

Broads Authority

23 September 2022

Agenda item number 14

Volunteer Strategy for the Broads

Report by Director of Strategic Services and Volunteers Coordinator

Purpose

This report presents a reviewed and updated Volunteer Strategy for members' consideration.

Broads Plan context

The Volunteer Service contributes to Aspiration 9 of the Broads Plan, in particular, 9.2, 'Offer a flexible range of practical volunteering programmes, events and training, and establish a longer-term succession strategy'.

Recommended decision

To adopt the Volunteer Strategy 2023-28.

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Broads Authority is committed to providing and developing a Volunteer Strategy that offers rewarding experiences for all our volunteers and that enhances the delivery of our purposes and the strategic priorities of the Broads Plan.
- 1.2. This version of the Volunteer Strategy for the Broads updates the version adopted in 2017, with a proposed action plan that covers the period 2023-2028. The document has been streamlined and its wording aims to provide clear and measurable objectives.

2. Context

- 2.1. The context section of the Volunteer Strategy for the Broads 2023-28 highlights what has changed since the previous strategy was adopted.
- 2.2. The Landscapes Review (Glover, 2019) recognises the enthusiasm of those who volunteer in caring for our protected landscapes and places particular emphasis on forging links with communities currently underrepresented. Objective 3 of the updated Volunteer Strategy aims to support staff delivering this ambition.
- 2.3. The Covid pandemic had significant effects on the Broads Authority's Volunteer Service, with volunteering stopping entirely for some months. It did, however, initiate new ways of working. The updated Volunteer Strategy reflect those changes.

- 2.4. The updated Volunteer Strategy highlights the importance of partnership working, especially in the context of challenging issues to address and reduced funding for core activities.

3. Financial implications

- 3.1. In the current, uncertain, financial climate, the updated Volunteer Strategy provides an affordable and achievable Volunteer Service that does not overly stretch staff capacity, whilst still supporting volunteers and volunteer activity to enhance delivery of Broads Authority activities.

4. Conclusion

- 4.1. This report seeks the views of members on the updated Volunteer Strategy, with a recommendation that it is adopted, subject to any amendments.

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[Broads Plan](#) strategic actions: 9.2

Appendix 1 – Volunteer Strategy for the Broads and Action Plan 2023-28

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1. Strategic aim

The Broads Authority is committed to providing and developing a Volunteer Service that offers rewarding experiences for all our volunteers, and that enhances the delivery of our purposes and the strategic objectives of the Broads Plan.

2. Benefits of volunteering

For the Broads Authority

Our volunteers make a huge contribution in terms of the time and skills they offer in many areas of our work. Some support operational activities such as maintaining a safe and open navigation, carrying out practical conservation tasks on the fens, keeping public access routes open, conducting ecological surveys and caring for our herd of grazing ponies. Some help in delivering environmental education and public events, representing the Authority as positive role models. Others enhance our visitor services provision by supporting staff at Yacht Stations and Visitor Centres. In short, our volunteers are an invaluable resource, supporting our staff and extending our services far beyond our statutory provision.

For volunteers

There are many reasons why people choose to volunteer, and they value their experiences in different ways. For some it's a chance to get out of the house and do something positive, or making friends and working as a team towards a common goal. For some it's a career stepping stone, learning valuable skills and experiences, while others relish the opportunity to inspire and encourage others to enjoy the Broads National Park.

Overall, volunteering for the Broads Authority gives people a sense of pride and a feeling of making a positive difference. Our volunteers also get opportunities to experience parts of the Broads that the public may not get to see, and take part in activities such as handling a patrol launch, teaching pond dipping to schoolchildren, or learning how to lay a hedge. In short, the benefits of volunteering are as numerous and varied as the volunteers who offer their time.

3. Context

This version of the Volunteer Strategy for the Broads updates the previous version adopted in 2017, and includes an action plan that covers the period 2023-28.

Landscapes Review

The [Landscapes Review \(2019\)](#) recognises the enthusiasm of those who volunteer in caring for our protected landscapes, and the transformative effect that volunteering can have in their lives as well as in the places in which they volunteer. However, the Review also recognises the need for better support and resources to attract and retain volunteers, and puts particular emphasis on forging links with communities currently under-represented.

The Government's response to the Review was published in January 2022, followed by a public consultation on proposed legislative and other changes.

