The Nature Volunteer's Companion

A Practical Manual for Creating and Enhancing a Volunteer-Run Nature Reserve

Devised and produced by

The Friends of Lyncombe Hill Fields CIC

We would be pleased to receive any comments and suggestions regarding this manual by email to *lyncombehillfields@gmail.com* for incorporation in the next and future editions.

FOREWORD

Any group of residents taking on the management of a piece of land for people and nature is taking a leap into the unknown. Council officers, wildlife charities or local projects may be available to offer advice, expertise or financial support but they have rarely if ever been in the position of taking on responsibility as a volunteer.

This excellent guide seeks to share the experiences and learning of those who have been there. It's equally insightful as an overview of what to consider when taking on a site as it is for specific thoughts on which tools were found to best serve which tasks. The group breathed new life into Lyncombe Hill Fields, greatly improving the access, the biodiversity and the appearance of the site and taking the community with them. Here is what they learnt along the way.

Dan Merrett
Bathscape Manager
Bath & North East Somerset Council

The sign on the gate in Greenway Lane that inspired the Lyncombe Hill Fields project in 2018

INTRODUCTION

THE VALUE OF OPTIMISM

2018 saw a notice on a gate sited on a suburban street that announced *"Land to let".* The site was just over 10 acres of hillside immediately south of Bath City Centre. Ten acres, five fields, mostly meadow, with 3 overgrown hedgerows, some small thickets and 3 public footpaths. Somehow, (after 2 years), we convinced the owners (the local council) to let us manage it to **"conserve and enhance the biodiversity of the land and maintain its wild nature whilst safeguarding public access".**

After that, as they say, the rest is ……

WHY YOU MIGHT WANT TO READ THIS

This brief booklet is designed to be the sort of thing we wished we had access to when we first started. We had read about nature reserves, restoring wildflower meadows, sustainable forests and the like. The thing was, we hadn't actually done a whole lot of it, so we had to learn as we went along.

There is quite a lot of advice online, but it often assumes, (i) you have access to an array of agricultural machinery operated by biddable contractors, (ii) that almost nothing is going to be done by hand, (iii) that you have all the expertise necessary to do all that was needed. **That really wasn't (and isn't), us**. We had a few garden tools, a willingness to learn and a naïve belief that it couldn't be that hard, surely? Well, yes it could.

Everything that follows is based only on first-hand experience. It doesn't mean this is the only or even the best way to approach each task we have attempted, just what we have tried that has worked.

WHAT THIS WILL COVER

The emphasis in this booklet is on 2 things: how to get things done and what kit you could use to make it happen in a practical and safe way. Any prices quoted will be based on those current in 2025 so by definition they are already out of date. We suggest you shop around and if possible, shop local. Deliveries can be expensive and involve a lot of wasted time waiting for a poorly paid courier driver to turn up. A word about timber. If you can, pick out the timber yourself. It saves paying for wood that is split, warped, full of knots or even shorter than advertised…

Let's hear it for YouTube. This can be invaluable when researching how to go about a task you have never attempted before. Obviously it is wise to consult several sources but a few minutes watching someone else put up guttering/dig a French drain or even scythe a meadow can save you a heap of avoidable errors.

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GETTING STARTED

A conversation between a couple of people leads to a vague idea starting to get some kind of traction. So a few of you see an opportunity in the neighbourhood that you think has legs. That's how it started for us. We knew we had very little time so concentrated on a small number of issues.

Local support. As individuals this was going to take a great deal of work and effort to start an organization from scratch. We approached a few residents groups, a social club and organised a meeting as soon as we could. The agenda we put to them was (i) did they think the idea of taking over this land is one their members would support and (ii) would they be prepared to support it financially? We had come up with a budget that seemed credible and a 3 year management plan. Their agreement meant we were a credible prospect.

Local networks. As soon as we had the chance we piggy-backed on the networks the community groups had, to spread the word. We lobbied our local councillors. Within a very short time, people were talking about us, as if it might actually happen. A zoom call with 50 people followed to attract volunteers and introduce local residents to the idea.

A core group. We needed to ensure what needed to be done (working on the 3 year plan, doing the costings, negotiating a possible tenancy/lease) was shared out between a small group of committed individuals to get things completed on time. Initially this was a group of four. They attended the meetings with the landowners, developed the plan and spread the word.

After all that, it was down to a wee bit of good luck

MONEY, MONEY, MONEY

How much money you will need depends on what you are trying to do. You are going to have core costs and project costs. **Core costs** are what you need to cover almost irrespective of what you are trying to do. They could include rent, insurance, maintenance, fuel and licences and so on. None of these are terribly attractive to potential funders. **Project costs**, like buying big pieces of equipment, buying materials, getting trees or plants are much more attractive to funders.

In essence, what you can do without is easy to fund, what you can't do without, less so.

Inviting donations. Just about every piece of publicity material mentions the ease with which supporters can fund us by clicking on the tablet on our website. This will take you to a page which connects you to **LOCAL GIVING** (other companies operate in the same way). There is an annual fee for the service which includes adding ***Gift Aid*** if the donor agrees. You will need to work out if the income from donations outweigh the costs.

Self-generated funds. We have produced an annual calendar for a number of years and it, along with the greeting cards we sell, are our single largest source of funds. Sales come mostly from community Christmas markets. A lot of supporters are happy to buy our calendar knowing that half the price is in effect a donation. Greetings card sales are slower but the profit margins are much greater. We use thecalendarcompany.org and pennybatchgallery.co.uk for the printing whilst all the pictures are taken by our volunteers. Other printers are available of course.

Discounts. For large or expensive items, we always tell our suppliers we are a community based non-profit organization, explain what we do and enquire about discounts. If you don't ask ……

RESTORING FOOTPATHS

Our site is crossed by 3 footpaths, with a total length of approx. 700 metres. Other than one 50m section it was compacted soil in the summer and slippery mud in the winter. This was a serious issue as the whole site is a series of slopes. We knew tackling this had to be a priority as we took over the site in September 2020. We decided to deal with just one of the paths to introduce ourselves to the local community.

Material: We needed something that was non-toxic, cheap, available in bulk, and relatively light to move about. We came across *20mm clean* demolition rubble from a registered recycling centre about a mile away. This material is no more than 20mm in diameter and asbestos/tarmac free. It is a combination of crushed bricks, blocks, concrete and roof tiles.

Method: We did not put any weed suppressant or lining material underneath* and started to lay it from one end of a footpath to another. It sank into the ground over time, so we topped it up. Some parts of the path took a number of layers before it settled to the desired level. Where the gradient got steeper we found that heavy rainfall would scour out the path and deposit material at the downstream end. To counter this we built a number of very shallow steps with pressure treated timber secured with scrap galvanized pipe and/or reclaimed *rebar*. This slows down the flow and minimizes damage in the winter. We also dug some *French* drains (see Google) using larger stones and drainpipes.

This method is time consuming and very hard work. It ends up with shovels, wheelbarrows and a lot of effort. Good for a brisk winter morning. The result has made the effort worth it. The paths are useable throughout the year and need only a very occasional top up. We have a large number of visitors with and without dogs. The effective restoration of the paths is something that is commented on by visitors virtually every time the volunteers are out. A PR triumph.

*****Weed suppressant can be problematic on wet or hilly ground. As water makes its way through the layer of rubble, it can lead to that rubble being swept away from the ground underneath. The roots of weeds and grass can stabilize the path if laid directly on the earth beneath.

Dog poo: if you've got visitors with dogs, you're going to find poo left lying around on or by your paths or even worse in plastic bags hanging from tree branches. The solutions are never going to be perfect but you could:

1. Arrange for a council bin to be installed near one or more of the entrances. Our local councillor was very helpful with this
2. Put a polite notice at all the entrances to the site
3. Anoint any piles you find with a fluorescent chalky spray

Even so, you will find some dog owners will ignore all of these. Don't waste your time trying to remonstrate with them. You have better things to do.

DIGGING

Mattock (£30) Digging a hole on rough ground? You are going to be looking at a mattock. Similar to a pickaxe except it has a head with a spike/adze at one end and a chisel at the other. We have two but tend to use the one with the fixed composite handle as the one with the wooden handle can become loose when the wood dries out.

Farmers bar (£30) Used for digging stony ground and/or to prepare for sinking posts. Usually a piece of steel about 1.5m long weighing 7.5 kg and pointed at one end and flat at the other. You can make do with a length of iron pipe if you can find one. Best driven in with a lump (club) hammer

Post rammer/driver (£50) A very heavy piece of steel pipe about 500mm long, sealed at one end and handles on either side. Much the easiest way to drive in wooden posts. A tool for one or better, two persons. Gravity based technology.

