

Volunteer Handbook

Welcome

Welcome to Lagan Valley Regional Park and thank you for volunteering. As a volunteer, you will be making an extremely valuable contribution towards the work that we do. We rely on you to help us conserve, maintain and improve this designated

Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, for the benefit of both people and wildlife. The Lagan Valley Regional Park covers some 4,200 acres of woodlands, wetlands, grassland, farmland and eleven miles of riverbank. It is located between Belfast and Lisburn and is a long, linear park, just over one mile wide at its broadest point in Drumbeg. The backbone of the Regional Park is the River Lagan and towpath which extends from Stranmillis to Lisburn and encompasses well known beauty spots such as Lagan Meadows, Barnett Park, the Giant's Ring and the Lock Keeper's Cottage, along which you will discover a remarkable environment rich in both history and wildlife.

In November 2007, we secured a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund under their Landscape Partnership Scheme. Our scheme, Laganscape, has allowed us to facilitate volunteer involvement and help ensure community involvement. The Regional Park and its partners are committed to building on this legacy.

Our Mission Statement

Mission statement

We will protect and conserve the unique landscape character of Lagan Valley Regional Park and the Lagan Valley AONB, enhance its biodiversity, cultural heritage and promote its benefit to visitors and the community.

Our Aims

1. We will proactively conserve and manage the biodiversity in the Regional Park.
2. We will support and facilitate ongoing research and education on the area's biodiversity and heritage.
3. We will encourage involvement of the community and develop volunteering in the Regional Park.
4. We will maintain and enhance the landscape quality of the Regional Park for the benefit of all.
5. We will proactively conserve and manage the cultural and built heritage of the Regional Park.
6. We will promote the benefits of green open spaces, within the area, for health and wellbeing.

7. We will support appropriate recreation activities, events and the development of sustainable tourism for the benefit of the region.
8. We will increase public awareness of the natural and cultural heritage throughout the region.

Induction

This handbook is designed to give you all the essential information you need to become a volunteer as well as a broad knowledge of the organisation, including Lagan Valley Regional Park policies and procedures.

The “Volunteers Handbook” will form part of your induction and training in equipping you with written documentation and necessary information about your role with us.

Throughout this handbook reference will be made to a range of policies and procedures adopted by the organisation. It is intended to give just a brief coverage of these; however you can obtain copies of all policies and procedures from the Volunteer Coordinator or the volunteer resources page of our website (www.laganvalley.co.uk).

During your induction you will be introduced to the Lagan Valley Regional Park team, you'll receive information about your new role and you will complete a registration form detailing your contact details, some background information and a contact number in case of an emergency. All information which you provide us with will be kept strictly confidential in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018.

Persons aged 18 and over are welcome to volunteer. At the discretion of the Park Manager, persons between the ages of 16 and 18 are welcome to volunteer if accompanied at all times by a parent or guardian.

If you have any further queries about your role please don't hesitate to talk to our Volunteer Coordinator.

The Volunteer Role...

The volunteer role is a 'gift relationship' binding only in honour, trust and understanding.

- **Do you need prior experience to become a volunteer?**

No, we encourage people from all walks of life to volunteer. Sometimes volunteers bring specialist skills with them; however Lagan Valley Regional Park is committed to the training and development of anyone who shows commitment and dedication to their role. We will endeavor to adapt tasks to suit the abilities and interests of volunteers where it is possible to do so.

- **How much time do volunteers need to commit?**

This is entirely up to the volunteer, some volunteers may only be able to commit once a week or once a fortnight, others may be available a couple of days or mornings a week.

The most important thing is that you let the Volunteer Coordinator know so that they can plan for the weeks ahead. Reliability is important, so if you are running a bit late or are unable to come along please give us a call to let us know.

- **Settling in**

In order to make sure you are happy with your choice of placement, we will assess how you're getting on after an agreed period of time. It will take the form of an informal chat and will give you a chance to identify training needs or voice any problems you may have. If there is any difficulty that can't be resolved (this is very rare) we can change your role or end the relationship for whatever reason.

Volunteer Opportunities...

There are many ways people can get involved with the Regional Park:

Wildlife Monitoring

Wildlife monitoring is very important for protecting and enhancing biodiversity. It provides information on where certain birds and animals occur throughout the year. Species of particular interest to Lagan Valley regional Park are the red squirrel, *Sciurus vulgaris*, the otter, *Lutra lutra* and the kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*. Monitoring the wildlife on the same site over a number of years helps us to understand how that environment is changing. If enough sites are regularly monitored, we can begin to build up a picture of the changing face of the Lagan Valley. Monitoring forms and details of the species we are interested in recording are available from our office at the Lock Keeper's Visitor Centre.

Saturday Conservation Group

A Saturday morning conservation group meets on a fortnightly basis to carry out a wide range of practical projects throughout the Lagan Valley Regional Park. These projects include: tree planting, woodland management, wetland management, habitat creation and hedgelaying.

Heritage Guides

Lagan Valley Regional Park is steeped in history. Heritage guides may assist the LVRP team deliver many of our events. You can also be trained to volunteer in the Lock Keeper's Cottage and the Industry Lighter, showing the public around and helping to deliver information on their history and the Lagan Navigation.

