



Blacknest Fields Management Plan, 2025 - 2030
- a site for nature recovery and community greenspace



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I: Introduction

Blacknest Fields is a 2.7 hectare (7 acre) site owned by the Blacknest Fields and Holt Pound Oval Charitable Trust ('the Charity', #301743) which is managed by Binsted Parish Council ('the Council') with assistance from volunteers including the 'Friends of Blacknest Fields' group ('the Volunteers'). It is situated in the South Downs National Park (SDNP), at Northings etc¹, adjacent to Alice Holt Forest (Figure 1), in an area of particularly dark night skies.

The site formed part of the Royal Forest of Woolmer and Alice Holt until 1857 Binsted Inclosure Award. It retains the mosaic habitat characteristic of wood pastureland, with deciduous copse, open meadows, scrub patches, mature field trees, banks, and areas of marshy grassland. The site's woodland edge position amplifies its wildlife diversity, with higher numbers of species than are found in either pure forest or pure grassland.

In 2021 the Council resolved to develop Blacknest Fields as a place for nature recovery and quiet greenspace for the local community, and to take action to improve its governance and management arrangements. Figure 3 summarises the significant progress towards these objectives that has already been made, as is more fully documented in 2022, 2023 and 2024 Annual Reports. Currently, the site combines three distinct types of use:

- **Areas designed specifically for public recreation** (Bridleway and Oak Tree Meadow) (public access, dogs on lead)
- **Wildlife-sensitive areas** (The Copse, Butterfly Meadow, Willow Corner and Back Field) (public access, no dogs)
- **Areas rented for equine grazing** (the Front Field). (No public access).



Figure 1: Location Map

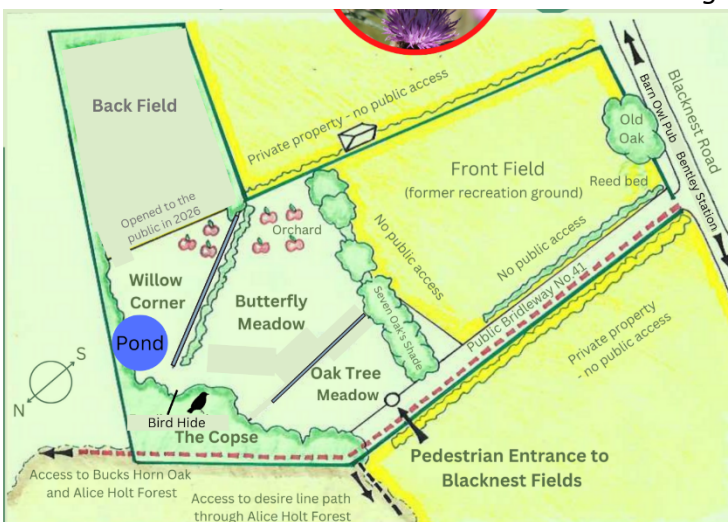


Figure 2: Current site plan

¹ Main site entrance is 300 metres north of Blacknest's 'Barn Owl' pub crossroads, W3W at Blacknest Road entrance 'pockets/sublime/cookie'.
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II Objectives 2025-30

Building on progress achieved in the initial management plan (which are summarised in Figure 3), the Council will continue its direction of travel during 2025-30, remaining focused on the three original objectives:

1) Nature: increasing the abundance and diversity of the site's flora and fauna

- 1.1 Continue to improve the condition of the site's mosaic habitats, to increase wildlife abundance and diversity.
- 1.2 Contribute to wider nature recovery goals, participating as appropriate in species re-introduction projects.
- 1.3 Continue to record the site's flora and fauna, reporting these to Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre.

2) People: a welcoming public space and an active volunteer community

- 2.1 Provide low-key² greenspace that is valued by the local community's schools, workers and residents, and fulfil public access obligations that arise from the site's 'Village Green' designation.
- 2.2 Maintain good access to the site by foot, cycle and horseback; and vehicular access for contractors, schools and wildlife groups; with on-site parking for special events in dry weather.
- 2.3 Continue to build an active volunteer community with a sense of shared ownership in the site's progress.

3) Management: strong governance, effective partnerships, good communication

- 3.1 Secure a nature conservation designation for the site, to help safeguard it in perpetuity.
- 3.2 Ensure the site is well-governed and adequately funded.
- 3.3 Work in partnership with relevant organisations and individuals, building on their knowledge and ideas.

