

Clwydian Range and Dee Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Denbighshire Countryside Service Volunteer Strategy 2015- 2020

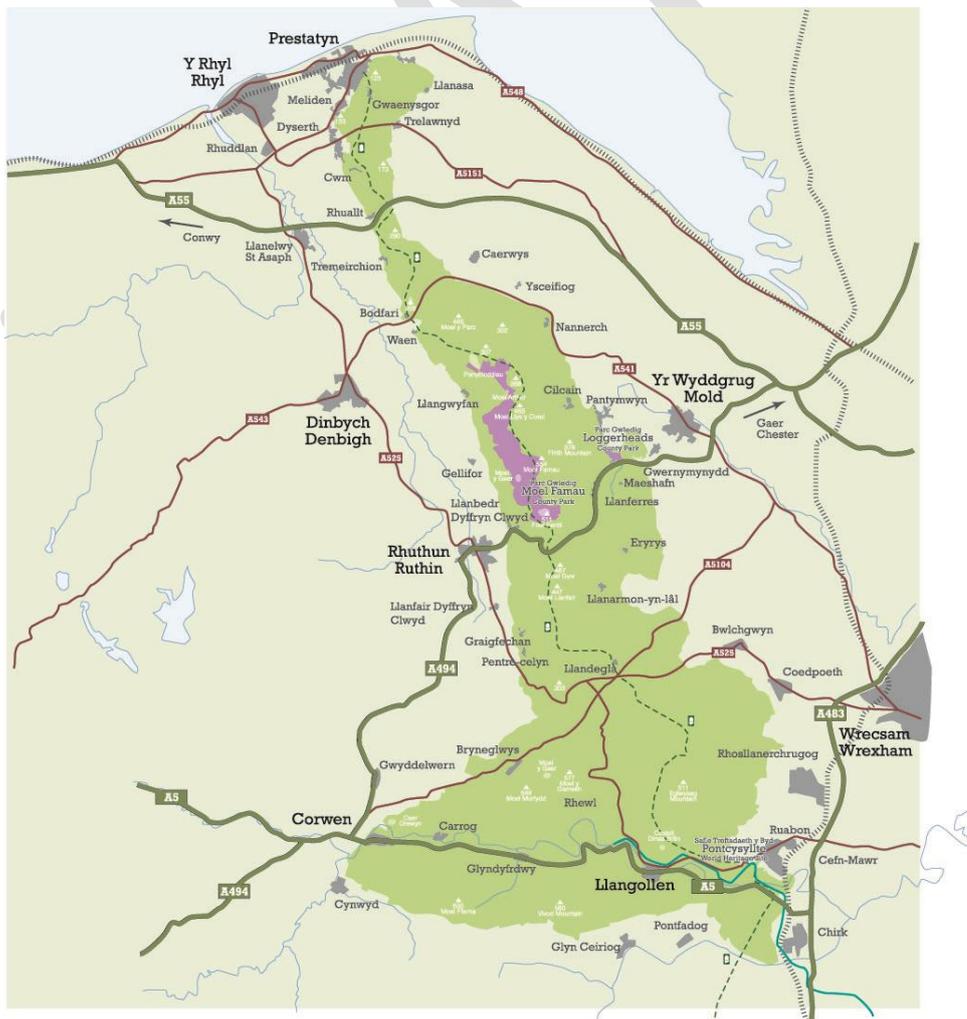


Clwydian Range and Dee Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

The Clwydian Range and Dee Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is an internationally important designated landscape including parts of the counties of Denbighshire, Flintshire and Wrexham in North East Wales. The AONB stretches as far north as Prestatyn Hillside and to the south it includes the remote Berwyn Mountains. The Clwydian Range forms an impressive chain of heather clad hills peaked with Iron Age Hillforts, giving way to the stunning Dee Valley.