Broads Plan

This Volunteer Strategy sits under the Broads Plan, the strategic management plan for the Broads, and supports its aspirations and objectives. The Broads Plan is currently being reviewed and it is anticipated that a new plan will be adopted in autumn 2022.

Covid pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021 had profound effects on many areas of the Broads Authority's work, and our Volunteer Service had to stop entirely for many months. More positively, the pandemic has also given many of us a new perspective on the personal appeal and value of getting out into nature, including special landscapes like the Broads, for our physical and mental health and wellbeing. Due to lessons learned during this time, we are more attuned to adapting our standard approaches, especially to embrace technology, such as the use of online meetings and electronic paperwork. There is a greater level of comfort using new technology through all demographics.

Changes since the 2017 Volunteer strategy

Since April 2020, the Broads Authority no longer has responsibility for Whitlingham Country Park which was used to deliver larger group volunteering and events. With few alternative accessible sites under the Authority's ownership or management, this currently makes larger group volunteering more challenging.

Since the Covid pandemic, staff dealt with increased numbers of new visitors to the Broads, which is welcome. The needs of this new audience are considered, including the importance of safety on the water.

The challenges due to climate change faced by the Broads are increasingly complex: biodiversity crisis, increased flood risk, stretched water resources, coastal erosion, etc. They all require working alongside other partner organisations on innovative approaches, especially in the context of reduced funding for core activities.

This Volunteer Strategy reflects these changes.

4. Objectives

Under its aspiration to 'connect and inspire communities', the Broads Plan includes a strategic objective to offer varied, flexible and sustainable volunteering opportunities and skills training to suit diverse audiences. The Volunteer Strategy provides a practical approach to delivering volunteering for the Broads Authority, under the following objectives:

Objective 1: Manage the efficient and effective day-to-day administration of the BA Volunteer Service and communication with volunteers

Objective 2: Provide appropriate, up-to-date and best practice training and support for BA volunteers and supervisory staff

Objective 3: Promote and increase opportunities to support greater engagement of under-represented groups in the Broads National Park and the work of the Broads Authority and its partners

Objective 4: Monitor and improve the effectiveness of the Volunteer Service in supporting Broads Plan objectives and the BA's work

5. Guiding principles

The following principles guide the delivery of the Volunteer Strategy:

- Volunteers feel welcomed and valued
- Volunteering improves health, wellbeing, and sense of purpose
- Volunteers learn about the Broads and the work of the Authority allowing them to act as positive representatives
- Volunteering contributes to Broads Plan aspirations and objectives, including working alongside Broads Authority partners
- The volunteer service is effective, efficient and sustainable
- Volunteers receive high standards in safety, training, and support#

6. Resources

The Volunteer Service sits under the Human Resources section in the Strategic Services Directorate. A full-time Volunteers Coordinator manages the service, supported by a part-time Administrative Officer (two days a week). Broads Authority staff supervise most volunteering activity.

Due to the reduction in suitable worksites, activities and staff capacity outlined in the Context section, there is a limit to the number of volunteers the Authority can comfortably manage, and it has not been possible to develop the Volunteer Task Leader role identified as an action in our previous Volunteer Strategy. However, this updated strategy includes an action to develop an alternative volunteer role that contributes to initiatives that encourage people from under-represented groups to enjoy the Broads.

7. Monitoring

Objective 4 in this Volunteer Strategy includes actions to monitor the effectiveness of the Volunteer Service. Update reports to the Broads Authority as part of the annual Broads Plan review will highlight progress against the objectives in the Volunteer Strategy Action Plan.

