

# Harbertonford Park Fruit Tree and Habitat Creation Proposal: "Harbertonford Fruit Corner"

By Sustainable Harbourne Valley

Led by Sue Ward and Jenny Hill

## Summary

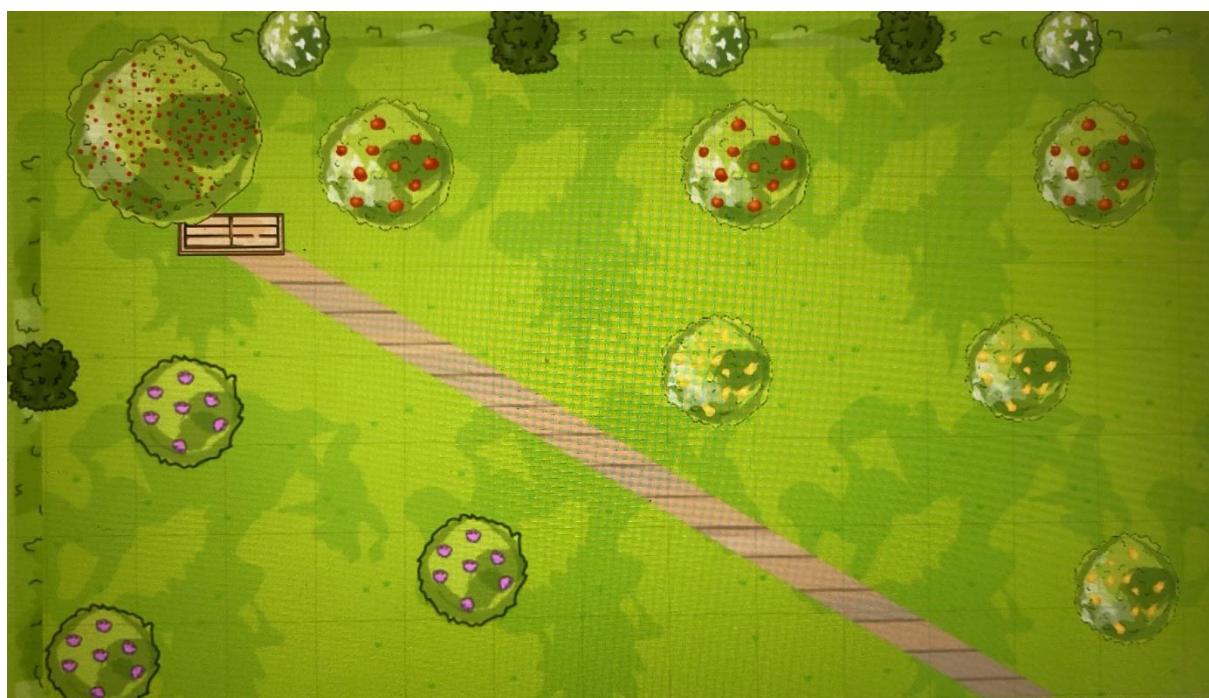
Harbertonford Park is a recreational space owned by the Diocese of Exeter and leased by the Parish Council. It is most often used by local families and a local Tai Chi group. It has several distinct areas: a playground with play equipment, a flat field with football nets for ball sports, a narrow area of woodland and a south facing steep slope leading up to a large fence dividing the park from the primary school field.

We propose to improve the offering at the park by utilising part of the steep slope as an area for planting community fruit trees. We also propose to use the large dividing fence to increase habitat and improve visual impact by planting flowering and fruiting climbers to grow up it.

We are asking the Parish Council the below, so that we can start the project. Does the Parish Council agree to SHV:

- Planting and maintaining flowering and fruiting climbers along the dividing fence line?
- Planting a semi-mature 'landmark' tree in the top left-hand corner of the site?
- Planting and maintaining a row of three fruit trees along the top of the slope and six dwarf fruit trees on the slope?
- Adding a footpath up the slope to allow the community to access the fruit trees for maintenance, harvesting and educational events?
- Maintaining the grass around the fruit trees to support their successful growth?
- Plant spring flowering bulbs around the fruit trees?
- Using the area for future events and community celebrations?

**Birds eye view of the final site (to scale) with fence line at the top, field at the bottom**



## **Project aims**

Our aims are to:

- Provide ongoing maintenance of the existing four apple trees,
- Engage an additional group of people to use and help maintain the park – those interested in fruit growing and fruit tree maintenance,
- Provide healthy food for all members of the village to freely harvest
- Provide an area for future community events and education, such as apple pressing days, pruning lessons and wassailing.
- Give Harbertonford's children and families a place to learn 'hands on' about growing fruit,
- Increase biodiversity by providing additional habitat and food sources for insects and birds by way of flowers and fruit,
- Contribute to national tree planting schemes and targets relating to climate change. All trees planted will be registered as part of the Queen's Green Canopy ([The Queen's Green Canopy \(queensgreencanopy.org\)](https://queensgreencanopy.org)) for the platinum jubilee in 2022.

