



THE
ROYAL
PARKS



VOLUNTEERING STRATEGY 2021-26

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INTRODUCTION

Our incredible volunteers are at the heart of the charity that manages our special places, The Royal Parks. The need for access to green space for urban living has never been more important, and as custodians of these parks it is our duty to ensure that they are accessible and open to all.

There is a balance between parks for people and for wildlife, and volunteers help both by engaging visitors for their health and well-being, whilst helping to conserve the landscapes, horticulture and wildlife. We enjoy the wider skills that volunteers bring, together with the opportunity to share our learning. With volunteers we have

a wider reach, more conversations and new ideas. In return we want to support each volunteer as they make a difference, meet new friends, and recognise the accomplishments we make together. And what better than ask a current volunteer to find out it is fun too!

There are so many ways volunteers help – over 50 different opportunities, including being a trustee. We thank all volunteers whether it's a one-off project or a weekly group lasting many years. We are so appreciative of all the volunteers for our many partners and stakeholders, such as the Friends groups. This strategy gives context to our work but most importantly, shows the direction that we are going in. We need more people to help us, to help the parks, people and life.



VOLUNTEERING WITH THE ROYAL PARKS

WHERE WE WERE IN 2018

As a newly formed charity, in 2018 The Royal Parks reviewed how we support volunteering, which helps management of the parks for wildlife and visitors. We worked closely with partner organisations, volunteers and The Royal Parks staff to understand more about how about our volunteering programme was doing and what areas could be improved.

Volunteers were making valuable contributions across the organisation, and although our volunteering programme was generally strong, it needed more consistency and direction. From this work we created a three-year Volunteering Strategy and Action Plan to strengthen the volunteer programme, grow and diversify the volunteer base, and to trial a Volunteer Ranger Service.

WHERE WE ARE NOW

We now have the mechanisms needed to underpin a strong service and programme, including consistent policies and guidance. Despite a challenging 2020 we have seen an increase in demand for opportunities to get involved with volunteering in the parks. We have grown to over 1,000 registered volunteers, and have developed over 50 opportunities to get involved with The Royal Parks. We have the scope, passion and need to increase flexibility within existing opportunities, as well as provide new opportunities to get involved. We hope to accomplish this in the next five years. Our Volunteer Ranger Service Trial has been a success in Richmond and Bushy Parks and has proven to be essential, creating stronger connections between visitors and the parks.

We have come a long way since 2018, but there is still more to do.



WHERE ARE WE NOW?

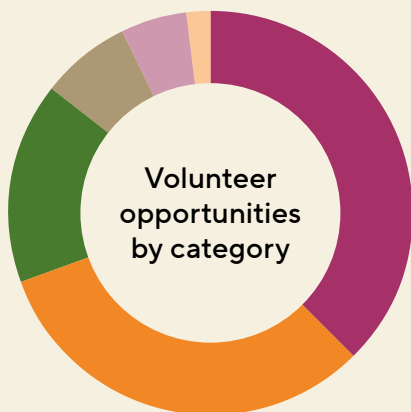
Since 2018, we've had:

1,043 volunteers registered

56 opportunities delivered

2,000+ sessions

WHAT DO OUR VOLUNTEERS DO?



Nature
(37.5%)



Heritage
(7.1%)



Engagement
(32.1%)



Events
(5.4%)



Horticulture
(16.1%)



Wellbeing
(1.8%)

WHAT DO OUR VOLUNTEERS THINK?

Survey results show that we are excelling (>85% volunteers satisfied) in the following areas:



Recruitment
(87.5%)



Training and induction
(91.5%)



Recognition
(96%)



Tasks and responsibilities
(99%)



Treating volunteers fairly
(97%)



Valuing volunteers
(95%)



Contact and communications
(95%)

WHAT DO OUR VOLUNTEERS WANT?

- More training and information sharing.
- More opportunities to get involved.
- More connection with the whole organisation.
- Stronger understanding of a plan for their role.
- More opportunities to socialise with other volunteers.

"As a volunteer with Autism and a Learning Disability my volunteer role has given me a role which feels important and part of a team. I feel needed."

- Volunteer

OUR MISSION



Our mission is to protect and conserve the parks that we manage in the face of changing and increasing challenges, and to build a secure future for the parks, their wildlife and visitors. Volunteers are essential for us to achieve this, and we will ensure they are supported to benefit from volunteering with us.

OUR OBJECTIVES

To achieve our Mission, we aim to deliver three core objectives. These objectives will centre around The Parks, The Volunteers, and The Visitors:

1. **THE PARKS:** Grow the volunteer programme to help build resilience in biodiversity, sustainability, and landscape across Royal Parks.
2. **THE VOLUNTEERS:** Ensure volunteers are well supported, providing a welcoming, diverse, and accessible programme for all.
3. **THE VISITORS:** Enhance the experiences, behaviours and understanding of park users by expanding visitor focused volunteer opportunities.

