



# The Future of Volunteering in the Mendip Hills AONB Countryside



Supported by the Mendip Hills AONB  
Sustainable Development Fund



In-kind Support by  
Active Mendip

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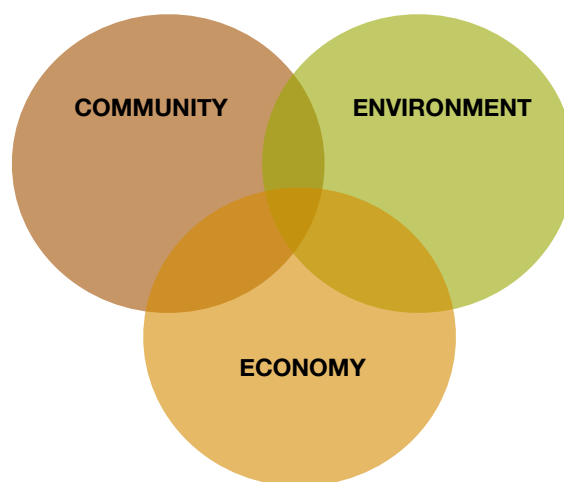
# Background

Viper Marketing & Communications Group were commissioned by Development Personnel Ltd. to provide a vision of volunteering in the Mendip Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) countryside. Alongside Development Personnel Ltd. the work is being funded by a grant from the Mendip Hills AONB Sustainable Development Fund and in-kind by Active Mendip.

Viper Marketing & Communications Group have extensive background knowledge of the people and organisations involved in the Mendip Hills AONB countryside. Viper is involved to varying degrees with the Mendip Hills AONB unit, Active Mendip and the Avon and Somerset Search & Rescue team. This knowledge has informed the findings and the visions in this report where quantitative data has not been available.

## Context

There are three sectors where people can volunteer; Community, Environment and Economy. These reflect the three sectors of sustainable development (Diagram 1). The middle section where all sectors overlap is the desired target. Currently on Mendip countryside volunteer groups fall into one sector with generally one overlap; Somerset Wildlife Trust sit within the Environment sector with close links to the Community sector, Active Mendip sit in the Economy sector with close links to the Community sector. This report will not suggest how a particular voluntary group can increase their overlap in other areas. It is perfectly acceptable for an organisation not to want to increase its overlap elsewhere. However, for the long term sustainability of volunteering in the Mendip Hills AONB countryside the outcome for this report will be suggestions on how to fill the middle section.



*Diagram 1. The three elements of sustainable development*

## Aim

The aim of the report is to provide a vision that can be discussed by the groups involved. The vision needs to be built on a sustainable base for volunteering in the future. This report examines if there is a sustainable base for volunteering at present and what elements are missing. The aim of this report was not to find out exactly how many volunteers there are, what they're doing and when. Although that would be important baseline information it would reveal little about the way forward.

For any volunteering vision to be successful it needs to have a sustainable base.

## Method

There are obvious limitations for the study. Only those groups who play an active role in volunteering in the Mendip Hills AONB countryside were asked for their views. This may mean smaller groups were missed out. Given more resources a wider and more in-depth analysis of all groups could have taken place.

The theory put forward for testing is this; the right **MOTIVATORS** need to be in place with the right **ACTIVITY** mix supported by the right **ORGANISATION** structure. Achieve this and a sustainable base for volunteering should be achieved.



*Diagram 2. The three elements needed to create a sustainable volunteering base*

## Survey

An on-line questionnaire was created with the link emailed to the following organisations;

Mendip Society	CHERT historic research group
Somerset Wildlife Trust	Hawk and Owl Trust
Active Mendip	The Trails Trust
Dry Stone Walling Association	Bath & North East Somerset Council
Mendip Hills AONB Unit	North Somerset Council
People & Places Project (Mendip Hills AONB Unit)	Mendip District Council
National Trust	Sedgemoor District Council
Natural England	Somerset County Council

From the 16 organisations approached there were 9 respondents to the questionnaire. This is a 56% return, considered representative despite the low number. Responding organisations; Mendip Society, Active Mendip, Natural England (2 responses), Bath & North East Somerset Council, Mendip Hills AONB Unit, Mendip Cross Trails Trust, CHERT and the Dry Stone Walling Association.

