

Richmond Environment Network

Linking, supporting, developing & promoting local environmental & sustainability activities

6 Phoenix Wharf, Eel Pie Island, Twickenham, TW1 3DY
www.richenvironmentnet.org.uk 020 8892 0590 info@richenvironmentnet.org.uk

How Do I Set-up a Friends Group?

REN primarily existing to support, foster and champion environmental community and charitable groups in Richmond upon Thames, this includes helping form new groups.

A Friends of Group can be formed in many ways and can also serve the local community in many functions.

The main focus of a Friends of Group is obviously the park. Therefore it is fundamental to their existence that the group is a fair representation of the local community and groups associated with or who use the park. Given the often numerous people, groups and organisations associated with a park it is sensible to have a central focus group i.e. a Friends Group representing the park. If needed sub groups can also be formed that report to the main group i.e. events group.

With a unified group formed the Friends Group can carry out a myriad of tasks, functions, opportunities etc associated with the promotion and management of their park. The following is a limited selection of the possibilities -

- *Funding opportunities / applications*

With the public sector being forced to do 'more with less', fundraising can be a reason in itself for the formation of a Friends Group, although it shouldn't be the sole reason. There are various funding opportunities that only Councils can apply for and equally there are funding opportunities that only community groups can apply for. Any community group will need to work in partnership with the Council if it intends to raise funds to carry out improvement works to Council owned or run parks. This also applies to parks that are owned or run by other land owners.

- *Community events*

- Sports days - organising family orientated sports days, football, athletics, coaching session's etc
- Easter Egg Hunts - celebrate Spring and the better weather to come with an Easter egg hunt
- Community Planting Days - assisting the Council and its volunteer partner British Trust Conservation Volunteers (BTCV) in planting and maintenance projects
- Guided Walks - Given the potential to have an extensive array of knowledge within the Friends of Group, there is the opportunity for the various groups or individual groups throughout the borough to have a series of parks and open space guided walks
- Volunteer Days - Co-ordinate Volunteer Days forming or repairing paths, clearing vegetation, painting out graffiti, painting furniture, buildings, lamp posts, fences etc. There is a wide variety of park / conservation volunteers in existence throughout the boroughs parks and open spaces

- *Park bench donations*

The Friends Group, in conjunction with Richmond's Parks and Open Spaces are an ideal avenue for promoting and supporting the departments' park bench donation programme.

- *Tree donations*

Like with park bench donations the Friends Group in conjunction with Richmond's Parks and Open Spaces are an ideal avenue for promoting and supporting the departments' tree donation programme.

- *Tree Warden activities*

The borough has a large number of affiliated tree wardens, the council is proud of the work these people do. The Friend's of Group is also an ideal network for promoting the Tree Warden scheme and the associated activities

Richmond Environment Network is a joint venture between ETRuT, BTCV and TLS



Richmond Environment Network

Linking, supporting, developing & promoting local environmental & sustainability activities

6 Phoenix Wharf, Eel Pie Island, Twickenham, TW1 3DY
www.richenvironmentnet.org.uk 020 8892 0590 info@richenvironmentnet.org.uk

- *Promotion*

Newsletter - a newsletter to help promote the above and membership

Website - to help promote the above and membership, link to other Websites i.e. friends Groups, LBRuT, park related organisations. The following is a very good example of a Friends Group Website, which may be of interest <http://www.force.org.uk/> <http://www.vauxhallpark.org.uk/>

How to (A step by step guide)

The following is only to be used as a guide and there are many ways of establishing a Friends Group but the most important factor is the group must be open and a fair representation of the community that uses the park or open space. The London Borough of Richmond upon Thames will only acknowledge a Friends Group that has a democratic open membership.

Often Friends Groups are formed, as a direct result of a local authority making a decision about a park or open space that is unfavourable with a proportion of a local community or that infrastructure (building, playground, paths, a historic garden, lighting etc) has deteriorated to an unacceptable level that the local community can no longer tolerate. Although unacceptable and negative because trust has to be rebuilt within the community, this is the easiest way of establishing a Friends Group and a number of strong groups within the borough have formed by this means. However, this does prove in general people are passionate and care about open spaces and with a focus of enthusiasm within the community a group is easily generated.

Although we provide this guide, we also recommend if your group is forming within the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames that you contact us so we can provide helps and support from the earliest stage. Officers at REN have a good track record in facilitating the set up of many successful new groups and also supporting people and groups in more difficult situations.

Step One

Create a positive focus to generate enthusiasm within the community. One example is holding an event with key objectives:

- Skills audit within the local community to help spread work load
- Get people together
- Ensure fair representation of all site users

The crucial factor at this point is to ensure the initiator(s) have rallied as many of the park's associated groups to take part in either the grant application or focus event. For example have you considered the bowls, tennis, football and cricket clubs etc, day care, nursery, play group, café operator, conservation volunteers, neighbouring school, residents association, civic amenity society, church etc?

Step Two

Once a body of people have been pulled together it is vital to form a democratic structure consisting of a Chairperson, Deputy Chairperson and Secretary. The group will need to form a constitution, which Richmond Environment Network can offer a tried and tested template for the group to use. The constitution shall clearly define the election process i.e. number of people to present, length of term, stand down period, membership of the group, charges (if any) for membership, how it reports to the wider group of people etc. Whilst it can be an unwanted distraction or seem overly bureaucratic for a community group to think about such things, doing so ensures the group operates in an open and transparent way, protecting the interests of the community, Members and the elected committee and we

Richmond Environment Network is a joint venture between ETRuT, BTCV and TLS



Richmond Environment Network

Linking, supporting, developing & promoting local environmental & sustainability activities

6 Phoenix Wharf, Eel Pie Island, Twickenham, TW1 3DY
www.richenvironmentnet.org.uk 020 8892 0590 info@richenvironmentnet.org.uk

recommend all groups develop a constitution. Once a constitution has been fully drafted it should be adopted by the wider group.

