

Group Handbook

October 2026

CONTENTS

Guidelines for Group Organisers

Guidelines for Secretaries

Guidelines for Group Treasurers

Programme Planning

Advertising and Publicity

Running a weekend

Guidelines for Regional Representatives

National Country Link Organisation

Guidelines for Group Organisers

Have contact details for all members

Talk to members and keep them in the loop

Always be thinking ahead – the next meeting, the next month, the next programme

Keep in touch with key people in the group: Secretary, Treasurer, Programme Organiser

Always be aware of the bigger picture of Country Link

Be in touch with other groups, share events and ideas

Lead from the front and by example

Be on time, especially when visiting somewhere or having a speaker coming. Delegate if you are going to be late

If a new member is coming, make sure someone is available to host them

Always have an up-to-date programme with you, and leave some behind at the venue

If the group has business to sort out, discuss advertising, shows, programme ideas etc, it might be an idea to have a small group meeting to discuss this before other members arrive, or on a different night

Use your Regional Rep for advice and help. Keep them informed of what your group is doing. The Regional Rep will ask for a group report to take to the National Committee Meetings in the Spring and the Autumn

Be positive, forward thinking, and proud of Country Link

Say your thanks.

Guidelines for Secretaries

Keep an up-to-date list of members with all their contact details - phone numbers, address, and email address

Liaise with the Organiser about who will email or text reminders out to members

Liaise with the Treasurer about sending subscriptions to the National Treasurer. People are not members of Country Link until their subscription has been paid. They must be a member to attend the weekends

Distribute the programme to all members, either electronically or by post. Ideally, try to let members have new copies before the previous programme has run out so that the momentum and interest is still there, and members are able to plan ahead

Prepare an agenda for the AGM and distribute it in advance of the meeting. Take the minutes at the AGM and circulate them to the members. You may want to do this after the AGM, or with the agenda just before the next AGM

You are usually the contact for members and for outside organisations

Enquiries from the website will be sent directly to you or your group's nominated contact

Guidelines for Group Treasurers

Each group should have a person who is responsible for the finances of that group

Records should be maintained detailing every transaction, with an annual summary produced for the group showing the receipts, payments, and the balance at the bank

It is advisable to have more than two signatories on the group bank account in case one is incapacitated, with any two signing cheques

Subscriptions should be collected from everyone. This will include the National Subscription, plus any local subscription that the group has determined to fund their own activities. Subscriptions are for one calendar year

The National portion of the subscription must be paid to the National Treasurer for the National funds. Cheques should be made payable to 'Country Link National'. A list of members' names should be supplied when sending the remittance. Cheques can be sent to the National Treasurer throughout the year as the subscriptions are collected

National subscriptions are due for a calendar year and anyone joining a group pays the full National Subscription regardless of when they join.

It's a good idea to allow new members to attend 3 meetings before paying their subscription.

The National Committee arranges third party insurance to cover all members in all groups. This is one of the benefits of the National subscription. Any personal accident and travel insurance remains the responsibility of individual members.

Anyone wishing to attend a National Weekend must have paid their subscription for that year.

The National Committee may offer funding towards expenditure, such as advertising, in any financial year. The group should submit invoices to the National Treasurer who will refund the group up to the amount set at the National AGM for that period. Invoices can be submitted throughout the year up to the limit set, currently £500.00. This money is not to be used to purchase clothing for members.

There are separate guidelines for treasurers of National Weekends.

Programme planning

How often do you want to meet?

Do you want a regular meeting day/night and time?

Do you want a regular base for indoor meetings?

Who will organise the programme? Will it be a co-ordinator or a group of people?

Will the group subscription cover all events, or will there be times when members have to pay extra e.g. cost of speakers or entry fees.

How will you publicise your group? See advertising section of the handbook for ideas.

What are the interests of the members? (Encourage members to try new interests and pursuits)

What will the duration of the programme be? Will it be twice a year or more often? Autumn/Winter and Spring/Summer is a good option.

Involve the members in planning a programme. Try to get as many members as possible to organise events

Make the programme varied and interesting.

Distribute information and reminders to members in as many ways as possible e.g. email, text, telephone, printed programmes, word of mouth.

Outdoor evening events are best in May, June, July, and August. Avoid travelling far in December, January, February, and March.

Ideas for Summer meetings - farm visits, walks, cycle rides, croquet, rounders matches, tennis, go-carting, barbeques, treasure hunts, hunt kennels, horseracing, castles, caves, historic sites, county and local agricultural shows, village shows, plant nurseries, horse riding, equestrian centres, stud farms, riding demonstrations, boat trips, country parks.

Ideas for Winter meetings -speakers, games nights, quizzes, meals, craft evenings, parties, pancake night, food or wine tasting, DVD nights, weekend walks, and cycling.

Ideas for Spring or Autumn meetings: museums, churches, ten pin bowling, badminton, cinema, plays, dances, folk nights, harvest supper, brewery visits, distribution centres, ghost walks and stories, swimming, behind the scenes at supermarkets, recycling plants, windmills, bonfire nights, pub nights, painting pots, brickworks, greyhound racing, bell ringing, observatories, weekend walks and cycling.

