

Otley Town Council

Environment & Sustainability Committee

Date: 13th July 2015

Report: Gallows Hill Community Orchard

Report by: Community Development Officer

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 To provide members with details on a proposal by the Practically Green group to establish a community orchard on the Gallows Hill Nature area.

2. Background

2.1 Practically Green are an Otley based group that seeks to promote Wharfedale as a 'greener' place to live through promoting and raising awareness of: energy saving and renewable energy; growing your own food and looking after the local environment.

2.2 Practically Green recently attended a Gallows Hill Steering Group meeting where they presented a proposal to set up and run a Community Garden at Gallows Hill including: fruit tree propagation; edible hedging; crop circles or squares etc. The paper presented and outlining the proposal is attached to this report below.

2.3 Practically Green expressed an issue with regards to establishing a written agreement that delegates responsibility of this project to the group. This agreement would need to be drawn up and agreed between Otley Town Council (the landowner) and Practically Green who are seeking to use an area of land at Gallows Hill.

2.4 The Gallows Hill Steering Group identified that the proposal for a community orchard is set out within the 'Gallows Hill Nature Area Strategy and Enhancement Plan 2014-2019' and that a community orchard would engage the community and provide significant publicity for the site. However, there is also recognition that a community orchard is intensive in terms of management.

3. Legal and Financial implications

3.1 There are no immediate legal or financial implications arising from this report.

4. Recommendations

4.1 Members are asked to note the content of this report and provide their views on whether to progress with the development of a community orchard at Gallows Hill, if so, whether to begin to develop an agreement with Practically Green to use an agreed area of the site for a community orchard.

Practically Green

Proposal for a Community Garden for Gallows Hill

Practically Green would like to set up and run a Community Garden in Gallows Hill in order to:

- Encourage more people to engage with their local 'natural' environment by providing collections of plants and information about the food they provide and the wildlife they support.
- Demonstrate which varieties of plants can be grown to support wildlife and provide food (see 'Edible Hedges' below).
- Provide classes on fruit tree grafting and other propagation techniques so people can use these skills in their own gardens/allotments.
- Grow specimen groups of different fruit/nuts trees/shrubs, bee-friendly plants, etc. that can be grown by anyone in this locality.

Once the plants are established (after approximately 2 years) we would encourage local schools to visit the site for guided tours and practical session where appropriate.

Other than the use of fencing to protect younger plants from damage by rabbits, etc. access would be open all year round (probably via gates).

Development

The plan is to develop the area in stages. We would first clear a series of adjoining circular growing areas and use each one to grow different crops.

The food grown within each circle would be free to gather by the general public (although we could perhaps ask for a 'Pay as you feel' donation towards the upkeep).

The basic 'capital' requirement would be for tree supports/stakes, weed suppressing fabric and perhaps some rabbit proof fencing to enable some crops to get established.

A second stage would be to develop an area suitable for running workshops open to the public.

Edible Hedging

These are a key part of the infrastructure, providing food and shelter for a wide range of wildlife as well as collectable food for the community. A mix of Hazel, Sloe, Elder, Brambles, Myrobalan, Dog Rose, etc. is used to build a hedge suitable as a boundary; we would also offer information/advice appropriate plant mixes for use as domestic garden boundaries

Crop Circles

In the sheltered circles we could grow different types of fruit with a range of varieties of apples in one area, damsons in another, etc. We would also include a bee-friendly collection of plants as well as some perennial food plants (Artichokes, Asparagus, etc). Each Circle would include an information board explaining how to grow the plants and the various uses for the crops they provide.

Demonstration area

Subject to agreement Practically Green would like to be able to:
Develop an area to run Workshops with a few picnic style bench /tables.
Subject to PG raising sufficient funds having the use of a hut/poly-tunnel for shelter and storage. Such a facility would also allow for collection/storage of rainwater, there being none otherwise available.

What is Practically Green looking for?

A written agreement (lease?) that delegates the responsibility for the site to Practically Green, most importantly because of the long term nature of the project, with some security of tenure assuming PG operates within agreed parameters.

With such an agreement PG would be in a much better position to raise funds/apply for grants specifically to develop the site.