Denbighshire's Countryside

Denbighshire is blessed with a diverse and impressive landscape. It is an area of contrasts, ranging from the windswept sand dunes of the north coast to wide river flood plains and gently undulating pastoral lowlands, over the heather clad moorlands of the Clwydian Range to the dramatic Dee Valley in the South.



Introducing the Strategy

This is a strategy for the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Denbighshire Countryside Service. One of Denbighshire's greatest assets is its beautiful countryside and rural environment which is rich in wildlife and heritage. The Clwydian Range and Dee Valley was designated an AONB in order to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area. 'Natural Beauty' includes the protection of flora, fauna and geodiversity as well as cultural landscape features. Both the AONB and the Countryside Service recognise the contribution that the environment makes to quality of life. By providing good quality opportunities for people to volunteer with nature and the countryside we are creating bonds between communities and the natural environment, benefitting both.

Purpose of the Strategy

The strategy provides an opportunity to demonstrate how the Service has worked successfully with volunteers for many years. The Service sets high standards in creating opportunities for volunteers to get involved in and help with the work of the Service. This strategy seeks to build on this by identifying areas where opportunities can be improved and reach all sectors of the community. The strategy will further support staff in providing these opportunities by outlining our vision and commitment to volunteering and developing an action plan for the next 5 years.

It will demonstrate the wide range of volunteering the Service already provides along with the health, social, economic and environmental benefits that volunteering delivers.

Links to Other Strategies

This document will link with other strategies and key agendas including the AONB Management Plan, the Denbighshire Countryside Strategy and the AONB Outreach Strategy. It will also link with the Denbighshire County Council's 'Working with Volunteers Policy' and the promotion of volunteering through the new county wide inclusive volunteering website www.denbighshirevolunteers.co.uk. Volunteer opportunities from all departments within the County Council will be advertised on this website.

The AONB Management Plan objectives for volunteers;

- PC03** Foster a sense of place and local pride to secure social well-being
- PC04** Ensure that the governance of the AONB promotes effective partnerships and fosters opportunities for communities to engage in the management of the AONB.
- ODP04** Raise awareness of the acknowledged health and well-being benefits provided by the AONB and develop initiatives promoting physical activity particularly walking and cycling
- PC04A** Produce a volunteer programme of events twice a year.
Develop a Young Ranger Scheme with a programme of activity across the AONB

Service Activity

Background

The Service has worked with volunteers for many years, developing programmes and projects which not only promote active stewardship of the countryside but provides an environment for people to socialise and improve their health through a more active lifestyle. The development of the volunteering opportunities we offer has expanded, with more varied opportunities available including a youth volunteering programme, an expanded walk leader's programme and more opportunities to engage with biodiversity, heritage and archaeological volunteering.

Archaeological conservation – CRAG – supported volunteer group

The Clwydian Range Archaeology Group was formed in around 2008/9 as part of the Heritage Lottery funded Heather and Hillforts project. The group of people involved wanted to continue beyond the lifetime of the lottery project. They have continued as a constituted group with Chair, Secretary and Treasurer and they have carried out a series of excavations in the Clwydian Range, notably on the slopes outside the hillfort of Moel Arthur. They are currently producing a report on their work for inclusion within the Historic Environment Record. The group has received funding from Cadwyn Clwyd and the Sustainable Development Fund to help them draw in professional support and to pay for some radiocarbon dating. Recently they have submitted an application the Heritage Lottery Fund in order to continue the work at Moel Arthur and to train up more members of the group in archaeological skills in order that the group can continue into the future

Biodiversity

Volunteers carry out or assist with species and habitat surveys, for example annual sand lizard, great crested newt and invasive non- native species surveys. Some specific species survey courses are made available to volunteers who wish to improve their skills in this area. Volunteers help with landowner liaison and other project work including data entry and analysis. Opportunities have increased with volunteers now assisting with events, such as pond dipping and children's activities.

