org.uk/>
- Public Liability Insurance

What we need from the group

Please keep us updated with progress within the group and of any funding applications, activities, events that you wish to organise. Although we will be unable to attend all meetings please forward copies of the minutes on to us and we will act where required.

Contact details

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