



## Chalfont St Giles Community Orchard Project

### Proposal for Milton's Cottage Trustees

#### **Aims and Ambitions**

We would like to create a community orchard, managed in a natural way, full of wildflowers and a haven for wildlife, a place we can all share, that can help revive forgotten skills and an interest in our fruit growing heritage. Our vision is to make the orchard a valuable addition to village life, offering the opportunity for cross generational learning and involvement in a community project.

#### **Background**

The Community Orchard Project (COP) was initiated by the Committee of the CSG Gardens Association (GA) in June 2021 as a fitting way to mark the Queen's Platinum Jubilee and support the Queen's Green Canopy Appeal.

Since then a COP Steering Group was established in April consisting of members of the GA and others from the local community who had expressed an interest in becoming involved. The Steering Group now consists of 11 members with two representatives from the Parish Council. Several of these members have volunteered to become trustees. A foundation Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) structure is being adopted for the Community Orchard and the Trustees will run the CIO.

An approach was made to the Chair of Milton's Cottage Trustees for permission to create an orchard in a small part of the meadow attached to Milton's Cottage. An outline proposal was submitted in August 2021 with additional information sent in November 2021. We were advised that the Trustees agreed in principal to discussions taking place and the Steering Group have met with the Trustees' representatives on several occasions since February, 2022.

#### **Ecological Survey**

Before any discussions could be finalised, the Steering Group were advised that an ecological survey should be carried out on the land to ensure that no valuable habitats would be disturbed in planting an orchard. The survey was carried out on 14<sup>th</sup> July, 2022.

The survey report is attached to this proposal (Appendix 1) and confirms there was nothing of ecological importance in the meadow and that the creation of the orchard would enhance the biodiversity of the site.



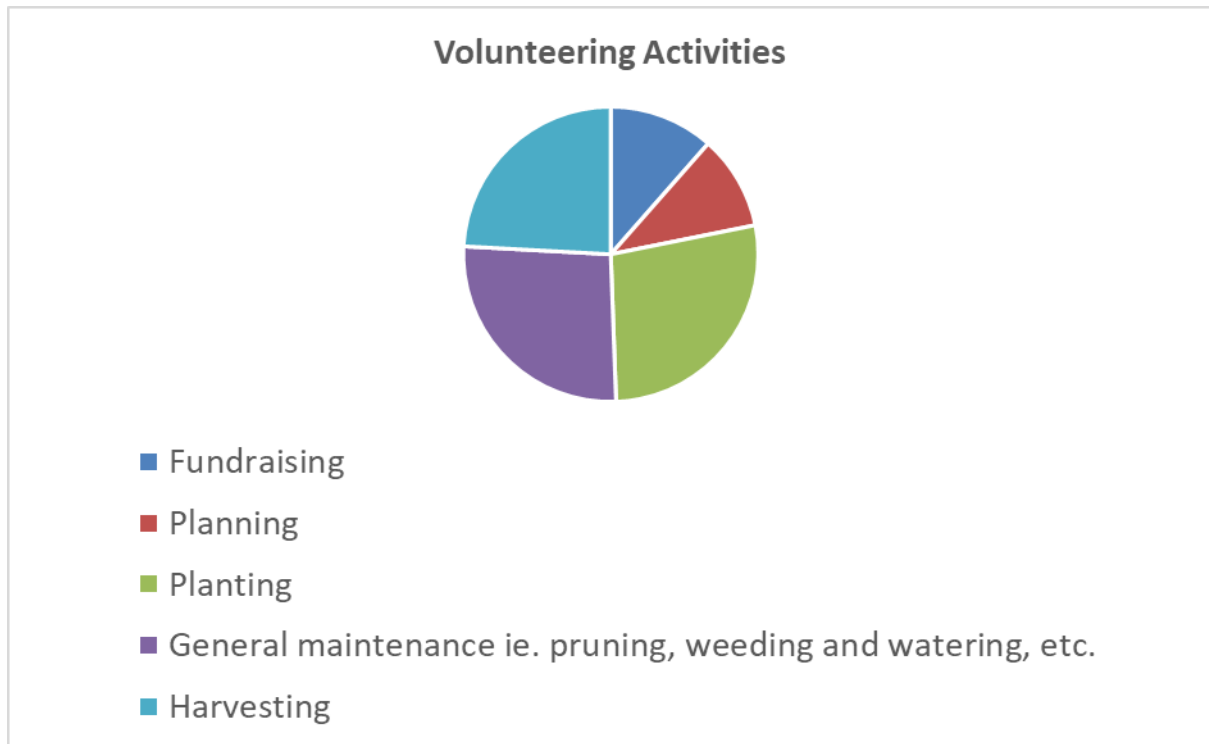
## Survey of Local Residents

As it was important to gauge the interest of the village in the creation of an orchard, a survey regarding the proposal was carried out by the Gardens Association at their plant sale in May and at the Orchard Awareness Day held on 2<sup>nd</sup> June. 53 responses were collected in total and the results showed that all but 2 thought a community orchard "a good idea" with the remaining two indicating they thought an orchard "might be a good idea". The reasons they cited can be found in the pie chart below:





35 of the 53 respondents stated that they would like to be involved in the project. The pie chart below shows the activities for which they would be willing to volunteer:



As can be seen, the majority were interested in the maintenance of the orchard - a very pleasing response!