There are two key approaches which will help us deliver these objectives:

- Maintain and develop strong communication and effective partnerships.
- Maintain and deliver best practices and policies.

OBJECTIVE 1: THE PARKS

Grow the volunteer programme to help build resilience in biodiversity, sustainability, and landscape across The Royal Parks.

We are facing a global climate emergency, which has far reaching impacts and consequences. These reach into all corners of our parks and present themselves in various ways. Climate change, pollution, and the spread of animal and plant diseases, coupled with the rising visitor numbers and the demands they bring, will impact on our parks and their wildlife. Volunteers will be vital in our fight against these numerous and increasing pressures.

We want to continue to grow the volunteer projects that we offer, as we know that both the parks and people will benefit from this. Our projects have already grown in scope over the last three years, and there is the room and urgent need to keep growing what we do.

We will continue to support and grow many existing valuable projects that volunteers are involved in. We will expand our conservation groups across the central parks, ensuring that work plans contribute directly to tackling the climate and biodiversity challenges we face. We will also involve volunteers in the delivery of ongoing engagement programmes, including Mission: Invertebrate and Greenwich Park Revealed.

Additionally, we aim to create new opportunities that will be exciting and interesting for volunteers, but also importantly help deliver projects and strategies across the parks. We will embed volunteers more widely into our landscape management work. We will create new one-off opportunities to deliver biodiversity enhancement projects.



WE AIM TO:

- Grow opportunities that focus on biodiversity, working to help deliver our long term biodiversity goals.
- Lead by example and always consider sustainability, embedding this into all our projects and practices.
- Grow volunteer involvement in landscape management work in the Parks, starting in The Regent's Park.
- Continue to support and grow current opportunities that contribute to conserving and enhancing the parks, including expanding the central conservation groups into The Regents Park and Kensington Gardens.
- Continue to work with corporate partners where appropriate.

OBJECTIVE 2: THE VOLUNTEERS

Ensure volunteers are well supported, providing a welcoming, diverse, and accessible programme for all.

Volunteers are invaluable in helping us achieve our strategic and charitable objectives and ensuring that our parks are looked after now and in the future for both wildlife and people.

We will continue to ensure that our volunteers are well supported, listened to, and that we work to build on skills and information sharing. We want to increase our learning and training offering for volunteers, including online and in-person events that are accessible to all. We will listen to what our volunteers want and need, and use this to inform what we deliver within our objectives.

We want to ensure we provide a welcoming and diverse programme. Despite growing awareness and discussion around Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion, the charity and environmental sectors can do more. We acknowledge and know that new ideas and fresh approaches generated by a diverse team of volunteers from different backgrounds and experiences will be essential in tackling current and future challenges facing our Parks and beyond.

Understanding which groups are under-represented in our volunteer base is essential to tackling equality, diversity, and inclusion in volunteering and across the parks. Together with other teams we want to work with partners to understand the work we need to do. We will work hard to understand how to reach and welcome diverse volunteers.

WE AIM TO:

- Ensure the volunteer programme is welcoming to all by seeking to understand which groups are under represented by our volunteer base.
- Work to understand and remove barriers to volunteering and our sector.
- Offer a wider, flexible range of volunteering opportunities, that allow for different needs and abilities and encourage the input of volunteers to more aspects of park management.
- Offer more learning and engagement for volunteers, including online and in-person events, to ensure volunteers have an understanding of the parks and their role within them, and feel connected to and appreciated by the charity.
- Work to involve young people in volunteering, helping to create opportunities to get involved in the environmental, conservation and urban ecology sector. We will trial work experience programmes and aim to deliver more youth focussed opportunities for 16 – 25 year olds.



OBJECTIVE 3: THE VISITORS



Enhance the experiences, behaviours and understanding of park users by expanding visitor focused volunteer opportunities.

The Royal Parks manage 5,000 acres of green space in London that is open and accessible to all, and we annually see visitor numbers upwards of 77 million. These spaces provide a sanctuary for wildlife, and also a haven for people away from the busy city. They have always been of high importance to both the residents of London and passing visitors.

Now more than ever people are realising the importance of these spaces for people's health and well-being. While we welcome this, with a continued increase in visitor numbers, this is inevitably creating increased pressure on these precious spaces. Unfortunately, these pressures can include some unwanted and challenging behaviours, including feeding and harassment of wildlife, and general disregard for the park's fauna and flora.

