Report for Bentley Parish Council

Bentley Old Recreation Ground: Community Green Space Proposal

Date: March 2026
Status: For Council Consideration

Contents



1. Executive Summary

The "Old Rec" is a historic four-acre site currently unused. Following a public consultation that engaged over 220 residents, a clear majority (78.7%) expressed support or openness to repurposing the land for community and nature-focused use.

A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) has identified a range of existing habitats on the site, including modified grassland, native hedgerows with trees, wet ditches and two small ponds. The appraisal also found the site to have suitability for a wide range of protected and notable species, including bats, badger, hazel dormouse, breeding birds, reptiles, great crested newt, hedgehog and notable invertebrates. This reinforces the need for any future proposals to be phased, sensitive and led by ecological evidence.

This proposal outlines a phased, low-impact vision for a community orchard, meadow restoration, and a wildlife pond. The financial model relies heavily on in-kind professional support, volunteers and community fundraising, and grant funding to ensure long-term sustainability without placing an undue burden on parish resources.

See Appendix A for a map of the site.

2. Background and Purpose

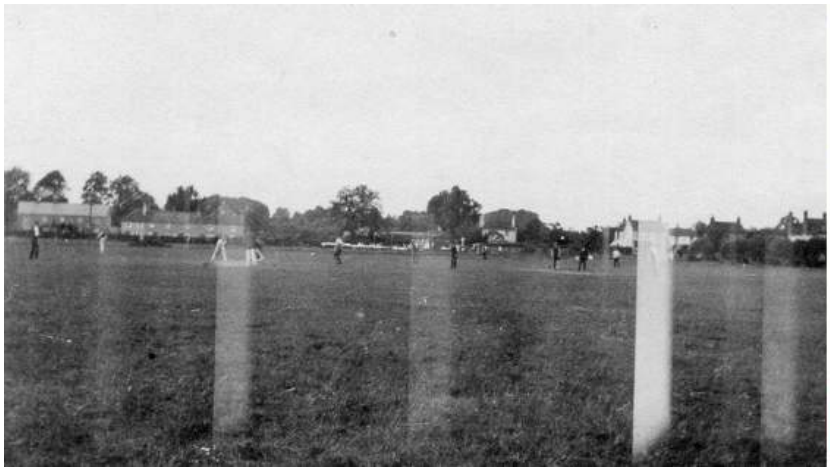
Brief History of the Old Rec

The land now known as the Old Recreation Ground forms part of what was historically Bentley Green, originally “waste” land belonging to the Bishop of Winchester as Lord of the Manor. Although described as unproductive, villagers held common rights over the land, primarily for grazing livestock.

These arrangements changed following the Bentley Enclosure Act of 1857, which redistributed areas of common land. A four-acre section (numbered 102 on the enclosure map) was awarded to:

> **“the Churchwardens and Overseers of the Poor of the said Parish of Bentley… to be held by them and their successors in trust as a place for exercise and recreation for the Inhabitants of the said Parish and Neighbourhood”.**

The award specified that the land was to be used for recreation and was not to be grazed by cattle or swine, only by sheep. This formalised its purpose as a space for community use.



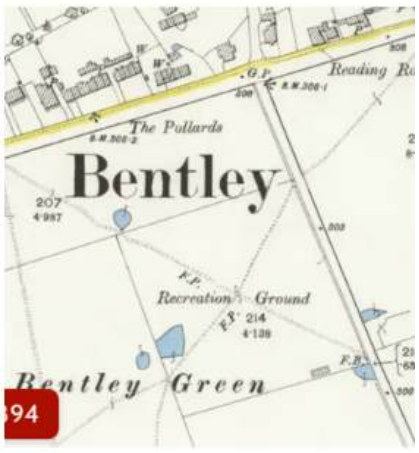


Photo credit: Ruth Bright

By 1894, footpaths crossed the Old Recreation Ground and ponds were present on the western boundary and south-eastern corner. The ground was used as a cricket pitch and hosted events such as the village Flower Show. Armistice Day celebrations were also held nearby, and following the First World War, army huts on Bentley Green were repurposed for community use, including a Men’s Club with Sir Robert Baden-Powell as President.

During construction of the A31 bypass, it temporarily became a car park and construction compound. After completion of the bypass, the land was rented out by the Parish Council to private individuals for grazing.

The site has therefore served a variety of community and practical purposes over time. Its original charitable intent - established in 1857 - **was to provide space for exercise and recreation for the people of Bentley.**

Current Condition and Usage

The site has been unoccupied since autumn 2024.

The grassland currently presents a mixed structure. Areas where manure accumulated during grazing have encouraged rank grasses, which tend to dominate and reduce overall plant diversity. In contrast, areas where horses grazed more intensively - and areas of bare ground left behind - have created conditions suitable for other species.

This variation in grass height and ground condition is ecologically significant. It can:

- Support a wider range of plant species
- Provide feeding opportunities for invertebrates
- Create habitat niches for small mammals and ground-nesting birds
- Increase overall structural diversity within the field

On the western boundary, a former pond shown on 1880s maps creates a shallow “bowl” in the landscape. This feature offers potential for future habitat enhancement.

The hedgerows around the site have been largely unmaintained in recent years. While this limits formal access in places, it has created valuable habitat corridors for wildlife and provides food, shelter and nesting opportunities.

See drone footage here.

Key Ecological Observations (Preliminary)

Initial site visits and informal ecological observations have identified:

- Suitable habitat for dormice (a red-listed species) who are confirmed in the local landscape
- Suitable habitat for great crested newts (another protected species)
- Priority habitats within the site - hedgerows and ponds
- Semi-improved grassland with limited wildflower diversity but potential for enhancement

These findings are preliminary and non-intrusive. Any future proposals would require further ecological assessment before works are undertaken.

Why the Consultation Was Undertaken

Following initial discussions with Bentley Parish Council regarding the possibility of returning the Old Rec to wider community use, a small interest group formed to explore potential options.

One of the early ideas discussed was the creation of a community orchard and/or other forms of green space.

Public input was identified as essential in order to:

1. Ensure the community has a voice in whether change is desired.
2. Understand the level of local support and willingness to engage.
3. Identify priorities, concerns and alternative ideas.
4. Assess whether a community-led approach would be viable and sustainable.

A public consultation was therefore undertaken to gather views before any formal proposal is brought forward.

The Purpose of This Report

This report presents:

- The results of the public consultation
- Findings from preliminary ecological surveys and site observations
- A draft vision for the site (see Section 5)
- Initial financial considerations
- A potential phased timeline

The report is intended to support informed discussion by Bentley Parish Council.

The information provided will enable councillors to consider the future of the Old Rec and determine whether further exploration of the proposal should proceed.

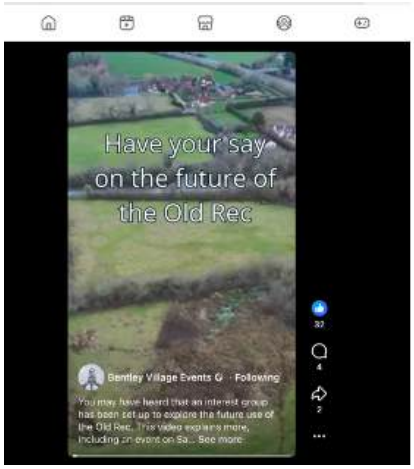
3. Public Consultation Findings

Methodology

A public consultation in the form of a survey was carried out between 21st January and 6th March 2026.

The survey included a mix of closed and open questions designed to understand:

- Awareness and use of the Old Rec
- Views on its future use
- Levels of support for different ideas
- Key concerns
- Willingness to be involved



The survey was promoted through:

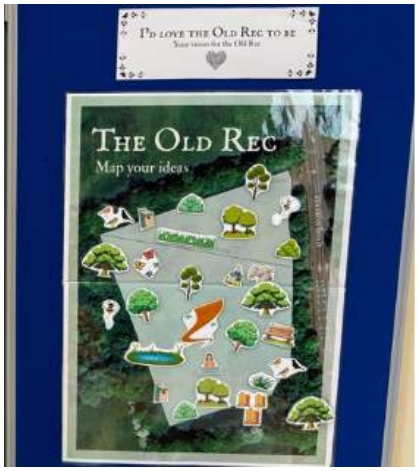
- Printed flyers (pub, village shop, parish noticeboards and school book bags)
- The parish magazine
- Online via local WhatsApp groups and Facebook pages

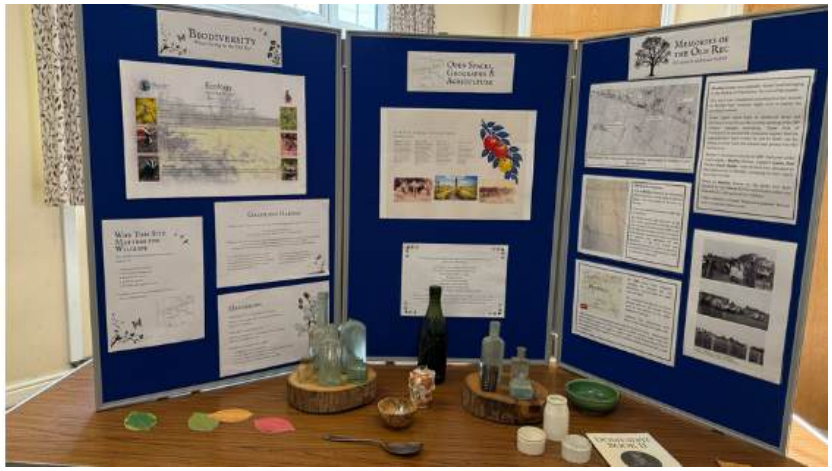
In addition, a consultation event was held on 14th February 2026, attended by approximately 40 residents.

The purpose of the event was to:

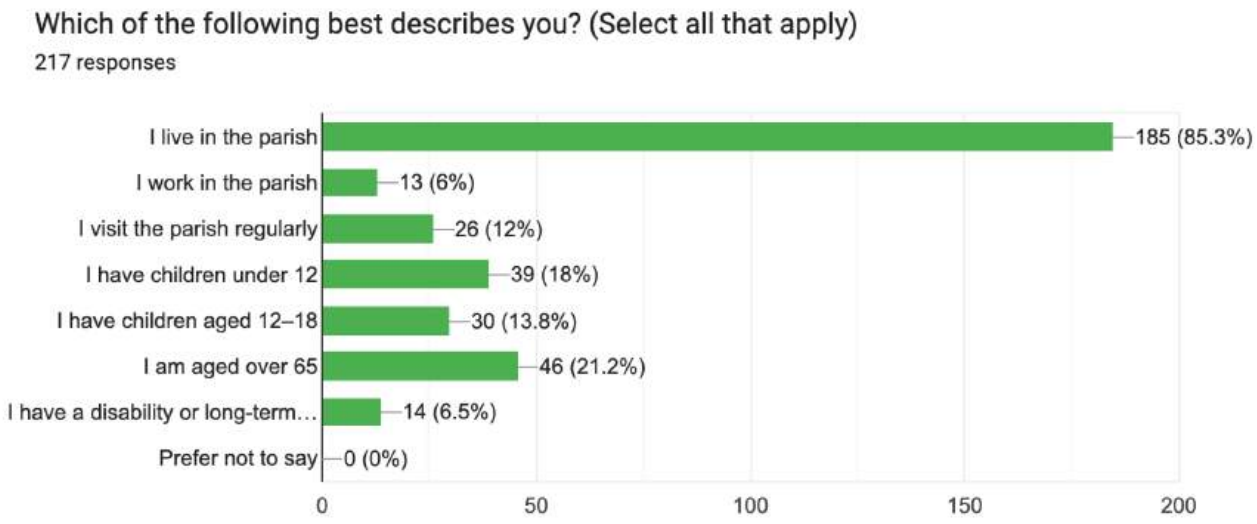
- Share the history of the site
- Present preliminary ecological insights
- Explain the emerging ideas
- Answer questions

- Gather memories, suggestions and feedback
- Encourage wider participation in the survey





A total of 221 responses were received. Respondent profile is shown below.



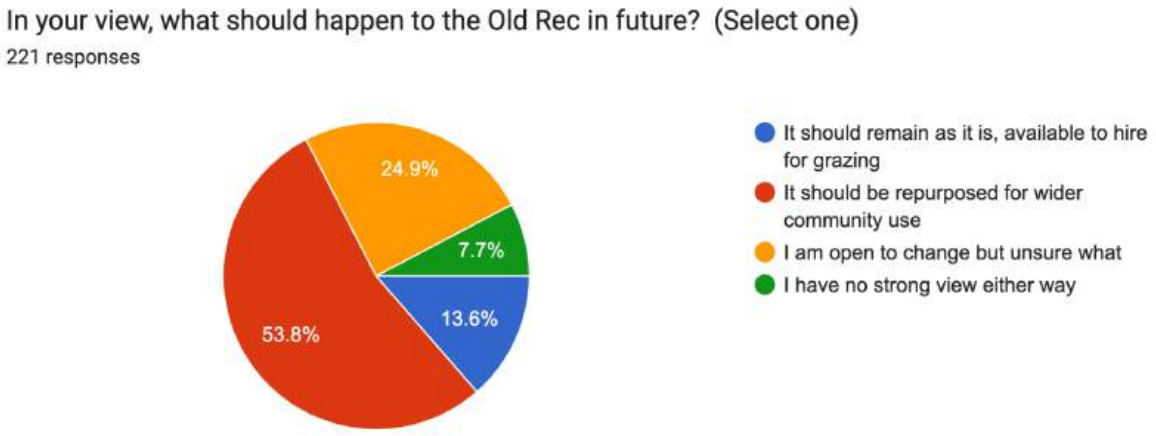
Headline Results

When asked what should happen to the Old Rec in future:

- 53.8% said it should be repurposed for wider community use
- 24.9% said they were open to change but unsure what
- 13.6% said it should remain available for grazing
- 7.7% said they had no strong view either way

This indicates that 78.7% of respondents were either supportive of change or open to exploring alternatives.

13.6% of respondents expressed a preference for retaining grazing. Their views are reflected later in this section.



Excluding those who answered that the Old Rec should remain as it is, respondents were asked "What are your main reasons for supporting repurposing or change?" **66.5% answered that "It could benefit a wider range of people."**

Support in Principle

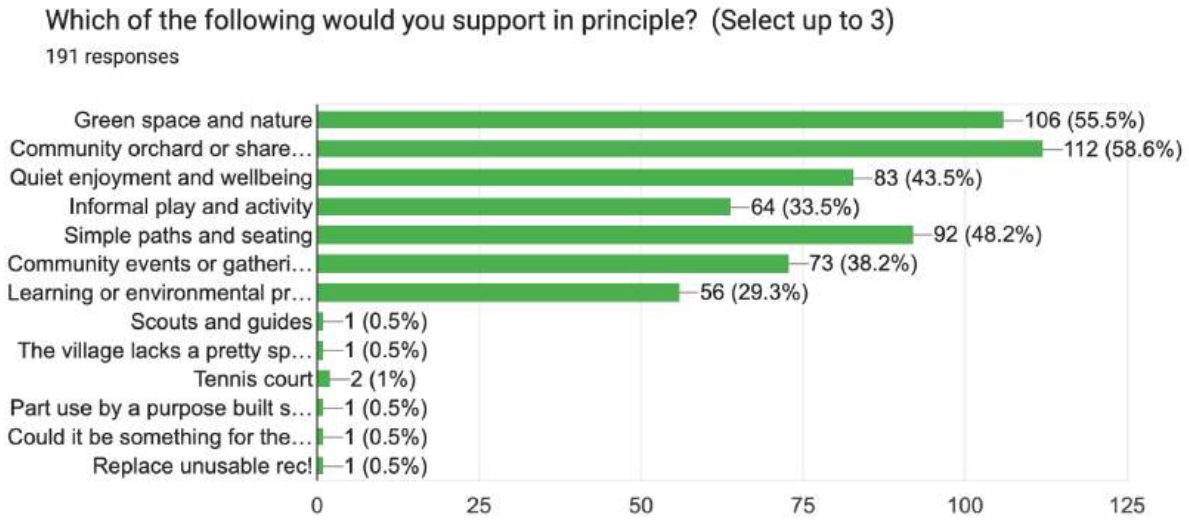
Respondents were asked which uses they would support in principle (selecting up to three options).

The most frequently selected options were:

- Community orchard or shared growing space – 58.6%
- Green space and nature – 55.5%
- Simple paths and seating – 48.2%
- Quiet enjoyment and wellbeing – 43.5%

Other ideas, including informal play, community events and learning projects, also received notable support.

These results suggest interest in a space that is informal, nature-focused and accessible, rather than heavily built or formalised



Key Themes Identified

Across both survey responses and the consultation event, several consistent themes emerged.

1. Support for Green Space

Many respondents described the Old Rec as currently underused and saw potential for it to serve a wider section of the village.

In answer to the question “complete the following sentence: **“I would support changes to the Old Rec as long as…”** responses included:

> **“It respects the character of the village, protects green space and genuinely benefits the local community.”**
>
> **“A community orchard, growing area and wildflower/wellness area would be great. It should have biodiversity in mind but also human wellness and taking into account loneliness epidemic.”**
>
> **“Accessible to all in the community and environmentally sustainable.”**

There was particular interest in retaining an open, natural character rather than creating a highly structured recreational facility.

2. Interest in Orchard and Meadow Planting

Support for a community orchard or shared growing space was strong.

Respondents referenced:

- Seasonal interest
- Opportunities for children to learn
- A space for informal community activity
- A “wood pasture” feel combining trees and open grass

This interest was often linked to wider environmental benefits, wellbeing and community engagement.

3. Wildlife Conservation and Habitat Enhancement

Many respondents expressed a desire to see the site managed in a way that supports wildlife and improves habitat value.

This included references to:

- Native planting
- Pollinators
- Protecting existing hedgerows
- Encouraging a wider range of plant and animal species

Comments included:

> **“It supported nature and wildlife”**
>
> **“It is natural and wildlife friendly”**

4. Seating and Quiet Space

There was consistent interest in simple infrastructure such as:

- Benches
- Informal paths
- Areas for reflection

Several respondents emphasised wellbeing:

> **“It is focused on well-being and the village community with access to multiple individuals but also if we are able to maintain it as a community. A community orchard, growing area and wildflower/ wellness area would be great.”**

“It should be a quiet area, reflective one”

“It provides places to relax and be in nature. Picnic areas etc.”

Concerns Raised

Respondents were also asked about their main concerns.

The most common issues referenced were:

- Ongoing maintenance costs
- Safety or antisocial behaviour
- Traffic and parking

These concerns were raised both by those supportive of change and by those unsure. Several respondents commented that any proposal would need to be:

- Sustainable in the long term
- Low maintenance
- Clearly managed
- Financially realistic

Views in Favour of Retaining Grazing

A minority - 13.6% of respondents (30 people) - expressed a preference for keeping the Old Rec available for grazing.

Reasons cited included:

- Lack of land available to rent for horses
- Maintaining its rural character
- Avoiding additional costs
- Concern about overdevelopment
- Worries about future upkeep

These views form an important part of the overall picture and highlight the need for any future proposal to be proportionate, financially sound and sensitive to the character of the area.