Viper was also present at the Mendip Hills AONB Volunteer Ranger Day on 31/1/09 at Fernhill Farm where they were asked their aspirations for the future

A desktop survey was also carried out. Most notable documents used;

- Volunteering in the natural outdoors in the UK and Ireland: a literature review. Executive Summary. Nick Ockenden June 2007 Institute for Volunteering Research.
- Countryside Recreation Network. Vol 16 Number, Summer 2008.

Viper was asked to help produce the report as it has many connections with volunteering in the Mendip Hills AONB countryside. This means that less background research was needed to understand the current situation and that any recommendations could be balanced against a practical working knowledge of the Mendip Hills.

Research gathered at the outset of the People and Places Project was used. The Mendip Hills AONB People and Places Project began on 1st April 2008 and is a two year pilot project. A grant from Natural England with match funding has enabled the AONB Service to work with the National Trust, Somerset Wildlife Trust and Natural England to coordinate current volunteering opportunities. This project has resulted in a coordinated programme of training, events and activities that is jointly promoted.

# The Three Elements

## The Three Elements: Motivators

Motivators are the triggers that cause people to give up their spare time. There are four main Motivators as seen in Table 1.

**Table 1. The Motivators of a sustainable base for volunteering in the countryside**

Motivator	Description
Love of nature	The natural environment is often described as something to which people are attracted, or something that they are fascinated by.
Desire to Look after Nature	An individual's wider appreciation of environmental issues and problems, and their 'green' lifestyle choices may trigger the desire to help manage or look after the physical environment.
Social	Volunteers often value the opportunity to develop social contacts and networks through their activities. Such benefits can also be seen at the wider community-level. Forms of volunteering in the natural outdoors can help to address social exclusion and poverty, for example.
Skills and Employability	Volunteers recognise the experience they gain through volunteering can improve their chances of securing paid employment. This can be particularly evident with younger volunteers. Despite this, it is possible that formal accreditation and recognition of these skills may be less important as a motivating factor to those that volunteer in the natural outdoors than within other sectors.

## Motivator Issues

Respondents were asked to rank the motivators in order of importance.

**Table 2. The Motivators ranked by respondents**

Motivator	Strongest motivation	Strong motivation	Moderate motivation	Weakest motivation
Love of Nature	22.2%	22.2%	22.2%	<b>33.3%</b>
Desire to Look After Nature	<b>33.3%</b>	<b>33.3%</b>	<b>33.3%</b>	0.0%
Social Factors - networking and sense of community	22.2%	22.2%	22.2%	<b>33.3%</b>
Learn and Develop Skills	22.2%	22.2%	22.2%	<b>33.3%</b>

Through the survey the Desire to Look after Nature was consistently ranked as the most prominent motivation for volunteers wanting to get involved. This is not surprising and is reflected in the amount

of practical tasks being promoted by many organisations. All other Motivators were ranked with the weakest motivation. From the relatively small survey sample differentiating between the other responses would add little value.

In theory the type of activities on offer should be evenly spread across the four motivator types. This would ensure the widest possible spread of people are motivated to volunteer. In Table 3 each of the activities indicated as on offer by the organisations has been grouped under the Motivator categories to understand the spread. Most notable Motivator category is Learn and Develop Skills, the lack of formal recognition for volunteers should be seen as an area to be improved on..