Volunteer Rangers

Our Ranger Service is an important interface between the Regional Park and the general public and visitors. We routinely carry out a range of activities from monitoring and wildlife care to practical conservation, taking guided walks and routine patrols. Our Volunteer Rangers enable us to do important additional work throughout the Regional Park.

Health and Safety

Under the Health and Safety at Work (N.I.) Order 1978, volunteers have a duty to take reasonable care for the Health and Safety of oneself and all others who may be affected by their acts or omission. Further details can be found in our Volunteer Health and Safety Policy.

Training and Development

Lagan Valley Regional Park is committed to the training and development of its volunteers. We firmly believe that volunteering is a two-way process and demonstrate this commitment by offering a planned programme of development linked to the key objectives of the organisation.

Volunteers will be encouraged to develop all the skills necessary to enable them to perform to the highest possible standards and furthermore participate in approved courses both inside and outside the organisation.

Volunteers are encouraged to express ideas and their views about the organisation and volunteering by contacting the volunteer Board representative or a member of staff.

Representing LVRP

As a volunteer you will be representing the Park and some duties may involve working with the public. Always be sure to welcome people and treat them with courtesy and respect. If they require further information refer them to a LVRP member of staff. Anyone who feels they would like training or guidance on working with the public, please speak to the Volunteer Coordinator.

Confidentiality

While volunteering with Lagan Valley Regional Park you may be subject to information, which is not public knowledge, we hope that you would respect this policy.

Relevant Policies

There are a number of policies that relate to volunteers working in Lagan Valley Regional Park. Below you will find a brief outline of these documents all available to read in full from the LVRP library, in the office, or online.

- **Volunteer Policy and Procedures** – This policy sets out the broad principles for volunteer involvement with Lagan Valley Regional Park.
- **Volunteer Diversity Policy and Monitoring Form** – This policy outlines our commitment to providing volunteer opportunities in an organisation that is non-discriminatory and that welcomes diversity.
- **Volunteer Recruitment and Selection Procedures** – This sets out our procedure for volunteer recruiting and selection.

- **Volunteer Code of Practice** – This policy outlines how we expect volunteers to conduct themselves and details a number of health and safety points we expect volunteers to adhere to.
- **Volunteer Health and Safety Policy** – This policy sets out volunteer duties in relation to keeping themselves and others safe at work.
- **Volunteer Lone Working Policy** – This policy details the measures we have in place for volunteers if they have to work alone to ensure their safe keeping.
- **Volunteer IT Policy** – This policy outlines Lagan Valley Regional Park's IT practice and acceptable internet/email use.
- **Volunteer Problem Solving Procedure** – This outlines how our organisation deals with problems *or complaints* relating to the work place and volunteering.
- **LVRP Policy and Procedures for the Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults** – This policy aims to ensure that all children and vulnerable adults participating in activity programmes organised by the LVRP, either on or off its premises, do so in as safe a manner as possible and that volunteers' safety is also protected.

Practical Matters

Welfare Benefits

Volunteering is a great way to boost your CV and improve employability. It shows commitment and dedication to prospective employers. If you are unemployed or receiving benefits you should contact your local Job Centre and let them know that you are volunteering. This should not affect your benefits.

Job references

Volunteers may request references when seeking employment. References will be given at the discretion of the Park Manager.

General safety info

- Always know the location of the nearest telephone in case of an accident.
- If you are in doubt as to the safe method of doing any job, ask your supervisor for help or support.
- We aim to keep our equipment in good working condition if you're aware of a fault please don't continue to use and let your supervisor know.
- If you feel ill, stop work and let your supervisor know.
- We will provide you with personal safety equipment: it's important that you wear it when carrying out certain roles.
- If you have an accident report to your supervisor and obtain first-aid. An incident report form must be completed in each case and given to your supervisor.
- The consumption of alcohol is strictly forbidden at any time.

- Smoking is not permitted inside any LVRP buildings or vehicles.
- Volunteers are not permitted to operate LVRP vehicles.
- Volunteers will be supplied with a personal alarm for their safety if lone working.
- Volunteers can refuse demands that they consider to be unrealistic.
- If for any reason volunteers feel threatened or vulnerable, while on duty, they should vacate the area immediately and contact LVRP staff.
- Volunteers should not bring dogs or pets along whilst volunteering.

Insurance

All volunteers are covered by LVRP Employer's Liability insurance whilst actively engaged in LVRP business. Personal equipment and belongings however, are not covered under this insurance.

Out of pocket expenses

LVRP would like to cover out of pocket expenses but we are currently not in a position to do so. We will continue to seek funding opportunities to provide this in the future.

Copyright

We hope that you are happy to donate the rights to any original copyright material you may produce while volunteering with us.

We hope that you enjoy your time volunteering with Lagan Valley Regional Park. If you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact our Office:

**Contact: Volunteer & Visitor Officer
Lagan Valley Regional Park,
3 Lock Keeper's Lane,
Milltown Road.
Belfast BT8 7XT**

**Tel: 028 9049 1922
Email: volunteering@laganvalley.co.uk**