

# Historic Environment Forum

## Health check for local groups

*The purpose of this pack is to help your group reflect on the benefits of broadening your base of volunteers, identify on what is preventing you from having a wider appeal now and devise a strategy to achieve that wider support in the future.*

*This pack contains some ideas for local groups derived from our research amongst people who are warm to volunteering for the local historic environment and some questions to help stimulate discussion at future meetings.*

# What is the Historic Environment Forum?

The Historic Environment Forum is made up of a group of organisations who are concerned with the local historic environment.



ENGLISH HERITAGE



Member organisations include English Heritage, National Trust, Civic Voice, the Council for British Archaeology, Historic Towns Forum, the Institute of Field Archaeology, the Institute of Historic Building Conservation, the Joint Committee of National Amenity Societies and many more.

# Background

- The Historic Environment Forum wanted to find out how to get more people volunteering locally to protect and champion the local historic environment
- To find out how to do this they commissioned BritainThinks, a research company, to conduct research into encouraging greater participation in the local historic environment
- One of the key outcomes of the project was this health check which local groups can use on the ground to help achieve this

## Key questions for the research:

- Why does one off local campaigning activity in the local historic environment not lead to more sustained volunteering?
- Why do so many people who are interested in their local historic environment fail to get involved at all?
- What can local groups do to build a broader base of more sustainable volunteering?
- And what can national bodies do to support them?

# What we did...

Literature review

Review of existing literature covering relevant Government policy affecting the local historic environment and research data covering the experience of volunteering.

Focus Groups

Discussion groups with 'one off volunteers' who have done a one-off activity like sign a petition but not sustained involvement, and 'warm non-volunteers' who are interested in the issues but have never got involved.

Lay research

Made a tool-kit containing details of local meetings, campaigns and websites and asked some of our participants to go and give some of the activities a try to see how they reacted to what is out there at the moment.

Collaborative workshops

Then we brought the participants together with representatives of local groups to collaboratively come up with a list of some approaches and activities that will help local groups attract and retain more supporters.

HEF Workshop

We presented our findings to the national partners in the Historic Environment Forum and brainstormed some ideas for how local groups can benefit from our findings in their local area.

Note: 'Local groups' refers to bodies which meet locally and act as advocates and watchdogs for local heritage and amenity on an ongoing basis and which do not exist for a single campaign or issue. They include civic societies and Building Preservation Trusts. However the tool kit and results can just as easily be transferred to other heritage organisations.

# Some of the key findings from our research...

- Even the one-off volunteers see getting involved in a group as a huge step onto 'another level' of involvement - they set the bar high for that kind of activity in terms of knowledge, time, cost and drive
  - Whereas in fact the one-off volunteers group of people have a relatively high level of knowledge and/or solid experience of activities
- The best positioning for volunteering is as an activity which is free, local, sociable, outdoorsy and time limited
  - Giving a sense of satisfaction or buzz and being valued are secondary ways of talking about volunteering

"It's fitting everything in, you know, a lot of us work 13 hour days and juggling families and trying to get to see friends and that sort of thing. These people probably have a lot more time or are retired."

"It would be good to just be able to turn up, it leaves you free to decide, you could even decide at the last minute whether you're going to go or not, but if there's information that you know you can seek out if you want to read it, say on the internet."

"I mean I know they have volunteers at Meanwood Valley Farm, they could do like litter picking as a family"

# Key findings

- The lens for getting involved is local or emotional; thinking about the wider environment is a huge step change and not one people are readily able to make
- Local groups need to be approachable and offer people a roadmap for the planning system
  - The world of committed volunteers is seen as alien and distant by the participants - the people are perceived as different and there is thought to be a huge knowledge gap which is a huge barrier
  - This is fed by confusion and cynicism about local government and the planning system - firstly in terms of the language and secondly the processes

“I wouldn’t go to a meeting for meetings sake, just to say oh I’ll have a go at this one, it has to be something that is personal to me.”

“They’d be wearing tweed...dark green...very English, a bit of a busybody but very knowledgeable.”

“I think a lot of the council processes and practices are borderline corrupt anyway so I don’t think that helps, so it’s down to who’s got the biggest pocket and the developer ultimately has a lot of money.”

# Key findings

- Involvement must be led by strong leaders who enable open discussion but also organise and move campaigns along
- For one-off volunteers the outcome of the campaign they were involved in is important
  - If they lose the campaign it feeds cynicism - local groups need to give hope by demonstrating success and 'making a difference'

"I think they (the leader) need to be passionate about what they're doing but as neutral as possible, he needs to see both their sides of the story and be quite diplomatic and neutral."

"I think a major negative, is the thought that whatever efforts you and thousands like you might go to, it's going to happen anyway, I mean I always knew that Sainsbury's was going to be built, there was never any question about it."

# The next stage is to give local groups a 'health check' they can use on the ground

- This purpose of this pack is to help local groups to build a wider pool of volunteers who sustain their involvement over the long-term, beyond one campaign or issue
- By helping you understand how your target audience think and feel about local campaigning and getting involved you will be able to craft your approach to have greater appeal to a wider pool of people
- You can use the ideas and actions in this plan as a reference tool when you are setting your priorities and devising campaigns and activities
- And use the questions and discussion points at group meetings to help focus on what you need to do to broaden your appeal
- The next section can be used to stimulate debate at meetings of your group



# Increasing your membership and volunteer base

1

What are the main benefits for your group?

2

Why do you need to do this?

3

What are the solutions?