**Table 3. The Motivators with Activities offered by organisations.**

Motivators and Related Activities	% Organisations offering the Activity									
Love of Nature										
Attend talks										
Attend walks										
Attend seminars										
Attend lectures										
Desire to Look after Nature										
Lead walks										
Lead talks										
Monitoring and/or recording wildlife										
Surveying historic sites										
Practical tasks to improve the natural outdoors										
Practical tasks to improve access to the natural outdoors										
Social & Networking										
Social time during volunteering activities										
Access to a restricted area of your organisation's website										
Involvement in planning volunteering in your organisation										
Internal newsletters										
Base or office for volunteers to visit										
Formal membership										
Teach other volunteers/members of the public										
Social events										
Mentoring of other volunteers										
First Aid training										
Represent the organisation to others										
Learn and Develop Skills										
Accredited training										
Non-accredited training										
Attendance certificates										
Recognition/achievement schemes										
Learn new skills										

## Motivator Change

In order to achieve a balance across the four motivators we recommend that;

- People's general love of nature is explicitly used as a technique for getting more people involved
- The aspects of developing social circles and new skills are promoted more
- Volunteers individually receive formal recognition for their input and effort

## The Three Elements: Activity

The Activity types required to entice people to volunteer can be broken down into four groups as seen in Table 4.

**Table 4. The Activity types of a sustainable base for volunteering in the countryside**

Activity	Description
Mutual aid and self-help	Volunteering involving people with shared problems, challenges or conditions working together to address them.
Philanthropy/Service to others	Volunteering to provide some form of service to one or more third parties or beneficiary. This often includes many of the practical and physical activities associated with environmental and wildlife conservation, such as managing and improving habitats and improving access.
Participation	Involvement of individuals in the political, governance or decision-making process at any level. This can include many of the forms of participation that relate to sustainable development initiatives where volunteers may sit on partnerships or steering/advisory groups in a consultative form.
Advocacy/Campaigning	Volunteering concerns collective action in formal or informal groups, or as individuals, to secure or prevent change. This can include particular issue-led campaigns and broader initiatives

## Activity Issues

The respondents were asked to rank the four Activity types that their organisation hoped to achieve. The wide ranging types of activities are shown in Table 4 above. In order of importance the organisations hoped to achieve Participation in Community Development then Philanthropy & Service to Others followed jointly by Mutual Aid/Self and Securing or Preventing Change.

Participation in Community Development was the issue ranked as the most important aspect that needed to be improved. The other three activity types were given a similar but lower rating of importance.

It appears that people want to get involved to physically change their area for the better. The natural beauty and habitats of the Mendip Hills are clearly emotional triggers for people that need to be built upon. Respondents answering that Participation is an area that needs to be improved is alarming as this is why people are getting involved. It seems that although their volunteers are physically involved they would like a greater voice in steering decisions that affect the area. The Mendip Search and Rescue Plan (Appendix 1) could be a tool to gain greater Participation. A collective plan where many groups and volunteers play an important role in keeping it up-to-date could be a very effective method of engagement. The plan could be a tool for creating relationships between voluntary and statutory bodies. Stronger relationships would benefit all involved according to the theory of activity types above.

The Advocacy/Campaigning type is certainly being carried out by a few people around specific issues and through the Mendip Society on broader concerns. Their low ranking may be a reflection on the

low respondent level. Certainly campaigning over issues that affect the Mendip Hills at a regional level is important but the issues needs to be quite specific to galvanise people to give up their time.

## **Activity Change**

In order to achieve a more sustainable base for volunteering we recommend the following changes in relation to Activities

- Build on the People and Places Steering Group to allow more representation from other voluntary organisations
- Host an annual volunteers conference allowing volunteers and their organisations to champion their work and discuss future initiatives
- Mendip Society to be offered a place on the People and Places Steering Group
- Examine how the Mendip Search and Rescue Plan could be used as a tool for greater Participation

## The Three Elements: Organisation

There are five Organisation elements that need to be in place. These can be seen in Table 5.