Figure 3: Progress achieved in initial Management Plan (2021-24)

Blacknest Fields achieved the overall aim set out in its first management plan (2021-24) of establishing the site as a place for nature recovery and quiet community greenspace. In 2024, the site won 'Best Project in a Protected Landscape' and 'Overall People's Choice' Awards in Hampshire's Countryside Awards, run by CPRE.

1) NATURE: Increasing the abundance and diversity of the site's flora and fauna

In 2021, the site's vegetation was in poor condition. By 2024, significant enhancements to site habitats had been made by improving meadow, hedge and tree management regimes, new planting and the construction of new habitat features. Pollinator enhancements funded by our 3-year SDNP 'Beelines' project 'Get Blacknest Buzzing' have established the site as a butterfly and moth hotspot. 132 m of old hedges have been rejuvenated by hedge-laying, and 300 m of new hedges plus a community orchard have been planted. A range of new trees have been planted, including disease-resistant hybrid elms that have been planted as route for the re-introduction of the white hairstreak butterfly. A wildlife pond and series of ephemeral scrapes have been built. A stag beetle stumpery, hibernaculum, bee bank, deadwood piles, and 50 m of deadhedges have been created.

By December 2024, 584 species of fauna and flora had been recorded at the site (including 43 rare fauna species), indicating that the site is functioning well as a biodiversity 'hotspot': it is sustaining breeding populations of birds, butterflies and amphibians and is functioning as a good local 'stepping stone' / wildlife corridor.

2) PEOPLE: A safe welcoming public space³ and an active volunteer community

In 2021, the public could only **access** the Bridleway (7% of site area). A new user community has had to be built from scratch. Newsletters, social media and wildlife photography have attracted public interest. Removal of rusty ironwork, and the installation of a sculpture, site map, benches, bird hide and bird feeding station now provide safe, welcoming, low-key public greenspace for schools, residents and workers. By 2024, the public area had increased to 63% of site area (only Front Field is now let for grazing and so closed to public access.). In Summer 2024, the art exhibition '*Re:Connecting: Habitats, Wildlife, People*', celebrating the restoration of Blacknest Fields, was held in Alton's Allen Gallery, with accompanying art workshops and school curriculum enrichment activities.

Site access for pedestrians, cyclists, horse riders; and for schools', contractors' and volunteers' vehicles, has been improved. Bridleway 41 was previously unusable because of extreme mud. It has been extensively re-surfaced, through three projects. Stiles and gates that originally impeded bridleway use have been removed and site security improved. A circular walk has been developed, linking the site to Gravel Hill car park and Bentley station.

We have established an active volunteer community ('Friends of Blacknest Fields') and strong relationships with SDNPA's teams of rangers and local wildlife sites and experts. Community participation enables the site to be managed almost exclusively by volunteers and provides rich sources of ideas and expertise. Using various survey and recording methods, wildlife records submitted to the Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre (HBIC)

3) GOVERNANCE: Effective management and funding

Improvements have been made in the management and administration of the Charity.

By 31 Dec 2024, over £52K had been secured from competitive grant competitions and donated goods.

Successful partnership working has been developed with many wildlife organisations and individuals.

² We absolutely do not want to create a 'honeypot' destination or to create a visitor carpark

³ Dogs on leads are allowed only in Oak Tree Meadow and are excluded from wildlife-sensitive areas.

III: Delivery Plans 2025-30

This section sets out our delivery plans to achieve the objectives described in Section II.

Note that this Management Plan is a ‘living’ document, and delivery plans will continue to evolve as new information and opportunities arise.

Figure 4 summarises achievements in 2025.

Figure 5 highlights the main plans that we aim to progress in 2026.

Figure 4: Plans completed in 2025	
➤	Extended Wildflower Meadow area (see 1.1.1)
➤	Planted Honeysuckles for Pollinator improvement (1.1.4)
➤	Cared for establishing new hedges to combat deer-browsing (1.1.7)
➤	Completed Willow Corner Pond (1.1.8)
➤	Acquired Field Shelter (2.1.1)
➤	Completed Phase I of Glow Worm re-introduction (1.2.2)
➤	Ecology survey was undertaken, to evaluate application for SINC status (3.1)
➤	Finalised Charity Constitution & Management Agreement (3.2)