Little Tern Colony

Volunteers help to monitor and protect the only breeding colony of this small seabird in Wales at Gronant Dunes, every year between April and August. A Friends of Little Terns group has developed to support the work of the service around the colony.

Social Care Groups

The Service works with a number of social care groups offering sessions designed specifically from the particular needs of these groups. Many individuals from these groups find great benefits from working in the countryside, a day's volunteering in the outdoors can provide a sense of fulfilment and well-being, as well as providing a social opportunity for people.

Volunteer Groups

There are a number of volunteer groups who work with the service to look after and promote certain areas in their local community. These include Friends of the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley, volunteer groups at Plas Newydd in Llangollen, Lord's Garden, Nant Clwyd Y Dre in Ruthin, Denbigh Community Conservation Volunteers and Prestatyn and District Environmental Association.



Young Rangers

The Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB Young Rangers programme follows the Europarc Federation Junior Rangers model. By providing an opportunity for young people to volunteer in the AONB and surrounding area it will increase their understanding of issues involved with the protected landscape and nature conservation. This will enable them to see they can have an active role to play as part of their local community towards safeguarding these features for future enjoyment.

Volunteer Programme of events

There is a volunteer programme of events produced biannually in a printed, A5 bilingual document. The programme is posted to volunteers from our volunteer list and sent out to volunteer groups and voluntary services in the local area. The programme is also posted on our website, www.Clwydianrangeanddeevalley.co.uk and www.denbighshirecountyrusideservice.co.uk and a link is posted on our Facebook page and Twitter account. The current Spring/Summer programme has 57 events over the 6 months, whilst the previous Autumn/Winter programme had 76 events.

Walk Leaders

Tackling the increase in physical inactivity is a major challenge for the future health and well-being of our local communities and is associated with a significant increase in burden to public health provision.

The Troedio Clwyd walk leaders are trained volunteers who lead weekly walks that enables people to keep active, fitter and healthier. Every year they contribute 3,000 volunteer hours per annum in Denbighshire.

Walking has been proven to improve self-confidence, stamina and weight control and to reduce anxiety and stress and reduces the risk of certain diseases such as diabetes and some types of cancers.

The volunteers keep registers, complete risk assessments and arrange walks for the group.



Links

Our volunteer management has developed with links to organisations that promote volunteer participation. The below organisations are examples of some of these.

Association of Voluntary Organisations in Wrexham – An organisation that connects voluntary and community organisations and activities across Wrexham County Borough.

Canolfan Ni – South Denbighshire Community Partnership

Denbighshire Voluntary Services Council – Promote volunteering opportunities in Denbighshire

Europarc - The representative body of Europe's Protected Area. Produced guidelines for Quality Volunteer Management in European Protected Areas.

Flintshire Local Voluntary Council – Promotes voluntary action and is an umbrella and support organisation for voluntary and community groups in the county

Landscape Projects – The Alyn and Chwiler Living Landscape is a WREN funded project focussing on the Alun and Chwiler river corridors to help restore, recreate and reconnect wildlife habitats working at landscape level and engage with local people, including land owners and volunteers. The steering group is made up of partners including the AONB and DCC.

RSPB- The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, is a charitable organisation registered in England, Wales and Scotland. Joint working from RSPB volunteers on the Black Grouse Recovery Project and at the Little Tern Colony at Gronant Dunes

Wildlife Trust – Joint working with the Wildlife Trust and the crossover of volunteers on different sites benefits both organisations, with the mix of skills and equipment and the opportunity for volunteers to work on sites they may not have visited before



Why do people volunteer?

Volunteers with the Service come from varied backgrounds and choose to volunteer for a variety of reasons. For some it is a chance to develop new skills or build on existing experience to open up career opportunities, for others it is a chance to give something back to the community and make a difference.

There are a great many benefits to volunteering, for the volunteers themselves and their local communities and to the Service. The Service gain a significant contribution to the delivery of work, between April 2016 and March 2017 our volunteers had contributed over **2200** days from **480** events.