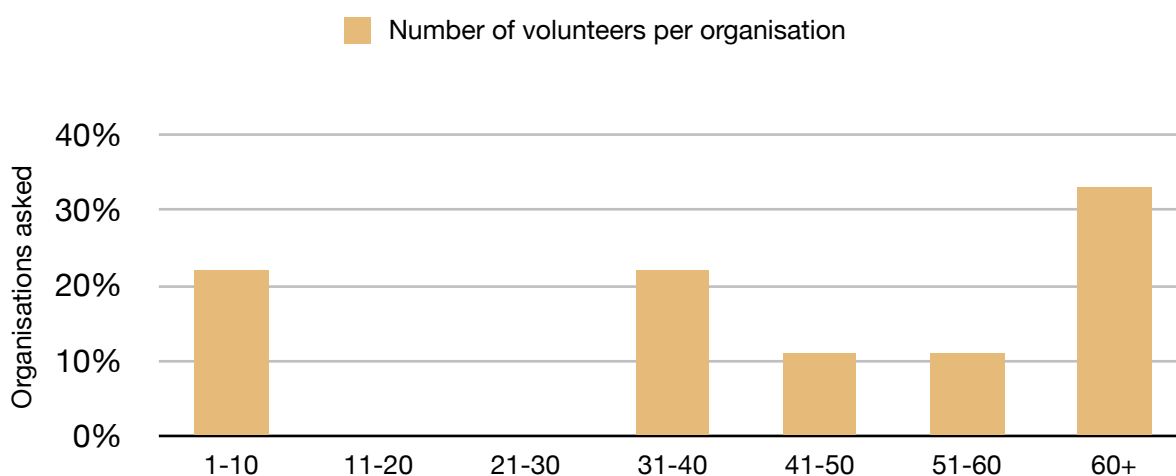
**Table 5. The Organisation elements of a sustainable base for volunteering in the countryside**

Organisation	Description
Diversity	The broader volunteers backgrounds are with a good succession of new volunteers the more stable an organisation.
Financially sustainable	Financial uncertainty unsettles organisations with the continual search for funding distracting paid staff and volunteers.
Welcome	A potential volunteers first contact with an organisation must be positive and rewarding for the person to progress to committing time.
Structure and Process	Poor internal processes and training of staff to manage volunteers can slow the development of long term volunteering.
Public Face	Poor or inappropriate types of communication with the public and other stakeholders can impact on the Diversity, Financial Sustainability and Welcome elements.

## Organisation Issues

This report did not set out to get wide baseline information about the numbers of volunteers and activities across the area but it felt necessary to understand the numbers of people that volunteering organisations attract. Table 6 shows that more than 30% of the organisations that responded have more than 60 people volunteering with them. These are baseline figures that could be tested again in future years to monitor change. These organisations clearly influence many people to be active on the Mendip Hills and could have a wide impact on the community.

**Table 6. The number of volunteers in respondent's organisations**



Of the five Organisation issues identified in Table 5 the two that respondents stated were in most need of improvements were the Internal Structures and the Public Profile of Volunteering. These concerns were backed up by the majority of respondents stating they had no formal written policies for volunteers or formal training in looking after volunteers.

**Table 7. The ranking of Organisation elements requiring improvement**

For your organisation what needs to be built upon to improve volunteering?	
Increase diversity (age, gender, background) of volunteers	55.6%
Financial stability	66.7%
The 'Welcome' experience	22.2%
<b>Internal structure/coordination/policies for volunteers</b>	<b>77.8%</b>
<b>The public profile of our volunteering</b>	<b>77.8%</b>

The People and Places Project has worked well in sharing best practice and jointly promoting activities. These need to be built upon.

Volunteering in the countryside is generally represented by white middle aged people doing practical tasks. While this probably reflects the reality of the situation it does nothing to broaden the type of people who may like to get involved. The public profile is also generally limited to A4 posters produced to a low quality promoting a particular event or press articles after the event.

Administration of groups appears to be an ongoing struggle. Is there scope for a shared resource? A shared member of staff to help emerging groups and established groups? It is likely the needs of these organisations will be similar - financial, databases, promotion, information on funding.

## Organisation Change

In order to achieve a sustainable base for volunteering we recommend the following changes in relation to Organisations

- Best practice for structures and policies needs to be widely shared between organisations
- Build on the People and Places Steering Group to allow more representation from other voluntary organisations
- Undertake campaigns to promote different types of volunteering that build on the four Motivators Improve
- Establish volunteer information points at key locations

# Fulfilling the Three Elements

## In 5 Years Time

Each respondent to the on-line survey was asked to state three improvements to volunteering in the Mendip Hills countryside they would like to see in five years time. Many of the responses fell into four obvious clusters as seen in Table 8.

