

Lancaster Greenspaces Forum Meeting 03
7th April 2014, St Barnabas, Morecambe

The theme of the meeting was 'Volunteers'

Groups attending:

Community Woodlands (Barleycop and Bolton-le-Sands)
Friends of Parks – Greaves Park, Regents Park, Williamson Park, Ryelands Park
Cemetery (Friends of) - Poulton Cemetery and Morecambe War Memorial Gardens

Broadly the key issues discussed could be grouped as follows:

New group seeking to establish a volunteer base

Emerging themes: Important to develop profile and visibility of the project/ the site. Some found notice boards and regular events useful to achieve this; door leafleting can be successful where there is a clear vision that people can identify with.

Established groups struggling to maintain their volunteer base/ maintain interest and commitment, particularly when

'not much is happening' / change on the ground is slow as the the group is working on funding bids/ strategic issues.

people move away, health issues and the group shrinks over time; it can be difficult to attract new and also younger volunteers to an established group

Some find it relatively easy to attract volunteers to attend work parties (woodland management), but not to take on more commitment/ take on a lead organising role.

Both established and new groups mentioned difficulties in securing appropriate technical support/ advice to inform the direction of their work (management plans)

Volunteer management issues for group leaders/ organisers:

- Skills and motivation
- Vision and project profile/ visibility
- Technical support
- Media / social media
- Managing conflict and challenging behaviour
- Permissions and sense of ownership

What works for us..

Projects that can communicate a strong vision that people can identify with/ that inspires them (to achieve this technical support, master planning and agreed management plans can be necessary).

Volunteer capacity, energy and commitment to match the task (seek help/ partnerships where suitable or adjust aspiration).

'Visibility', e.g. go out to events (West End Festival) or recruit through events in the space/ the park; create a visual or other draw and 'talking point' (wildflower meadow

Greaves Park).

Point of contact – make it easy for people to get involved once they have noticed you/ have taken an interest (contact details, regular events, schedules displayed in the park/ the space, use social media and digital technology etc).

Communicate a sense of ownership and permission to get involved (again this often requires agreed management plans and clear communication).

Looking forward

External Training and support - Invite CVS to the next event and explore how CVS can support skills and capacity (training events).

Group Sharing and mutual support – develop a programme of site visits/ visit each other's projects (this can be a long term activity).

External capacity and partnership working – Adult Education Tutors, Community Payback Team (to be coordinated through Lancaster City Council), links with schools, back to work schemes etc.

Technical support – share experiences within the group at meetings and Social Media (e.g. experience of working with the Forestry Commission), Lancashire County Council and Lancaster City Council can provide some limited support – worth to get in touch and ask.