Likelihood of Future Use

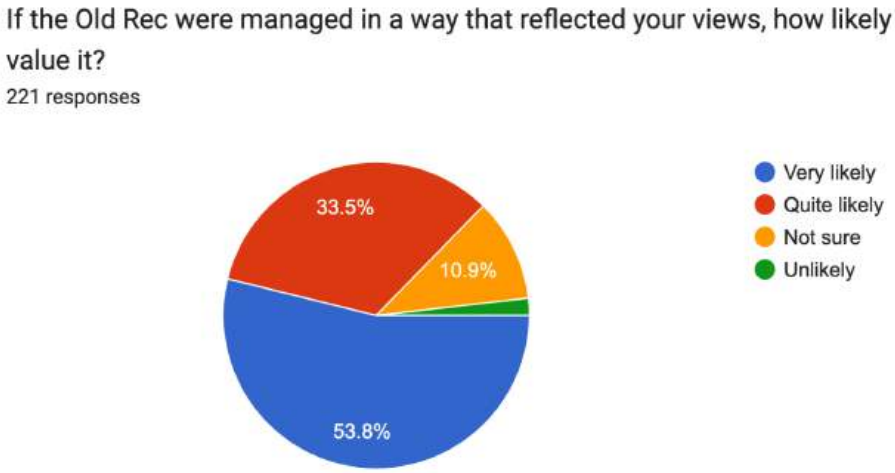
When asked how likely they would be to use or value the Old Rec if it reflected their views:

- A large majority responded “Very likely” or “Quite likely”

In addition:

- A significant proportion indicated they would like to stay informed or be involved as ideas develop

This suggests potential community capacity, should councillors wish to explore a community-led model in future.



Summary

The consultation indicates:

- Clear majority support for exploring wider community use
- Strong interest in green space, orchard planting and habitat enhancement
- Appetite for simple, low-impact improvements
- Legitimate concerns around maintenance, cost and safety
- A minority preference for retaining grazing

While the findings do not determine the outcome, they provide a clear evidence base that there is community support for the proposal.

See Appendix B for full consultation survey results.

4. Ecological Overview

Site Description

The Old Rec comprises approximately 1.2 hectares of semi-improved grassland.

The field has historically been managed through grazing and has been subject to past disturbance, including temporary use during construction of the A31 bypass. It remains open in character, with variation in grass height and ground condition across the site.

Current vegetation is dominated by coarse grasses, with relatively low wildflower diversity. However, as noted in Section 2, areas of differing grazing intensity and disturbance have created structural variation, which can support ecological diversity over time.

The site is surrounded by ditches and mature native hedgerows, which provide habitat and act as wildlife corridors.

Access and Boundaries

- A five-bar gate on the eastern boundary (north side) allows access from Station/River Road.
- A five-bar gate on the southern boundary (eastern side) provides access to the adjacent field to the south.
- A public footpath crosses the site from approximately halfway along the eastern boundary to the intersection of the northern and western boundaries.

Historic mapping from the 1880s (see Brief History of the Old Rec) shows a pond on the western boundary. A natural bowl remains in this location.

Key Ecological Findings to Date

It is important to note that site visits and surveys were undertaken in January and February 2026. This is not the optimal time of year for ecological surveys, as many species are dormant, less visible, or hibernating.

The observations below are therefore high-level and indicative, and further targeted surveys during the appropriate survey season would be required to better manage the site.

Full reports are included in the Appendices.

4.1 Soil Assessment

William Whitfield – Soil Scientist (January 2026)

Mr Whitfield surveyed soils across the site to inform potential planting proposals.

Key findings include:

- Soils are developed in relatively thin flinty drift over weathered Gault clay.
- Topsoils are moderately deep flinty silty clay loams (12–18cm), with good crumb structure.
- Dense subsoil clay occurs below approximately 50cm.
- Drainage is described as “relatively good”, with only slight intermittent surface wetness.
- There is no marsh vegetation indicating long-term waterlogging.

Mr Whitfield concluded:

> **“Soil depth for tree planting is good and will allow good root development.”**

He also noted:

> **“You will need to take specific advice about planting fruit trees on the ground but evidence from the surrounding boundaries indicates a wide choice of deciduous tree species to consider during the planting stage of the project.”**

Clearing surrounding ditches [which has now been undertaken] could improve drainage further and provide firmer winter access.

The soil conditions are not considered a barrier to tree planting in principle.

See Appendix C for full soil report.

4.2 Habitat and Wildlife Review

Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust (Site visit 3 February 2026)

The Wildlife Trust visited as part of the Team Wilder initiative to review habitats and provide suggestions for enhancement.

They describe the Old Rec as:

> **“A modified grassland field surrounded by wet ditches lined with mature, native hedgerows supporting standard trees.”**

The grassland is classified as semi-improved grassland, containing species such as cock’s foot, ragwort, clover, ox-eye daisy and dock. However:

> **“Wildflower abundance and diversity is low with coarse broad-leaved grasses dominating.”**

Grassland Management Recommendations

The Wildlife Trust advised that grassland condition could be enhanced through “cut and collect” management:

> **“Removing cuttings each time helps remove nutrients from the soil which reduces grass vigour and promotes wildflower diversity and abundance.”**

They recommend annual monitoring, including a Rapid Grassland Assessment in June to provide a biodiversity baseline and measure change over time.

Hedgerows

Hedgerows were noted to contain willow, field maple, ash, hawthorn, dog-rose, dogwood and blackthorn.

They are described as providing **“great wildlife habitat, particularly when they are thick and bushy.”**

A hedgerow survey is recommended to inform future management. A dormouse survey would be required prior to hedge works, as dormice are legally protected.

Orchard and Tree Planting

The Wildlife Trust commented:

> **“A community orchard would be a great way to support biodiversity and engage the local community.”**

Fruit trees are noted to provide nectar, pollen, leaves and fruit, with apple supporting over 50 moth species.

The Trust advised that wetter boundary areas may be less suitable for fruit trees, while the central area of the field may be more appropriate. Further advice from Hampshire Forest Partnership is recommended prior to planting decisions.

Pond Restoration

Standing water was observed in corners of the field following wet weather. The former pond location on the western boundary was identified as an opportunity for restoration as well as the south-eastern corner.

Guidance from the Freshwater Habitats Trust was referenced, highlighting that restoration should:

> **“Open up the pond sufficiently so that enough work needs to be undertaken to have the required impact of opening up the canopy and letting light in.”**

Full habitat recommendations are included in Appendix D.

4.3 The Preliminary Ecological Appraisal

Frances King-Smith - Ecology Works

Ms King-Smith from Ecology Works visited the site and produced a poster for the consultation event as well as a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA). Her on-site survey and comprehensive desk study confirmed that the site supports habitats suitable for a number of protected or notable species, including:

- Foraging, commuting and roosting bats
- Hazel dormouse
- Breeding European hedgehog
- Commuting Eurasian otter
- Badger
- Breeding birds
- Wintering thrushes
- Reptiles (grass snake, slow worm, common lizard)
- Amphibians, including great crested newt
- A range of invertebrates, including brown hairstreak

The Ecology Works PEAI also recommends further targeted surveys during the 2026 survey season to establish the status of these species before any change in management.

See Appendix E.

4.4 Amphibian and Landscape Context

Chris Worgan – Newt Conservation Partnership

Mr Worgan reviewed geology and historic mapping and confirmed that the area near the large willow corresponds with the former pond location.

He noted that the geology is “Gault Formation - Mudstone”, often blue-grey clay, which is:

> **“Great for ponds.”**

He also observed that the wider area forms a long corridor of green space north of the A31, which may allow amphibian movement without crossing busy roads.

He commented that reinstating the pond would be:

> **“A benefit to wildlife and the ecology of the site and surrounding area.”**

This highlights the potential for landscape-scale habitat connectivity, subject to further detailed assessment.

Summary

In summary:

- The site is classified as semi-improved grassland with moderate ecological value.
- Soil conditions are suitable for tree planting in principle.
- Hedgerows and ditches provide established habitat corridors.
- There is potential for grassland enhancement, tree planting and pond restoration.
- Protected species may be present, and further seasonal surveys would be required before any works.

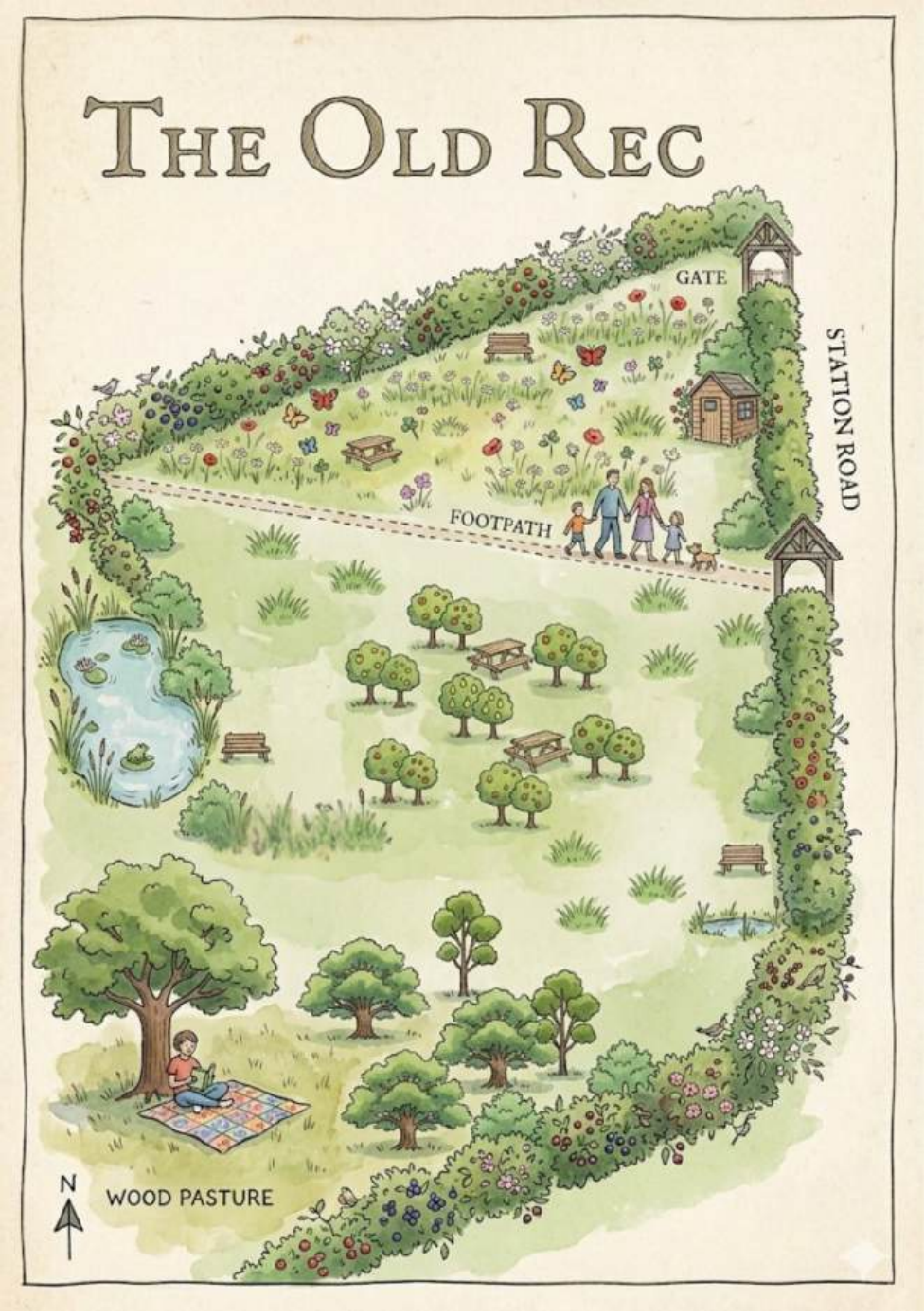
The winter timing of surveys limits the level of certainty at this stage.

Any future proposal would need to be informed by further ecological appraisal and appropriate mitigation measures.

5. Vision for the Site

The following section sets out a possible vision for the Old Rec, as shown in the concept illustration (not to scale) below.

This illustration is indicative only. Any future layout would depend on further ecological surveys, technical advice and funding availability. It is not a final design.



Scope and Character of the Proposal

This proposal is specifically for the creation of a low-impact community green space focused on habitat enhancement, informal access and nature-based engagement. The project would work with the existing ecology rather than replacing it - conserving what is valuable, enhancing habitats where appropriate, and introducing features that allow residents to enjoy and care for the space over time.

It does not seek to introduce formal sports facilities, reinstate a managed cricket ground, relocate allotments, or establish the site as a primary venue for large-scale village events such as the fete or flower show.

The intention is to retain the site's open and natural character, with limited infrastructure and minimal traffic impact. This would not be an instant transformation. It would be a phased, evolving project, where benefits for wildlife and people begin early and continue to grow.

Working With What Is Already There

The site already contains:

- Established hedgerows and ditches
- Semi-improved grassland
- Areas of natural variation
- A historic pond location
- Existing public footpath access

The vision would seek to:

- Retain and strengthen these features
- Improve habitat condition gradually
- Introduce new elements carefully and proportionately

The aim would be a simple, low-impact green space, not a heavily formalised park.

Proposed Elements

Community Orchard

A central feature of the vision is a community orchard, positioned in areas identified as suitable through soil and drainage advice.

An orchard would:

- Provide nectar and pollen for insects

- Offer leaves and fruit as food sources for wildlife
- Maintain open grassland beneath trees
- Create seasonal interest throughout the year

Concerns were raised in the survey about fruit going to waste. This can be addressed through active community involvement.

Possible initiatives could include:

- Volunteer harvest days
- Juice pressing or cider-making sessions
- Selling surplus produce to support maintenance or other village causes
- Providing fresh fruit to residents without their own produce
- Seasonal events such as wassailing or harvest celebrations

The site would be managed as a “Traditional Orchard” a Priority Habitat under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UKBAP).

See Appendix F for recommendations from Sir Harold Hillier Gardens



Meadow Habitat Creation

Grassland enhancement would take place gradually through recommended management techniques such as “cut and collect”.

Over time, this could:

- Increase wildflower diversity
- Improve conditions for pollinators
- Create a more varied landscape

A small “butterfly bank” or species-rich area may be possible, subject to funding and ecological advice.

The intention would not be to convert the entire field to meadow immediately, but to improve habitat condition steadily and monitor progress.

Wood Pasture

In addition to meadow enhancement, a small area of the site could be planted to create a wood pasture.

Wood pasture is traditionally characterised by open-grown trees set within grazed grassland, often with areas of thorny scrub. It combines elements of woodland and pasture, creating a mosaic of habitats rather than dense tree cover.

A modest wood pasture area on the Old Rec could:

- Introduce structural diversity to the landscape
- Provide long-term habitat for invertebrates, birds and small mammals
- Offer shade and shelter
- Retain an overall open feel
- Reflect historic English landscape patterns

Planting would focus on widely spaced standard trees, potentially including native species such as oak, field maple or disease-resistant elm, alongside small groups of shrubs such as hawthorn or blackthorn. This would be managed as “Wood Pasture and Parkland” - a Priority Habitat under the UKBAP.

Wildlife Pond(s)

Restoration of the former ponds on the western boundary and south-eastern corner presents an opportunity to protect freshwater wildlife, and could also attract a wider range of land-based species too.

If appropriate, reinstating open water could:

- Support amphibians and aquatic invertebrates
- Enhance landscape connectivity
- Restore a historic feature of the site

This may require planning.

Seating and Quiet Reflection

Simple, sensitively placed seating could provide:

- Space for rest and reflection
- Informal meeting points
- Access for older residents or those with limited mobility

Infrastructure would be minimal and sympathetic to the landscape.

Interpretation and Engagement

Low-key interpretation signage could explain:

- The history of the Old Rec
- Wildlife present on the site
- Ongoing habitat management

This would help visitors understand how the space is evolving and also promote a sense of shared ownership and pride. When people understand the purpose of a space and feel connected to it, they are more likely to respect it, care for it and encourage others to do the same.

Education, Citizen Science and Training

The project has potential to support learning and monitoring throughout its development.

Possible opportunities include:

- Wildlife recording using iNaturalist or iRecord
- Annual grassland assessments
- Pollinator counts

- Bioblitz events
- School visits linked to nature and ecology
- Scout or youth group participation

Frances King-Smith of Ecology Works has indicated interest in using the site for training ecologists, which could provide:

- Professional oversight
- Additional surveys and assessments
- Free ecological input
- A longer-term evidence base for the site

This could ensure that habitat management is informed by current best practice.

Community Participation

Benefits would not be limited to the finished space.

Throughout the project, residents could benefit from:

- Volunteering outdoors
- Physical activity and practical conservation work
- Shared community events
- Learning new skills
- Watching the site develop season by season

Evidence consistently shows that time spent outdoors and participation in practical nature-based activity supports mental and physical wellbeing.

The project could therefore offer both immediate and long-term value.

A Space That Grows Over Time

The vision is for a site that evolves gradually; where habitat improves year by year, trees mature, species increase and community involvement deepens.

It would remain:

- Informal
- Ecologically informed
- Financially proportionate
- Managed with long-term sustainability in mind

This section outlines what could be possible.

Whether and how this vision progresses will depend on further surveys, funding and Parish Council agreement.

6. Conservation Potential and Environmental Impact

This proposal centres on conservation and habitat enhancement. Any future changes would aim to work with the site's existing ecological value, strengthening habitats while maintaining its open character.

Grassland Enhancement

The grassland is currently classified as semi-improved, with coarse grasses dominant and relatively low wildflower diversity.

Through gradual management - including reducing grass vigour via "cut and collect" methods - there is potential to:

- Improve wildflower diversity over time
- Increase food sources for pollinators
- Create a more varied sward structure
- Strengthen ecological resilience

Wildflower seeding or plug planting could be considered once soil nutrient levels are reduced, subject to further advice and monitoring.

The aim would be incremental improvement rather than rapid transformation, with annual monitoring to measure change.

Orchard Benefits

A community orchard could deliver both ecological and social value.

From a conservation perspective, orchard trees would provide:

- Nectar and pollen sources for insects
- Leaves and fruit for birds and invertebrates
- Layered habitat structure within open grassland
- Seasonal variation in blossom, foliage and fruit
- Long-term carbon capture through tree growth

Traditional orchard landscapes are recognised as valuable biodiversity habitats, particularly where grassland beneath trees is managed sympathetically.

Protection Measures

Any future works would be informed by:

- Further targeted ecological surveys during appropriate seasons
- Professional advice regarding protected species
- Careful siting of new features to avoid sensitive areas
- A phased and proportionate approach

Existing hedgerows, ditches and the historic pond area would be retained and managed with ecological sensitivity. The intention would be enhancement rather than disturbance.

Strategic Alignment

Enhancing the Old Rec as a community green space has the potential to align with:

- East Hampshire District Council's Climate and Environment Strategy
- Hampshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy published 2025
- Nature recovery and pollinator initiatives
- Wider health and wellbeing goals linked to access to green space

By strengthening habitats while improving community access to nature, the project could contribute to both environmental and social outcomes.



7. Proposed Timeline

Phase 1 – Approval and Detailed Surveys (0–6 months)

- Parish approval
- Detailed ecological survey
- Funding applications

Phase 2 – Ground Preparation (6–12 months)

- Grass reduction
- Orchard planning
- Infrastructure planning

Phase 3 – Planting and Establishment (Year 1–2)

- Orchard planting (winter season)
- Meadow seeding
- Install seating

Phase 4 – Establishment and Review (Year 2–3)

- Monitoring biodiversity
- Community events
- Maintenance review

8. Financial Overview

This section provides an early-stage indication of potential costs, aligned with the proposed phased timeline.

All figures are approximate and indicative, based on current supplier pricing (2026), publicly available information, initial professional advice, and assumptions about the likely scale of works.

The final scope of the project will depend on ecological survey outcomes, design decisions and available funding. Costs in future years may also change due to inflation or wider market conditions. Where possible, volunteer labour and in-kind professional support are expected to reduce overall expenditure.

