

# Common Ground Suffolk

## Code of Conduct

*Standards of Behaviour for Members, Volunteers, and Directors*

**Version:** 1.0

**Date adopted:** [Date to be inserted]

**Date of next review:** [Date to be inserted — recommended annually]

**Applies to:** All members, volunteers, and directors of Common Ground Suffolk

*This code of conduct sets out the standards of behaviour expected of everyone involved with Common Ground Suffolk. It applies in all settings including Society activities, meetings, online communications, and social media. It should be read alongside the Society's Safeguarding Policy, Privacy Policy, and Health and Safety Policy.*

## 1. Our Values

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Common Ground Suffolk exists to serve the community. Everything we do is guided by the following core values, and we expect everyone involved with the Society to embody them in their conduct at all times.

**Community.** We put the needs of the community first. We are inclusive, welcoming, and open to everyone regardless of their background, ability, or circumstances.

**Respect.** We treat every person we encounter with dignity and respect. We listen to one another, value different perspectives, and do not tolerate discrimination, harassment, or bullying in any form.

**Integrity.** We act honestly and transparently in everything we do. We do not misuse our position, our access to resources, or our relationship with the Society for personal gain.

**Responsibility.** We take our obligations seriously. We follow the Society's policies, fulfil our commitments, and take responsibility for our actions and their consequences.

**Sustainability.** We act as stewards of the environment. We conduct our activities in a way that respects and protects the natural world and reflects the Society's commitment to biodiversity and climate resilience.

## 2. Who This Code Applies To

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This code applies to all of the following:

- all members of Common Ground Suffolk
- all volunteers, whether regular or occasional
- all directors and officers of the Society
- any contractors or other individuals acting on behalf of the Society

The code applies in all settings connected to the Society, including:

- Society activities such as growing sessions, volunteer visits, and community events
- general meetings, board meetings, and any other Society meetings
- online and digital communications carried out in connection with the Society
- social media activity where the person is identifiably associated with the Society
- any other context where a person's conduct could reasonably reflect on the Society

## 3. General Standards of Behaviour

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All members, volunteers, and directors are expected to:

- treat every person they encounter through the Society with courtesy, dignity, and respect
- act honestly and transparently in all dealings connected to the Society
- respect and comply with the Society's rules, policies, and any reasonable instructions given by the board or a designated officer
- maintain appropriate confidentiality regarding the personal circumstances of beneficiaries, members, and volunteers
- report any concerns about the conduct of others to the appropriate person promptly and in good faith
- take reasonable care for their own health and safety and that of others during Society activities
- respect the property of the Society, beneficiaries, and other people
- represent the Society accurately and honestly in all communications
- avoid bringing the Society into disrepute through their conduct, whether in person or online

## 4. Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion

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Common Ground Suffolk is committed to being an inclusive organisation that is genuinely accessible to everyone in the community. We do not tolerate discrimination on the grounds of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy or maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, or sexual orientation. These are

the protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 and our commitment extends beyond legal compliance.

All members, volunteers, and directors must:

- treat every person equally and without prejudice
- not make assumptions about a person's abilities, needs, or preferences based on any personal characteristic
- challenge discriminatory behaviour or language if it is safe to do so, or report it if not
- actively contribute to a welcoming and inclusive environment in all Society activities
- be mindful of barriers to participation and support efforts to remove them

Behaviour that constitutes harassment, bullying, or discrimination will be treated as a serious breach of this code and may result in expulsion from the Society. Harassment includes any unwanted conduct related to a protected characteristic that has the purpose or effect of violating a person's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating, or offensive environment.

## **5. Conduct Towards Beneficiaries**

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Our beneficiaries, the individuals and households we support through our growing activities, are at the heart of everything we do. Many of them will be vulnerable, elderly, or in difficult circumstances. The following standards apply specifically to interactions with beneficiaries.

- always act in the best interests of the beneficiary
- maintain clear professional boundaries at all times and never develop personal relationships with beneficiaries that could compromise your objectivity or the Society's integrity
- never accept gifts of significant value from beneficiaries or their families
- never discuss a beneficiary's personal circumstances with anyone who does not need to know
- always seek a beneficiary's consent before taking any action on their behalf or in their space
- report any concerns about a beneficiary's welfare to the Designated Safeguarding Lead immediately in accordance with the Safeguarding Policy
- never use your position as a volunteer or director to exert undue influence over a beneficiary

Volunteers working in private gardens or other one to one settings must additionally comply with the safe working practices set out in the Society's Safeguarding Policy.

