
Tranquil Wood Community Asset Proposal

A ‘gift’ from the Brodie Family to establish a natural community asset for Betchworth and Buckland

The Opportunity

Betchworth Parish Council has the opportunity to acquire a significant part of Tranquil Wood (Figure 1) as a permanent nature-based community asset, to benefit the residents of Betchworth and Buckland for generations to come.

The opportunity exists because the owner of the woodland, a member of the Brodie family, has agreed to sell the wood at a nominal price. He is persuaded by Re-Betchworth Trustee’s vision of a nature asset for the community. He is aware of its open market value — which, for ancient woodland in Surrey, would typically be measured in tens of thousands of pounds per acre — and has chosen to make it available to the community at a fraction of that value.

This kind of opportunity is extremely rare. Re-Betchworth Trustees are inviting Betchworth Parish Council to consider purchasing the woodland using Community Infrastructure funding to create a valuable community asset.

Figure 1 Tranquil Wood on the Betchworth-Buckland Parish Boundary



What is Tranquil Wood?

Tranquil Wood is a twelve-acre fragment of ancient woodland clothing the shallow valley of Slough Brook, on the boundary of Betchworth and Buckland parishes, immediately south of the A25. It is one of those places that repays quiet attention: snowdrops, wild garlic and bluebells in spring; badgers, deer and foxes; reed beds, a pond that grow in the winter and transient wetland nurtured by the brook; a canopy shaped by centuries of natural process and human stewardship.

Ancient woodland — defined as land continuously wooded since at least 1600 — covers less than two and a half percent of England's land area. Its soils, seed banks, fungal networks and hydrology carry ecological histories that modern planting cannot replicate. Once lost or degraded, it cannot be recovered within any meaningful human timescale. It is, in the truest sense, irreplaceable.

Why this matters now

Without community ownership, Tranquil Wood remains vulnerable. It could be fragmented, neglected, or managed in ways that gradually erode its ecological value. That risk is not abstract: the woodland sits within a landscape that is already under development pressure.

Hartsfield Manor, just 350 to 400 metres to the south, is proposing a major redevelopment to be completed in 2028. That project will have a significant impact on the surrounding landscape and its wildlife. Tranquil Wood offers real scope for biodiversity net gain enhancement in direct response to that development — but only if it is under community stewardship rather than in private hands.

The timing of the owner's willingness to sell — coinciding with this development pressure — makes the case for acting now all the stronger.

What community ownership would mean

Ownership by Betchworth Parish Council would transform the woodland from land that happens to exist into a shared civic asset — protected in perpetuity, managed transparently, and available to the whole community. In practical terms, it would mean:

- Permanent protection from inappropriate development or management, secured through democratic ownership rather than a commercial arrangement.
- A refuge for wildlife along the Slough Brook corridor, covering two significant habitats: ancient broadleaf woodland and riparian wetland.
- A living classroom for local schools, families and nature groups.
- A jewel in the crown of the Betchworth and Buckland Nature Trail currently being developed through the 4Bs Biodiversity Initiative.

-
- A place of quiet and restoration for residents — the kind of accessible natural space that evidence consistently links to physical and mental wellbeing.
 - A keystone habitat within Surrey's emerging Local Nature Recovery Strategy, demonstrating that communities can and do play an active role in nature recovery.

Cost of Purchasing the Woodland

Re-Betchworth Trustees have spoken to the owner of the woodland who indicated his willingness to sell. He put us in touch with his land agent Mr Anthony Horton. Through a face to face meeting we established that an acceptable offer might be:

~~£100k~~ for woodland

~~£20k~~ Land Agent's Fee

About ~~£10k~~ Solicitors Fees for land transfer

Mr Brodie's solicitors are Boodle Hatfield. ~~Sam~~ Arthur is the person who will do the legal work.

The total cost of acquiring the woodland would therefore be in the region of **£20,000**

Other costs

1 Public Liability Insurance

For a 10-acre woodland, the cost is typically pay £150–£200 per year for public liability cover. Specific figures from specialist providers. Ashburnham Insurance offers woodland public liability starting at £155 per year for up to 50 acres. Tranquil Wood has a couple of features that insurers will ask about — the pond, the wetland and Slough Brook are watercourses, and if the Nature Trail routes through the site there will be public access. Factors including the size of the woodland, who accesses the land, and whether there are watercourses or unoccupied buildings on the land all influence the premium. These features may push the cost toward the higher end — perhaps **£200–£300 annually**.

