

GREENSPACES VOLUNTEERING HANDBOOK



2025

BARNET GREENSPACES TEAM



Welcome

Thank you for joining your local Friends volunteering group. Barnet Greenspaces Team aims to make your time improving your local park as safe, enjoyable and rewarding as possible.

To help us provide support and insurance to your Friends group, we ask that you please read this document.

The 'Contents' section below should help you navigate this document and aid future referencing.

Contents

Welcome	1
Contents	2
Risk Assessments	3
Tools Guide.....	3
Bowsaw.....	5
Loppers	6
Secateurs	7
Litter Pickers	8
Rake.....	9
Spade & Shovel	10
Broom	11
Brush slasher (long billhook).....	12
Hazards	13
Working at height.....	13
Falling objects	13
Working near water.....	14
Contact with litter	14
Tetanus and other micro-organisms.....	14
Contact with dog faeces.....	15
Bites and stings	15
Thorns, brambles, and nettles.....	15
Toxic plants	16
Physical and/or verbal abuse	16
Fault reporting.....	17
Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion.....	17
Thank you.....	18

Risk Assessments

The risk assessments provided are done with the aim of keeping you safe and insured when working within Barnet Greenspaces.

Alongside this document you should receive a 'General Risk Assessment' which covers most tasks which you will complete on-site. This should be read in conjunction with the on-site risk assessment which highlights specific hazards and provides key information in the event of an emergency.

The risk assessment refers to the tools guide which you'll find in the next section.

Tools Guide

This section describes how to use the most common tools that you'll come across while volunteering at your local greenspace.

If you feel uncomfortable or unsafe undertaking any task, **please stop and ask for help.**

You may be providing your own tools (thank you!), be provided with tools from your volunteer leader or be borrowing them from a tools library. In any case, please take a moment to familiarise yourself with basic tool use, described below.

Wear appropriate clothing for the weather conditions. If it's wet and windy wrap up warm, if it's hot and sunny wear a sun hat and sunscreen. It is a good idea to wear stout leg wear at any time of the year to prevent scratches etc.

Manual handling, or moving objects, is a normal part of volunteering activities. For your own safety, please avoid moving anything that requires more than one person to lift, or objects over 20kg/44lb.

Please assume **stout footwear** is required for the task, unless your group leader tells you otherwise.

Please take responsibility for **carrying your own refreshments** to keep your energy levels up and prevent dehydration.

Everyone is responsible for the health and safety of the group, if you see anything that looks unsafe, please say something to the task leader. The group leader will help you with additional explanation and training for these tools:

Bowsaw

PPE	Rugged boots, work gloves, eye protection advised
Storage	Stacked in a box or hanging from pegs on the wall
Transport	Blade cover on, hold by the handle or frame
Pre-use checks	Blade tensioned and sharp. No loose parts in the handle or frame. Check your surroundings to ensure you have enough space to work without endangering others
Use	Start the cutting groove by drawing the blade towards you until back-and-forth sawing can be achieved. Continue this full sawing motion using the full range of the blade with minimal downward pressure. Try to saw at 90° to the branch for maximum efficiency
Pro tip	The blade can be trapped by compression in the wood. Making an undercut of 10% through the underside before your main cut from the top should avoid this, meaning less wasted energy
Avoid	Please avoid cutting any branch over shoulder height to minimise the risk of head injuries. 150mm is the suggested maximum diameter of wood to be cut using manual saws (150mm, or 15cm is about the length of a pencil)



Loppers

PPE	Rugged boots, work gloves, eye protection advised
Storage	Stacked in a box or hanging from pegs on the wall
Transport	Must be in the closed position, held by the handles or shaft
Pre-use checks	The main bolt should be tight with the two blades operating smoothly. If the blade sections are significantly pitted or blunt, then the tool should be serviced before use
Use	<p>Loppers should be used for pruning live trees and shrubs, or processing cut material on the ground. Operators should be mindful of their posture when using loppers, keeping the back straight with shoulders and hips in alignment to avoid injury. Keep both hands on the handles and be aware of your surroundings to ensure you do not injure yourself or others</p> <p>The working motion of loppers should be easy, not testing the limits of your strength. A good rule of thumb is not to cut a branch with a greater diameter than your thumb</p>
Pro tip	When processing cut branches, start with the main stem, and sever all branch unions as close to that stem as possible. Repeat this process with the smaller branches you've created for the most efficient way of processing cut material
Avoid	Do not twist the loppers as part of the cutting operation, this quickly leads to equipment failure



Secateurs

PPE	Work gloves, eye protection advised
Storage	Stacked in a box
Transport	Must be in the closed position, clasp engaged
Pre-use checks	Check smooth cutting operation and self-opening. If the blade sections are significantly pitted or blunt, then the tool should be serviced before use
Use	Used for minor/delicate pruning or to process cut material. The user may choose to support the object being cut with their free hand. The maximum diameter of branch cut should be about that of your index finger
Pro tip	Regularly switching hands helps to avoid fatigue
Avoid	Do not twist the secateurs as part of the cutting action. If the branch is too large to cut easily then select another tool