A further 18 surveys were completed at the Village Show on 3<sup>rd</sup> September, all responses agreeing that the orchard is "A good idea" and all but 2 enthusiastically volunteering to help. We have not yet fully analysed the responses.

From the results of the survey and via conversations, we are confident that our proposal to create a community orchard would be well supported by the village.

### **Milton's Cottage Meadow**

The site is bounded by a fruiting hedge approximately 2 meters in depth and height along the East side, a rather worn wooden fence to the North along Deanway and stock fencing and trees to the West and South.

There is a rich variety of very well-established trees along the boundary to the West, including an English Elm, at the bottom of the footpath (and several elm saplings along the fence) Norway Maples, Hornbeams and Lime trees: most are thought to be around 80 years old.



Several beehives are sited beyond the car park, cared for by a local bee keeper. There is also a derelict beehive nearby.

We have been advised by the clerk to the Parish Council that the land on the West boundary, between the stock fence and the footpath, is not owned by Buckinghamshire Council and therefore may belong to the Crown. If this is the case, it might be possible for the Trustees of Milton's Cottage to apply to take over this strip of land, should they wish, enabling the scrub to be cleared, thus opening up views into the cottage and field from the footpath and allowing easy access from the Junior School. Given our intention is to involve community groups, this would obviously include the village schools.

## **Our proposal**

### **Location**

The meadow is on a North facing slope but there are two relatively flat areas of ground in the field: one at the top of the hill bordering the grounds of Hill House and the other at the bottom adjacent to Deanway.

We have been advised by other community orchards we have consulted to avoid planting trees on steep slopes as the anchoring and support capabilities of their roots would be compromised and they may lean over in the downhill direction or even slip downhill. There is also a common belief that there might be a roman road in this area too - all good reasons for avoiding planting in the middle area of the meadow.

Having walked the plot, and taking into account the access, water supply and topography of the site, as well as the desire to preserve the view of the Cottage, we conclude that, to meet the needs of the community, the only viable and most suitable site for the orchard is adjacent to Deanway for the following reasons:

### **Access**

As the orchard should be accessible to all, the steep slope to the top of the hill would prove a barrier for those with mobility issues and parents pushing prams and pushchairs. An accessible entrance that would comply with BS5709:2018 would be hard to achieve given the gradient.

While the Museum car park is sited half way up the hill, it would still be challenging for many to access an orchard located at the top of the hill. In addition, it would not fit with the ethos of the orchard project, as we would want to discourage the use of cars as much as possible.



### **Water Supply**

Many newly planted community orchards fail because of a lack of watering but there is an independent metered water supply close to the entrance to the drive. To reroute this to the top of the hill would be difficult and expensive.

Additionally, the soil at the top of the field will be more prone to drying out quickly should we have more summers like 2022.

### **Topography**

The top of the hill is exposed; fruit trees need more sheltered locations to thrive and produce an abundance of fruit. We know that the trees planted there 30 years ago failed and the vegetation suggests that it is less fertile than at the bottom of the hill.

Soil tests indicated that the soil at the base of the hill is fairly neutral, has a good soil structure/texture and is better suited to support a good range of fruit.

As stated above, the steep slopes in the middle of the meadow are the least suitable for trees.

### **Surroundings**

One of our ambitions in creating an orchard is to provide an attractive, valuable and valued asset for the village. Siting the orchard next to the Cottage where it can be seen from the road would enhance both the Cottage and the route into to the Village along Deanway. Many respondents to the survey said that they would like to see better use made of the "unused" land adjacent to Milton's Cottage.

Additionally, many villagers have commented on the loss of the trees that they remember forming the boundary with Deanway as well as the current appearance of the meadow, particularly given its location within the conservation area.

Comments included on some of the surveys completed at the Village Show read:

"What an amazing idea for the village! Milton's Cottage Meadow is in such need of a purpose and it is so central and visible" DM

"Milton's Field is very central, attractive and accessible from Deanway" CL

"What's not to love – a great idea" MG



## Layout of the Orchard

A plan of our proposal is attached (see Appendix 2). Once the location is agreed we will produce a species list but, in the meantime, we propose to grow a variety of top fruits. The majority of apple trees would be semi-vigorous M116 or half standards MM106, as these will be easier to manage than vigorous rootstocks but also have a good level of resilience to stresses.

We appreciate that preserving the view of the Cottage as painted by Thomas Jones in 1772 is important to the Trustees, so our proposed wedge-shaped design would take this into account. The thin end would be sited approximately 10 meters from the fence along the driveway and 3 meters in from the North boundary fence. The broad end of the wedge would enable visitors to enjoy the viewpoint from an attractive seating area accessed by a mown pathway.