Figure 5: Main plans for 2026	
(** denotes projects that are/will be the subject of funding bids)	
➤	Improve Back Field Wildflower Meadow ** (see 1.1.1)
➤	Wetland strip in Back Field **(1.1.1)
➤	Copse improvement project ** (1.1.3)
➤	Tree Safety audit (1.1.5)
➤	Care for establishing new hedges (1.1.6) and community orchard (1.1.4)
➤	Erect fence around Willow Corner pond ** (1.1.7)
➤	Glow Worm re-introduction Phase II ** (1.2.2)
➤	Reinforce vehicle turning area ** (2.2.1)
➤	Improve site signage and interpretation (2.2.3)
➤	Recruit additional wildlife monitoring volunteers (2.3)
➤	Ecologists’ decision on application for SINC status ** (3.1)
➤	Re-instate Newsletter (3.2.5)

1	NATURE: Abundance and diversity of site’s flora and fauna	
1.1	Managing the site’s mosaic habitats	
1.1.1	Wildflower meadows	<p>Continuing to improve Wildflower Meadows: We are building on progress made through our initial (2022-5) SDNP ‘Beelines’ project, which enabled the establishment of good meadow management regimes. We are using manmade cutting/lopping instead of herbivore browsing/ aftermath grazing, as the latter is problematic on this volunteer-managed site.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued use of a Cut-n-Collect mower⁴ is our current alternative to traditional hay baling, following successful 2024 and 2025 trials of this method. • Our efforts to establish yellow rattle (hemi-parasitic species that benefits wildflowers by reducing grass fertility) have not been successful. Pilot areas sown in Autumn 22 flowered and set seed, but further sowings in Autumn 2023 were less successful amidst exceptionally wet weather. Red bartsia⁵ could potentially provide an alternative - it thrives in similar clay at Bentley Butterfly Meadow, particularly in trampled areas like track edges.

⁴ It was difficult to hire hay contractors; and late-baled hay is of low value. 2024 trial using SDNP cut-n-collect mower was successful - likely to be available for future use by community groups?

⁵ Red bartsia (*Odontites vernus*) - its main pollinators are carder bees and other solitary bee species including *Melitta tricincta*, found in south east England, which is wholly dependent on red bartsia.



		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purchase of a small trailer is being considered, to transport volunteers’ field mowers. (Would be kept on site.) • Funding from a ‘Beelines II’ SDNPA bid has been obtained, enabling us to extend wildflower meadow management regimes to the wet Back Field (Fig 6 yellow area). So far, we have: rolled/harrowed the Back Field to rectify poaching after 2024’s wet conditions; moved the Back Field access gate from its former (wet) position to higher drier ground (shown in red in Fig. 6) to extend season for machine access for meadow maintenance (using cut and collect mower to remove arisings). We also have spread green hay from the site’s other wildflower meadow areas to increase floral diversity (2025); and used 2024-25 HCC Pollinator grant to increase honeysuckle quantities in Back Field hedges). • We are encouraging a wetland strip along eastern edge of Back Field, adding meandering shallow scrapes and adding leaky dams / swales (blue on Fig. 6) to extend seasonally wet areas. We have planted goat willow whips in the wetter field margins (February 2026) to create meandering scrubby areas that benefit bird habitats and slow/reduce groundwater running to Thames Water’s Binsted Road pumping station. We will next: re-establish a hedge along the field’s degraded southern boundary; increase meadowsweet quantities in the wetter areas; and we will evaluate the meadow flora to assess if any other additions are needed. (To be clarified: are beetle banks helpful; and should we survey ditch as a ‘winterbourne’ which may have distinctive species?)  <p>Fig 6: Back Field refocus</p>
1.1.2	Tussocky grass	We will ensure that approximately 30% of the wildflower meadows are left uncut when mowing wildflower meadows and will retain patches of coarser grasses in Willow Corner as habitat for common lizards, slow worms, toads and grass snakes, and to encourage our harvest mouse populations.
1.1.3	Copse and Wood Strips	The small deciduous woodland ‘copse’ borders the edge of Alice Holt forest. It is mainly oak and holly, with some hawthorn, honeysuckle, hazel and viburnum. Ground flora is sparse – some ivy, ‘ground ivy’ (Glechoma hederacea), grasses and nettles. We will develop a copse management plan, realise opportunities to remove some spindly oak and open small canopy patches to increase forest floor light levels, without damaging the graduated vegetation of copse edge. We are using deadwood to protect hazel stools from deer browsing and intend to add some further hazel ⁶ where the copse is sufficiently light. Standing deadwood & ivy and is kept to provide bat roosts and woodland bird nest sites. We will allow wood strips to develop in the Seven Oaks field (alongside mature oaks) and along the southern edge of Back Field (in the area hatched yellow in Fig. 6, where elm & hazel has been planted).
1.1.4	Community orchard	Our community orchard, planted in Autumn 2023, is starting to produce its first crops. It needs formative pruning until the trees reach maturity. (Apple trees last pruned Feb 2026). As the trees come into production, fruit will be used by local schools and/or a community juicing scheme may be explored.

