

## CLIMATE, BIODIVERSITY AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

---

**Date:** 26<sup>th</sup> of January 2021

**Title:** Community Orchard

**Contact Officer:** Compliance and Environment Officer – Angus Whitburn

---

### **Background**

A request has been received by Olivia Thornton to revitalise the plan for a community orchard this year (2021). Olivia Thornton attended the Stronger Communities meeting on the 20<sup>th</sup> of January 2020 as a member of the public, originally requesting the council start planting more trees on Witney Town Council Land to tackle carbon emissions. The decision was made to add an agenda item to the biodiversity subcommittee to discuss tree planting. Because of the pandemic and the Climate & Biodiversity subcommittee being decommissioned on the 13<sup>th</sup> of May 2020 this agenda item was nether further reported on by officers or discussed by councillors.

### **Current Situation**

There is a lot of useful guidance available to help with the setup and running of a community orchard. The first step would be to find suitable land where groups would have easy access. This would be essential as the orchards purpose would be to benefit the local community with its fruit, learning environment, and area to relax.

The perfect area of land would be situated near a school and residential housing. This would provide the school with a learning environment and project for children. And the residents would benefit from the fruit. If a school was not willing to participate with the planting and maintenance of the trees this would fall to a volunteer group or at a cost the Town Councils contractors.

Without a local community close to the orchard the trees may die and when matured the fruit would fall to the ground and rot away. Although this could benefit the biodiversity of any area this would look unmaintained and impact on the appearance of the area.

### **Environmental impact**

Having declared a Climate Change Emergency at its Council meeting on 26 June 2019 – with this in mind Councillors should have due regard to the environmental impact of any decisions they make with regard to its facilities and services it operates.

The planting of more trees would absorb more carbon helping to aid in reducing the carbon footprint of Witney. The planting of an orchard would also benefit the biodiversity of the area by supporting flora and fauna as well as creating a habitat for animals.

### **Risk**

In decision making Councillors should give consideration to any risks to the Council and any action it can take to limit or negate its liability.

Using any section of amenity land for tree planting has the potential to remove that lands recreation use, especially before the trees mature.

### **Financial implications**

There has been no research into any schemes that provide trees for a community orchard. If there are no such schemes there would be a cost to purchase fruit trees and the cost of there planting and maintenance, if volunteer groups cannot be found or created.

The Committee might like to identify and include a budget in the 2021/22 budget deliberations for this project.

### **Recommendations**

Members are invited to note the report and consider the following:

1. If the community orchard project should be explore further
2. Councillors to discuss criteria of the land for a community orchard for Officers to report for a future meeting if a suitable area of WTC land can be found.