The estimates presented here assume an initial orchard of approximately 100 fruit trees, establishing the core planting area and basic infrastructure for the site. As the project develops, there may be opportunities to expand the orchard or introduce additional features and activities. Any such expansion would be delivered gradually, subject to funding, community support and ecological considerations, and may increase overall costs over time as the site evolves.

Phase 1: Surveys and Planning (Year 1)

Item / Service	**Approx. Cost**	**Notes**
Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (completed)	In-kind	Ecology Works
Protected Species Surveys (Dormouse)	In-kind	Ecology Works
Great Crested Newt Survey	In-kind	Ecology Works
Bat Activity Survey (if required)	In-kind	Ecology Works
Hedgerow Survey	In-kind	Volunteer-led
HBIC Data Search (completed)	In-kind	Ecology Works
Soil Survey (completed)	In-kind	W Whitfield
Grassland Baseline Assessment (Rapid Assessment training)	In-kind	Wildlife Trust support
Initial Design / Layout Planning	n/a	Volunteer group

Item / Service	Approx. Cost	Notes
Planning advice (if required for pond(s) restoration)	£500	
Accessible pedestrian gate (mobility-friendly gate)	£400	
Tool storage (shed or similar storage)	£1,000	
Community communications and print materials (annual): Design and printing of flyers, posters, volunteer recruitment materials, event promotion, and production of an annual report for residents and the Parish Council.	£150	

Note: Several surveys may be delivered at no cost through training partnerships.

Phase 2: Ground Preparation and Habitat Management (Year 1–2)

Item / Service	Approx. Cost	Notes
Cut and collect contractor (1–2 cuts)	In-kind	Local farmer/landowner
Composting area setup	In-kind	Donations / Volunteers
Ditch clearance (if required)	n/a	Parish drainage and lengthsman
Pond restoration (contractor digger 1–2 days)	In-kind	Local farmer/landowner
Planning application (if required for pond works)	£3,000 - £4,000	
Community communications and print materials (annual)	£150	

Planning permission may be required for pond restoration depending on scale and impact; this would need confirmation with the local planning authority.

Phase 3: Orchard and Habitat Creation (Year 2–3)

Item / Service	Approx. Cost	Notes
Orchard trees (50-75 trees*)	£40 per tree (£2,000 - £3,000 total)	Subsidised schemes
Tree guards and stakes	£20 per tree (£1,000 - £1,500 total)	
Wildflower seed (species-rich mix)	£1,150	
Small wood pasture tree planting	£252.00	Woodland Trust subsidised pack
Interpretation signage	£1,000–£2,500	
Volunteer planting events	£0	
Community communications and print materials (annual)	£150	

*** Initial planting estimate.** The project assumes an initial orchard of approximately 50-75 fruit trees. The orchard may be expanded in future phases as the project develops, subject to available funding and community support.

Phase 4: Community Infrastructure (Year 2–4)

Item / Service	Approx. Cost	Notes
Benches (4)	£2,600	
Interpretation signage	£1,000–£2,500	
Fencing (if required for protection areas) approximately 30 metres	£1,000	
Community communications and print materials (annual)	£150	

Contingency

A contingency of 10 - 15% would be advisable to allow for unforeseen costs.

Based on the maximum estimated total above:

- Estimated project upper range: ~£21,000
- 15% contingency: £3,000

Indicative Overall Estimate

£25,000 (factoring in costs in the upper range, contingency and the flexibility to expand the project if deemed appropriate).

Current Grazing Income

The Old Rec is currently rented for grazing at an annual fee of approximately £600.

If the Parish Council were to support a change in use, this income would cease.

It is important to note, however, that the land was originally awarded in 1857 **“in trust as a place for exercise and recreation for the Inhabitants of the said Parish and Neighbourhood”**. Its historic purpose was therefore community use rather than revenue generation.

The Parish Council already meets the ongoing baseline costs associated with ownership of the site, such as insurance and administration, through the council tax. These costs are not currently offset by the grazing income in a material way.

The proposal does not seek to replace the grazing income directly. Instead, it asks the Parish Council to consider whether the community and environmental value of the site - consistent with its original purpose - is an appropriate priority for this land.

In-Kind Support and Professional Contributions

In addition to potential grant funding, the project has already attracted offers of practical and professional support from within the community.

These include:

- Local farmers offering machinery support for grass cutting and ground works
- Volunteer labour for planting, maintenance and event organisation
- Ecology Works providing ecological surveys and assessments

- Chris Worgan (Newt Conservation Partnership) offering professional advice on pond restoration
- Support from Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust through Team Wilder

This in-kind contribution has significant financial value.

It reduces the need for contractor-led work and ensures the project benefits from professional oversight while keeping costs proportionate.

Importantly, this support demonstrates early community commitment before any formal decision has been made.

Community Pledges and Fundraising

In addition to in-kind support, several local residents have indicated a willingness to contribute financially to support the project.

While no formal fundraising campaign has yet begun, substantial pledges have already been offered in principle.

This indicates that:

- There is financial commitment within the village
- The project would not rely solely on public funding
- Community members are prepared to invest in the site's future

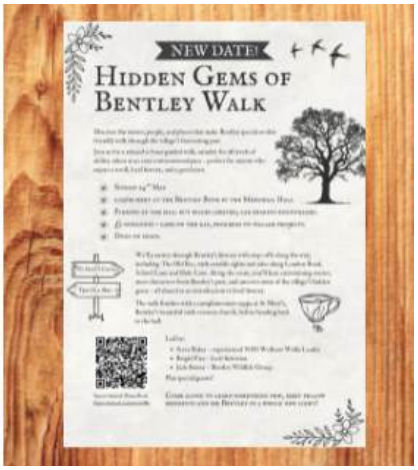
Fundraising

Alongside pledges and donations, the project will also develop a programme of community fundraising activities. These initiatives not only raise funds but also help build a sense of ownership and connection with the space.

Possible activities include:

Adopt or Sponsor a Tree
Residents and supporters could sponsor a tree for around £100, either in their own name or in memory of a loved one. Sponsors could receive recognition on a simple dedication list or map of the orchard.

Community Activities and Walks
Events such as the Hidden Gems of Bentley Walk could invite a small suggested donation (e.g. £5) to take part while celebrating local heritage and nature.



Seasonal Fundraising
Activities such as Christmas hamper raffles or seasonal prize draws could provide accessible ways for the community to support the project.

Community Events
Fundraising events such as quiz nights, talks, or local gatherings could raise funds while strengthening community engagement.

Produce from the Orchard
In the longer term, produce from the orchard may be sold to support the project, including fresh fruit, juice, or cider, where appropriate.

Easyfundraising
The project could register with Easyfundraising, allowing supporters to generate donations through everyday online shopping.

Targeted Crowdfunding
Specific improvements, such as benches, signage, or habitat features, could be funded through targeted crowdfunding campaigns (for example, GoFundMe-style appeals).

Volunteer Challenges
Supporters could take part in sponsored challenges such as walks, runs, cycle rides, or environmental challenges, raising funds through sponsorship.

Local Business Sponsorship
Local businesses may be invited to sponsor elements of the project. This could align with corporate social responsibility initiatives or environmental commitments, including local carbon offsetting.

Together, these approaches provide a flexible and community-focused way to generate income while strengthening engagement with the space.

Grant Funding

In addition to community pledges and in-kind support, a number of grant schemes may be relevant to elements of the project. These include local authority grants, tree planting partnerships such as Hampshire Forest Partnership, The Woodland Trust, and the Tree Council schemes, as well as national and local community grant schemes.

Grant funding is competitive and cannot be guaranteed. The project would therefore proceed in stages and only when funding is secured.

Ongoing Costs

Long-term costs are expected to be relatively modest and may include:

- Annual grassland cut and collect - Chris Holmes has agreed to undertake this
- Occasional tree maintenance - when professionals are required
- Replacement planting - cost of trees, stakes, guards etc.

Forward Financial Planning

If the Parish Council agrees that the proposal should move forward to the next stage, a more detailed 3–5 year financial plan would be developed. This would set out anticipated third-party costs and potential funding sources.

The plan would cover:

- Investigation, surveys and detailed design work
- Initial site preparation, habitat creation and planting
- Ongoing annual maintenance, including grassland management, hedge and tree care, pond management and upkeep of any infrastructure

This more detailed plan would enable the Parish Council to review projected costs, funding sources and delivery stages before any physical works proceed.

9. Delivery Model and Community Involvement

The proposal is intended to be community-led, professionally informed and appropriately governed.

If the Parish Council agrees, a structured delivery model would be established to ensure clarity of responsibility, transparency and long-term sustainability.

Governance Structure

Initially, the project would operate as a community working group, supported by Bentley Parish Council as landowner.

A clear governance structure would be established, including:

- Chair
- Treasurer
- Secretary
- Volunteer Coordinator
- Ecology / Conservation Lead
- Nominated Parish Councillor (Parish Council liaison)

Terms of reference would define:

- Roles and responsibilities
- Decision-making processes
- Financial controls
- Reporting arrangements

The Parish Council would be asked to provide practical support in the early stages, such as banking facilities for grant applications and payment of suppliers where required.

In the longer term, subject to viability and Parish Council agreement, the group may seek to become a registered charity. This would:

- Enable access to funding streams available only to charities
- Provide an additional governance framework
- Strengthen transparency and accountability
- Register for Gift Aid with HMRC
- Benefit from potential VAT reliefs

Any move towards charitable status would be carefully considered and formally approved.

Mission Statement

At an early stage, the group would develop a concise mission statement for the Old Rec.

This would set out the site's purpose and guiding principles, and act as a reference point for future decision-making.

The mission would likely reflect commitments to:

- Conservation and habitat enhancement
- Community access and wellbeing
- Financial sustainability
- Respect for the site's history and character

Having a clear mission would help ensure that future activities remain aligned with agreed objectives.

Collaboration with Bentley Wildlife

The project would seek to formally merge with Bentley Wildlife, an informal group of local residents interested in wildlife conservation and habitat enhancement within the parish.

Bentley Wildlife has already contributed to awareness, small-scale initiatives and informal monitoring in recent years. Bringing the Old Rec project under the same umbrella would:

- Build on existing knowledge and relationships
- Avoid duplication of effort
- Strengthen volunteer capacity
- Provide continuity of wildlife-focused activity in the village

The intention is that the Old Rec could become a focal point for wildlife-related activities, monitoring and community engagement, while not preventing or limiting other conservation initiatives elsewhere in the parish.

The aim is coordination rather than centralisation - ensuring that wildlife projects across the village remain connected, supported and strategically aligned.

Volunteer Group

Interest in participation has already been demonstrated.

45 residents have expressed a willingness to volunteer, through the consultation process.

Volunteering opportunities could include:

- Tree and meadow planting
- Wildlife monitoring and citizen science
- Event organisation
- Light maintenance tasks
- Administrative and fundraising support

Volunteer involvement would be coordinated to ensure safe working practices and clear supervision.

Management Plan

A five-year management plan would be developed before any physical works commence.

This plan would:

- Set clear objectives
- Define phased delivery priorities
- Outline habitat management schedules
- Identify monitoring measures
- Establish maintenance responsibilities

The plan would ensure that change is gradual, evidence-based and aligned with ecological advice.

Insurance and Risk Management

Bentley Parish Council, as landowner, holds public liability insurance for the site.

All volunteer activities and project works would:

- Be risk assessed in advance
- Be logged with the Parish Council
- Follow appropriate health and safety procedures

Where specialist contractors are engaged, they would be required to hold their own insurance and comply with relevant standards.

Annual Review and Reporting

To ensure accountability and transparency, the group would produce an annual report for the Parish Council.

This would include:

- Progress against the five-year management plan
- Delivery of agreed project phases
- Ecological monitoring findings
- Financial summary
- Volunteer engagement data

This annual review mechanism would allow the Parish Council to monitor progress and ensure the project remains aligned with its objectives and responsibilities as landowner.

In summary, the delivery model would be structured, phased and accountable.

10. Risks and Mitigation

Any long-term community project carries risks. Identifying these early allows them to be managed proportionately and transparently.

The following risks have been identified at this stage, together with proposed mitigation measures.

Insufficient Funding

Risk: Grant applications may be unsuccessful, community fundraising may fall short, or costs may exceed early estimates.

Mitigation:

- Phased delivery: no works would proceed without secured funding.
- Clear indicative costs for each stage - upper range.
- Combination of grants, community fundraising and in-kind support.
- Conservative cost assumptions and contingency allowance.
- Flexibility to reduce scope if funding is limited.
- Consideration of a modest, ring-fenced contingency allocation from the Parish Council, to be drawn upon only if required to unlock external funding or address unforeseen essential costs.

The project is designed to scale according to available resources.

Ecological Constraints

Risk: Further surveys may identify protected species or habitat sensitivities that restrict certain works.

Mitigation:

- Commission targeted seasonal surveys before works commence.
- Follow professional ecological advice.
- Adapt layout or timing of works where required.
- Prioritise enhancement over disturbance.

The proposal is intentionally nature-led, and would adjust to reflect ecological findings.

Volunteer Fatigue

Risk: Initial enthusiasm may reduce over time, leading to insufficient volunteer capacity for delivery or maintenance.

Mitigation:

- 45 survey respondents have indicated that they would be willing to volunteer
- Clear and realistic workload planning.
- Defined volunteer roles and coordination.
- Community events to maintain engagement.
- Ongoing recruitment of new volunteers through parish communications, local groups and seasonal activities.
- Use of contractors for specialist or heavy tasks where needed.
- Annual review of capacity within the five-year management plan.

The intention is to create manageable, seasonal volunteering rather than continuous demand.

Parking and Noise

Risk: Volunteer activity, contractor works or increased public use of the site could lead to concerns about parking pressure within the village or noise disturbance.

Mitigation:

- The site has no on-site parking and no roadside parking directly adjacent, which naturally limits vehicle access.
- Volunteers are expected primarily to walk to the site given its proximity to the village. Where tools are required, brief drop-off arrangements could be made before parking elsewhere.
- Contractors undertaking specialist works (e.g. grass cutting or tree surgery) would typically bring suitable off-road vehicles onto the site to avoid roadside parking.
- No regular vehicular access is proposed.
- Loud mechanical noise would be infrequent and limited to essential land management activities, such as annual grass cutting or occasional tree works, which are typical in a rural setting.
- Day-to-day activity would consist primarily of small volunteer groups and visitors walking the site.
- Occasional seasonal events (for example, harvest gatherings or wassailing) would be limited in frequency and managed appropriately.

The Old Rec is not intended to function as a destination attraction, but as a local amenity for village residents. Its lack of formal parking provision inherently limits scale and intensity of use.

Vandalism or Antisocial Behaviour

Risk: Damage to trees, signage or infrastructure; misuse of the space.

Mitigation:

- Encourage strong community presence and ownership.
- Design with minimal and robust infrastructure.
- Clear sightlines and open layout.
- Appropriate signage to explain purpose and stewardship.
- Reporting and liaison with the Parish Council if issues arise.

Experience in other community spaces suggests that visible care and active use can reduce misuse.

Maintenance Burden

Risk: Long-term maintenance requirements exceed volunteer capacity or available funding.

Mitigation:

- Five-year management plan with defined responsibilities.
- Selection of low-maintenance planting and infrastructure.
- Annual review and adjustment of maintenance regime.
- Exploration of contractor support if appropriate.

The project would prioritise simplicity and sustainability to ensure it remains manageable over time.

Overall Approach

The risks identified are not unusual for community-led green space projects.

Through phased delivery, professional advice, transparent governance and annual review, these risks can be managed proportionately.

11. Next Steps and Approvals Required

This report has presented consultation findings, preliminary ecological information, indicative costs and a possible phased vision for the Old Rec.

No decisions have been taken at this stage.

In order to determine whether further work should proceed, the Parish Council is invited to consider the following next steps.

Bentley Parish Council is asked to:

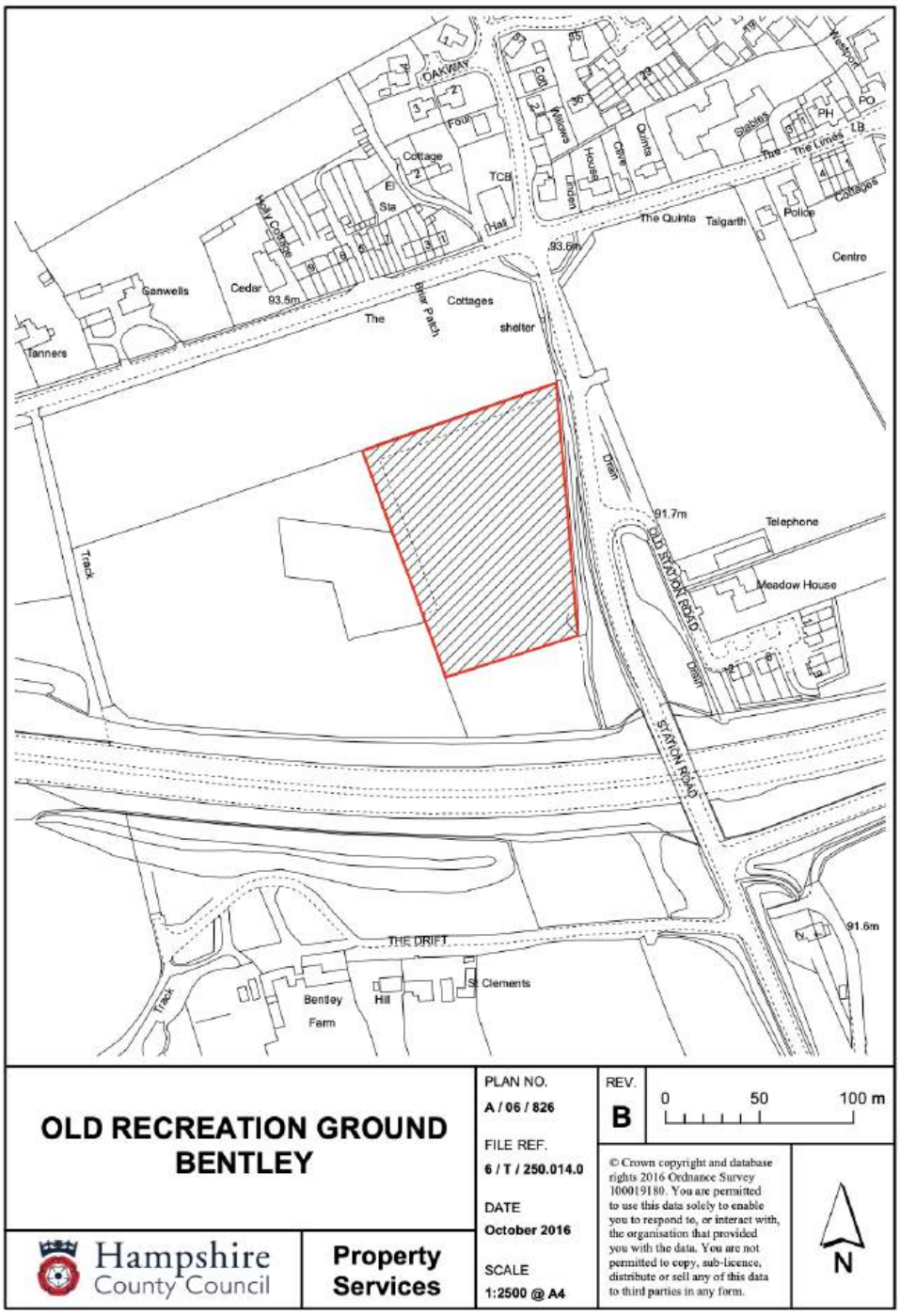
- **Note the consultation findings,** including levels of support, concerns raised and willingness to volunteer.
- **Agree in principle the creation of a community green space** - incorporating orchard, habitat enhancement and informal recreation - is appropriate for further development.
- **Authorise the community group to move forward to the next stage,** including detailed seasonal ecological surveys, refinement of the draft layout and development of a five-year management plan.
- **Support the submission of grant applications,** including providing necessary permissions as landowner and, where appropriate, banking facilities for grant administration.
- **Confirm governance arrangements,** including agreement in principle to the proposed delivery model and reporting structure.
- **Consider whether a modest, ring-fenced financial contribution or contingency allocation** should be established to support early-stage costs or unlock matched funding, subject to formal approval of any expenditure.