**Table 8. Improvements respondents would like to see in five years for volunteering in the Mendip Hills countryside**

Coordination	Opportunities	Rangers	Access
Better coordination	Diverse opportunities	Young rangers	Coordinated access improvement groups
Promote as one linked volunteering service	More opportunities	Provision of voluntary warden service	Conservation groups working with access groups
Clarity of who does what	Wider range of opportunities including office based	Expanded countryside ranger service	
Coordinate publicity	Expanded range of opportunities		
Joint database of volunteering opportunities	Bring in people from towns and cities		
Shared guidelines and training			
Same accreditation process (Qualified professional wallers)			
Ongoing coordinated promotion of volunteering opportunities			

Other comments that didn't fall into an obvious cluster;

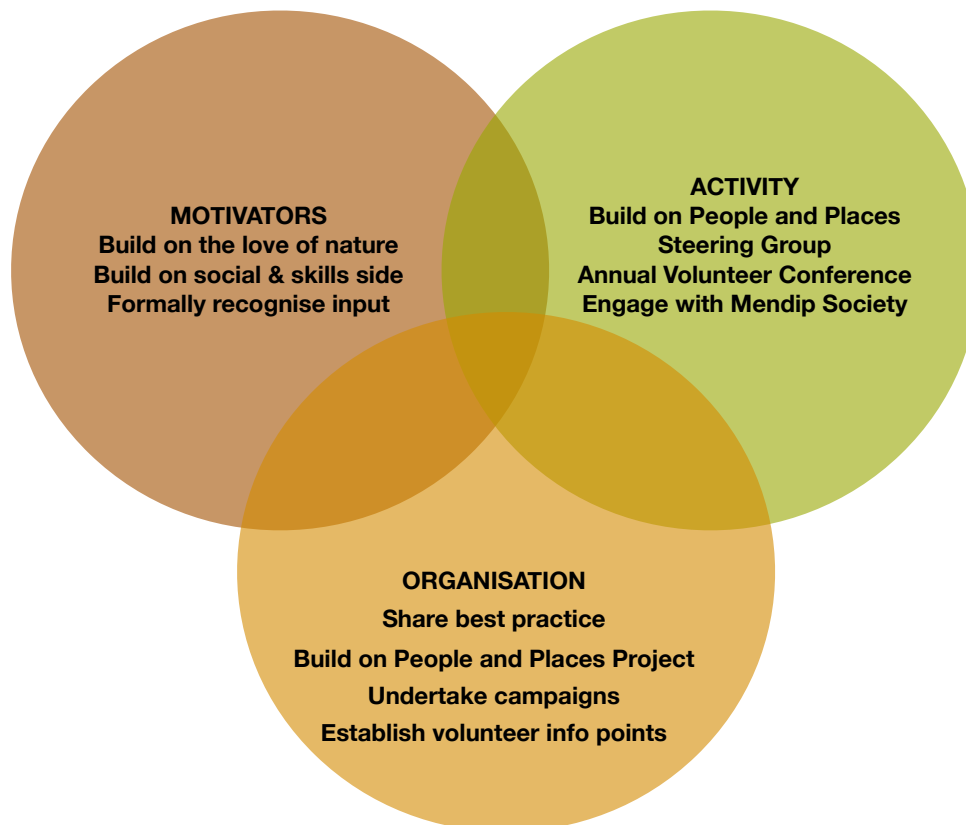
- Volunteer centre
- Secure funding
- Walls restored
- Annual volunteer event to celebrate success

The changes suggested in this report are;

- People's general love of nature is used as a clear technique for getting more people involved

- The social and skills development aspects of volunteering are promoted more
- Volunteers individually receive formal recognition for their input and effort
- Build on the People and Places Steering Group to allow more representation from other voluntary organisations
- Host an annual volunteers conference allowing volunteers and their organisations to champion their work and discuss future initiatives
- Mendip Society to be offered a place on the People and Places Steering Group
- Examine how the Mendip Search and Rescue Plan could be used as a tool for Participation
- Best practice for structures and policies needs to be widely shared between organisations
- Undertake campaigns to promote different types of volunteering that build on the four Motivators
- Establish volunteer information points at key locations

Incorporating the changes suggested in this report and those from the respondents we can place them in the model of the three elements needed to create a sustainable volunteering base (Diagram 3).