Working with volunteers in their local community is an effective way to connect local people to their environment and heritage, promoting sustainable management of these highly valued areas.

Volunteering is also highly regarded for providing many social, health and educational benefits to the individual.



Jon Reaney – Trainee Warden

Jon Reaney joined Young Rangers aged 14 to help him gain his Duke of Edinburgh Bronze award. Whilst volunteering with the Young Rangers Jon developed a keen interest in Countryside Management and joined Loggerheads Country Park for his school placement. That placement reaffirmed his interest in working in the countryside and he went on to study Forestry and Countryside Management at Coleg Cambria, returning to Loggerheads to complete 300 hours of placement as part of his course. Jon went on to win Forestry Student of the year and was successful in applying

for a 6 month traineeship with the AONB team. Jon is now a full time assistant warden for the AONB.

Ken Robinson

“After I retired 14 years ago I wanted to put something back into the community by volunteering at Loggerheads Country Park. I can enjoy working outdoors with likeminded people whilst learning new skills.”



Vera Arrowsmith, Nordic Walking Instructor

“After retiring from being a nurse and working with people all of my life, I felt that I would like to carry on to help others to improve their health. I had also suffered from illness and felt that it was important that I keep myself active. I decided to become a Nordic Walking Instructor with the support of the Service and the Let's Walk Scheme. We have such fun every week, I have met new people, and I keep active and find it really worthwhile.”



Benefits of volunteering

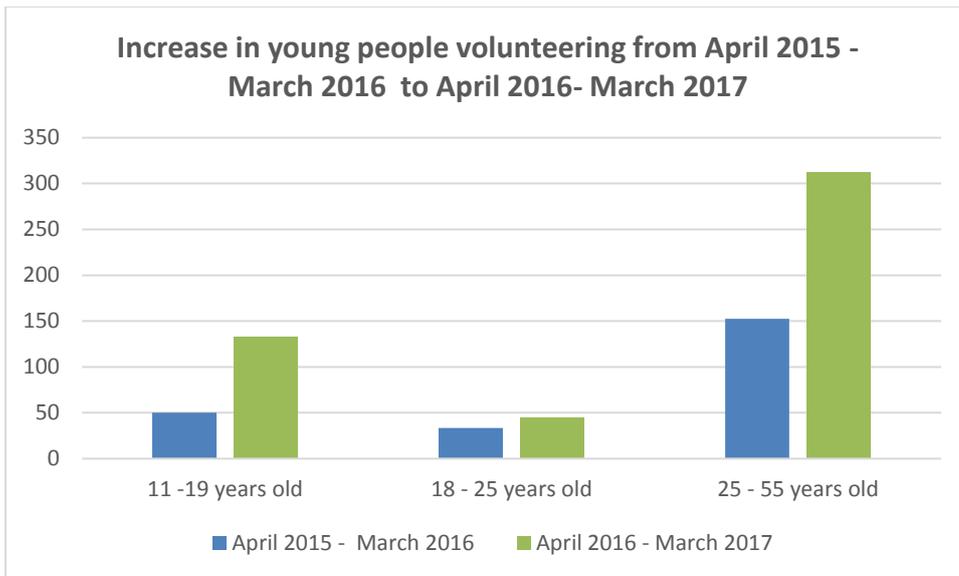
Social and Health benefits

- Volunteering can provide a social network for people from all backgrounds to come together to enjoy contributing to a greater good, promoting a sense of well-being.
- A number of volunteers join after retirement, this can provide them with a sense of comradery that may be missing after leaving the work place and keeps people fit and active.
- The social connection that is provided by volunteering can help people suffering from depression, loneliness and social isolation.
- It can provide stimulation, routine and structure as well as a source of exercise.
- Volunteering can help people recover from health issues through physical and mental activity.
- Volunteering can give people a sense of empowerment and commitment for making a difference.

