

Working Party progress report on changing the overflow car park into a community orchard.

Introduction

Since the report to the council at the June Council meeting the working party have been diligently working towards a better understanding of what we need to do to turn the vision into a reality. We have used local knowledge and gained support from residents with skills that we needed. This report provides a summary of what is known and what is needed to move forward.

We identified five fundamental areas of work that needed to be addressed.

1) Groundwork

We had been advised by tree specialist that the hardstanding needs to be lifted to create a healthy environment for an orchard. In particular the middle area where the two-year-old fruit trees would be planted. The removed hardstanding would then be used to build a firmer surface for the creation of fifteen car spaces to the left of the main gate. Bunds of soil that already exist on the three sides of the site would also be used to improve the surface and increase the depth of the middle area. We also asked for the creation of a firm surfaced path for wheelchair access from a proposed pedestrian gate site to the central seating area.

Three groundwork specialists were invited to visit the site, given an identical set of photographs with measured and scaled maps and asked to provide a quote for the work as described. The quote from the preferred provider will form the basis for our budget and influence our decisions on grant applications. Each groundwork specialist was told that we would be given a clear specification document that would establish the details of what was needed before work could begin.

2) Water supply

The land has a small stream that runs down two sides of the site but it cannot provide a reliable water supply for supporting the 2-year-old fruit trees that will surround the central seating area. We explored a variety of options including harvesting water from the roof of the Memorial Hall. We were helped by Jeff Monks a member of the Memorial Hall Committee who prepared a comprehensive and costed report on the options we had available. The full report is available for the Council. We believe his recommendation of having a separate metered water supply from

Memorial Hall to be used to load water into water tanks on the site. We agreed that it is the most cost efficient and practical solution.

3) Survey

We were strongly advised by organisations offering grants that we need to find out if the parish of Rodney Stoke and Draycott would support the creation of a community orchard with a central seating area. In response we created a simple survey that could be completed either online or in paper form and we would gather responses from a variety of collection points. We gave the community a clear month and finished the survey on September 8th. We now have a total of 105 responses that say yes to the creation of the orchard and a much smaller number of 5 that said no. The comments made by the respondents on the surveys are a valuable resource for the working party. A full analysis will be provided for the Council.

4) Grants

The Working Party was clear from the outset that we would need to find the money to pay for the transformation of the car park into a community orchard with a central seating area. We are aware of several residents of the parish would like to provide donations for the fruit trees and the Memorial Hall committee have already voted to donate a bench in honour of Steve Young, however, we need a large enough grant to complete the groundwork. We have found quite a few sites offering grant opportunities, especially if the focus was on planting trees. The requirements vary, the timings for applications and what they will give money for. In addition, some organisations that offer grants provide the money after the work has been completed and the money has been spent. We will need to find a way of managing that process before we can apply.

5) Communication strategy

We embarked upon a strategy of openness and clarity since the June council meeting. We set up a dedicated Facebook page providing information and a clear response to any questions raised. Currently 48 members and many offers of help. We also met with and discussed the plan with a variety of local organisations. This is a list of organisations offering to fully support us.

- The Memorial Hall committee
- Warrens market shop
- Seagers strawberry shop
- Rodney Stoke camping ground
- Strawberry Special Pub
- St Leonards church

- St Peters church
- Westbury sub-Mendip tree nursery
- Draycott community shop
- Rodney Stoke and Draycott Primary School
- Rodney Stoke Women's Institute (WI)
- The Laurels

Summary

The working party has now explored the proposal to regain the land currently known as the overflow car park and create a community orchard and we believe the following questions are for the Council to agree upon and the replies will inform the ongoing work for the working party.

- 1) Which of the three companies providing quotes will be the preferred provider?
- 2) Agree with the water supply proposal recommended by the Memorial Hall committee?
- 3) Agree that the survey results confirm we have the backing of our parish?
- 4) Agree that the working party must continue searching for and aiding the Council in applying for grants to fund the proposal.

If the Council supports the working party findings and recommendations, then the next steps will be as follows.

- 5) Full specifications for the groundwork need to be prepared.
- 6) The working party will need to create local volunteer working parties to cover security, design, tree choice, site management, communications.
- 7) The working party will also organise community events on behalf of the Council to celebrate the orchard year over the next 12 months and gain community support and engagement.

Councillors

Lynda Dearden
Val Bullen
Robert Massey