# What are the benefits of taking action to have a broader base of members and volunteers?

- **More successful campaigns**
  - Involve local communities more, building momentum around projects leading to pressure on your local council and more media attention
- **More inclusive - attracting more people from a wider demographic base, especially younger ones**
- **Draw from a broader range of skills**
  - Especially modern communications skills e.g. web design, social media etc that can transform a campaign
- **Wider networks, building involvement as new people bring in more new people**

# Why is there a need to broaden your base?

- Local groups face a demographic challenge - they often have an older profile amongst leading members
- Leading members of groups are often time-poor and very stretched
  - Extra capacity can help your group focus on what's most important to you
- **Secure your legacy**
  - Local groups work tirelessly to protect the local historic environment - it's imperative to recruit the next generation so your achievements are not forgotten or reversed

What are the solutions for attracting new people? This is a list of must haves and must not haves for local groups' events and communications, generated at the workshops in Leeds and Leicestershire...

## Must

Have good advertising/publicity

**Be welcoming**

Have a clear mission

**Fit different lifestyles**

Be easy to get involved quickly and in different ways

**Allow you to learn and gain new skills**

Convey passion

**Have a personal touch**

Have a strong visual element

**Show clear, up to date information**

Appeal to all ages

**Respond quickly when you contact them**

Be open and transparent

## Must not

**Have wordy and boring explanations**

Make you feel guilty

**Be too expensive**

Be too vague on what the purpose is

**Make younger people feel unwelcome**

Be too worthy and dull

**Be oppositional all the time**

Make you feel like you have to be an expert

**Have out of date information on display**

Give you too little notice to plan ahead

**Be cliquey**

In our two workshops local people and reps from local groups worked together to come up with some ideas to attract more people to volunteer with local groups...

## Leeds

1. Restoring a historic building
  - Engage community through fundraising
  - Business involvement
  - Engage schools/press
2. Engage people to volunteer rather than expect people to contact civic societies
  - Vary the demographics: Approach different places to engage people – e.g. job centres, schools, universities, Scouts/Guides
  - Encourage and accept people who aren't totally driven but who would like to help
  - Market your activities
  - Don't give off the impression that people have to give up too much time
3. Photographic/Art project
  - Involve colleges
  - Use a web platform (e.g. Flickr)
  - Incentivise winner
4. Street parties/Garden parties
  - Different stalls
  - Raise awareness and funds
  - Crafts and food stalls

## Leicester

1. Advertising and promotion
  - Go into schools and libraries
  - Link with national events
2. Pride and passion
  - Guided tours
  - Planning training
  - Treasure hunts
3. Involve young people
  - Bring history to life: use the right language
  - Link with schools
4. A personal touch
  - Personal two way communications
  - Case studies
  - Familiar local leaders
5. Events
  - Piggyback on existing events
6. Fundraising
  - Sponsored activities
  - In-kind donations

At the end of the workshops, we asked the local people and local groups to write down ten top tips for local groups to help them get more people involved - here are the most popular choices...

- 1. BROADEN YOUR APPEAL**
- 2. FOCUS ON THE FUTURE**
- 3. APPEAL TO FAMILIES NOT JUST INDIVIDUALS**
- 4. MODERNISE YOUR MEMBERSHIP PROCESS**
- 5. HAVE MORE FUN EVENTS**
- 6. USE SOCIAL NETWORKING**
- 7. WORK WITH OTHER GROUPS**
- 8. INVOLVE THE WHOLE COMMUNITY**
- 9. PRIORITISE A CLEAR AND UP TO DATE WEBSITE**
- 10. CLEARLY SET OUT HOW PEOPLE CAN GET INVOLVED**

# Some key questions for your group to discuss in these three themes...

- Try using these questions and discussion points at group meetings to help focus on what you need to do to broaden your appeal
- Use the answers to identify the main areas where your group can develop and write points to follow through for the coming year
- Review progress towards achieving your plan quarterly

**1** How do we communicate?

**2** How do we approach people to join us?

**3** How can we develop partnerships?

# Communications - Five Key questions

1. What was your best communication tool in the last 12 months? Why? What is the worse? Why?
2. Circulate copies of a recent report or newsletter – circle any examples of jargon and compare notes – How near or far are you from using plain English that could be understood by anyone on the street?
3. How far ahead of meetings and events do you give notice? What would be a good target for notice periods of events?
4. Google your group. What do you find? What could make it more appealing?
5. Imagine you were a member of the public who wanted to volunteer for a local group. What would be the three main places they would find you? What would be the three main places they might look where they wouldn't find you?



# Making the approach - Five Key questions

1. What is your 'pitch' for people who might be interested in your group – what is in it for them?
2. What local or national events could you use to recruit?
3. When are the best times to approach people?
4. Who is the person in your group who is best suited to approaching people? Why are they best person to do this?
5. Do you ever push to fast? Do you allow people to get involved gently at first, on their own terms or do you always ask them to join when they show interest?

# Partnerships – Five Key Questions

1. Can you think of an occasion in which you have not been able to work with another group because of a disagreement about the right approach?
2. Who are three different types of groups you have common interests with whom you could work more closely in the future? Are there any organisations with whom there is a less obvious affinity that you could work with?
3. What are the top five obstacles to working with other groups? How could each one be dealt with? Think about seeing local authorities as partners not opposition
4. Think of an occasion in which you worked well in partnership with another organisation with similar aims? What were the factors that made it work?
5. When you work in partnership with others do you draw up an agreement? What elements should ideally be in such an agreement?

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