There are a number of different types of structures and statuses and we recommend you seek advice from REN or other support bodies on which will be the most appropriate for your group, usually it will be the first few in the list below. A structure or shell refers to whether you will be a company, which is a body that can own assets and employment staff and will mean annual accounts will need to be filled to Companies House. Status refers to whether the group seeks charity status and the Charity Commission will be the regulator and annual accounts will need to also be filled with them. If you opt for an incorporated charitable trust you will have both regulators:

- An unincorporated voluntary association (easiest option; no regulator and no filling)
- A charitable trust (unincorporated with Charity Commission as regulator)
- An incorporated charitable trust (i.e. a not for profit company with charitable status)
- A not for profit company (Companies House as regulator)
- A community interest company (CIC regulator)

REN has helped groups with all of these structures and statuses and can provide local examples. Don't worry if all this seems alien we are here to guide you through it all.

If the group is going to form itself as a charitable trust (i.e. seeking charitable status) or is looking to manage finances they will need to elect a Treasurer. There is no vital need to form a charitable trust unless the group intends a large fundraising campaign and or the groups intends to purchase assets (i.e. mowers, computers or expensive equipment) or wishes to reach agreement with the council where the park or open space is leased to or the group takes on a responsibility to manage. A number of groups within the borough are looking at this option now.

Community bank accounts are available at most high street banks and there's also specialist charity banks as well. The process in establishing community bank accounts can be a little onerous, however we have heard the process at all banks are just as onerous as each other.

Step Three

The Friends Group needs to decide how many times a year the committee meets and the wider group also. Although REN initially can commit and officer to attend twice a year additional support should be agreed with REN in advance. However, the Friends Group can meet as often as it likes and usually REN can continue to attend meetings and can of course support the group on an on-going basis. The meetings should produce clear minutes that if need be can be responded to by the designated officer.

Step Four

Utilising the initial skills audit from step one, the Friends Group should nominate relevant representatives that have a particular specialism. The nominees should be willing to assist LBRuT in the management of the open space, the Greenspace Stakeholder Forum and the Environmental Groups' Forum when developing the strategic direction for Richmond's parks and open spaces. Specialisms to consider are conservation and wildlife, play, horticulture, sport, grant funding, sponsorship, Web design, promotion etc.

Step Five

With the Friends Group formed and the initial meeting(s) held it is an ideal time to set and agree targets for the coming year with the REN or LBRuT Officer. One of the targets would most likely be the reason why the group was formed. Also to keep people updated on the goings on with the group, this could be via emails, websites, social media (Facebook, Twitter etc) or printed newsletters, however, these cost

Richmond Environment Network is a joint venture between ETRuT, BTCV and TLS



Richmond Environment Network

Linking, supporting, developing & promoting local environmental & sustainability activities

6 Phoenix Wharf, Eel Pie Island, Twickenham, TW1 3DY
www.richenvironmentnet.org.uk 020 8892 0590 info@richenvironmentnet.org.uk

Step Six

The hardest step of all is keeping the Friends Group together (interest and participation is always easier at the beginning), member's interested and recruiting additional members. This should be made easy by following Step 5, also holding annual events, developing a website and regular newsletter updates etc. REN can provide with a page/s free of charge on its website, with additional listings of your activities on REN's Events Calendar, with the entries also being submitted to both local papers. REN can also signpost to sources where good free website can be developed and hosted and officers from REN can aid in establishing and maintaining these.

Depending on what activities the group intends to undertake, a need to raise funding might come about, particularly if the group is to be an active one, in holding events, volunteer days etc as the Group will need it's own insurance. At this point a meeting should be convened with an Officer of Richmond Environment Network (REN) to discuss funding opportunities, such as grant applications to charitable trusts, holding events, earning income etc.

Further Information

REN's website has a good deal of information and resources to help groups, this can be found at <http://www.richenvironmentnet.org.uk/Support-for-Env-Groups.aspx>

The Environmental Groups Forum aims to encourage great communication between all parties, sharing information and good practice. The Forum will also be used to disseminate useful information to the groups such as funding info. Frequently the Forum's are organised when the Council is running a consultation exercise so that REN can facilitate local group's involvement and input into these. Further information can also be found on the REN website

Any further information can be sort from Richmond Environment Network on <mailto:info@richenvironmentnet.org.uk> or calling 020 8892 0590

A number of organisations have also published several books on the subject.

BTCV

BTCV Local Action <http://shop.btcv.org.uk/shop/level2/60/stock/961>

*This book is also available free available when you join BTCV Community Network, which also gives you access to cheaper insurance.

BTCV Urban Handbook <http://shop.btcv.org.uk/shop/level2/59/stock/955>

BTCV Environments for All <http://shop.btcv.org.uk/shop/level2/104/stock/4253>

Also **Green Space** who also publish many books on related topics, including Making a Difference, How to Set Up and Maintain a Community Group of Parks and Green Spaces <http://www.green-space.org.uk/library/gspublications.htm>

Copies of these books can also be borrowed from REN's Resource Library

This documents was last updated in July 2010. However, this guide is frequently updated based upon the experiences of REN and local groups and as such we welcome feedback to ensure this guide is as comprehensive as possible.

Richmond Environment Network is a joint venture between ETRuT, BTCV and TLS

