

GROUNDWORK REPORT

Volunteering Scoping and Mapping Study Wandle Valley Regional Park

Simon Sadinsky
Community Project Officer

Groundwork London
18 – 21 Morley Street
London SE1 7QZ

Telephone 020 7922 1230
LONDON@groundwork.org.uk
www.groundwork.org.uk/london



Section 1: About this study

The proposed Wandle Valley Regional Park, stretching from Croydon and Sutton through Merton and Wandsworth, will be a vibrant and welcoming network of green space that will help local residents escape the pressures of city life, get closer to nature and be more active. It will also create a high quality environment that helps bring jobs, growth and prosperity to the Wandle Valley.

A significant part of the above mentioned vision for the regional park is engaging volunteers as a means of engendering the stewardship and ownership of the River Wandle among the local community. In line with this, Groundwork London was asked to undertake a volunteer scoping and mapping study, examining existing levels of volunteering in the regional park catchment area – 1.6km radius from the park itself - and identifying prospects for future development around volunteering.

The resultant data helps form a picture of the current state of volunteering activity within the catchment area of the Wandle Valley Regional Park, as well as within the regional park itself. It breaks down the type and scale of volunteering taking place while simultaneously delving deeper into the potential obstacles and barriers to volunteering within the region. Finally, it explores the respondent organisations' understanding of the regional park development and interest in becoming more involved in the process moving forward.

Section 2: Methodology

The construction of this report could be broken into three distinct sections: research, data collection and reporting. The research stage was two-fold, the first of which was to collect and collate existing information, including contacts gathered through the Wandle Forum. The second stage was to identify other relevant organisations that were likely to involve – or be interested in involving – volunteers within the catchment area of the park. This was done in a number of ways, including reaching out to Volunteer Centres in Wandsworth, Croydon, Sutton and Merton.

Through information provided by the Volunteer Centres and through researching existing opportunities listed on Do-it.org and other volunteering websites, a database was formed

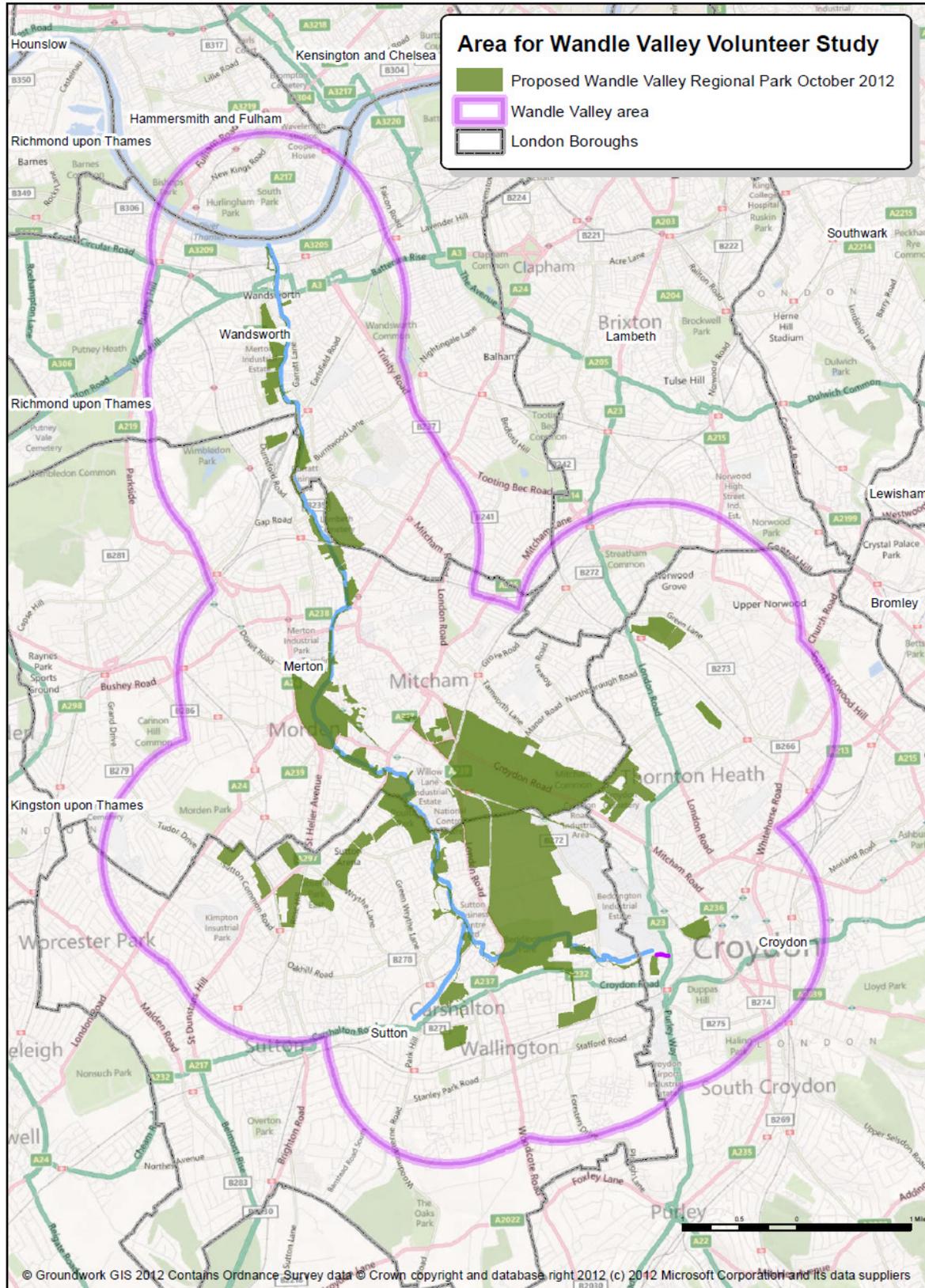
consisting of organisations utilising volunteers in certain fields and within specified postcodes within the regional park catchment area. Simply looking through these sites, however, would have ignored a large section of the population that either do not use these services or do not currently advertise for volunteers. To compensate for this, a range of desk based research was performed to identify other organisations that would be suitable for this study.

