



# 2022 - 2025 Management Plan for Blacknest Fields: a site for nature recovery and community greenspace

## Introduction

**Binsted Parish Council** ('the Council') manages the 2.7 hectare (7 acre) site at Blacknest Fields site on behalf of the 'Blacknest Fields and Holt Pound Oval Charitable Trust' (Charity #301743), with assistance from volunteers, notably from the 'Friends of Blacknest Fields' group.

**Location:** As shown in Figure 1, Blacknest Fields is located three fields from Blacknest's 'Jolly Farmer' pub, adjacent to Alice Holt Forest. W3Words at Blacknest Road entrance 'pockets/sublime/cookie'. W3W at Oak Tree Meadow entrance 'kjlkjlkjlkjlkjlkj'

**This Management Plan** sets out the vision for - and planned operational management of - Blacknest Fields, with a particular focus on the three years to April 2025. Progress toward this Plan will be kept in regular review, as site plans will evolve over time. This document is therefore very much a 'living' document, which Binsted Parish Council will endeavour to keep updated. The Plan has two parts:

- **Part I: 'Where do we want to get to?'** - Sets out the vision, objectives and planned site uses.
- **Part II: 'How are we going to get there?'** - Summarises site management projects and day-to-day operations.

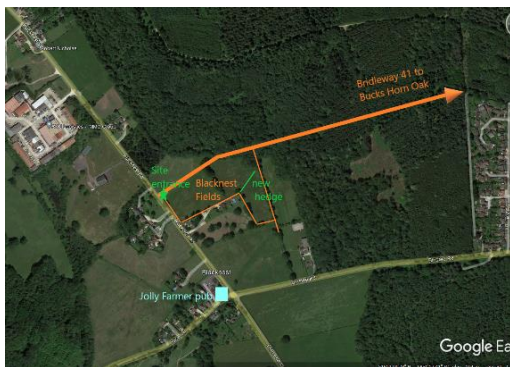


Figure 1: Location Map

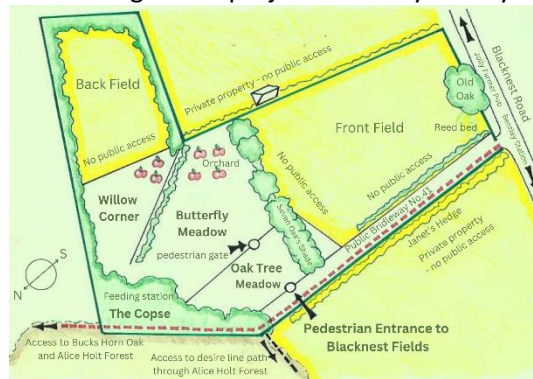


Figure 2: Current site plan

The site has three distinct types of use, with public access to the first two of these (per green shading in Figure 2):

- **Areas designed specifically for public recreation** (Bridleway and Oak Tree Meadow)
- **Wildlife-sensitive areas** (The Copse, Butterfly Meadow and Willow Corner) and
- **Areas rented for equine grazing** (the Front Field, the Back Field and the Path Strip).

Each of these areas has a complex mosaic of different habitats, and the site borders the Alice Holt Forest to the west.



Figure 3: Sketch showing site project areas (Note: Diagram is not to scale)

### Locations of main projects:

- A. Improved entrance and track
- B. Gates, welcome map, bench, sculpture
- C. Bridleway with holly canopy
- D. Benches & den-building area
- E. Deadhedges, log piles & reptile refugia
- F. Jubilee hedge (planted Feb 2022)
- G. Front field hedge (planted Nov 2022)
- H. Community orchard (planted Nov 2022)
- I. Old hedges (laid and coppiced Nov 2022)
- J. Birdwatching station. Stag beetle stumpery.
- K. Wildlife Ponds (Planned Spring 2024)
- L. Alders & willow scrub – wetter areas



## Part I: Where do we want to get to? Vision and objectives for Blacknest Fields

**Vision:** Our overall aim is to increase the community value of Blacknest Fields so that it provides a place for nature recovery and a quiet greenspace for the local community.

By April 2025 we plan to have completed the first phase of the site transformation, and for the site to have stable community uses - although managing greenspace is never a 'finished project'! The dual functions of the site - for nature recovery, and for people's wellbeing - are considered of equal importance and will be developed in a mutually compatible manner. However, sensitive wildlife management does impose certain constraints on human activities. For example, the risk of forest fires makes it necessary to prohibit BBQs and campfires; it is also important to exclude dogs from some wildlife-sensitive areas (dogs' worming and flea medications seriously harm invertebrates<sup>1</sup>; dog urea raises nitrogen and phosphorus levels<sup>2</sup>; and dogs disturb ground-nesting birds<sup>3</sup>).

**Objectives:** This Management Plan sets four main objectives:

### Objective 1: Increase the abundance and diversity of the site's flora and fauna

- (i) We want to enhance the site's habitats, to protect and diversify the wide range of flora and fauna that thrive in woodland-edge mosaic habitats, to achieve improvements for wildlife and climate resilience).
- (ii) We want the site to function as a biodiversity hotspot/stepping stone and be part of joined-up wildlife corridors across the local area, particularly across the wood pastures along southeastern borders of the Alice Holt Forest.
- (iii) Ultimately, we want to secure a nature conservation designation for the site, to safeguard it in perpetuity.

### Objective 2: Provide a safe, welcoming public space for schools, residents and workers

- (i) We want to provide low-key\* greenspace for the local community, to fulfil public access obligations arising from site's 'Village Green' designation, and to create a site that is recognised as a greenspace area in the Local Plan. We want the site to be a community asset that is valued and enjoyed by local schools, workers and residents, in particular to provide a restorative space for quiet reflection and nature study, respecting this Dark Skies<sup>4</sup> area of the South Downs National Park (SDNP). (\* We absolutely do not want to create a 'honeypot' destination.)
- (ii) We want to improve people's ability to safely access the site by foot, cycle and horseback, and we acknowledge that hurdles still need to be overcome to achieve this goal (as described in Section 2.3.)
- (iii) We do NOT wish to create a carpark, but we do want schools and wildlife groups to be able to safely access the site by minibus. As such, a small turning area where a minibus can turn on-site would be highly beneficial.

### Objective 3: Active community participation

- (i) We want to build a diverse, active volunteer community that participates with a shared sense of purpose in projects that help nature to thrive and helps to create and enjoy outdoor activities and events. The corps of volunteers to date has included SDNP volunteer groups, local youth group and Duke of Edinburgh participants, the 'Friends of Blacknest Fields' and members of Binsted Eco Network. It is recognised that the Council, by itself, lacks sufficient staff capacity or funding to run site operations or community activities.
- (ii) We want to build on the ideas and knowledge of local wildlife experts, and on suggestions from visitors, residents and local workers, about ways to develop the site's uses and usefulness. Our aim is for '*Evolution not Revolution*': making gradual improvements, especially in response to new information about the site's wildlife and to new suggestions for increasing climate change resilience.

### Objective 4: Effective site management, governance, and communication

- (i) The Council, as Trustee of Blacknest Fields Charitable Trust, will ensure the site is well-governed and adequately funded, preparing costed management plans and ensuring that site activities align with the site's longstanding charitable purposes, which remain '*for recreation*' and '*to assist the labouring poor*'.
- (ii) The Council will manage site operations so the site's dual functions are met – for nature recovery (by improving site habitats for wildlife) and people's wellbeing (ensuring people can safely enjoy site facilities and activities).
- (iii) The Council will work in partnership with organisations such as SDNPA, Butterfly Conservation, Forestry England, HCC, and the Wildlife Trusts to develop and fund projects and activities.