Guidelines for Regional Representatives

To report in person, by proxy, or in written form, to all National Committee Meetings upon the state of individual groups in their area.

To visit groups in their region on a regular basis and /or discuss the groups with an appropriate group representative.

Should a group in the region be responsible for a National Weekend, the Regional Rep is to liaise with the organising committee of the Weekend, and to advise the National Committee of the progress of the weekend.

To ensure that groups within a region are being run effectively in accordance with the Constitution of Country Link, and to advise and help groups accordingly. A copy of the constitution can be found on the Country Link website.
www.country-link.org.uk/documents.php

To advise the National Co-ordinator of advertising opportunities within the region and to promote groups on a regional basis.

To account to the National Committee and to the Treasurer for any funds being held regionally.

Ideas for Advertising/Publicity

Word of mouth and personal recommendation is highly effective. Talk to friends, neighbours, colleagues, relatives, and acquaintances about the benefits of Country Link membership.

Make presentations to local community groups about Country Link and its activities.

Have a stand at a fete, show, ploughing match etc.

Leave leaflets, posters, programmes in public places e.g. NFU offices, libraries, agricultural merchants, local shops, pubs, community centres etc. Include the Country Link website address on all publicity materials – www.country-link.org.uk Please remember, it is illegal to put leaflets on parked cars

Send programme information for your group and reports on recent activities to the Web Editor to upload to the Country Link website; make sure the information is up to date and sent in good time. website@country-link.org.uk

Write a report about a Country Link event for a local newspaper. Contact them first to see whether they are currently looking for items and find out what format they prefer, whether they want photos etc. Always include contact details/phone numbers for potential new members

Wear Country Link clothing or badges. Examples of clothing can be viewed at www.libertyworkandleisure.co.uk

National Country Link has an account and has set up our logo, and local group names. Orders can be placed through Lesley at oxfordshirecountrylink@hotmail.com

The Country Link banners are available to borrow

Place postcards and posters in local shop windows

Place advertisements in parish magazines, free newspapers, and local newspapers

Create a website for your own group. Make sure there is a link to the Country Link national website www.country-link.org.uk

Remember – you can claim a refund for advertising costs from the National Treasurer, up to the figure agreed at the AGM, currently £500.00. Please check with the National treasurer for eligibility and to confirm the amount currently available. oxfordshirecountrylink@hotmail.com

Make a scrapbook and display it at local shows, or leave a copy in local libraries for reference.

Take a stand, table, or display at local agricultural shows, fetes, and craft shows etc.

Display leaflets, programmes, and membership forms, as well as photos, a scrapbook, information about National Weekends etc. Try to make sure that your stand is staffed at all times, so that you can talk to anyone who shows an interest.

Get involved in national fund raising for charities e.g. Children in Need and Comic Relief, and BE SEEN. Fund raising packs are usually available from local TV and radio stations.

Create business cards giving the name, phone number, and email address of the local contact (ask them first!). Leave them in suitable places or give them to relevant people. Reply promptly to any enquiries

If you meet in the same pub on a regular basis then leave a sign at the bar to inform potential new members that Country Link meet here.

Running a National Weekend

Background: Weekends are organised for the members on behalf of the National Committee, by a group of members, with National Country Link giving financial support if/when required. Weekends are usually in April/May or October/November for 2 or 3 nights. You can host weekends in your area, or areas where no groups are present. This is your opportunity to showcase your group and area. It is not difficult to organise a weekend; Use the skills of your group members. A large group is not necessary, 4 to 6 people are an ideal team. Further support and help are available from others who have run previous weekends.

Finances: As you will be running the event on behalf of National Country Link, an account separate from your own group account should be set up for the weekend, called National Country Link Weekend or group name National Weekend. Two out of three people for signing cheques is normal; three will give you a spare for signing. You can ask for a deposit from members when booking (first form) or all up front; second form – balance and trips etc.

All costs must be specifically related to the running of the weekend, and anything else must be approved first by the National Committee; the purchase of clothing is not allowed.

When finalising the figures, please submit to the National Committee, along with any proposal if you wish to increase the donation to your charity.

Tips: Hotel – minimum of 50 rooms, singles, doubles and twins. Weekends are becoming popular, we don't want to be saying 'NO' to anyone, especially new members, as the weekends are the icing on the cake. You require private dining, parking; spa/sports facilities are optional. The initial search can be done on the Internet. Telephone the hotel and ask for conference/banqueting. Ask for dinner, bed, and breakfast rates for a 2 or 3 night stay, giving dates preferred. Explain all about Country Link, using positive words if you like what you hear.

Ask to visit – take a few of you. View all the facilities and a selection of bedrooms. Ask about the deposit, date for returning rooms not booked without incurring any costs, date for final payment, menus, in-house disco costs, dining times. State that we sort out all bookings so therefore one payment cheque! If all ok, inform your area rep and National Committee that you wish to run a weekend.

Do a 'risk assessment' - a mental walk through of the Weekend to find the problems as soon as the ideas have been formed so as to give plenty of time to solve them.