*Diagram 3. The three elements needed to create a sustainable volunteering base with recommendations*

## Vision

Based on the above we recommend the following vision be discussed;

In five years time you will be able to visit the People and Places centre, staffed by 2 paid full-time employees. The centre would be in a high profile situation and hold information on all the latest volunteering opportunities and local information about the Mendip Hills AONB. The staff would be employed as part of the Mendip Hills AONB Unit with funding for the initiative coming through an expanded People and Places Steering Group.

**Table 9. Vision for creating a more sustainable volunteering base on the Mendip Hills**

Vision	Justification
Phase 1	
People and Places Steering Group; AONB Service, Somerset Wildlife Trust, National Trust, Natural England, Active Mendip, Mendip Society, Hawk & Owl Trust, CHERT	Better coordination Clarity of who does what Shared guidelines and training Same accreditation process Wider range of opportunities including office based Coordinated access improvement groups Conservation groups working with access groups
Phase 2	
People and Places Team; 2 members of staff - one with internal remit to ensure consistency between organisations and one external to organise campaigns, welcome new volunteers and promote joint events	Promote as one linked volunteering service Coordinate campaign publicity Joint database of volunteering opportunities Diverse opportunities Coordinate Young Rangers Keep Search and Rescue Plan up-to-date
Phase 3	
People and Places Office with public face.	Diverse opportunities Wider range of opportunities including office based roles promoted more easily Bring in people from towns and cities Provides Young Rangers with a base

# Appendix

## Appendix 1; Mendip Search & Rescue Plan

The Mendip Search & Rescue (SAR) Plan (2005) is a document that aims to coordinate the response of the emergency services to incidents that are hard to reach e.g. in forests and on Black Down. The plan was produced with the help of the emergency services by the Mendip Hills AONB Unit.

The plan provides fixed point information that needs to be updated on a regular basis. The fixed point information is rendezvous points, access points, notable location information and telephone numbers of key contacts. The plan provides a document that crosses operational boundaries, similar to the Mendip Hills AONB Management Plan.

The relevance of the plan to the future of volunteering in the Mendip Hills AONB countryside needs to be explored. Organisations actively encouraging people into the countryside have a duty of care over them. While the organisations take precautions through risk assessments and appropriate training, accidents will happen. More people visiting the area will result in more accidents. A coordinated response throughout the entire chain of help is essential. The plan provides a safety net under activity in the Mendip Hills AONB countryside. The plans future needs to be considered through this study.

## Appendix 2; Complete Survey Responses

### 1. Please rate the factors that motivate people to volunteer with your organisation?

					<i>answered question</i>	<b>9</b>
					<i>skipped question</i>	<b>0</b>
	<b>Strongest motivation</b>	<b>Strong motivation</b>	<b>Moderate motivation</b>	<b>Weakest motivation</b>	<b>Rating Average</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
Love of Nature	22.2% (2)	22.2% (2)	22.2% (2)	<b>33.3% (3)</b>	2.67	9
Desire to Look After Nature	<b>33.3% (3)</b>	<b>33.3% (3)</b>	<b>33.3% (3)</b>	0.0% (0)	2.00	9

Social Factors - networking and sense of community	22.2% (2)	22.2% (2)	22.2% (2)	<b>33.3% (3)</b>	2.67	9
Learn and Develop Skills	22.2% (2)	22.2% (2)	22.2% (2)	<b>33.3% (3)</b>	2.67	9

## 2. How many people volunteer in your organisation?

**answered question** 9

**skipped question** 0

	Response Percent	Response Count
1-10	22.2%	2
11-20	0.0%	0
21-30	0.0%	0
31-40	22.2%	2
41-50	11.1%	1
51-60	11.1%	1
<b>60+</b>	<b>33.3%</b>	<b>3</b>

