



# **LINCOLN CONSERVATION GROUP**

## **MEMBERS' HANDBOOK**

**Nature Conservation Volunteers**

**Making a Difference to our Environment**

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## MEMBERS' HANDBOOK



### 😊 WHO ARE WE?

The Lincoln Conservation Group started life in October 1994. We are all volunteers. Members of the Group span all ages and walks of life but you must be 16 years or over to join. We are affiliated to BTCV (the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers) and have our own insurance.

Joining the Lincoln Conservation Group is a great way to meet people. The Group has an active social life, including visits to the cinema and theatre, walks in the Peak District and elsewhere, and occasional holidays in this country and abroad.

### 😊 WHAT DO WE DO?

**Tasks:** We carry out practical nature conservation work in and around Lincoln. We hope to conserve the natural history and biodiversity (variety of plant and animal life) of the area, and have lots of fun while doing it!

The majority of our workdays (which we call tasks) involve work on the wildlife havens in and around the city of Lincoln. However, we also work on nature reserves around Lincolnshire, and for nature conservation organisations further afield, including Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Yorkshire and Norfolk.

Task work includes: coppicing and hedge laying, tree and hedge planting, woodland and grassland management, drystone walling, construction and maintenance work (paths, steps, etc), and pond restoration.

Tasks are held twice a month, on Sundays, usually the first and third Sunday of each month. Every few months we have an away weekend for tasks a little further afield. We stay in accommodation provided by the organisation we are working for.

**Task Leaflet:** Tasks are listed in our programme leaflet, currently called VOLE (Voluntary Opportunities for Lincoln's Environment), which comes out every three months (Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter). Once you are a member of the group, the task list is emailed to you (or sent by post if you are

not on email). We are happy to have comments on our Task Leaflet, ideas for ways in which it can be improved, etc.

**Meetings:** We hold a 'business' meeting once a month, on the last Tuesday of each month. The venue varies but it is always held at someone's house. It starts at 8pm and finishes about 9.30pm when we adjourn to a nearby pub. Minutes are emailed out to Group members and should be posted to those not on email.

**Social things:** The Group is active socially too – for example, cinema, theatre, walks, the pub, holidays.

## 😊 **HOW YOU CAN GET INVOLVED**

Volunteering on a task is only one of many ways in which you can be actively involved with the Group. If you enjoy coming out on task, you might also want to join in with some of the organisational/behind the scenes activities. Group funds meet the costs you might incur if you take on an additional role within the Group.

And remember – if you offer to take on responsibility for something, it doesn't mean you have to do it every time, just that you need to work with others in the Group to make sure it is done. And others in the Group will give you help and support as you learn about the role you have taken on.

### ❖ **SOCIAL EVENTS**

We all like the social part of being a member of the Group so let us know about events you think might appeal, or bring information to a meeting. If you want to organise something – a walk, barbecue, party, a visit to the cinema, theatre or a music event – just circulate details and see who is interested.

### ❖ **TASKS**

You can volunteer with the Group on its tasks. We meet at the site for 10am and work until 3.30-4pm (depending on light). Most people stay all day but you can come along just for a few hours.

We supply tea, coffee and biscuits but you have to bring your own packed lunch, soft drinks, etc. You need to wear old clothes and sturdy footwear.

We will train you how to use tools safely and we have a tools safety talk before each task.

If you don't have transport, we can arrange for someone else to give you a lift, so don't be afraid to ask.

Most of our members have other commitments. You DON'T have to go to every task!

## ❖ PUBLICITY

There are several ways you could help with publicity. We always welcome new ideas for promoting the Group so that we recruit new members. Remember that you do not have to do everything yourself, just make sure it gets done. And there is always someone to ask if you are not sure what to do.

- **Posters**

**Displaying posters:** we have a promotional poster. Group members put these up at work or other venues where potential new members can see them. Could you put up a poster somewhere?

**Producing posters:** you could be our 'poster person', reviewing the current poster and recommending changes when necessary; producing new copies for members to use; producing laminated versions for display boards, etc.

