



The St James Village Orchard Project

The following sections were drafted to be able to answer, within the tight constraints of the maximum space available on the forms, key questions from our major grant application to Local Food. The overall orchard project is obviously a long-run one, exceeding the duration of a typical funding grant. We therefore separated out a two-year preparation and planting project to cover the initial construction of the orchard and satisfy grant management requirements.

BRIEF PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The St James Village Orchard Project is a new initiative to develop an inherently sustainable community orchard on a one-acre field - the Gresham Green Inclosure. Originally enclosed in 1854, the Inclosure is now overseen by a local board of Trustees who have agreed to rent the Inclosure on a long-term basis to the Committee. The Project will recover and improve the land and plant an orchard of 80 trees for the benefit of St James and surrounding communities as a source of local fruit and as a much-needed additional village amenity. Under-planting the trees with a wild flower meadow, installing bird and bat boxes and bee hives will encourage wildlife bio-diversity.

The orchard, its under-planting and hedges, will be managed on organic principles. The tree selection will provide a mix of fruit types suited to the locality particularly including local and lesser known varieties. The project will partner with local expertise in tree selection and management and use local suppliers and tradespeople. Public information signs and tagging to identify the trees, plants, wildlife and birds will be provided. We will encourage its use for educational visits by schools and other local groups.

The project will actively involve the Committee, many other local residents, local businesses, trades-people and expert advisers. It will encourage long-term community participation and interest through related events, training and product development. The Local Food grant will fund orchard planting and establishment, including costs of trees and related items, planting, signage and publicity, benches, orchard and meadow care and management, and site rent. Future funding once the orchard is established will come from fund-raising events in the orchard, sponsorship, from the sale of surplus fruit, and appropriate grants. The Trustees strongly support the project as did the Parish Meeting Committee and a public village meeting; it has strong support from other local and national bodies.

PROJECT AIMS

As a long-run programme, the Orchard Project will generate a wide variety of valuable outcomes, many of them beyond the specific Local Food project. These are expanded in an attachment to this form. The Local Food-funded project will have three specific outcomes:

- Approx. 80 mixed fruit trees (varieties listed in an attachment) planted and established during the first year of the project
- A regular communication programme of information and education leaflets (circulation 500), meetings and a regularly updated orchard web-site (with hit-counter) in operation by the end of the first year, covering orchard activities, sources and uses of fruit, connections to other local food sources and to other programmes of related interest
- Ten additional sponsors or volunteers providing support, physical or financial, to the upkeep of the orchard and its related programmes in each project year

PROJECT BENEFICIARIES

The Orchard project will provide the foundation for the continuing benefit of all residents in the village of St James South Elmham - approximately 85 households/250 people plus those from the 12 other villages in the "Saints" cluster and other nearby villages - about 4000. This will be through the ready accessibility of locally-grown fruit and orchard products, the availability of the orchard and its facilities for events and village or privately organised activities. Those who are infirm or with low incomes in this deeply rural area will particularly benefit, plus local school children, and all those looking for a pleasant outdoor environment for an event or gathering.

Organisational beneficiaries will include schools and societies with an interest in orchards and wildlife, and local food initiatives. The orchard will provide a good educational environment and volunteer opportunities and volunteer training opportunities for those interested in developing their interest, knowledge and practical skills in fruit identification and propagation, and orchard, meadow and wildlife management. By connection with other sites within and around the village, it will enhance the interest and attractiveness of the village as a whole to the local community and to visitors and researchers in other local food activities and in ancient sites and the natural history of this part of east Anglia.

PEOPLE EXPECTED TO BENEFIT

The Local Food project is one of the core launch activities in the Orchard Project which as a whole will sustainably benefit an increasing number of people from an expanding community. The Local Food project can expect to benefit directly some 250 people, a number which will progressively rise to 1000 and beyond as the orchard matures, fruit and fruit product output

increases, via the recipients of orchard literature and those who access the web site.

ORGANISATIONS TO BENEFIT

As with individual beneficiaries, the number of organisations benefitting will increase well beyond the Local Food project duration. In its duration some 40 organisations whether local, such as Bungay Primary School, garden clubs, and volunteer groups, or wider or national such as Suffolk Wildlife Trust, Making Local Food Work and The National Trust could gain from its support and other groups who will be addressed via these partnerships already established. Local small contractors and suppliers will benefit (indeed already are doing so) from the preparatory work prior to the Local Food project. Within the village, the committee and "Friends of the Orchard" will have particular involvement collectively and as individuals.

ESTABLISHING THE NEED

The need and opportunity were established by:

- Observation of the lack of village amenities, the opportunity to involve a wider section of the local community in village activities and provide a more interesting environment
- The widely researched and reported need for increased global and national and the particular value of local food production both for quality and to reduce food-miles and food production carbon footprint
- Research into national and regional initiatives for orchard establishment and support and the need for the protection of existing orchards
- Increasing prices of quality fresh produce and scarcity of local varieties
- Need to preserve the continuity of rarer, Suffolk-specific varieties
- The Greshaw Green Inclosure was at risk of becoming derelict and overgrown and, therefore, being lost
- The few remaining orchards in the local area had been grubbed out some years ago
- The proposal was discussed in detail with Trustees, gaining their full support and discussed at public village committee meeting with an enthusiastic reception
- It was subsequently tested with a number of relevant local and national organisations (e.g. The National Trust, Common Ground) and very well supported.
- Fully supported by District and County Councils and councillors.
- Finally, the proposal has been enthusiastically supported when tested with a wide cross-section of other residents of St James and nearby villages

MAKING LOCALLY GROWN FOOD ACCESSIBLE

Clearly, the produce from the orchard, extending to fruit products as the output from the orchard increases over time, will be local and immediately accessible. It will be made available free and/or at low cost according to the long-run strength of the programme's finances. Produce from the orchard is directly intended for distribution within the village (and for villagers to pick their own). This will benefit low-income households, the infirm or elderly or those without space for their own fruit trees.

