

Blacknest Fields Working Group



**A Development Routemap
- towards increasing the
value of Blacknest Fields
for the community.**

1. Aims of this Development Routemap

This purpose of this Development Routemap is to confirm the approach that the Blacknest Fields Working Group is taking to developing a long-term site plan.

The council is requested to confirm that it is content with the approach outlined.

2. 'Guiding principles' for site development

The Working Group will be guided by the following 10 core principles:

- (i) **'Evolution rather than Revolution'**, with a phased approach to development.
- (ii) **An overall focus on providing low-key local greenspace and a place for nature recovery** (NOT on creating a 'honeypot' destination accessed by car).
- (iii) **Sensitive to the site's wildlife habitats**, current and potential (esp Allotment Gdns)
- (iv) **Future-proofing, by increasing climate resilience** (flood, fire, drought, carbon, etc).
- (v) **Engaging with local residents, workers and businesses** to stimulate development into a well-used community asset – currently, few people know the site.
- (vi) **Partnership working, and a 'Value for Money' approach**, makes the most of ideas, expertise and funding available from local experts, partnerships and collaboration.
- (vii) **Embracing hybrid options** (site has multiple uses; & some site areas multiple uses).
- (viii) **Improving Bridleway 41** (surface condition, safety and linkage) is a priority.
- (ix) **Parking** should NOT be provided at the site.
- (x) **No change in Working Group remit** ("*how Blacknest Fields can generate best value for community*") or **site's charitable purposes** ('recreation' & 'assist labouring poor').

3. A phased Development Plan

A four phase plan is anticipated, per Table 1. 'Evolution not revolution' will enable early site use by parishioners, without over-hasty commitments or financial risk to the council.

Table 1: Anticipated approach and timeline:

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August 2021	Development Routemap agreed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Guiding principles agreed. ○ Reduce grazing area to meet public access obligation. ○ Public engagement commences.
Aug 2021 – Mar 2022	Discovery phase.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Small-scale community events (Picnic & Walk, Sept 21.) ○ Discussions with partners/funders. ○ Area of grazing area reduced. ○ Small area opened for public access. ○ Bridleway surface and access points improved. ○ Further assessment of nature-sensitive areas.
Dec 2021	Dvlpt Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Council will agree a clear, costed Development plan.
Apr 2022 – Mar 2023	Alpha phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Early grant funding obtained. ○ Public access area landscaped. ○ Nature recovery measures started. ○ Volunteer-led activities start onsite.
Apr 2023 – Mar 2025	Beta phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Further grant funding obtained. ○ Further physical enhancements. ○ Further development of community use
Apr 2025 onwards	Maturity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Physical development is complete. ○ The site has clear, stable uses. ○ Funding is in place for ongoing site maintenance.

3. Site use ideas under consideration

3.1 Site options identified in the Dossier that don't involve site sale or parking is the starting point for developing plans, but the Working Group will continue to seek further ideas and views. Many ideas are not mutually exclusive, so hybrid options are likely.

		Score*
1	Enhance BNF as a halt for walkers (no parking)	4.13
2	Wildlife enhancement (pond, flowers, trees, etc) (no parking)	4.07
3	Community - natural playground (no parking)	3.93
4	Community - permaculture and foraging (no parking)	3.67
5	Community - stargazing (no parking)	3.60
6	Community - tree seedling nursery (no parking)	3.53
7	Community orchard (no parking)	3.33
8	Register BNF on register of land for Biodiversity Offsetting	3.33
9	Community wood hub (e.g. beanpoles, men's shed) (no parking)	3.07
10	Equine grazing on part or all the site	2.93
11	Community - forest school (no parking)	2.80
12	Community - Roman Pottery kilns interpretation (no parking)	2.80
13	Community - Green social prescribing (no parking)	2.53
14	Commercial forestry, with prof mgt company (but not Forestry England lease)	2.07

Note: * Mean score from Apr2021 Survey Monkey: 5-point scale, in which 5 = 'Brilliant idea' and 1 = 'Terrible Idea'.

