

Volunteer Lock Keeper Information Sheet

The Volunteer Lock Keeper (VLK) Role

Key elements of the role;

- Welcome, engage and assist visitors
- Deal with the general public including boaters and other canal users – i.e. providing information & assistance
- Offer help to operate the locks and handle boats through the locks (assistance mandatory at mechanised locks)
- Encourage water conservation – i.e. check sluices are closed and encourage lock sharing
- Undertake light maintenance tasks such as painting and edging around the locks as agreed with your Task Manager. This varies around the country.
- Report any significant changes or issues to the Trust's staff, through the protocol identified by your Task Manager

In addition to this there may be local variances depending upon need and resource, such as the opportunity to give guided walks & talks to local community groups or local maintenance projects. These will either be identified to you by your Task Manager or could arise from an opportunity you have identified – please do talk to your Task Manager if you would like to carry out activities beyond the usual day to day VLK activities in your area.

Please ask your Task Manager should you wish to have a copy of the Volunteer Lock Keeper Role Description.

Responsibilities

☑ To champion the Canal & River Trust – Volunteer Lock Keepers are the face of the Trust and should be a vast network of ambassadors. Whilst we hope that it is rarely the case, there may be times when you disagree with some aspects of the work being carried out by the Trust. If this is the case, please discuss it with your Task Manager rather than in a public forum.

☑ To check that the lock(s) are safe and appropriate safety measures are in place – for the public, the rest of the lock keeping team and other staff/volunteers in the area and for yourself. To carry out minor safety checks as agreed locally. This could include reporting fly tipping and cordoning off an area until it has been reported and removed, ensuring throw lines are available at specified locations on site, and checking of your own PPE such as lifejacket safety checks.

☑ To report incidents

☑ To liaise with Task Manager in advance regarding availability.

☑ To seek guidance when unsure of appropriate response to certain situations.

How we aim to support you

All Volunteer Lock Keepers are assigned a Volunteer Task Manager, who has overall responsibility for you whilst volunteering for the Canal & River Trust. They may delegate management responsibility to other members of the team for specific tasks or at particular locations, your Task Manager should make you aware of who is directly responsible for managing each of the tasks you carry out as a VLK.

Volunteers who carry out more than one role within the Trust may have a different Task Manager responsible for each distinct role. In some areas Lead Volunteers have been identified to take on elements of management responsibility for other volunteers.

The Volunteer Lock Keeper Service

VLK's help us to provide a complementary service to visitors on the water and on the towpath. From research that we've carried out (in part the comments that you feed back to us), we know that you're really making a difference and are greatly appreciated. We recently received feedback from a boater who'd take their grandson through the Foxton Lock flight and really appreciated the help of the VLKs there: 'we feel she needs to be commended for giving a little boy a very memorable day and a great deal of enjoyment.'

Help and advice should not be forced upon people but offered with a smile. Boaters are welcome to refuse help offered by a volunteer lock keeper (with the exception of some mechanised river locks) – for some the physical operating of the Locks is what makes their experience so enjoyable, or they may just have a different way of doing things, and providing they are not at risk of endangering themselves or others, this should be graciously accepted. You are there to support waterway users, not police them.

Volunteer Lock Keepers enable the Trust to provide a highly valued additional customer service on a scale which we could not sustain without your support. Whilst you may get boaters asking for exact operating hours, we are unable to guarantee this at the majority of our sites as every team differs in size and every volunteer differs in their availability, therefore both the Trust and you as volunteers require a degree of flexibility within the role. Whilst we can give visitors an expectation of when and where they are most likely to encounter volunteer lock keepers on their travels we should not mislead them to expecting a guarantee of assistance as this may not always be possible. We know some of you have done local information boards at the approach to lock flights saying who the VLKs are on that day and when they're there – a great idea, thank you.

In some areas notice boards are used to display the names of volunteers available that day and their contact details so people are aware assistance is available if needed.