BENCHES

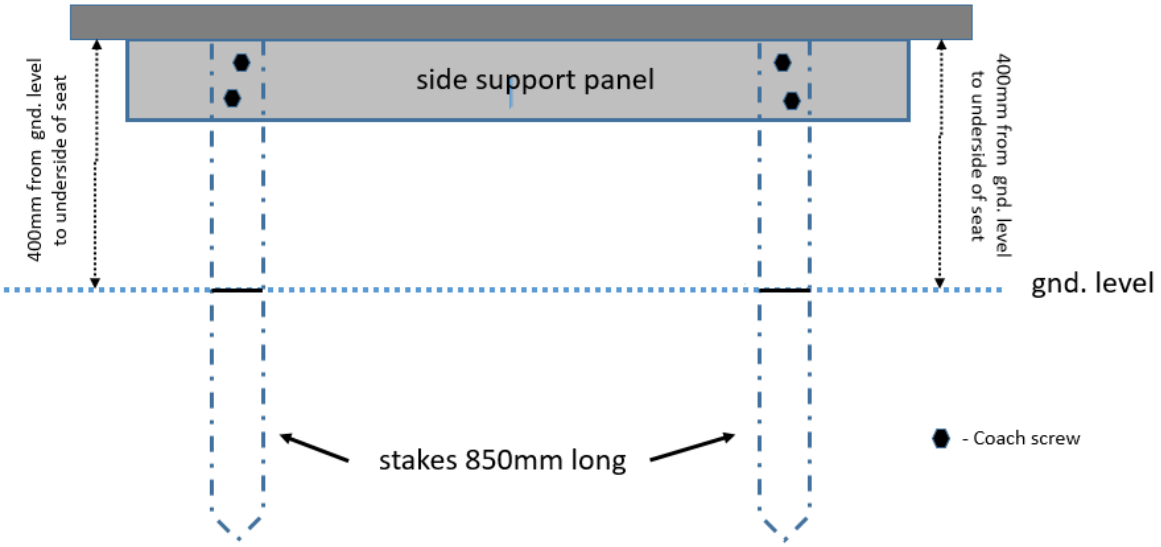
If you have visitors, or even if you don't, you might think about installing benches. Like firm footpaths, they are much appreciated by visitors. This particular design is simple to install and uses relatively cheap materials. It does not include a back rest or arm rests, just a horizontal seat supported on 2 fence posts (the legs), driven into the ground. It is made entirely from timber all of which should be pressure treated.

The **seat** is made from floor joists 200mm x 47mm (8" x 2") from one length 1.8 m long

The **side support panels** for the seat 100mm x 38mm (4"x 1.5") made from 2 lengths 1.8 m long, which will be cut to suit, shown here in light grey, each with 4 drill holes (shown in black)

The **legs** are made of two round wooden fence posts/stakes with a diameter of 75mm (3") cut from 1 x 1.8m length. Make sure you don't get fobbed off with a split stake.

The finished height of the bench should be just under 450 mm (18"), which is the standard height for a kitchen chair. Below is the front view with the side support panel attached to the wooden posts/stakes. This gives the two legs side to side stability.



Tools

- Watering can
- Tape measure
- Hand saw/circular saw
- Farmers bar
- Post rammer
- Power drill or impact driver and hex bit to fit coach screws
- Spirit level (1m) and
- 70 mm (hex head) coach screws

Using the proportions shown above, the steps are as follows. This is a 2 person job. Read all the steps before you begin.

1. Make sure all of the timber is dry before you start. Cut 100mm off the flat end of the 1.8 m fencing stake. Keep this. Cut the remainder in half to make 2 stakes each 850mm long. You will have one with a sharpened end and the other without. Cut the one with two blunt ends to match so that you now have two stakes that can be driven into the ground. Mark where you are going to position the stakes. Give the ground a good water and let it soak in. To start them off use a farmers bar or mattock to help you engage the point into the ground. If you suspect the ground is very stony, you can drive the farmers bar down to a depth of about 425mm to check.
2. Take the small piece of wood you cut off the end of the fence stake and pop it into the post rammer. This will minimize the damage to the flat end of each post. Mark each of the stakes 400mm from the flat end. Drive the 2 stakes into the ground with a post rammer to the line you marked. Keep checking the post is *plumb* (left/right and forwards/backwards) with the spirit level and that you stop when you get the line you marked on the stakes. This is important.
3. Measure and cut one of the side supports for the seat to about ¾ of the finished length of the seat. You should now have a support that can later be attached across the two legs you have made.
4. The legs should be protruding 400mm out of the ground. Check by looking at the line you drew on each of them. If you can't see them you may have gone too far. Not a tragedy. We can fix this. The top of the side support timber needs to be 400mm from ground level. Fix one side of this timber to the leg with a coach screw. Lift it up to and using the spirit level fix it to the other leg. The side panel may be higher than the top of one of the legs. That is not a problem! You are going to finally fix the seat to the side support panels, not the posts. That is the genius of this design
5. Leave the remaining two fixings on this side for now. Go round to the rear of the bench and having marked the positions of the fixing holes, get the second panel in line and level with the front side support panel and secure with coach screws. Once you are satisfied that the side panels are level and level with each other, fix the second lot of coach screws.

birds eye view of the seat attached to the top pf the side support panels with evenly spaced coach screws

6. Above is a birds-eye view of the legs and the side support panels which have been previously attached front and rear. The (transparent) seat is then positioned on top of the panels so it fits evenly front and rear and side to side. Fix vertically from the seat into the top edge of the side support panels. Once you are satisfied it looks OK, you can drive the coach screws a

bit further into the face of the seat so they do not sit proud of the surface. This then ties the 2 side panels together along with the seat to provide a really stable bench. Job done!

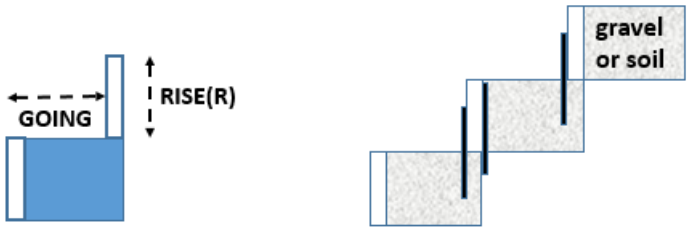
After a while you might need to fill in the ground in front of the seat with gravel as the ground gets worn away by feet. If your bench gets a little wobbly, you can always add a thin piece of wood just proud of ground level across the legs (at the back).

Why not concrete? The method above has proven to be very effective. Driving dry posts into dry/dampish ground means the fit is very tight and becomes more so when the ground gets wet. Setting the legs in concrete means digging much wider holes, fixing the legs so they are plumb until the concrete is dry and hoping nothing moves as the rest of the bench is attached. A lot more trouble.

Grouping benches. Initially, we spread individual benches across the site according to where they offered the best views and on flattish ground. This is great for individuals or even couples but not so attractive to larger family groups. We hope putting two or even three benches together will address this issue.

STEPS

This is a very brief note about simple steps on a path with a gradient that should be no greater than you would find on a staircase inside a house. The height (the "rise") between two steps should be ***no more*** than 200mm and the horizontal distance ("the going") ***no less*** than 220mm deep (preferably more). This makes the steps easy to climb. If possible the steps should be of the same rise throughout in each section. Try and avoid having to build sides to your steps.



When building steps *outside* you will typically have a number of risers made of treated wood with rubble or soil (not wooden treads) filling the horizontal gap between them. You can pin the risers with treated/hardwood wooden stakes on the front or the back, (or front and back). For longer life you can use ***rebar*** (reinforcing bar for concrete) instead of wooden pins. We use 8mm or 10mm rebar secured with field staples and fill the gap with gravel to ensure a non-slip surface and good drainage. You can get rebar in DIY stores or skips/scrap yards and cut it with a big hacksaw or angle grinder.

SAWING THROUGH BRANCHES

Silky saw. (£100) A fearsome (Japanese) curved saw around 400mm long that is extremely sharp**.** It should be able to deal with anything up to 125mm in diameter. Once you have used one you will never go back to a bow saw. You can combine a silky with an **extending handle (£150)** which can allow you to cut up to 6m into the canopy without too much trouble. Always wear eye protection. If you are going to cut branches above head height you will also need safety helmets. We have found that a team of three means you have one person cutting, one person watching out for danger and one watching out for passers-by. There are cheaper alternatives to Silky saws, but they are not as versatile as the original. Avoid using these kinds of saw to cut seasoned timber: it blunts them very quickly. Always return the saw to the sheath rather than leave it lying around as you get on with a job.

GETTING THROUGH ROUGH VEGETATION

Hand Scythe (£130) Apart from dealing with grass, this can be used to hack back rough vegetation like hemp agrimony, cow parsley, brambles etc. In this instance great scything skills whilst useful are not essential. See grass cutting for more detail.

Brush cutter (£200). Similar to a wire strimmer but the cutter uses a triangular steel blade. The advantage is that you don't have to keep feeding the plastic wire through as it wears out. However if you are not careful it can get jammed if it is angled towards the ground. Brush cutters and strimmers can be petrol or cordless (battery driven). Cordless are quieter, lighter, avoid fossil fuels and don't need regular maintenance (which saves about £100 PA). They will need large batteries and will run for about an hour per battery (8.Ah to 10Ah). The batteries will each cost around £125 but last for years. See also *strimmers* under grass cutting.