## **6. Conduct at Meetings**

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All members, volunteers, and directors are expected to conduct themselves with courtesy and professionalism at Society meetings of all kinds. Specifically:

- contributions to discussion should be made respectfully and constructively
- every person present has an equal right to be heard and should not be interrupted, shouted down, or dismissed
- disagreements should be expressed through debate and the democratic process, not through personal attacks or aggressive behaviour
- decisions made by a properly constituted vote of the membership or board are binding and should be respected even by those who voted against them
- confidential matters discussed in closed sessions of the board must not be disclosed outside those sessions without authorisation
- any person who behaves in a manner that disrupts a meeting or prevents it from conducting its business may be asked to leave by the Chair

## 7. Conflicts of Interest

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A conflict of interest arises when a person's personal or financial interests could influence, or could be seen to influence, a decision they are involved in making on behalf of the Society. Conflicts of interest are not in themselves improper, but they must be managed transparently.

All members, volunteers, and directors must:

- declare any personal or financial interest in any matter under consideration by the board or at a general meeting, before the matter is discussed
- absent themselves from any discussion and vote on a matter in which they have a declared conflict of interest
- not use their position within the Society to obtain personal benefits or to benefit their family members, friends, or business associates
- not accept gifts, hospitality, or other benefits from suppliers, contractors, or other third parties in connection with their role with the Society, beyond token items of negligible value

Directors must record all declared conflicts of interest in the board's conflicts of interest register. Members who have a conflict of interest in relation to a vote at a general meeting must declare it to the Chair before the vote is taken.

## 8. Use of Society Resources

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Society resources, including funds, equipment, vehicles, facilities, and the Society's name and reputation, must be used only for purposes that further the Society's objects. All members, volunteers, and directors must:

- use Society resources economically and only for authorised purposes
- not use Society resources for personal benefit or for the benefit of third parties unconnected to the Society's objects
- take reasonable care of Society property and report any damage or loss promptly

- not commit the Society to financial expenditure or legal obligations without proper authorisation in accordance with the Society's rules
- return any Society property promptly when requested or when their involvement with the Society ends

## **9. Social Media and Online Conduct**

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Social media is an important tool for Common Ground Suffolk in communicating its activities and values to the wider community. However, it also carries risks to the Society's reputation and to the privacy and wellbeing of individuals. The following standards apply to all social media and online activity connected to the Society.

### **9.1 Official Society Channels**

The Society's official social media accounts and online platforms are managed by the director or volunteer designated by the board for this purpose. The following applies to all those posting on official Society channels:

- all content must be accurate, respectful, and consistent with the Society's values and objects
- content must not include personal information about identifiable individuals without their explicit consent
- photographs of beneficiaries, volunteers, or members may only be posted with their prior written consent, and in the case of children, the consent of a parent or guardian
- content must not be defamatory, misleading, discriminatory, or offensive
- any content that could give rise to a legal issue, including claims of defamation or copyright infringement, must be approved by the Chair before posting
- negative comments or complaints received on official channels should be handled calmly and professionally and escalated to the Chair if they cannot be resolved

### **9.2 Personal Social Media**

When members, volunteers, and directors use their personal social media accounts in ways that connect them to Common Ground Suffolk, the following standards apply:

- do not post content that could damage the Society's reputation or bring it into disrepute
- do not share confidential information about the Society, its members, its volunteers, or its beneficiaries
- do not post photographs taken during Society activities without the consent of those depicted
- do not make statements that could be taken as representing the official position of the Society unless you have been authorised to do so
- do not engage in online arguments, disputes, or heated exchanges in which you identify yourself as being connected to Common Ground Suffolk

- if you are uncertain whether a post is appropriate, seek guidance from the Chair or the social media lead before posting

### 9.3 Communications with Beneficiaries Online

As set out in the Safeguarding Policy, volunteers must not communicate with child beneficiaries through personal social media or messaging accounts. All digital communications with beneficiaries should be through official Society channels wherever possible. Where direct contact with an adult beneficiary is necessary, it should be kept professional, transparent, and proportionate to the task at hand.

### 9.4 The Society's Online Reputation

The Society's ability to attract volunteers, members, funders, and partners depends significantly on its reputation. All those connected to the Society should be mindful that their online conduct, even on personal accounts, can reflect on the Society and should conduct themselves accordingly. Serious or persistent breaches of these social media guidelines will be treated as a breach of this code and dealt with under the disciplinary procedure in Section 11.

## 10. Raising Concerns

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Common Ground Suffolk is committed to a culture of openness in which anyone can raise concerns without fear of retaliation. If you have a concern about the conduct of a fellow member, volunteer, or director, or about any aspect of the Society's activities, you are encouraged to raise it.