If agreed, the next phase would focus on evidence gathering, detailed planning and securing funding.

Any physical works would return to the Parish Council for review and approval before implementation.

12. Appendices

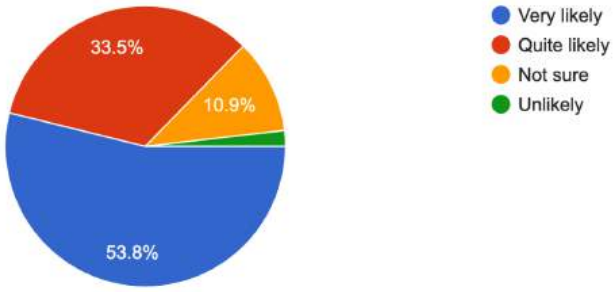
Appendix A



Appendix B

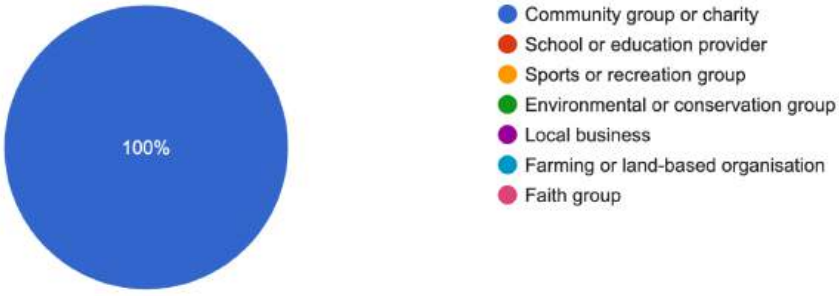
If the Old Rec were managed in a way that reflected your views, how likely would you be to use or value it?

221 responses



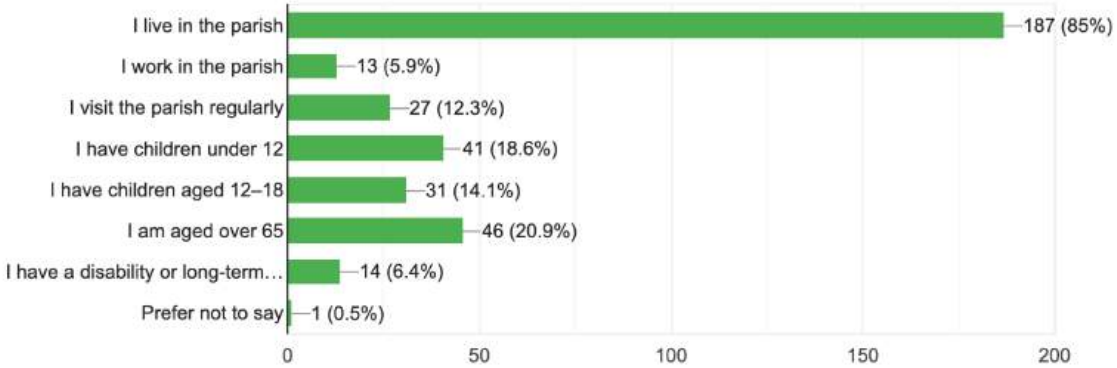
What type of organisation or group are you responding on behalf of? (Select one)

1 response



Which of the following best describes you? (Select all that apply)

220 responses

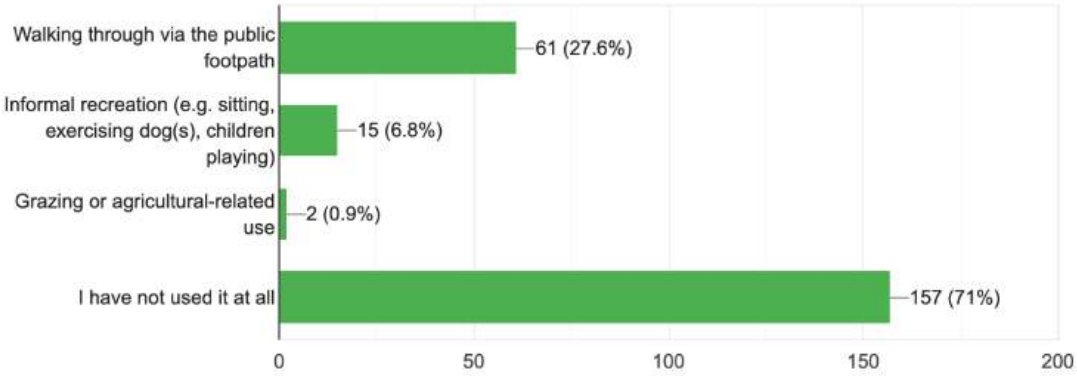


Before today, were you aware of the Old Rec and where it is located?

221 responses

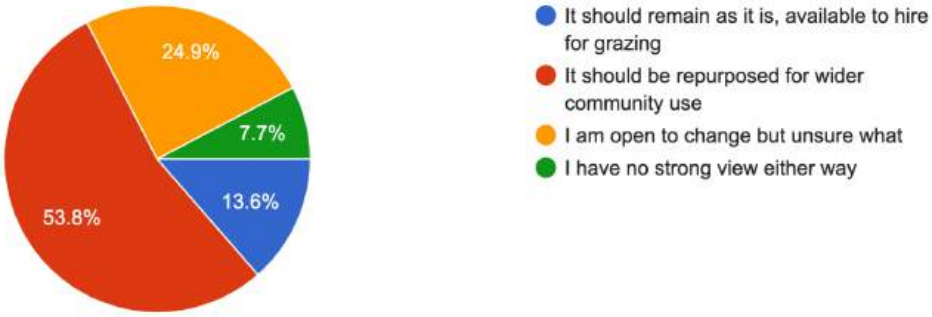
Have you ever used the Old Rec for any purpose? (Select all that apply)

221 responses



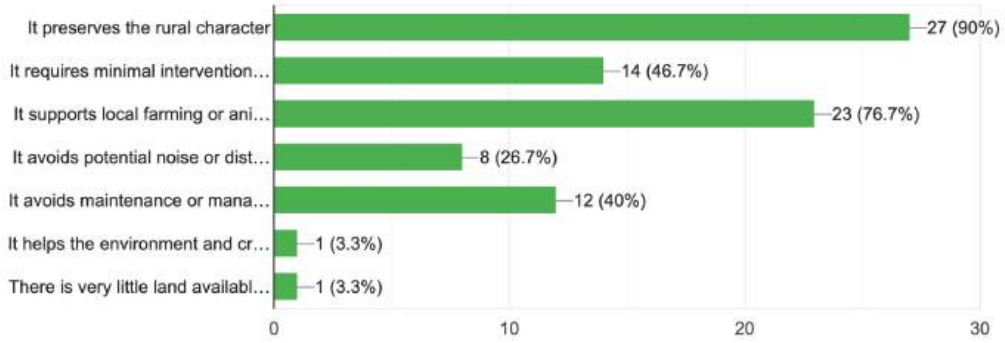
In your view, what should happen to the Old Rec in future? (Select one)

221 responses



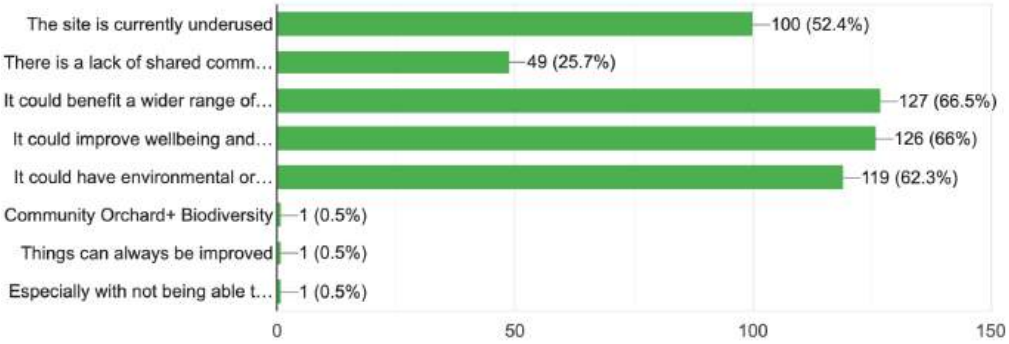
What are your main reasons for preferring the Old Rec to remain available for grazing? (Select up to 3)

30 responses



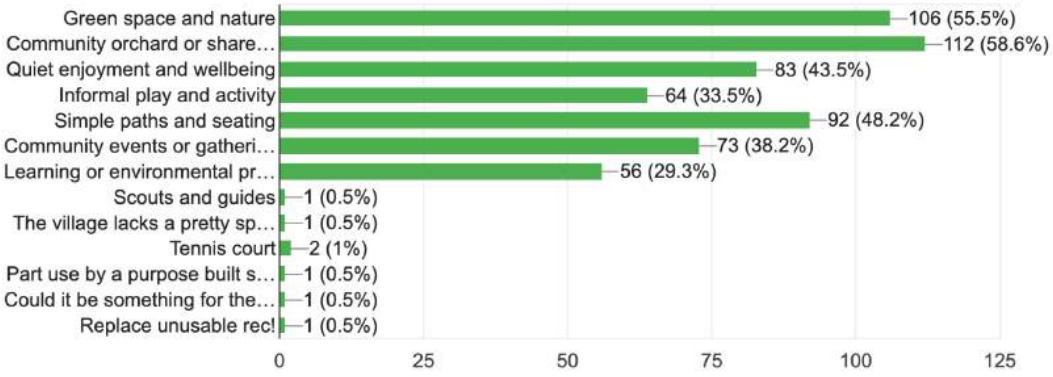
What are your main reasons for supporting repurposing or change? (Select up to 3)

191 responses

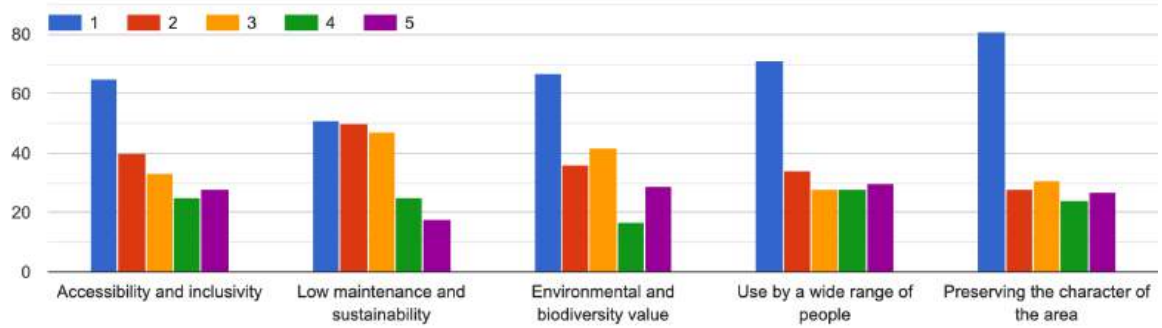


Which of the following would you support in principle? (Select up to 3)

191 responses

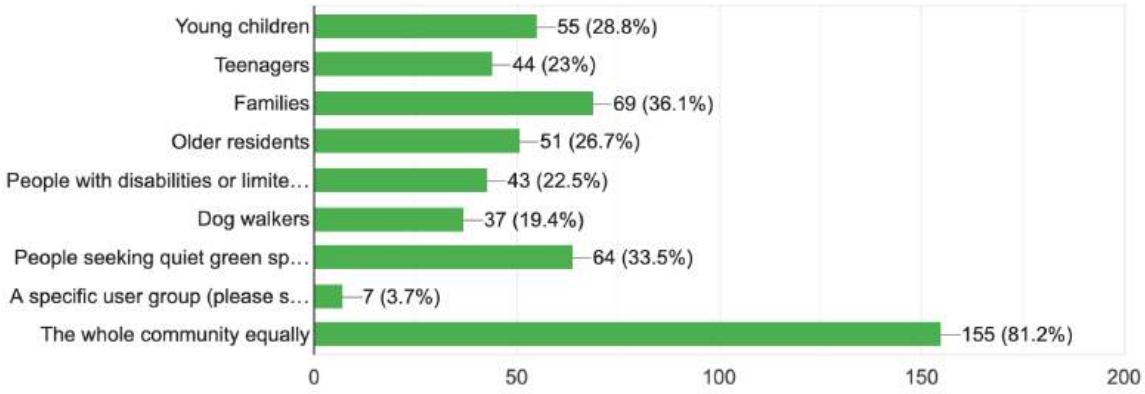


Which of the following principles matter most to you? (Please rank 1–5, where 1 is most important)



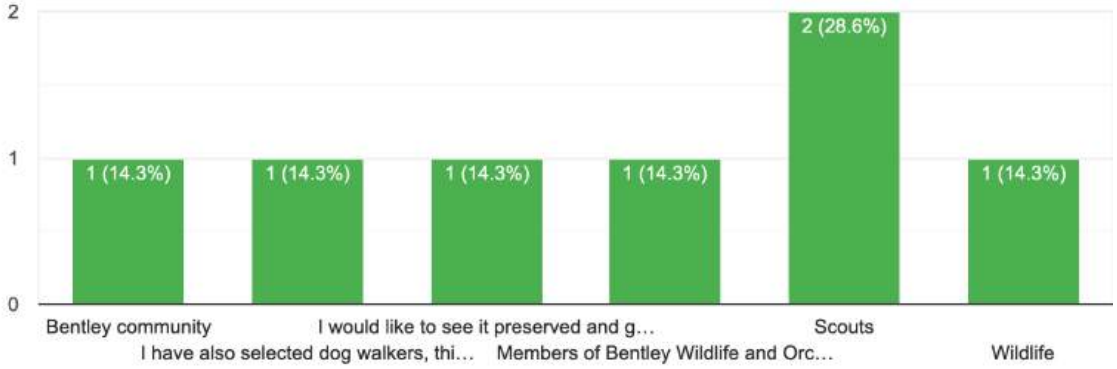
Who do you think the Old Rec should serve? (Select all that apply)

191 responses



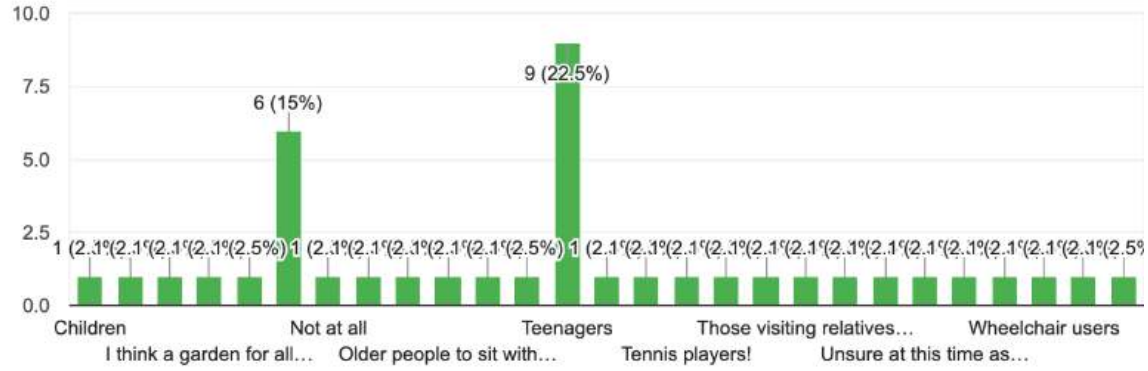
If you answered "A specific user group" please specify who here.

7 responses



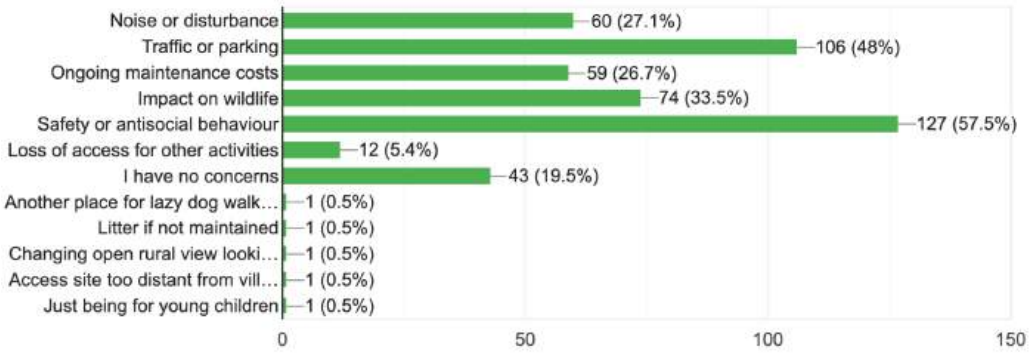
Is there anyone whose needs you feel are currently under-presented in the parish?

40 responses



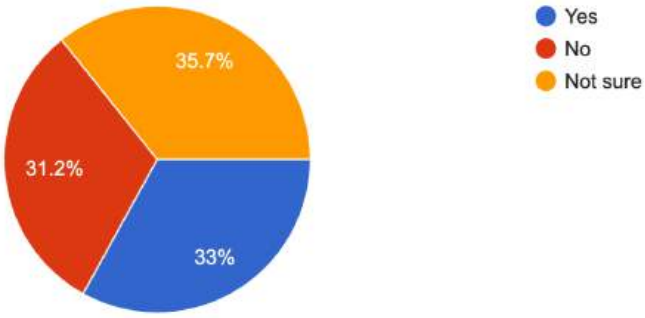
What concerns you most? (Select up to 3)

221 responses



Even if you are broadly in favour of a change in use, are there any specific uses you would NOT support on the Old Rec?