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<sup>1</sup> [Pet flea treatments poisoning rivers across England, scientists find | Pesticides](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Deluge of dog pee and poo harming nature reserves, study suggests | Biodiversity](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Ground nesting birds and dogs on reserves | Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust \(hiwwt.org.uk\)](#)

<sup>4</sup> Blacknest Fields' Dark Skies are an important aspect of the site's 'habitat' - the site is in one of the darkest parts of SDNPA Dark Skies Reserve.

## Part II: Operational Management Plan for Blacknest Fields, 2021 - 2025

Section II of this management plan sets out how we plan to achieve the vision and objectives described in Part I.

October 2023 marks the halfway point between the site's public opening (in April 2022), and April 2025, the date by which BPC plans to complete the initial transformation of Blacknest Fields.

Table 1's left hand column summarises main activities undertaken between 4Q 2021 and 1 Oct 2023. Right hand column (in blue) summarises the *additional new* activities planned between 1 October 2023 and 1 April 2025, subject to confirmation of the necessary permissions and funding. The 10 new projects (in blue text) will combine with the continuation of existing initiatives (marked  below), to ensure the site's Vision and Objectives are fully achieved.

<b>Table 1: Main activities and projects</b>	
<b>1 October 2021 to 1 October 2023</b>	<b>1 October 2023 to 1 April 2025</b>
<b>Objective 1: Increase the abundance and diversity of site's flora and fauna</b>	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Made pollinator enhancements, including fencing, to deliver our SDNP 'Beelines' project.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Continue to improve meadow and hedge management; <a href="#">#1 Wildlife re-introductions, such as glow worms; white hairstreak butterfly / elms.</a>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Improve habitat quality. Planted 230 m of new hedges, hedge trees and community orchard; and hedge-laid c.100m of old hedges.	<a href="#">#2 Build wildlife ponds (working with SDNPA).</a>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Continue and improve grazier relationships.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Start to use animals for aftermath grazing.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Establish a survey baseline and recording process, with wildlife records submitted to the Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre (HBIC).	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Continue and extend surveying; train new surveyors; establish butterfly transect; and trial new surveying and monitoring methods.
<b>Stimulate joined-up wildlife corridors across the entire wood pasture alongside Alice Holt forest.</b>	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Develop partnership working with Butterfly Conservation, Bealeswood Common, etc.	<a href="#">#3 Improve collaboration with local landowners, inc. Forestry Commission.</a>
<b>Objective 2: Provide welcoming public space for schools, residents &amp; workers</b>	
<b>Improve people's ability to safely access the site by foot, cycle and horseback.</b>	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Improved Bridleway 41 (Phase I: entrance and muddiest section re-surfaced).	<a href="#">#4 Re-surfacing of Bridleway 41 (Phase II)</a>
	<a href="#">#5 Continue to seek safe off-road cycle paths &amp; rail links (throughout Blacknest-Frith End-Bentley).</a>
<b>Encourage schools, wildlife groups and local people to use the site.</b>	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Created site map and signage, benches, site sculpture and bird feeding station.	<a href="#">#6 Improve bird feeding station in copse;</a>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Developed circular walk to site, from Gravel Hill car park and Bentley train station.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Secured Allen Gallery art exhibition (May 2024) to create public engagement & school curriculum enrichment.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Visits made by Binsted, Bentley and Rowledge schools, plus youth and Duke of Edinburgh volunteer.	<a href="#">#7 Get a rain shelter, and provide sleepers for seating for visiting groups, to encourage school &amp; volunteer group visits.</a>
<b>Objective 3: Active community participation</b>	
<b>Expand our volunteer community.</b>	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Established newsletter and social media presence	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Use wildlife photography to sustain public interest.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Using wildlife photography to engage and sustain public interest (Facebook).	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Deepen volunteers' engagement via wildlife recording (Butterflies, HDM, moths, bats)
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Engaging volunteers via wildlife recording (Butterflies, HDM, moths, bats)	<a href="#"># 9 Diversify range of volunteers (SDNP, Duke of Edinburgh, Hive Helpers, businesses).</a>
<b>Objective 4: Effective site management, funding and governance</b>	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Secured £x funding from y competitive grant competitions. (Grants summarised in Appendix A).	<a href="#"># 10 Secure funding for projects, and ongoing work to rejuvenate copse and hedges, etc.</a>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Site will be Included in 'Open Spaces' return to SDNPA Local Plan by October 2023.	



The following pages in this Section describe in more detail the approach we plan to take to manage the site:

## Objective 1: Increasing the abundance and diversity of the site's flora and fauna

### 1.1 Understanding Blacknest Fields' habitats, micro-habitats and wider connectivity

**Our highest management priority is to increase Blacknest Fields' biodiversity.** The site is fortunate to lie adjacent to Alice Holt forest, and to have retained the 'mosaic' habitat characteristic of wood pastureland - its deciduous copse, its open meadows, scrub patches, deciduous hedges, mature field trees, banks, and areas of marshy grassland. However, at the start of this project, much of the site's vegetation was in poor condition, particularly its hedges.

**Blacknest Fields' wildlife diversity is amplified by the site's position at the woodland edge.** Woodland edge positions - where the forest ecosystem transitions to a grassland ecosystem (ecologists use the term the 'eco-tone') - support higher numbers of species than are found in either pure forest or pure grassland. In 'Venn Diagram' terms, areas of overlap between forests and grasslands have greater species richness than deep forest or open meadows - for example with both woodland and meadowland birds present.

**A top priority for wildlife management at the site is to ensure good management of the mosaic habitat and transitional edges between the open meadows and Alice Holt forest,** as it matters a great deal how these transition zones are managed - it is very beneficial where there are messy edges or a 'rising profile' from the open meadow, through shrubs and scrubby grassland, to the mature tree canopy. Where shrubs form a protective edge around the mature tree canopy, they push wind upwards over the canopy - this assists wildlife in the woodland interior by maintaining more even temperatures in the wood. Edge areas are such highly sensitive areas of biodiversity, and even small changes in their characteristics matter - and can profoundly affect the wildlife living there.

### 1.2 Planned interventions to improve habitats and diversify species

**We want to allow habitats to evolve so that they can support a greater profusion of plants and animals:**

- We plan to maintain and improve the site's open wildflower meadows by good hay meadow management regimes, establishing hemi-parasitic yellow rattle and refuge strips (Mohicans/field edges). We will observe how the vegetation responds (rather than simply adding massive amounts of wildflower seed from the outset).
- We also plan to increase the overall amount of woody biomass onsite, to improve the wildlife potential of each 'mosaic' habitat. For example, by allowing hedges to become wider; addressing the lack of oak tree successors by allowing hedge oaks to become hedge trees; and allowing some open-grown trees and denser scrub patches.
- Blacknest Fields, in Norman times part of the royal hunting forest, is part of a wider wood-pasture landscape and historically would have had shifting mosaics of grazing lawns, open-grown trees, thorny scrub and understorey, and wetland vegetation, prior to the planting of Alice Holt forest in 1812 and the Inclosures of 1857.

**Overall, our approach will be closer to 'rewilding' than to a conventional conservation approach in which a site is tightly managed for a given shortlist of already-present species.** Keeping browsing herbivores on this small site would be problematic (discussed in Section 1.5) so manmade cutting and lopping must replace the natural disturbance generated by herbivore browsing. To keep a dynamic landscape, variation over time is beneficial. We will obviously do our best to improve site conditions for already-present species, especially those that are rare or vulnerable. But rather than micro-managing site habitats solely for already-present species, we are seeking to make habitat improvements likely to attract species not already-present; and possibly to make species re-introductions (e.g. glow worms). Restoring vegetation and creating wildlife ponds will enable significant increases in the range of flora and fauna, especially when we understand the microclimates in each of the habitats. For example, specific butterfly species use different heights in the oak trees; lizards and grass snakes enjoy sunny banks and log piles.