Once a list of organisations from a range of sectors had been compiled, a questionnaire was developed that would capture the information requested by the Board of Trustees of the Wandle Valley Regional Park. A copy of this survey can be found at the end of this report as Appendix 1. Alongside the survey was sent a map developed by the GIS team at Groundwork specifically for this study, which identified both the catchment area for the regional park and the park boundaries themselves. This can be seen in Figure 1 below.

Prior to sending out the questionnaire to the organisations identified using the methods detailed above, the survey was run past a couple of “test” organisations that Groundwork had previously developed relationships with. The purpose of this was to gauge whether the survey was easy to both use and understand. Finally, the questionnaire was distributed via SurveyMonkey to all the identified organisations. For those requested it, a hard copy was also available. In order to increase the likelihood of participation, occasional follow up emails and phone calls were placed over the course of a month and each respondent was entered in a draw to win a £50 gift certificate to M&S. The end response was very strong, with 89 organisations responding to the survey.

In addition to this report, the data gathered through this study will be used to inform the construction of an organisational database for use by the Wandle Valley Regional Park. Both the findings from the study and this database should prove invaluable in providing baseline data for the development of the park, both in terms of volunteering and engagement.

Figure 1: Map distributed with each questionnaire:

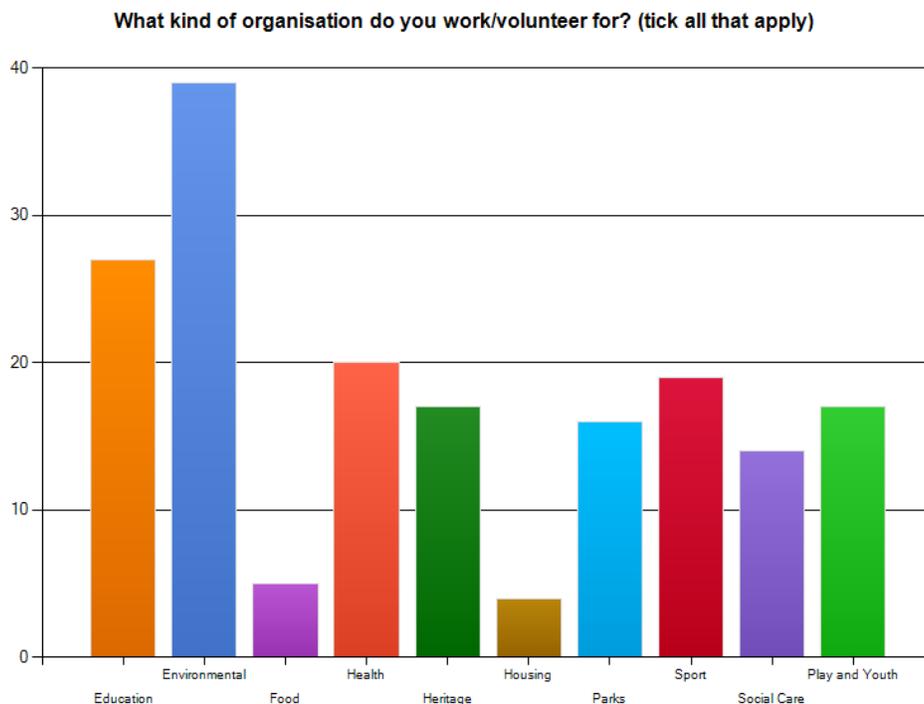


Section 3: Key Findings

As detailed above, 89 organisations responded to questionnaire. Of those, around 80% currently involve volunteers within their organisation. The way that the survey was structured, those that did not currently involve volunteers were guided directly to questions about expanding opportunities, barriers to volunteering and increasing participation in the development of the regional park. Those organisations that are currently using volunteers were questioned in greater detail about their volunteering practices before moving on to the above mentioned sections.