SAFETY! You will need eye and ear protection when using a brush cutter or wire strimmer **(£40).** Support harnesses are useful, especially for those with back issues

Weed slashers (£25) A really cheap and basic tool made of a flat wooden handle with a steel blade about 1m long and 40mm wide. Very effective when hacking down rough vegetation like nettles and dock (but not woody stuff). Good for perfecting your backhand/golf swing.

Why not chainsaws? Understandably, chainsaws are covered by a great deal of safety legislation that requires training, specialized clothing, regular maintenance and sharpening. On top of that they are expensive. Frankly for our needs, just not worth the bother. If what needs doing involves cutting major branches at height, best call in the tree surgeons.

MOWING

Cutting to encourage wildflowers

Traditional haymaking involved cutting the grass, drying what had been cut by turning it over after a few days ("tedding"), lining it up into windrows, pressing it into useable blocks (baling) and then removing it. In the autumn cows/sheep were let out to feed on the recovering grass to reduce the short grass (sward) and the land left to recover over the winter. The stock would produce bare patches which enabled the wildflower seed to establish themselves. This couldn't work for us.

- Even if we had the equipment to "ted" "row" and "bale" the grass, we would have to find a market for the bales of hay and deliver them to our customer in an imaginary lorry.
- We don't have cattle or sheep on hand to feed in the autumn. Even if we found someone who wanted to put their stock on our land, we don't have stock proof fencing which would be very expensive to erect (£20 per linear metre).
- We have 3 public footpaths crossing the site with numerous visitors accompanied by dogs.

Our approach has to be different

We cut from June onwards and complete our first cut in late August. All the grass we cut is removed with rakes and stacked to the sides of the field. Hand raking is laborious and the most effective ratio is one person operating the mower to 8 people raking and stacking. A second cut then follows almost immediately, with much less material processed but much deeper raking to remove dead, undecomposed grass (AKA "thatch").

Tools for cutting grass Whichever of the following you use depends on the thickness and height of what you have to deal with. We use these tools in the following (descending) order:

Hand scythe. Often used for the initial cut where the grass is particularly high or it is mixed with tough, scrubby plants. We have two sizes to suit people of different stature. You will need sharpening stones at the very least, but we have a peening jig for when the blade goes out of shape. Use a specialist supplier and you will get great advice about what you will and won't need. If you want to use scythes to cut grass properly you will need to find a tutor.

Scythe Mower £1300 These are designed to cut vegetation at ankle height, leaving the material intact. The small number of manufacturers are mostly from countries in the alpine region (Austria, Italy, Switzerland and Germany). Scythe mowers are all based on the same principle: a small petrol engine that drives the cutters and the wheels of the machine forward. The cutting blades are reciprocal (going from side to side) set on a bar which is about 1m long. The cutting action is identical to hair clippers used in your local barbers or dog grooming salon, but on a much larger scale. You will need to have a secure shed to store the mower. When you have to transport the cutter for servicing/repair you *(or they)* will need a van.

Safety. We have simple safety procedures when using this mower. Let go of the handles (to turn off the cutters) when dogs/children get close, turn off the machine entirely when doing any maintenance. New users get a brief demonstration before they start.

Fuel. The choices are regular unleaded E10, super unleaded E5 and Aspen. Aspen is the cleanest of all three but is twice the cost of the E10 or E5. We have been advised to use E5 as it has lower ethanol content, so fewer carburation problems. Unused petrol (except Aspen) left for months over the winter may also give you carburation problems.

N.B. We have not come across a battery operated scythe mower presently on the market.

A note about purchase and servicing. We chose an AL-KO machine as it had the best reviews and the most suppliers in the UK. Whilst you might be tempted to purchase from an online warehouse miles away, don't. Even if your local garden machinery workshop knows how to maintain/service your machine, they may decline your custom if you chose to buy it elsewhere. We went to meet our prospective supplier before we bought the machine. Our servicing includes collecting our machine, and returning it to us. We have found that getting it done in the winter means a shorter queue and a faster turnaround. We allow £250 PA for servicing and repairs. Our engineer has got us out of a couple of scrapes. This is a long term relationship worth nurturing.

Spares for the scythe mower. When you get a puncture onsite you are better off dealing with it yourselves. One spare tyre, a couple of inner tubes, 3 x 300mm tyre irons, spare nuts/bolts for the blades/wheels, a foot pump and relevant socket wrenches are a must. We discovered that the wheels were attached by a very powerful robot in the factory and we struggled to remove them. Get your supplier to ease them so you can get them off when the time comes. You will discover that blackthorn spines will go through any tyre, so avoid.

A stitch in time. A regular maintenance routine is a must. It will keep the machine going and save time and expense in the long run. You will need to learn how to dismantle, clean and reassemble the blades. Tyres need to be kept pumped to the right pressure (attach small cable ties around the valve stems to stop them disappearing into the wheels) and cables need the odd drop of oil. Keep the engine oil topped up.

Rotary mower £500 Our (DeWalt) rotary mower is used to cut lower and remove thatch from areas previously tackled by the scythe mower. It is very much a secondary tool and is used far less

frequently. We opted for a battery operated model, with a large deck and a wide range of depth settings. It doesn't need servicing except for running a file over the blades now and then

Corded Strimmer £200 Like a brush cutter but uses plastic wire which slices through grass and light weeds very effectively. After a few years, we realized we rarely used this tool and donated it to another project that had a particular need for its properties.

Raking, raking and more raking

This is what occupies most of our mowing time. In the summer we are mostly removing bulky material with rakes and pitchforks into large (one tonne) builder bags.

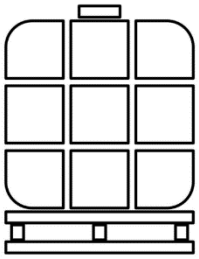
Wide plastic rakes £20 are easily the best tools for clearing cut grass. They are remarkably robust and don't get jammed like the ones designed for leaves, with fine tines. We only use metal rakes designed for raking out thatch. We have been using *Bulldog* brand rakes for a number of years. The only issue has been some of the heads have come loose. A screw into the handle solves that problem.

Other types of rake are available. Those sold as leaf rakes, with fine metal tines, are great for manicured lawns, but not so great when dealing with rough ground. We also found that scarifying rakes never seem to leave our shed.

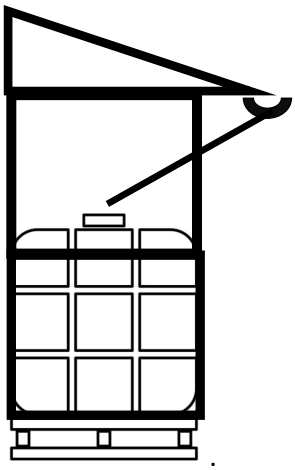
Large builders' bags (which cannot be re-used for heavy loads) are suitable for moving large quantities of cut material. Usually found lying around in skips (ask first). **FREE**

COLLECTING WATER

If you are going to plant anything at all, you will need a source of water. Using water provided by a utility company (if it is available) can be expensive with standing charges incurred 12 months of the year, when you most probably only need it for half that time. If you do not have a freely available source of water on site, you will have to come up with a method of collecting it.



Walk into any farmyard and you are bound to come across an *intermediate bulk container* (IBC). **£150 used**. Like a giant wine box in a cage. Measuring approximately 1.2m x 1m x 1m, they can hold 1000 litres. The container is made of strong plastic surrounded by a metal frame which includes a pallet at the bottom. There is an inlet at the top and an outlet tap at the bottom in the front. Mount on levelled rubble, bricks or blocks or they will end up at a funny angle. An IBC full of water will weigh at least one tonne.



Collecting rainwater involves creating a lean-to roof structure above an IBC. Assuming you can't attach the IBC to the guttering of a building, this lean-to is built with pressurized timber using the cage around the IBC as a base for a shallow roof that has a gutter at one end to feed the rainwater downpipe into the top of the IBC. You can use *roof underlay* (the stuff used under tiles or slates, not the gritty stuff for wooden sheds) for the roof. It is cheap and durable as long as it is secured with *roof lath.* Depending on your average rainfall, this arrangement should fill each IBC every year. You can increase your catchment area by extending the roof beyond the sides of the IBC. Avoid very windy sites!

Fittings **(£5)** to allow you to connect the outlet tap (at the front of the IBC) to a hose are widely available (try eBay).

Moving the water you have collected Where you site your water collectors is important. You obviously want to site your collector(s) as near as possible to where the water will be needed. Carrying water any distance is back breaking. One full 10 litre watering can is hard work as it weighs 10 kg! Filling a watering can, even with a length of hose can be very tedious unless you have the IBC on stilts as the flow is determined by the *head* (the difference between the top of the water in the IBC and the lowest point of outflow).

The solution could be to use a (cordless) **transfer pump.** It will increase the flow significantly especially if it is used with larger bore hosepipe (19mm [3/4”]) rather than the more usual size (15mm [1/2”]). The *Ryobi* pump shown can move water at least 10 metres uphill. It is likely to cost **£150** and **£30** for a battery adapter.

Shading To reduce direct sunlight producing algae in the IBCs, it is possible to use light green scaffolder’s *debris netting.* Each layer applied reduces light by about 25%. It is very cheap **(£30)** if bought in full rolls of 2m x 50m. We also use this netting to shade our tree nursery.