## 3. What volunteering opportunities are in place through your organisation?

**answered question** 9

**skipped question** 0

	Response Percent	Response Count
Lead walks	33.3%	3
Lead talks	55.6%	5
<b>Practical tasks to improve the natural outdoors</b>	<b>66.7%</b>	<b>6</b>

Practical tasks to improve access to the natural outdoors	55.6%	5
Monitoring and/or recording wildlife	44.4%	4
Surveying historic sites	33.3%	3
Accredited training	22.2%	2
Non-accredited training	55.6%	5
Attendance certificates	0.0%	0
Recognition/achievement schemes	0.0%	0
<b>Learn new skills</b>	<b>66.7%</b>	<b>6</b>
Access to a restricted area of your organisation's website	11.1%	1
Involvement in planning volunteering in your organisation	44.4%	4
Social time during volunteering activities	55.6%	5
<b>Internal newsletters</b>	<b>66.7%</b>	<b>6</b>
Base or office for volunteers to visit	33.3%	3
<b>Formal membership</b>	<b>66.7%</b>	<b>6</b>
Teach other volunteers/ members of the public	33.3%	3
Social events	55.6%	5
Mentoring of other volunteers	22.2%	2
First Aid training	22.2%	2
Represent the organisation to others	33.3%	3

Attend lectures	0.0%	0
Attend walks	44.4%	4
<b>Attend talks</b>	<b>66.7%</b>	<b>6</b>
Attend seminars	22.2%	2

**4. Please rate in order of importance what your organisation hopes to achieve through its volunteers.**

**answered question** 9

**skipped question** 0

	<b>Most important</b>	<b>Moderately im- portant</b>	<b>Important</b>	<b>Least important</b>	<b>Re- spons e Count</b>
Mutual aid and/or self help	<b>44.4% (4)</b>	22.2% (2)	22.2% (2)	11.1% (1)	9
Philanthropy and/or service to others	11.1% (1)	11.1% (1)	<b>55.6% (5)</b>	22.2% (2)	9
Participation in community development	11.1% (1)	<b>77.8% (7)</b>	11.1% (1)	0.0% (0)	9
Securing or preventing change	33.3% (3)	0.0% (0)	<b>44.4% (4)</b>	22.2% (2)	9

**5. Please rate in order of importance the aspects of volunteering in the Mendip Hills countryside you think need to be improved.**

**answered question** 9

**skipped question** 0

	<b>Most important</b>	<b>Moderately im- portant</b>	<b>Important</b>	<b>Least important</b>	<b>Re- spons e Count</b>
Mutual aid and/or self help	22.2% (2)	22.2% (2)	<b>33.3% (3)</b>	22.2% (2)	9

Philanthropy and/or service to others	12.5% (1)	25.0% (2)	25.0% (2)	<b>37.5% (3)</b>	8
Participation in community development	<b>44.4% (4)</b>	<b>44.4% (4)</b>	11.1% (1)	0.0% (0)	9
Securing or preventing change	22.2% (2)	11.1% (1)	<b>33.3% (3)</b>	<b>33.3% (3)</b>	9

**6. For your organisation what needs to be built upon to improve volunteering?**

	<i>answered question</i>	<b>9</b>
	<i>skipped question</i>	<b>0</b>
	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
Increase diversity (age, gender, background) of volunteers	55.6%	5
Financial stability	66.7%	6
The 'Welcome' experience	22.2%	2
<b>Internal structure/coordination/policies for volunteers</b>	<b>77.8%</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>The public profile of our volunteering</b>	<b>77.8%</b>	<b>7</b>

**7. Do you have formal written policies concerning volunteers that are available to the public?**

	<i>answered question</i>	<b>9</b>
	<i>skipped question</i>	<b>0</b>
	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
Yes	44.4%	4
<b>No</b>	<b>55.6%</b>	<b>5</b>

**8. Have you received any formal training for managing volunteers?**

	<i>answered question</i>	<b>9</b>
	<i>skipped question</i>	<b>0</b>
	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
Yes	22.2%	2
No	77.8%	7