

Freeman's Wood Community buy-out

Frequently Asked Questions

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1) I can't see how to make a donation – how does it work?

Start from this page:

www.lancastergreenspaces.org.uk/freemans-wood-purchase.html

- Scroll to the bottom of the page
- Wait for it to load, then where it says 'Just one donation' click Next.
- Select or type the amount that you wish to donate, then Next.
- Select yes or no to Gift Aid, and to receiving communications from Lancaster Green Spaces.
- Select your preferred payment method (card, Paypal or CAF account). Use the scroll bar just to the right of the box if you can't see the 'Next' button.
- Then follow the instructions for what info you need to enter – including your name and address, and your date of birth (needed for claiming Gift Aid, where applicable).

Note that the Charities Aid Foundation only make a small administrative charge, so 96.4% of what you donate will go towards the purchase or management of Freeman's Wood (plus an extra 25% if you pay tax in the UK and tick 'yes' to Gift Aid).

2) I don't want to donate online. Can I do it another way?

You can send a cheque payable to 'Friends of Freeman's Wood' to the FFW treasurer Simon Thomas at 37 Coverdale Road, Lancaster, LA1 5PY. Note that we may not be able to claim Gift Aid on donations made by cheque.

3) Who will actually own the land?

If you become a 'square-holder' you will sponsor particular squares of land but you won't actually own them.

The Friends of Freeman's Wood group (FFW - <https://www.freemanswood.com/>) is working with other local organisations to make the community buy-out possible.

The land will initially be purchased by North Lancashire Community Land Trust (NLCLT - <http://www.communityland.org/>) who have kindly offered to lend the money. Once FFW has raised the funds to pay back the purchase cost to NLCLT – hopefully by the end of 2022 - the ownership will either be transferred to FFW, or NLCLT will offer FFW a very long-term lease for the management of the land (we will get legal advice and consult members on how best to proceed). Either way, the land will be community-owned, and FFW will be able to apply for grants to fund improvements to the public access and wildlife habitats.

Lancaster Green Spaces (a registered charity which works with various local 'Friends of ...' groups - <http://www.lancastergreenspaces.org.uk/>) is assisting with fundraising through the Charities Aid Foundation, enabling us to claim Gift Aid on donations. They are hosting the square-holders online donation page.

4) What sort of organisation is the Friends of Freeman's Wood, and who runs it?

FFW was set up in 2003 as an unincorporated voluntary association, with a constitution, a bank account and elected executive committee. Membership is free and everyone on our mailing list is a member.

It currently has 8 committee members who were elected at the AGM in April 2022, to which all FFW members were invited. The committee members are: Jon Barry (chair), Emily Heath (secretary), Simon Thomas (treasurer), Mandy Bannon, Eleanor Levin, Doug Ashman, Janet Everard & Ian Procter.

FFW is now in the process of changing its legal status to a charitable incorporated organisation (CIO), with help from a local solicitor.

This will give us extra protection in terms of trustees' liabilities, more transparency (we will have to publish our articles of association and annual accounts), and will make it easier to apply for grants.

The FFW AGM agreed that the committee will appoint trustees for the new CIO. The initial trustees will be Jon Barry, Emily Heath, Simon Thomas, Mandy Bannon & Ian Procter.

5) How can I be sure that the land won't be sold to a developer in a few years time?

Freeman's Wood is now designated as a Town Green (common land) which protects it from development currently, though the owner has control over how the land is managed.

The charitable objectives of the Friends of Freeman's Wood (CIO) will be written to prevent the sale of the land for development.

The Friends of Freeman's Wood campaigned for 8 years to get Town Green status. We stopped it from being turned into a housing estate (the owner submitted a planning application for 250 houses in 2019, which was withdrawn in 2020 after the Town Green decision). And long before that (late 1990s/early 2000s) there was a successful campaign to stop Freeman's Wood being turned into a car park associated with a bypass of Lancaster.