The Lock Keeping Season

A typical season for a VLK runs from April – October. At a number of locations the role will cease in the Autumn due to the decline in traffic and oncoming stoppage season restricting boat movements. Your Task Manager will discuss the plan for your area in advance. In some busy areas volunteers will be given the option to continue volunteering throughout the Winter months, or offered alternative activities such as more practical maintenance and vegetation management tasks. Your local Volunteers' Coordinator will also be able to identify alternative activities, such as the local Towpath Taskforce. To find out what other volunteering opportunities are available in your area visit <http://canalrivertrust.org.uk/volunteering> or speak to your local Volunteer Coordinator. We also completely appreciate that you might want to hibernate for the Winter after a long Summer!

The Recruitment, Registration & Induction Process

The VLK role is an important one, volunteers are placed in a position of responsibility and act as the 'face' of the Trust. We have had a few concerns expressed by boaters about how we select and train people to be a VLK and these simple steps help ensure that you're the right volunteer for the role and you to decide if we're the right charity for you to give your time to As such an appropriate recruitment process in place.

Registration

It is important that all Canal & River Trust Volunteers are registered as this ensures we have carried out background checks appropriate to the role including everyone's emergency contact details and important medical info stored securely. Volunteers are also unable to claim expenses until they are officially registered on the ThankQ database. This should have happened when you initially met your VTM so contact them if you've never filled in a registration form. At this point we also asked you for references which we've followed up.

Volunteer Statement

The Volunteer Statement contains mutual hopes and expectations to make sure that you are able to help the work of Canal & River Trust and that you feel valued and supported in doing so. Every volunteer should receive a copy from their Task Manager as part of the Induction process, either by individual copy or through referral to the copy in the Volunteer's Handbook. It forms a foundation for our relationship and any objections regarding its content should be raised immediately with your Task Manager.

Your Volunteer's Handbook

To support you throughout your volunteering we issue a Volunteer's Handbook to all regular Trust Volunteers. This contains useful information about the Trust and our volunteering vision and helps answer many questions volunteers often have, including information on equal opportunities, expenses, driving for the Trust, working with children, managing your safety, etc. The Handbook's have been recently updated and are in the process of being distributed, if you are yet to receive yours please ask your Task Manager.

Training

All VLK's can expect to receive a standardised mandatory training package, including;

☐ Induction presentation - this presentation gives the introduction to the role and the Trust, talking through Customer Service and much more. It's a presentation which we aim to give to all VLKs across the country with the opportunity to include local information and details.

☐ On Site Training – to cover local procedures, familiarisation with locks and operational buildings, introduction to the local team, demo of safe lock usage and chance to try for yourself, emergency procedures, location of first aid kits and identification of qualified first aiders. This may be spread over a period of time. Some areas use a volunteer 'buddy' system to help new recruits settle in.

☐ Volunteer Lock keeper Safety Training one day course – delivered by KNW training, mandatory for all VLK's.

☐ Health & Safety Video's – topics include; slips trips and falls, lone working, water safety life jackets & throwlines, safe handling of hazardous substances, safe handling of needles & syringes plus additional topics as identified by your Task Manager. These may be viewed in one hit or spread over time.

☐ CAATS (Competency Assessment And Training Scheme), specifically for Lock Keeping. Additional elements carried out as part of your volunteering may require additional CAATS assessments.

In addition there may be further training requested by your Task Manager in response to a specific local or individual need.

Specific Customer Service training is available should there be demand, please notify your Task Manager if interested and a session can be organised if there are viable numbers (min 6) within a region.

Operating Locks & Advising Boater's

Our canals, rivers and their locks vary from one site to another, your local team will help you understand the requirements and idiosyncrasies in your area. The Boater's Handbook is a fantastic resource for understanding the range of different locks across the network and best practise when boating; <http://canalrivertrust.org.uk/media/library/141.pdf>

Our Values

Caring - We care passionately about our canals and rivers, about their past, their future and about everyone who uses and enjoys them.

Local - We operate at a local level and try to reflect local needs and local ambitions in all that we do.

Open - We welcome new people and new ideas – and we are transparent in all that we do.

Safe - The personal safety of everyone on our canals and rivers is our number one priority.

Expert - We combine years of experience with the latest innovations to deliver the very best results.

Support & Resources

Clothing & Equipment

All Volunteer Lock Keepers will receive blue CRT Volunteer polo shirt, a name badge, a hi-vis vest and a CRT Volunteer black fleece as standard. Volunteers giving over 10 days per month may also receive a CRT Volunteer blue sweatshirt and baseball cap.