3.2 The overall focus will be on generating community value and participation.

'Success' with the Blacknest Fields project will hinge on generating community participation, as well as improving the site's physical condition. A community picnic (18 Sept) and woodland walk (7 Sept) are being organised. Parish council assets should *'earn their keep'* in community value, by contributing to parishioners' social, cultural, and ecological wellbeing:

- **social value** - enabling the community to enjoy a range of activities at Blacknest; and developing an increased *sense* of community through these activities.
- **ecological wellbeing** - enabling parishioners to enjoy the restorative power of nature; and to enable nature recovery, so it's there for future generations.

The pandemic prompts us to re-think community needs. Environmental concerns (climate change and biodiversity loss) require us to re-think traditional land use – e.g. how the site can contribute to flood resilience, carbon sequestration and halt species loss.

'Organised' group activities		Who benefits?
Stargazing events		Parishioners, Jolly Farmer
Community picnics, Wassailing, May Day celebrations, etc		Local communities
Forest School class outings		Younger children
School outings / nature study		Children over 5
Outdoor workshops e.g. making bat boxes, coppicing, charcoal		Over 18s
Collection point for local apples / fruit (e.g. for juicing)		Charity / Bentley School
Pop-up plant or produce stalls		Local communities
Actions for individuals or informal groups		Who benefits?
Circular walk around site, picnicing		Anyone
Bird watching		Anyone
"Quietude" - incl. therapeutic recovery sessions (e.g. excluded pupils)		Anxiety & mental health
Natural playground, kick a ball, kites, frisbees, etc		Local families
Foraging and berrying		Anyone

Activities related to green social prescribing	Anyone referred by GP
Products grown/made from the site	Who benefits?
Foliage for Christmas wreath-making	Local church group
Foraging for berries, damsons, wild garlic, etc	Anyone
Growing dye plants / damsons	Local textile artists
Damsons, apples, raspberries / community orchard	Locals
Pea-sticks, bean poles, ?charcoal, from hazel coppicing, withies	Community groups
Ecosystem services	Who benefits?
Carbon sequestration, climate adaptation, climate resilience	Everyone
Nature recovery	Everyone
Increased flood resilience	Blacknest community

4. Renegotiation of Grazing Contracts

It's clear the area let for grazing will need to be reduced, to meet the council's obligation of providing public access to the Recreation Ground (a designated Village Green). It is proposed to renegotiate the current contract rates, durations, areas and obligations:

Contract renegotiation. The council has arranged meetings with both current tenants, to discuss renewal ahead of the 22 September contract renewal date. We propose to revert to 12-month contract duration (currently 6 months) but for a reduced area.

Review of market rates. A survey of market rates is being conducted. Initial results confirm there is a high level of local demand for grazing and suggest that the rates currently charged (£1,100 p.a. for approx. 7 acres) are substantially below prevailing market rates.

Review of contractual obligations. Both current contracts specify that *"tenants are responsible for fencing their own stock and; at least once a year, to cut/have cut the grass, to keep the premises free from Ragwort or any other notifiable weeds or scrub on the said land; also to trim or have trimmed the hedges around the site at least once during the Agreement Period, preferably in the winter months"*. The tenants were relieved of their hedge cutting responsibilities when the council reduced the contract duration to 6 months. This aspect needs clarifying. Also, there is nothing in the agreements to prohibit or control the use of electrified fencing. This also needs clarifying, ahead of public use of the site.

5. Improving bridleway safety and site security

A qualified tree surgeon will remove the large, dead oak branches overhanging the bridleway (tendering underway). The RoW volunteers will remove the dilapidated stile (at no cost). Removing Blacknest Fields' kissing gate would enable roadside gate to be locked, to increase site security. Replacing the internal metal gate with bollards would improve bridleway useability for riders and cyclists, while maintaining site security. We are in discussion with Footpaths Officer, British Horse Society and Hants Countryside team regarding specifications and will bring costed proposals to a future council meeting.

6. Administration and Governance

To ensure proper governance, Working Group has completed the following actions:

1.	Confirmed WG membership and refreshed GDPR permissions	Done
2.	Created a webpage for Blacknest Fields	Done
3.	Invited further public participation in the site development process.	Done
4.	Site retention decision communicated to key partners (SDNPA, EHDC, W Trusts, FE)	Done

Alison Melvin (Chair, Blacknest Fields Working Group)