**We anticipate making the site management interventions listed in Figure 6.** Episodic interventions ('patch rewilding') preserve and improve the mosaic of different habitats found in 'wood pasture' (by mimicking the impact of wild herbivores). As our knowledge of site flora and fauna increases, we will be able to finesse improvements in each habitat type, using knowledge of particular species that depend on that habitat and its micro-habitats.

**Figure 6: Planned interventions**

Interventions	Expected benefits
<p><b>Keep meadows mown</b> (per Section 1.5) to support flower-rich grassland and prevent closed forest canopy developing ... but allow small patches of natural oak regeneration. 30% of uncut meadow area when hay cut (rotate patches year-to-year via Mohicans/edges)</p>	<p>Preserve existing meadow habitat and widen range of flowering plants range to support butterfly and other meadow species. Mohicans provide wildlife sanctuary areas when hay is cut. Patch of oak regen in front field will create grazing shade. Path Strip is an opportunity for herbaceous wetland flora.</p>

Improve Path Strip mowing regime, diversify flora	
<b>Nestboxes</b> for owls and kestrels	Re-introducing owls & kestrels beneficial to meadow ecology
<b>Copse:</b> hedge-lay holly at bridleway edge; halo-prune 2 copse trees to create patches that allow sunlight to penetrate to forest floor; increase quantities of honeysuckle; maintain tree ivy. Added stumpery & log piles.	Improve vitality and structure of woodland – enhance ‘rides’ to benefit forest butterflies and woodland flora; adding honeysuckle to benefit white admirals; preserving holly habitat for barbastelles, and ivy for winter nectar supply.
<b>Develop ‘scalloped edges’ of shrubs</b> along copse and Willow Corner	Reduce wind speeds and create warmer habitat areas
<b>Patches of thorny scrub ‘buttresses’</b> and sections of wider hedges up to 7-14m) – (per Section 1.6). Deadwood piles at ground level within these sections also beneficial.	Thorny scrub is one of UK’s most biodiverse habitats. ‘Fortress’ nesting conditions are needed by birds such as yellowhammers and nightingales. Wide hedges – and hedge bottoms – provide forage corridors and habitats for beetles, saproxylics and other inverts, and benefit connectivity (mammals including hedgehogs, voles, shrews).
<b>Rejuvenate old hedges</b> (per Section 1.6) to ensure vigour and growth at hedge bottoms	
<b>Ensure good establishment of new hedges</b> by mulching and gapping-up	Improves wildlife corridors for mammals and bats. Helps diversify species of hedge plants.
<b>Diversify tree species</b> by new planting (elms, alder, crabapples, damsons, walnuts, viburnum) and by allowing selected hedge-plants to grow into hedge trees (in Willow Corner double hedge, back row oaks to serve as hedge trees and front row to be hedge-laid alongside ponds).	Botanical diversity is a good defence against increasing biosecurity risks. Reintroduction of elms will provide opportunity to re-introduce white hairstreak butterfly.
<b>Add wildlife ponds to Willow Corner</b> , with reptile refugia & log piles in surrounding area	
<b>Ephemeral scrapes</b> (Willow Corner & Front Gate)	
<b>Use disturbed soil areas and standing dead trees</b>	For insect habitat, especially to create bee banks

To help create **joined-up wildlife corridors** we will wherever possible work collaboratively with neighbouring land owners, e.g. wildlife opportunities along Forestry England ancient forest bank<sup>5</sup> and along neighbours’ hedges.

### 1.3 Wildlife monitoring

We are working with expert volunteer wildlife recorders to actively monitor the abundance and variety of wildlife present on-site. This is essential to, to make informed plans, and to assess the progress and performance of nature recovery actions taken. Their expertise is producing a good understanding of the flora, birds, reptiles, moths, butterflies, spiders and bats on site; and their networks also kindly give us access to specialist wildlife monitoring equipment (Hedgehog & Dormice footprint tubes, bat SongMeter & echolocators, amphibian mats, moth traps).

**Findings to date:** Monitoring to date (Oct 2023) has already produced a strong baseline of **xxx** wildlife species found at the site, including **28** rare fauna species. Sarah Womersley (Co-ordinator of Friends of Blacknest Fields volunteers) is maintaining structured and reliable wildlife records in an Excel database, and has an extensive collection of wildlife photos which are stored on DropBox. **All wildlife sightings are also being logged on the Living Record app (for flora) and on the i-Record app (for fauna).** Validated records from both ‘apps’ are automatically shared with Hampshire Biological Information Centre (HBIC), so using these apps will gradually build the evidence as to whether Blacknest Fields merits a protected nature designation (such as a SINC or Local Nature Reserve (LNR)).

**Next steps:** We will continue to monitor and record the diversity and abundance of on-site wildlife and to highlight the rare species that may require specific management approaches. We also plan to :

- used fixed point photography to identify changes over time (**AGREE LOCATIONS!**)
- establish transects (2024 - ?specify for butterflies only) - soil survey??
- create our own map using QGIS?

<sup>5</sup> This forest bank marks the ‘new’ boundary of the forest set in 1812.

## 1.4 Adapting to Climate Change

Climate zones across Britain are moving north at the rate of 5km / year (which is hundreds of times faster than after the last ice age) and extreme climate events are also becoming more frequent and intense.

We plan to address the risk of more frequent drought by incorporating water into the landscape so that the site becomes more resilient in hot, dry summers and during heatwaves. It is a particular priority to create wildlife ponds (subject to any planning permission) in Willow Corner.

Vigilance against forest fires is also vital. The use of disposable BBQs and campfires is prohibited at the site. Note that Forestry England has advised that fire 'beaters' should not be re-installed (used to be provided by FCE on footpaths into Alice Holt Forest) as they do not want to encourage untrained firefighters to endanger themselves.

We will use 'Nature-Based Solutions' (as opposed to engineering solutions) to adapt the site for climate change.

For example: to attenuate flooding risks (as we adapt to wetter winters, and more extreme rainfall events), we are adding wildlife ponds; have planted 'thirsty' tree species (willow, alder) on wetter parts of the site; and are allowing scrub and sedge patches to assist the site to absorb more water in wet periods, again reducing flooding risks. Adding ditches and seasonal 'scrapes' will also assist with flood prevention and attenuation. Coppicing also has much to offer for climate adaptation, by ensuring vigorous vegetation with reduced risk of windthrow.

Increasing the site's diversity of fauna and flora is also a powerful climate adaptation strategy. We also plan to create refugia from climate change, recognising that certain species (e.g. bumblebees) are predicted to cope poorly with 2 deg C of global warming, or when spot temperatures exceed 40 deg C. In these conditions, site areas that are naturally cool (such as north-facing slopes) become particularly important.

## 1.5 Meadow Management

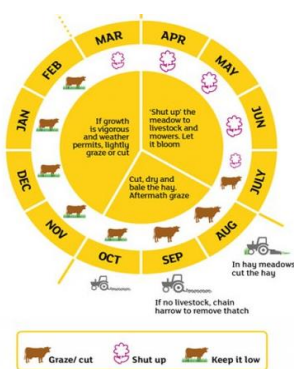
Our overall objective is to increase the abundance and diversity of plants in the meadows and bridleway, to benefit pollinators of all types. In parts of the site not let for horse grazing, we plan to achieve this using traditional hay meadow management methods, i.e. by cutting and baling hay, then using livestock for 'aftermath' grazing. Four important points are:

- (i) the hay must be cut late, after the plants have flowered and set seed, from late July to September;
- (ii) hay must be taken off the meadow to prevent soil nutrient built-up.
- (iii) A short period of 'aftermath' grazing (cattle/ponies/sheep) in stockproof areas helps tread seed into the ground and reduce grass growth over winter, so wild flowers have space to spread and germinate.
- (iv) Ragwort (poisonous to livestock) must be removed before meadows are cut; otherwise hay cannot be sold.