⁶ Coppiced hazel has much to offer for climate adaptation, by ensuring vigorous vegetation with reduced risk of windthrow.
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1.1.5	Trees	<p>Annual tree safety checks are undertaken, under a rolling 5-year programme. No site trees have Tree Protection Orders. Trees are managed with minimal intervention⁷. On live trees, only larger-diameter dead branches that are considered unsafe will be removed; and lower branches of the field oaks will be retained⁸, these being important features of ancient wood pasture landscapes and field oaks. For dead trees, decisions regarding whether to fell or leave as standing deadwood will be made on an individual tree basis. Public safety cannot be compromised, but in many instances a tree can be made safe whilst retaining shoulder-height standing deadwood. Bats' presence on site is confirmed, so any arboricultural work will require a dawn or dusk survey to check if bats are present before work is undertaken. Individual trees in which bats are found roosting, or the whole woodland, are legally protected⁹.</p> <p>Oak: The site's predominant tree species is oak, with some 50 mature boundary oak specimens (along bridleway, in Seven Oaks field, at edges of Willow Corner and Path Strip, and a lone oak at Blacknest Road verge). These seem of uniform age, with no young oak except those recently planted in hedges. We have asked Forest Research's dendrochronologists if they may be able to date the older trees, to ascertain if they were planted in 1820s (as post-Waterloo oak afforestation), or 1860s (when site came into council ownership).</p> <p>Ash: Ash dieback is present, but the site has few ash trees, so not a major issue.</p> <p>New tree planting: various species including black poplar, elm, sallow willow, alder, field maple, spindle and oak have been planted recently. To further supplement the population of young oaks, we will protect a small number of selected oak saplings from those that regenerate naturally.</p> <p>Elm: 5 hybrid (disease resistant) elms were planted in Back Field in Autumn 2023 - when mature, to enable the re-introduction of the white hairstreak butterfly.</p> <p>Black Poplar: 2 rare black poplars were kindly donated and planted in the wet lower section of the Front Field in Spring 2025.</p>
1.1.6	Hedges and Scrub	<p>It is a high priority to care for recently-planted hedges and trees. Wire mesh was added alongside new hedges suffering deer browsing; and periodic weeding is also being undertaken to limit competition from vigorous grasses. We keep a water bowser and water tank (IBC) onsite and have added guttering to collect rainwater from the field shelter roof.</p> <p>We are regenerating dilapidated hedges and aim to continue to rejuvenate 3% of the total site's old hedges p.a.. Two priority areas are the Blacknest Road 'roadside' hedge (which has significant dead patches) and the copse edge holly (beneficial for wildlife, including for barbastelle bats, but which needs controlling to prevent too much shade in the copse).</p> <p>To respect the neighbouring landowner's wishes, we will make no major changes to the Path Strip hedge boundary.</p> <p>A hedging contractor undertakes any mechanical cutting of hedges required, between 1 Sept and 28 Feb - by law, hedges cannot be cut from 1 Mar until 31 Aug (bird nesting season). Getting work done early in the Autumn (September) is operationally preferable, as the site is less likely to be waterlogged. We encourage luxuriant, A-shaped 'fortress' hedges by adopting a 2-year hedge cutting regime that allows hedges to flower and fruit. We will encourage patches of blackthorn and bramble scrub to develop in areas that do not impede hedge trimming, managed by the same 2-year hedge cutting regime. Patches of young blackthorn scrub are important for hairstreak butterflies.</p>
1.1.7	Ponds	<p>Willow Corner pond was dug in Summer 2024 and minor rectification of its southern edge undertaken in Winter 2024. In Spring 2025 we installed a lifebuoy and safety signage near pond. We will continue to assess whether the pond liner</p>

⁷ Lone Oak at roadside cannot be 'minimum intervention' (gets cut by electricity company to avoid overhead wires; & Hampshire Highways).



⁸ A tractor can - with care! - squeeze through a gap between these central oaks.

⁹ Such protection, managed by Natural England, isn't conferred in perpetuity: so bats don't automatically trigger a TPO protection (NE's system to protect wildlife is separate from tree protection system.)