MINI-PONDS

Water is a magnet for wildlife, from tiny insects to the largest mammal in the local area. Even the smallest pond is colonized in a remarkably short period. It is possible to dig a pond by hand and then seal it with a sheet material like butyl or even concrete. This would be hard work and could have a limited lifetime. A number of ready-made alternatives are easier and cheaper.

Used plastic paddling pools/sand pits, central heating overflow tanks, old galvanized water tanks can all be obtained on free sites easily. You can dig a small depression and use the spoil to build up the ground around it. Try and get it reasonably level. If you cover the plastic with roof underlay you get less damage due to sunlight. Fill one side with rocks to the top of the container, add water and watch what happens. If you are worried about safety, surround with a fence or hide it between trees. A simple wildlife trap camera **(£75)** pointed in the right direction will be a revelation. Present advice is to not fill your pond with weed/tadpoles etc. You just have to wait a bit. They will come. It won’t be long.

MICRO FORESTS

Also known as *Miyawaki* forests or tiny forests. To create one is a major undertaking and will need some planning. Micro forests have become increasingly well known, especially in overcrowded cities in the developing world. They are now becoming popular in Europe. They are planted at a density between 2.5 to 5 saplings to the square metre, using a wide variety of species appropriate to the area (preferably locally sourced) and after 3 years of watering, weeding and general nurturing, left to establish as they will. There is no subsequent thinning out. The results can be spectacular. They often grow faster, taller and healthier than commercial forests. They are an attempt to mimic ancient (naturally occurring) forests but involve massively speeding up the process. There is plenty of information about the mixture of species, the preparation of the ground, what to plant where. Google it and you will have plenty to chew on. Despite what you might read, there is no minimum or maximum area for a tiny forest. It is the method that is the most important thing.

The major steps are as follows

- Do your homework so that you can explain what you propose to do and why it is such a good idea. If it is not your land this will involve convincing the landowner.
- Will a forest with trees that get their full height create any issues with shading, existing views or overhead cables? There may be planning issues. Somewhere well away from, or out of sight of any of your neighbours might be the best bet
- Is there a source of water nearby or will you have to collect it? (see above)
- Do some trial digging to discover what the soil conditions are likely to be. It is going to be difficult to establish some species if you don't have a soil depth of about a 750mm before you hit bedrock. Just work with what you have got.
- Look around at the existing trees and see what they need to guide your planting. If the plot is overshadowed you may find growth rates may be disappointing.
- Set out the plot and determine the area. 200 sq. metres at 2.5 per sq. metre would require 500 saplings, and so on. You could go for a higher density of course.
- If you have time you could begin by covering the site with light proof sheeting, cardboard and/or chippings, to at least deal with the annual weeds. Or you could do that after planting. You will find that local tree surgeons will usually be happy to deliver tree chippings for free as long as they can get access and they are in the area. If you come to any arrangement you are most likely going to have to accept what turns up. Wood chippings are really useful as mulch.
- You are going to have to remove perennial weeds and turn over the soil. How long did it take to do this successfully for say, 5 sq. metres? That will give you guide to what it will take.
- Work back from the ideal planting time (a month either side of the new year) You will need to estimate the completion of digging and general preparation in good time for the delivery of the saplings
- Can you see any evidence of deer damage on site? Depending on what you discover will help to decide whether to fence the site, or use tree guards with canes, or not bother with either. (Broken) plastic tree guards will have to be retrieved in the future. Canes are extremely attractive to schoolboys

- If your site is on a steep incline, consider a *bund*. This is a line of stones on a level contour. You could also create one using wood, like a very wide step. When you get a major rain event it slows down the water flowing down the hill and allows it to soak in.
- Is the site likely to suffer from vandalism? It is best to be in plain sight of the public as it acts as a deterrent.
- Once you have gone through all of these steps, think about a putting up a notice to explain what you are about to do and why. You may want to involve local people (including children) in a well-publicised planting event
- Saplings want to be at least 450mm long, and taller. Shorter than that they will tend to have a very limited root ball.
- Tree choice. To stick with the Miyawaki method, trees should be UK wild natives with no ornamental varieties. There are various theories about the best way to mix them up. Random seems to be fine. Just be aware that the edges of the micro forest will be the driest so drought resistance should be borne in mind.

Beware, there are websites that will tell you that you will need someone with a digger to remove the soil to a specified depth and replace it with topsoil. They will help you raise a large amount of money, (usually to cover *their* costs). You could go down this route but it will involve a lot of time and effort for what might be a very similar result if you went DIY.

How much do saplings cost? We have planted a few thousand saplings to date and have never paid for any of them. We have sourced them from: a) ***I Dig Trees/TCV/OVO Energy***, b) **The Woodland Trust**, and c) **More Trees Banes (MTB)**. The first two sources are national, MTB are local to Bath

If you go online you will find companies that supply saplings to corporates who wish to buff up their green credentials. The saplings need to be planted somewhere, so why not with you?

A 450 tree micro forest newly planted at the rate of 4 saplings per sq. metre. This works out at a distance of 500mm between each tree. The canes and tree guards were removed after a few months after this picture was taken. Lots of leaf litter as mulch. Watered from an IBC and weeded for the first couple of years.

A GENERAL NOTE ON SPECIES SELECTION

NATIVE OR NON-NATIVE?

What you plant or chose to allow to flourish may be down to whether you are going to restrict species that are native to the UK, or even native to your area. There is plenty of information on this. However far you take this, it can be a source of lively debate.

Common non-native species such as Buddleia, Horse Chestnut, Sweet Chestnut, Holm Oak, Pear, Apple, Walnut, Sycamore, White Poplar, London Plane and Eucalyptus have all been brought to the UK at some point. They support a wide range of animal life and have adapted to our climate but whether they should be allowed to remain depends on your point of view.

Beware of species with the prefix "wild" in its name. It is no guarantee of being a UK native.

"Invasive" species The list of these issued by the UK Government continues to grow. It's rare to hear of anyone actually introducing giant hogweed, floating pennywort or Himalayan balsam, but it is illegal.

Aggressive species Whilst Agrimony, Nettle, Field Bindweed, Blackthorn and Bramble may be native, if left unchecked, they can colonize open areas very quickly and out-compete everything around them. Thorny plants can be used as a natural barrier to species that like to graze on saplings but we cut them back initially to allow small saplings to develop.

Planting for the second half of the 21st century. The speed of climate change, especially the effects of prolonged drought and/or very wet winters, has made some people question whether all UK native species will have a great future in the near future.

Wildflower seed for meadows. If bought from commercial suppliers, this can be very expensive. On top of that it may be old or have been stored in the wrong conditions. You may come across wildflower mixes that come in very gaudy colours. OK for parks or even your back garden but on a nature reserve? Far better to look closer to home. The National Trust in Bath cultivate wildflower meadows and carefully collect seed to distribute to other projects. You will need to reserve yours sometime in the summer, ready for autumn planting. A dry cold shed (or even a fridge/freezer) is very useful for storage purposes. The holy grail of wildflower meadow creation is Yellow Rattle (AKA Hay Rattle AKA *The Meadowmaker*). Once established it should keep coming back each year as it produces masses of seeds each summer for the following year. Yellow Rattle is an annual, so this year's seed produces next year's flowers. It is prudent to collect seed every year just in case the natural processes don't work well left to themselves. You may find you have mixed results, especially with Yellow Rattle. It maybe the soil chemistry is wrong, or you planted it too deep/shallow, too damp/too dry or it got too much/little shade. Gardeners' world in fact. Keep going, you will get it right in the end. It is useful to try and mark where you have planted any wildflower seed on your site. What3Words is useful as it divides the world into 3m x3m blocks. It is free and relatively accurate.

PROPAGATION OF TREES AND BUSHES

(in the autumn)

Hardwood cuttings It is relatively easy to ***strike*** hardwood cuttings to add to the saplings you bring in. Quick to do and FREE! Don't try this with fruiting trees. There are just a few things to consider.

- When you take the cuttings (in autumn) they will need to be about the thickness of a pencil and be at least a little bit bendy (this shows the section you are using is this year's growth).
- Put the cuttings into a bucket of water as you collect them
- Prepare a bucket of weed-free soil
- In each case cut a length about 300m below a node (where the leaves emerge) at the base and above a node at the top. Remove any leaves. Insert into the bucket of soil. They can be quite tightly packed. Label.
- Then leave outside in a sheltered place and be patient. They might look like they are dead, but leave them alone! Keep watered if they get very dry. You can sink the bucket into the soil to help this process. It may take a year to see the results.
- It is worth experimenting. Some species, like holly, appreciate some of the bark removed. A potato peeler is good for this.

Layering

When lateral branches get very long they can end up resting on the ground. Sometimes they start to develop roots. It is possible to replicate this process. This can be done by scraping the earth underneath and burying the branch under a small amount of soil. You can secure this with a piece of wire bent into a "U" shape or just employing as big stone. Mark with a stick or barrier tape. Sit back and wait until next autumn and if a root structure has developed just cut the branch to separate from the parent and you have a clone, ready to plant out.