Blacknest is on heavy clay, so our meadow management approach, and choice of species, differs somewhat from traditional chalk-soil flower meadows.

**Reducing fertility.** The site originally had no yellow rattle, a hemi-parasitic species that benefits wildflowers by reducing grass fertility. Some pilot areas of rattle sown in Autumn 22 flowered and set seed, but we will need to make further sowings if we are to permanently establish rattle. Red bartsia (*Odontites vernus*) is another annual root-hemiparasite of short grasslands on low-fertility soils (thrives in similar clay at Bentley Butterfly Meadow), whose seeds requires a period of chilling to break dormancy and therefore must be sown in the autumn. Red bartsia is particularly associated with trampled areas like the edge of tracks and footpaths. 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. Other hemiparasites include Euphrasia (eyebright).

Figure 7: Hay cycle



In greater detail, the annual management cycle for hay meadows looks like this:

**When to cut hay:** Hay is cut from mid-July to September depending on weather and wild flowers present. Alternating between earlier cuts (after mid-July) to later cuts (late August or early Sept) is beneficial. Leaving unmown ('mohican') strips along field edges (e.g. a third of total area) is beneficial, to provide food resources for butterflies/ wild bees. Swap margins/ plots each year to avoid them being swamped with more competitive grasses.

The hay is cut and spread out to dry. It is 'tedded' (turned) to dry the crop. This loosens seeds that remain in the flower heads, particularly yellow rattle, which falls to the ground. When the hay is dry (usually 3-5 days), and once any dew has dried, it is baled and taken away to storage. Small rectangular bales are preferred (easier to handle). In damp weather, haylage may be made instead of hay (usually wrapped in plastic so the grass can ferment slightly).





**The Copse** The deciduous woodland copse is mainly oak and holly, with some hawthorn, honeysuckle and a couple of hazels. We still need to do a full inventory of the trees and understory. In Autumn 2022, spindly hawthorn at far eastern edge of copse was coppiced, as a first step towards restoring it as hedge. In 2023 we will hedge-lay the holly at the copse's bridleway edge, to improve it as a wildlife habitat. We plan to prune/'halo-thin' 2 copse trees to create patches that allow sunlight to penetrate to forest floor; increase quantities of honeysuckle; and maintain tree ivy.. There is abundant deadwood on the copse floor, making it ideal for invertebrates and popular with common lizards.

**New hedges.** A total of 230m of new hedges have so far been planted at the site. The 70m **Jubilee hedge** (planted in Feb 2022 with Tree Council funding) needs to be cared for (a condition of the grant, for at least 3 years), with reports on its progress. **Two further new hedges totalling 160m** - the 'Front track hedge', and the 'Willow Corner' hedge - were planted in Autumn 2022 using whips supplied by SDNP 'Trees for the Downs' funding.

**Rejuvenating old hedges.** We will select, annually, c.3% of the **site's total xxx m** of established hedges for 'rejuvenation' by hedge-laying or coppicing: manual hedge-laying and 'gapping up' will improve connectivity; and where there are hedge line trees, these will generally be kept to preserve habitat. SDNP volunteer work parties laid the very poor condition hedges on 'Seven Oaks' hedge; and a section of hawthorn hedge along long hedge leading to Binsted Road was hedge-laid using CPRE Hedge Fund funding in Feb 2023. Hollies along bridleway will be hedge-laid in Autumn 2023, to thicken boundary vegetation.

**Routine management of existing hedges (and hedge-line trees) will be managed in a three-year rotation, by:**

(a) an annual light trim of rejuvenated hedges (alternating between first year cutting one side and top, and second year cutting the other side), allowing the hedge to become approx. 10cm taller and fatter each year; and  
(b) 'letting up' sections of hedges which are to be 'laid' (for two years prior to the hedge-laying).

Rejuvenated hedges will be allowed to flower (they flower on 2<sup>nd</sup> year wood) and set fruit (to support wildlife). The goal is for all hedges to achieve a healthy 'A-shape' (hedge base wider than its top), with at least 2' at hedge bottom un-flailed to ensure the best habitat for wildlife.

**Patches of blackthorn scrub** are being allowed to grow in some designated meadow areas, to provide wildlife 'stepping stones' and young blackthorn shoots for hairstreak butterflies (managed in a 3-year rotation.) Blackthorn patches must be a tractor's width away from boundary hedges, so tractor tyres cutting hedges aren't puncture.

**Roadside Oak and hedge gap** We were turned down by HCC for County Council-planted oaks/ elms. [Request highway tree planting | Hampshire County Council \(hants.gov.uk\)](#)

**A qualified tree surgeon** undertakes an annual safety inspection, and will carry out any major tree work, plus give information to guide work undertaken by volunteer work parties undertaking more minor tree works.

**A hedging contractor** is contracted to undertake the mechanical cutting of hedges between 1 Sept and 28 February - hedges, by law, cannot be cut from 1 Mar until 31 Aug (bird nesting season). Getting work done in September is preferable, as the site is less likely to be waterlogged. In Autumn 2023, mechanical hedge cutting will include clearing Path Strip, which have been neglected due to tractor access being blocked by blackthorn scrub.

The **Council should not cut the neighbour's bridleway hedge** (on left when looking at site from Blacknest Road), which belongs to, and is managed by, the neighbouring land owner. However, in 'sympathy' with the site's aims, owner has kindly agreed to let several trees growing in the hedge develop into hedge-line trees. Owner also gave permission (Feb 2023) for BPC to trim road facing hedge on her land to improve sightlines for horses exiting our site.

**The hedge on Corner Field side of Path Strip** is cut by Longfield's contractor (by tractor reaching over from Corner Field). (Graziers' pre-2022 responsibilities included cutting all Path Strip hedges.) The Corner Field hedge does not need cutting in Autumn23/Spring24, as it was cut in Autumn 2022.

**Biosecurity.** To minimise the risk of introducing or spreading harmful pests and diseases, and to protect the adjacent Alice Holt Forest, site Contractors are strongly encouraged to take the following biosecurity measures:

- 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.

## 1.7 Ponds and wetlands

**Aspirations for wildlife ponds.** The introduction of wildlife ponds to the site is one of its core ambitions, both to boost wildlife and to attenuate the reduce the risk of local flooding. We're seeking permissions and funding to build a wildlife pond (or series of ponds and ephemeral scrapes) in Willow Corner. By the end of 2023 we hope to have firm funding commitments from SDNPA and EHDC s106 bid to enable the pond to be built in Spring 2024.

There is no pond or body of water at the Fields, or their immediate vicinity, but there is a water source. Ephemeral, natural springs arise in the adjacent Alice Holt forest and cross the bridleway onto Blacknest Fields, travelling down



the gully through the north-eastern edge of the Copse, into Willow Corner and down Back Field (coloured in blue in Figure 9A). The water gully turns into existing drainage ditches across the field opposite 'Jolly Farmer' crossroads, eventually joining a tributary of the River Slea.

We plan to capture water from the ephemeral stream and divert it into two ponds and a scrape in 'Willow Corner', the low-lying field at the north-east of the site. Its edge has a hedge gully that becomes a stream in wet weather, and areas at this side of the field often retain ephemeral pools of water in the winter months.

