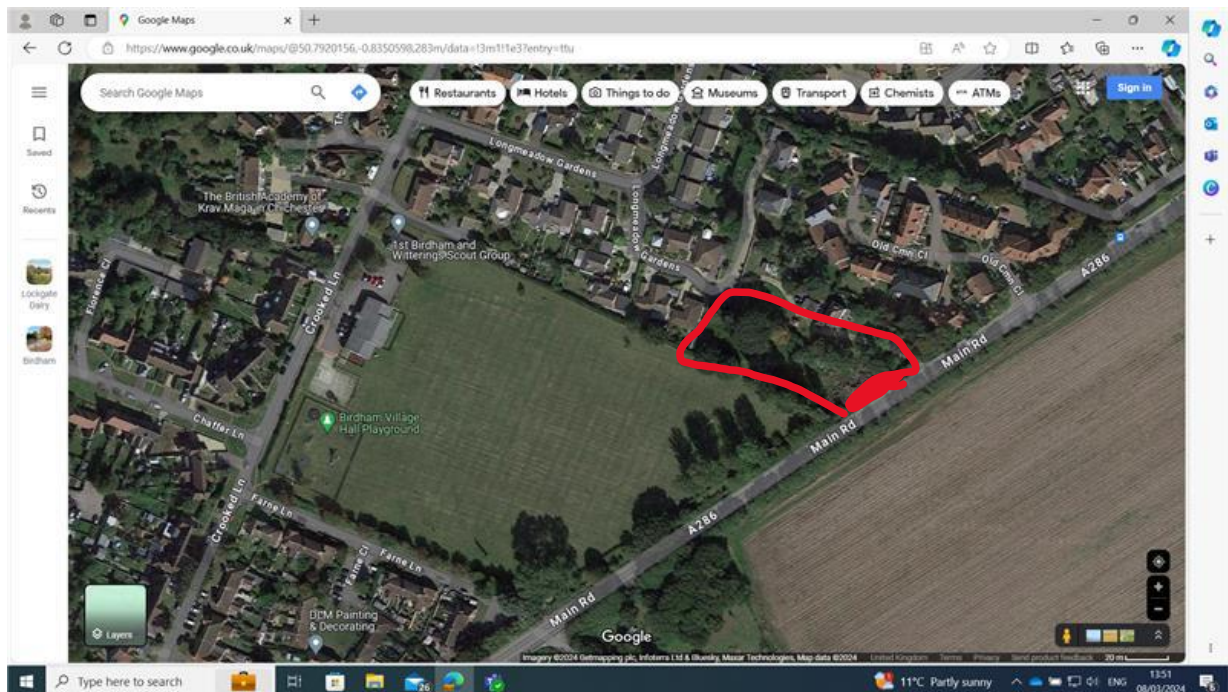


**Proposal:** to use a piece of land, approximate ½ acre, which has been donated to Birdham Parish Council to establish a community growing space.