This Autumn, we propose planting between 5 and 10 trees spaced 4 meters apart running parallel with Deanway, but well-spaced from the pavement along Deanway. Once an accessible gate has been installed and any necessary groundworks carried out, the remaining 20/25 trees would be planted. This may be delayed until in the Autumn of 2023.

We also propose planting a species rich native hedgerow along the border with Deanway this Autumn. This would not only improve the visual aspect and eventually remove the need for the wooden fence, but also add protection to the young fruit trees from extreme weather such as winter frosts. Gaps in the hedge would avoid creating a frost pocket and a hedge would provide food and habitat for beneficial insects and other wildlife. There are two tree stumps just inside the Deanway boundary - these could be left as a habitat for insects.

Over 97% of wildflower meadows have been destroyed since the 1930s, disappearing under the plough or being converted to silage fields. We would like to reverse this trend on the site by managing the area better and planting wildflower seeds. A wildflower meadow would have been a familiar sight for Milton.

Seating would be added in strategic places. Boards similar to those shown below would provide information about the orchard, wildlife, flora and fauna.

This location has the potential to become a multi-use space once the orchard becomes established, i.e, a story-telling arena, wildlife surveying, green woodworking, pruning classes, hedge-laying, bee-keeping etc.



## **Volunteers**

In addition to the 11 members of the COP Steering Group, we have the names of a further 42, across a range of ages, who have stated that they would want to be involved in planting and maintaining the orchard.

Two volunteers own excavators and heavy mowing equipment and have offered to help with the groundworks, preparation of the planting holes and grass cutting.

One member of the Steering Group is a qualified arboriculturist and has recently undertaken the Level 3 Certificate in Community Orchards (CICO) This is a six month course, regulated by the Crossfield Institute. Two further members of the Steering Group have enrolled on the same course starting in September. One place is fully funded by the RHS, the other is being self-funded.

BBOWT's Chalk, Cherries and Chairs Project will assist with further training for the volunteers.

## **Budget and Funding**

We anticipate that the amount we need to create an orchard and maintain it for the next 5 years is £11,000. Details can be found in Appendix 3.

We have never seen fundraising as being an issue. We have received a great many offers of donations from villagers who have heard about the Community Orchard Project. Additionally, we plan to approach the Community Board, HS2, and charities who promote tree/orchard cultivation. However, we are unable to do so until a site has been found and a Lease or Partnership has been agreed with the landowners.

The Gardens Association has put aside funds raised at their last two plant sales. This will be transferred to a new COP bank account once the CIO has been established. There is sufficient funding to plant at least the first 10 trees.

Additionally, once a site is agreed and either a Lease or a Partnership Agreement signed, BBOWT will be able to proceed with the release funding of around £5,000 promised for trees, training, equipment and advice and guidance.

Further funding will be sought from the local community and/or the following organisations, as all have grants available for a project such as this:

[The Community Board](#)

[HS2 Community and Environment Fund](#)

[The Tree Council](#)



[International Tree Foundation](#)

[National Garden Scheme](#)

Chalfont St Giles Gardens Association

Chalfont St Giles Village Show

The Parish Council

## **New Resources**

### **Accessible Gate**

If the ideal location, as proposed above, is agreed, a new accessible gateway into the meadow would need to be created from the drive. This will be one of the most costly items of the project. If sited just inside the drive, it would be possible to leave the existing gate to the drive in place and would provide easy entry for visitors to Milton's Cottage Museum to walk to the viewpoint within the meadow used by the artist to paint the cottage.

For the preferred location of the accessible gate, please see the plan. The gate pictured is for illustration purposes only but is similar to those installed by the Chiltern Society and complies with BS5709:2018 specification and provides access for large mobility vehicles with or without a RADAR key.

The gate at the top of the drive would be inaccessible to many, so would remain locked but would be required to allow mowing and hedge-cutting equipment to gain access.







### **Lockable shed**

There is currently a small shed sited in a corner above the carpark. This is in a poor state of repair. If it were felt desirable to keep tools on the site i.e., wheelbarrows and long handled pruners, etc., we would propose replacing this shed with one that could be securely locked.



### **Seating**

The orchard is intended as a place of quiet reflection, so it is important that seating is provided. The most obvious site for one of the seats is the viewpoint where Thomas Jones erected his easel. These would be added as and when funding was available. The most suitable material and design of seating to be agreed.





## Information Boards

The intention is for the orchard to be a learning resource. Information about the orchard, trees and wildlife would be integral to that purpose. Additionally, the trees would be labelled with information about the variety, its use and best time to harvest.



In conclusion, we hope you will receive our proposal favourably and agree to a Lease or Partnership Agreement. We are more than happy to meet with the Trustees to present our proposal and/or have a site meeting to answer any queries and explain the plan, if felt desirable.

## Additional Supporting Documents

Appendix 1 – Ecological Survey

Appendix 2 - Proposed Plan

Appendix 3 – Resource Plan and Budget

Briony Wickenden 24<sup>th</sup> September 2022