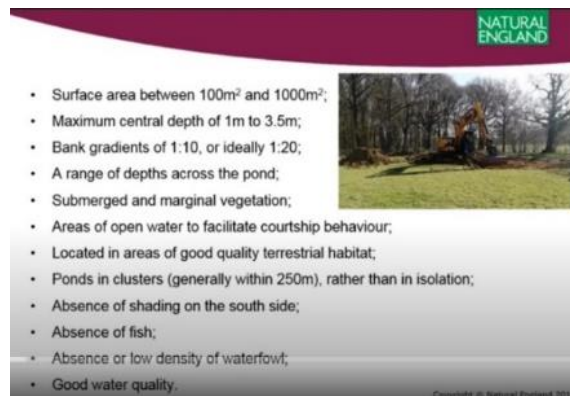
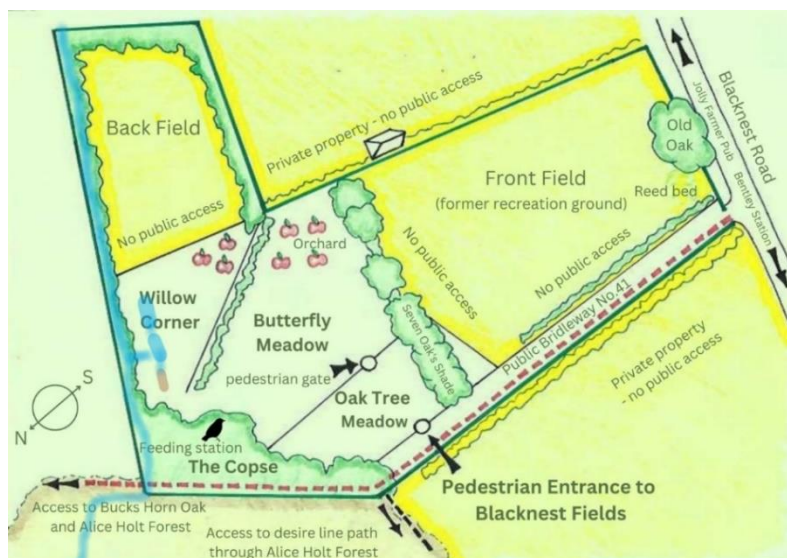


Figure 9A: Current site configuration and proposed pond location

Fig 9B: Pond specification (Great Crested Newts)

We had great support from Hampshire's Newt Conservation Partnership Project Officer ([www.newtpartnership.org.uk](http://www.newtpartnership.org.uk)). Its NaturalEngland-funded scheme would have provided the best source of pond funding: it was unfortunate that we could not satisfy its requirement to find existing Great-Crested Newts within 0.5km of the new pond site.

However, SDNPA is an excellent alternative source of funding for the majority of the project, requiring co-funding of £2,000 which BPC is seeking to secure through EHDC s106 bid. SDNP has provided expert guidance on pond design and planning aspects: SDNP's pond consultant Clive Leek in Dec 2022 confirmed the most appropriate location for ponds to be in 'Willow Corner'. Surveying was completed in a further site visit, in Sept 2023. Plans involve:

- i) Creating 2 ponds + 1 scrape ( ponds between 5/6m diameter and 3/ 4 m diameter). Ponds would be sculpted, with shelves, ledges etc and make them more random in shape to make them look natural. SDNP advises it is best to have a couple of ponds, to provide greater floodwater attenuation, as well as to ensure a more natural-looking wetland feature. At this point we anticipate the pond specification will be broadly similar to (but bigger than) Natural England's guidance for Great Crested Newt ponds, shown in Figure 9B:
- ii) Including shallow swale/ ditch connectivity between the ponds and scrape. Most biodiversity is found at the shallower depths, so this ephemeral wetland area is really important.
- iii) A liner is needed, as the clay of the site cracks in summer and would not sustain a year-round water supply. Bentonite powder is the suggested liner to use. This is less costly than heavy artificial liners and avoids putting plastic into the environment. Bentonite swells and forms a watertight seal that can be repaired in the future so avoids the need to remake ponds if liners fail.
- iv) We are seeking confirmation that the spoil created by excavating the ponds can be used onsite. SDNP expects it will be possible to spread most of the excavated soil on-site, and re-landscape the area.
- v) The pond edge will be outside the drip of adjacent oak trees - this is over 10' from the oak trunks and therefore digging will not disturb the roots of these large oaks.

**Bird watching screen** – if funding can be found we will add a woven willow screen for birdwatchers at pond edge.

## Objective 2: A safe, welcoming public space for local residents and workers

### 2.1 Welcome

**Our aim** is to create a welcoming site that makes people aware they're in a special, cared-for place. Our owl logo and signage is designed to reflect this ethos. Blacknest Fields' wildlife, and the site's tranquillity, are particularly valued by walkers, wildlife enthusiasts and photographers; and by people seeking to recharge their batteries or manage their mental health. It is also an ideal place for children to play, let off steam and enjoy simply being close to nature, in a simple, uncommercialised setting.

Different rules apply to different parts of the site, and site signage provides a site plan and clarifies these rules:

- **Areas for public recreation** (The Bridleway, the Oak Tree Meadow) welcome dogs on leads and are open year-round. We have installed in Oak Tree Meadow a sculpture, site map and bench.
- **Wildlife-sensitive areas** (The Copse, the Butterfly Meadow and Willow Corner) are open to the public, but not to dogs. We plan to install a communal seating area (from sleepers) for volunteer group events. On the wildlife 'features' (e.g. stumpery) we will include explanatory signage /interpretation.
- **Areas rented for equine grazing** (the Front Field, the Back Field and the Path Strip) are not open to the public. The site plan at the Oak Tree Meadow entrance should ideally be enhanced: the public is sometimes unclear as to whether they are welcome to enter the site; we also want to include additional information about the site history and QR codes for links to circular map and wildlife information. Funding for enhanced signage was approved in principle by Ramblers Charity, but our delays in confirming interpretation board details (pending new pond), mean we need to re-submit this grant application in 2023-4 or find alternative funding.

### 2.2 Interpretation of heritage

In 2024, we plan to install an interpretation board to briefly explain the site's history, including: (i) local area's extensive production of Roman pottery; (ii) Norman times role as royal hunting forest; (iii) 1815 oak replanting for royal Navy; (iv) Victorian role as the parish recreation ground (before Binsted Rec existed), with cricket pitch and footpath leading to the now-closed Cricketers pub, in an era when Blacknest was a poor but busy agricultural community, using water supplied from Alice Holt springs to village pump; and (v) WWII timber exports for Iran's railways, and charcoal manufactured for ammunition and flares.

Longer-term, there could potentially be scope to include a Roman pottery interpretation display of some type.

### 2.3 Improving Access

**We are addressing the site's rather poor access**, for pedestrians, cyclists, horse riders and cars, as follows:

- Bridleway 41** surface was in poor condition (waterlogging and impassable mud - a particular barrier to Bucks Horn Oak residents, 1 mile away). The two worst points were resolved in Dec2022: (i) Blacknest Road entrance (without changing Blacknest Road entrance configuration<sup>8</sup>); and (ii) Bridleway valley (at far end of our site), using SDNPA s106 funds and HCC grant. Contractor for this work also added crushed aggregate to strengthen the bridleway track. Further (Phase II) resurfacing will be carried out in October 2023, on bridleway behind copse, to prevent mud in wet weather. Further top-dressing on the bridleway track will be carried out if s106 funding bid is successful.
- Access by car/minibus is limited** with a lack of carparking or turning area onsite. We wanted to create 15m<sup>2</sup> onsite turning area and 2nd, locked gate to restrict inner site access (cost c.£25K -£30K) so school minibuses can turn and exit the site front-first in all weathers. HOWEVER, Hampshire Highways would have required £10K desk-based review by qualified transport consultant before it would consider changes to existing entrance configuration. BPC does not wish to fund transport consultant review (for which CIL funding cannot be used). We are therefore not progressing developing a turning area. We permit parking on Oak Tree Meadow at community events in summertime. Otherwise, vehicle access is limited to maintenance contractors and wildlife volunteers.
- Foot/cycle/horse access to Blacknest Road bridleway entrance is perilous**, due to high traffic speeds and the absence of safe pavements on C98 Blacknest Road. Hence, even from the nearby Jolly Farmer pub and bus stop, the site cannot be safely accessed by pedestrians. We continue to feed these concerns into reviews of road safety concerns in Blacknest and Frith End. Volunteers in Summer 2023 trimmed hedge on RHS exit onto Blacknest Rd, to improve sight lines for horse riders (approval from neighbouring site to carry this out.)