Educational

- It is a good way of promoting active stewardship of the countryside and reconnecting people to nature.
- The Young Rangers and volunteer programme offer educational and career development opportunities, engaging young people and volunteers looking to learn new skills or expand and develop existing ones.
- Involving communities in the work of the AONB and countryside service promotes a better understanding and sense of involvement and connection to the management of sites, developing projects and the governance of the AONB





As the graph above demonstrates, there has been an increase in young people volunteering in the last 12 months. This could be attributed to the increase in youth volunteering through the Young Rangers scheme, particularly the additional development of a Dee Valley Young Rangers group.

The Service has also seen an increase in volunteers in the 25-55 years old age range. This could be from people in this age bracket coming out to volunteer who are looking to gain experience as they change career fields and there is also a higher representation in this age bracket from people volunteering through the service with social care groups.

Economic

- Volunteer hours can provide much valued match funding in kind
- There is an average cost across funding applications that put a value on volunteer time. Most use £6.10p per hour for unskilled work and £12.50 for skilled labour as a reference.

Barriers to Volunteering

There may be a number of barriers that prevent people from volunteering. These barriers can be personal, physical and mental and can be influenced by social circumstances and the actual practicalities of volunteering.

Economic

Some of the sites in the Service where volunteering activity takes place are more rural with poor transport links. This may limit the amount of volunteers who may not own a car, or who cannot afford to travel a long distance in their car to attend these events. It is important therefore where possible transport is provided and volunteering opportunities should be also provided in areas of deprivation where appropriate.

Outdoor practical work requires outdoor clothing, gloves and stout shoes, this can often provide a barrier for people on a low income. The Service should provide gloves and practical equipment were required and should consider providing suitable footwear were this is a potential issue.

Health

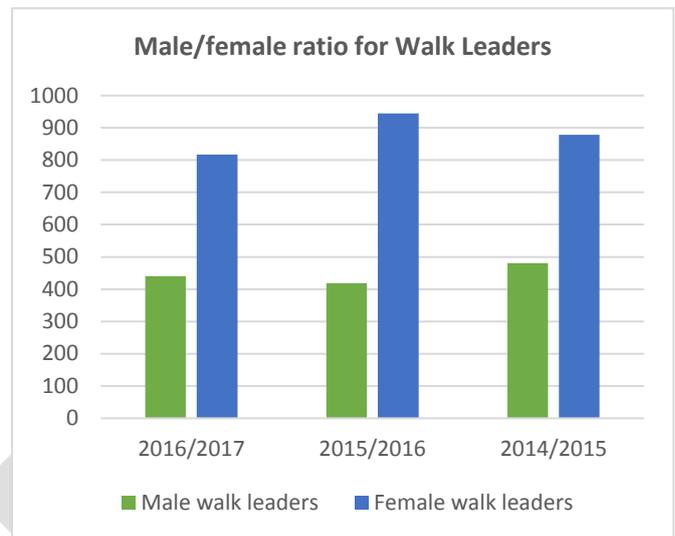
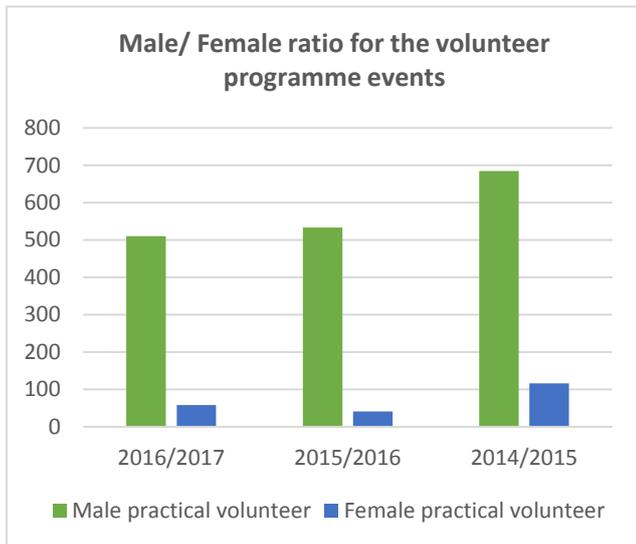
The volunteer programme activities often require a certain level of fitness. This can be a barrier to people who are recovering from an injury or have long term health issues. It is important that a range of opportunities are made available that take in to account physical ability, for example volunteers could be given the opportunity to help with indoor based less physical work. People could also be given the opportunity to volunteer from home. The Troedio Clwyd Walks programme is ideally suited for people who want to build up their fitness levels.

