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STAFFORDSHIRE MOORLANDS DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET DELEGATED DECISIONS

**COUNCILLOR J PORTER
PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR CLIMATE CHANGE & BIODIVERSITY**

Friday, 28 May 2021

1 2021/01 - COMMUNITY ORCHARDS

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STAFFORDSHIRE MOORLANDS DISTRICT COUNCIL

Cabinet Delegated Decisions

20 May 2021

TITLE:	Community Orchards Scheme
PORTFOLIO HOLDER:	Councillor Joe Porter - Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Biodiversity
CONTACT OFFICER:	Mark Forrester - Head of Democratic & Community Services
WARDS INVOLVED:	All

1. Reason for the Report

- 1.1 To seek approval for the establishment of a Community Orchards Scheme in Staffordshire Moorlands.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 To approve the Community Orchards Scheme as set out in the report at 7.11–7.14 below.

3. Executive Summary

- 3.1 The value for communities of green spaces – parks, orchards, allotments, gardens etc – has become well recognised and access to these spaces the subject of public policy. The health and social benefits have been promoted as well as the benefits for the natural environment and tackling climate change.
- 3.2 As part of the Council’s response to Climate Change and the associated ecological crisis, and recognising the potential of community orchards to engage local communities in these issues, as well as the wider health and social benefits, the Council is proposing to promote the establishment of community orchards across Staffordshire Moorlands. These orchards will be in both urban and rural locations.
- 3.3 In order to raise public awareness and interest in advance of consultation the Council, during the late 2020/21 planting season, took the opportunity to pilot a number of orchards. The aim was to test out elements of the proposed scheme (within the limits imposed by Covid-19). Seven orchards have been

planted.

- 3.4 It is now propose to extend the scheme by a further 23 locations with planting in Nov/Dec 2021. For 2021/22 a budget of £10,000 has been earmarked for the project from within the existing Community Planning budget. Further details of the proposed criteria for funding and selecting orchard projects are outlined in the report below.

4. **How this report links to Corporate Priorities**

- 4.1 The scheme is part of a series of measures to tackle Climate Change.

5. **Alternative Options**

- 5.1 To approve the scheme as set out in this report (recommended)
- 5.2 To not proceed with a scheme
- 5.3 To develop an alternative scheme – for example, to promote orchards but not provide direct funding.

6. **Implications**

6.1 Community Safety - (Crime and Disorder Act 1998)

No specific implications but measures which improve social cohesion may help in addressing community safety issues.

6.2 Workforce

The scheme will be supported by Council staff from a number of service areas.

6.3 Equality and Diversity/Equality Impact Assessment

An assessment has been undertaken: as a community based scheme, one in which many different people can share a common goal and benefit, there is a potential to promote good relations between different groups of people in the community. The key to gaining this value is in the engagement with local communities and consideration of access and equality issues when choosing the sites, who will be involved (deliberately targeting different groups) and how the community is engaged in ongoing maintenance and use (such as community events).

6.4 Financial Considerations

A budget of £10,000 has been allocated for the project from within

the existing Community Planning budget.

6.5 Legal

No specific implications.

6.6 Climate Change

Tree planting is a recognised way of removing CO2 from the atmosphere and new orchards can assist nature's resilience to climate change by providing habitats and food for pollinating insects which are threatened by climate change and other factors.

6.7 Consultation

The scheme will be subject to public consultation during summer 2021 when public views and ideas will be encouraged. Engagement with local communities via Parish Councils and local community groups is an essential part of the project.

6.8 Risk Assessment

There are number of operational risks associated with individual orchards which relate to: (1) Ensuring that the local community is engaged, including different groups within a community (2) Ensuring the right location is chosen (3) The right species of trees etc are selected (4) There is sufficient community support to provide the ongoing maintenance and best use of the orchard. These can be addressed by following good practice established nationally.

There is risk associated with not having a dedicated officer identified to support the operational elements of the scheme – it is dependent on releasing time of officers from other duties. But this is thought to be manageable for the current scale of the project and as planting is naturally restricted to the winter period there is predictability for resource planning.

There is reputational risk associated with the possibility that demand for community orchards exceeds current capacity. Action is being taken to identify possible sources of external funding to extend the scheme.

