

Interested in being involved in Millennium Farm Trust and want to know more about the role of Trustee ?

A Trustee's role is akin to a guardian. They need to ensure that the charity always acts in the best interest of the beneficiaries, that the expenditure of the charity's income is prudent and represents best value for money, that everyone within the charity acts within the law and that every effort is made to have people from a wide range of backgrounds to help manage the charity.

To quote from a government document about Trustees in charities:

“ The main aspect of a trustee's role is to make sure that the charity does what it was set up to do and that it is run in accordance with its governing document. You are not expected to be a legal and/or financial expert. If there is anything you need help with or do not understand you should seek appropriate professional advice”

From ChangeUp for Better Governance Project 2006.

Essentially Trustees need to be honest, responsible, reliable citizens with no criminal records or disreputable behaviours .They would need to be willing to commit a minimum of 18 months and preferably longer to enable them to grow into the role and then become independently active within the Trustee role.

Typical time commitments for just Trustee business would be 4-5 hours per month once initial mentoring and induction has taken place. This average monthly time commitment includes the monthly Trustee meeting of 2-2.5 hours. In September and October in preparing for the AGM the weekly rate might top 6 hours sometimes.

A prospective Trustee would be encouraged to visit the work sites, gain a potted history from our newsletters and talking to members and workers, encouraged to seek external opinions of the charity and study recent AGM reports.

A prospective Trustee would be required to have at least 2 and possibly three references and also a CRB Check.

Trustees need to take reasonable care to maintain accurate and accountable records and ensure policies and procedures are in place to enable this to happen.

A prospective Trustee should be referred to the Charity Commission website www.charitycommission.gov.uk where there is some useful overview material about the roles and responsibilities of a Trustee.

If you cannot access the web at home/library then contact the Charity Commission on 0845 300 0218 (8.30a.m. – 6.00.p.m. weekdays) to request a copy of The Charity Commission booklet " The Essential Trustee : what you need to know" . Speaking to officers in the local Volunteer Centres can be useful for obtaining further information about being a Trustee and general information about charities

and their role in today's society.

Finding out about the purpose of the charity, the management structure and how the charity developed as well as the current situation is important for potential Trustees.

Charities in Suffolk are well supported by umbrella organisations such as SAVO (Suffolk Associations of Voluntary Organisations), Suffolk Acre and Mid Suffolk Action in Partnership . These along with the Volunteer Centres provide up to date information on laws and regulations affecting charities, best practice, implementation of Equal Opportunities , Disability discrimination etc as well as training days on issues such as First Aid, Health and Safety at work, Writing constitutions, management issues etc.

It is important that all Trustees (existing and prospective) realise that they cannot be well informed/skilled in all matters and that skills /knowledge sharing amongst the Trustees and seeking outside specialist advice is essential for the charity to be well run legal entity .

Trustee ship can enhance one's own learning in many fields and provide a very useful experience that could be used in future career development.