Social

There could be a variety of social barriers that prevent people from volunteering. Women and men may prefer to volunteer in groups where there are more of their own gender. Similarly people may prefer to volunteer with people from their own age group. The Service has set up a Young Rangers programme from young people to volunteer through from 11 to 18 year olds. People may also prefer to volunteer through the medium of welsh.

There are many opportunities to volunteer with the Service through practical volunteering, the volunteering opportunities in the biannual programmes are all practically based tasks.

From volunteer data collected annually it is clear that the practical volunteering offered in the volunteer programme appeals more to men than women, however the opportunity to volunteer as a walk leader has a higher proportion of female participants.



Timing of activities

The majority of volunteering opportunities provided by the Service are held during the week, this can make it difficult for people who work Monday to Friday and students to engage with the activities. The Service should consider volunteering opportunities outside of the normal working week.



The Vision

Introduction to the Vision

Access to the countryside is an important feature of the lives of many people living locally in and visiting the area. The countryside and landscape of Denbighshire and the AONB provides a rich resource for biodiversity, culture, heritage and a place of recreation. By engaging people in volunteering it can increase understanding and appreciation of this asset, re-connecting people to nature, whilst the very act of volunteering in the countryside lends itself to a positive influence on mental and physical well-being.

Individuals who do not normally have a direct influence on the landscape feel that they can become involved in the management of the area through the work of the Service. Social needs and health benefits can then be realised through the participation of these volunteers.

Projects will be geographically spread throughout the AONB and Denbighshire Countryside. Volunteer opportunities should be meaningful and provide an enjoyable experience and the work of the volunteer should be recognised and valued.

'The Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB and Denbighshire Countryside Service will provide accessible events and projects that will give equal opportunities for people to become involved in everything we do'

Delivering the Vision

Objectives

- **VO1: Ensure that there are a variety of opportunities for all sectors of the community to engage with the Service**

Maintain links and foster new ones with voluntary services and organisations that run enablement courses for individuals who may not, for health or social reasons, have the confidence or ability to try volunteering themselves. Through these programmes individuals can experience volunteering in the countryside and develop the confidence to continue volunteering through the events programme. Participation in the new volunteering management system that DCC are implementing could broaden the engagement with volunteers who may not have been reached before, encourage the use of the system through signposting people to www.denbighshirevolunteers.co.uk.

- **VO2: Encourage volunteers to play an active role in, and gain an understanding of the management of their own local environment.**

Provision of a volunteer programme with events through the year and throughout the AONB and Denbighshire Countryside. Some volunteer events will be based on practical and traditional skills training, such as dry stone walling and hedge laying. Where possible seek to develop further training for volunteers. A programme of informal talks will be held throughout the year with speakers from a variety of backgrounds.

- **VO3: Develop an environment where volunteers can make a valid contribution to the work of the service and feel appreciated for the work that they carry out.**

Meaningful and enjoyable volunteering opportunities should be provided. Social events help connect volunteers and staff from different areas, creating a wider social group and transfer of knowledge and is a way of showing the services appreciation towards the work of the volunteers. A good working example is the hedge laying competition which has been held for two years and has proved popular with volunteers from across the area. Volunteers to be given an opportunity to provide feedback and suggestions. Social activities such as the Christmas Party and annual summer field visit should be continued.