Growing from seed

We have no direct experience of gathering seeds, and the various processes that have to be followed to create saplings. We know some people who do:

More Trees BANES: *moretrees.earth*

The Tree Council: *treecouncil.org.uk*

TOOL TIME

A note on electrical power tools. Power tools will have to be battery operated when working outdoors. As far as possible it is best to keep to one brand, so tools can use the same battery packs. *DeWalt, Bosch* and *Makita* are somewhere between professional and DIY quality. Sticking to one brand means that tools can be bought *naked* (without batteries and chargers) which is a major saving. It is possible to get battery adaptors for other brands (try eBay) but this is not always the case.

IMPACT DRIVER £120 These have transformed modern construction in the last 20 years or so. They allow you to construct wooden frames, attach bird boxes to trees, and build benches and lots besides. Like having a spare hand when you use them. Get one and you will wonder why you ever used a drill and screwdriver. Can be used with all kinds of fixings (see below) and saves masses of time.

CIRCULAR (SKIL) SAW £150. Possibly not essential unless you are going to cut a lot of timber. Much quicker than a handsaw and can be useful when *ripping* (cutting along the length of a plank). Doing this with a handsaw is very hard work and takes some skill.

ANGLE GRINDER (£50) When building steps there will be a need to cut vertical supports and wooden supports are going to need replacing after some time. So use metal instead. The angle grinder may get a lot of work over time.

(left) **LONG SPIRIT LEVEL (£20)** You are going to need one of these as soon as you want to install anything. Get one at least 1m long and hang it up somewhere safe.

(below) Small, **two sided post level (£10)** has a very specific use but can save a lot of time especially when fitting posts.

FIXINGS When building/fixing any structures it may be advisable to avoid using nails, slot head, Phillips or PZ screws as they can be hard to undo/remove once they have been exposed to the weather. To ensure more security from interference by others try *coach screws* that incorporate a hex head. Easily undone with a spanner or impact driver. More expensive but a lot less bother.

FENCING PLIERS £20 if you are going to repair any wire fencing these are essential. You can hammer staples in, remove them and cut fencing wire with them. Long fencing runs are most probably best left to the professionals

USE IT, DON'T LOSE IT

Once you have all of these tools, hopefully stored safely, you need to ensure that after every session they are returned. Each of our sessions is run by a ***Site Leader*** (the charge hand) who should know what has been taken out for the job. A few things we have found useful:

- Hooks only sufficient to hang each of our spades shovels and forks. If one is unoccupied ……
- Taking out what you need in known quantities. We have 15 rakes, each tied in bunches of five. If we need 8 rakes, we take out 2 lots of five
- Mark tools with bright paint if practical. Small hand tools are easily lost if they are green, which many, inexplicably, are
- Batteries are expensive and may have been used on a range of tools. They will be recharged, off-site if they have been used. We have a board that identifies the number that are charged and who is recharging the remainder.

GIFTS OF SECONDHAND TOOLS

We have received offers of pre-owned tools and the results have been mixed.

- Spades and shovels are usually robust and often only require a clean down.
- Digging forks often have bent tines and are frustrating to use.
- Anything that arrives needing a wooden replacement handle is not likely to be worth the bother, as handles are expensive and may be hard to fit properly
- Handsaws are usually blunt and rusty, bow saws twisted.
- We would not accept any power tools with a lead (we don't have electricity), and cordless tools without a battery are most probably not worth it either. If you do accept them, get them PAT tested.

There is a delicate balance to be struck between not seeming to be rude or ungrateful and accepting tools destined for the wheelie bin.

STORING YOUR EQUIPMENT

It won't take long before you have amassed enough equipment to think about storage. If you are looking to site a shed you will have to think about a metal one. A wooden shed is fine for some old pots in your back garden but not much else. Pretty soon you will find the market leader is *Asgard*. A shed that can safely contain a mower is going to cost at least £1300. It has a very robust door lock and would be very difficult to break into quickly. Anything stored in an unattended shed, on publicly

accessible land, however secure, is, in reality, uninsurable. Some steps to make your equipment more secure:

- Large items chained together and/or to a floor anchor or a U-bolt through the plywood floor. Everything should be bolt cropper resistant
- Any chain used should be matched with a similar quality padlock
- Padlocks with keys are more secure than ones with combination rollers
- Mark everything with your initials in indelible pen along with randomly applied paint to make items less attractive to thieves in terms of re-sale

SITING THE SHED

You may not want, (or be permitted) to create any kind of permanent base such as concrete for your shed, so a good alternative is new, pressure treated, softwood sleepers (200mm x 100mm) about 500mm apart with support on the edges all round. Easily levelled on blocks on top of rubble and then secured together with angle brackets. The spaces between can be filled with the same rubble. This method is cheap and simple. An alternative is interlocking gravel grids which are much cheaper but possibly not as robust. You need to get it as level as you can from the start, and ensure that the base is not skewwhiff by checking the diagonals are the same length, corner to corner.

ERECTING THE SHED

Metal sheds come as a number of large panels that are screwed together and then to the base. All the locks are fitted for you. There will be an instruction leaflet and a video, which your team need to read/watch a few times. Not including the time it takes getting the panels from the point of delivery to the site, it is likely to take 3 people about 3 hours to complete the task. It is a good idea to make

one person responsible for directing the others. DO NOT attempt this task in wet or windy weather. Start work early in the day.

Tools: spirit levels, saws, string, tape measures, flat and cross-head screwdrivers, impact screwdriver, mastic gun, lump hammer, swear box.

A METAL TOOL STORE/BIKE SHED may be all you need if you don't have a large mower.

(USED) SHIPPING CONTAINERS are highly secure, weatherproof and readily available for a reasonable price, likely around £1,500 for an unmodified 16ft container.

If you are looking for something that can be used for something more than storage, to create more of a room for instance, there are plenty of companies now that will refurbish them with insulation, windows, doors, electrics and heating. They are customisable and can be re-worked to be different lengths and widths for a price. A basic 20ft refurbished container could cost around £15-£20k though more if there are any extensive groundworks, electrical installation or complicated delivery requirements.

There are some drawbacks, condensation can be an issue if not insulated properly. Delivery can be an issue if access isn't great. If a highly secure space is what is needed and access is good they can be a great solution.

ORCHARDS

Thinking of establishing a community orchard?

1. Do your research: talk to people who have already set up a community orchard (e.g. Corston Community Orchard or Horfield Community Orchard) or are experts (e.g. Gloucestershire Orchard Trust). There is also lots of information available online from, e.g. The Orchard Network (https://ptes.org/campaigns/traditional-orchard-project/orchard-network/) and The Orchard Project (https://www.theorchardproject.org.uk/).

2. Key questions to ask:

- How many fruit (and nut) trees to grow in total?
- How many different fruit (and nut) species to grow?
- How many different varieties of each fruit (and nut) species to grow?

3. Issues to consider include:

- Fruit trees require annual maintenance so don't plant more than you can cope with, i.e. most likely fewer than 50.
- Choose your fruit tree rootstocks carefully because the rootstock the fruit tree is grown on determines the final height of the tree, e.g. MM106 rootstock for apples is good for community orchards because the final height is about 4-5 metres, so you won't need ladders to harvest the fruit.

- Deer like to eat fruit trees – if deer are an issue, you'll need to use heavy duty tree protection which costs around two to three times the price of a fruit tree (see the photo below). This level of protection may also be necessary in urban environments to protect against damage from people. You may also want to use about a 20 cm height of chicken wire to place around the trunk to stop rabbits chewing the bark.
- Choose easy to grow varieties that aren't especially susceptible to disease.
- Think about how you plan to use the produce, e.g. plant apples if apple juice is your main anticipated output. How will you juice your apples and pears? Bath City Farm has just set up a community juicing facility (Summer 2025). Or you may wish to purchase the necessary equipment or hire it from another orchard.
- Planting some crab apple trees will help pollination of the fruit trees and they're also really attractive trees and good for wildlife.
- Choose varieties of fruit trees that blossom at different times so that you have both a long blossom period and a long harvesting period. This means you won't have a glut of fruit all at the same time.
- Are there any local or rare varieties that you'd like in your orchard?
- Do you plan to plant the trees in a random arrangement, or in concentric circles, or sections of similar species and varieties?
- Think about the characteristics of your site, e.g. are there any frost pockets that you should try to avoid?
- Where to source your fruit trees? Bare root trees are much cheaper and will tend to get going faster than pot grown trees. Good nurseries are Orange Pippin Trees (https://www.orangepippintrees.co.uk/) and Walcot Organic Nursery (https://walcotnursery.co.uk/).
- Is there a water source available? You'll need to water the trees at least for the first few years until they get established. Summers can be hot and dry and without water your fruit trees will die.
- Fruit trees should be spaced at least 5-7 metres apart.

