

A COMMUNITY ORCHARD for IDE



Executive Summary

Pynes Victorian Orchard survives in its original unploughed state, three and a half acres of ancient apple orchard right on the edge of Ide village. It has been neglected, many of its trees have fallen for want of pruning over the last 40 years, and the land has been intermittently grazed by horses.

Spurred on by discussions for Ide Neighbourhood Plan, made in 2018, Ide Parish Council decided to try to buy the orchard to use for public amenity, and run it as a community orchard. Ide has no public open space other than the small triangular village Green, bounded by road on two sides, good for children's kickabouts, the annual fete, but not much more. Victorian Orchard presents a once in a century opportunity for the people of Ide, its neighbours and the public at large.

There are over fifty community orchards in Devon, popular for giving free access to open ground close to home; encouraging physical activity in attending to the trees, grass and hedges; harvesting and juicing the crop as a community effort; holding outdoor communal events; providing a place for relaxation, education and reflection; and protecting the ecology and integrity of a cherished part of the neighbourhood.

The Church Commissioners own the land, and agreed to sell it to Ide Parish Council. We negotiated a price after a professional valuation. They also agreed to rent us the orchard so that we could begin to protect, restore, replant and manage it while waiting to buy it. A parish council working group took on that task. After two and a half years of further discussions, including the settling of an outstanding adverse title claim on a parcel of ground along one boundary, we signed and exchanged an option to purchase agreement in July 2021. This guarantees us the right to buy the property at the agreed price at any time during the three years up to 30 July 2024.

The cost of the land is £62,050, plus £11,560 VAT which we must pay, but can reclaim by virtue of being a parish council. We have already raised £7,680 from community groups, parish, district and county councils, and interested individuals, to cover set up costs for surveyors, agents and legal fees, and materials like this prospectus. A further £907 was donated by working group members for 72 new trees planted in January 2020.

We have now arrived at the point where we can go out to raise the capital to buy the land.

A Community Orchard for Ide

Ide has long been a village of orchards. Victorian Orchard lies across the road from Pynes Farm, on the right as you go south up the hill towards Dunchideock. It remains Ide's oldest traditional fruit orchard, neglected for two generations, yet still in its original form. Its 3.65 acres of sloping field, facing north, overlook the village. It contains a number of old apple trees, many fallen and dead. The Church Commissioners own Victorian Orchard and, stimulated by discussions about the Ide Neighbourhood Plan, have agreed to sell it to the Parish Council for use as a community orchard.

The Community Orchard is one of two major capital projects planned for the village by the Parish Council. We are also involved in acquiring Weir Meadow, on Halscombe Lane, for use as a playing field, along with the two adjacent Northern Fields, on College Lane, to allow the playing field to function fully.

There are over fifty community orchards in Devon. They have become popular as places for friends and neighbours to come together for seasonal events such as apple pressing or hay making; and they provide unique spaces for recreation, productive activity, and relaxation. Local, common, public space is something we are very short of in Ide. Community orchards are a fine resource for schools seeking outside classroom activities. They offer the chance to maintain and increase biodiversity, provide local fruit and to resist property development. Victorian Orchard is formally designated for protection as Local Green Space in the Ide Neighbourhood Plan (2018).

We have joined an organisation called Orchard Link which promotes the restoration and replanting of orchards in

South Devon, and offers technical advice and support. In January 2017, Orchard Link's chairman, Charles Staniland, addressed a public meeting in Ide about the benefits of community orchards. Real enthusiasm was expressed at the meeting for the idea of buying the Orchard.

In November 2017 the Parish Council set up a Community Orchard Working Group to conduct negotiations with the Church Commissioners; plan a fund raising campaign; gather ideas for the use of the orchard which fit the needs of Ide's residents; and review how best to manage the orchard, its trees and boundaries.