There was a wide variety of types of organisations that responded to the survey, which is ideal as it identifies the practices and needs of a cross section of the organisations active within the local communities. Figure 2 highlights the categories that these organisations classified themselves as working within. In addition to the categories highlighted below, respondents had the opportunity to write in a category that they felt better described their organisation. Of these open ended responses, popular ones included transport, crime prevention, religion and advice and support.

Figure 2: Types of organisations



As can be expected given the subject matter, the largest sector represented was environmental. However, there was also a strong representation of organisations that fell under other categories, including education, health, sport and social care, which demonstrates the wide spectrum of organisations that can be tapped into as part of the regional park development. It is worth noting that organisations were given the option of ticking multiple boxes, as this would give a better indication of the range of services provided.

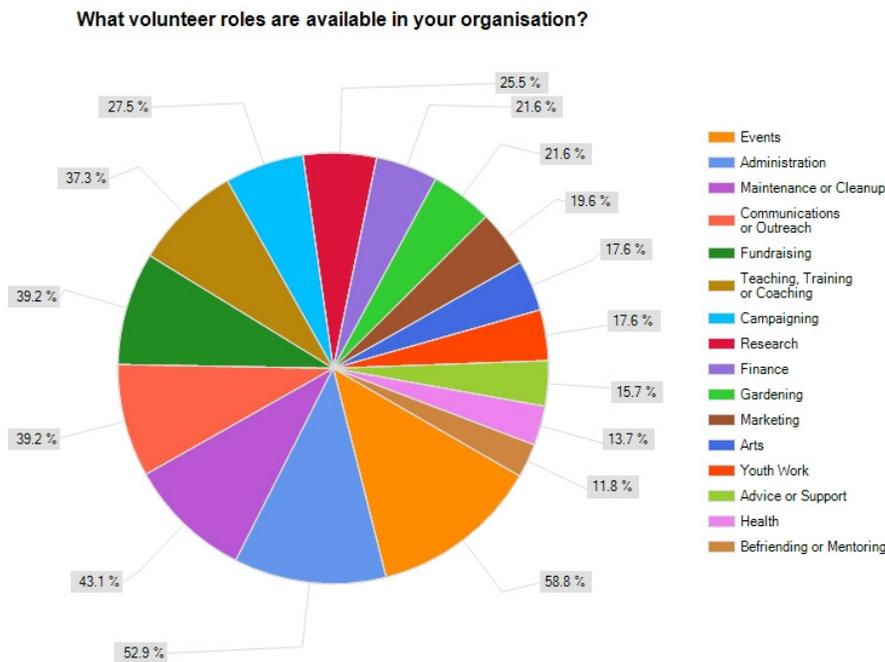
Of the organizations that responded in the affirmative as to whether they provide volunteer opportunities, around 50% offered over 21 volunteer opportunities throughout the course of the year. This compared to around 40% who used between 1-10 volunteers and 10% who used between 11-20. Of those who felt their capacity for engaging volunteers was limited, most found the biggest barrier was a lack of organisational capacity. There was also a significant number – just fewer than 20% of respondents – who felt they lacked the skills or training, while 12% identified issues relating to safeguarding as limiting their capacity. Several organisations left comments stating that they had a large base of skilled volunteers to draw from, however they lacked the staff time to manage or oversee them. They saw the regional park as an opportunity to network and collaborate with other local organisations – both within and outside of their sector – to increase their combined capacity to manage volunteers.

Volunteer roles available

In identifying the volunteer roles that were available within each organisation, the questions were broken into three key sections, the first of which was to identify the volunteer opportunities that were available within the organisation at large. These findings can be seen in Figure 3, below. Again, respondents were given the opportunity to write in additional categories, and although most chose not to, other responses included animal care, trustees and conservation work.

As is common with many small to mid-sized organisations, there was a large demand identified for volunteers to assist with administration, events and fundraising. While these are roles that may not be directly applicable to the development of the regional park, as many of these roles will not take place in or be related to the park, it does give a sense of the scope of volunteering and the skills and/or capabilities that are available to tap into.

