

The Fairfield Association

Procedure for Raising a Concern

The Association hopes that our warm and collaborative spirit means that serious concerns will be rare. However, the following procedure exists to ensure that if a concern does arise, it is handled consistently, fairly and with care for everyone involved.

Step 1 — Informal Resolution (where appropriate)

In some cases, a quiet and friendly conversation is all that is needed. The person whose behaviour has caused concern may be entirely unaware of the effect it has had, and a calm, private word can resolve matters quickly and without lasting difficulty.

Where the person raising the concern feels comfortable doing so, they may wish to speak directly to the person concerned and explain how their behaviour has felt. However, no one is obliged to do this. It is particularly understandable that someone may not feel able to raise the matter directly where there is a perceived power imbalance, a fear of retaliation, or where the behaviour has been serious. In any of these circumstances, or where the person simply does not feel comfortable with a direct conversation, it is entirely acceptable to move straight to Step 2.

Step 2 — Raising a Concern Formally

Any volunteer working on the reserve or in the orchard who wishes to raise a concern should contact the **Volunteer Coordinator** in the first instance. All other volunteers should contact **[Name]** directly.

If the concern involves the Volunteer Coordinator or the named trustee, or if it is about any other trustee, it should be raised with a different trustee who has no involvement in the matter.

Concerns can be raised verbally or in writing. No one will be penalised in any way for raising a genuine concern in good faith.

Step 3 — Initial Response

The person receiving the concern should:

- Listen carefully and with an open mind
- Make a written note of what has been shared and when
- Explain the next steps clearly and kindly
- Refer the matter to the trustees without delay

Step 4 — Investigation

The trustees will appoint one or two trustees who have no personal involvement in the matter to look into the concern. The investigation will:

- Be conducted promptly, fairly and in confidence

- Give the person whose behaviour has been questioned a full opportunity to share their perspective
- Consider any witnesses or other relevant information

The Association will aim to complete its investigation within 28 days of the concern being received. If this is not possible, both parties will be kept informed of progress and given an estimated timescale.

If the concern is about a trustee, that trustee will play no part in the investigation or in any decision about the outcome. Where it is not possible to identify trustees without a conflict of interest, the Association may appoint an independent person from outside the organisation to assist with or lead the investigation.

The process will be handled with care and impartiality. Both parties may bring a fellow volunteer or friend to any meetings held as part of the investigation, for support.

Step 5 — Support During the Process

The Association recognises that raising a concern, being the subject of one, or witnessing difficult behaviour can all be unsettling. The trustees are committed to handling all such situations with fairness, kindness and discretion, and to ensuring that everyone involved feels supported throughout. Anyone who feels they need to talk things through is encouraged to speak to a trustee in confidence at any point.

Step 6 — Outcome

Once the investigation is complete, the trustees will decide on an appropriate response. Depending on the findings, this may include:

- No further action (if the concern is not upheld)
- A supported conversation or mediation between the parties
- A written warning to the person whose behaviour was found to be unacceptable
- A requirement to undertake training or agree to a behavioural understanding
- In serious cases, suspension or removal from the Association

Both the person who raised the concern and the person it was raised about will be informed of the outcome.

Step 7 — Appeal

If either party is dissatisfied with the outcome, they may appeal in writing to the full board of trustees within 21 days of being notified of the decision. The appeal should set out clearly the grounds on which it is being made. The trustees' decision on appeal will be final.

Additional Information

Confidentiality

All those involved in a concern – whether as the person raising it, the person it is raised about, or a witness – are expected to maintain confidentiality throughout the process. Information will only be shared on a need-to-know basis. The Association reserves the right to share information where there is a safeguarding concern or a legal obligation to do so.

Concerns Raised in Bad Faith

This policy exists to support and protect all volunteers and the Association expects it to be used in that spirit. However, anyone found to have raised a concern that was deliberately false or malicious may themselves be subject to action under this policy.

Safeguarding

Where any concern raised under this policy also involves a potential safeguarding issue (for example, concerning a child or vulnerable adult using our sites), the trustees will follow the Association's Safeguarding Policy and, where necessary, refer the matter to the relevant statutory authority.

Review

This policy will be reviewed by the trustees at least every two years, or sooner if there is a significant change in circumstances or following any serious concern being raised.

This policy was adopted by the Trustees of the Fairfield Association on: _____

Signed on behalf of the trustees: _____