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<sup>8</sup> Note: the gate width was increased to enable emergency vehicles to access the site and the gateway 'refuge' length was slightly elongated, to prevent contractors' tractors and school minibuses from protruding into the road while opening the entrance gate.

- (iv) **All-ability access.** The site, attractive in summer, can be wet and muddy in winter. We must work with this limitation. Use of normal wheelchairs is impossible (ground is rutted, waterlogged and muddy): but all-terrain wheelchairs are welcome; a sign at site entrance highlights BPC will arrange access on request.

The **Binsted Road gate entrance is only for maintenance use and grazier access**; there is no public Right of Way. This track also gets muddy and is passable only in dry summer weather. A large patch of blackthorn that was blocking the track was cleared by volunteers (Sept 2023) to enable tractor access for Autumn 2023 hedge-cutting.

## 2.4 Butterfly walk and potential for 3-mile 'insect superhighway' /wildlife connectivity

**Bridleway 41 links to Alice Holt Forest's extensive network of tracks/firebreaks** (c.200 m east of Blacknest Fields), which provides a car-free walking route to Bentley Station Butterfly Meadow and Gravel Hill carpark. [Also, at the edge of Blacknest Fields, is a 'desire-line' path into Alice Holt Forest (this is not an approved forest path as Forestry England carries out no safety checks on it.)] Few people are aware of these routes.

**Working with Butterfly Conservation, Blacknest Field volunteers have developed** a 4-mile circular 'butterfly' walk, which was inaugurated during 2023 Alton Walking Festival. This starts at Gravel Hill carpark (or Bentley station), passes through Bentley Butterfly reserve, through Lodge Inclosure, to Blacknest Fields and back, per Fig 10. Leaflet describing route is available on parish council website and Bentley Station Community Rail partnership is also interested in promoting this from station. Forestry England would not give its approval to waymarking this route in the forest. **We intend to use a QR code to provide a workaround.**



Figure 10: Alice Holt tracks from site to Butterfly Meadow **replace: Circular walk route**

## 2.5 Safety

**We aim to provide a safe space** that encourages quiet public enjoyment of the site (e.g. picnics or wildlife watching.) We have taken the following actions to help ensure safety for staff, contractors and visitors:

- (i) **'What Three Words' site locations** are included on site interpretation boards in case visitors get lost or need to call for emergency help from the site. The site has no electricity, so it's not feasible to install a defibrillator, but we plan to advertise the nearby new defibrillator recently installed at Blacknest Industrial Estate.
- (ii) **Signage on bridleway warns dog walkers** to put their dogs on the lead when approaching Blacknest Rd exit.
- (iii) **Ticks:** Posters are displayed to remind summer visitors to be 'tick aware', given high local deer populations, and 'tick awareness' leaflets are made available at community events.
- (iv) **A 'lone working policy'** is in place to help safeguard staff, Councillors, volunteers and contractors in the event that a medical emergency should arise on-site. This involves such 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 at the site; and (iii) telephoning said friend on leaving the site (without such call, the friend must investigate as an emergency.)
- (v) **Risk assessments** are carried out before each event, with copies of risk assessments kept at Council office.
- (vi) **First Aid at events.** The Council provides first aid bag for community events and makes best efforts to ensure a qualified first aider is on-site at community events.
- (vii) **Rusty wirework:** Volunteers have removed most rusty barbed wire / posts with rusty nails. Work continuing.
- (viii) **Electric fences:** Horse-grazing tenants are reminded in their contracts that they must display warning signs when electric fences are being used. The Council has provided these signs – these legally must be hung at 20m intervals along fence perimeter. The electric fence used alongside the bridleway has been moved back so it now meets the regulatory requirement for this to be set at least 1m from the bridleway.
- (ix) **The tree canopy along bridleway** needs to be raised, to meet the legal requirement to ensure horse-riders have at least 16' headroom and a path width of at least 3m (further work on this is needed, but work also needs to be sensitive to needs of roosting barbastelle bats which are known to use this canopied bridleway passageway).
- (x) **Blacknest Fields is in a low crime area**, so there is no particular reason for site users to feel unsafe, other than due to the risk of road traffic accidents due to the absence of pavements / cycle lanes on the Blacknest Road.



## Objective 3: Active community involvement

### 3.1 Building community involvement in site projects and social events

We aim to build a volunteer community that actively supports the site and is involved in site projects, as well as holding social events where local people simply enjoy the site and develop their sense of community connection. The overall objective is for Blacknest Fields to be a well-loved public space for the local community (not a tourist ‘hotspot’.) Binsted is a highly dispersed parish, but 2011 Census figures showed that 55% of Binsted’s residents live within a two-mile radius of the site and 30% of Binsted Parish’s population live within a one mile radius, with a further c.100 people also working at the Blacknest Industrial Estate (directly opposite Blacknest Fields).

**We are building the new user community from scratch too.** For many decades there was no public use of this site other than a few local bridleway users, walking or exercising dogs/horses. Relatively few of the local residents who were involved in the Council’s ‘Blacknest Fields Working Group’ (that led to 2021 decision not to sell the site) volunteer at the site, but significant numbers of new volunteers are becoming involved (see below).

**The ‘Friends of Blacknest Fields’ group**, established in July 2022, is widening community engagement. Sarah Womersley, who leads volunteer co-ordination and communications to the ‘Friends of Blacknest Fields’ group, is working with the Council to help develop community involvement. [Blacknest Fields’ Community FaceBook page](#) enables people to find out how to visit the site, share wildlife sightings and get involved in volunteer work parties and community events. Quarterly ‘Friends of Blacknest Fields’ newsletters are jointly written by Council and Friends of Blacknest Fields group and emailed from the email [BNF@binstedparishcouncil.org.uk](mailto:BNF@binstedparishcouncil.org.uk). The Council leads on managing GDPR permissions for newsletter, and on writing articles for parish magazine and the Council’s website.

### 3.2 Engaging with wildlife enthusiasts

**We have particularly focused on encouraging people knowledgeable about wildlife**, particularly local volunteer wildlife recorders, to record the flora and fauna present, and to develop wildlife features on-site (e.g. log piles, stumpery, birdwatching screen, kestrel box, swift tower.) We want to extend the range of wildlife groups we are in contact with, to include experts in trees and beetles. This involvement of volunteer wildlife experts provides great opportunities for children and adults of all ages to learn new skills, and some volunteers are being trained as wildlife recorders. Small-scale community events held with wildlife experts (e.g. moth trapping) are providing excellent opportunities to engage with local residents (and schools) interested in local wildlife, and to build enthusiasm for nature recovery at the site and the restoration of its wildflower meadows, etc.

**We have built up a small community ‘kit’ for educational wildlife activities;** Quadrant, ID charts, butterfly net, specimen jars, first aid kit, etc. This is stored in the Council’s ‘Community Cupboard’ at Binsted Sports Pavilion.

**We intermittently share information with Butterfly Conservation** which manages Bentley Station Butterfly Meadow (for example, to develop the Butterfly walk mentioned in Section 2.4.)

### 3.3 Community participation and volunteering

We are working to further widen community participation, to help deliver the volunteer-led projects in Figure 11. Collaboration with local wildlife groups is especially important. We also actively encourage the involvement of Duke of Edinburgh participants and corporate volunteering in work parties.