The nearest substantial shops are some 7 miles away and transport links for those without their own cars or who are unable to drive themselves are very limited. Specific measures will be taken to ensure that these households receive priority distribution. Those who might most benefit in this way are known to and supported within the community by committee members and other residents.

As the yield increases in the period beyond the specific Local Food project so the availability of local fruit of verifiable provenance can be extended more and more widely in the surrounding area. This will be done in connection with other well-known local parish meetings and committees and local volunteer organisations, such as the Halesworth Volunteer Centre, either directly or as a route for communication. To enhance its amenity value, the orchard will be laid out with an open space and with seating to improve its attractiveness, provide rest for those in need and improve the village quality of life (there is no village green). In the longer term, a wider distribution may be achieved via a c.i.c. shop in nearby Metfield village and local charities e.g. Lions.

OTHER ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED

We are in contact with The National Trust and have a nominated contact - their Orchard Project Officer - who has provided substantial information and support already and a list of further contacts. We will be accepting their offer of assistance, especially with our community communications programme. We have been in contact with the Adnams Charity - the charity of Adnams Brewery - who have accepted our grant application and funded the purchase of special wild meadow seed to under-plant the orchard.

Suffolk Wildlife Trust are enthused by our project, have offered full support and guidance and have visited St James to discuss the project and sources of help with us. We will be working closely with a local Nurseryman who specialises in fruit trees and will be our preferred supplier. He is providing substantial advice and guidance on tree selection and will also provide on-going support and training in tree care and orchard management. We also have the strong support of our local district and county councillor and of the two councils themselves (Waveney DC and Suffolk CC), who are providing financial support for costs beyond the specific Local Food project and are publicly associating themselves with the project.

PROMOTING THE PROJECT

We intend a programme of publicity with a leaflet to all village households and other interested parties produced and distributed once we are assured of continuity of essential funding. It will set out the aim of the project, the nature of the orchard, how it will develop, the history of the site, progress to date, and contacts and supporters (within the village and more widely). It will include invitations to help in construction, planting, sponsorship, tree adoption etc. and supportive comments and logos/pictures from sponsoring companies and other organisations and relevant experts. Subsequent leaflets with similar material will have a broader distribution and will include information about fruit and other orchard products and their benefits.

Regular information updates will be produced. Meetings will be held to inform interested parties in the village hall and the orchard in future years as it matures. Updates will be given at Parish Meetings and to the Inclosure Trustees. We will inform the local press at significant times such as the initial planting day and use the several existing local newsletters and magazines. We have already acquired a domain name - stjamesvillageorchard.org.uk - and a website will be constructed and maintained to inform people about the orchard's development, activity programmes and opportunities to support the orchard directly or indirectly and provide links to other relevant and informative sites and organisations.

The orchard itself will have quality, informative, permanent signs to inform and educate visitors and encourage their continued contact and involvement. We will connect with other local food initiatives such as Metfield Apple Day.

MONITORING AND EVALUATING PROGRESS

We have already begun a photographic record of the orchard site starting from its unused state and a diary of events and progress. The Committee holds regular meetings as we develop the detail of the orchard programme and its design and implementation plan and funding arrangements. We will monitor the viability of the trees, failure/re-plant rates and reasons. We will also monitor the success of the under-planting and the richness of the wildlife attracted and the success of related uses such as bee-keeping within the orchard.

As the orchard matures we will monitor usage, sponsorship and donation levels, volunteer levels and fruit production by variety on a year-by-year basis and also the development and success of orchard-related product. We will particularly maintain scrutiny on its beneficial impact on the community, especially the elderly. Specifically, we will maintain a tree count, monitor leaflet distribution and feedback and track and recognise those who join in the development and success of the project, including those who participate in the various activities and learning opportunities and celebrate assistance with the orchard's success and contribution to the

community. We will also use the web-site to monitor levels of contact and interest.

SUSTAINABILITY

The orchard, by its very nature, is naturally sustainable with an average apple tree life of up to 100 years, and this has underpinned the choice and direction of the Orchard Project. Proper environmental stewardship is at the heart of this initiative and recorded in the Environmental Policy, and will be incorporated in the orchard maintenance plan. Expert advice has been built into the plan and the project budget and excellent partnerships with key organisations are already being constructed (see above and attachments).

The Greshaw Green Trustees, who are very supportive, will maintain a continuing, long-term interest in the success of the orchard within the community and are directly connected with it in receiving annual rents over a renewable 10-year period. The orchard committee will ensure new members are recruited to assure continuity and will progressively connect the orchard and its availability and use into the fabric of village life. Reports on activities and progress will be given to the Parish Meetings. Feedback from individuals, supporters, visitors and partner organisations will be actively encouraged and followed up.

The committee will continue to seek financial assistance from local authorities and other organisations, from specific fund-raising events, by hiring out access for family or other events making use of the orchard open space, from corporate and private sponsorship and donations. Where appropriate we will engage with other grant bodies with mutually consistent aims and interests.

As the orchard approaches maturity, we expect the opportunity to raise funds to support the long-run project from the sale of surplus fruit directly or via local shops in Metfield, Harleston and Halesworth and from the sale of other orchard produce. We will consider maximising the visibility and value of the St James Village Orchard brand through the creation and sale of orchard products and accessories (baskets, boxes, calendars etc). We will also consider connecting with and participating in the annual Aldeburgh Food Festival - a major regional event.