The FFW committee members/trustees and NLCLT directors are extremely committed to keeping it as public green space! We would only appoint new trustees who agree with this objective. It would not be possible for a group of people motivated by making money to take over and sell the land and we will continue to be accountable to our members.

6) What happens to my donation if the community buy-out falls through?

Your donation will be returned to you if we are unable to proceed with the land purchase. However, we believe that this is very unlikely to be necessary.

7) What will happen to my donation if you attract more donations than are needed to buy the land?

We plan to keep all donations, and use them to maintain and enhance the land for wildlife and public benefit in future. Although we expect to attract grants for some immediate improvements, once these are spent it will be more difficult to obtain grants for all our future costs such as insurance. Many grant-makers require a matched contribution to be made by the beneficiaries - they won't fund 100% of the project costs.

We will in any case publish an annual report and accounts, so that everyone can see how their donations are being spent.

8) How much funding is needed and when by?

Around £60,000 is needed to pay for the land purchase and the buyer's and seller's legal costs. Initially this will be paid for by a loan from North Lancs Community Land Trust (NLCLT), which will be interest-free until the end of 2022.

FFW aims to raise enough funding to pay back the NLCLT in full by the end of 2022. However, if it takes longer that is not a major problem – it just means FFW will need to start paying interest on the remaining part of the loan, from 1 January 2023 onwards.

We are very grateful to NLCLT for offering a loan to enable the land purchase to proceed as quickly as possible.

9) How can I find out how much has been raised so far?

The best way is to join Friends of Freeman's Wood (free!) by signing up to our mailing list here: <https://mailchi.mp/d86c136c2960/ffw-signup>

You will receive an email newsletter every few weeks, and you can unsubscribe whenever you like.

There will also be regular updates posted on the ['Save Freemans Woods' Facebook group](#), and on the FFW and LGS websites.

10) When will I find out about my what3words squares?

We aim to let you know which squares you have been allocated within a few weeks of you making a donation. Hundreds of people have donated to become a square-holder so this is a big admin task - please bear with us!

11) What are the advantages of owning the land, given that its Town Green status protects it from development anyway?

Freeman's Wood was granted Town Green status in Spring 2020, after a long battle by the local community. This status currently protects the land from development, but there is always a risk that the law could be changed to weaken or abolish this protection, or that the landowner could get planning permission to develop Freeman's Wood by providing an alternative piece of land for community use somewhere nearby.

If the community owned the land, it would have even more protection from development, and we would be able to manage the land in a way that benefits people and wildlife (currently the overseas owner can manage it as they see fit and stop us doing so). The spiked metal fence that was erected in 2011/12 deters people from entering the woods and using the open space in the middle for recreation. We will be able to make it more accessible and welcoming when we have control over the land.

Only when we own the land, will we be able to attract grants to implement the improvements that the community wants to see. This may include, for example, creating

easier access onto the land by foot while deterring motor vehicle use (which is illegal in any case on a Town Green).

12) What plans are there for how to manage the land in the longer term?

Once the purchase costs have been secured, grant funding will be sought to improve access to the site for walkers and make other improvements that benefit local people and wildlife. A plan will be drawn up by FFW trustees following extensive community consultation to discover what people want to see happen.

FFW has already begun consulting the local community in various ways. For example, we did an online survey of FFW members in April 2022, we collected feedback from everyone who attended the 2022 AGM, and we are doing a consultation event on 16 July on Coronation Field, which has been advertised to 5,000 households via a leaflet. We also intend to visit various community and youth groups to gather feedback directly from them.

There are many issues to consider, such as how to improve access for walkers and people who use wheelchairs and pushchairs - without making access easy for fly-tippers or motorised vehicles.

Community ownership is an exciting opportunity - but it also brings more responsibilities. For example, we'll need to find ways to deal with problems that may occur on the land, manage volunteers effectively, and raise funds every year to pay for Public Liability Insurance, remedial works and other costs. The FFW committee members/trustees are grateful for everyone's ideas, support and understanding of the challenges ahead!