

Report on the Committee's Activities : 52nd AGM 29th July 2021

Chair's Report : Elizabeth Devas

The last nine months has been an extraordinary time for the Committee. The six newly elected members had not all met each other before, or the two existing, and we were only able to conduct meetings by Zoom. We set about revitalising procedures, reviewing the constitution, tracking down documents and writing policies to ensure we had good governance in accordance with our responsibilities as Trustees. We have had more than nine full meetings, with various sub groups meeting to discuss issues to bring to the full Committee.

The most pressing issue was to get Wolds End Orchard up and running. To do this we immediately set up a sub-Committee made up of two Committee Members of the Campden Society and six members of the Wolds End Community Orchard group. The CS Committee also had numerous discussions about the Orchard including holding meetings specifically to discuss its future given the groundswell of support it received in 2020 from the local community. At our March Committee meeting, we unanimously agreed the Campden Society's objects are best achieved by Wolds End Orchard not being developed in whole or in part and rather being retained in perpetuity as a Community Orchard and Nature Reserve for the benefit of the local community and natural environment.

Our next task is to bring together a management plan for the site and discuss the best way of executing this over the long term. There are a number of the Wolds End Community Orchard members on the sub-committee who are feeding into this process and we will share information and welcome input from Members throughout this process. There is a more detailed account of the Orchard activities in the next section of the statement.

We have also established a protocol to monitor and respond to planning applications that are relevant to the Society's objects. We have monitored and responded to the Town Council's approach to the Craves and the offer that has been made in relation to this field, so that we can help to protect it as a green open space for the town. We attend meetings to discuss the new development on Aston Road which it is anticipated will free up the school car park for the town. Most recently we have sent out information to all our members about Cotswold District Council's Green Infrastructure consultation.

We have attended meetings with the Chipping Campden Conservation Trust and worked with them to establish common aims. I am delighted that one of the Trustees has submitted a statement to read out on behalf of the CCTF.

We have provided regular communications, not only to you our members, but also to the town at large by way of the Bulletin. The website is being refreshed and social media channels expanded.

I am enormously grateful to my fellow Committee members for the energy, enthusiasm and commitment that they have all shown in getting the Society revitalised and moving forward. Together we have been motivated and encouraged by you, our members, support and feedback, and we thank you for that. Please do keep up your feedback and comments, this is your society and we are the steward.

Lastly, I want to thank David Kingsmill for almost ten years of service to the Society. In these last nine months I have valued David's input, reason, wisdom and humour.

Wolds End Orchard Report – Julianne Davis

We are pleased to report the orchard is being actively managed, led by the Orchard Sub-Committee and over 40 volunteers who have transformed the orchard and opened it up to the local community. Our thanks to all for their hard work and enthusiasm - they have really made a huge difference.

Orchard Work

Volunteers have undertaken bramble management to uncover veteran trees, planted 20 young trees and over 100 hedge whips, installed three bat boxes, constructed two dead-hedges and 'bug hotels'. We have numbered and mapped all 87 fruit trees and laid 80m of hedge in Westmorland-style with local champion hedge layer, Robin Dale. Eight felled tree trunks were kindly donated by Campden House Estate and delivered by Ian Pay as informal seating. We have also started professional restorative pruning to veteran trees and begun to identify tree varieties. We prepared a paper for the Committee as part of its decision making process about the future of the orchard outlining the benefits to wildlife and the local community of keeping the site intact as a traditional orchard and how the orchard could be managed to deliver those community and nature benefits.

Community Access and Events:

187 people joined us for Blossom Weekend and at the time of writing we hope hold our summer Town Picnic on Sunday 25 July. We have also invited Jecca's House to have access to the orchard for their clients. Other visitors included those from the National Trust, Gloucestershire Orchard Project, RSPB and Batsford Arboretum, all of whom provided great feedback and ideas for further improvements. This autumn we will recommence juice making to sell as part of our fundraising efforts. We'd like to make plans for further visits by community groups and young people and we have open days on 11 September (with Jecca's House), October (celebrating Apple Day) and January (Wassailing).

Education

Our two Duke of Edinburgh students undertook a program of orchard maintenance work on Monday afternoons with Geoff Carr and the Campden Beaver Scouts were our first youth group visiting, enjoying a Mini Beast Hunt as part of working towards their badges looking at British Wildlife.

Fundraising

We prepared grant applications raising £3,044 from Severn Trent Water and MidCounties Co-Op as well as receiving £1,035 in donations from members and supporters. We were also kindly offered locally made apple juice by one member to sell to raise further funds for work and this will be on sale at the AGM. We thank all these individuals and organisations for their generosity, without which we would not have had the funds to undertake the work and hold our events.

Summary

The last eight months has been hard, but enjoyable and rewarding, work. If we have learnt one thing it is that there is so much more to learn about helping the orchard achieve its full potential for wildlife, the local community and the environment. The good news is there is lots of support and funding out there to help us. Following advice from our visiting experts we now wish to seek professional advice about managing the site for increased biodiversity and improved productivity of our veteran, mature and young trees. We will work towards the development of a management plan with the aim of striking an appropriate balance between the operation of the orchard as a traditional orchard, nature conservation and public access. Our thanks again to all those who have been involved and supportive of the orchard this past eight months – we could not have done it without you.