Concerns should be raised in the following way:

- in the first instance, raise the concern directly with the person involved if it is safe and appropriate to do so
- if direct resolution is not possible or appropriate, raise the concern with the Chair or the Secretary in writing
- if the concern involves the Chair, raise it with another director or through the Society's whistleblowing procedure
- if the concern relates to safeguarding, follow the procedure set out in the Safeguarding Policy

All concerns will be taken seriously, investigated fairly, and handled with appropriate confidentiality. No person will be penalised for raising a genuine concern in good faith, even if it turns out to be unfounded. Raising a concern maliciously or in bad faith is itself a breach of this code.

## 11. Disciplinary Procedure

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Where a member, volunteer, or director is alleged to have breached this code of conduct, the Society will follow a fair and proportionate disciplinary procedure. The procedure is designed to be corrective where possible and to escalate only where necessary.

### **11.1 Informal Resolution**

Minor or first-time breaches will ordinarily be addressed informally. The Chair, Secretary, or another appropriate director will speak with the person concerned, explain the concern, and give them an opportunity to respond. Where appropriate, informal guidance or a verbal warning will be given. A record of the conversation will be kept on file.

### **11.2 Formal Written Warning**

Where informal resolution has not resolved the issue, or where the breach is sufficiently serious to warrant a more formal response, the board may issue a formal written warning. The written warning will set out:

- the nature of the breach
- the expected standard of behaviour
- the consequences of further breaches
- the right of the person to respond in writing within 14 days

The written warning will be placed on file and will remain active for a period of 12 months, after which it will be disregarded for disciplinary purposes provided no further breaches occur.

### **11.3 Suspension**

Where a breach is serious, or where a person has received a written warning and a further breach has occurred, the board may suspend the person from some or all Society activities for a defined period. Suspension is a neutral act taken to allow the matter to be properly investigated and does not constitute a finding of guilt. The person suspended will be informed in writing of the reason for suspension, its duration, and their right to respond.

### **11.4 Expulsion**

In cases of serious or persistent misconduct, the board may propose the expulsion of a member or the removal of a volunteer or director from their role. Expulsion of a member must follow the procedure set out in Rule 11 of the Society's rules, including the right of appeal to a general meeting. The grounds for expulsion include but are not limited to:

- serious breach of this code or the Society's safeguarding policy
- behaviour that has caused or risks causing significant harm to a beneficiary, volunteer, member, or the Society
- dishonesty, fraud, or misuse of Society resources
- persistent breach of this code following earlier warnings
- conduct that has brought or is likely to bring the Society into serious disrepute

### **11.5 Principles of Fairness**

Throughout the disciplinary process the following principles will apply:

- the person concerned will always be informed of the allegation against them and given a genuine opportunity to respond before any decision is made
- decisions will be made by persons who are not directly involved in the matter and who can act impartially
- the person concerned has the right to be accompanied to any formal meeting by a fellow member or volunteer of their choosing
- decisions will be communicated in writing with reasons
- the person concerned has the right to appeal any formal decision to the next general meeting of the Society
- all disciplinary matters will be handled with appropriate confidentiality

## **12. Acceptance and Compliance**

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All members, volunteers, and directors are required to read and sign this code of conduct before participating in any Society activity. By signing, they confirm that they have read and understood the code and agree to comply with it.

A signed copy of this acknowledgement will be held on file by the Society. The most recent version of this code will be published on the Society's website and made available to any member, volunteer, or member of the public on request.

Where this code is updated, all existing members, volunteers, and directors will be notified and asked to confirm their continued acceptance of the revised version.

## **13. Policy Review**

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This code of conduct will be reviewed by the board at least annually, and following any significant disciplinary incident or change in the Society's activities. Any significant changes will be communicated to all members, volunteers, and directors. The board may update this code without a rule change, as provided for in the Society's rules, but must report any significant changes to members at the next general meeting.

## **14. Related Policies**

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This code should be read alongside the following Society documents:

- Safeguarding Policy
- Privacy Policy
- Health and Safety Policy
- Conflicts of Interest Policy
- Rules of the Society

*Policy adopted by the board of Common Ground Suffolk*

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed (Chair): \_\_\_\_\_ Signed (Secretary): \_\_\_\_\_

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## Individual Acknowledgement Form

*Please complete and return this section to the Secretary. A copy will be kept on file by the Society.*

I confirm that I have read and understood the Common Ground Suffolk Code of Conduct and agree to comply with it in all my activities connected to the Society.

**Full name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Role:** Member / Volunteer / Director (please circle)

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_