Through SDNP’s rangers, we have had great support from SDNP Conservation Volunteers, and hope to maintain this in the future. (There is an SDNP programme into which bids for SDNP volunteers can be made – see [Apply SCF - SDNPA](#) but we have arranged directly through the rangers.)

Figure 11: Volunteer-led projects				
		Start	Finish	Comments
Wildlife surveying	Ongoing - individually and through group events	Baseline	Ongoing	
Work parties	Log piles; hedge lay, plant, gap-up; owl & bat boxes ...	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing
Hive Helpers Youth	Built a stumpery in copse in Feb 2023, as stag beetle habitat.			
SDNP Volunteers	Laid Seven Oaks’ hedge line in Feb 2023; mulched it Sept 23.	Feb 23	Ongoing	

#### Other Completed events and active Projects

- We inaugurated our new ‘butterfly walk’ in May 2023 Alton Walking Festival and organised a further community walk in July 2023. Continuing to collaborate with Butterfly Conservation.
- Midsummer Picnic Jun 2022, Foraging Walk, Meadows Open Day Jul 2023 (SDNP rangers, Hive Helpers, ANHS).
- Rowledge & Binsted primary school children visited, Jun 2023. Bentley primary invited to visit in 2023-4 year.
- The Allen Gallery in Alton has agreed to stage an art exhibition in summer 2024, featuring Blacknest Fields’ wildlife through the work of wildlife photographer Alex Potts and ceramicist Bridget Maklin.

## Future Volunteer Projects

- We want to introduce further young people to the site, by involving young volunteers studying for Duke of Edinburgh awards (and if possible through YoungACAN, Alton Climate Action Network's youth wing.)
- We are developing new sources of adult volunteers, for example: local business 'Ground&Water' consultants will undertake a day of volunteering in Nov 2023. Other potential future sources of volunteers include 'Hampshire Monday Group' (Petersfield based), 'Hampshire conservation volunteers' <https://www.hcv.org.uk/>, Men's Sheds (Liss), Jalsa Salana community. We also have contact details of Selborne Landscape Partnership volunteer corps.
- We want to extend the site's contribution to mental health. Practitioners working with excluded students expressed interest in using the site as a space in which to hold restorative one-to-one therapy sessions.
- We want to continue to develop 'Creative Responses' to Blacknest's wildlife.
- We intend to engage with local businesses and landowners as part of our aspiration for a 3-mile 'pollinator super-highway' in 'Get Blacknest Buzzing' project, and will, through this, raise awareness of volunteer opportunities.

**The community was interested in hosting Stargazing events** at Blacknest Fields and/or Binsted Recreation Ground. We discussed this idea (including borrowing the necessary astronomical equipment) with SDNPA Dark Skies Ranger and Hampshire Astronomical Society (Clanfield) but neither can assist such events due to a lack of volunteers in local astronomical groups. Note: Stargazing would be in late autumn /early spring (to ensure event timing is not too late).

## Objective 4: A well-managed site with effective Governance and Communication

### 4.1 Governance and Implementation of Management Plan

**The Council manages the site on behalf of the Charitable Trust**, whose remit includes ensuring the site is adequately funded. This Plan and the site's finances are also fully reviewed by the full Council team, each January; and discussed periodically, as needed during the year. Day-to-day operational management of the site is carried out by the Clerk and Council's lead for Blacknest Fields (currently the Council Chair), in co-operation with the volunteers in the Friends of Blacknest Fields who assist the organisation of work parties and events, and lead on wildlife recording, the organisation of volunteers, and the operation of the Blacknest Fields Community Facebook page.

**In general, funding for site improvements will come from grant applications;** and income from equine grazing and s106/CIL funding will cover fund basic site maintenance (hedging, etc) plus bridleway maintenance. To date, **13** grants have been secured with a total value of over **£30,000**, as listed in Appendix A. Further bids are in progress, and sources of further funding are also identified, to meet this Plan's remaining aspirations outlined in this Plan.

**Blacknest Fields' inclusion as one of SDNPA's Sites4Nature** has already assisted the Council to access expert advice and ranger-led volunteer parties, plus funding through 'Trees for the Downs' scheme. (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 (incl. nature reserves, woods, ponds, heaths and road verges.))

**Ambitious national government policy ambitions for nature recovery** (enacted by 2021 Environment Act) have yet to be matched by funding. Funding from Biodiversity Net Gain for small sites like ours is by no means certain. However, the formation of the national Nature Recovery Network is underway, through 50 county-based Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) – Hampshire CC has the lead for Hampshire's LNRS. Funding will have to follow if the government is to meet its target to, by 2042, have created or restored 500,000 hectares of additional wildlife-rich habitat outside of protected sites (i.e. c.10,000 hectares per county.)

### 4.2 Managing site operations

(i) **Role of Parish Council** It is the responsibility of parish council's Finance Committee (collaborating with Blacknest Fields volunteers) *"to review contracts with 3<sup>rd</sup> parties, including contracts for maintenance, use of Council facilities, and works contracts."*

(ii) **Legal considerations** - Figure 12 summarises legal considerations.

#### Figure 12: Legal considerations

- 1) The law prohibits hedge cutting from 1 March until 31 August, during bird-nesting season.
- 2) [Schedule 1 birds](#) have extra legal protection, under 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act, with unlimited fines and up to 6 months in prison, for anyone found disturbing these birds species, intentionally or by not taking enough care.
- 3) [A licence from Natural England](#) is needed to handle birds at close quarters (e.g. for ringing them).
- 4) When horses are being grazed, and electric fences used, warning signs are required along the fence perimeter.
- 5) Bats' presence is confirmed, so any arboricultural work requires a dawn or dusk survey to identify if bats are present before work is undertaken. Individual trees in which bats are found roosting, or the whole woodland, are protected by

law. 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.)

- (iii) **Site security:** Anti-Social Behaviour, including fly-tipping, is a risk at all unsupervised areas of public land in rural areas. We aim NOT to significantly alter the appearance of the Blacknest Road site entrance appearance and are very circumspect about how the site is promoted. Removal of Blacknest Road kissing gate improved bridleway access for horse riders and cyclists - and enabled site security to be improved, as entrance gate can now be locked (historically was left unlocked to enable horse access). Gates to Oak Tree Meadow and Blacknest Road have inverted hinges to increase site security. We will keep in review whether CCTV or lockable ground post barrier may also be needed at site entrance. The gap in the roadside hedge could potentially allow unwanted site access - however the gap is well camouflaged by brambles cut in the shape of the hedge.
- (xi) **Managing contractors** Parish Clerk manages the calendar for routine maintenance tasks involved in managing the meadows, woodland and hedges, and ensures the site is safe and clean, as outlined in Figure 13. Binsted's volunteer Rights of Way team helps the council to keep the bridleway in good order. HCC owns (and is responsible for maintaining) the fingerpost at the site entrance.

**Figure 13: Calendar of Routine Management Tasks (managed by Parish Clerk)**

	Task	Who?
January	Check site safety/security/gates/fences are in good condition	Clerk
February		
March		
April	Confirm contractors for mowing, hay making & aftermath grazing	Clerk
May- July	Check site safety/security/gates/fences are in good condition Cut paths through meadow grass;keep track grass and picnic area grass short	Clerk Volunteer Alan M
August	Cut meadows after wildflowers set seed & remove hay	** 2023 Ed Dale
September	Aftermath grazing (when parts of site will be closed to public) Check site safety/security/gates/fences/trees are in good condition	From 2024, tba Clerk
October	Hedge contractor to cut hedges Tree surgeon safety check & minimal intervention	Ed Dale TBAt

\*in 2022, starred items were done by volunteers. \*\* in 2022, haymaking was done by Ben Macdonald.