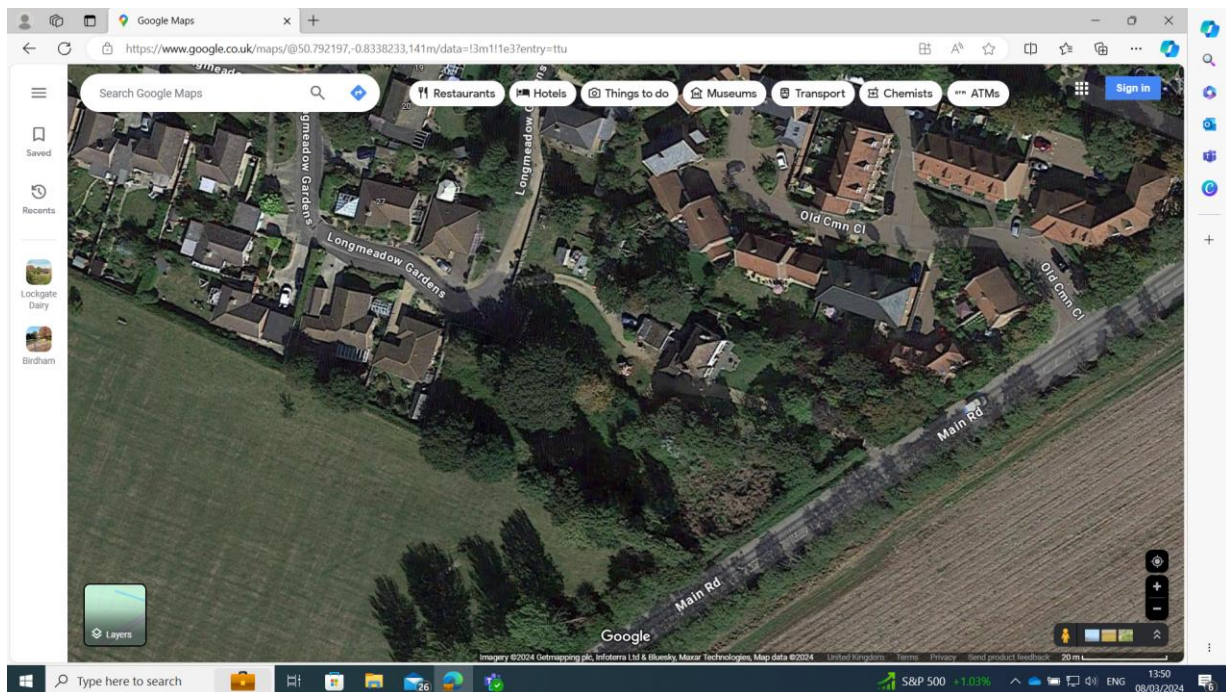
**Lead:** Mark Hobson

**Background:**

The land is adjacent to the village hall and playing fields, which provides multiple benefits. The village hall has toilet facilities, water, waste collection, kitchen facilities and parking. The playing field and the village hall are central to the parish and easy walking distance from most of the homes. There is a pedestrian access from the main road, which makes it accessible by bus. The 1<sup>st</sup> Birdham and Wittering Scout Troop is also on site. There is a proposal for 150 new homes to be build approximately across the road from the playing fields, which will contain affordable homes and will probably appeal to families with children. [Plans to build 150 new Birdham homes submitted \(sussexexpress.co.uk\)](https://www.sussexexpress.co.uk) - these houses are unlikely to have substantial gardens for food growing, but families with children are very interested in community growing according to our local survey.



The site is bordered by the playing fields on one side, the road on one, a private property on one and another (single) private property on the last. There are tall hedges with a gap on the side facing the playing field, which would be a natural place to put an entrance while providing some security and sense of separation from the main playing fields. From this point, there is a solid fence to the left and partially to the left rear of the property, along Longmeadow Gardens. The private property which extends from Main Road to Longmeadow Gardens (the main entry is on Main Road, there is a rear access to Longmeadow Garden) has a temporary, makeshift set of fencing along it to the piece of land. The details of this boundary will need to be defined, as well as responsibility for creating and maintaining a fence or border on this boundary. There is also currently a water hose which goes over the fence at the corner of Longmeadow Gardens – it is not clear where this goes to and which way the water feeds, but it appears to go into the property which is at the rear of the site.



### **Why would a community orchard or community growing space be desirable and beneficial?**

There is great interest in community growing, locally and nationally. As a nation, about 85% of fruit which is purchased in the UK is imported. With climate change, concern about food miles, changing international regimes regarding import and increased competition for fresh food in the future, it makes sense to secure a place where fresh fruit could be grown and freely available for the health and wellbeing of local residents.

There are multiple other benefits, including:

- Saving money on food bills. Increased freshness, variety, flavour of home-grown produce
- A place to socialise
- Gentle exercise suitable for most (if adapted to accommodate health issues)
- A step toward a horticultural qualification
- Experience and skills toward employment
- A sense of accomplishment and enjoyment

- Improved mental and physical health from outdoor exercise
- Low food miles / carbon footprint
- Better understanding of where food comes from (especially for children)
- Likely higher intake of fruit and vegetables and decreased food waste
- Increased community cohesion and integration
- Improved air quality

### **Why an orchard?**

The land locally is fertile for orchards. Once established, orchards require minimal regular activity and yield generous quantities of fruit. If planted wisely, the fruit could have long seasons between early, mid and late yields. Orchards are superb for air quality and providing a home for nature, as well as a pleasant place to be. It is proposed that much of the site be developed as an orchard, with some space for seating and potential future raised beds.