Litter Pickers

PPE	Work gloves
Storage	Stacked upright or in a box. Care should be taken to avoid the working end contaminating the handle
Transport	Always hold the handle!
Pre-use checks	Check the grab has a smooth operation with full closing
Use	Pick single pieces of litter at a time, placing them into a black bag which is held in your other hand
Pro tip	Turn cans and bottles upside down, when possible, to empty them of liquid before placing them in your black bag
Avoid	Do not pick up hazardous waste such as unbagged dog faeces or drugs paraphernalia. Should you encounter these items please contact parks@barnet.gov.uk with a photo and what3words.com location (mailbox monitored during business hours Monday-Friday)



Rake

PPE	Work gloves
Storage	Stacked upright where possible
Transport	By handle, being mindful of surroundings
Pre-use checks	Check all tines are intact and the head is securely attached to the shaft
Use	Try to maintain a strong lower back while raking. Twisting of the shoulders relative to the hips can cause injury; work square on to shoulders if possible
Pro tip	Keep one foot in place, like a netball player with the ball, and rake towards it then pick up the pile. This is more efficient than raking whole lines where you move the same item multiple times
Avoid	Working too closely to other volunteers



Spade & Shovel

PPE	Work gloves, rugged boots
Storage	Stacked upright where possible
Transport	By handle, being mindful of surroundings
Pre-use checks	Check connections between the blade, shaft, and handle
Use	Spades cut and prize soil when digging; shovels move loose earth. For either operation, pay heed to twisting motions and the lower back
Pro tip	Work with “T-Rex arms” to keep the tools close to your centre of gravity, reducing the strain on your body. Rakes can often be more efficient in moving loose earth short distances
Avoid	Exhausting yourself - fatigue leads to errors and injury. Take regular breaks, especially if the work is unfamiliar to you



Broom

PPE	Work gloves, rugged boots, facemask optional
Storage	Stacked upright where possible
Transport	By handle, being mindful of surroundings
Pre-use checks	Check connections between the head and shaft
Use	Clearing light debris from areas of hard standing or sealed surfaces. For smaller areas, the user should sweep towards them, collecting from a central point. For larger areas, the user may sweep away from them with a pushing motion
Pro tip	Start from a corner, pushing debris into the centre without sweeping 'clean' areas twice
Avoid	Be mindful of the dust being created, especially if conditions are hot and dry. Facemasks should be worn if airborne dust is noticeable



Brush slasher (long billhook)

PPE	Steel toe cap boots, long sleeves recommended. Gloves should not be worn when using swinging shafted tools
Storage	Stacked upright where possible, blade guards in place where applicable
Transport	By handle, horizontally, being mindful of surroundings. Blade facing down
Pre-use checks	Check connections between the head and shaft. Sharpen using a cigar stone if necessary
Use	Clearing patches of bramble, stinging nettles, or saplings. The user should position themselves so as to maintain a stable base while swinging the tool. The slasher should cut diagonally downwards as the user proceeds forwards, leaving a linear trail of debris to one side
Pro tip	Left and right-handed individuals can clear both sides of a path at once while maintaining suitable distance
Avoid	Avoid being too close to other volunteers or members of the public. Use common sense, though a rule-of-thumb is to maintain a distance of two tool-lengths from one another



Hazards

The general risk assessment details a range of hazards which may foreseeably be encountered when volunteering in Barnet greenspaces. This section serves to make you better aware and prepared for some potential hazards and expands on the general risk assessment with information which should help keep you safe.

Please note that the chances of coming to serious harm while volunteering at your local greenspace are low. Reading the below sections should allow you to take reasonable precautions should any of these circumstances occur.

Volunteer groups may work in close proximity or be widely dispersed across a site. Please stay within audible range of the volunteer leader so that they might be alerted to hazards or issues.

Working at height

Working from height should be avoided at all times; even standing on a toolbox or a rock to reach up high. Please avoid working at above shoulder height.

Your group leader will work with the Greenspaces Team to make sure tasks are designed to avoid working from height. Contractors can be brought in if working from height is unavoidable.

Falling objects

Some tasks may involve removing small trees or shrubs through felling; in no other circumstances should any object be falling from height.

To minimize the risk, please ensure that no-one else is within a distance of 2x the height of the tree or shrub, so if the tree is 3m tall please ensure everyone else is at least 6m away.

Signs will be placed on paths to stop members of the public approaching while any felling is taking place. If you notice anyone approach, please urgently alert other volunteers to stop work.

Working near water

Normal volunteering activities should not take place within two metres of the water's edge. Working near water is subject to additional training and insurance requirements. Working near water carries the risk of diseases such as Weil's disease and Lyme's disease as well as the hazard of drowning.

Contact with litter

Please follow the above tools guide for the operation of litter pickers. Should inadvertent contact occur between your skin and an item of litter then please wash with soap and water in the nearest toilet facilities immediately then monitor how you are feeling, contacting the NHS emergency (999) and non-emergency (111) as appropriate.