Volunteer Strategy for the Broads: Action Plan 2023-28

Objective 1: Manage the efficient and effective day-to-day administration of the BA Volunteer Service and communication with volunteers				
Ref	Key actions	Key outputs by 2028	Resources	Timescales
1.1	Monitor and review volunteering opportunities, and promote new and existing opportunities to volunteers.	Volunteers can easily access good quality volunteering opportunities suitable to their role, skills, interests and availability, and appropriate to the BA's requirements.	BA Volunteer Coordinator	Ongoing
1.2	Provide volunteers with appropriate clothing, PPE and equipment; update and implement relevant health and safety requirements.	Volunteers have suitable clothing, PPE and equipment to carry out their roles safely.	BA Volunteer Coordinator BA Head of Safety Management BA Health and Safety Committee	Ongoing including <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quarterly Health and Safety Committee meetings
1.3	Produce weekly updates, monthly newsletters and other relevant communications to keep volunteers informed and engaged.	Volunteers are being well informed about BA volunteering opportunities and events, the BA's objectives and operations and the Broads National Park.	BA Volunteer Coordinator BA Admin Officer (Volunteers)	Ongoing including <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Weekly (updates) Monthly (newsletter)
1.4	Maintain, monitor and review volunteer activity logging and analysis processes.	The BA has accurate and up-to-date records of volunteering activity and trends.	BA Volunteer Coordinator BA Admin Officer (Volunteers)	Ongoing
1.5	Monitor and review expense claims processes and promptly reimburse volunteers for appropriate out of pocket expenses.	Volunteers can claim appropriate expenses efficiently and fairly.	BA Volunteer Coordinator BA Admin Officer (Volunteers)	Ongoing
1.6	Continue to streamline volunteer administration processes and monitor their effectiveness.	All administrative processes for the BA Volunteer Service are effective, efficient and sustainable.	BA Volunteer Coordinator BA Admin Officer (Volunteers)	Ongoing including <ul style="list-style-type: none"> After annual record reviews

Objective 2: Provide appropriate, up-to-date and best practice training and support for BA volunteers and supervisory staff

Ref	Key actions	Key outputs by 2028	Resources	Timescales
2.1	Deliver induction training to new volunteers and make any necessary changes to the induction programme to improve its effectiveness.	New volunteers understand their roles clearly and are able to work safely and effectively.	BA Volunteer Coordinator Volunteer supervisors	Ongoing
2.2	Deliver appropriate training to existing volunteers; monitor volunteer training programmes and make any changes necessary to improve their effectiveness.	Volunteers are receiving appropriate ongoing training to perform their roles safely and effectively.	BA Volunteer Coordinator Volunteer supervisors External training providers	Ongoing including <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3-yearly core training refreshers • Internal and external qualification refreshers
2.3	Deliver appropriate training to volunteer supervisors; monitor supervisor training programmes and make any changes necessary to improve their effectiveness.	Volunteer supervisors are receiving appropriate ongoing training to effectively support volunteer training and operations.	BA Volunteer Coordinator	Ongoing
2.4	Keep up-to-date on volunteer training requirements and best practice through research and comparison with other National Park Authorities, HSE and other relevant organisations.	The BA's volunteer training provision is up-to-date, following and evolving in line with national best practice.	BA Volunteer Coordinator National Park Authority Volunteer Coordinators	Ongoing

Objective 3: Promote and increase opportunities to support greater engagement of under-represented groups in the Broads National Park and the work of the Broads Authority and its partners

Ref	Key actions	Key outputs by 2028	Resources	Timescales
3.1	Deliver volunteer action days and corporate and community group volunteering days to enable casual volunteering opportunities.	The BA is providing opportunities to volunteer on a casual basis for those unable to commit to longer-term volunteering.	BA Volunteer Coordinator Ranger Services Maintenance Teams	Ongoing
3.2	Develop a volunteer role that supports delivery of initiatives to encourage people from under-represented groups to understand and enjoy the Broads National Park.	Volunteers are contributing to initiatives that encourage people from under-represented groups to experience and enjoy the Broads.	BA Volunteer Coordinator Comms Team Education Officer Ranger Services	By end of strategy term

Objective 4: Monitor and improve the effectiveness of the Volunteer Service in supporting Broads Plan objectives and the BA's work

Ref	Key actions	Key outputs by 2028	Resources	Timescales
4.1	Monitor volunteer activity against Broads Plan objectives to check they align, and research and introduce new activities if appropriate.	Volunteer roles and activities are effective in supporting Broads Plan objectives.	BA Volunteer Coordinator	Ongoing including <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Annual Broad Plan reviews
4.2	Monitor volunteer activity to make sure it supports and enhances, but does not replace, statutory staff activity.	The Volunteer Service is supporting an enhanced work output over and above the BA's statutory work requirements.	BA Volunteer Coordinator	Ongoing
4.3	Complete regular volunteer surveys and use feedback to guide Volunteer Service provision and effectiveness.	Volunteers are contributing to the ongoing success of the Volunteer Service, and are able to access varied and fulfilling volunteering roles.	BA Volunteer Coordinator	Ongoing