

EAST Lothian COUNTRYSIDE VOLUNTEERS BUSINESS PLAN 2017/20

1. Background to Revising ELVPW to Form ELCV

East Lothian Countryside Volunteers (ELCV) is seeking to secure the renaming of the East Lothian Path Wardens (ELVPW) and the expansion of its aims and work to cover a wide range of volunteer groups which all work closely with the Countryside Section of East Lothian Council (ELC). ELVPW secured its charitable status as a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO) in December 2013. Over three years it was successful in securing funding for hand and power tools for the path wardens use and raising awareness of the work that path wardens undertake.

When ELVPW was being planned, having a more broadly based charity was considered. However, it was not pursued as it was felt that it was better to focus on the path wardens and to make a success of that before possible expanding it if other groups wanted to emulate what was hoped would be a worthwhile initiative.

ELVPW supported the work of the Countryside Section of ELC to maintain the network of paths across the county. These paths provide an invaluable resource for those who live, work and visit East Lothian to engage in walking, cycling and horse riding. Much of the maintenance of this mosaic of paths is undertaken directly by the local authority, but a group of around 60 volunteers contribute to this effort by assuming responsibility for a stretch of paths in their own locale.

2. East Lothian Countryside Volunteers Mission

To support, promote and expand the contribution of our volunteers in protecting and enhancing the East Lothian countryside, its wildlife, heritage and accessibility for the wellbeing of our communities and all the people of East Lothian.

3. The Work of East Lothian Countryside Volunteers

Our volunteers are keen to make improvements to the East Lothian countryside. This is achieved by way of litter picking, removing invasive plant species, planting trees and hedges, surveying vulnerable plant and animal species, looking after grazing animals that are helping towards bringing more flowering plants to our grasslands, making the County more accessible for residents and tourists and working with communities.

To support this work involves making bids for funding to sources that are outwith the reach of the ELC. Due to ever increasing operational budget constraints for public bodies such as the Council, the development of new projects and initiatives is likely to continue to be a challenging prospect. Given prevailing economic environment it is not envisaged that this forecast will change in the short to medium term.

The following Volunteer Groups that will be supported by ELCV are:-

Dunbar Conservation Volunteers
Friends of North Berwick
Friends of Levenhall Links
Friends of Aberlady Local Nature Reserve
Friends of Yellowcraig
East Lothian Volunteer Path Wardens
Junior Rangers
North Berwick & Traprain Laws Pony Groups
Plant, Bee & Butterfly Surveyors and Individual Volunteers

4. East Lothian Countryside Volunteers – Our Key Objectives

The organisation's purposes are:-

To support the enhancement and maintenance of the natural heritage within East Lothian and promote it as a vehicle for citizenship/community development, volunteering and environmental protection and improvement. This will be delivered by:-

- i. Ensuring any and all work undertaken is completed in a manner that delivers direct or indirect protection to sensitive environmental habitats and species and delivers tangible community benefits in terms of improved amenity, local environment and access.
- ii. Promote the work and role of the East Lothian Countryside Volunteers and stimulate community interest and additional local volunteer involvement in the enhancement of the countryside resource.
- iii. Source funding for natural heritage conservation and enhancement, path maintenance/improvement and to equip and promote the operations of the volunteers.

To deliver these objectives ELCV will:-

- iv. Liaise and collaborate with local land managers to inform them about our work and help them to improve their land for conservation
- v. Promote both the physical and mental health benefits of volunteering and the importance of having an accessible, safe and attractive community environment
- vi. Work with educational bodies from nursery schools to universities
- vii. Liaise and collaborate with other charitable bodies working in the countryside of East Lothian
- viii. Continue to work closely with East Lothian Council and in particular with the Countryside Team and the Local Area Partnerships

5. East Lothian Countryside Volunteers 2017/2019 Work Plan

The following activities will be pursued in parallel over the next two years broken down into the Volunteer Groups that have sought funding through and/or publicity through ELCV to assist the delivery of their projects and initiatives.

All the volunteers involved in our Volunteer Groups have been asked to come up with ideas to improve the areas and initiatives that they work on. This is an important step towards involving them in influencing and planning their volunteering.

A Brief Summary of the Group Work Plans

Major Projects

1. The Path Wardens Strategic Path Link between Athelstaneford to both Pencraig and Sandy's Mill on the River Tyne Path

This also includes a link to the A199 roadside pavement and River Tyne path – upgrade of Core Paths 327 and connecting to Path 312. This project involves the creation of 1.5 km of new path and 500m of path improvement/drainage at a cost of £35,000.

2. The Path Wardens Spittalrig to Letham Path Link

The upgrading of this 1.9km Core Path 110 route requires surface / drainage improvements to the existing path at a cost of £20,000.

3. The Friends Of Aberlady Local Nature Reserve Volunteer Hub

A facility for volunteers to collect equipment, complete recording work and to encourage and support independent volunteering. The impact of this project, when it is completed, may well be repeated later at other locations in East Lothian. The total cost would be £18,250.

Other Projects

1. A general fund to seek funding for the purchase of protective clothing, machinery and training – All Groups
2. A dry and wet walling training course for volunteers and the purchase of stone for work at Yellowcraig and North Berwick – Friends of Yellowcraig and North Berwick
3. A general requirement for all groups for materials and the means to get them where they need them to construct a fence to protect a Little Tern breeding site, upgrade a flight of steps at Yellowcraig, undertaking measures to encourage wildlife in Levenhall and North Berwick and in all of this involving the Junior Rangers.

The total cost for all these projects would be c £12,000.