- **Task Leaflet (VOLE)**

**Distributing Task Leaflet:** We produce about 700 copies of the Task Leaflet each time, and they are distributed by Group members to local libraries, nature reserve visitor centres, workplaces, and other relevant places (eg Wildlife Trust shop, organic cafes, etc). You could help with this distribution.

**Producing the Task Leaflet:** We produce four issues a year. There is a standard template (in Word) which is easy to use. The programme is usually confirmed early in the month before the next issue, so that it is ready for distribution before the first task. The current task details and the summary of forthcoming tasks is provided by the person who is organising the task programme. We use a print shop in Lincoln (West Parade) to copy and fold the leaflet.

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If you volunteer to produce the Task Leaflet, this is what you do:

- update the general information – what to look for in the season covered by that issue; issue/volume number and dates on the front cover; activities at Whisby (as long as they don't clash with our task dates!); etc;
- copy the task information into the template (and edit it if necessary to make it fit the space);
- book in the copy job with the print shop and ensure the hard copy pages are delivered on time, and sort out payment, or arrange for someone to do it;
- arrange for the finished copies to be collected and prepared for distribution, including a copy to each of the organisations we are doing tasks for – either doing this yourself or arranging for someone else to do it with you or for you;
- get copies to the next Group meeting so everyone can take some for distribution;
- email the final version of the task list to the Lincolnshire Echo (What's On/News Desk) and to whoever is managing our website.

## • Displays

**Promotional displays:** sometimes we have a display in Lincoln library to promote our work, usually timed to coincide with a new issue of the Task Leaflet. There are glass display cabinets in the library foyer and these can be booked, free of charge, for a month. We have some display materials – information about us, what we do, where we work, photos, etc. The rest of the display varies and can include vegetation, work gloves, safety goggles, tools, etc. You could offer to book the cabinet and put up/remove the display.

**Display materials:** these should be reviewed and revised regularly, so they are up to date and ready to use. However this does not always happen. The best way is for two or three people to get together so if you would like to be involved in updating our materials (and perhaps bring some fresh ideas to what we have), please feel free to volunteer.

## ❖ TOOLS

We have a lot of tools which need to be maintained. We usually have a task in the summer which includes tool cleaning and a barbecue. You could offer to look after the tools or help someone else to do so.

Whoever looks after the tools needs to:

- make sure the tools are properly stored in the tool shed
- advise the Group if we need more tools
- let the Group know if there is a problem with storage or the tool shed

- make sure tools are cleaned and checked regularly and repairs are organised when necessary.

You can also offer to collect the tools for a task if the task leader is not able to do so or it is easier for you to do so.

And where do we keep the tools? The Group has an allotment on Long Leys Road. We have a storage shed on the allotment which is where we keep the tools. Our original intention with the allotment was to grow hedging plants, trees, etc, to plant out on task sites. However, this didn't work out so now several members of the group have taken over the cultivation of the allotment, to grow vegetables and wildlife friendly plants.

## ❖ REFRESHMENTS

We provide tea, coffee and biscuits at every task. We have a 'brew kit' which includes several flasks, mugs, supplies of tea and coffee, etc. Someone has to prepare the brew kit for each task. You could offer to do this occasionally, or take overall responsibility for the brew kit and for making sure someone does it for each task. Task leaders have other things to do and ideally do not want to have to do the brew kit too. Remember – if you volunteer to be responsible for the brew kit you do not have to do it every time, just make sure it is done.

If you are going to prepare the brew kit for a task, you:

- contact whoever has it and get it from them before the day of the task
- check the stocks of tea bags, coffee, sugar, and biscuits, buying more if necessary (Group members get very disappointed if anything is missing, especially the biscuits!)
- on the day of the task you will need to fill the flasks with boiling water, get milk, etc.

## ❖ LEADING TASKS

Several members of the Group are actively involved in leading tasks and we are keen to encourage others to take on this role. You could just lead one task a year, or more. If you think you would be interested in leading a task but are not sure, why not offer to help one of the leaders so you can see what is involved.