ADMINISTRATION AND MANAGEMENT ISSUES

There are two reasons why it is worth keeping records of the amount of time your volunteers have contributed towards your work:

a) KEEPING RECORDS FOR FUNDRAISING

If you are looking for financial support, it may be possible to come up with a notional contribution by showing the support you have gained from time provided by volunteers. When assessing the contribution from volunteers towards partnership funding for lottery applications, it suggests: professional services – up to £350 a day; skilled labour - £150 a day; unskilled labour - £50 a day (as of 2019)

b) KEEPING A DIARY

It is useful to keep records of volunteer activity. Each session (example below) can be logged to identify the date, activity, number of volunteers and the hours worked. It provides valuable information:

- Which days of the week, months of the year are most popular
- How many volunteer hours were needed to complete certain tasks, and when they were undertaken, to aid planning next year

As an example

Date	Activity	Volunteers	Hours	TOTAL HOURS
Sunday 01/06/2021	lay rubble to footpath at entrance	12	2	24
Thursday 05/06/2021	mow East field	7	2	14

RECRUITING VOLUNTEERS

From the start we arranged 2 hour working sessions on Wednesday and Sunday mornings. We have slightly more on Sundays than Wednesdays. Volunteers come as often as they wish.

Initially we recruited from our supporting residents associations. We followed up with signs on site (explaining what we were doing each session), publicity via local media and the word spread. We have recruited Duke of Edinburgh Award pupils and students from our local universities. As time goes by, people get to notice us and what we are doing, so that helps too.

It goes without saying that retaining volunteers is essential. People who work with us get to learn new skills and get to make new friends. We provide hot drinks and home-made cake on most Sundays. In the summer the Wednesday evening volunteers might be offered a choc ice or a fruit lolly! Thanking everyone for their efforts at the end is always worth remembering.

VOLUNTEER RECORDS

You will, of course, need to keep records of all volunteers whilst they are with you. This is deemed reasonable under the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UKGDPR). All of the people who are responsible for our volunteer sessions have a document like this, on their phones ***just in case***. Once

someone has eased to be a volunteer, it makes sense to update the records. We remove phone numbers and email addresses.

VOLUNTEER	NAME	EMERGENCY CONTACT
COLLINS	ROSEMARY	ARTHUR CONLEY 07*** ******
DARNLEY	JACK	CHRIS FINCH 07*** ******
MELTON	MO	RYAN JOHNSON 07*** ******
TURNER	CHLOE	SUSAN HILL 07*** ******

Volunteers on a summer's evening

DOCUMENTED POLICIES YOU WILL MOST PROBABLY NEED

- Health and safety (incorporating risk assessments for practical activities)
- Equal opportunities
- Safeguarding
- Arrangements for persons under 18 including those volunteering via the Duke of Edinburgh Scheme
- Photography

Review and update these annually. You will need most, if not all of these. They are a useful management tool in their own right. In addition, many funders, especially charities, expect these to be in place. Also insurers. You can find model policies available online and many projects are happy to share their policies to get you started. **These are provided in the appendix to this guide.** You may want to add or change certain sections, but they could help as a starting point

INSURANCES YOU WILL NEED

Employers' liability insurance. **£250 P.A**. **(for £10m cover)** Volunteers are treated by insurance companies as if they were employees. Your organization has a duty of care for your volunteers. It is very expensive to insure anyone under 18. If you choose not to insure under 18s, parents will need to know this.

Public Liability insurance £**50 P.A. (for £5m cover)** This is to cover third parties, that is, someone outside your organization who might be on site. Who covers the limb of a tree that falls on someone's head, for instance? The onus is on the claimant to prove reckless negligence on your part. As this is very hard to prove, you get a lot of cover for a very small premium.

There are a lot of trusted insurers that provide for organisations in the voluntary sector.

ORGANISATIONAL FORMS

What follows is *definitely not legal advice* or meant to scare you off. However, before you engage in any activity that involves volunteers and and/or affects others, it is essential to know your legal position.

Any group of individuals who meet together to achieve a common goal, are just that. A group of individuals who are individually and jointly liable for whatever they do, irrespective of what they call themselves. Liability is unlimited (everyone's personal assets could be at risk)

Many landlords and potential funders, will only work with a group of people with a proper legal form. You will most probably want to be one that is non-profit distributing. The main choices are becoming a *Charity* or a *Community Interest Company (CIC).* Both have to provide an annual report including a financial report. **Both have limited liability**. This means only the *organisation* (not individuals) would have to pay off any debts accrued with what can be raised from the assets along with its share capital. The share capital for non-profit companies is usually a nominal amount.

Charities are limited in terms of what they are permitted to do and are subject to scrutiny by the Charity Commission. They have advantages including the ability to claim back VAT and exemption from Corporation Tax.

CICs have to report to Companies House but are subject to less external scrutiny. CICs have to pay Corporation Tax at the prevailing rate if they make a profit of more than a *de minimus* amount (believed to be around £100). It makes sense to plan purchases to minimize your tax liability in any given year.

CICs provide a solid governance structure, providing credibility and permanence, without excessive bureaucracy. We have a share capital of £5, £1 from each of our "Subscribing Members" – the community organisations that helped us start. They attend our Annual General Meetings and provide us with input and some financial support. Their role as *members* is much less onerous than those of Trustees of a Registered Charity. The Directors are supported by Site Leaders (see the Health and Safety Policy in the Appendix), who share the supervision of volunteer sessions and meet to discuss future policy. The structure should be valuable when it comes to succession.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION AND FUNDING

Networking can be key - get in touch with similar organisations in your local area to understand how they're set up, how they're funded etc. People in the volunteer sector tend to be really generous with their knowledge and time.

INFORMATION SOURCES

- **BANES 3rd sector group** (3sg.org.uk) is a network of charities, social enterprises and community groups in BANES. Information and advice
- **Avon Wildlife Trust** (avonwildlifetrust.org.uk) surveys, advice, some funding
- **Plantlife** (plantlife.org.uk/learning-resource/), lots of information, grassland, fungi, species
- **RSPB** (rspb.org.uk/bath)
- **Bath Natural History Society** (bathnats.org.uk) surveys

FUNDING SOURCES

- **BANES** websitehttps://www.bathnes.gov.uk/funding-finder
- **Ward Councillors** have an annual fund they can spend each year. Small grants
- **Bath in Bloom** (bathinbloom.org/contact) small grants, also, they run the It's Your Neighbourhood scheme in conjunction with the RHS
- There are some huge directories of charitable funders, but it can take up a huge amount of time and might be soul destroying. If you want to go down that route go to the main public library

In conclusion…..

However well you plan things, you are going to have to deal with setbacks and knock backs. It will come good in the end.

As time passes, things get easier as your profile will rise and what was a challenge at first (attracting interest, volunteers, funding) becomes much less so. Longevity has its rewards.

Other organizations in the Bath area have contributed to this guide. Thanks go to: Bathscape, Bath City Farm, Corston Orchard.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 HEALTH AND SAFETY POLICY/RISK ASSESSMENT

APPENDIX 2 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES POLICY

APPENDIX 3 SAFEGUARDING POLICY

APPENDIX 4 WORKING WITH UNDER 18s/DoE

APPENDIX 5 PHOTOGRAPHY POLICY

- The documents below were originally developed from examples found online. Over a number of years they have been developed to suit the particular needs of the Friends of Lyncombe Hill Fields CIC. At the beginning of each calendar year the Directors review each of the policies to ensure they still meet our needs.
- Every volunteer is issued with the first 3 policies. Parents/guardians are issued with appendix 4, if their child is volunteering through the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme.
- The documents refer to LCNR, an imaginary organisation that might be a Local Nature Reserve or a Community Nature Reserve. In all other respects they are identical to the policies of Friends of Lyncombe Hill Fields CIC.
- Feel free to use these policies as you will.

APPENDIX 1 COMBINED HEALTH AND SAFETY POLICY AND RISK ASSESSMENT Updated January 2026

HEALTH & SAFETY POLICY

LCNR wishes to ensure as far as reasonably practicable the safety and welfare of volunteers and any other people working in these Fields, and also visitors and any others who may be affected by the actions of those people. Volunteers are insured by LCNR as if they were employees.

Volunteer Working Parties

Work is only to be carried out by maintenance volunteers or by other people who have been granted such permission by a Director of LCNR. Everyone must have due regard for their own and others' safety, checking that each task is safe in the prevailing circumstances (weather, daylight, fatigue, equipment being used, clothing and personal capabilities) before proceeding. All will have been briefed on this Health & Safety Policy and Risk Assessment. Any children must be supervised by a responsible adult at all times.

Personal safety. Volunteers must alert the Site Leader of any pre-existing condition and the location of any medication they are carrying that is pertinent to the volunteering activity. Site Leaders are to brief volunteers of any unusual safety risks (other than listed in the policy) and control measures.

Site Leader:

- A Site Leader will be identified at the start of each working session and will be present throughout that session. No work will be carried out without the Site Leader's permission. The Site Leader is responsible for:
    - The overall health, safety and performance of all volunteers or other people working during that session
    - Appointing Task Leader(s) for that session, or where appropriate and necessary taking on that role themselves
    - Briefing the Task Leader(s) (or where there are no Task Leaders, the volunteers) on the plan of the work to be carried out in that session.

The Site Leader will carry a charged mobile telephone and the First Aid kit at all times. They will have a key to the shed where the list of emergency contacts for all maintenance volunteers is kept and spares for the First Aid kit are located.