Figure 3: Volunteer Roles within each organisation

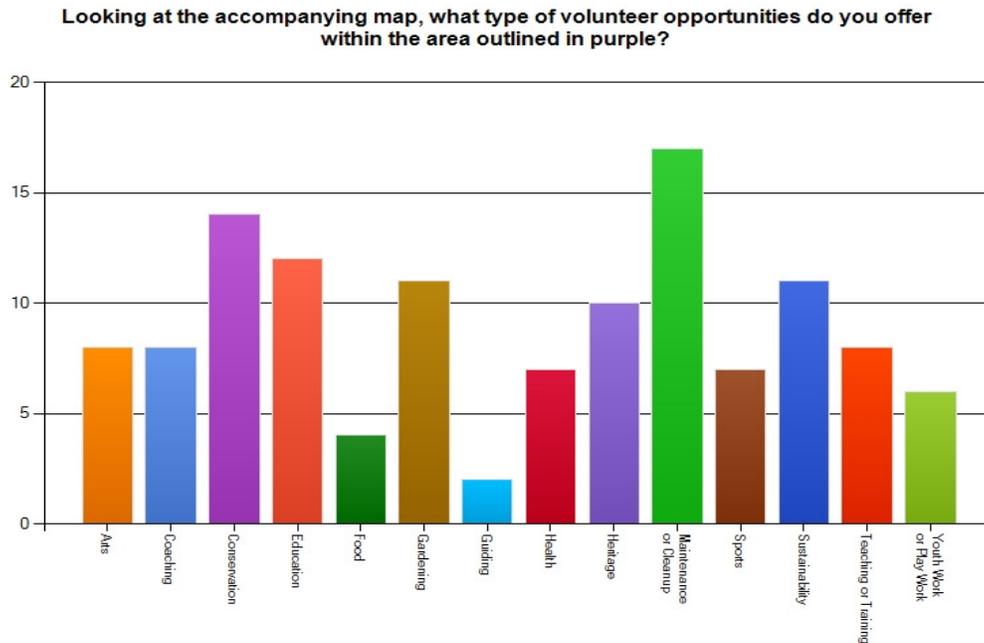


As a follow up to this question, respondents were asked to identify how they advertised the volunteer opportunities that they had available. The most commonly used sources for advertising were volunteer centres, followed by Do-it.org and CVSs. Interestingly, almost 50% stated that they do not advertise their opportunities formally, instead using word of mouth, social networks and/or their own organisational website or newsletter. Similarly, when asked what standards are used to manage their volunteers, most stated that they use an organisation specific volunteer policy, while a minority also used Investing in Volunteers and the London Volunteer Management Charter. A significant number did not use any set standards or simply used CRB checks as a method of oversight.

Using the map shown previously in Figure 1, respondents were asked to identify whether they offer volunteer opportunities within the area outlined in purple, which is the regional park catchment area. Some organisations did not respond to this question, either because they had previously stated they do not offer volunteer opportunities at all or because they were unsure as to whether their activities took place within the area shown on the map. Of those that did respond, however, over 90% answered in the affirmative. These organisations were subsequently asked what types of volunteering they offered in the catchment area, the results of

which can be seen in Figure 4. Note that the vertical axis represents the actual number of organisations who identified that they offer each type of opportunity.

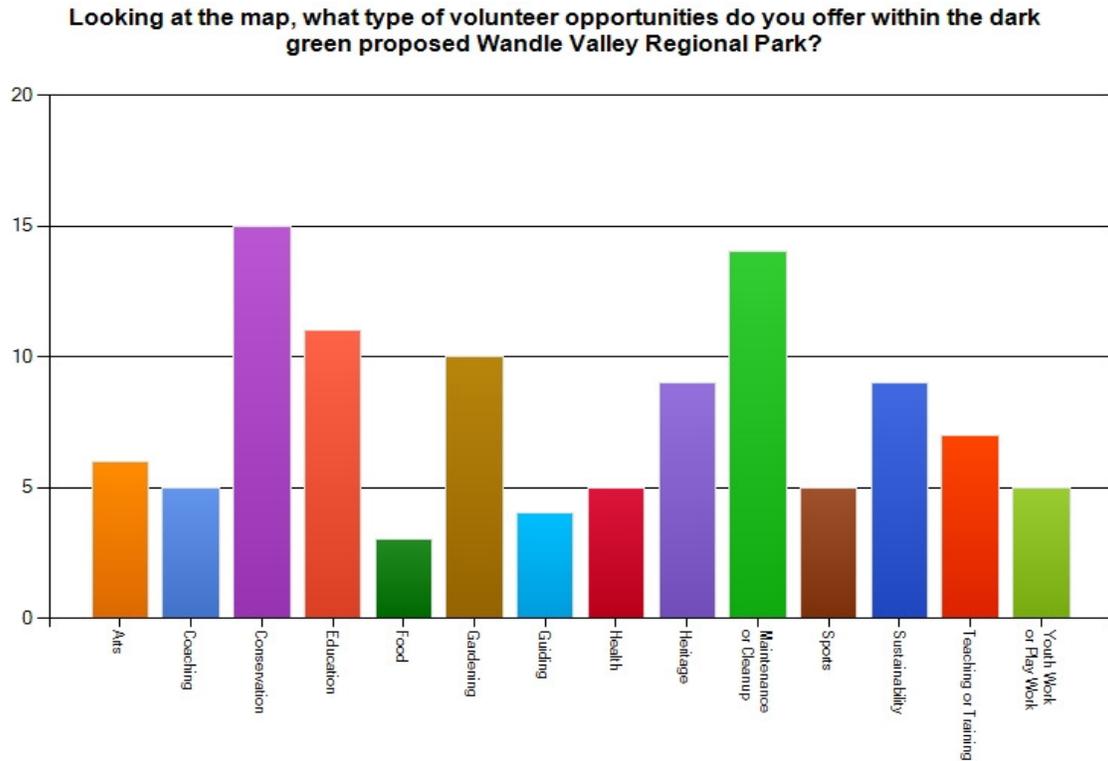
Figure 4: Volunteer Opportunities Within the Park Catchment Area