Any sharps or drugs paraphernalia should not be picked up. Instead, please report the location to the Greenspaces Officer for collection by hazardous waste contractors. If any sharps are contacted the individual should be transported to the nearest A&E department (found on the Site Specific Risk Assessment).

Tetanus and other micro-organisms

Contact between broken skin and rusty tools or soil can lead to infection. To minimise the risk of this situation occurring we suggest covering any cuts with plasters or similar bandaging and ensuring your tetanus immunisation is up to date.

Contact with dog faeces

Dog faeces contains a range of dangerous toxins and diseases. Toxocariasis is a parasite present in dog muck which can cause blindness in children. The risk to adults is acceptable if sensible precautions, including avoiding direct contact with dog faeces, are taken. Should direct contact occur then the affected area should be cleaned immediately with soap and water at the nearest toilet block, identified on the Site Specific Risk Assessment.

Bites and stings

These can be from bees, wasps, ants, other insects, dogs, rats, nettles etc. Although these rarely present a major hazard it is important to be aware of the risk of anaphylactic shock. This is a major allergic reaction of the whole body. It can be recognised by blotchy skin, swelling of the face and neck, impaired breathing, and rapid pulse.

- Inform the group leader and other volunteers if you have an allergy to stings or bites and carry appropriate medication.
- Go to hospital without delay if you are bitten by an animal due to the risk of infection
- If someone has a reaction on another part of the body away from the localised site where the bite or sting occurred, this may be a sign of anaphylactic shock and the person should be taken to hospital immediately.

Thorns, brambles, and nettles

Coming into close proximity to brambles, stinging nettles and thorny shrubs is a normal part of greenspace volunteering. Stout, rigger style work gloves should be worn in these circumstances, though work gloves offering less protection may be worn at the volunteer's discretion. Tweezers and anti-septic wipes should be included in the site first aid kit to remove any stuck thorns quickly and safely.

Toxic plants

Volunteers should be made aware of the following toxic plants, and satisfy themselves (perhaps through searching for images of the plants online) that they can undertake rudimentary identification of them:

- **(Giant) hogweed** – both hogweed and non-native giant hogweed are typically found path side, in verges, and rough grassland. Though more pronounced with the giant variety, all hogweed sap irritates the skin when activated by sunlight, causing scarring which can last years. Any suspected sap contacts with the skin should be covered from sunlight and washed off as a matter of urgency.
- **Blackthorn** – in addition to the advice regarding thorns found above, blackthorn should be treated with additional caution as wounds from the thorns can be painful.
- **Yew** – Though a common woodland, hedging and churchyard tree, yew leaves contain extremely poisonous alkaloids called taxines; consuming a small quantity of the leaves may be fatal to children, livestock, and pets. Extra care should be taken when cutting yew plants to ensure no leaves are left behind.
- **Hemlock water dropwort** – this plant grows in wet areas and is often mistaken for cow parsley. All parts of hemlock water dropwort are extremely poisonous. Any suspected sightings of this plant should be reported to the local Greenspaces Development Officer for removal by specialist contractors.

Physical and/or verbal abuse

Incidents of staff or volunteers being abused on site are extremely rare. Reasonable efforts should be made to de-escalate heated situations. Individuals should decide, in conjunction with group leaders, whether the incident is criminal in nature. If that is the case, the police should be contacted using 999 or 101 depending on the severity of the situation.

Lower-level incidents should be reported to both the Barnet Community Safety Team, via BarnetCST@barnet.gov.uk and the Greenspaces Development Officer for incident

reporting. Should the incidents be recurrent, an action plan will be formulated with input from the Friends group, the police and Barnet Community Greenspaces Teams.

Fault reporting

Please report any faults you come across in Barnet Greenspaces to parks@barnet.gov.uk with a www.what3words.com location and a photo if possible. Mailbox monitored during normal business hours Monday-Friday

Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion

A wide range of people live, work, and enjoy greenspaces in Barnet. Barnet greenspaces volunteering groups should not restrict their membership based on protected characteristics as defined by the Equality Act 2010.

Diversity is celebrated in Barnet, and that should be reflected in the borough's volunteering groups. We provide training and help to group leaders to make sure all of our volunteering groups are accessible to people of any background.

All tasks can be modified so that everyone is included. We only ask that if someone needs a carer's help to undertake moderate physical activity that their carer also attends and helps facilitate the activity.

Some volunteers may be very young or old, have physical or mental disabilities, are pregnant, have recently given birth, or may not understand verbal or written English. All of these groups are welcome, and the Greenspace Team will work to ensure a bespoke Risk Assessment takes into account their specific needs in relation to the volunteering tasks.

Thank you

Thanks for reading this handbook. Please rest assured that with common sense supplemented by awareness and the right PPE, the chances of you coming to harm while volunteering at your local greenspace is extremely low. It is our sincere intention that you have an enjoyable, safe, and rewarding time while volunteering. Please email parks@barnet.gov.uk with any feedback to enable us to improve our volunteering offer.