Task Leader(s): will be appointed at the discretion of the Site Leader. They are responsible for ensuring that the volunteers or other people engaged on a specific task under their control understand:

- The nature and extent of the proposed task
- The tools and equipment to be used
- The potential risks of the task and how these can be eliminated or minimised
- Any medical condition that could affect a volunteer's ability to participate.

Task Leaders will monitor the performance of the task and will arrange that all LCNR tools and equipment are returned to the shed at the end of the session.

Task Leaders will carry a charged mobile telephone at all times. They will have the mobile telephone number of the Site Leader and, in the event of any accident or near-miss will contact the Site Leader immediately.

Unplanned tasks (that arise as a result of planned work) may only take place after an assessment of the risks by the Site Leader.

Use of Power Tools

1. Only persons over 18yrs. with appropriate training and deemed competent to do so may use power tools.
2. A visual check of the equipment must be carried out by the operator before use.
3. Appropriate safety equipment must be worn by the operator.
4. Any adjustments to machinery may only take place once the power source has been isolated
5. Tools must be regularly maintained and serviced by a reputable power tool dealer (as appropriate).
6. Power tools may only be used when explicitly agreed with the Task Leader
7. Detail on the use and dangers of the scythe mower are provided in **"MOWER INSTRUCTIONS"**

Use of ladders

1. One person must "foot" the ladder at all times and if possible the ladder should be secured at the top
2. Appropriate PPE should be used

RISK ASSESSMENT FOR WORKING AT LCNR

SIGNIFICANT HAZARDS/RISKS (associated with this task)	*DESCRIPTION OF HAZARDS/ RISKS*	*EXISTING CONTROL MEASURES IN PLACE.*	*RISK RATING*	*REMEDIAL ACTION/ADDITIONAL CONTROL MEASURES REQUIRED*
Striking by moving/flying/falling objects	Cutting overhead branches Working beneath trees Using mattock/strimming on rocky ground	Tasks will not go ahead beneath mature trees in windy weather Assessment of danger	Tolerable	A cutting team of at least 3. One operator, one directing the cutting and one to ensure a 5m distance is maintained as the "fall zone". Anyone within the fall zone should be wearing a hard hat and goggles and have determined their plan of retreat in advance. Equipment must be checked by 2 people before work starts Eye protection to be worn
Injury to public from maintenance work carried out on site	Members of the public getting too close to works being undertaken	All practical work tasks to be individually risk assessed. In exceptional circumstances it may be necessary for warning signs to be used and/or areas to be taped off	Tolerable	Participants to be briefed that the fields are well used by the public and that they must be aware at all times of other people in the vicinity No tools to be left unattended
Injuries to participants from using hand tools and power tools	See the section on power tools above	▪ participants briefed on correct & safe use of tools	Tolerable	The Task Leader must ensure that all participants are using tools correctly.

		▪ appropriate PPE to be used ▪ tools are in good working order and suited to the task		No tools to be left unattended
Disease	Lyme's disease Bacteria (especially from dog faeces)	▪ participants briefed on diseases and to wear appropriate clothing	Tolerable	Tick remover and hand wash in First Aid kit

SIGNIFICANT HAZARDS/RISKS (associated with this task)	**DESCRIPTION OF HAZARDS/ RISKS**	**EXISTING CONTROL MEASURES IN PLACE**	**RISK RATING**	**REMEDIAL ACTION/ADDITIONAL CONTROL MEASURES REQUIRED**
Insects and plants	Horseflies Bees and wasps Poisonous, thorny and irritant plants.	Participants to be made aware of risks. Participants to be advised to wear appropriate clothing.	Tolerable	Insect repellent, sting/pain relief and tweezers in First Aid kit to be carried at all times. Anyone with a pre-existing medical condition relating to allergies should inform the Task Leader at the start of each session of any medication or treatment that they are carrying.
Risk of being stung when mowing tall vegetation	Unseen wasp/bees nests being disturbed	Site Leader/Task Leader to recce site before mowing starts	Tolerable	Insect repellent, sting/pain relief and tweezers in First Aid kit to be carried at all times. Anyone with a pre-existing medical condition relating to allergies should inform the Task Leader at the start of each session of any medication or treatment that they are carrying

Slip/trip/fall on same level or from a height of less than 2 metres, or uneven ground	Trip hazards Loose material underfoot Muddy ground	Participants to be advised to wear appropriate footwear and clothing	Tolerable	Check for trip hazards in advance Provide safety briefing on site
Risk to personal safety from assault, abusive behaviour, dogs etc.	Avoid possible altercations, especially with unfamiliar dogs and other animals	Participants to work in groups or within sight and sound of members of the group	Tolerable	Provide safety briefing and equipment on site
Extremes of weather **Hypo – cold conditions** **Hyper – hot conditions**	Hypo – hypothermia Hyper – heat stroke, heat exhaustion, sun burn, dehydration Rain – slip hazard	Tasks will not go ahead or be curtailed as appropriate in extreme weather e.g. extremely hot, cold, windy or wet weather	Tolerable	Watch weather forecast in advance Appropriate clothing Hot/cold drinks Sunscreen in First Aid Kit

SIGNIFICANT HAZARDS/RISKS (associated with this task)	*DESCRIPTION OF HAZARDS/ RISKS*	*EXISTING CONTROL MEASURES IN PLACE*	*RISK RATING*	*REMEDIAL ACTION/ADDITIONAL CONTROL MEASURES REQUIRED*
Emergency response	Process to be followed in an emergency	First Aid Kit in shed Carry mobile phones Inform volunteer's emergency contact (names/numbers kept in shed) Nearest A&E *(RUH: BA1 3NG)*	Tolerable	Volunteers to be briefed accordingly
"Sharps" and other dangerous litter	Needles, broken glass and any other sharp objects)	Use of gloves when collecting litter. All sharps to be notified to the Task Leader.	Tolerable	Volunteers to be briefed accordingly
Back injury from lifting, digging etc.	Could be a problem when lifting heavy items, shovelling stone, or digging roots	Ensure a steady pace of work; ergonomic lifting procedures for heavy items Care when loading wheel barrows	Tolerable	Volunteers to be briefed accordingly

SPECIFIC MOWER INSTRUCTIONS

Alko Mower Checks

The following is to be performed by the Site Leader or Task Leader:

- Check the mower for any damage.
- Check tyre pressures and inflate as necessary (30 pounds per square inch).
- If the mower is to be powered to transit to or from the cutting area the cutter guard is to remain in place.
- The cutting guard is to be removed and placed away from the mowing area.
- It is to be fueled appropriately.
- A short trial run to ensure it is running correctly.

Prior to mowing

The following is to be performed the Site Leader or Task Leader:

- The area to be mown is to be identified.
- The length of the mow can be marked to assist.
- Site Leader or Task Leader to survey area to be mowed with regard to wasp/bees nests as far is practical
- Survey the area to be mowed and its bounds and hazards identified. Hazards are to be removed such as rocks, branches/sticks that will damage the mower.
- The area is to be surveyed for other hazards such a steep banks that will not be mown, trees/shrubs to avoid etc. and other hazards that could puncture the tyres such as blackthorn.
- Reminder not to pull the mower backwards when it is being powered forwards (this causes damage to the tyre/hub interface)

General Safety Brief

- All users of the mower are to be fully conversant and in agreement with LCNR H&S Policy and Risk Assessment
- The volunteer team are to be briefed on the area to be cut and the boundaries e.g. areas not to cut and that have been identified as a hazard (steep bank) or to remain uncut.
- Volunteers are to be briefed to stay out of the way of the mower and be aware of its movement.
- Operators are to be briefed to stop mowing immediately (letting go of both controls) should someone or animal e.g. dog be near to the mower
- If the mower gets jammed by vegetation and needs to be cleared, the motor MUST be turned off prior to any remedial action being undertaken.
- Special vigilance is to be taken when mowing adjacent to paths.
- Novice mowers are not permitted to operate close to the paths.
- All volunteer belongings and petrol can are to be placed away from the area to be cut.

Briefing of Novice Operators and Others as Necessary

The briefing is to be performed by the Site Leader or Task Leader:

- Highlight the hazards with the mower i.e. the cutters & the hot engine
- Highlight the hazards with mowing and mitigating action

Hazard	**Controlling action**
Damage to people and dogs	Stop mowing in vicinity of people and dogs
Damage to the mower cutters from rocks and sticks and other objects e.g. saplings etc.	Survey the cutting route and look ahead for hazards.
Damage to the mower from rolling over.	Cut along the slope and take care when turning and do not cut on steep slopes.
Damage to the mower from grass locking wheel.	Monitor the wheels and if a build-up of grass around the wheel begins, stop mowing and clear debris.
Damage to tyres or inner tubes	Tyres to be regularly checked to ensure they are properly inflated (30lb. PSI) If wheels get stuck, care should be taken when moving forwards Do not mow in the vicinity of blackthorn
Damage to the mower from fire due to spillage of fuel on hot engine.	Refill using a funnel.
Mower out of control e.g. panicked operator	Release both levers immediately

Mowing tuition of Novice Operators to be provided by the Site Leader or Task Leader.