221 responses



If you answered "yes" to the question above, please tell us what you would NOT support, and why
Building development
Not as another playground or area for large gatherings.
I would like to see it remain as green open grassy space… keep it wild and uncluttered with any buildings/hard landscaping. It is rare to be able to spend time in a wild open space and not have to stick to the path; let it be a happy natural and protected space.
New building development
Paving it over, building on it, opening it to traffic. We need more wildlife habitats, not rat runs for motorists.
Anything causing additional noise or reduction of public open space
More development, i e. new build of housing.
Anything that would attract thieves and other antisocial people.
Somewhere that becomes a ‘hangout’ spot for antisocial behaviour and dumping
Loosing more green space and character for the area
As a bmx or skate Park, or similar. I think it would be predominantly teenagers and there may well be issues with noise and litter
Housing and Urban Development
Skate park or bike track. They tend to attract graffiti and unsociable behaviour.
Anything that would negatively affect it’s use for young children
Housing or buildings
Development
Housing
Housing. Shops. Concrete. Paving. Focus on older generation.
I do not think there should be a change of use
Building new houses
Do not want noise from a child play area
Use which would be detrimental to wildlife

If you answered "yes" to the question above, please tell us what you would NOT support, and why
Any kind of children's play equipment
Not supporting anything other than agricultural
I wouldn't support it if it was only for one specific group of people.
Building resulting in traffic and noise. I would like to maintain sense of a quiet village and traffic and building is already, I feel, becoming an issue
Housing
Evening events, risk of antisocial behaviour
Anything not in keeping with the nature: even if there is some play area keeping it wooden and natural looking
Area that would attract antisocial behaviour. There is a traveller community opposite which is continually growing and has anti social behaviour with other area around Bentley.
Housing and further structures
Housing development
Dog walking and anything that disturbs the Old Rec as a grassland habitat.
Skate Park. Anything that can attract buildings of any kind.
Housing or building development. Needs to remain an open green space
Concrete park where teenagers will hang out.
Sports facility - parking requiref
Allotments or community growing. Both come with visual and practical disadvantages
Sports- the new rec is ample for that.
Any repurposing should not duplicate what is currently available elsewhere
Dog walking
Travelling community, so much rubbish left
Housing in that location only there are better locations to be utilised for the obvious need for more housing in the village
It should not replicate existing village facilities, e.g. children's play area and sports ground of the current rec.
A teenager "hang out" spot

If you answered "yes" to the question above, please tell us what you would NOT support, and why
Any form of activity involving noise
Gardens, as there are some already established. Play grounds established
Vehicle access
Sports - we have the rec and a great team trying to make that into a valuable resource for all the village
Building
Anything that attracts visitors who need to park, because there is no parking. Development because it would change the character of the village and cause more teaffic problems.
Houses
No to housing
Non durable trendy initiatives. Anything that tends to change the settled character of the village .
People using BBQ's or fire pits.
Play area
Any structures or play parks
Any hard development + excessive costs
more building
New Houses, More Buildings as it creates more traffic for Bentley and pollutes the air more and kills ecosystems
Houses
uses which turned it from a field into a structured 'leisure facility' with benches/tables/all weather paths
No buildings (only pergola) too much development in the village already…
Skate park
anything that detracts from biodiversity
I would welcome the field to be used primarily for community benefit as a green space or convening space to bring people closer together.
Anything requiring a building or siting of equipment
Any uses involving built landscape
Teenagers drinking there and taking drugs-especially at night

Please complete the following sentence (optional): "I would support changes to the Old Rec as long as…"
It is sustainable for the future
It is focused on well-being and the village community with access to multiple individuals but also if we are able to maintain it as a community. A community orchard, growing area and wildflower/ wellness area would be great.
Children and sports were a priority
It has a feasible long term plan built on a sound financial footing.
The nature of it isn't spoilt .
It is environmentally friendly and takes into consideration the wildlife in the area
it remains inaccessible to motor vehicles and will not attract antisocial behaviour.
It respects the character of the village, protects green space and genuinely benefits the local community.
Very happy with the ideas if an orchard and bees as already have been suggested
The character of the village is maintained. That there is no new development of housing. That it doesn't become a locus and magnet for antisocial behaviour. There are environmental benefits, e.g. new wildlife habitats.
It was well managed and not used for antisocial activities
they benefit the whole community
It was affordable for the Parish. A padel court would be amazing in part of it but obviously only if the money could be raised separately.
Does not encourage development in 1tree field.
It is well planned so no antisocial behaviour is likely to occur
It was in keeping, for the village & community and was environmentally friendly
See previous answer.
It's keeps the rural theme of the village
They are in keeping and prioritise those who live locally
This was environmentally and financially sustainable

Please complete the following sentence (optional): "I would support changes to the Old Rec as long as…"
It is community based and in keeping with the village character. No executive housing.
It's environmental
accessible to all in the community and environmentally sustainable..
You get on and hold Bentley archers to account and ensure a PERMANENT solution immediately to the main rec issues.
It has environmental benefits
The rural character was preserved and it wasn't housing
If remains green
It benefits the community.
Was good for the community, protected it from housing development.
80% of green grass is kept. A replacement building is very modern. The car park is kept or slightly expanded. Events e.g. scout sale can continue to rent the space occasionally. Playground is kept or updated
it creates a space for all and realistically has a clear maintenance /upkeep programme
It is in keeping with the traditions of the village.
Open to all and well maintained
It was an area used by various ages
the green space is preserved or enhanced
They are minimal
Access remains enclosed and safe
It supported nature and wildlife
It was available to all
There were equal opportunities to engage with change and use the space for the whole community (not just a select few)
It doesn't involve building any structures
Nothing. No change.
It is open for everyone
It's inclusive to everyone in the village.

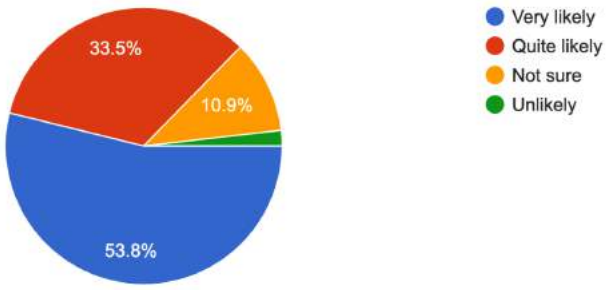
Please complete the following sentence (optional): "I would support changes to the Old Rec as long as…"
Sufficient parking and no risk of anti social behaviour
It doesn't impact the infrastructure and traffic through village.
There was a realistic long term plan to ensure maintenance
It preserves the biodiversity
The space is open to all residents for their enjoyment
The would benefit the community. I currently use it mainly to exercise my dog, especially as the alpaca field is not accessible due to the risk of being attacked by the alpacas.
As it is for a community project
It adds value to the village and its people
Every one can enjoy what the changes are
It enhances our village
It provides places to relax and be in nature. Picnic areas etc.
Antisocial behaviour and safety is a concern and something we need to always be aware of. The site is a bit isolated and away from the centre of the village whilst also being quite close to the A31 so a bit difficult to run and find help of you feel threatened at any time.
The space is correctly implicated and actual with environmental usage and not what it looks like on paper to tick a government box.
there is general support....
This piece of land is looked after and remains a quiet place which enhances nature and our beautiful countryside village.
It could be altered if it doesn't work.
A grassland habitat is maintained.
It retains the natural beauty of the land
It continues to be maintained after any development
It didn't bring more traffic to village
environmental and sustainability is central focus for the change.
It wasn't just aimed at children

Please complete the following sentence (optional): "I would support changes to the Old Rec as long as…"
It's natural and made of wood
Everybody is equally considered, able bodied, disabled, with animals, without animals, children, no children and young and old.
It is managed and looked after
all are consulted and the majority vote followed.
It benefits a wide range of people in the community
It is as natural and wildlife friendly
It's not housing
It provides facilities for the community
It serves the community. Currently it is a boggy fields which isn't accessible
it benefits a wide range of residents rather than a handful who have "shouted the loudest"
the changes have realistic goals
It helps educate other people
the residents will benefit from using the area
There is not a sole focus on the environment
It benefits the Bentley community
It's open for community use
it is sympathetic to nature and there are hardcore paths to walk around the area
It has a clear purpose, is not mistreated and is maintained well
It is beneficial to nature/ecology
It remains maintained
It becomes a community assess and use for all. Secure safe area.
The whole village is in agreement.
it is used sensibly by the community (ie. Doesn't provide a location for antisocial behaviour etc, particularly given its relatively close location to the travellers site).
Its not built on
Those changes are whole heartedly embraced supported and maintained by the community

Please complete the following sentence (optional): "I would support changes to the Old Rec as long as…"
No housing
they truly benefit the community and don't duplicate what is already available
It enhances the settled character of the village in a durable, manageable, financially lightweight manner.
They are in keeping with the community
the character of the area is maintained and sympathetically changed to incorporate new features where needed
It benefits the majority of the community
Basically it should be a quiet area, reflective one
Green Spaces / Nature / Biodiversity / Butterfly Area
It benefits the whole community
No more fruit trees planted. There is enough waste of fruit already
It benefits the people Of the parish.
the environment is a main focus and no animals homes are destroyed
The changes make the Old Rec available to all and are sustainably manageable in the long term
it remains an integral part of the fields within which it is situated
It's accessible for all
It is in line with the village and does not generate more noise andvtraffic
it is done for the long term and is fiscally responsible.
It supports a local green space and served the purpose of being accessible to the whole community.
the Parish Council have overall ownership and maintenance, and they do not reneg in future
It can be supervised in some way

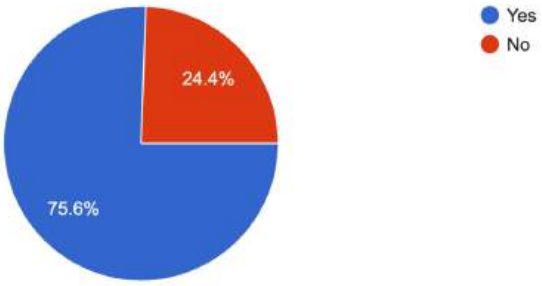
If the Old Rec were managed in a way that reflected your views, how likely would you be to use or value it?

221 responses



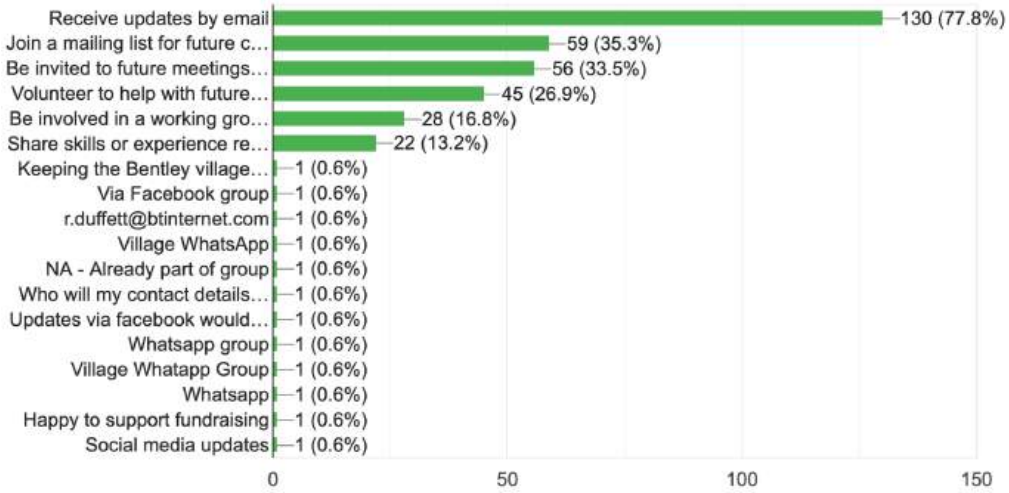
Would you like to stay informed or be involved as ideas develop?

221 responses



How would you like to stay informed or get involved? (Select all that apply)

167 responses



Is there anything else you would like to tell us about the Old Rec or its future? (Optional)
It should have biodiversity in mind but also human wellness and taking into account loneliness epidemic.
Let’s use it for something other than dog waste !
Please please don’t over develop it. Keep it wild.
I would like to visit the space as it is now but was unaware of its existence before and I don’t know where the access point is, perhaps you could add this to your map.
It should be accessible and a community asset everyone can enjoy.
I have only lived in the village 2 years and try to take an interest in the village,this is the first I have heard of this piece of land.
I would like to keep the zip-line as the kids love it
A very good idea for a piece of unused land
The Friends of Blacknest Fields would wholeheartedly offer advice on the project if it were decided it would support wildlife and nature. Community projects such as this are vital to creating green corridors and connectivity across our landscapes, however small the space. A community orchard or similar would support aspirations of supporting wildlife and could be low maintenance and high return for both people and wildlife.
Please think about archeological possibilities
No
I think, firstly we need to engage with a local farmer that can graze sheep and get it rolled in spring, definitely looks like it needs managing even if it stays as it is.
Think it’s important to make sure it is used and doesn’t get built on.
Well done with putting forward this initiative! Really helpful to include the video. I had to pass on one of the questions. Strictly speaking I do not live in the parish of Bentley - but rather the parish of Binsted. I am on Station Road - GU10 5JY. There wasn't really an option for me to tick.
Just that I had no idea it was not privately owned
Undertake a biodiversity survey before deciding anything!

Is there anything else you would like to tell us about the Old Rec or its future? (Optional)
I can remember watching cricket there 50 years ago and very pleasant it was too. However, the current Rec provides all the facilities, is underused, has parking and is safer. Any money available could be better used to upgrade the pavilion.
Should allow dogs!
What about building a sustainable wooden roundhouse with benches. It could be used as a communal meeting space or forest school etc
Well done to date and exciting times ahead
A much larger project, but the development of Little Horsted Green outside Uckfield in Sussex has been very successful. Main takeaways from this project for Bentley would be the accessible, mud free walking routes and the mixed variety fruit orchard. Also lots of benches to sit and enjoy the space. YouTube video here - https://youtu.be/o1zmL5GyqkE?si=Ht50Tyz2Q5F_LP8Q
I think a wildflower meadow would be worth consideration
Make it an extension of the Binsted rec /bentley playing fields for all to enjoy with seating (and a path to walk on)
I own a parcel of land to the South of the Old Rec. The Coronation Oak should be better maintained.
A Bowling Green would be a good feature
Due to the delay in the current rec area an interim place to practice sport activities would be a benefit to the locals and the greater community. Paths around the field, road base not a concrete surround, maintained and stable and walkable and wheel chair access.
I worry about access by foot across the road coming up from the station. Very dangerous for the elderly and young alike. Because of its situation wherever you come from you have to cross the road.
I would wonder if it could be changed to be a slipway to the a31 which would lower the number of cars going through the village
I'm very impressed by all those involved in this survey and inclusion of the community in considering the future of the Old Rec. Jim

Is there anything else you would like to tell us about the Old Rec or its future? (Optional)
Don't forget livestock owners! Animals are very good for people and well known for the equine assisted and all types therapy and mental health therapy
A ‘park’ layout, with all weather wheelchair access, and ‘stops’ along the way with benches, kids fixed play structures and adult outdoors ‘workout’ structures. Area for community gardens/shared growing space. Stops with simple educational/historic information.
I like having horses in the field. It adds to the country feeling of the village.

Appendix C

The Soil Cover on the Old Recreation Ground, Bentley

Soils covering the Old Recreation ground were surveyed in January 2026 to provide background information for proposals for suitable planting for a community space in the village.

The field is in permanent grassland but has been disturbed in places when the ground was used as a construction site during the development of the bypass. The area is surrounded by ditches.

The soils are developed in relatively thin flinty drift which is a combination of river terrace material and drift from sloping ground to the north. This material sits over the weathered surface of the underlying Gault clay.

Soils over the field are moderately deep flinty silty clay loams or, in some cases, heavy silty clay loams (clay content between 20 and 25 percent) over coarsely structured clay with little profile definition between the surface layer and the immediate subsoil. Topsoils (12-18 cms) are of greyish brown, slightly to moderately flinty, silty clay loam or heavy silty clay loam with a strong crumb structure. The immediate subsoil is of a similar colour and texture. There are a few rusty mottles present, indicating intermittent waterlogging, with a deeper flinty, silty clay loam subsoil, which is loosely structured. Dense subsoil clay occurs at depths below about 50cm depth.

The drainage over the ground is relatively good, although slight mottling in the loamy cover indicates some intermittent surface wetness, and there is no marshy vegetation, like *juncus spp* that would indicate long term wet conditions. Clearing of ditches surrounding the field will allow more excess water to drain naturally from the field and there is no need to provide field. Any improvement in the drainage condition would give firmer access to the land during the winter months.

You will need to take specific advice about planting fruit trees on the ground but evidence from the surrounding boundaries indicates a wide choice of deciduous tree species to consider during the planting stage of the project.

Soil depth for tree planting is good and will allow good root development.

W.A.D.WHITFIELD

22.1.2026

Appendix D

Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust

Beechcroft House
Vicarage Lane
Curdridge
Hampshire
SO32 2DP

01489 774400

Bentley Old Rec site visit report 03.2.26

Introduction

Jade Bower requested a site visit to review existing habitats and provide some suggestions of how the site might be enhanced for wildlife including a potential community orchard. I visited the site as part of our Team Wilder project that supports communities to take action for nature and make space for nature. A review and recommendations are set out below. If funds allow a further Ecological Appraisal is recommended by a professional ecologist which HIOWWT can provide.

Site advice recommendations

Open grassland habitat

The grassland field is approximately 1ha in size and consists of '**semi-improved grassland**' that has been modified through interventions such as grazing and use of fertilizers. It contains a variety of grasses and wildflowers such as cock's foot, ragwort, clover, ox-eye daisy and dock. However, wildflower abundance and diversity is low with coarse broad-leaved grasses dominanting.

Open grassland monitoring and management

Completing an annual **Rapid Grassland Assessment** in June will help provide a baseline measure of grassland condition for biodiversity, inform management and then measure change over time. This should only take an hour once you get the hang of it as you are noting presence of wildflowers whilst in flower and relatively easy to identify across 10 x 1m square sample plots. A useful measure to include is percentage cover of wildflowers in each plot as this should improve over time with appropriate management. See Hampshire County Council pollinator pledge toolkit for more details including details of Pollinator Count surveys that are another useful measure. Where possible getting photos of pollinating insects will help identify which species are present using the iNaturalist app. HCC provide training for the surveys but I can also **offer some training at the site** which can double up as a community engagement event at the same time.

The grassland habitat can be improved for wildlife and biodiversity by introducing '**cut and collect**' management of grass where grass is mown and cuttings collected by machine or raked off by hand. Removing cuttings each time helps remove nutrients from the soil which reduces grass vigour and promotes wildflower diversity and abundance. An annual cut and collect in late July will start the process of improvement which will take a number of years. If resources allow the process can be speeded up by completing three cut and collects in one year in approximately April, July and September before reverting back to an annual or ideally two cut and collects per year in March and August/September.

Agicultural contractors have suitable machinery that cut and collects in one go, to keep costs down its best to have a designated area on site for composting of cuttings (and this can provide habitat for wildlife such as slow worms). Machinery should not be used in wet conditions to avoid soil damage.

Flail collector machinery

Alternatively you can enquire about booking Hampshire County Council staff to use their pedestrian-operated, motorized scythe and baler —free of charge: contact karima.smith@hants.gov.uk. The machine can compact hay into small, manageable bales, which could be used for feeding livestock in the local community. However this is slow going compared to tractor so they may not be able to cut the whole field and you would need to focus on one area.

HCC Motorized scythe and baler

It's important to leave some grassland areas around the margins uncut each year with tall grasses that provide overwintering habitat. Retaining or even planting good size patches of stinging nettles in sunny spots will provide valuable foodplants for red admiral and peacock butterflies.

Conservation grazing could also be considered for management of grassland but I understand the likely high use by people and dogs means this probably wont be suitable. You could conisder have stock fencing around a large central area that could be grazed and keep livestock and people apart, however, this is likely to be expensive. HIOWWT does provide conservtaion grazing services – I can enquire further if you wish.

Open grassland habitat creation

Once grass vigour is reduced wildflower seeding/planting can also be considered. See attached Plantlife's '**Good Meadow Guide**' for more details on management and improvement.

A '**butterfly bank**' can be created as a colourful feature area by removing turf and ideally 150mm topsoil and seeding/planting into low nutrient subsoil. This will create a species-rich meadow habitat to attract butterflies and other pollinators. If funds allow this can be created by a contractor with a mini-digger around 150-200m2 in size or smaller size by hand with spades. Turf/topsoil is used to form a low south facing

crescent shaped bank around the bare soil and helps provide sheltered warm conditions. Wildflower plug plants can be propagated at home or bought online and make for a fun community planting session.
A sunny sheltered south facing location would be ideal. One location we looked at was alongside the south facing hedge at the northern end on the site.

