

# Marston Vale Trust

## Volunteer Policy

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### Introduction

The Forest of Marston Vale in simple terms:

**Our challenge is to use trees and woodlands to transform 61 square miles between Bedford and Milton Keynes, repairing a landscape scarred by decades of clay extraction, brick making and landfill. We have already planted around 1 million trees and by 2030 we will plant 5 million more, working with local communities, government and businesses, to create new woods and other wild places for everyone to enjoy.**

More information about the Forest of Marston Vale can be found from several sources:

- ~ [www.marstonvale.org](http://www.marstonvale.org)
- ~ The Forest Plan (2000) available as a Cd Rom from the Forest Office
- ~ Discussion with staff members and other volunteers
- ~ A very brief and easily digestible fact sheet called “Volunteering in the Forest of Marston Vale” is available for all volunteers

### Why are volunteers involved?

Forest Volunteers are vital to the creation of the Forest of Marston Vale. The fact that people are willing to volunteer means that much more can be achieved than would be the case otherwise. Involvement of volunteers puts the *community* into Community Forest and shows clearly that local people are fully involved in our work.

The existence and success of the Volunteers’ committee – MVCOG and the fact that the Marston Vale Trust includes a volunteer as a trustee are other clear measures of the success and importance of volunteers to the organisation. These are very useful and tangible ways to demonstrate to potential funders that local people are involved in the creation of the Forest.

Whilst the involvement of volunteers is important, there is no intention to use volunteers to replace paid staff of Marston Vale Services.

### Recruitment

Opportunities for volunteering with the Forest Team are advertised widely: through the Forest web site, at the Volunteer Centre in Bedford, in the Volunteer’s newsletter - *Reed All About It* and the Forest’s newsletter – *Commentree*.

There are three types of volunteer:

1. **Conservation Volunteers** – participants in conservation tasks. These tasks are open to all-comers 14 or over, without the need for introductory paperwork or any discussion other than that which relates to the task in hand. Supervision is provided by the task leader.
2. **Casual Volunteers** – those whose details are entered onto the Volunteer database after a very simple discussion/induction. Casual Volunteers are approached directly by telephone, email or through *Reed All About It*, when help is needed with specific, irregular projects and tasks. On-the-job training is given by the task supervisor. Examples – help with tree planting, Woodworks!
3. **Formal Volunteers** – those who fill a defined, regular role within the Team. Roles are advertised and volunteers interviewed for tasks. A task description along with a person specification is produced for each task. References are usually requested. Volunteers are managed by a named supervisor and formal meetings are scheduled (4-6 monthly) to discuss progress. An induction process is carried out to introduce volunteers to the Forest. Branded clothing may be available for volunteers who are carrying out tasks that require them to be identifiable. When there is competition for a task, unsuccessful candidates have the opportunity to discuss their application with the task supervisor. Training will be provided on-the-job with opportunities for more formal courses or similar offered as and when appropriate, after discussion with the task supervisor. Examples – *Fund Raising Assistant, Public Relations Team Leader*.

All volunteers receive a copy of *Commentree* and *Reed All About It* and are invited to attend meetings of the Marston Vale Volunteers Co-ordinating Group (see below). Volunteers are given a warm welcome, enough information to enable them to carry out the task in hand effectively, and thanked for their help.

### **Equal opportunities and diversity**

Marston Vale Services is committed to equality of opportunity for all, including opportunities for volunteers.

An Equal Opportunities Policy forms part of the Staff Handbook (pages 66-71), available in the Forest Office, to be read by all volunteers on request.

### **Expenses**

Money is available (from The Marston Vale Trust and Marston Vale Volunteers Co-ordinating Group) to pay travel expenses for volunteers when they have been asked to carry out a task. Receipts or tickets will be required as proof of use of public transport. A simple form is available for this purpose. Expenses are paid in cash. Volunteers are provided with a drink for a half day's work or a meal and a drink for a full day; from the Forest Centre Café.

### **Insurance**

Volunteers are insured through Marston Vale Services employer's liability cover, when carrying out tasks as directed by a competent person (staff member or volunteer).

### **Health & Safety**

The Marston Vale Services Health & Safety policy is part of the staff handbook and is available for all volunteers to read (from the Forest Office on request). Responsibility for health & safety varies depending on the level of volunteer (apart from a general assumption of reasonable care):

1. Conservation Volunteers – no requirements other than general reasonable care. Task Supervisor to brief volunteers on relevant health and safety issues. Participants are asked to disclose details of any serious/relevant medical conditions to the supervisor.
2. Casual Volunteers – Task Supervisor to brief volunteers on relevant health and safety issues. Reference made to Health & Safety policy through induction – available to all volunteers.
3. Formal volunteers – health and safety forms part of the induction process. Volunteers take a greater responsibility for their own and others' health and safety.

### **Confidentiality**

Volunteers must not disclose confidential information, gained from involvement with the Forest, to anyone outside, either whilst involved or thereafter.

### **Grievance and disciplinary procedures**

#### *Volunteers*

In the case of a grievance, volunteers should approach the task supervisor or a member of the Forest staff Team. Staff will seek to resolve grievances as quickly and fairly as possible. Should a resolution not be reached through discussion with the task supervisor, the issue should be passed, in writing, to the next level of MVS management.

#### *Staff*

Should staff (or supervisory volunteers) have a grievance against a volunteer, the issue will be discussed with the volunteer concerned. Should a satisfactory resolution not be forthcoming, the volunteer may be asked not to continue with their volunteer activities.

### **Marston Vale Volunteer Co-ordinating Group (MVCOG)**

An independent group of volunteers that oversees the management of the whole Forest Volunteer effort. MVCOG also organises a social calendar for volunteers. It has a constitution and a bank account as well as elected officers – Chair, Secretary, Treasurer. Elections take place during the Annual General Meeting in May. Any volunteer may be nominated for election to one of these posts. The committee meets quarterly or as necessary. All volunteers are welcome to attend meetings and make contributions.

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