		<p>needs further work: the bentonite layer may need to have a compacted clay top layer added (which we hope SDNPA will advise us about). In Feb 2026, we secured funding to buy some stock fencing and posts, to erect a temporary fence around the pond until the fragile pond edges have stabilised and prevent visitors from walking on bentonite pond liner until this has also stabilised.</p> <p>We will clear debris from the Blacknest Road gate corner to improve its well-established ephemeral pond. Depending on advice from HCC's SINC survey, we may slightly enlarge the seasonal wetland in this area. The scrub/sedges/alder establishing in this area is helping the site to absorb more water, helping to reduce flood risks for local residents.</p> <p>Longer term, there may be potential to add a further pond at Back Field's southernmost edge. Through Hampshire's Newt Conservation Partnership (www.newtpartnership.org.uk), Natural England pond funding could be available if Great Crested Newts establish themselves in our new Willow Corner pond¹⁰.</p>
1.1.8	Grazed area	We will continue for the foreseeable future the Front Field grazing contract . This is renewed annually on 21 Sept. Access is from Blacknest Road entrance.
1.2	Nature Recovery	
1.2.1	Nature Recovery	Hampshire CC leads Hampshire's Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS). Blacknest Fields is important for pollinators and we are signed up to HCC's Pollinator Pledge. Blacknest Fields is included as one of SDNPA's Sites4Nature (SDNPA's '30by30' target and associated 'Re-Nature' initiative seeks to boost, from 25% to 30%, the National Park area that is actively managed for nature.)
1.2.2	Wildlife re-introductions	<p>Blacknest Fields' management style is closer to 'rewilding' than to conservation approaches whereby sites are tightly managed for the conditions required for specific rare species found onsite, and we are open to appropriate wildlife reintroductions and nature recovery ideas.</p> <p>Blacknest Fields is one of Hart Wildlife Rescue's approved release sites for hedgehogs and other species. 2 hedgehog 'rescues' were released in Autumn 2024 and 3 in Autumn 2025.</p> <p>The establishment of hybrid elms (described in 1.1.5) is hoped to provide a route for the future re-introduction of the white hairstreak butterfly.</p> <p>Funding was secured to reintroduce glow worms in Autumn 2025. Following Derek Gow Associates' visit to the site in Summer 2025, it was agreed the optimum location is in the Wildflower Meadow (near BeeBank). The grass in this area will be kept shorter than the rest of the meadow.</p> <p>Harvest mice are already present in small numbers and the habitat management regime described in 1.1.2 aims to encourage their populations.</p> <p>Dormice are <u>not</u> present but could potentially be reintroduced in future.</p>
1.2.3	Wildlife corridors	<p>To help create joined-up wildlife corridors we will where possible collaborate with neighbouring landowners and groups seeking to stimulate wildlife corridors across the wood pasture edge of Alice Holt Forest (from Station Road Butterfly Meadow SSSI to Bealeswood Common in Dockenfield.)</p> <p>We hope to continue good hedge management collaboration with the owner of the field immediately north of the Blacknest Road Bridleway Entrance Track.</p>
1.2.4	Climate Resilience	<p>We will continue to use 'Nature-Based Solutions' (rather than hard engineering) to adapt the site for climate change, e.g. adding ponds / swales¹¹ to increase wildlife's resilience to hot, dry summers and heatwaves.</p> <p>We aim to create further refugia (e.g. north-facing slopes to assist species such as bumblebees to better cope when temperatures exceed 40 deg C.)</p>

¹⁰ It is a requirement of this funding that Great-Crested Newts already exist within 0.5km of site.

¹¹ **Swales** are linear vegetated channels with flat bases that attenuate flooding by encouraging water to flow through grass/ other robust vegetation. They are shallow (typically 150mm-300mm deep), with shallow sloping sides that allow water to flow gently across. Swales usually collect surface water runoff laterally across direction of water flow. Swales normally dry out but some can retain permanent water.

