

# PROJECT: BERRY HILL COMMUNITY ORCHARD

**OUR  
PLAN**

BERRY HILL

EDGE END

CHRISTCHURCH



# THE VISION:

The potential for a Berry Hill Community Orchard (BHCO) was first recorded during WDPCs Public Consultations for the Berry Hill, Christchurch and Edge End NDP held at Lakers School in 2013 and 2014. BHCO is located in the Nine Wells area at the edge of Common settlement and at the bottom of Lakers Road. The 1.7 hectares of Forest Waste is licensed by WDPC from the FC for a (rolling) period of one year. It is also to be designated a Local Green Space for community use in the NDP. The Berry Hill Community Orchard Group (BHCOG) was established in 2015 to manage the orchard in partnership with WDPC, following the guiding principles of a sustainable community. The long-term vision is to create a Community Heritage Orchard in the area, as a sustainable community project, demonstrating the fruits of cooperation, community action and goodwill. In particular, it will deliver the following:

- Management of a Community Heritage Orchard, using organic principles, which will be a repository for rare and locally successful fruit tree varieties.
- Creation of a community space for education and enjoyment, and accessible to all.
- Provision in the long-term of a source of healthy, organic, fresh food.
- A legacy for the future.
- Creation of a 'green corridor' as a haven for wildlife, to increase biodiversity in the local area.
- Creation of opportunities to reintroduce native species.
- Promotion of outdoor learning, work and play opportunities for all age groups and abilities.
- Working with volunteers to manage the site and events, providing socially inclusive benefits for all.

**Access to the site is by foot with vehicular access permitted only by WDPC or the FC. Some contractors i.e. with work machinery, may need to have access, but the general public will not have any vehicular use of the area. Neighbours of the site include residential properties and local schools (see Appendix 14).**

## **The orchard:**

The first trees of BHCO were planted in 2015/2016. The orchard will have the capacity to be planted with a large number of various fruiting trees and shrubs, as well as wildflowers and species deemed pertinent by the BHCOG. In the long term, BHCOG should aim to create a mother tree nursery of locally sourced varieties to use as graft material providing a supply of historic varieties for other orchards in the Forest of Dean and Gloucestershire. Throughout the orchard snowdrops, native bluebells, daffodils and wildflower seeds will be planted to provide a wildflower meadow for the enhancement of biodiversity.

Following pre-development work by students of the University of Worcester, has been established that the soil is suitable for growing fruit trees, soft fruit and other species. Current established oak and birch trees are to remain in place. Non-native species within the area will be suppressed, as these are less likely to attract native wildlife. Ground cover suggested by advisors will include a variety of grasses and wildflowers, including docks, nettles, celandine, clovers, daisies, dandelions, thistles, creeping buttercups, and some garden escapees such as daffodils and cultivated bluebells.



## Community:

The site lies within the Parish WDPC in the village of Berry Hill and the hamlet of Nine Wells. A path or number of paths will run through the orchard site providing pedestrian access from Lakers Road and also Nine Wells Road. The orchard will also have a number of seating areas, and near the shaft of the old pit, have a memorial and tribute dedicated to the miners and Freeminers of the area. The site is overlooked by housing to the east, and these residents have all been supportive of the project and their views were and will continue to be taken into account during the early and future stages of project development: this will result in good relationships with all neighbours. The local and wider community can use the site for recreation or access and will continue to be able to enjoy the site at all reasonable times and without undue interference. As a result of the "ground up" approach taken to the development of the project, it is hoped there is a sense of ownership and shared responsibility amongst members of the local community.

Children, young people and school groups will be encouraged to access the orchard site for learning, relaxation and play. Local community groups may use the site for public events and workshops. It is hoped that members of the community volunteer and share in the work undertaken in the orchard. The increasing public interest in local food production and sustainable communities is reflected in the regeneration of orchards. BHCOG aims to promote good health and well-being to members of the whole community through organised activities, such as a gardening group at the BHCOGC volunteer working days, and other public events in the orchard, including apple days and wassailing.

## Management:

The BHCO site is owned by the FC, and licensed to WDPC. In 2015, collaboration between WDPC and the FC who also provide professional orchard advice, resulted in the formation of the BHCOG to establish an orchard to be managed according to sustainable principles. BHCOG has an approved constitution and is managed by a Committee of volunteer members, including Chair, Treasurer, Secretary, and including a representative of WDPC. BHCOG has a volunteer membership from within the local and wider communities, which can be called upon for Working Days and to help at public events taking place within the site. WDPC is responsible for management and the Miners Memorial. BHCOG is responsible for management and maintenance of:

- The orchard sites, including fruit trees, cordons, espaliers, and any tree nursery established in future years.
- Ground cover.
- Hedges within the orchard, including fruiting hedges.
- Any Wildlife area.

