

Natural Basingstoke - Notes on Branch Operations

The following notes set out the initial arrangements for new branches of Natural Basingstoke for districts or sites for which no group currently exists.

1. Branch Structure

A Natural Basingstoke branch group does not need a separate constitution and officers, but can operate under the constitution and operating agreements of Natural Basingstoke. On that basis it will be covered by the Natural Basingstoke insurance policy for public liability, personal injury etc.

The basic requirements of a branch group are:

- one identified branch Co-ordinator who will be responsible for communication with Natural Basingstoke management committee and BDBC officer,
- a list of members of the branch and their contact details. All members should be 18+ years of age. All younger participants are minors and must be supervised by a responsible adult (parent, grandparent, scout or guide leader etc.) when on site(s).
- members of the branch support the objectives of the branch but do not necessarily all take part in work party activities, there are many roles and activities in a conservation group which do not involve vigorous exercise (admin, communications with members, education with junior members etc.)
- it will help a branch to prosper if a small group of members share the various tasks of running the branch as a branch committee.
- at least one member should attend the quarterly meetings of Natural Basingstoke to participate in discussions and decision making about voluntary conservation activities in Basingstoke. That person is assumed to be the Co-ordinator unless Natural Basingstoke Secretary is notified otherwise. The branch will have one vote as do other member groups if a vote is taken at such meetings.
- as soon as possible at least one member of the branch should be qualified in Work Party Leadership and one member qualified in First Aid for Conservation Volunteers. Until these skills are available within the branch, site meetings and work parties will need to have qualified members of Natural Basingstoke in attendance.

2. Operational Arrangements

As a branch of Natural Basingstoke a group will adopt the good practices established by voluntary conservation groups in the past and recorded in outline in the Sites Agreement with BDBC which deals with roles and responsibilities in relation to council owned land – but, as good practice, should apply to other categories of sites..

Over time, a branch group may develop sufficient expertise and membership to constitute itself as a voluntary conservation group. In that event the group would formally become a Member Group of Natural Basingstoke and take responsibility for its own programme of activities, finance, equipment, insurance etc.

However, in the early stages the following arrangements should be in place:

- all meetings of the group which are public events on site(s) or work party meetings must be supervised by a trained Event Leader or Work Party Leader. Until such time as the group has its own Work Party Leader(s) the Work Party Leader will be provided, by agreement, by Natural Basingstoke.
- the group will take account of the working practices and arrangements agreed by Natural Basingstoke with BDBC when working on LA land (work planning, risk assessment, notifications etc.). If working on land owned by other organisations these would in general be a guide to good practice.
- the branch members, with guidance from Natural Basingstoke, will develop a programme of action stretching over a period of at least 12 months which will include the following:
 - understanding the nature of the site(s) and the habitats represented,
 - informal surveys per season of the nature on site(s)
 - meetings or events which engage with the local community with details of the site(s) and their findings,
 - recording of site(s) baseline data and review with advisors of site potential,
 - development of a programme of activities on site(s) for members and the community in general.
- by prior arrangement the branch may call on technical advice, specific skills and specific equipment from other member groups or branches of Natural Basingstoke.

For the longer term success of the group the branch members will develop a plan in association with Natural Basingstoke to develop the skills of its members in conservation practice and sustaining a health membership which will enable the group to operate autonomously within Natural Basingstoke as a Member Group.

3. Definition of Site(s) & Site Plans

One of the most interesting phases of developing a new site based branch is the Phase 1 recording of Site Data. Starting with the definition of the site(s) on which the group wish to operate this exploration should include documenting the following:

3.1 Physical definition of site and its boundaries:

- large scale map from BDBC and/or Google earth shot annotated
- the ownership and management of the site(s)
 [Ownership and management responsibility may be by different bodies. Permission to visit the site and thereafter to perform any activities on the site will be required and the ongoing plan for operations will need to be detailed and agreed with the owner at some stage before they begin in earnest.]
- boundary data - indicating exactly where the boundary lies, who the land owner sharing that boundary is and ideally a photographic record of the state of the boundary. [i.e. condition of boundary fences, details of trees which straddle a boundary etc.]

3.2 Site Data - Structural

A plan of the site(s) should show any embedded features which are not natural and not the subject of the group's activities (such as children's play areas or pathways maintained by the LA)

- Natural

A plan of the site(s) should show the various landscape types

and habitat areas within the site(s).

It is highly recommended that a photographic record is made of the site before activities begin and the changes on the site captured again at intervals.

Recording site data is an ongoing task as various elements are surveyed over the years - such as flora, butterflies, birds etc. and it is not always possible to capture base line data for all categories at the beginning. This should be thought of as a 3 year process, gathering more data year by year. Regular site data capture also indicates what impact the group is having in protecting and enriching the wildlife value.

3.3 Conservation Plan

Having collected some baseline data or anecdotal evidence of the nature on the site this should suggest some initial lines of activity to secure and develop the biodiversity of the site.

A planning horizon of 3 years of activity is reasonable – and in the early stages should be reviewed and revised before each work season (Sept – April), based on the data gathered over the summer survey and data collecting season (April – Sept).

The advice of technical experts within Natural Basingstoke may be sought to evaluate the site data and discuss objectives of the plan.

Findings and lines of development should also be discussed with the land owner at the earliest stage.

Based on the medium term plan, an annual schedule of site meetings, survey work and other events can be developed appropriate to the seasons to promote the work of the group, spread understanding of what the potential of the site(s) is within the community, and activities on site(s).

4. Documentation for Branch activities

Apart from creating the records detailed above, the branch will need to develop, with Natural Basingstoke assistance, the following documentation:

For the annual list of events and site meetings:

- Risk assessments

- Standing Work Party arrangements

- Work Party objectives per meeting (in advance of each meeting but not necessarily for the whole year ahead)

- Tools & Equipment list per meeting (in advance of each meeting but not necessarily for the whole year ahead)