1.2.5	Biosecurity and Invasive Species	<p>To minimise the risk of introducing or spreading harmful pests and diseases, site contractors are strongly encouraged to take these biosecurity measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - clean all equipment (boots, clothing, ropes & tools of soil/organic material before entering and when leaving site - routinely disinfect chainsaws, pruning saws and other cutting tools, and before starting work on a new site - Wash-down vehicles (cabs, wheels, footwells) & machinery, to stop soil build-up, before working at a new site. <p>For our pond and wetland site areas, we are aware of the importance of keeping dogs out of the water (to avoid the spread of crassula) and of not planting invasive, colonising species that would prevent establishment of a biodiverse wetland community. Plants to avoid include: Bulrush (<i>Typha latifolia</i>), Great pond sedge (<i>Carex riparia</i>), Reed canary grass (<i>Phalaris arundinacea</i>), Reed sweet-grass (<i>Glyceria maxima</i>), Branched bur-reed (<i>Sparganium erectum</i>) and Common Reed (<i>Phragmites australis</i>).</p>
1.3 Wildlife Recording		
1.3.1	Record verification and reporting	<p>Site volunteers will continue to record wildlife, using a variety of different systems, each of which (eventually) flows across to the formal records held by Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre (HBIC). We also maintain a pan-species site list; highlights from which are reported in the site’s Annual Report.</p> <p>The main recording systems currently used are:</p> <p>Reptiles / Amphibians - HIWARG / RecordPool Butterflies – Transect volunteers / IRecord Bumblebees – sightings reported direct to Bumblebee Conservation Trust Bats - recorded via Surrey Bat Group (and shared with Hampshire Bat Group). Other mammals: IRecord Moths - IRecord Birds - BTO ringing scheme / Birdtrack.</p>
	Butterfly Transect	An informal monthly butterfly survey is carried out and recorded on iRecord.
	Bumblebee Transect	<p>In February 2025, the Bumblebee Conservation Trust approved two Bumblebee Transects, per Figures 7 and 8. During Summer 2025, trained volunteers walked transect #1 fortnightly, submitting records to Bumblebee Conservation Trust.</p>  <p style="text-align: center;"><small>BLACKNEST FIELDS VOLUNTEERS BUMBLEBEE TRANSECT 2025, 0.85KM</small></p> <p style="text-align: right;">Figure 7: Bumblebee transect #1</p>  <p style="text-align: center;"><small>SECTION 1: HEDGEROW Walk up the bridleway into BNF site BNE EXTENSION</small></p> <p style="text-align: right;">Fig 8: Bumblebee transect #2</p>
	Nothing	We have been fortunate to benefit from Martin Angels’ and Chris Piper’s expert knowledge to run moth traps and hope to find a way to continue these regularly following Martin Angel’s 2025 retirement from moth trapping.
	Bird ringing	We have been fortunate to benefit from Daniel Banks’ expert knowledge to run regular bird ringing sessions under the BTO scheme and hope to continue this.

1.3.2	Monitoring methods	<p>We have built up a small community ‘kit’ for educational wildlife activities; Quadrant, ID charts, butterfly net, specimen jars, pond net, etc. Expertise and specialist monitoring equipment¹² is also shared by SDNP rangers and volunteer wildlife experts, which greatly assists our monitoring of the flora, birds, reptiles, moths, butterflies, spiders and bats on site.</p> <p>We will continue to recruit/train new volunteer surveyors to monitor and record the diversity and abundance of site wildlife and to understand any species that may require specific management approaches.</p> <p>We plan to use fixed point photography to record site changes over time.</p>
2	PEOPLE: A welcoming public space and an active volunteer community	
2.1	Providing greenspace that is valued by the local community	
2.1.1	Rain shelter	<p>In Spring 2025 we moved the recently-purchased field shelter to Willow Corner, to provide dry space for volunteer activities & school visits. NB: there is no water supply on-site & we have no wish to have a public toilet.</p>
2.1.2	Schools and youth groups	<p>We are working to increase the visits made by Binsted, Bentley and Rowledge schools, and by youth groups (e. g. Hive Helpers, Scouts). We will continue to support Duke of Edinburgh volunteers who wish to be involved at the site.</p>
2.1.3	Community use and events	<p>The public are welcome to use the site at any time, for example for picnics and family outings. The site is a safe place for children to play, let off steam and enjoy simply being close to nature, in an uncommercialised setting. Blacknest Fields’ wildlife, and the site’s tranquillity, are valued by walkers, wildlife enthusiasts and photographers; and by people seeking to recharge their batteries or manage their mental health. Organised community events such as ‘Dawn Chorus Day walk with breakfast at the Fields’ are being organised when sufficient volunteers are available.</p>
2.1.4	Site Safety	<p>A ‘lone working policy’ is in place to help safeguard staff, councillors, volunteers and contractors in case a medical emergency arises on-site. This involves visitors (i) taking a mobile phone when on-site, (ii) calling a friend on arrival at Blacknest Fields, telling them how long they expect to be on-site; and (iii) telephoning said friend on leaving the site (without such call, the friend must investigate as an emergency.)</p> <p>Risk assessments are carried out by the Council Clerk before each event or site project, and activities undertaken at Blacknest Fields are included in the Council’s public liability insurance cover.</p> <p>First Aid at events. A first aid bag is available for community and volunteer events. Efforts are made to have a qualified first aider on-site at such events.</p> <p>Electric fences: Horse-grazing tenant’s contract advises the need to display warning signs when electric fences are in use. These legally must be hung at 20m intervals along fence perimeter. The electric fence alongside the bridleway meets the regulatory requirement to be at least 1m from the bridleway.</p>
2.2	Maintaining and improving access	
2.2.1	Access	<p>We will maintain the on-site bridleway in good condition, to facilitate site access by foot, cycle and horseback; and we will maintain the entrance track to provide vehicular access for graziers, contractors, schools and wildlife groups. Currently, when vehicles turn on the track in wet weather, they make the track muddy. In Feb 2026, we secured funding to buy some MOT Grade1 aggregate with the intention of reinforcing the area that is used for vehicle turning on the entrance track near the Oak Tree Meadow gate.</p> <p>We have NO wish to make the site a tourist ‘hotspot’; or to create a visitor carpark. (This would attract people seeking to avoid Alice Holt Forest parking charges and would create maintenance expenses.) On-site parking for community events in dry summer weather is provided in Oak Tree Meadow. In wet conditions, the workaround for parking at community events has (since Jolly Farmer pub’s closure) been to park at Binsted Rec and operate a transport “shuttle”. Parking at ‘Barn Owl’</p>

