

Walk leader guidance (Oct. '25)

WALK GROUP COORDINATORS

At present, the following volunteers have overall responsibility, including the drawing up of volunteer rotas, for the weekly walks:

Monday: Boxgrove – Annelize Kidd

Tuesday: Worplesdon Place – Martyn Parker

Wednesday: Shalford – Andy Wilson

Thursday: Shere – Kevin Jenkins

Friday: Whitmoor Common – Roger Philo

INTRODUCTION

All volunteers must have received walk leader training from the GHW's Training Coordinator.

The Walk Group Coordinators send out draft rotas every few months, scheduling leaders and back markers for forthcoming walks. Volunteers are responsible for confirming their availability and arranging swaps if they need to change the date they had originally agreed to lead or back mark. If an emergency occurs on the day of the walk that prevents you from leading or backmarking, please contact the relevant Walk Group Coordinator and/or use the GHW Volunteers WhatsApp to seek a replacement.

The walk leader, in liaison with his/her back marker, is responsible for ensuring, within reason, that the walk is safe, inclusive, and enjoyable.

Except in exceptional circumstances, a scheduled walk should always go ahead unless it is too icy or dangerous to walk. It is not possible to identify every such circumstance. However, a recent example was when a 40-degree temperature was forecast and so the walk leader informed potential walkers a few days in advance via the group WhatsApp that he would run a shorter walk earlier in the day than scheduled; he also turned up at the scheduled time for the walk in case any walker had missed the message.

Children and adults with special needs are welcome on the walks, provided they are accompanied by a supervising adult.

Before the walk

- If you are leading for the first time or following a route that you have not taken before, it is advisable to do a recce of the route. If there have been weather conditions that might make your planned walk hazardous – for example, persistent rain that could cause muddy and slippery paths – then it is also worth recceing the walk beforehand.
- There are risk assessments for established routes (updated annually in January) that you should consult when following a particular route for the first time. These can be obtained from the Walk Group Coordinator. If you are planning a walk that does not broadly follow one of these established routes, then you must complete a risk assessment explaining how to mitigate identified risks for this route; you should use the blank risk assessment proforma, which can be downloaded from the GHWs website or obtained from the Walk Group Coordinator.

- The walk leader and back marker must wear their GHWs walking vests and carry a whistle around the neck; the leader should also take the following:

A copy of the walk register (ask the group Coordinator for a copy);

Copies of the new walker registration form can be downloaded from the website:

(<https://www.guildfordhealthwalks.org.uk/ourvolunteers.html>)

A charged mobile phone (with the mobile no's of other walk leaders within his/her walk group, or to call 999 in case of an emergency);

A bottle of clean water (to wash out grit from any scrapes/falls) (we do not provide plasters or any medication);

Whistle (comes in useful should the back marker need to urgently get the attention of the leader);

Space blanket (to keep a walker warm in case shock sets in after an incident);

Blank ICE cards (to hand to all new walkers);

A copy of the Incident & Accident/Near Misses Report Form;

It is recommended to have the BritishFirstAid app, and also WhatThreeWords on your phone, and a few copies of our walks leaflet

- The walk leader and back marker should **arrive at least 15 minutes before the walk starts**.. He/she must take the register, a copy of which must be forwarded to the Walk Group Coordinator after the walk is completed (who needs to retain registers for up to 1 year, for insurance purposes)..
- The walk leader and back marker should have a quick meeting before the walk starts to be clear on the route and to be aware of any walkers who may need extra assistance, or may not be able to complete the walk and will need a shorter route. You should also discuss how to handle a walker with whom other walkers may feel awkward and/or a walker with a disruptive dog.

- The walk leader needs to indicate the likely timing of the walk and ask if anyone needs to return by a specific time.
- If a new walker arrives, introduce yourself and make them feel welcome. Ask them to fill out a new walker registration form. If this is not possible to do so at that time, ask the walker to email you so that you can send them a copy of the form for completion. Completed walker registration and photo permission forms need to be emailed to data@guildfordhealthwalks.org.uk. The data RP will contact you to confirm receipt of the forms; the original forms will then need to be destroyed (shredded, burned, or composted), and photos of the forms deleted from your phone.
- Just before setting off on the walk, explain that you are leading and identify the back marker. Introduce any new walkers. Explain briefly the general route and point out any potential risks, such as a busy road that will need to be crossed. Remind walkers with dogs that they must keep their dogs on a short lead. Please note that if a walker decides to leave the walk early, they should inform the walk leader or the back marker. Finally, remind everyone that they walk at their own risk, and that we adhere to the following guidelines: All walkers should be reminded to carry a form of identification with them and a completed Countryside Code.
- ICE card on their person and any medication they may need. Additionally, they should, if possible, have an ICE (In Case of Emergency) contact on their mobile phones. When calling emergency numbers, a possible phone password is bypassed, and the option to call 999 or the ice contact is given.
- In very rare circumstances, you may have noticed that someone does not have appropriate footwear for the route you have planned. As Guildford Health Walks is an inclusive scheme, you should, where it is reasonable, adjust the route.

During the walk

- People will walk at slightly different speeds and so it is important that the leader always keeps the back marker in sight and stops on two or three occasions. This is not only to allow the group to come back together but to give people a short break. It is advisable to walk at the pace of the slowest walker. We are also committed to improving people's well-being by an appreciation of nature, so it is good to point out features of natural beauty and share any knowledge you have of the natural world.
- Remember that people walk at their own risk and all the walkers are adults. Therefore, it is not your responsibility, for example, to supervise them when crossing a road or walking along an uneven, rutted surface. It is sufficient for you to advise them to be careful in such circumstances. You should not, however, take them along a route that is unusually and obviously dangerous – for example, a patch of ground that is underwater, or a narrow path that is also a bridleway (Dark Lane in Shere).

- Incidents where walkers are injured are rare. However, falls do occur occasionally, and sometimes walkers feel unwell. The procedures for what to do in such circumstances are set out clearly in the *GHWs Incidents and Accidents Report Form Guidance*, which will be covered as part of your initial training. It is also advisable that you familiarise yourself with this policy before leading your first walk. It is important to remember, however, that there are always experienced volunteers, including the appropriate Walk Coordinator, with whom you are expected to liaise and receive their advice and guidance. In case of an incident/accident, the walk leader needs to complete the incident report form (available at (<https://www.guildfordhealthwalks.org.uk/ourvolunteers.html>)) and email it to incidents@guildfordhealthwalks.org.uk

After the walk

- Do a final check of the register to ensure all walkers have returned with the group. If the Walk Group Coordinator is not with you, please ensure that you pass a copy of the register to them within the next few days. We need to maintain a record of the number of people who walk with us as evidence for any applications we make for funds to support our scheme.
- It's often useful to have a quick discussion with your back marker and/or any other volunteers about the route, any incidents, walkers who may have found the going tough, etc. This includes discussing the reasons why a walker does not complete the walk.
- Encourage the social side of these walks by joining walkers for a coffee, for example.
- Optional best practice: Some walk leaders keep a record of the walks they lead, including details of the conditions, date, number of walkers, and any additional notes. There is a space on the register for comments to add this information.