In March 2018, the Council successfully negotiated a purchase price with the Commissioners of £17,000 per acre, plus reclaimable VAT, which is in line with an independent valuation as amenity land, conducted by Rendells Surveyors and commissioned by the Parish Council in April 2017. After further discussions the Church Commissioners agreed to grant us a licence to occupy and manage the orchard from 28 September 2018, with certain conditions: its use must be as a private orchard until we own it; and the licensee is to be an individual. Andrew Bragg, of West Town Farm, took on the licence on the Parish Council's behalf, splitting the annual licence fee of £544 equally with the Parish Council Working Group. In July 2021, we signed a three year Option Agreement to purchase the land. We now need to raise the money within that three year period.

Ide has a rare, once in a century opportunity to acquire a piece of land which borders its residential area, and which holds a place in the village's heritage and history. It will be an area of open space, for public enjoyment, where traditional fruit trees can be restored, planted and cultivated as a community enterprise.

Heritage

In the last seventy years Devon has lost about 90% of its traditional orchards. Every Devon farm had its own orchard, with historical taxation figures showing that in 1789 there were 22 farms of varying size in the parish of Ide. Today there are six, and as the number of farms has declined, so has the number of orchards.

Ordnance Survey maps of the early 19th century show the extent of orchard planting and, compared with today's orchards, how much has disappeared. Pynes Victorian Orchard is now the only surviving post-medieval orchard in Ide[§].

An aerial snapshot of Ide in the spring of 1800 would have revealed a tiny island floating in a sea of pink and white blossom. There are remnants of this sea: a strip of land behind The College; a paddock behind the Huntsman Inn; solitary, gnarled fruit trees in back gardens around the village; and, largest of all, the Pynes Victorian Orchard.

Originally part of Canns Farm, this orchard, despite its name, predates the Victorian era by several hundred years and could have been first planted in medieval times. The fact that it still lies within its original boundaries adds to its historical importance.

The orchard would have been planted for cider. Cider apples were an important crop throughout Devon until the early 20th century, with farm labourers often being paid in the liquid gold rather than hard cash.

The number of rare old apple trees makes this an important Devon orchard. This alone would justify our restoring and preserving it as an outstanding piece of landscape heritage for Ide to cherish and enjoy for years to come.

[§] Devon County Council Environment Viewer, Historic Landscape Character – Orchards.
<https://maptest.devon.gov.uk/portaldvl/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=82d17ce243be4ab28091ae1f15970924>



Ide

F.P.

372
2.940
371
3.075
Mill Pond
(Disused)

B.M. 100.0

370
19.808

Vicarage

THE
GREEN

a's Church
(Vicarage)

F.P.

Grave Yard

B.M. 117.5

Cobbe House

B.M. 131.8

Canns
Farm

P.O.

Station

M.P.