¹² For example: Hedgehog & Dormice footprint tubes, bat SongMeter & echolocators, amphibian mats, moth traps).

		<p>pub might be possible by prior arrangement for certain events (dependent on timing) but cannot be assumed (Barn Owl carparking is at a premium). All-terrain wheelchairs are welcome; a sign at site entrance highlights that access will be provided on request.</p> <p>The Binsted Road gate entrance is only for maintenance use; there is no public Right of Way. This track gets muddy and is passable only in summer weather.</p>
2.2.2	Maps	<p>We aim to make the ways of accessing the site better known, and particularly to make directions for the circular walk route (from Gravel Hill car park and Bentley train station) easier to find, by use of a QR code. We have added Blacknest Fields' location to Google Maps.</p>
2.2.3	On-site signage	<p>We are seeking funding to improve the existing site map and add further interpretation details. The existing map at Oak Tree Meadow entrance needs improving by making the 'welcome' message more prominent, adding information about local history, a QR code giving directions for the route to Bentley Station /Gravel Hill Car Park, and wildlife information. (Ramblers Charity funding for enhanced signage was approved in 2023, but our delays confirming the details (pending new pond) mean this initial offer has lapsed.)</p> <p>We will continue to display signs to warn of site hazards (ponds, ticks), to protect wildlife features (keep to paths, keep off deadwood piles) and to clarify the rules applying to different parts of the site¹³. The site has no electricity, so we cannot install a defibrillator, but we will put up a sign to highlight locations of nearby defibrillators (at Blacknest Industrial Estate but none at Barn Owl pub). HCC owns and maintains the bridleway fingerpost at the site entrance.</p>
2.3	Strengthening the volunteer community	
	<p>We have been fortunate to find volunteers with considerable expertise and wildlife knowledge, and additional ad-hoc volunteers for periodic work parties, and we host periodic visits by SDNP Volunteer teams. We hope all these will continue. We are seeking to recruit extra volunteers¹⁴ to assist with the bumblebee and butterfly transects, establish small mammal monitoring, and to help to record species that are currently under-recorded (including spiders, beetles and trees).</p> <p>We would also like to work with partners interested in developing 'Creative Responses' to the site and to host midweek events or volunteer days to support mental or physical health initiatives. However, we will additionally need to find appropriately qualified volunteers to run such activities, as such additional or regular activities cannot be supported by current volunteers.</p>	
3	EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT	
3.1	Safeguarding the site in perpetuity	
	<p>We hope to secure a nature conservation designation for the site, as a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC). Sites with this status are recognised as being of substantive nature conservation value. The primary role of this designation is to help ensure biodiversity is given due consideration in land use planning. We were fortunate to secure SDNP funding to cover the necessary site survey assessment, which was carried out by HBIC/HCC ecologists in August 2025, the outcome of which will be known towards the end of 2026.</p>	
3.2	Strong and effective governance	
3.2.1	The Charity, its Constitution and Trustees	<p>A constitution for the Holt Pound Oval and Blacknest Fields Charity has been approved, based on the Charity Commission's 'Charitable Incorporated Organisation' (CIO) model, covering both sites. (Although adopted by the Council, it may take several years for the Charity Commission to formally ratify the change from Charitable Trust¹⁵ to CIO.) Important benefits result from adoption of the CIO model (wherein the Charity has its own legal personality): for example, the Charity</p>

¹³ In areas for public recreation (Bridleway, Oak Tree Meadow), dogs on leads are welcome; Wildlife-sensitive areas (Butterfly Meadow, Copse, Willow Corner & Back Field) are open to the public but not to dogs. Areas rented for equine grazing (Front Field) are not open to the public.