Butterfly bank created with mini-digger in urban park in London with mini forest alongside


Other wildlife / community engagement features could include **bug hotels** such as this pallet design and **log pyramids**, where logs are part buried in the ground in a vertical position, that are great for stag beetles in particular. **Log piles** with mulch on top provide habitat for many species from bugs to small mammals, reptiles and amphibians.

Log pile with mulch & bug hotel


Open grassland habitat creation – orchard and tree planting

A **community orchard** would be a great way to support biodiversity and engage the local community. Fruit trees provide many food sources for wildlife include nectar, pollen, leaves and fruit with Apple supporting over 50 moth species. As the trees don't get too big they can be spaced so as to maintain the grassland without too much shading which helps promote wildflowers.

Additional native tree planting with **stand alone trees** and **small blocks of low growing trees** (shrubs) will provide further habitat and food sources for wildlife and create more of a habitat mosaic that promotes biodiversity and make it more interesting for people to walk around. Planting disease-resistant elm helps replace many trees lost to Dutch-elm disease and supports the rare white-letter hairstreak butterfly. Shrub blocks can include species that flower and have berries such as hawthorn, blackthorn (foodplant brown hairstreak butterfly, buckthorn (foodplant for brimstone butterfly), spindle, guelder rose & dog rose.

Shrub blocks in open grassland setting, brimstone butterfly

Further advice on tree planting suitability should be sought from Liz Keeling at Hampshire Forest Partnership who may also be able to supply trees. Conditions around the edges of the field, particularly along south and west boundaries, are likely to be too wet for fruit trees but the area in the middle should be ok. Liz recommended visiting a nearby community orchard recently created in Grayshott. The site could also be suitable for a mini forest. They are created using a planting technique that quickly establishes an entire forest ecosystem that's about the size of a tennis court, see link to HFP website for criteria (a water source nearby is desirable).

Hedgerows, trees and ditches

Hedgerows on site contain willow, field maple, ash, hawthorn, dog-rose, dogwood and blackthorn. They provide great wildlife habitat, particularly when they are thick and bushy, and food sources. A hedgerow survey is recommended to better understand their current status. This survey is comparatively simple to do, but collects enough vital information to give a good assessment of hedgerow health, as well as robust advice for future management.

Future management could include planting up gaps with new trees. Some coppicing, where trees are cut down to the base and allowed to regrow, may be needed to allow sufficient space and light for planting and establishment. This will also be an opportunity to introduce more variety of species such as hazel and guelder rose bearing in mind the wet ditches along the hedgerows may limit suitability.

Prior to any hedge management a Dormouse survey is recommended. They are protected so you would need to ask a licenced surveyor. You would tend to do this by putting up Dormouse tubes in the hedge to check for footprints. If there are any hazel then you can look at the distinctive nibbled nuts. They hibernate at ground level over winter so a survey would be done in spring/summer.

Allowing the hedge and some bramble to naturally spread out into the field will provide more wildlife habitat. Some new hedge planting could be done along the edge of the existing edge to thicken it in places. Maintaining the ditches and access to them will need to be considered as part of long term hedgerow management.

Water and ponds

At the time of visiting following wet weather there was standing water in SE and NW corners of the field with drainage ditches linking to the wet area in SE corner. A larger pond which is marked on old maps is located on the western boundary and is largely shaded by trees. Removing any trees growing in the pond

and coppicing trees around the pond particularly on the south side will allow more light in and begin the restoration process.

See extract from Freshwater Habitats Trust: GUIDE TO THE RESTORATION, CREATION AND MANAGEMENT OF PONDS page 28: Understanding pond restoration works:
*'The aim of restoration works is to open up ponds, so that they are **no longer completely shaded** and to **remove sediment** to restore something close to the original pond profile. This does not mean removing all trees and scrub and does not necessarily mean removing mud from all over the pond basin. It is particularly important to leave some scrub and bramble habitat close to a pond as essential local terrestrial habitat for birds, pollinators and amphibians.*

However, it is equally important to have a major impact and to open up the pond sufficiently so that enough work needs to be undertaken to have the required impact of opening up the canopy and letting light in to stimulate wetland plant recovery from buried, often ancient, wetland seedbanks. Under good working conditions, for a typical small pond less than 20 m in maximum diameter, the work required can often be achieved in one to two days with a chain saw operator and digger working together. Volunteers can also greatly help with transferring cut wood to wood piles.'

HIOWWT and South Downs National Park have used this contractor for pond creation/restoration
Morton:Pattison | Ecology and Countryside in Southern England

Citizen Science and community engagement

Citizen Science provides useful records to help monitor wildlife which informs management and the local authority planning process. iNaturalist is a photo based recording app suitable for beginners who need help identifying the things they see. A community project can be set up to help collate records. iRecord app and website tends to be used by more experienced recorders with records verified by experts, a site based project can also be setup to collate records. Natural History Museum have produced a useful introductory guide to Citizen Science and survey calender here.

Reviewing local wildlife records from open sources like iNaturalist and iRecord helps confirm species presence in the local area. Supporting further wildlife recording by volunteers with these smartphone apps on the site will help build more evidence of local wildlife.

iNaturalist app with records from Bentley with 135 observations / 102 species

An HBIC data search will also provide useful baseline records - community groups can often get this for free with the local authority paying the bill. It's also worth asking around for any local expertise in your community that might be able to help with surveys.

Many wildlife features could be installed at community events as well as running simple citizen science surveys such as the Pollinator Count Survey mentioned above, Big Butterfly Count or Birds in Greenspaces. Running a Bioblitz event is another way of engaging the community where you record all the species you can find on the site in a set time. You can set up a Bioblitz project on the iNaturalist app so people can take pictures and submit them. Involving any local experts will help.

Team Wilder

Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust's Team Wilder project is a community-driven initiative aimed at empowering individuals, businesses, and communities to take collective action for wildlife and nature recovery. The project envisions creating a "wilder" region by fostering stronger connections with nature and encouraging active participation in conservation efforts.

There are lots of resources on the Team Wilder webpages including how to guides to support wildlife. There is a facebook group, newsletter and online network meetings for groups. Once established you can add your group onto the Team Wilder map and any specific actions you would like to add as well.

Appendix 1 – iRecord website records for Bentley – 15 species

Records | Species | Families | Groups | Downloads

Accepted name	Common name	Group	Kingdom	Order	Family	No. of records	First record	Last record
Polygonia c-album	Comma	insect - butterfly	Animalia	Lepidoptera	Nymphalidae	2	28/06/2020	03/08/2021
Aglais io	Peacock	insect - butterfly	Animalia	Lepidoptera	Nymphalidae	2	01/08/2021	16/06/2022
Silene dioica	Red Campion	flowering plant	Plantae	Caryophyllales	Caryophyllaceae	1	16/05/2023	16/05/2023
Medicago polymorpha	Toothed Medick	flowering plant	Plantae	Fabales	Fabaceae	1	11/10/2022	11/10/2022
Epilobium hirsutum	Great Willowherb	flowering plant	Plantae	Myrtales	Onagraceae	1	25/07/2023	25/07/2023
Fagopyrum esculentum	Buckwheat	flowering plant	Plantae	Caryophyllales	Polygonaceae	1	11/10/2022	11/10/2022
Lymantria monacha	Black Arches	insect - moth	Animalia	Lepidoptera	Erebidae	1	29/07/2025	29/07/2025
Xylaria hypoxylon	Candlesnuff Fungus	fungus	Fungi	Xylariales	Xylariaceae	1	08/11/2022	08/11/2022
Coleophoridae		insect - moth	Animalia	Lepidoptera	Coleophoridae	1	16/05/2019	16/05/2019
Aglais urticae	Small Tortoiseshell	insect - butterfly	Animalia	Lepidoptera	Nymphalidae	1	14/08/2021	14/08/2021
Aphantopus hyperantus	Ringlet	insect - butterfly	Animalia	Lepidoptera	Nymphalidae	1	01/08/2021	01/08/2021
Vanessa atalanta	Red Admiral	insect - butterfly	Animalia	Lepidoptera	Nymphalidae	1	03/08/2021	03/08/2021
Melanargia galathea	Marbled White	insect - butterfly	Animalia	Lepidoptera	Nymphalidae	1	28/06/2020	28/06/2020
Pyronia tithonus	Gatekeeper	insect - butterfly	Animalia	Lepidoptera	Nymphalidae	1	14/08/2021	14/08/2021
Agrophila sulphurella	Straw Grass-veneer	insect - moth	Animalia	Lepidoptera	Crambidae	1	01/01/2011	01/01/2011

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Appendix E

Preliminary Ecological Appraisal

The Old Rec, Station Road, Bentley, Farnham, Surrey, GU10 5JT

March 2026

Ecology Works Limited, 136 The Causeway, Petersfield, Hampshire GU31 4LL

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Ecology Works Limited is a registered company in England and Wales. Company Number: 14215199
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Report Conditions

The methods and recommendations set out in this report are based on the following guidance:

- Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) (2024) Guidelines for Ecological Impact Assessment in the UK and Ireland. CIEEM, Romsey.
- CIEEM (2017) Guidelines for Ecological Report Writing. CIEEM, Romsey.
- CIEEM (2021) Good Practice Guidance for Habitats and Species, Version 3, May 2021. CIEEM, Romsey.

  which include:

  - JNCC Handbook for Phase 1 Habitat Survey: A technique for environmental audit (Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC), 2010)
  - UK Habitat Classification (UKHab) Version 2 (Butcher et al, 2023)
  - CIEEM Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal, Second Edition (CIEEM, 2017)
  - Bat Conservation Trust Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines (BCT, 2023)
  - Great Crested Newt Mitigation Guidelines (English Nature (now Natural England), 2001)

Site	The Old Rec, Station Road, Bentley, Farnham, Surrey, GU10 5JT
Client	Bentley Parish Council
Report	Preliminary Ecological Appraisal
Survey date	2nd February 2026
Author	Frances King-Smith BSc (Hons) CEcol MCIEEM Principal Ecologist and Founder
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Review date	6th March 2026
Issued	6th March 2026
Disclaimer	This technical report has been produced by Ecology Works Limited using all reasonable diligence and care within the scope and terms agreed with the client. It should not be taken as legal advice, which should be sought separately from a legal specialist if needed. The report must not be relied upon by a third party without prior approval from Ecology Works Limited. It is specific to the proposal set out by the client at the time the report was commissioned and must not be relied upon to support any other future proposal at this or any other sites. Implementation of any recommendations, licensing requirements from Natural England or planning conditions arising from this ecological work are the sole responsibility of the client, and not of Ecology Works Limited.
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Contents

Executive summary

Ecology Works Limited was commissioned by Bentley Parish Council to undertake a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal of a field of permanent pasture known as the Old Rec, Station Road, Bentley, Farnham, Surrey, GU10 5JT. The PEA is required to support a proposal to transform the field into a Public Open Space for the village community. No development or other construction is planned. The site is defined as Open Green Space in the Bentley Parish Modified Neighbourhood Plan (July 2025), and is in a Conservation Area. Confirmation would need to be sought from East Hampshire District Council as to whether a planning application is required for this proposal.

This report is based on the findings of the survey and is supported by a comprehensive desk study. It details the level of suitability for protected and notable species and sets out the ecological constraints to the proposal.

The Old Rec comprises a single large modified grassland field of approximately 1.2 hectares, surrounded by mature hedgerows with trees to the north, east, south and west. The site is located on the southern edge of the village centre, west of Station Road. Taken together, the desk study and Preliminary Ecological Appraisal made the following findings:

- There are no statutory nature conservation sites within 1km of the site.
- Bentley Pond Site of Importance for Nature Conservation, located 400m north-east of the site, is the only non-statutory nature conservation site within a 1km radius of The Old Rec.
- Many protected and notable species have been recorded within 1km of The Old Rec, including at least nine species of bat, otter, badger, hedgehog, brown hare, great crested newt, reptiles, birds and invertebrates.
- The site is assessed as having:
    - Widespread on-site habitats comprising modified grassland, native hedgerows with trees, wet ditches and two small ponds;
    - Suitability for a wide range of protected and notable species, including foraging, commuting and roosting bats, badger, hazel dormouse, breeding birds, reptiles, great crested newt, hedgehog and a varied invertebrate community including stag beetle and brown hairstreak butterfly.

Further surveys are planned during 2026 for bats, hazel dormouse, reptiles and great crested newt, to establish the status of these species and ensure the proposal will support and enhance the site's biodiversity in perpetuity. The results of these surveys will be used to support and inform the emerging design for the site, comprising habitat enhancement work, planting, pond restoration and installation of nest boxes. Implementation, management and monitoring measures will be set out in a detailed Ecological Management Plan.

The proposal will serve to enhance and protect the site for local wildlife, including a wide range of protected and notable species and important habitats, in perpetuity. This will see an overall Biodiversity Net Gain at The Old Rec.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Ecology Works Limited was commissioned by Bentley Parish Council to undertake a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) of field of permanent pasture known as the Old Rec, Station Road, Bentley, Farnham, Surrey GU10 5JT. The PEA is required to support a proposal to transform the field into a Public Open Space for the village community.

No development or other construction is planned. The site is defined as Open Green Space in the Bentley Parish Modified Neighbourhood Plan (July 2025), and is in a Conservation Area. Confirmation would need to be sought from East Hampshire District Council as to whether a planning application is required for this proposal.

This report is based on the findings of the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal field survey carried out in February 2025 and is supported by a desk study. It details the level of suitability for protected and notable species at the site, such as bats, badger, hazel dormouse, breeding birds, reptiles and great crested newt, and sets out the potential ecological constraints to the proposal. The report includes recommendations for measures to avoid, mitigate or compensate for impacts to protected or notable species, in line with the Mitigation Hierarchy. It also suggests specific enhancement measures to deliver an overall Biodiversity Net Gain.

1.2 Site description

The Old Rec, referred to hereafter as 'the site', comprises a single large modified grassland field of approximately 1.2 hectares, surrounded to the north, east, south and west by mature hedgerows with standard trees. The site is centred around National Grid Reference SU 78363 43742, and What3Words location ///that.watch.otter.

The site is bound by fields to the north, south and west, and by Station Road to the east. Bentley village centre is 200 metres (m) north-east of the site. The A31 trunk route is 50m to the south and the River Wey is located 580m to the south at its nearest point. A site location plan is provided in Appendix 1.

1.3 Site proposals

The proposal entails transformation of the field of permanent pasture into a Public Open Space, enhanced for community use and biodiversity. The scheme is currently under consultation, including a local residents' survey to establish the most suitable inclusions in the scheme based on local desire and expertise. Design proposals are not finalised at the time of writing this report, however, initial ideas include, but are not limited to:

- A central orchard area, an arboretum or Miyawaki forest area in the south and a butterfly area in the north
- Pond and habitat restoration work
- An outdoor classroom and a demonstration hop garden
- Mown paths, benches and interpretation boards around the site, and a dog waste bin at the entrance

2 Legislation

2.1 European Protected Species (EPS)

All British bat species, Eurasian otter, hazel dormouse and great crested newt are afforded full protection under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). In addition, these species are protected under Schedule 2 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017. Schedule 2 defines European Protected Species (EPS). These animals and their habitats receive additional protection via the Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act, 2000, and under the Bonn Convention, of which the UK is part. Taken together, these make it an offence to:

- kill, injure or take such an animal
- possess any part of such an animal (alive or dead)
- intentionally or recklessly damage, destroy or obstruct access to any place or structure used by these species for shelter, rest, protection or breeding
- intentionally or recklessly disturb these species whilst using any place of shelter or protection
- deliberately disturb these species in such a way as to be likely to impair their ability to:
    - survive, to breed or reproduce, or to rear or nurture their young
    - in the case of animals of a hibernating or migratory species, to hibernate or migrate
    - to significantly affect the local distribution or abundance of the species in question (this is therefore interpreted to protect the foraging, commuting, breeding and terrestrial habitat of these species)
- keep (possess), transport, sell or exchange, or offer for sale or exchange, any live or dead animal of these species, or any part of, or anything derived from them

A bat roost is considered any structure or place which a bat uses for shelter or protection. Bats can be loyal to roosts, returning year on year; legal opinion is therefore that protection of roosts applies whether or not bats are present at the time of survey or construction work. There is no definition of the timescale for how long a disused bat roost remains a roost.

If an offence outlined in the list above may be committed as a result of planned works, such as re-roofing, extension or demolition for bats, or habitat removal for otter, dormouse and great crested newt, such work would need to be carried out under licence from Natural England. Works or mitigation activities involving interference with these species must be carried out by a suitably-licensed individual (with a current Natural England bat/dormouse/great crested newt licence).

2.2 Badgers

Unlike other protected species, badgers are legally protected because of historic and persistent persecution, rather than conservation. They are afforded full protection, as are their setts, in England and Wales under the Protection of Badgers Act 1992. Their foraging and commuting habitat is not protected by this legislation. The Act makes it a criminal offence to:

- willfully kill, injure or take a badger (or attempt to do so)
- cruelly ill-treat a badger
- dig for a badger
- intentionally or recklessly damage, destroy or obstruct access to a badger sett
- cause a dog to enter a badger sett
- disturb a badger when it is occupying a sett

2.3 Birds

In the UK, all wild birds are afforded protection under Section 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), making it an offence to intentionally kill, injure or take any wild bird or to take, damage or destroy a nest (while in use or during its construction) or eggs. Some species receive further protection via inclusion in Schedule 1 of the Act, which makes it an offence to intentionally or recklessly disturb these birds whilst building a nest or in, on or near a nest containing eggs or young; or to disturb dependent young. Schedule 1 species include, for example, barn owl *Tyto alba*.

2.4 Reptiles

British reptile species are included in Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and are therefore protected from intentional killing or injury. This includes the widespread species: adder *Vipera berus*, grass snake *Natrix helvetica*, slow-worm *Anguis fragilis* and common lizard *Zootoca vivipara*.

Smooth snake *Coronella austriaca* and sand lizard *Lacerta agilis* are classed as rare reptiles and are afforded full protection under the Act. This makes it an offence to intentionally or recklessly kill, injure, disturb, take, possess or sell these species (of any life stage). It is also illegal to damage, destroy or obstruct access to places they use for breeding, resting, shelter and protection.

All species of reptile are listed as Species of Principal Importance under Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006, and must therefore be taken into consideration as part of planning for any development.

2.5 Other Species

The NERC Act 2006 requires due consideration be given to biodiversity and its potential enhancement when considering proposed developments, i.e. as part of the planning process. Section 41 of the Act defines a number of species as Species of Principal Importance for consideration during planning, which include several bat species, dormouse and a number of species which are not strictly legally protected, such as hedgehog *Erinaceus europaeus* and stag beetle *Lucanus cervus*.

All wild mammals, including rabbit *Oryctolagus cuniculus* and fox *Vulpes vulpes*, receive protection from harm with intent to inflict unnecessary suffering, including crushing and asphyxiation, under the Wild Mammals (Protection) Act 1996. This is relevant where burrows need to be removed as part of construction activity (notwithstanding the legal protection of badger detailed above).

2.6 Local Nature Recovery Strategies

Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) are a key component of the Environment Act 2021 in England. This legislation requires responsible authorities, typically local authorities, to develop and publish LNRSs with the aim of identifying priorities and opportunities for nature recovery in their areas. These strategies will be evidence-based, map the most valuable natural habitats, and set out proposals for improving biodiversity. LNRSs are designed to support the broader goal of halting biodiversity loss and contributing to the national Nature Recovery Network, ensuring coordinated and targeted conservation efforts across the country.