Providing opportunities that centre around volunteers' engagement with visitors is

increasingly important to ensure a deeper connection, understanding and enjoyment of these treasured green spaces. These engagements are central to forming and influencing park visitor behaviours in a more positive way.

We want to expand our current opportunities that have engagement at their heart, to help tackle some of the issues that the parks are facing. We will aim to expand our highly successful volunteer ranger trial, moving the service into the central parks at an appropriate pace whilst ensuring sustainability of the service in Richmond and Bushy Park.

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WE AIM TO:

- Strengthen and expand the Volunteer Ranger Service across The Royal Parks ensuring we maintain a robust service in Richmond and Bushy Parks.
- Trial the Volunteer Ranger Service in the central Parks, with a view to expanding to all parks.
- Work closely with the Learning team to deliver adult learning through volunteer led walks and engagement programmes.
- Explore and deliver volunteer opportunities and projects within wider The Royal Parks programmes, focused on enhancing visitor awareness and appreciation of nature, well-being and heritage.

DELIVERING THE VOLUNTEER STRATEGY



The Volunteering Strategy delivery will be guided through a 5 Year Action Plan. There are two key approaches which will help us to deliver our objectives:

- Maintain and develop strong communication and effective partnerships.
- Maintain and deliver best practices and policies.

DEVELOP STRONG COMMUNICATION AND EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS

Maintaining the relationships and communications that already exist to support the volunteer programme is integral. Whilst nurturing these existing relationships, building new relationships will be equally important to grow and diversify the programme. These relationships refer to external stakeholders such as Friends groups and other voluntary organisations, the volunteers themselves, and internal stakeholders such as Park Managers and other teams.

WE WILL:

- Continue to facilitate and support The Royal Parks volunteers, partners and staff who co-ordinate volunteers to share best practice.
- Support and develop volunteer opportunities delivered with and by partners, such as Friends groups. Sharing volunteer numbers and hours to champion the work volunteers do.
- Continue to seek project opportunities for volunteers, ensuring that volunteers are included and costed in new funding applications or projects and that their involvement is sustainable.

DELIVER BEST PRACTICES AND POLICIES

A key objective of our first volunteer strategy (2018-21) was to strengthen the volunteer programme in part by strengthening the infrastructure. We have utilised experience from across The Royal Parks, NCVO and other like-minded organisations to develop and implement robust volunteering policies.

We now have a set of policies that underpin the new volunteer strategy, that will enable us to successfully evolve and deliver our new objectives. These policies take into account challenging and changing conditions so that we work more efficiently and deliver stronger and better outcomes.

WE WILL:

- Implement the 5-year Volunteer Action Plan (2021 – 26) in consultation with relevant partners and The Royal Parks teams. This will be updated as required to respond to developments in national and local policy, any significant changes in the use and environment of the parks, and the management needs of The Royal Parks.
- Continuing to ensure that all elements of the The Royal Parks Volunteer Programme are underpinned by Best Practice. Highlight our commitment to volunteers and ensure we give them the best experience possible.
- Annually review and update all policies and procedures: expenses, insurance, code of conduct, data protection, equality, diversity and inclusion, problem resolution, complaints, benefits and recognition.
- Provide relevant training for the volunteer team and volunteer co-ordinators,
- Update the volunteer co-ordinator handbook annually with any policy changes, share and give training in policies and procedures.
- Continued use of the volunteer hub (GDPR compliant database), collect and store data, track volunteer hours and publicise opportunities to help inform future decision making.
- Review Risk Assessments at least annually, taking into account changing circumstances (e.g. Covid-19).



OUR VALUES

We have five organisational values that define how we work at The Royal Parks. It guides how we behave, how we make decisions and how we interact with one another and with stakeholders, partners and volunteers.

We have set out below how our values link to the work our volunteers do, and how we support those volunteering – giving their time to help us.



WE ARE RESPONSIBLE

We take ownership of our decisions and actions, we are proud of our work, we learn from our mistakes and ensure to recognise and celebrate success.

WE ARE EXCELLENT

We will aim to deliver to the highest practicable standard within available resources in everything that we do. This includes how we work with our volunteers, ensuring that the support they receive and opportunities we provide are excellent and underpinned by best practice.

WE ARE RESPECTFUL

We treat our volunteers in ways that are reasonable, right and just.

WE ARE OPEN

We encourage access to knowledge and information, collaborative management and decision-making and the empowerment of our volunteers to share their ideas and skills to make an active contribution to the direction of the charity. We strive in return to share our knowledge and training with our volunteers who contribute so much.

WE ARE INCLUSIVE

We welcome everyone to enjoy and participate in volunteering across the Royal Parks and aim to be an organisation that is representative of the city it serves. We know that by having a diverse volunteer base we benefit from new ideas and fresh approaches generated by people from different backgrounds and experiences. It also ensures that our work is relevant to and impacts and benefits on all kinds of people in society. Our volunteering is available and should be accessible to all.