¹⁴ Potential sources of further volunteers may include 'Hampshire conservation volunteers' <https://www.hcv.org.uk/>, Men's Sheds (Liss). We also have contact details of Selborne Landscape Partnership volunteer corps.

¹⁵ 'Charitable Trusts' place unduly onerous responsibilities on individual Trustees.

		(rather than its Trustees) will be able to enter into contracts, which is potentially important for the Holt Pound Oval. Trustees: the constitution specifies that the Charity will have a minimum of 2 Trustees and a maximum of 5 Trustees. Currently it has 2 Trustees.
3.2.2	Council responsibilities	A management agreement has been agreed , setting out the duties of the Council (as manager) and the Charity (as owner) for the two Charity sites. This reflects the arrangements and roles as they have been historically and since Blacknest Fields was opened to the public in 2021. The Council’s duties include: the financial management of the sites; legal conformity and site safety; the management of maintenance work; and the procurement of all insurance policies necessary for the two sites (including: Employer’s insurance; Public liability insurance; property insurance covering the sites’ assets; and insurance specific to the Charity and its Trustees.) This management agreement will be further reviewed when the Charity Commission ratifies the Charity’s transition to a CIO model. Meanwhile, day-to-day operational site management is carried out by the Clerk and Council’s lead for Blacknest Fields, in co-operation with the Friends of Blacknest Fields volunteers, who assist the organisation of work parties and events, lead on wildlife recording, organise the volunteers and run the Blacknest Fields Community Facebook page.
3.2.3	Finance	Income from grazing and access licence contributes - indeed, typically covers - the costs of routine site maintenance costs such as hedge-cutting. Grant funding. We continue our approach of funding all significant projects by competitive grant competitions rather than using Council Precept or Reserves. It is specifically agreed that £5K of general reserves held by the Council can be made available to fund Blacknest expenses that cannot be covered by grants or site-generated income. ¹⁶ Similarly, £5K of General Reserves¹⁷ can be made available for Charitable Trust emergencies for either site (e.g. if extensive tree work is required after storms). Blacknest Fields has its own bank account¹⁸ , into which are paid donations from ‘EasyFunding’ shopping app and any from EHDC Community Lottery. Application has been made for new bank account with no fees. Low transaction levels mean ‘Rialtus’ accounting package is not required for the charity account. Biodiversity Net Gain was reviewed in Jan 2025 as a potential funding mechanism, but was dismissed as an unworkable option for this site (as detailed in paper presented to Jan 2025 parish council meeting).
3.2.4	Communication	We are continuing to use social media (Facebook) as the main communication channel, using wildlife photography to engage and sustain public interest, subject always to protecting wildlife from undue public attention and to doing the best to protect the site from harmful activities such as fly tipping. The Facebook page currently has 312 followers. We need to re-establish our quarterly newsletter. In 2026, we plan to develop flyers ‘Enjoy BNF’ & ‘Support BNF’ to distribute to schools and put in the Welcome Pack given by church to parish newcomers.
3.3	Partnership Working	We aim to continue our good relationships with rangers and ecologists at organisations including Alton Natural History Society, SDNPA, Butterfly Conservation, HCC Countryside Service /Nature Recovery team, HBIC and the Wildlife Trust, all of whom are valuable sources of advice for wildlife and practical land management. It would be beneficial to increase our interaction with Forest Research and to exchange wildlife records with Forestry England’s ecologist.

¹⁶ Council’s auditor recommended Council to temporarily move these funds to general reserves, rather than holding a specific EarMarkedReserve (as was done until Mar 2025 via ERM15), but EMR will be re-instituted as soon as general reserves permit.

¹⁷ Until March 2025, this sum was held in ERM18, was moved into general reserves, and will be re-instituted as an EMR shortly.

¹⁸ Council agreed to apply for a charity account credit card but this has been deferred pending potential change in bank account.