- **VO4: The contribution that volunteers make to the work of the service is recognised and promoted.**

The regular use of social media and an increase in press releases should be used to promote the work of the volunteers corporately and to the wider general public.

- **VO5: Volunteer opportunities provided should be inclusive and consistently pay high regard to the health, safety and welfare of all volunteers working with the service**

All staff working with volunteers will be first aid trained and will carry out risk assessments for tasks. Guidelines on working with volunteers and the DCC volunteer policy will be followed.

- **VO6: Identify areas in the Service where there are a lack of volunteering opportunities and consider ways to get people involved.**

Broaden our range of volunteer opportunities to connect to people with a variety of skills to the work of the countryside service. Investigate areas of volunteering which partners and similar organisations may already provide but are currently not available. Discussions could be held around the North East Wales Countryside Ranger Forum or the Countryside Managers Association.

Opportunities to train volunteers in certificates such as brush cutters should be investigated where funding allows, the volunteer will gain a valuable certificate and in return can directly help with site work. Investigate the possibility of 'Friends of' groups applying for funding for training for volunteers. Promote volunteer opportunities through social media. Monitoring of volunteer numbers will help to identify strengths and gaps in participation from volunteers

- **VO7: Forge links with other volunteer groups.**

Links should be created between volunteer and Young Ranger groups in other protected landscapes. Investigate hosting volunteer groups and joint events or exchanges.

- **VO8: Develop a programme of training for volunteers.**

Incorporate a list of training needs for the volunteers to develop their skills.

6. Actions

	OBJECTIVES	ACTIONS
VO1	Ensure that opportunities are provided for people, wherever possible, from all sectors of the community.	Maintain and foster links with organisations who help to enable individuals to engage with volunteering.
		Promote and engage with the implementation of the DCC volunteer management system, www.denbighshirevolunteers.co.uk
		Provide a programme of volunteer opportunities across the AONB and Denbighshire.
VO2	Encourage volunteers to play an active role in, and gain an understanding of the management of their environment.	Provide opportunities to engage with traditional skills
		Hold a programme of informal talks
		Promote the AONB annual Forum and similar conferences of interest
VO3	Develop an environment where volunteers make a valid contribution to the work of the service and feel appreciated for the work that they carry out	Develop a meaningful programme of volunteer activities
		Develop a system where volunteers can give feedback
		Develop opportunities with local businesses which may provide discounts for volunteers in recognition of their contribution
		Maintain social events for the volunteers to develop relationships and recognise their contribution
		Promote an annual volunteer award.
VO4	Work by the volunteers will be recognised and promoted	Promote the contribution of volunteers through social media and press releases
		Collect volunteer monitoring data to be reported corporately

		Promote volunteer activity on site through promotional material and uniform.
VO5	The volunteer opportunities provided should be inclusive and consistently pay high regard to the health, safety and welfare of all volunteers working with the service	Provide staff with suitable training in first aid and health and safety.
		Provide a review of risk assessments and lessons learnt through team and planning meetings
		Provide access to all appropriate corporate guidelines on working with volunteers during staff induction
		Provide appropriate PPE for volunteers engaged in practical activities
VO6	Identify and promote areas where volunteering could develop and create new volunteer opportunities. To include identifying areas of non-supervised volunteering.	Develop opportunities for non-supervised volunteering such as trail monitoring
		Investigate funding opportunities for training volunteers in skilled volunteering
		Develop opportunities for volunteering in all aspects of the service and AONB
VO7	Forge links with other volunteer groups	Create links between volunteer, Young Ranger and 'Friends of' groups in other protected landscapes and countryside services
		Investigate hosting volunteer groups and staff from other areas with joint events or exchanges.
VO8	Develop a programme of training for volunteers	Establish a training programme for volunteers to increase their skills and show the commitment of the Service to their development