131

131

128

123

313a
1.105

318
3.399

144

Pynes

313
4.190

317

A Community Orchard

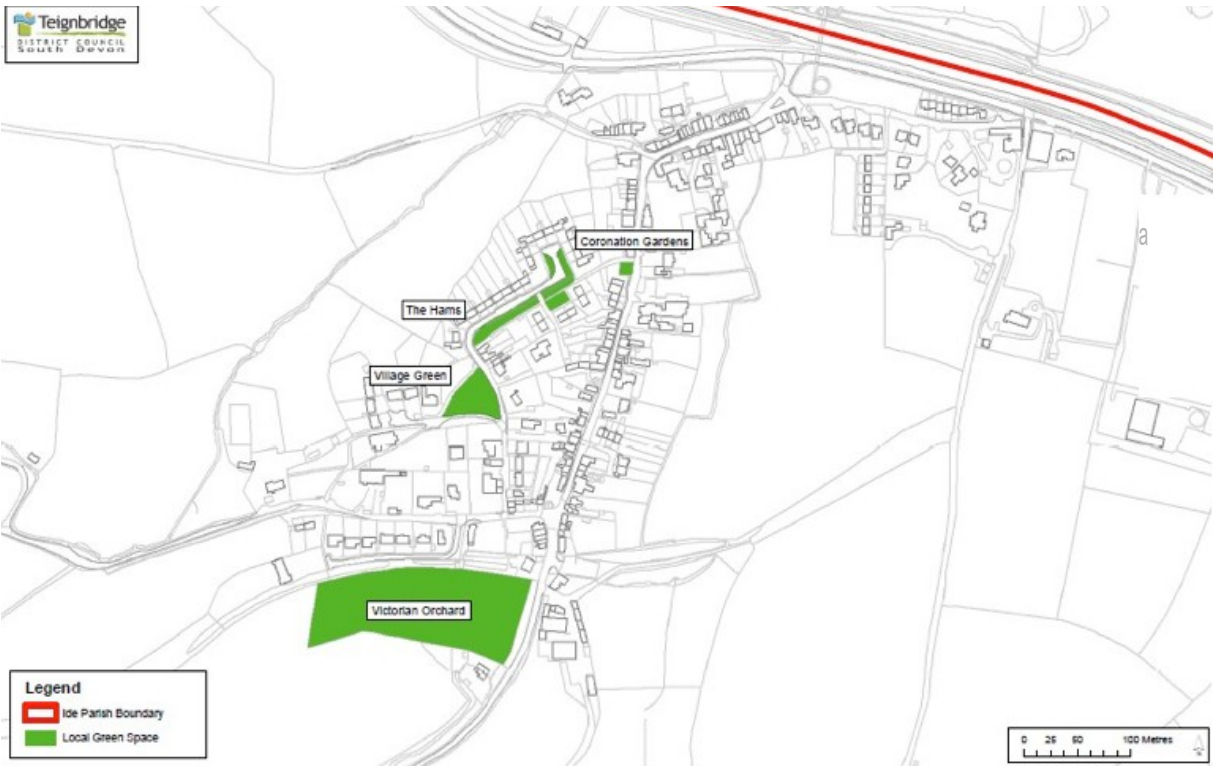
A community orchard can make a significant contribution to the life of a village, providing a diverse range of activities and benefits.

Ide Community Orchard will create open, public green space for the residents of Ide and the public. It will become a place for restoring balance with our natural surroundings. We will develop areas in the orchard for picnics, relaxation and other activities such as art and yoga.

Since September 2018 volunteer working parties have been restoring the existing trees, and learning how to look after them.

In due course we aim to make our own juice. We will run events open to all, with talks and demonstrations; and to make sure the crop is good, we will tap into our folklore and honour the trees with a seasonal wassail.

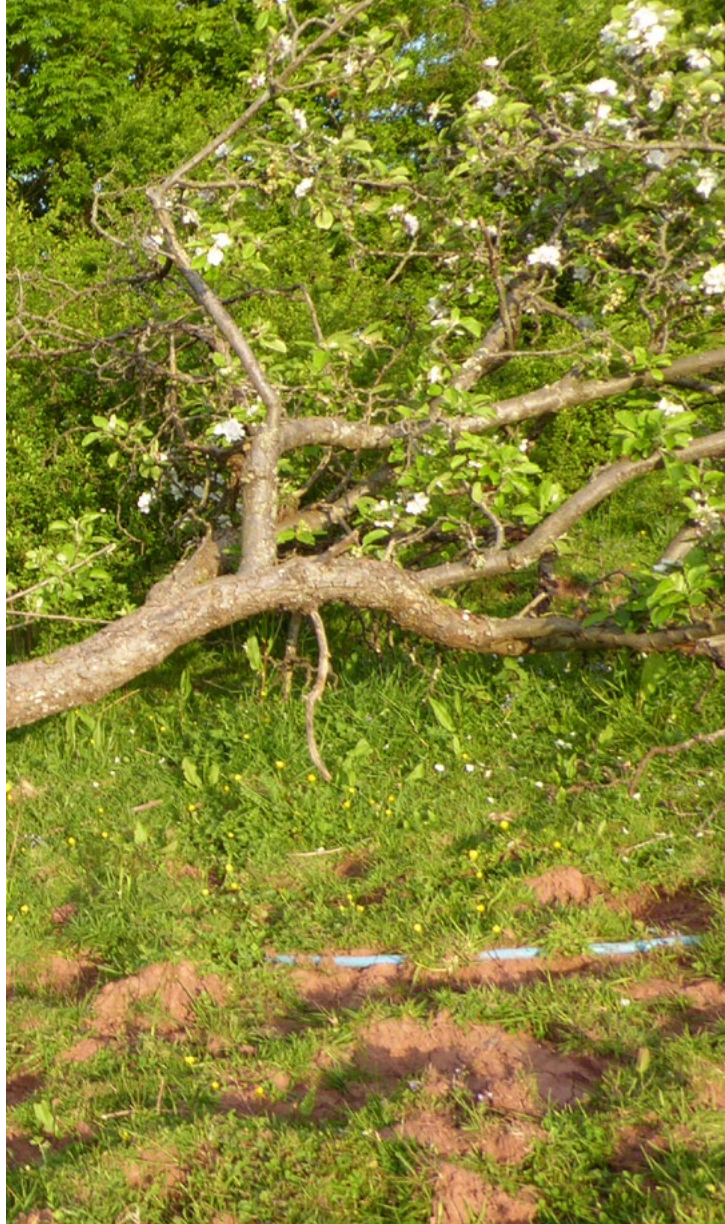
Learning how fruit is grown and produced will provide educational opportunities for the children of Ide School. They will learn about the importance of preserving natural diversity so that the apples and other fruits become pollinated.