Hampshire LNRS sets out a comprehensive strategy based on a wide range of evidence, and has various focuses, such as designated nature conservation sites such as East Hampshire Hangers, habitat management measures and rare species. The LNRS is supported by interactive mapping, which makes the locations of non-statutory designated nature conservation sites and other ecological network features publicly available. The strategy is landscape-level, it does not specifically relate to small-scale proposals, however there are general high-level principles relevant to this assessment such as consideration of bat flight lines in the landscape.

3 Methods

3.1 Desk study

3.1.1 Zone of influence

The desk study was carried out within the zone of influence, which is an area around the site set by the assessor that may be affected by the proposals because of factors such as alterations to habitats, lighting, noise, the water table or human presence. For the purpose of the PEA, the zone of influence has been set at a 1 kilometre (km) radius around the site. This is increased to 2km for bats, which are highly mobile, and is increased further where the site falls within any impact zones of European sites, which can have zone of influence radii of several kilometres or more.

3.1.2 Local Records Centre

Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre (HBIC) was approached for records of notable and protected species of within 1km of the site (2km for bats). Data was received from HBIC on 4th March 2026.

3.1.3 MAGIC data search

The Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside[1] (MAGIC) online resource was accessed on 26th February 2025 to search for the following features:

- Internationally and nationally designated sites: SPAs, potential SPAs, SACs, possible SACs, Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar sites), Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), National Nature Reserves (NNRs) and Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) within 1km of the site
- European Protected Species (EPS) bat licences granted within 2km
- EPS hazel dormouse and great crested newt licences granted within 1km
- Natural England great crested newt class licence returns submitted within 1km

3.2 Field surveys

3.2.1 Survey area

The field survey encompassed the area affected by the development proposal.

3.2.2 Preliminary Ecological Appraisal

The habitat survey was undertaken following the user manual, habitat key and definitions for UK Habitat Classification (UKHab)[2], and entailed a detailed survey of on-site vegetation to identify key plant species present and to categorise the primary habitats and define them further using the UKHab secondary codes, where appropriate. Guidelines for

[1] MAGIC Map Application. https://magic.defra.gov.uk/MagicMap.aspx.
[2] UK Habitat Classification User Manual V2.01 (July 2023) UKHab; UKHab Field Key V2.1 (September 2020) UKHab; UK Habitat Category Definitions V1-1 (September 2020) UKHab

Preliminary Ecological Appraisal were also followed[3]. Where relevant, dominance was noted based on the DAFOR scale[4]. Target notes were made to identify particular features/species within the site. The habitats are described in the Results section and examples of habitats present are shown in photographs. A UKHab habitat map is provided in Appendix 3.

The site visit also included an assessment of the suitability of habitats present to support protected or notable species. These methods are detailed in Table 1.

Table 1. Methods used for establishing site suitability for protected and notable species

Species/ species group	Details

Bats	Roosting opportunities for bats are referred to as Potential Roosting Features (PRFs) and can take the form of a wide range of features within trees. These include loose or peeling bark, splits, cracks, woodpecker holes, callous rolls, snags, hazard beams and many other types of features. The presence of dense ivy on trees can both conceal and create suitable roosting features.
	Trees were assessed as
	• 'None' (no PRFs);
	• 'FAR' (Further Assessment Required to establish presence of PRFs); or
	• 'PRF' (at least one PRF present). PRF is further broken down into:
	  ◦ PRF-I (the PRF is suitable for individual bats or very small numbers); or
	  ◦ PRF-M (suitable for multiple bats and therefore could support a maternity colony).
	These categories for trees are in line with the criteria set out in the Bat Conservation Trust (BCT) Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists Good Practice Guidelines.
	These guidelines were also used to assess the suitability of the surrounding habitats and landscape for foraging and commuting bats.

Badger	A badger survey was undertaken of all areas within the site boundary. The site was searched for signs of badger activity including setts, tracks, caught guard hairs on fencing and brambles over mammal paths, snuffle holes and dung pits or latrines. Any mammal burrows recorded were closely examined to assess whether their shape and size was consistent with those of badger, and to check for diagnostic evidence such as paw prints, tracks, guard hairs and bedding material pulled from setts by badger. Any badger setts recorded were assigned a category of either 'main', 'annexe', 'subsidiary' or 'outlier' sett, and a status of 'active' or 'disused', based on the presence or lack of recent evidence, cobwebs and accumulations of leaf litter in sett entrances.
Otter	The site was assessed for its suitability for Eurasian otter *Lutra lutra*, predominantly based on the presence of ditches, streams, rivers or other waterbodies. Where present, areas in and around waterbodies were searched for holts, couches, lie-ups, feeding remains and spraints (otter droppings).
Water vole	Any waterbodies present were also searched for evidence of northern water vole *Arvicola amphibius*, such as burrows, latrines, tracks and feeding lawns.
Hazel dormouse	The habitat on and adjacent to the site was assessed for its suitability to support hazel dormouse, indicated by the presence of woodland, scrub or hedgerows with food plants such as hazel *Corylus avellana*, bramble *Rubus fruticosus* aggregate (agg.) and honeysuckle *Lonicera periclymenum*, which are able to provide a food contingent throughout the active season.

[3] CIEEM Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal, Second Edition (CIEEM, 2017)
[4] The DAFOR scale was used to note levels of dominance within habitats present for each plant species, from Dominant, Abundant, Frequent, Occasional or Rare.

Species/ species group	Details
Birds	The site was broadly assessed for its suitability for breeding birds. The following evidence was noted: • Presence of suitable nesting vegetation such as hedgerows, scrub and trees • Nests • Nesting material • Calls of chicks and young • Repetitive entry into suitable features and carrying of food and nesting materials by adult birds
Reptiles	Grassland, scrub, woodland edges and garden habitats within the site, if present, were appraised for their suitability for providing opportunities for basking, breeding, foraging and hibernating by widespread reptile species, such as grass snake and slow-worm. Materials resting on the ground, referred to as refuges, are routinely lifted to check for reptiles.
Great crested newt	Supported by the desk study for this species, waterbodies and terrestrial habitats on the site were assessed for their suitability for supporting great crested newt. Refuges, including logs, were routinely lifted to check for sheltering newts. . The ponds on-site underwent a great crested newt Habitat Suitability Index (HSI) assessment[5], to enable rapid assessment of how suitable the pond is for this species. Ponds with a score of 'below average' or lower are not routinely surveyed for great crested newt, as the species is unlikely to be present.
Invertebrates	The habitats on and adjacent to the site were broadly assessed for their suitability to support rare or notable invertebrates or important assemblages.
Other species	As well as the species above, the PEA included an assessment of the site's suitability to support Species of Principal Importance defined under the NERC Act 2006, such as hedgehog *Erinaceus europaeus* and brown hare *Lepus europaeus*.
Invasive plant species	Where observed, the presence of invasive plant species listed on Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, such as Japanese knotweed *Reynoutria japonica*, was noted during the survey. Please note, this does not represent an exhaustive search of the site for invasive non-native species.

The Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) was carried out in the daytime on 2nd February 2026 by Frances King-Smith BSc (Hons) CEcol MCIEEM.

Frances is a Natural England Registered Bat Consultant (RC152) with Natural England class licences for all UK bat species (ref. 2026-88982-CL18-BAT), hazel dormouse (2026-88895-CL10a-DOR) and great crested newt (2026-88993-SCI-CL09-GCN). Frances is a Chartered Ecologist and a full member of the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management, with 19 years' experience in protected species surveys, licensing and mitigation. She has held Natural England licences for bats, badger, water vole, hazel dormouse and great crested newt across a wide range of projects and sectors and is a selected member of the International Union for Nature Conservation (IUCN) Otter Specialist Group and Species Survival Commission.

Weather conditions during the PEA were 7°C, 100% cloud cover, dry and a light southerly breeze. The survey was conducted using a 1,000 lumen LED Lenser torch and 8x42 binoculars.

[5] Oldham R.S., Keeble J., Swan M.J.S. & Jeffcote M. (2000). *Evaluating the suitability of habitat for the Great Crested Newt (Triturus cristatus)*. Herpetological Journal 10(4), 143-155

3.3 Limitations

3.3.1 Preliminary Ecological Appraisal

The visibility of plant species varies throughout the year, and the UKHab habitat survey was undertaken in February, when many plants are in a vegetative (non-flowering) state and can be more difficult to identify. However, due to the common and widespread habitats and species present, the species were easily recognised and the habitats were straightforward to classify under UKHab. Notwithstanding this, a further habitat survey is planned during the flowering season to record any species which were not apparent during the PEA.

It is not always possible to access every PRF, e.g. gaps high up in trees, therefore the preliminary bat roost assessment is based on the suitability of such features to support roosting bats. This is a standard, unavoidable constraint of the survey work and is not considered a significant limitation.

There are no significant limitations to the survey overall.

4 Results

4.1 Designated sites

4.1.1 Designated sites

There are no statutory nature conservation sites located within a 1km radius of the site. The site is within the 5km to 7km zone of influence (ZoI) for recreational pressure impacts to Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA), however as there is no new housing proposed and no increase in recreational impacts on the SPA, this is not relevant to the proposal and is not considered further.

4.1.2 Priority habitats

The following Priority Habitats are recorded within 1km, none of which are functionally linked to the site:

- Coastal and floodplain grazing marsh
- Chalk river
- Ancient woodland
- Deciduous woodland
- Traditional orchard
- Pond

4.2 Habitats

The habitats on the site are mapped in Appendix 3 according to UKHab and are detailed below. No invasive non-native plant species were recorded.

4.2.1 Grassland

Modified grassland/tall or tussocky sward g4/128/504

The site comprises a large, square field of modified grassland, shown in Photographs 1 to 6. The grass was ungrazed at the time of the survey and had a varied, tussocky sward ranging in height between approximately 30 and 60 centimetres (cm). The species composition is consistent across the field and appeared species-poor and characteristic of semi-improved grassland grazed over decades. A further visit is planned for the summer flowering season to record any additional species not evident during the February PEA.

The species composition is dominated by Yorkshire fog *Holcus lanatus*, red fescue *Festuca rubra* aggregate (agg.) and cock's-foot *Dactylis glomerata*. Other species present include creeping buttercup *Ranunculus repens*, false oat-grass *Arrhenatherum elatius*, soft rush *Juncus effusus*, oxeye daisy *Leucanthemum vulgare*, spear thistle *Cirsium vulgare*, broad-leaved dock *Rumex obtusifolius*, common ragwort *Jacobaea vulgaris*, rough meadow-grass *Poa trivialis*, crested dog's-tail

Cynosurus cristatus, bird's-foot trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*, white clover *Trifolium repens*, ribwort plantain *Plantago lanceolata*, rosebay willowherb *Chamerion angustifolium*, selfheal *Prunella vulgaris*, cut-leaved crane's-bill *Geranium dissectum*, common vetch *Vicia sativa*, curled dock *Rumex crispus*, creeping thistle *Cirsium arvense*, common nettle *Urtica dioica*, and lesser stitchwort *Stellaria graminea*. A number of large log piles are present in the south-east corner of the grassland (Photograph 4).

Modified grassland/scattered scrub/tall or tussocky sward/ecotone g4/10/128/530

The northern end of the field is encroached by scattered scrub in the form of immature, self-seeded blackthorn *Prunus spinosa* from the northern hedgerow (Photograph 5).

Modified grassland/tall or tussocky sward/waterlogged g4/128/504

The northern and southern ends of the field were waterlogged at the time of the survey (Photograph 6).

4.2.2 Woodland

Lowland mixed deciduous woodland/scattered trees/seasonally wet w1f/32/502

The boundary hedgerows open out into a small area of scattered trees in the south-eastern corner of the site, which includes ash, turkey oak *Quercus cerris* and black poplar *Populus nigra* (Photographs 5 and 6). This area is seasonally wet, but the habitat does not meet UKHab criteria for *Wet woodland w1d*.

Pond 1 and a large log pile are present in this area (Photograph 8).

4.2.3 Heathland and Shrub

Hedgerows line the northern, eastern, southern and western boundaries. All are lined by wet ditches.

Species-rich native hedgerow h2a5

The western hedgerow has higher botanical biodiversity than the other boundaries, being dominated by ash and locally dominant bramble, with holly *Ilex aquifolium*, goat willow *Salix caprea*, hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, hazel *Corylus avellana* and blackthorn. A patch of stinking iris *Iris foetidissima*, a native wildflower, is present at the northern end of the hedgerow, which also contains Pond 2 and a small clearing.

Other native hedgerow h2a6

The northern hedgerow is heavily dominated by dense blackthorn and ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, with locally dominant bramble and pedunculate oak *Quercus robur*. The hedgerow is 3-5m high and 8-10m wide.

The eastern hedgerow is dominated by ash and bramble, with field maple *Acer campestre* and willow *Salix* species (sp.), dogwood *Cornus sanguinea*, pedunculate oak, field rose *Rosa arvensis* and dog rose *Rosa canina*. The hedgerow is 3-6m tall and 6-7m wide.

The southern hedgerow is sparse and more of a tree line in places, comprising hawthorn, pedunculate oak, small-leaved lime *Tilia cordata* and ash, with bramble. The hedgerow and trees are 4-12m tall, with the canopy spread up to 15m wide.

Bramble scrub h3d

An approximately 50m² patch of bramble is present towards the northern end of the western boundary, encroaching into the field from the western hedgerow (Photograph 9).

4.2.4 Rivers and Lakes

Other standing water/pond (non-priority) r1g/41

The boundary ditches widen into two distinct ponds, which are likely to be seasonal and held up to 0.5m of standing water at the time of the survey. Pond 1 is in the south-east corner and is approximately 1.25m wide. Pond 2 is approximately 1.5m wide and is located on the western boundary near the north-west corner. A pond is shown on historic OS mapping south of this location, which may have been grown over by the hedgerow, or it may be Pond 2.

Other standing water/ditch r1g/50

Agricultural drainage ditches line all four boundaries of the field, being mainly concealed beneath the hedgerows. These are seasonally wet and held up to 0.4m of water at the time of the survey.

Photograph 1. Looking west from site entrance

Photograph 2. Looking north from south-east of site

Photograph 3. Central area of modified grassland from south

Photograph 4. Log piles in south-east corner

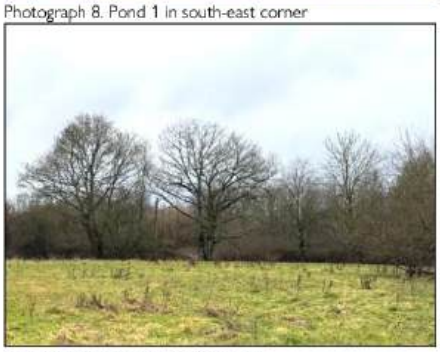
Photograph 5. Encroaching blackthorn, northern boundary

Photograph 6. Waterlogged area in north of site

Photograph 7. Flooded woodland area in south-east corner

Photograph 8. Pond 1 in south-east corner

Photograph 9. Western native hedgerow and bramble patch



Photograph 10. Southern hedgerow

Photograph 11. Northern hedgerow

Photograph 12. Eastern hedgerow

4.3 Bats

4.3.1 Desk Study

HBIC provided over 110 records of at least nine different bat species within 2km of the site, comprising:

- Brown long-eared bat *Plecotus auritus*
- Common pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pipistrellus*
- Daubenton's bat *Myotis daubentonii*
- Long-eared bat species *Plecotus* sp.
- Myotis species *Myotis* sp. bat
- Nathusius' pipistrelle *Pipistrellus nathusii*
- Natterer's bat *Myotis nattereri*
- Noctule *Nyctalus noctula*
- Pipistrelle species *Pipistrellus* sp.
- Soprano pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pygmaeus*
- Unidentified bat *Chiroptera* sp.
- Western barbastelle *Barbastella barbastellus*

The desk study returned three records of EPS bat licences granted within 2km of the site:

- Licence 2019-39302-EPS-MIT was granted in 2019 for the destruction of resting places for common pipistrelle, soprano pipistrelle, brown long-eared bat *Plecotus auritus* and Natterer's bat *Myotis nattereri*. The licence was granted approximately 800m to the south of the site.
- Licence 2014-4766-EPS-MIT was granted in 2014 for the destruction of a resting place for brown long-eared bat at a property approximately 840m to the south of the site.
- Licence EPSM2013-6622 was granted in 2013 for the destruction of resting places for common and soprano pipistrelle at a property approximately 920m to the south of the site.

4.3.2 Ground Level Tree Assessment

The GLTA encompassed all trees/groups of trees within the north, east, south and west boundary hedgerows. These comprise a range of mainly native tree species of varying maturity and health. Full details of all trees are provided in a separate Arboricultural Statement.

The GLTA recorded one tree as PRF-M (suitable for supporting higher numbers of bats) and two trees as PRF-I (suitable for supporting individual bats). Details of these trees, i.e. those relevant to the assessment of possible bat roosts on-site, are provided in Table 2.

Table 2. GLTA results

Tree no. and species	Photographs	Location and comments	PRF class
T1 Turkey oak	 	What3Words location ///rave.means.joked Three-stemmed tree in south-east corner supporting extensive flaking and gapped bark, deadwood and a snag. The central stem is dead and supports the majority of the PRFs.	PRF-M Suitable for multiple roosting bats
T2 Black poplar		What3Words location ///pranced.treetop.brief A significantly reduced tree shown on the right of the photograph. This supports a limited range of PRFs comprising holes in the bark.	PRF-I Suitable for individual roosting bats
T3 Pedunculate oak		What3Words location ///vaulting.balanced.booklets A mature oak with limited PRFs in the form of bark holes low on the stem.	PRF-I Suitable for individual roosting bats

Foraging and Commuting Habitat

The site contains high quality hedgerow habitat suitable for foraging or commuting bat species, which use the hedgerows to shade them from moonlight as they navigate the landscape. There is no significant light pollution at the site, and no streetlighting along Station Road. The hedgerows on-site are part of an extensive network of hedgerows in and around Bentley, including the swathe of trees and scrub along the A31 to the south. The hedgerows, ditches and ponds will support a wealth of invertebrate diversity, make the site ideal for foraging and commuting bats, having high suitability in line with BCT guidelines.

4.4 Badger

HBIC returned four records of badger within 1km of the site.

No specific signs of badger *Meles meles* were observed during the survey. A number of mammal paths leading into the hedgerows are present on all four boundaries. These are likely attributable to a range of mammals including deer species, fox *Vulpes vulpes* and badger. No badger setts were recorded, however the grassland and hedgerow edges provide suitable foraging and commuting habitat for badger.

4.5 Otter

No EPS licences have been granted for otter within 1km of the site. HBIC returned a single record of otter on the River Wey 575m south of the site from 2003.

The site is flanked on all sides by seasonally wet ditches. A review of the Environment Agency's Statutory Main Rivers Map does not show any link between these ditches and the River Wey, located 580m to the south at its nearest point. However, the ditches may run into the river via culverts.

No evidence of otter was recorded. If the ditches are linked with the River Wey, it is possible otter would occasionally commute along these waterways, however this is unlikely. The ditches are not suitable as a food resource or holt-building site, and overall this species is considered likely absent.

4.6 Water vole

HBIC returned no records of water vole within 1km of the site.

No evidence of water vole was recorded along the seasonally wet ditches on the site boundaries. These are heavily shaded by the hedgerows and lack any emergent vegetation required as a food source by this species. Furthermore, they are unsuitable due to being dry in the summer and are unlikely to have been colonised by this species due to a probably lack of functional connectivity with the nearby River Wey. Water vole are therefore likely absent from the site.

4.7 Hazel dormouse

HBIC returned no hazel dormouse records within 1km of the site and the MAGIC database confirmed that no dormouse licences have been issued by Natural England within 1km of the site. There are anecdotal records of this species in the local landscape on the National Biodiversity Network Atlas, although this information cannot be relied upon for commercial purposes, in line with the Terms of Use.