Promotion and Awareness Raising Initiatives

1. The ELCV Trustees will :-

- Host a website that will promote the work of all of the volunteer groups
- Contact other countryside volunteering charities that work in East Lothian to facilitate coordination and cooperation

2. Path Wardens are organising:-

- A guided walks programme
- A leaflet pack of East Lothian paths with descriptions provided by path wardens
- Stickers and plastic discs, to go on metal poles and wooden posts, to indicate the paths that are being looked after by path wardens
- Funding required - £3,000

3. All Groups will:-

- Promote their activities in their local community
- Some of the groups have their own websites which they will continue to maintain and develop

6. East Lothian Countryside Volunteers

The main purpose of the charity is to direct, co-ordinate and encourage voluntary input into the various volunteer groups across the county by way of securing funding for work plan projects and raising awareness for and promotion of the work of volunteer groups and individuals. In doing this ELCV does not plan any chargeable services.

It is envisaged that the ELCV Trustees will meet, at least, every 3 months to assess work plan adjustments and work plan revisions from groups and individuals. Fundraising for projects and initiatives will be dealt with on a quarterly basis. This will be a means to ensure that there is no competition between groups and that opportunities are not missed, by bringing together a number of bids. Requests from volunteer groups for assistance to raise funds and awareness/media coverage will be dealt with,

by the Trustees, as they arise. There may be occasions, due to the complexity and scale of the work involved, where work is contracted out. While funds may be sourced by the ELCV, ELC may undertake the necessary tendering process and where appropriate to manage and underwrite the work.

Volunteer groups will continue to use the secure tool storage facilities provided by ELC and to work closely with ELC Countryside Team. The clear demarcation of responsibilities between ELC and the ELCV will be maintained.

7. East Lothian Countryside Volunteers Supporters

- Our key stakeholders will, in the main, be the communities, residents, workers and visitors of East Lothian. As the main stakeholders and benefactors, it is hoped through better awareness, promotion and celebration of success we will be able to engage more volunteers and communities in assisting the overall effort.
- With regard to our organisational framework, management and human resources the charity will follow its constitution, including holding regular trustees meetings to decide on strategy and respond to projects and initiatives from volunteer groups.
- An annual AGM will be held at the “Volly Jolly” annual gathering to which all volunteers are invited. This provides an opportunity to celebrate the work of all our volunteers that we support.

8. East Lothian Countryside Volunteers Finance

East Lothian Countryside Volunteers - Resources and Finance

The main resources available to ELCV are 1) the time and skills of our volunteers and 2) external grant funding obtained to support our work plans detailed in section 5 above.

Volunteers

- In 2016 ELCV volunteers donated at least some 10,000 hours work according to available time recording data.
- As another indication of the scale of the volunteers’ work, it would have cost some £126,000 a year if we had had to replace the volunteers with paid staff in 2016.
- UK Government sponsored research shows that volunteers themselves consider the wellbeing benefit derived from volunteering substantially exceeds its value measured in economic terms.
- These may be under-estimates of the scale and value of ELCV volunteers work. Our time-recording data are patchy and the total work time by volunteers in 2016 may be substantially higher than recorded. ELCV will improve the data we collect on volunteers’ work time. Good information on time worked is important to planning our work well and will help us get support from stakeholders, our communities and funders.
- An important reason for forming ELCV is to expand and strengthen the work of the volunteers. This means planning to recruit more volunteers. It also means planning to increase our external funding so that we can properly support the expansion in our work.

External grant funding

- In addition to volunteers’ time we need to spend money on the facilities, tools, equipment and materials needed to enable conservation and improvement works.
- Since the charity began, as ELVPW, external funding of some £2,500 a year has been obtained, which has been spent mainly on tools and promotional material. Bearing in mind the growth in activity that ELCV is seeking, cash spending and external funding will rise significantly.
- ELCV will seek funding to support its work plans (section 5) from external sources. External sources include grant-making trusts, landfill tax credit trusts and windfarm-funded community trusts. Businesses with interests in East Lothian will be approached for funding and for employee volunteering, as is already being done at Aberlady and Yellowcraig. Companies based in Edinburgh may also be approached.

- ELCV will prepare a budget for each of the major projects noted in section 5 as part of the process of preparing applications for external grant funding. The budget for each project will specify the cash spending required. It will also indicate how much volunteers' time will be needed to deliver the project.

ELCV will operate sound financial procedures and governance in line with OSCR requirements and good practice, to ensure proper and effective management of the funds it secures. ELCV will bank funds secured and spend them according to the project priorities set in this plan and in accordance with the requirements set by external funders.

9. East Lothian Countryside Volunteers Assumptions

- The Countryside Team of ELC will continue to play a supporting role.
- Improved co-ordination and achievement will encourage support and interest.
- The current level of voluntary support will be sustained and increased.

10. East Lothian Countryside Volunteer Dependencies

- Future volunteer work in the East Lothian countryside may become increasingly dependent on third party resourcing and funding.
- Continued and increased volunteer input will be required to maintain and increase the volunteer work.
- Develop and sustain sufficient community interest and support.

11. East Lothian Countryside Volunteers Risks

- A key risk is failure to secure funding against a backdrop of reducing financial support by ELC, Scottish/UK/EU governing bodies. The delivery of Brexit and the possibility of a second referendum on Scottish Independence are factors that could enhance or reduce funding opportunities for ELCV.
- A secondary risk is an inability to retain and develop the voluntary resource.

12. East Lothian Countryside Volunteers Service Monitoring and Evaluation

- Regular evaluation of maintenance and development work will be undertaken and recorded.
- All activity will be reported and audited by the ELCV Trustees.

13. East Lothian Countryside Volunteers Policies

- The charity will operate within the agreed charitable status as set out by OSCR and existing legislation. It will adhere to sound financial governance procedures and the ELCV Trustees will ensure that these are met.

14th June 2017