MARK TRILLO

Executive Director (People) and Monitoring Officer

7. **Detail**

- 7.1 The value for communities of green spaces – parks, orchards, allotments, gardens etc – has become well recognised and access to these spaces the subject of public policy. The health and social benefits have been promoted as well as the benefits for the natural environment.
- 7.2 In the Staffordshire Moorlands we are perfectly positioned to champion nature-based solutions to climate change and establish a Nature Recovery Network. The district benefits from 222 square miles of beautiful green spaces that, more than ever, our communities have appreciated during the difficult period of Covid-19. Since the Council declared a Climate Emergency in July 2019, encouraging people to connect with nature has been put at the heart of our mission to fight climate change.
- 7.3 In 2011 the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) promoted the benefits of community orchards and produced guidance on how to create them. Many councils working with local communities have set about creating new orchards which are accessible to the public – ‘community orchards’.
- 7.4 The 2011 DCLG guidance states that: *An orchard is a collection of fruit and, sometimes, nut trees often planted among grass full of wild flowers. Just as traditional orchards were often the centre of village life and a cornerstone of the rural economy, community orchards are excellent places for people to come together to plant and cultivate local and unusual varieties of fruit trees and to use as the focal point for community activities such as Apple Day, open air plays, picnics, story-telling events or festivals or as a green haven in which to relax and wind-down.*
- 7.5 One of the projects identified as part of the development of the Council’s Green Infrastructure Delivery Plan is our community orchards scheme with an ambition to plant 30 orchards across the Moorlands in partnership with parish councils and community groups. Up to 90% of our traditional orchards in the UK have been lost since the 1950s, decimating this vital habitat for bats, badgers, owls and woodpeckers, and impacting an important source of domestically-produced fruit with 84% of our fruit now imported. Orchards are also a vital part of our heritage, as a part of the quintessential image of the British countryside. Our community orchards will help to reduce carbon emissions, provide valuable habitats for wildlife, and improve the health and wellbeing of local people.
- 7.5 One distinguishing feature of community orchards is the high level of community involvement in their development, maintenance and beneficial use.
- 7.6 As part of the Council’s response to Climate Change and the associated ecological crisis and recognising the potential of community orchards to engage local communities in these issues, as well as the wider health and social benefits, the Council is proposing to promote the establishment of community orchards across Staffordshire Moorlands. These orchards will be in both urban and rural locations.
- 7.7 The Council will undertake a process of public engagement on the Community

Orchard scheme as part of its proposed consultation on the Council's Climate Change Plan in 2021.

7.8 At this stage, and similar to other community orchards, the proposed aim is to:

- plant and cultivate local and unusual varieties of fruit
- be open and free for the public to enjoy
- encourage community involvement and act as a focal point for community activities and events.
- encourage opportunities for learning new skills, for example, pruning and grafting
- encourage wildlife to inhabit the area and establish beekeeping
- act as an open air classroom and educational resource for local schools
- promote the health benefits of eating and trying new fruits
- encourage people to plant fruit trees in their own gardens
- benefit from locally sourced fruit and reduce 'food miles'

7.9 In order to raise public awareness and interest in advance of consultation the Council, during the late 2020/21 planting season, took the opportunity to pilot a number of orchards. The aim was to test out elements of the proposed scheme (within the limits imposed by Covid-19):

- Develop cross service working on the project
- AES involvement to gain experience of planting
- Engagement of Parish Councils to gauge their interest
- Use of volunteers
- Gain and assess public interest for scheme going forward

7.10 To date as part of the pilot:

- we have developed 7 orchards:
- 5 on Council land in Leek – (1) Brough Park, (2) Land next to Haregate Community Centre, (3) land at top of Wettenhall Drive, (4) land behind Price of Wales Public House, Wallbridge, Leek, (5) bottom of Woodcroft, adjacent to allotments. All sites were planted by AES staff.
- 1 in Kingsley – involving the parish council developed on their land.
- 1 in Endon – along the canal using local volunteers; involving liaison with the Canal and River Trust with a view to the possibility of extending on locations along the canal.
- Staff involved from AES and the Council's Service Commissioning, Development Control and Democratic and Community Services.

7.11 It is now propose to extend the scheme by a further 23 locations with planting in Nov/Dec 2021 to:

- 5 locations in Biddulph and 5 in Cheadle. Initial conversations have taken place with local councillors to identify potential locations

- 18 in parishes. We have started to promote the scheme and received interest from parish councils and local groups.
- Where the land is not owned by SMDC it is proposed to seek a 50/50 funding split.

If additional external funding can be secured it is proposed to extend the scheme further to many more locations with an eventual target of 100 orchards.

7.12 Next steps:

- Publicise the Council's proposal.
- Undertake community engagement on the scheme's aims and criteria.
- Invite expressions of interest from Parish Councils and community groups (community groups must have Parish Council support).

7.13 Criteria

- The Parish Council and/or community group to propose locations
- The Council can provide professional advice - suitability of location, number and type of species (currently we propose no one site would have more than 40 trees and all should be able to have at least 15 trees. They will be a mix of fruit trees such as apple, pear and plum as well as some hazel and crab apple and other suitable species where considered appropriate to the site e.g. Walnut, Mulberry, Cherry, although that should remain secondary and complementary to, and not detract from, the main aim of establishing traditional orchard fruit trees and otherwise erring towards native species).
- Local volunteers required to do the planting
- Parish/applicant to commit to upkeep of the orchard and its use by the community.

7.14 For 2021/22 a budget of £10,000 has been earmarked for the scheme from within the existing Community Planning budget.

- The Council will meet the costs of purchasing trees for orchards on our land and 50% of the cost on other land.
- The Council will procure the trees/plants from local sources where possible.