Again, this demonstrates that while sectors such as conservation, park maintenance and cleanup and gardening are heavily prevalent, there are a wide variety of other volunteer activities taking place in the region. Of the pre-identified sectors, the only areas that have fewer than 5 organisations offering volunteer opportunities within them are food and guiding, which are slightly more niche than the other categories.

Those organisations who responded that they do provide volunteer opportunities within the catchment area were then asked whether they offer volunteer opportunities directly within the parks that will constitute the Wandle Valley Regional Park - areas that are highlighted in green within Figure 1. Of those that responded, 71% did offer volunteer opportunities in the regional park boundaries. The breakdown of types of volunteer opportunities can be seen in Figure 5. These responses will be studied in more detail later in this report, however it is worth noting that while the largest number of responses fell under the category of conservation, maintenance or cleanup or education, there was once again a fairly even spread of activities taking place in the park, ranging from arts to health to youth work.

Figure 5: Volunteer Opportunities in the Wandle Valley Regional Park



Training

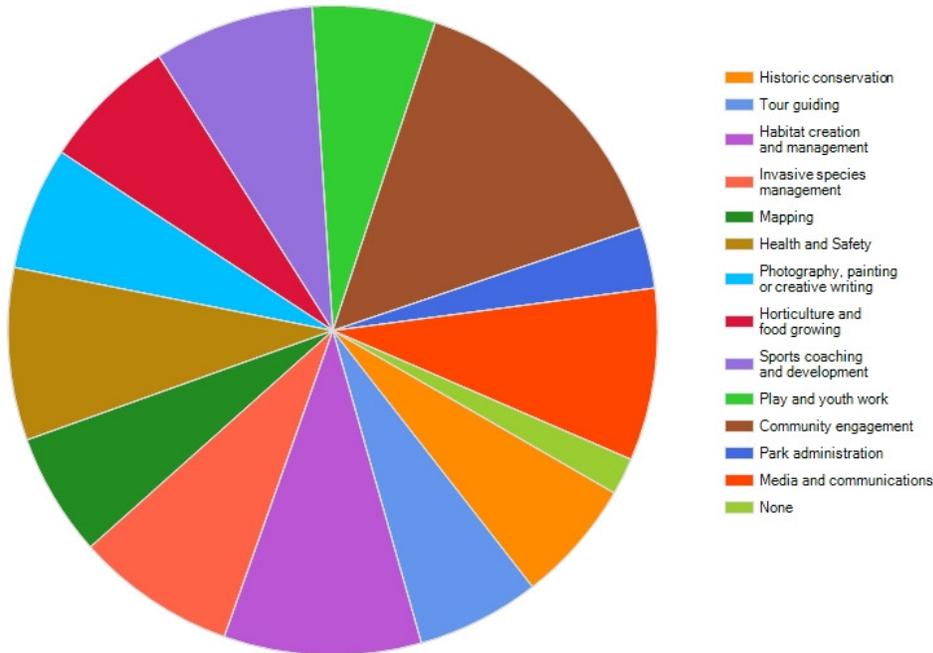
As part of the development of the Wandle Valley Regional Park, there will be opportunities to engage volunteers in a range of training opportunities. As such, it was important to gauge the interest among local organisations in linking into these trainings. Of the organisations who filled out the survey all but three responded that they would like to link their volunteers into trainings. These organisations were then given a range of training themes, chosen keeping potential future projects in the regional park in mind, and asked to identify the areas of particular interest.