These aims would be achieved by each of the actions outlined below.

### **Planting flowering and fruiting climbers along the fence**

The bare approx. 10ft high chain link fence divides the primary school field from the park. It stretches 44ft along the top of the slope, which is itself above the field level by 10ft and is therefore an imposing feature of the park.

Planting flowering and fruiting climbers along the fence would both soften the appearance, making the park a more inviting place to be, and provide habitat and food for insects and birds. Purchasing, planting, pruning and tying in of the climbers would be undertaken by volunteers from Sustainable Harbourne Valley. We have consulted with the school and they support this idea, as it would allow more privacy for the children on the school playing field.

### **Planting a 'Landmark' tree**

There are a number of mature Ash trees along the park edges which are infected with Ash die back. The death of these trees in the future will be a real loss to the park. We propose to plant a 2meter+ tree on the site to be an immediate feature of the project and ensure that there is an established tree on its way to maturity in the park when the Ash are removed. The diagonal access path up the slope would lead towards this landmark tree and draw the community into the fruit tree site.

Purchasing and planting would be undertaken by volunteers from Sustainable Harbourne Valley.

### **Adding a footpath for access**

Access to the fruit trees is needed for maintenance, harvesting and enabling those less physically able to participate and benefit. A local professional landscaper would be engaged to dig, retain and surface the footpath. The footpath will either a single continuous gradient or incorporate a number of steps to create a shallower gradient. A decision on location, shape and which option is dependent on the availability of funding for this aspect of the project.

Sustainable Harbourne Valley will fund, engage and project manage the creation of the footpath.

**Plant and maintain a row of three semi-dwarfing apple trees along the top of the slope and six additional semi-dwarfing mixed fruit trees (pear and plum) on the slope and maintain the grass on the remaining slope**

The park currently has four existing apple trees growing on the slope – two on either side of the willow structure. A fifth large apple tree blew down last winter, and the remains of its trunk are now left. We have sought the advice of Charles Staniland of South Devon Orchard link regarding the number and size of fruit trees and spacing within the slope. If this project is agreed, Orchard Link has offered to continue to provide support and advice as we progress.

A row of three semi-dwarfing apple trees is proposed across the top of the slope, set back from the fence. Trees on a M26 or MM106 rootstock would be chosen to restrict final height which would in turn prevent the branches from interfering with the fence and ensure that fruit picking is easily accessible.

Six additional smaller fruit trees would be planted on the slope at appropriate spacings. We would either move the old apple tree trunk off the slope and relocate it at the bottom of the slope as a natural seat or play structure for the children or if this is not suitable, cut into logs and remove it.

As previous trees have suffered damage from children, all of the fruit trees will be protected with wire tree guards to discourage branches from being snapped as the trees establish.

Purchasing, planting, watering and future maintenance (of both the new and existing fruit trees) such as pruning and mulching will be the overall responsibility of Sustainable Harbourne Valley volunteers. We visited the Primary School in October and ran a session with the year 3 & 4 children focused on fruit trees and planning an orchard on the site. The children were extremely enthusiastic and the School are keen to follow this up by assisting with the planting of the trees with the children. On planting the trees the grass around the base of the trees would be removed in a 1m diameter circle to reduce plant competition for the young trees, and this will be maintained by Sustainable Harbourne Valley volunteers for the initial years while needed for the trees to establish. We propose that the remaining grass on the slope is left to grow, providing habitat and food source for insects and animals. The Sustainable Harbourne Valley volunteers can provide the maintenance of this grass (if required by the Parish Council) by cutting twice a year: once in spring and once at the end of the summer.

### **Plant spring flowering bulbs**

There are currently limited spring flowers in the park – limited to wild bluebells in the woodland. Spring flowering bulbs will enhance the park and provide early nectar for insects. Bulbs will be allowed to naturalise across the area. Snowdrops, daffodils and crocus will provide a good duration of flowering throughout late winter and spring.

### **Using the area for future events and community celebrations**

We will engage with the community and School in the initial planting phase and want this engagement to continue in the future by using the area for educational and community events. Examples include apple pressing days, pruning lessons, ‘wild’ food cookery sessions. These will be coordinated by Sue Ward, a Sustainable Harbourne Valley member and resident of Harbertonford who is an experienced community educator, having previously worked as a Learning Through Landscapes Fruitful Communities Coordinator. We would also look to involve other local sustainable craftspeople to join in these events.

### **Timeline**

The project is anticipated to take place in five stages. An indicative timeline is shown below, subject to change due to funding decisions and weather:

Stage 1 – Engage with wider village, publicise and invite input: Nov - Dec

Stage 2 – Site preparation: Dec -Jan

Stage 3 – Tree planting: Feb

Stage 4 – Flowering and fruiting climber planting: Mar-Apr

Stage 5 – Bulb planting and celebration: Sep-Oct

### **Funding**

We have engaged with several funders and have agreement in principle, pending the Parish Council's agreement.