- (iv) **Grazing and Access contracts** Annual grazing contracts are reviewed each summer, with 21 Sept renewal date. Access to grazing in Back Field ('Allotment Gardens') is from Binsted Road gate & Path Strip; access to Front Field ('Recreation Field') is from Blacknest Road entrance & bridleway gate. A new temporary access Agreement gives Longfield residents access from Longfield to Corner field until Jun 2024 or sale of their property.
- (v) **Environmental Impacts:** Site management should align with [the Council's Climate Action Plan](#) and positively impact the environment. All Council's procurement choices aim to minimise energy, resource consumption and waste. No chemicals are to be used at Blacknest Fields, either to control pests or as fertilisers; and no peat is used at the site. When mulch is needed (e.g. for tree planting), peat-free planting media will be used. Almost zero waste is generated from site operations: deadwood arisings are used in 'dead hedges' or chipped as mulch.
- (vi) **Litter and Waste Management:** Visitor numbers are currently low, so it's unnecessary to provide litter bins at the site. This will be kept in review. Periodic litter checks of the areas open to public access will be made, and any problems reported to the Clerk. If necessary, the Parish Lengthsman can be asked to tidy litter from the site.
- (vii) **Site Services:** The site has no mains water or electricity supply. Water for horse grazing tenants historically supplied from neighbouring houses' /hosepipes. A water bowser was acquired (Summer 2022) to provide water on-site (for Jubilee hedge survival; and for livestock. Council may investigate sources of funds to install mains water (as a general improvement and to enable visiting groups, such as school parties, to wash hands).

### 4.3 Partnership working

The Council has good relationships with rangers and ecologists at organisations including Alton Natural History Society, SDNPA, Butterfly Conservation, HCC Countryside Service/Nature Recovery team, and the Wildlife Trusts, all of whom are a valuable source of advice for wildlife and practical land management advice. We have strong relationships with SDNP, ANHS, HCC and Butterfly Conservation.

We want to improve partnership working with Forestry England, which has so far been uninterested in collaboration. Across the Surrey border, Surrey Hills AONB will be expanded to include Dockenfield area -we are working via Bealeswood Common wildlife recorders to explore associated opportunities.



Appendix A - Funding obtained to date					
		Description	Start	Finish	Comments
<b>SDNP Beelines Grant 'Get Blacknest Buzzing' project</b>	<b>£4995</b>	3year project to expand and diversify the site's flora, benefiting pollinators, by improving site infrastructure and better meadow management. Project focuses on both meadows and hedges. Exploring local green hay exchanges and creation of a 3-mile 'insect superhighway' along Buglife's aspirational B-line (Bentley to Dockenfield).	2022	2025	Match funding of £5000 from various sources (inc. Dist & Cty Cllrs, HCC & volunteers).
<b>HCC Countryside Access Parish Partnership Jan2023</b>	<b>£4,800</b>	Repair bridleway 41 – Phase I - Entrance & East section	Dec 2022	Dec 2022	
<b>S106 SDNP transport</b>	<b>£12,404</b>	Repair bridleway 41 (Phase I)	Dec 2022	Dec 2022	
<b>Tree Council 'Branching Out' grant</b>	<b>£995</b>	Feb 2022, funded planting stock, tree protectors and mulch for 70m Jubilee hedge (planted by volunteers.)			Report on hedge for at least 3 years.
<b>Waitrose Community grant (John Lewis' 'Community Matters')</b>	£1,000	Funded fruit trees and protective fencing for community orchard, planted in the Willow Corner and Butterfly Field.	Autumn 2022		
<b>SDNP Trees4Downs</b>	approx value £1,375	Supplied 735 hedge whips & 40 field trees, with protectors. Volunteers planted 160m new hedges ('Front Field' & 'Willow Corner').	Autumn 2022		
<b>County Cllr grant</b>	£950	Water bowser	July 2022		
<b>District Cllr grant</b>	£995	Educational outreach (Beelines co-funding)	July 2022		
<b>District Cllr grant</b>	£1000	Oak slab bench	July 2022		
<b>CPRE 'Hedge Fund' 2022</b>	<b>£600</b>	Demo hedge-laying & hedge-laying tools	Feb 2023		
<b>Binsted Fete 2022</b>	£400	Site sculpture of owl 'totem pole'	Aug 2022		
<b>HCC Countryside Access Parish Partnership Oct 2023</b>	£5,000	Resurfacing Bridleway 41 (Phase II)	Oct 2023		
<b>Potential future grants</b>					
<b>SDNP Pounds4 Ponds</b>	<b>£6K?</b>	<b>Wildlife pond #1</b>			
<b>s106 EHDC Biodiversity</b>	<b>£7K?</b>	<b>Co-Fund Pond, Bird Hide, Treework, Fencing</b>			<b>Per 2.3(i)</b>
<b>Ramblers Charity</b>	<b>£1.5K?</b>	<b>Interpretation board</b>	<b>Summer 24</b>		
<b>CPRE 'Hedge Fund' 2023</b>	<b>£260?</b>	<b>Demo hedge-laying &amp; hedge-laying tools</b>	<b>Feb 2023</b>		

**Sleepers**, to form small platform for volunteer groups' briefings

**Aspiration for mains water supply** (currently horse grazing tenants rely on hosepipes from adjacent properties.)

## Appendix B: Completed Work and Projects by Quarter

Activity	Item	Who	'21	2022			
			Q4	Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4
Survey	Flora etc	V	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Hedge	V	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				
	Reptiles	PG			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Dormice	V					
	Moths	MA			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Bats	SL	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Meadow	Hay	C		T		H	
	A'math						
	Fencing	C				<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	+ Flora	V					<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Trees	Dead wood	C	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Copse	C					<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Orchard	V					<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Alder & Elm						
Hedges	Fencing	C		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Prep	C					<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Planting	V		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Gap up	V		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			
	H-lay	C					
	H-cut	C		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> A			B
Habitat	Logpiles	V				<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	S-Stones						
	Batboxes	V					
	Birdboxes	V					
Pond #1	Plan	C					<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Build	C					
	Enclose?	V					
Bridle way 41	Patching	C					<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Canopy	C					
	H-layg	C					
Signage	Signs	C					<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	B'flyWalk	C					
Equip't	Benches	V,C			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Sculpture	C					<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Screen	C					
Comms	A Review	V					
	N'letters	V					<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Events	Var			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

## Appendix B: Planned Work and Projects by Quarter

Activity	Item	Who	2023				2024				2025				Notes
			Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
Survey	Flora etc	V	☑												
	Hedge	V													
	Reptiles	PG			☑										
	Dormice	V			☑										
	Moths	MA	☑	☑	☑										
	Bats	SBG			☑	☑									
Meadow	Hay	C			☑										
	A'math	?				?									
	Fencing	C				?									
	+ Flora	V													
Trees	Dead wood	C													
	Copse	C													
	Orchard	V													
	Alder & Elm		☑ A		E										
Hedges	Fencing	C													
	Prep	C													
	Planting	V													
	Gap up	V	☑		☑										
	H-lay	C	☑				?								
	H-cut	C				C				D				A	
Habitat	Logpiles	V													
	S-Stones														
	Batboxes	V	☑												
	Birdboxes	V	☑												
Pond #1	Plan	C	☑	☑	☑										
	Build	C													
	Enclose?	V													
Bridle way 41	Resurface	C				☑									
	Canopy	C													
	H-layg	C													
Signage	Signs	C													
	B'flyWalks	C		☑	☑										
Equip't	Benches	V,C													
	Sculpture	C													
	Screen	C				?									
Comms	A Review	V	☑				2				3				
	N'letters	V	☑	3	4	...									
	Events	Var	☑												