If you lead a task, this is what you do:

- about a week before the task, contact the organisation for which we are working, to check that they are expecting us and to confirm the work (it

sometimes changes because of weather conditions) and the tools we will need;

- you might have to visit to site, to see what we are to do and where, particularly if we are going to be working without a member of the 'employing' organisation present on the day;
- email a reminder round to everyone in the Group, asking who is going to attend and if they need a lift or can give one (or ask someone to send an email on your behalf);
- coordinate transport, as we try to take as few cars as possible, particularly to tasks which are further afield;
- collect the tools, or arrange for someone else to do so;
- check that someone is doing the brew kit;
- prepare the Risk Assessment (required for our insurance) for which we have a standard form; you can prepare most of it in advance and complete it on the day.

At the task, you:

- make sure everyone is clear about what is being done and how it is to be done;
- go through the risk assessment;
- lead the 'tools talk' about safe use of tools, or ask someone else to do it;
- decide the tea and lunch break times (members of the Group are very good at letting you know when they want a break!);
- during the day monitor the task to make sure everything is going to plan;
- at the end of the day make sure all the tools are collected back in and that the site is left clean and tidy.

For most tasks, someone from the organisation we are working for is with us and will oversee the work, check the site at the end, etc.

## ❖ ORGANISING THE TASK PROGRAMME

We have a good list of organisations for which we work but we are always happy to develop other contacts. The task programme is organised in 3-month 'chunks' and we try to get a balance of task content and organisations in each programme.

We currently have someone organising the programme. However, you maybe interested in working with them, perhaps with a view to taking over in the future.

If you organise a programme, this is an idea of what you have to do:

- see if we have had any requests from organisations and whether or not they have asked for specific dates;

- put together a draft programme, looking at what we did at the same time last year and what we have done over the past few weeks, to maintain a balance of tasks;
- contact organisations to see if we can work for them, what they would want us to do and if the date/s we suggest are acceptable (perhaps getting some bookings for the next programme too); review all the proposed tasks and check that all the dates fit;
- confirm arrangements with the organisations;
- circulate details to members of the Group to get a leader for each task;
- send the final details (including grid ref and meeting place) to the person who is putting VOLE together.

You will also have to give an update at the business meetings, or arrange for someone else to do so, so that everyone knows how plans are going for the next programme. Members of the Group often contribute task ideas at the meetings.

### ❖ **GROUP MEETINGS: CHAIRING, TAKING MINUTES, ETC**

If you feel like offering your services to take on one of these roles, both of them are straightforward!

**Chairing:** the week before the meeting you circulate the agenda by email. It is usually pretty standard but occasionally a specific item is added for discussion. Go through the last Minutes just before the meeting so you know what will come up under 'matters arising' and whether you need to raise anything else. Chair the meeting, allowing discussion but keeping people on track so the time is managed effectively (so we can get to the pub!). Make sure everyone is clear what the decisions are or who is responsible for Action Points. Make sure the venue and Chair for the next meeting are agreed. Close the meeting.

**Minute taking:** we have a fairly standard format for the Minutes which you can copy. Ideally the Minutes should be done within a few days of the meeting, so that everyone finds out about social events, and those responsible for Action Points are reminded of them and have time to do them. All you have to do is: take notes during the meeting; type up the Minutes; circulate them to all members (arranging for them to be posted to those not on email).



## ❖ FUND RAISING

We need funds for a variety of purposes: paying our insurance; paying the allotment fee; buying new tools or paying for repairs; paying for tea, coffee, etc; paying for the Task Leaflet or other publicity; contributing to mileage costs for one day tasks which are outside the Lincoln area; etc.

We raise funds through some paid tasks – 3-4 a year – and other activities such as car boot sales, Group T-shirts, etc. If you feel like organising a Group stall at a car boot sale, there is always something to sell and someone will help you. If you have other ideas for raising funds, talk about them at a task or let us know about them at one of the meetings.

## WHO'S WHO IN THE GROUP – AT JANUARY 2006:

Co-Chairs: Julian and Jude

Treasurer: John T

Minute taker: Nicola

Programme organiser: Nick (likely to be taken over by Richard D. and Rebecca for the Autumn 2006 programme)

Tools: no one at present!

Publicity inc Task Leaflet: Jude

**EVERYONE CAN GET INVOLVED**

**THERE'S ALWAYS SOMETHING TO DO  
WITH LINCOLN CONSERVATION GROUP**