WHAT WE'VE DELIVERED



As we look to deliver the next 5 years of the volunteer strategy, we also want to reflect on what we have delivered and achieved in the last 3 years in the relation to our three objectives.

STRENGTHENING THE PROGRAMME

Key to the 2018 strategy was getting the basics right and making sure that the right infrastructure was in place, we took the time to reinforce relationships and looked to enhance the volunteer experience.

We worked hard in year 1 to write and implement all of the fundamental policies and practices that underpin best practice and would help with consistency across all opportunities.

Another key achievement was the research and implementation of a new volunteer database to store information in line with GDPR, and also to make it easier to monitor key information and manage opportunities. Our new volunteer hub now has over 1,000 registered volunteers.

We supported the volunteer co-ordinators by producing a comprehensive volunteer co-ordinator handbook and supporting documents so that all volunteers across the parks would be managed to a consistent high standard.



KEY OUTCOMES

Suite of high quality supporting documents produced, that clearly show support and commitment to both volunteers and their co-ordinators:

- Volunteer Handbook
- Volunteer Coordinator Handbook
- Volunteer Policy
- Volunteer Agreement
- Volunteer Hub

GROWING THE PROGRAMME

To grow the programme we needed to support existing projects, alongside trialling new programmes and looking to diversify.

We started to build one-off volunteering programmes, such as bulb and hedge planting days, and meadow and woodland management, utilising our growing volunteer base to spring into action when additional tasks were presented by the park teams.

A key aim was to reconnect support and communications with several groups, to sustain them when initial funding streams had finished. The two Isabella Plantation volunteer groups have been re-connected with the wider volunteer team and their input is now being recorded. Since October 2020, 12 volunteers have contributed 202 hours of weeding, bramble clearance, planting and path raking. We also re-connected with the Regent's Park Community Wildlife Garden volunteer group, and since March 2019, 9 volunteers have spent 655 hours working in the garden.

Our central conservation group was set up and expanded. We now have regular groups in St James Park on Duck island and in Hyde Park. Volunteers have contributed to a variety of tasks; creating wildflower meadows, clearing invasive species, and planting willow. Our aim is to keep expanding into our other central parks.

KEY OUTCOMES

- 55 registered opportunities.
- 1,043 registered volunteers on GDPR compliant hub.
- Central conservation groups have a combined 53 volunteers and have contributed 553 hours since their formation.
- Since April 2019, 397 volunteers from 9 different organisations have contributed 2069 hours across 6 of our parks while attending corporate volunteer 'park days'.
- Since January 2020 we created 4 one-off opportunities that engaged 79 volunteers, who contributed 327 hours.





TRIALLING VOLUNTEER RANGER SERVICE

In the first year of the strategy, we created an Advisory Group with key members of the Friends' Groups in Bushy and Richmond Parks and we recruited a Volunteer Officer to deliver the service. 25 Volunteer Rangers were first recruited in Jan 2019, and following a comprehensive training programme, started to carry out their role from April 2019.

Year 2 saw a further 70 volunteers recruited and trained in Bushy and Richmond parks. A total of 1945 hours were given over weekends and school holidays and 7214 visitors were reached by the service. A mini-trial service was also introduced to Greenwich Park with 12 Volunteer Rangers for July to October. The evaluation of this has helped plan the full version of the service which will be rolled out in 2021/2022.

The last year unfortunately saw the Covid-19 pandemic, meaning volunteer rangers and other volunteers could not get out into the parks as much.

In total of 119 volunteers have been recruited and they have reached over 17,000 visitors during the three-year trial period.

The trial has been a huge success, and we will look to expand the service further across the Royal Parks over the next 5 years.



KEY OUTCOMES

Bushy and Richmond Parks:

- We have fully trained 95 fully Volunteer Rangers.
- They have contributed 3087 hours and reached 17411 visitors.
- 154 active days in Bushy and 169 active days in Richmond Park.
- 45% conversations advise behaviour change to benefit the park.

Greenwich Park trial:

- We trained 12 volunteers to take part in a mini trial.
- They contributed 138 hours and reached 442 visitors.

We are grateful and thankful to the hundreds of generous volunteers who share their skills, energy and time to help us work towards a secure future for our parks.

To find out more about this strategy, how we're transforming volunteering or to become part of our volunteer community, go to:

royalparks.org.uk

The Royal Parks is registered in England and Wales

Company Registration No: 10016100

Registered Charity No: 1172042

Registered Office: The Old Police House
Hyde Park, London W2 2UH

0300 061 2000

hq@royalparks.org.uk
royalparks.org.uk