### **Are there any good examples locally?**

- Transition Chichester has orchards - [Grow Chichester – Transition Chichester](#)
- Loxwood has a similar site (adjacent to a village hall and playing fields) - [Loxwood Community Gardens Initiative | for all the village community \(wordpress.com\)](#)
- Petersfield has a Physic Garden – which shows nicely how integrating some structure and seating makes it a lovely place to be. [Petersfield Physic Garden](#)

### **How else can this benefit the community?**

- We can have community days (ie Apple Days, Harvest Days, Wassailing, other special events), helping to strengthen our local community.
- We can use the produce to create community meals at the village hall.
- We can donate surplus produce to local charities and the school to provide to local people.
- We can create a beautiful, peaceful place to be.
- We can teach people how to cook with the food and how to preserve it to be used throughout the year, leading possibly to other cookery projects and food-related skills.

### **What needs to be considered?**

1. Access. It appears natural that the point of access would be through the current gap in the hedging. It could remain as an open space, or a low unlocked gate could be considered (to allow people more security with children or dogs within the growing space. If necessary in the future, this could be enclosed. Vehicles could potentially be brought along the path from the parking area, this is closed off by a fence with a gate.
2. Water. While the details of the hosepipe are unclear, there does not appear to be a water source on site. While water could be brought from the village hall, this would be laborious. If the intention is for it to be solely an orchard, it would be hoped in time that the trees would not require watering. However, if it is used for other growing, water would be highly beneficial. Any structure erected on site could have water butts, but this may not be sufficient during the hot, dry summers.
3. Toilets. There are toilets at the village hall. During any group sessions, these would need to be available.
4. Shelter. It would be ideal to have some form of shelter on site. This could be a willow structure, pop-up gazebo or pergola or more permanent shelter such as a bushcraft shelter or other structure including storage.



5. Storage. If any tools or equipment are to be left on site, storage will need to be considered on site or at the village hall. This could include gardening equipment (ie, pruners, wheelbarrows etc) but also any portable chairs.
6. Seating. In creating a comfortable place to work and relax, seating should be considered. This could be as picnic tables and benches, free-standing benches, portable chairs or built into any beds (for example, space on brick-built raised beds).
7. Raised beds. This may be a longer-term action, but it would be good to consider leaving some space for raised beds. These could then be used for community growing of herbs and small fruit plants, accessible to people who have mobility difficulties.
8. Overhanging trees and tree surgery. Agreement needs to be made about any pruning of overhanging trees and the cost of tree surgery for the taller trees already on site.
9. Signage. It would be beneficial to have one or more signs about the orchard – explaining what it is, how it came to be, how people can be involved, guidelines about picking.



#### Local organisations which may be interested in helping:

- Manhood Wildlife and Heritage Group
- Sidlesham Community Orchard
- Transition Chichester
- [Donnington Horticultural Society gardening club West Sussex England United Kingdom](#)
- Selsey Horticultural Society
- The Hidden Garden, Selsey
- West Wittering Horticultural Society

#### Ongoing management

It would be good to have a “core group” or “management team” or “friends of the orchard” to ensure that the regular items are taken care of, events are planned, any insurance includes the orchard, and to conduct any fundraising etc. It may be beneficial to have a person designated as the project manager. If any advice is required on constituting such a group, Voluntary Action Arun & Chichester is able to help. [Voluntary Action Arun & Chichester - support for charities \(vaac.org.uk\)](#)

#### Funding and Fundraising

In the last year, there have been a number of grants available for the creation of community orchards or the planting of trees. Chichester District Council is currently running one: [Chichester District tree scheme - Chichester District Council](#)

Further grant funding could be available through multiple different sources

In addition, this could make a great project for crowdfunding. People or organisations could be invited to sponsor a tree, bench or other structure or item, and it could include the possibility of a plaque (ie "In memory of") - a popular way to remember people or show appreciation locally.

#### **How can Arun & Chichester Food Partnership help?**

- We can look out for funding opportunities and connect you.
- We can help with community consultation, creating a Microsoft Forms survey for you, publicising this and collating the responses. This will help with showing desire for this locally (which helps with fundraising), finding volunteers and increasing local involvement.
- Publicity
- Help in arranging events such as open days / Apple Days
- We can connect you with other local community growing spaces through our Community Growing Network.