Expenses & Time Recording

All the Trust's volunteers are able to claim out of pocket expenses. For your first claim we require a bank details form to get you registered on the system, after that submit an Expenses & Time Record to your Task Manager. This can be submitted at any time, most volunteers opt for a monthly submission. Either form can be requested from your Task Manager. There are parameters around what we can pay with details available in your Volunteer's Handbook or from your Task Manager.

Should you have not received your expenses 2 weeks after the submission date please contact the Volunteers' Coordinator for your waterway, who should be able to swiftly resolve any issues. In the case of persistent delays please contact your VTM's manager.

Communication

Due to the nature of the role regular communication between volunteers and their Task Managers / supporting team are crucial. This may happen via face to face meetings, email bulletins, phone calls, written communications and notice boards, etc and will vary depending upon the number of volunteers in a particular area, the management style of their Task Manager and your needs. As a minimum we recommend one face to face meeting a month between Task Managers or their wider team members and the volunteers in their team.

National updates from the national volunteering team will be come out in the form of a monthly e-newsletter and through our new quarterly magazine 'Waterfront' to help keep you up to date with new developments.

We are also aware that many of you enjoy hearing about the experiences of other volunteers across the country. A great way to share ideas, ask questions and generally celebrate the work that you and your team do is to join the Facebook group 'Canal & River Trust Volunteers'. We love to hear what you've been up to, get feedback on what works well and what can be improved, and see your photo's. For those who are already active in the group thank you for your contribution, and for those who aren't - why not give it a go?

Problem Solving

Should you have any problems whilst volunteering with us please speak to your Task Manager initially so that they can try and resolve them, if you feel unable to do this then please contact your VTM's manager. It is always our intention to resolve matters as locally as possible, however, any problems that cannot be handled locally will be dealt with as appropriate to the National Volunteering Manager.

FAQ's

What should we do when offered tips / donations?

Whilst we have no objection to you accepting a cuppa and a bacon butty from an appreciative boater we do ask that you refuse personal tips as this is at odds with the whole ethos of volunteering. Where visitors are keen to give money please steer them towards donating to The Trust. Ideally this would be via our text donation numbers or to a nearby Trust collection box, however, if this is not possible we recommend receiving donations in sealed envelopes, and returning them to a safe place asap, as agreed with your Task Manager.

Unfortunately cash handling always carries a risk to those involved and as such we try to avoid it as much as possible, therefore should your task manager feel it is unsafe to accept donations at your particular site please respect their decision, it has been reached with your best interests in mind. The Trust's fundraising team are currently developing branded donations envelopes and hope these will be available in future to give out to donors who can then return them via post or designated locations at their leisure.

What should I do when I see unsafe / illegal behaviour?

Your Task Manager will be able to tell you local reporting procedures. Remember, your role is to inform and assist, we do not expect you to police the waterways. If you see someone doing something you are uncomfortable with we recommend pointing out their actions and explaining why they are inappropriate, and where appropriate a better way of doing things, but only if you feel it is safe to do so and you think that the boater will be receptive. Any incidents like this that you see, log them as 'near misses' with your task manager. Please try and do this as soon as possible following the incident so that details are fresh in your mind. Illegal behaviour should be reported to police – again, where possible try to write down details of the incident as soon as possible, including date, time, location, description and boat name/license number if applicable.

Can I bring a friend along?

Having a friend or partner join you whilst volunteering can be a great way to share your enthusiasm for the role and encourage others to get involved. If you would like to bring a friend with you please

ask your Task Manager well in advance so they can carry out the necessary planning to ensure their time with us is safe. As we hope you will appreciate from the time spent on your own induction and training they may be limited in what tasks they can carry

out. If you have a friend who would like to help on a regular basis we recommend they follow the usual application process at the start of the year.

How do we sign people up as Friends of The Trust?

It's simple for people to join The Trust as Friends, they can either join online via the website or complete the form in the 'ducklings' leaflet.

There are also the Get Involved leaflets for those interested in volunteering.

Your task manager should be able to get a supply of these through your local office and there may be others that are of use to you. As an organisation, we aim not to produce too many leaflets and guide people towards the website as much as possible. There are other useful leaflets out there but they are limited in number.