Costs should be based on 75 people attending. Add together the cost of buses, the band, disco, a reception drink, flowers, stationery, gifts (optional), plus a buffer of £200.00

(optional) divided by 75, giving a total to add to the room rates. This is the charge per member

Use of a computer helps drawing up and printing of information and forms, but it is not necessary for accounting purposes; if the 'treasurer 'is happy with pen and paper, then go with it – the important thing is to keep track of money coming in and going out.

Check and re-check forms and information before going to print. Check everything that comes in!

Make use of previous weekend information sheets and forms; there are no copyright issues. Some members think deadline dates are for advisory purposes only so build in several weeks leeway for final payments to the hotel.

Build a good relationship with the hotel; one person to deal with the hotel – as long as members have a bed and food, any disasters on visits etc will be forgiven. Advise the hotel that 90% of members are likely to be in the dining room within 20 minutes of the start time for breakfast so that they can be prepared.

Use your own group to trial visits, which gives other people's opinions on them, and more potential leaders.

Evening entertainment – not all people like loud music, so try to have an area where people are able to sit and chat or to have a rest.

Organisers need to be aware of new members, especially if he or she is on his or her own. People attending national weekend who are not members of a local group still need to pay their national subscription

Have a welcome desk in the hotel reception for members to collect their packs, ask any questions etc. If it is possible, have someone at the front door to point members in the right direction.

There is no formal structure to the Weekend, although that may evolve. Maybe having fancy dress, as an ice breaker, on Friday night, with a buffet dinner, to enable guests to mix and for latecomers to settle in. Name badges are a good idea.

If members are being asked to make menu choices at any point prior to the meals, there should be a list somewhere to remind them as with everything going on, many members will not remember what they chose.

Visits – Appoint a leader for each visit with list of attendees with contact numbers and issue leaders contact number to attendees in case of any emergency. Please put a list in the welcome pack of all visits and who has booked on each; make sure guides also have a list of those in their group, and maybe a list in a central point in case some members miss it in

the pack. Give guides an alphabetical list of members on their trip to enable them to check members onto transport, on tours etc throughout the day (clipboard and pen).

Saturday is a busy day, with visits out on buses. Make sure the driver knows the route before leaving the hotel. Leaders should have contact details for their host if all else fails.

The formal night fits in well here, but it is not set in stone. Allow time to get ready, and state the dress code to help with packing!

Usually, the Members Meeting or Annual General Meeting is on Sunday. It may be an idea to ask to borrow the hotel PA system for these meetings.

On Sunday cars are used for visits and, as leaders, you need to know where you are going and who is coming on the trip. Most weekends include a farm walk on both days, but go with local circumstances. Especially if running a weekend some distance from your home area.

Fund raising is a good idea, and as host you choose the charity you want to support.

Members pack – names of all members and their group, who is on what visit, dining times, menu choices if these need to be made in advance, bus departure times, mobile phone numbers of leaders.

It is usual practice for a report to be written about the weekend for uploading to the website. This can be written by a member of the organising team or, if you are a small team, it can be delegated to visiting members to write about their individual trips. The report should be sent to the web editor – website@country-link.org.uk

Above all, enjoy the experience as much as possible. Stay sober – you are always on duty. It will be tiring but the feeling of relief when it is all over is wonderful. You will have made many friends who will make you welcome on their weekends in the future as well as at other events.

There is a wealth of experience, and all on the National Committee are happy to help.

Country Link Organisation

Job Title	Current Post Holder	Job Details
National President	Peter Hurt - Nottinghamshire	Approved annually at the AGM; attends National Committee Meetings in an advisory but non-voting position
National Vice Presidents	Jerry White – West Somerset/East Devon Philip Charles – Derbyshire Maria Guest – Derbyshire Charles Humby – South Wiltshire	
National Chair Person	Nigel Swain - Somerset	Member of the National Committee; has voting rights at the National Committee Meetings; elected annually at the AGM
National Vice Chair Person	Richard Rymer - Yorkshire	
Past Chairman	Dick Stephens - Oxfordshire	Appointed by the National Committee; attends National Committee Meetings in an advisory but non-voting position
National Treasurer	Lesley Sheaf - Oxfordshire	Member of the National Committee; has voting rights at the National Committee Meetings; elected annually at the AGM
National Secretary	Liz Goodwin - Derbyshire	
Regional Representatives	**Sarah Thompson** – South West (Cornwall, North Cornwall/West Devon, Somerset, Somerset West/Devon East, South Wiltshire) **Richard Rymer** – Northern (Yorkshire) **Lorraine Clarke** – West Midlands (Cheshire, Shropshire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire, Worcestershire) **Peter Hunt** – East Midlands (Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Northamptonshire) **Dick Stephens** – South Eastern (Oxfordshire) **Andrew Smith** - Scotland	Elected by the groups in their own region; the link between individual groups and the National Committee; attend National Committee Meetings; have voting rights; are expected to be in touch with every group in their area at least once a year, and to make a report to the National Committee twice a year
Web Editor & National Coordinator	Vicky Hutton – Nottinghamshire	Updates the website. Appointed by the National Committee; attends National Committee Meetings in an advisory but non-voting position
National Advertising	Vicky Hutton - Nottinghamshire	