Cover levels: Most standard policies include £2 million public liability as standard, with the option to increase to £5 million depending on the size and usage of the woodland. For a Parish Council-owned site with public access, £5 million would be sensible and prudent.

2 Initial preparation and maintenance costs

The current situation is there is no management of the woodland. It has existed without any management for over 60 years. When branches and trees fall they are left in place to decompose.

The pragmatic approach to woodland management is to actively manage a relatively narrow strip along the western margin of the woodland adjacent to a path that will be created to provide access to the woodland for residents to use. There is an existing, but overgrown path that can be resurrected. Volunteer working parties using hand saws, loppers and shears will be able to clear the line of the path. Branches of any trees that are cut could be used to produce wood chip for the pathway.

Fallen trees along the path will need to cut into manageable lengths and moved away from the path and left to decompose. Any diseased trees in danger of falling across the path will need to be felled. There might be an initial cost of say **£5000** to clear and make safe a good public footpath within the woods.

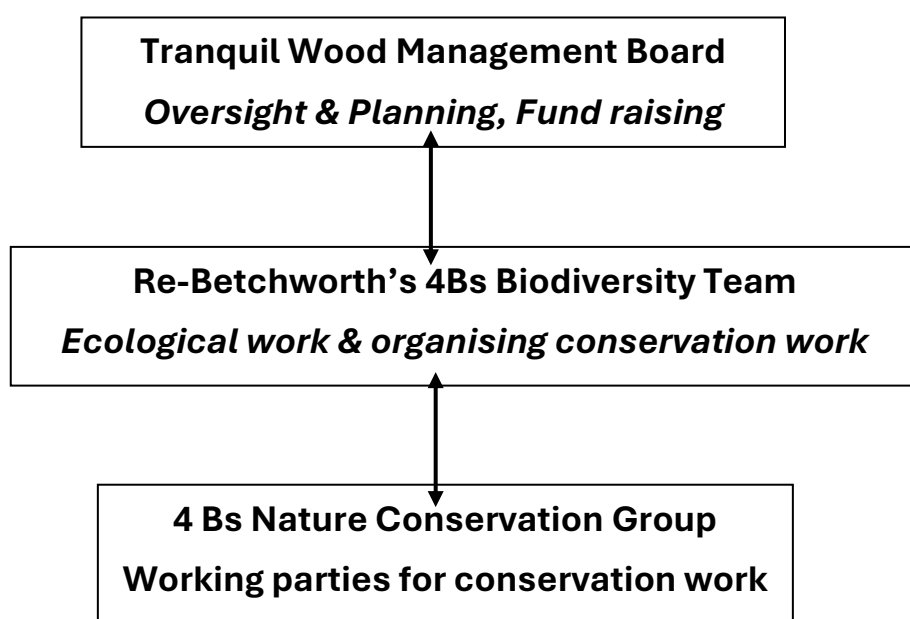
There will also be a small cost for signage (**£100**).

Ongoing Management & Stewardship

A possible Tranquil Wood management structure is outlined in Figure 2. A small management board with representatives from Parish Council, Re-Betchworth's 4Bs Biodiversity Team and the Nature Conservation Group would oversee the management of the woodland, prepare an annual report to the Parish Council, raise money and seek grants for conservation and restoration projects. The 4B's Biodiversity Initiative Team will be responsible for organising working parties to create and help maintain the pathway and be involved in conservation and restoration work. The team will also be seeking funding for ecological surveys and habitat restoration.

Stewardship would be a collective responsibility supported by a group of volunteers willing to spend time helping to maintain the pathway and undertaking habitat restoration projects from time to time. In 2026 the 4Bs Biodiversity Initiative, with the help of Betchworth Council funding to the Re-Betchworth Charity, set up a 4Bs Nature Conservation Group. So far 2 conservation events have been held attracting 20 people each time so there is a group of willing activists ready to help to keep the woodland tidy and create and maintain new pathways.