The responses, which can be seen below, demonstrate a strong interest in a range of training opportunities. The areas of training that garnered the strongest interest related to community engagement, habitat creation and management and invasive species management – perhaps not surprisingly given that the largest number of respondents worked in these sectors – however, there was also a demand for trainings such as health and safety and media and communications. These trainings could be used not only as a way to supplement the projects

run as a part of the Wandle Valley Regional Park but also to link organisations and to ultimately increase and sustain engagement.

Figure 6: Training Opportunities

If as part of park development there were to be training opportunities for volunteers, which would you be interested in? (tick all that apply)



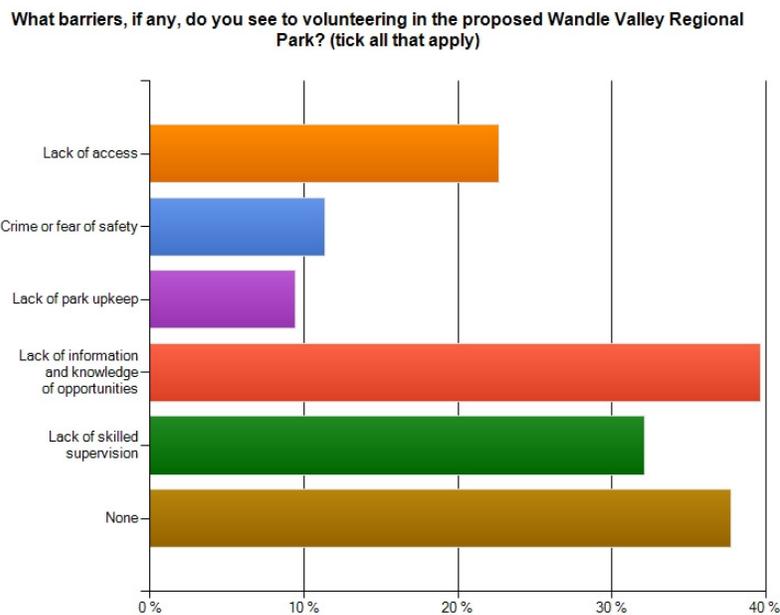
Barriers

Around 65% of respondents stated that their increased knowledge of the Wandle Valley Regional Park – gained through this survey – means that they would be interested in expanding their volunteer opportunities within the regional park area. Therefore, equally as important as understanding the current levels of volunteering in the proposed Wandle Valley Regional Park catchment area is understanding what barriers – or perceived barriers – there are to volunteering. Compensating for and addressing these barriers as part of the park development will be a vital part of increasing engagement in the area. As can be seen below, the most significant barrier – shared by 40% of all respondents – was a lack of information and knowledge of opportunities. This was further broken down in a follow up question, which asked how easy people found it to discover what was taking place in the regional park area. Around

40% responded 'Not At All', 53% 'Somewhat' and only 7% 'Very' easy to discover. This is a very real selling point in the development of the regional park, as it will provide the forum a means to link to and publicise activities, both existing and new.

Another significant barrier to volunteering in the proposed Wandle Valley Regional Park identified in the survey was a lack of skilled supervision, meaning they either did not have the staff capacity to oversee the volunteers or their staff lacked the training needed to expand their opportunities. This further exemplifies the demand for trainings identified above and for providing a space for local organisations to network and work together. Other responses to the question regarding barriers can be seen in Figure 7, below.

Figure 7: Barriers to Volunteering



The Wandle Forum and Wandle Valley Regional Park Website

Other questions not related directly to volunteering but relevant nonetheless included questions regarding advertising events and activities on the new Wandle Valley Regional Park website (85% stated that they would like to do so) and gauging interest in joining the Wandle Forum (45% stated they would be interested in joining). This information, including a breakdown of who

responded in what way, will be provided to the Board of Trustees of the park for them to use accordingly.

The final question within the survey was an open ended question, asking respondents to comment on what possibilities or opportunities they saw for their organisation to increase participation in the proposed park. As with the above mentioned information, this data will be passed along to the Board of Trustees to use when shaping future park development. However, the vast majority of the responses expressed the belief that the park would be a prime opportunity to link with other organisations and build partnerships to develop a wide variety of projects that integrate the strengths of each organisation and volunteer base and through doing so increase the visibility and profile of both the member organisations and regional park itself.

Section 4: Lessons Learned

The response to this survey was very positive and in itself speaks to a level of interest in the proposed regional park from local organisations. The survey also clearly highlighted that while there is already a diverse range of volunteering opportunities available in the park, there is both the space and interest for further development.