More specific activities, to be undertaken on regular Working Days, follow an agreed Work Plan. Annual General Meetings are held in February, when members of the Committee stand for election by the wider membership. A list of current elected members is available. Audited accounts will be presented to the membership for approval.

## Aims and objectives:

The main aim of the BHCO is to manage the Community Heritage Orchard in Berry Hill.

This will be achieved by:

- Volunteers monitoring and maintaining the fruit trees.
- Utilising the BHCO tree nursery to preserve rare and local varieties.
- Creating a green corridor haven for wildlife, to increase biodiversity in the local area.

- Managing selected habitats to maximise biodiversity to include:
  - Enhancing species-richness grassland by suppressing coarse grasses and introducing wild flowers of local provenance.
  - Cutting hedges only very infrequently and implementing rotational hedge laying around the site where required or sought to minimise disturbance.
  - Maintaining native species of trees.

## Access Aims:

The BHCOG aim to make the orchard safe and accessible to all will be achieved by:

- Maintaining open access through the main part of the orchard.
- Maintaining surfaced paths on key routes within the orchard.
- Actively managing potential conflict between users, e.g. dog-walkers and children.

The BHCOG will also aim to promote the orchard as a space for community events by:

- Encouraging the use of the orchard for community events.
- Maintaining a policy for use of the orchard for community events.
- Maintaining an open space specifically designed for larger gatherings.
- Running an annual apple day, wassailing and other public events.

## Educational aims:

The BHCOG will aim to promote the orchard as an educational resource by:

- Developing safe access within the orchard and the Community Allotment for a wide range of people of all age groups to learn, as individuals or in organised groups, about wildlife, food growing and traditional orchards.
- Promoting use of the orchard by local groups and educational establishments.
- Promoting learning and skills acquisition of BHCOG members to strengthen BHCOG capacity.

### Management aims:

Membership of BHCOG is open to all and the Group will be governed in accordance with the BHCOG Constitution. The objective of maintaining the effective cooperative relationship between BHCOG and WDPC will be achieved by:

- Ensuring ex officio WDPC representation in BHCOG.
- Maintaining existing good channels of communication between officers of BHCOG and officers of WDPC.
- Ensuring appropriate and up-to-date policies are in place in support of the aims and strategies of BHCOG.
- Undertaking a regular review of policies and ensuring they comply with legislation, where appropriate.
- BHCOG will aim to ensure that their activities are adequately and appropriately funded by:
- Setting a budget to cover BHCOG's annual running costs and reviewing at the start of each financial year (January).
- Setting a contingency budget for longer term aims and aspirations of BHCOG and reviewing annually.
- Identifying projects for which additional funding needs to be sourced at the start of each financial year.

### Background:

The following timeline gives a history of the milestones for the orchard to date:

- **February 2015** – First meeting of interested people to discuss the potential orchard.
- **March 2015** – Berry Hill Community Orchard Committee was formed.
- **March 2015** – Licence signed between WDPC, the FC and BHCOG.
- **May 15th 2015** – The first community event of 'Balsam Bashing' took place.
- **July 21st 2015** – BHCO were asked to attend Forest Forum to display ideas for community orchard.

■ **October 2015** – Fencing and pathways constructed.

■ **Sat 5th December 2015** – Community Work Party planted productive fruit trees, *\*honoured by the first one being planted by Senior Verderer Bob Jenkins.*

■ **Sunday 21st February 2016** – Community Work Party planted heritage fruit trees.

■ **Sunday 28th February 2016** – Community Work Party planted soft fruit bushes.

■ **Sunday 20th March 2016** – Community Work Party planted ground plants and installed benches. Scouts began planting and clearing their area.

■ **Sunday 20th March 2016** – Berry Hill Community Orchard AGM.

■ **Sunday 17th April 2016** – Community Work Party tidied, weeded and installed a design board and plaques.

■ **Saturday 30th April 2016** – Berry Hill Community Orchard Grand Opening and Celebration Day, that included a variety of art, music, sport and cultural exhibits and fun events at Berry Hill Primary School, Under 5's, Lakers School, The Hut, Berry Hill Band Hut, Christchurch Church, Hot Pot Pottery and Berry Hill Rugby Club.

■ **Sunday 22nd May 2016** – Community Work Party removed growing bracken.

■ **Sunday 12th June 2016** – Community Work Party removed growing bracken.