Remedial restoration work and new planting

The Orchard has been neglected for many years. Until recently there were 40 productive apple trees; there are now twelve. The remaining trees are interesting old varieties, so our first task in December 2018 was to carry out remedial pruning and care. In January 2020 we planted 68 new apple and four new pear trees, while also creating areas for other recreational activities.

The ground was badly rutted after three winters as a paddock for horses. The grass needed rolling and resting for a full year, with a square metre cleared around each remaining tree to enable it to recover. There is also work to do on the gate, hedges and boundaries, some of which are broken down or overgrown.

Habitats, havens, wildlife protection, and education

A traditional orchard is different from a tightly planted, modern orchard: less intensively managed, and more in common with woodland, pasture and parkland. It typically consists of fruit trees and grasses, with scrub round the edges and hedgerow. This mix of habitats adds up overall to something more valuable than the sum of its individual parts.

Old trees will be left as dead or decaying wood, where they don't affect the orchard's health, as a habitat for beetles, hoverfly and moths.

The grass will be managed by grazing combined with infrequent cutting for hay. Clumps of bramble will be left wild. We will only trim hedgerows every three years.

Apples will be allowed to lie for birds. Winter migrants such as fieldfares, redwings and hawfinches feed on apple pips and, with the grass allowed to flourish, the number of voles, and the owls that feed on them, will increase. Protected species surveys will be undertaken.

Ecology of a traditional orchard

In the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UK BAP) of 2006, traditional orchards are designated as a priority habitat. We have already started planting new fruit trees and looking after the neglected, mature apple trees; but managing the grassland properly is also crucial for the long term success of Victorian Orchard. While the new trees are still young, and grazing with sheep or cattle is not feasible, we have the chance to manage the grass less intensively. Tall, summer grass provides better refuge for insects; in turn this brings more food for foraging bats, and better cover for small mammals. They in turn provide food for owls and other predators. A late mow will allow more time for black knapweed, poppy and ox-eye daisy to set seed, for example. This style of single-cut grassland is a priority UK BAP habitat.

Managing the hedges better will protect dormice: they too are a priority species, legally protected in Britain and Europe, and highly susceptible to urban creep and fragmentation of their habitat. Stable, sustainable management will protect little owls, especially with the help of nest boxes in the mature trees. And an orchard with long grass could also provide protection for breeding hares and their leverets, another UK BAP priority and a species previously abundant around Ide.



Financing The Project

The cost of the land is £62,050 (plus £11,560 VAT, reclaimable because we are a parish council). The early set up costs to cover fees for surveyors, solicitors and agents, and materials like this prospectus, came to an additional £7,680, money we raised with donations from local community groups, individuals and local authority councillor grants; and which we have already spent. We needed this initial priming to get to the point we have now reached, where we can go out to raise the capital amount to buy the land.