Figure 2 Possible Management Structure Tranquil Wood Community asset



The Case for Community Infrastructure Funding

The purchase price of approximately £10,000 reflects the owner's generous intention rather than the woodland's open market value. For ancient woodland in Surrey, comparable sites are typically valued in the region of £15,000 to £18,000 per acre — meaning that Tranquil Wood's open market value would likely be in the region of £150,000 to £200,000 or more. The community is being offered an extraordinary asset at a nominal consideration.

Community Infrastructure funding is designed to ensure that development contributes to long-term community wellbeing and resilience. The case for using this funding rests on four arguments:

Green infrastructure is infrastructure

Ancient woodland, riparian corridors and semi-natural green space deliver demonstrable infrastructure functions: biodiversity support and ecological connectivity, climate adaptation through cooling and water retention, flood mitigation, and physical and mental health benefits. Many local authorities now recognise that land acquisition securing these functions is an eligible and cost-effective use of developer contributions.

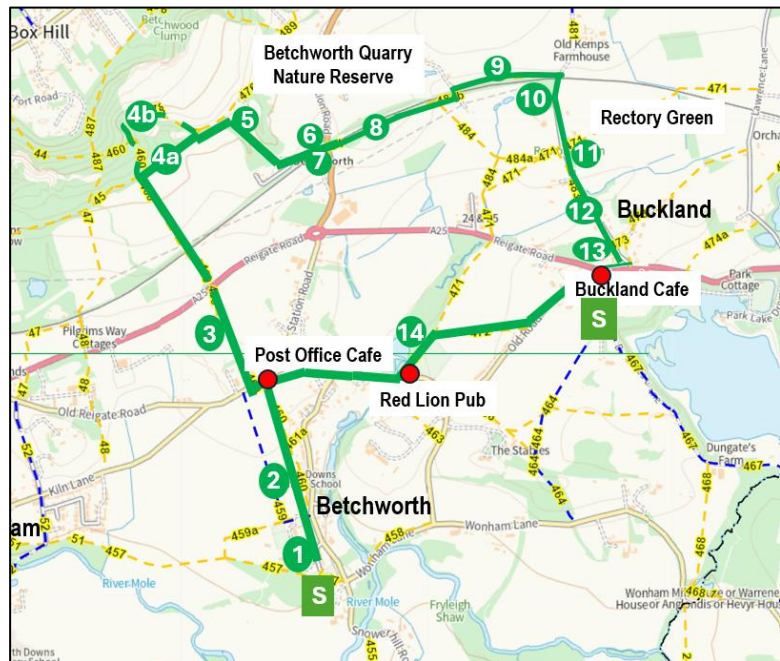
A one-off capital investment of ~~£10,000~~ secures a permanent asset with an open market value many times greater, delivering enduring ecological, social, educational and health returns for minimal ongoing costs. Once this opportunity passes, equivalent

provision could not be created for any amount of public money. Few applications will ever present a comparable cost-benefit case.

Community Infrastructure funding guidance consistently emphasises permanence, democratic accountability and long-term community benefit. Ownership by the Parish Council satisfies all three. It ensures the funding secures a lasting public asset rather than a time-limited enhancement, and it aligns with the Council's statutory biodiversity duty under the Environment Act 2021.

A final consideration

In 2026 the 4Bs Biodiversity Initiative is establishing a Betchworth & Buckland Nature Trail to connect people to nature and raise awareness of local wildlife and their habitats. Figure 3 provides a map of the trail. The trail intersects Tranquil Wood at point 14 but if the woodland became a community asset the trail could be extended to incorporate the woodland.



A Community Legacy

The current owner of the woodland is a member of a family with deep roots in Betchworth. In the process of disposing of landholdings accumulated over generations, he has made a deliberate choice: to ensure that Tranquil Wood passes not to a private buyer seeking amenity or investment value, but to the community in which it is located.. He understands its market value and has chosen to set that aside. This is, in the most straightforward sense, a gift — structured as a sale at nominal consideration, but a gift in intention and in effect. The Parish Council is being asked to accept and honour that gift. In taking the opportunity to acquire the land, the Parish Council will itself be creating a legacy for the benefit of residents of Betchworth & Buckland.

Norman Jackson

Re-Betchworth Trustee

4Bs Biodiversity Initiative

April 2026