Some sectors were very well represented – for example, conservation and maintenance and cleanup were very prominent. Other types of organisations were less well represented, such as food, health and youth and play work. This could be due in part to minor selection bias or because some of these activities are more informal than others, and therefore harder to reach. For example, although a great many sports groups and clubs were identified, relatively few responded to the survey and the same is true of schools. In part, this could be explained by a lack of clarity among these organisations about what constitutes volunteering or what role the park plays in their volunteering. A coach who volunteers teaching football or a carer who walks patients in the park may not see themselves as volunteering in the park in the same way as someone performing a river cleanup. At the same time, the dearth of certain types of organisations currently active in the park could potential point towards gaps in services and may indicate areas worth developing within future activities.

This survey also provided information about skills and capacities that can be tapped into, as well as capabilities that must be further developed. The demand for trainings was strong, indicating that offering trainings could be a very tangible way of increasing volunteering and promoting participation within the park. There were very few volunteers taking part in guiding within the regional park catchment area – if this is to be a part of future park activities, there must be a strategy to train or increase participation in this activity. On the other hand, projects involving maintenance or cleanup will have a large built in network of volunteers to rely on and could therefore be a strong existing resource for work within the park.

One of the key selling points of forming a regional park is that it provides the space for forming networks and connections between local organisations. The survey identified a real need and desire among organisations to link together as a way to both remain informed and collaborate in park activities. From the perspective of volunteering, this would enable organisations that lack the organisational capacity – the major barrier to increasing volunteer numbers identified within the survey – to collaborate with larger, more established volunteer groups. It would also allow for skill sharing among organisations, increasing efficiency and cutting down costs. A number of the respondents stated that while they have a large group of dedicated and skilled volunteers, they did not have the capacity to train or manage them.

As organisational capacity was the primary barrier, there is a strong argument to be made that the Wandle Valley Regional Park would benefit greatly from a staff member whose role it is to coordinate, facilitate and promote volunteering. This will not only encourage greater numbers of volunteers but will also serve as a “carrot” to entice increased engagement of local organisations with the park and associated projects.

Alongside a potential staff member overseeing volunteering within the park, there was a strong demand identified for having an information hub, such as the Wandle Valley Regional Park website, that will allow organisations to advertise volunteer opportunities within a single database. This will be of benefit not only to the organisations but to potential volunteers searching for placements and in many ways will serve as a virtual entry point into the park. This is particularly true as many of the organisations surveyed did not have a formalised method of advertising for volunteer opportunities or vacancies and stated an interest in advertising their events and activities on the Wandle Valley Regional Park website. In the general comments section of the survey, several organisations responded saying that they saw the formation of the

regional park as a way to publicise the volunteer activities that their organisation run and were overwhelmingly interested in listing their activities on the regional park website, seeing it as a way to both promote themselves and gather new volunteers.

Finally, there currently seems to be a significant and troubling lack of knowledge among local organisations regarding opportunities and activities taking place within the region. While this is somewhat to be expected given that the park is still in the process of development, the fact that almost 40% of respondents found it Not At All Easy to discover what is taking place in the park, while the same number identified a lack of information and knowledge of opportunities as being the primary barrier to volunteering in the park, represents a real hurdle that must be addressed. This survey demonstrates that there is actually a wide cross section of organisations and activities taking place across the region yet there currently seem to be little in the way of collaboration, partnership or knowledge sharing between these organisations. There is a real space for the Wandle Valley Regional Park to serve as a nucleus of sorts, linking organisations, providing trainings and serving a hub for information.

Appendix 1: Distributed Survey

Wandle Valley Regional Park Volunteering Study

We're creating a regional park along the River Wandle in South West London, stretching from Croydon and Sutton through Merton and Wandsworth to the Thames (see [map](#) for more details). Our exceptional network of green spaces rich in history will help you escape the pressures of city life, get closer to nature, and to be more active. The park will create a high quality environment that helps bring jobs, growth and prosperity to the Wandle Valley. Please visit our [website](#) for more information.

As part of this process, we are undertaking a study to analyse volunteer opportunities within the regional park area, and the potential for developing these opportunities in the future. We would greatly appreciate your assistance in this process by completing this survey.

***1. What kind of organisation do you work/volunteer for? (tick all that apply)**

<input type="checkbox"/> Education	<input type="checkbox"/> Heritage	<input type="checkbox"/> Social Care
<input type="checkbox"/> Environmental	<input type="checkbox"/> Housing	<input type="checkbox"/> Play and Youth
<input type="checkbox"/> Food	<input type="checkbox"/> Parks	
<input type="checkbox"/> Health	<input type="checkbox"/> Sport	

Other (please specify)

2. Please write the name of your organisation:

3. Please provide contact information for your organisation:

Address _____
Contact Name _____
Contact Number _____
Contact Email _____

Volunteering - General

***4. Do you provide volunteer opportunities within your organisation?**

Yes
 No

***5. If so, how many over the course of a year?**

1-10
 11-20
 21+

Wandle Valley Regional Park Volunteering Study

***6. What, if anything, is limiting your capacity for encouraging more volunteers? (tick all that apply)**

Skills or training

Organisational Capacity

Safeguarding

Not Applicable

Other (please specify)