A separate £907 was donated by working group members to cover the 72 new trees planted in January 2020.

The Parish Council opened a separate account, administered by the Parish Council, to run the finances for the community orchard project.

The principles of our funding strategy will include:

- **A broad based approach:** we will appeal for donations to interested local residents, make applications to national and local grant giving bodies, employ crowd-funding and run local fund-raising events, to maximise the opportunities available. An initial search indicates there are a number of trusts whose criteria we

meet. Parish councils can also borrow money from the Public Works Loan Board, at low rates of interest, over a period of up to 50 years, with the approval of their county Association of Local Councils and the Secretary of State.

- **A considerate approach** recognises that in a vibrant village like Ide there will always be competing demands for funding, prioritises funding opportunities, and works closely with other groups also seeking funding.

We have signed an Option Agreement with the Church Commissioners which gives us up to three years, until 30 July 2024, to raise the money and buy the orchard. We can exercise the option at any point during this period. We intend to spend the first of the three years raising funds from grant making bodies and trusts, and from interested individual donors. At the start of the second year, we will take stock, and if there remains a shortfall, consider the merits of and support for applying for a loan to fund the balance.

There is a high level of interest and support for the Orchard in the village; and we anticipate a ground swell of energy and commitment for fund-raising efforts. The Working Group is quietly confident that the target can be achieved.

Management of the project

Ide Parish Council set up a Community Orchard Working Group in December 2017. The group has brought together members of the parish council with those in the community who have expertise in horticulture and fruit tree management, farming, fund raising, and running community projects. The current group’s members are:

Peter Cloke	Chair of the Working Group
Nick Bradley	Chair of Ide Parish Council
Andy Bragg	Agriculture and orchards
Trevor Gardner	Fund raising
David Howe	Solicitor
Mel Liversage	Ide Parish Clerk
Jessica Paine	Ide Parish Councillor
Julian Perrett	Environment and ecology
Richard Sharman	History and Heritage
Mark Thomas	Ide Parish Councillor
Phil Willcock	Treasurer

A Friends Group has been established and is open to anyone in the community who wants to volunteer on the orchard working parties.

The Parish Council has oversight of the project and receives regular reports from the working group at its meetings and communicates news, opportunities and updates via its website.

Future ownership and running of the Orchard

Ide Parish Council will own the freehold of the Orchard, and run it through its formally established Community Orchard Working Group, which is accountable to the Council for the decisions and financial arrangements it makes.

Many community orchards are run by charitable trusts. We have an established, expert working group which has raised money to subsidise the occupation arrangements of the orchard for the last three years, manage restoration work, and buy and plant 72 new fruit trees. There is a group of volunteers ready to assist with pruning and at harvest time. So we have the ideal structure to set up as a charitable body to carry on the work.

The Council will pledge that the orchard must continue to be used as a public community orchard, whether managed by the present working group set up by the Parish Council or in accordance with the charitable objectives of a free standing trust, whose constitution will ensure its purposes to restore, develop and maintain the Orchard for the benefit of local people and the public, visitors and wildlife.

How you can give

Using the enclosed donation form, also available on the Ide Village website, the simplest way is to donate direct to the Ide Parish Council Community Orchard fund by bank transfer to a dedicated account specifically set up for the Orchard:

Lloyds Bank, sort code 30-80-37

account number 38420963

account name "Ide Parish Council Com Orchard".

If writing a cheque, please make it to:
"Ide Parish Council Com Orchard".

If you prefer to give regularly, you can set up a standing order using the enclosed donation form.

You can sponsor one or more trees: £150 for one tree, £250 for two trees, each additional tree £125, by using the enclosed form.

Ide's Community Orchard will be for the whole village. We hope that many residents and those living in the surrounding area will give generously to support the project.

For further information about giving or joining the Friends Group please contact:

Peter Cloke

Chair, Ide Community Orchard Working Group

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Ide, EX2 9SA
Grid Ref: SX 898901