- Mowing is only to be performed by persons over 18 yrs.
- Identify the hazards on the mower, see above.
- Before starting show interlocks for cutter and motor.
- Ensure the volunteer can do this themselves prior to starting.
- Start with throttle control in high revs position, pull cord and then reduce revs to approx. half-speed.
- Engage the cutters first, engage drive second and then perform a short cut say 2m
- The operator is to perform an emergency stop letting go.
- With long grass, up to half of the width of the cutters should be engaged in cutting to avoid missing areas.
- Walk with the volunteer to ensure they are content with the operation.
- Provide guidance on turning the mower.
    - Prior to making the turn ensure the area is clear of people and other objects such as rakes.

- Release the cutters prior to making the turn and lean the mower back a bit.
- Guide the mower around the turn and engage cutters before starting the next strip. Ensure the volunteer can safely turn the mower at the end of the first strip.
- If not provide appropriate assistance.
- If the volunteer is nervous offer to turn the mower at each end.

Mowing

- Check the operator is content at intervals and aim to change the mower operator every 10 to 15 mins
- Check the fuel level and refill as necessary.
- When refueling check the mower for damage.

On completion of mowing

- Check the mower for damage.
- Apply oil to cutters, replace white cutting guard and return to designated store.
- The same guidelines for mowing apply to moving the mower e.g. stop in the vicinity of people and dogs.
- Report any issues to the Site Leader.

APPENDIX 2 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES POLICY

Updated January 2026

LCNR is committed to eliminating discrimination, and encouraging diversity amongst our volunteers. Our aim is that each and every volunteer feels respected and valued. No volunteer will be treated less favourably due to any of, or none of the following characteristics:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender Reassignment
- Pregnancy and Maternity
- Race (including ethnic origin, colour, citizenship, nationality, and national origin)
- Religion or Belief
- Sex
- Sexual Orientation

Enquiries about a volunteer's Disability and Health The only circumstances in which LCNR may make health enquiries are to establish whether the applicant will be able to safely carry out a function that is intrinsic to the work concerned

Observance of the Policy Volunteers must not:

- Discriminate against or harass other volunteers
- Attempt to induce other volunteers to practise unlawful discrimination
- Victimise individuals who have made allegations or complaints of discrimination, or provided information about such discrimination.

Complaints and arbitration

Anyone who feels that they have been treated in a manner that is not in accordance with any element of this policy, should raise the matter with one of the Directors as soon as possible.

If it proves to be impossible to resolve the issue with the Directors, both parties (the complainant and the Directors of LCNR) will be able to appoint a mutually agreed arbiter.

APPENDIX 3 SAFEGUARDING POLICY
Updated January 2026

LCNR is committed to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, young people and adults and is committed to safeguarding practice that reflects statutory responsibilities, government guidance and complies with best practice requirements.

- All children/adults, regardless of age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex, or sexual orientation have an equal right to protection from all types of harm or abuse
- Some children/adults are additionally vulnerable because of the impact of previous experiences, their level of dependency, communication needs or other issues
- Working in partnership with children, adults, young people, their parents, carers and other agencies is essential in promoting young people's welfare.

Definitions:
The Children Act 1989 definition of a child: anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday, even if they are living independently.
Adult at Risk: An adult who has needs for care and support is experiencing, or is at risk of, abuse or neglect, and as a result of those needs is unable to protect himself or herself against the abuse or neglect or the risk of it.
Child and Adult Abuse: Children and adults may be vulnerable to neglect and abuse or exploitation from within their family and from individuals they come across in their daily lives.

Types of abuse identified for the purposes of this policy:
- Physical
- Sexual
- Emotional
- Psychological
- Neglect
- Radicalisation
- Discriminatory
- Financial
- Cyber bullying
- Forced marriage
- Mate crime

Confidentiality and Information Sharing:
We expect all volunteers and trustees to maintain confidentiality. Information will only be shared in line with the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).

Recording and Record Keeping:
A written record will be kept by the Safeguarding Lead about concerns regarding anyone with safeguarding needs. This must include details of the person involved, the nature of the concern and the actions taken, decision made and why they were made. All records must be signed and dated. All records must be securely and confidentially stored in line with GDPR. This information may be shared with statutory authorities (including Police, Social Services, LEAs, schools) by the Safeguarding Lead in consultation with the other Directors.

The reporting procedure
Updates will be given to the Directors about a safeguarding concern. We will consider what information can be shared without risking any investigations that may be ongoing or breaching confidentiality. The initial report and updates would include:

- the nature (category of abuse) of the allegation/incident
- who is leading the process
- any immediate arrangements have been put in place to prevent further abuse or neglect
- which agencies have been notified and are involved
- Any referral or reporting requirements considered

If other agencies are involved, we will maintain regular contact with them. Where possible, agree when updates will be given.

Volunteers may need a simple briefing about what's happened (on a need-to-know basis)

Use of Social Media, Mobile Phones and other Digital Technology:
All trustees and volunteers are made aware that it is unlawful to photograph children and young people without the explicit consent of the person with parental responsibilities. All volunteers (and a parent/guardian in the case of those under 18 years) will be made aware that only first names may accompany photographs published unless the specific use of a surname has been previously agreed.

Whistleblowing:
It is important that people within LCNR have the confidence to come forward to speak or act if they are unhappy with anything. This includes concerns about another volunteer. The Lead for Safeguarding will be identified to all new and existing volunteers as the first point of contact.

ANNUAL REVIEW This policy will be kept under review at all times, and will be subject to review by the Directors annually, on or before 31 March.

Lead for Safeguarding XXXXX XXXXXXX (Director)
Email : LCNR@gmail.com Telephone number: XXXXXXXXXX

NSPCC Helpline
0808 800 5000

APPENDIX 4 SAFEGUARDING AND INSURANCE FOR DUKE OF EDINBURGH AWARD SCHEME (DOE) VOLUNTEERS
Updated January 2026

The DoE provides a minimal Personal Accident cover to participants/Leaders. Public Liability insurance cover should be provided by the Licensed Organisation, which will provide an indemnity in respect of their legal liability (and that of participants and adult helpers) for bodily injury or damage to property arising in connection with a DoE activity. *(https://www.dofe.org/run/insurance/)*

The Licensed Organisation is the school.

- The school will have policies on Safeguarding, Health and Safety, Equal Opportunities and Risk Assessment.
- It may also have Public and Personal Liability insurance either directly or via the Local Authority. It is the responsibility of the parent/guardian to check the extent of this cover.

LCNR is not the Licensed Organisation. It works through Licensed Organisations (in this case the school).

- LCNR has policies on Safeguarding, Health and Safety, Equal Opportunities and Risk Assessment. These are reviewed annually. All these policies will be provided to the Licensed Organisation and a parent/guardian prior to a school student volunteering.
- LCNR has Public Liability and Employers Liability insurance. Please note, our insurance policy treats volunteers as if they were employees. **It is important to note that Employers Liability does not apply to any volunteer under the age of 18 including DoE volunteers.**
- LCNR organises communications with volunteers via WhatsApp. In the case of DoE volunteers, communication via WhatsApp will only be with a parent/guardian.

APPENDIX 5 PHOTOGRAPHIC POLICY
Updated January 2026

Friends of Lyncombe Hill Fields (FLHF) welcomes photographs being taken of its landscape, of the long-distance views from the fields, of its flora, fauna and insects, and of its volunteers at work. We do not place any restrictions of how these are used or published, except as outlined below in this Photographic Policy.

We have a Photos Group comprising volunteers who every month select what they consider to be the best 12 or more photographs that have been submitted to them, of these subjects, for inclusion in the Gallery section of our website https://friendsoflyncombehillfields.co.uk/gallery/ . In this way we have built up a beautiful portfolio of several hundred photographs that have been taken since January 2022. If you wish to submit photographs to be considered for inclusion in this website Gallery, and are not a member of any of the FLHF WhatsApp groups, then please send them to lyncombehillfields@gmail.com . Photographers' names are credited to the individual photographs selected for this Gallery, but no payment is made for this use of the photographs.

Volunteers and supporters who are members of our various WhatsApp groups normally submit their photographs via these WhatsApp sites, for consideration by the Photos Group, or for the general information of other volunteers and supporters.

We draw on all of these submitted photographs for inclusion in our annual calendar or as subjects for our greetings cards. These items are sold to raise money to cover our operating costs and for other projects, consistent with the not-for-profit structure of our Community Interest Company (CIC). Again photographers' names are credited for the individual photographs, but no payment is made for this or any similar use of the photographs.

When we use any photographs which include volunteers at work, we normally do not include any detail of the names of any volunteer, and especially not the surname except where we have obtained specific permission from that volunteer.

This photographic policy has been explained to all of our volunteers including to students undertaking Duke of Edinburgh Award assignments. All are asked to tell us if they do not wish to be included in such photographs.

When we have primary school-aged children visiting the fields for Forest School activities, the children are broken into groups, and one or more groups are specifically noted as being for children whose parents or guardians have asked that they are not to be photographed.