***7. What volunteer roles are available in your organisation? (tick all that apply)**

<input type="checkbox"/> Administration	<input type="checkbox"/> Events	<input type="checkbox"/> Marketing
<input type="checkbox"/> Arts	<input type="checkbox"/> Finance	<input type="checkbox"/> Research
<input type="checkbox"/> Advice or Support	<input type="checkbox"/> Fundraising	<input type="checkbox"/> Teaching, Training or Coaching
<input type="checkbox"/> Befriending or Mentoring	<input type="checkbox"/> Gardening	<input type="checkbox"/> Youth Work
<input type="checkbox"/> Campaigning	<input type="checkbox"/> Health	
<input type="checkbox"/> Communications or Outreach	<input type="checkbox"/> Maintenance or Cleanup	

Other (please specify)

***8. How do you advertise your volunteer opportunities? (tick all that apply)**

Volunteer Centres

CVBs

Do-it.org

None

Other (please specify)

***9. What standards do you use to manage your volunteers?**

London Volunteer Management Charter

Volunteer Policy

Investing in Volunteers

None

Other (please specify)

Volunteering in the Wandle Valley Regional Park

Please [click here](#) to see accompanying map of the regional park catchment area for reference.

Wandle Valley Regional Park Volunteering Study

*** 10. Looking at the accompanying map detailing the park boundaries, do you have volunteer opportunities within the area outlined in purple?**

Yes
 No

11. If so, what type of volunteering do you have?

<input type="checkbox"/> Arts	<input type="checkbox"/> Gardening	<input type="checkbox"/> Sports
<input type="checkbox"/> Coaching	<input type="checkbox"/> Guiding	<input type="checkbox"/> Sustainability
<input type="checkbox"/> Conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> Health	<input type="checkbox"/> Teaching or Training
<input type="checkbox"/> Education	<input type="checkbox"/> Heritage	<input type="checkbox"/> Youth Work or Play Work
<input type="checkbox"/> Food	<input type="checkbox"/> Maintenance or Cleanup	

*** 12. Looking at the map, do you have volunteer opportunities within the dark green proposed Wandle Valley Regional Park?**

Yes
 No

13. If so, what type of volunteering do you offer in the area?

<input type="checkbox"/> Arts	<input type="checkbox"/> Gardening	<input type="checkbox"/> Sports
<input type="checkbox"/> Coaching	<input type="checkbox"/> Guiding	<input type="checkbox"/> Sustainability
<input type="checkbox"/> Conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> Health	<input type="checkbox"/> Teaching or Training
<input type="checkbox"/> Education	<input type="checkbox"/> Heritage	<input type="checkbox"/> Youth Work or Play Work
<input type="checkbox"/> Food	<input type="checkbox"/> Maintenance or Cleanup	

Other (please specify)

*** 14. Do you currently provide training or link into training schemes for volunteers?**

Yes
 No

Wandle Valley Regional Park Volunteering Study

***15. If as part of park development there were to be training opportunities for volunteers, which would you be interested in? (tick all that apply)**

<input type="checkbox"/> Historic conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> Health and Safety	<input type="checkbox"/> Community engagement
<input type="checkbox"/> Tour guiding	<input type="checkbox"/> Photography, painting or creative writing	<input type="checkbox"/> Park administration
<input type="checkbox"/> Habitat creation and management	<input type="checkbox"/> Horticulture and food growing	<input type="checkbox"/> Media and communications
<input type="checkbox"/> Invasive species management	<input type="checkbox"/> Sports coaching and development	<input type="checkbox"/> None
<input type="checkbox"/> Mapping	<input type="checkbox"/> Play and youth work	

Other (please specify)

***16. Now that you are aware of the plans surrounding the Wandle Valley Regional Park, would you be interested in expanding your volunteer opportunities in the regional park area?**

Yes
 No

***17. What barriers, if any, do you see to volunteering in the proposed Wandle Valley Regional Park? (tick all that apply)**

<input type="checkbox"/> Lack of access
<input type="checkbox"/> Crime or fear of safety
<input type="checkbox"/> Lack of park upkeep
<input type="checkbox"/> Lack of information and knowledge of opportunities
<input type="checkbox"/> Lack of skilled supervision
<input type="checkbox"/> None

Other (please specify)

***18. How easy do you find it to discover what is taking place in the regional park area?**

Very
 Somewhat
 Not at all

***19. Would you be interested in promoting your events and activities on the new Wandle Valley Regional Park website that is in the process of being developed?**

Yes
 No