The site includes four mature, generally well-structured, hedgerows with trees, which would provide the food continuum of nuts, berries, seeds, catkins and invertebrates required by dormice to maintain them throughout their active season, along with opportunities for breeding and hibernating. The site is therefore suitable for hazel dormouse.

4.8 Birds

HBIC returned over 200 bird records of a wide range of notable bird species within 1km of the site, including red-listed skylark *Alauda arvensis*, tree pipit *Anthus trivialis*, swift *Apus apus*, greenfinch *Chloris chloris*, hen harrier *Circus cyaneus*, hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*, cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*, house martin *Delichon urbicum* and lesser-spotted woodpecker *Dryobates minor*, among many others.

The hedgerows and trees on the boundaries of the site provide extensive opportunities for a wide range of breeding birds and wintering thrushes. The grassland may be used by breeding skylark and ground-foraging thrushes.

Long-tailed tit *Aegithalos caudatus*, blue tit *Cyanistes caeruleus*, robin *Erithacus rubecula*, dunnock *Prunella modularis*, starling *Sturnus vulgaris*, Eurasian treecreeper *Certhia familiaris*, wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*, greenfinch *Chloris chloris*, song thrush *Turdus philomelos*, woodpigeon *Columba palumbus*, carrion crow *Corvus corone* and rook *Corvus frugilegus* were seen or heard on-site during the PEA. A number of disused nests were observed in the hedgerow trees. Overall, the site is considered optimal for breeding birds and wintering thrushes.

4.9 Reptiles

HBIC returned nine records of widespread reptile species within 1km of the site, comprising slow-worm *Anguis fragilis*, common lizard *Zootoca vivipara* and grass snake *Natrix helvetica*.

The site provides an extensive area of tussocky, well-established grassland with a suitable vegetative structure for widespread reptile species such as common lizard *Zootoca vivipara* and slow-worm *Anguis fragilis* to forage, bask and breed. The surrounding hedgerows and log piles provide suitable sheltering and hibernation opportunities. The ditches would provide seasonal hunting opportunities for grass snake *Natrix helvetica*. The site is therefore suitable for widespread reptile species.

4.10 Great crested newt

HBIC returned 18 great crested newt records from between 2003 and 2023. The majority are from Bentley Pond (a SINC located 415m north-east of the site), which had a peak count of 114 newts on any one visit in this recording period. There are also records from two nearby garden ponds, one of which is 285m east of the site and lies between Bentley Pond and The Old Rec. This species is therefore well-established in the local landscape.

There are four boundary ditches incorporating two ponds on-site, Pond 1 in the south-east corner and Pond 2 on the western boundary, along with one further pond shown on OS mapping within 500m of the site. Both ponds score '0.65: Average' on the Great Crested Newt Habitat Suitability Index, suggesting they are relatively suitable.

All of these waterbodies are suitable for breeding great crested newt. Minor roads are unlikely to be a significant dispersal barrier for this species, and it is therefore possible that the site could support great crested newts from the same metapopulation as those breeding in Bentley Pond. The seasonal drying of the ponds can further enhance breeding suitability for this species by reducing the risk of fish and fowl presence. The surrounding hedgerows, log piles and grassland provide high quality terrestrial habitat for this species and overall the site is suitable for supporting breeding and terrestrial great crested newt.

4.11 Invertebrates

HBIC returned over 240 records of notable invertebrates within 1km of the site, the majority of which are *Lepidoptera*. There is a single record of stag beetle *Lucanus cervus* (a Priority Species), although none of brown hairstreak butterfly *Thecla betulae*; these species are discussed below.

The mosaic of habitat within the site will undoubtedly provide an excellent resource for widespread invertebrate species, and some suitability for more specialist species. The hedgerows, waterbodies and grassland present represent a component of the local network of habitats relied upon by invertebrates.

The log piles in the south-east corner provide extensive deadwood habitat suitable for stag beetle and other saproxylic invertebrates. The grassland, trees and hedgerows provide a wealth of spring and summer flowering plants to sustain nectaring species and the blackthorn hedge on the northern boundary is suitable for brown hairstreak butterfly, for which blackthorn is the exclusive larval food plant. Seasonally wet ditches support unique assemblages of invertebrates that cannot survive in permanent water bodies because of predators such as fish. The ditches may be relied upon by breeding dragonflies, water beetles, hoverflies, non-biting midges, soliderflies and caddisflies, among other species groups. The site is therefore suitable for a wide range of invertebrates including important assemblages and notable species.

4.12 Other species

HBIC returned two records of hedgehog *Erinaceus europaeus* and two records of brown hare *Lepus europaeus* within 1km of the site. Both are Species of Principal Importance under the NERC Act 2006. The grasslands present provide suitability for foraging and commuting hedgehog, and may be suitable for brown hare, although there is limited arable land in the area, which brown hare prefers.

An extensive rabbit *Oryctolagus cuniculus* warren is present in the south-west corner. Rabbit is a naturalised species in the UK.

5 Ecological Impact Assessment

5.1 Summary of results

Taken together, the desk study and Preliminary Ecological Appraisal made the following findings:

- There are no statutory nature conservation sites within 1km of the site.
- Bentley Pond Site of Importance for Nature Conservation, located 400m north-east of the site, is the only non-statutory nature conservation site within a 1km radius of The Old Rec.
- Many protected and notable species have been recorded within 1km of The Old Rec, including at least nine species of bat, otter, badger, hedgehog, brown hare, great crested newt, reptiles, birds and invertebrates.
- The site is assessed as having:
    - Widespread on-site habitats comprising modified grassland, native hedgerows with trees, wet ditches and two small ponds;
    - Suitability for a wide range of protected and notable species, including foraging, commuting and roosting bats, badger, hazel dormouse, breeding birds, reptiles, great crested newt, hedgehog and a varied invertebrate community including stag beetle and brown hairstreak butterfly.

5.2 Ecological effects of proposal

5.2.1 Designated sites

There will be no detrimental impacts upon any designated sites a result of the proposed development. Therefore no mitigation is required in respect of designated sites.

5.2.2 Habitats

There will be no negative impact for on-site habitats, which will be retained and enhanced for biodiversity, with a positive impact overall. As plans become finalised, there will be further information available about habitat enhancements, and it will be possible to quantify the overall Biodiversity Net Gain of the site. This will also be a useful way of monitoring the site during future management.

5.2.3 Bats

No tree losses are planned and therefore there will be no impacts upon roosting bats. No lighting or construction is proposed, therefore there will be no negative impacts on foraging and commuting bats and their prey in close proximity to the site. Managing the site for biodiversity and enhancing the habitats present will increase the suitability of the site for bats and could ensure it becomes an important resource for this species group in its own right.

All bats and their roosts are protected in the UK under the Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). See Section 2 for details.

5.2.4 Badger

The modified grasslands provide suitable foraging and commuting habitat for badger. No impacts on this species are anticipated as a result of the proposal.

Badgers and their setts are fully protected under the Protection of Badgers Act 1991. See Section 2 for details.

5.2.5 Otter

It is possible that otter occasionally commute along the site's boundary ditches, which may be connected with the River Wey. There will be no impacts to the ditches or to otter, if occasionally present.

Otter are protected in the UK under the Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). See Section 2 for details.

5.2.6 Water vole

Water vole are likely absent from the site, therefore there are no impacts for this species, and water vole are not given further consideration in this report.

5.2.7 Hazel dormouse

Hazel dormice may be present within the boundary hedgerows, which are highly suitable for this species. While no loss of hedgerow is proposed, management of the hedgerows could have detrimental impact to dormice if carried out insensitively or at inappropriate times of year.

Hazel dormice are protected in the UK under the Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). See Section 2 for details.

5.2.8 Birds

The site's boundary hedgerows, trees and grassland are suitable for a range of breeding birds and wintering thrushes. Management practices including flailing of hedges and mowing of grassland at inappropriate times of year could have a detrimental impact to individual breeding birds.

Breeding birds, their eggs, nests and young are protected at all times of the year under the Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). See Section 2 for details.

5.2.9 Reptiles

Provided the log piles are retained, there should be no significant habitat destruction in respect of reptiles, therefore no impacts are anticipated. However, inappropriate management of the grassland could cause harm to individual reptiles. The grassland will be enhanced under the proposals, which will benefit any reptiles present.

All widespread reptile species are protected under the Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). See Section 2 for details.

5.2.10 Great crested newt

Pond enhancement works undertaken during the great crested newt breeding season could cause detrimental impact to individuals of this species, if present.

Great crested newt are protected in the UK under the Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). See Section 2 for details.

5.2.11 Invertebrates

There should be no negative impacts to invertebrate species at the site provided the log piles are retained. The proposed habitat enhancement works will provide a benefit for this species group overall.

While the invertebrates likely to use the site do not receive strict legal protection, a number are listed as Species of Principal Importance under the NERC Act 2006, including stag beetle and brown hairstreak butterfly. See Section 2 for details.

5.2.12 Other species

The grassland present provides suitable foraging and commuting habitat for hedgehog, a Species of Principal Importance under the NERC Act 2006; see Section 2 for further details. Given the nature of the proposal, no negative impacts on this species are anticipated, and a positive overall impact for hedgehog is likely via the protection and enhancement of the habitat resource present, which will also increase the invertebrate prey resource for hedgehog.

There are no impacts anticipated for the rabbit warren recorded on-site. Rabbit are a naturalised species with some protection under the Wild Mammals (Protection) Act 1996; see Section 2 for further details.

6 Recommendations

The PEA has confirmed suitability of the site for a number of protected species, some of which could undergo specific impacts via inappropriate habitat management measures. For most protected and notable species, however, the proposal is likely to see an uplift in the quality and quantity of suitable habitat present, as well as the enhancement and protection of these features in perpetuity, securing the site for biodiversity in the long-term.

6.1 Further survey

In order to inform the proposal and provide contextual information to guide habitat creation and management prescriptions, completion of the following surveys would be beneficial:

- Static bat detector surveys comprising deployment of a single static detector each month from April to October, inclusive;
- Hazel dormouse nest tube surveys comprising deployment of 50 nest tubes in boundary hedgerows in March. One check would be carried out each month in early July, mid-August and late September, to record dormice, their nests and young;
- Reptile surveys comprising deployment of 50 reptile mats in suitable habitat in March, and seven subsequent checks to record reptiles basking on, or sheltering under the mats; and
- An environmental DNA (eDNA) survey of the western and south-eastern ponds to establish whether great crested newt are present during the breeding season. If present, a full presence/absence survey and population estimate will be recommended, comprising six visits between March and June, with at least three of the visits between mid-April and mid-May, to undertake three of the four main detection methods: bottle trapping, torching, egg searching and netting.

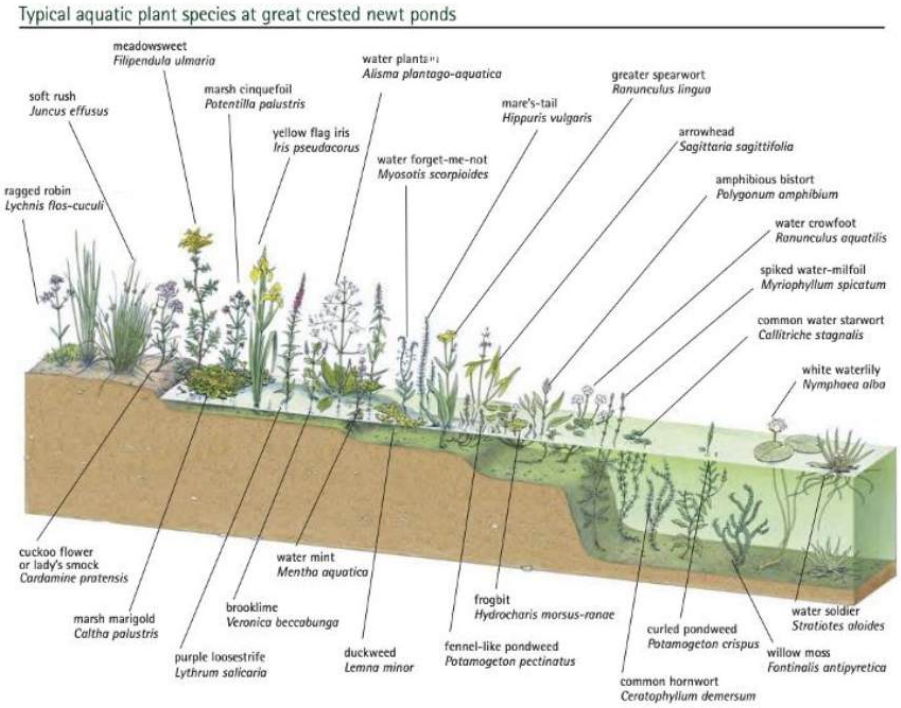
6.2 Mitigation, compensation and enhancement

6.2.1 Habitats

A suitable scheme of habitat creation and enhancement measures will be implemented under the proposal, plans for which are still being developed at the time of writing this report. This is likely to comprise, but is not limited to:

- Implementation of a prescribed regime of heavy cropping of the grassland at suitable times of year to deplete the soil nutrients. This will be followed by oversowing with a suitably diverse, soil-appropriate wildflower mix from a UK wild seed provider such as Emorsgate Seeds. The mix will include yellow rattle *Rhinanthus minor*, which actively aids establishment of other wildflower species. A suitable example for the site would be Emorsgate EM4F Wild Flowers for Clay Soils, although expert advice would be sought from the provider.
- Planting of orchard trees in the centre of the site and infill planting of hedge gaps such as those present along the southern boundary and in the south-western corner. All planting will be undertaken at a suitable time of year, November being ideal.

- Enhancement of the ponds via selective vegetation clearance, digging out of silt and earth, profiling of multiple berm levels and plug planting with a range of emergent species. The following great crested newt pond design, extracted from the Great Crested Newt Conservation Handbook (Froglife, 2001), will be followed where possible to provide optimal habitat for this species:



This work will be carefully timed in accordance with the advice provided in these guidelines, to ensure newt breeding and hibernating is not impacted.

- Retention and possible fencing-off of log piles in the south-east corner.
- Installation of a range of wildlife nest boxes and habitat features for birds, bats, hedgehogs and invertebrates. These could be purchased from a suitable provider if the project budget allows, or constructed by the local community and school.

6.2.2 Ecological Management Plan

Upon completion of the recommended further surveys, an Ecological Management Plan will be required, setting out all of the implementation and management prescriptions, incorporating any sensitive timing of work required in respect of protected species recorded on the site. This will also establish responsible parties for the work required and provide a programme of ecological monitoring.

7 Conclusion

The site supports a range of habitats, including native hedgerows, a Habitat of Principal Importance. It offers suitability for foraging, commuting and roosting bats, hazel dormice, breeding birds, foraging and commuting badger, reptiles, great crested newt, and other notable species such as hedgehog and a wide range of invertebrates including stag beetle and brown hairstreak butterfly.

The scheme will see the habitats protected and enhanced as the site is gradually transformed into a Public Open Space for the village community.

Further surveys are planned for bats, hazel dormouse, reptiles and great crested newts, to establish the status of these species and ensure the proposal will support and enhance the site's biodiversity in perpetuity.

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Appendix 1 Site Location Plan

Appendix 2 Proposed Site Plan

- Drawing to be added when available -

Appendix 3 UKHab Habitat Map

Bentley
PARISH COUNCIL

Ecology

The Old Rec, Bentley

what3words ///that.watch.otter

Survey

A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal and UKHab Habitat Survey were completed in February 2026.

Habitats

The Old Rec is a modified grassland field surrounded by wet ditches lined with mature, native hedgerows supporting standard trees, with log piles and an area of wet woodland also present.

Protected species

The Old Rec supports a diverse range of natural habitats that are suitable for the following protected species:

- Foraging, commuting and roosting bats
- Hazel dormouse
- Breeding European hedgehog
- Commuting Eurasian otter
- Badger
- Breeding birds
- Wintering thrushes
- Reptiles such as grass snake, slow worm and common lizard
- Amphibians, including great crested newt
- A wealth of invertebrate species, including the notable brown hairstreak and many others

Next steps

Ecology Works plans further, targeted surveys for the 2026 survey season to establish the status of a number of these species at The Old Rec. This work will enable the project team to ensure protected species can thrive throughout and beyond its transformation into a valuable Public Open Space.

www.ecology-works.co.uk

Appendix F

Orchard at Bentley, Hampshire

- Top fruit could include scab resistant fruit (good for heavier soils), look for self-fertile varieties which helps with crop reliability.
- Pears I would stay away from, unpredictable with fruiting unless you go for wild pears for juicing.
- Soft fruit like currents like it wet and do well in some shade
- Try to spread your harvesting season across several months rather than all coming down at ones.
- Walnuts might not be the best choice because of the heavy soil however the specialist nursery below might be able advice on a particular variety. Walnuts take a generation to fully fruit. Long-term investment. Have insect repellent properties.
- Cherries, bird will get most of them, not worth the bother
- Maybe planting fruit hedges to increase accessible hedgerows (from both sides) and create 'rooms'.

Top fruit	**Soft fruit**
• Apples: Ellison's Orange • Sunset • PitmastonPineapple • Rosemary Russet (stores well) • Pinova • Greensleeves • Scrumptious • Keswick Codlin (early) • Discovery (early – very yummy) • Worcester Permain (late – good colour + taste) • A cooker could be Bramley or Crispin • Pears: Conference (probably the best to go for) • Stone fruit: Czar is a good plum • Opal as above • Mirabelle de Nancy , a Cherrie plum which would work well as part of a hedge row. • Serbian Gold is an excellent quince • Medlar or *Mespilus germanica*, bone hardy and interesting •	• Loch Ness (Bl berry, can be planted as part of a hedge row) • Thornless Logan (as above) • Hinomaki red or green are good Gooseberry varieties, (need several to pollinate successfully) • Jonkheer van Tet is a good red cur. • Ben Lomand a good Bl. Cur. • Ben Hope, as above • Josta berry (x between Bl. Cur and Gooseberry) shrub can be left to grow, no annual pruning required , good fruiting
Hedgerow / wild fruit	**Suppliers + learning:**
• Webbs Cobnut, good fruiter, you could mix the varieties to stretch the season • Elder berries (*Sambucus*) might already exist in your hedgerow, good for jellies and cordial • *Amelanchier*, June berry • *Prunus spinosa* (unless you already have sloes in your hedgerows)	• Southern Fruit Trees - Supplying fruit trees across the UK that is the one near you • The Walnut Tree Company | Walnut Fruit Trees | Walnut Timber Trees • Hedgerow foraging guide - CPRE • The Edible Hedgerow | British Food: A History • https://www.frankpmatthews.com/

• Wild service tree, rare UK native – *Sorbus torminalis* • Cornelian cherry - *Cornus mas* 'Jolico', good allrounder throughout the year and edible. This cultivar has particularly large fruit and is grown as an edible	• https://www.agroforestry.co.uk/ martin Crawford is inspirational. Webinars available

Arboretum / woodland trees could be some of the trees listed above. *Juglans*, *Sorbus* , *Amelanchier*. All of them have good autumn colour and/or spring flowering. Others could include *Quercus palustris*, ok on wet soils. Also good are *Nyssa sylvatica*. Brilliant autumn colour.

I wouldn't go for any trees which have poisonous properties in their fruit. It would be easy to misunderstand. As much as teaching which-is -which, is an important lesson for youngsters. Not enough taught nowadays. But maybe not for a community orchard.

Fran Clifton

Head Gardener, Sir Harold Hillier Gardens