

### **Decoy Orchard, Coach Road**

On Wednesday, 16th August 2023, I met at Decoy Orchard with Ellen Koenders, who is one of the volunteers who look after this Orchard. The Teignbridge Rangers for Green spaces found that they could no longer look after it once their workforce was reduced.

The Orchard is situated adjacent to the car park on Coach Road and is sandwiched between the BMX track, the football pitch and the old nursery.

The Orchard has around 45 mature fruit trees, mostly apple trees (a mix of eaters, cookers and cider) and some pear and cherry trees.

Ellen told me that the Orchard is left to its own devices for a large part of the year, where the wild animals and plants live their lives in a peace and quiet space.

4 or 5 times a year the volunteer group come together to maintain the Orchard, by pruning, cutting the grass with scythes, and removing this. The pruning's are kept as dead hedges on the side, so that the wildlife make use of this for cover and nesting areas. Tools are borrowed from the Teignbridge Rangers, as they have only some personal tools, which is not enough for a group to work there.

Once a year in October, many friends and the wider community are invited for the harvest of the apples, after which several people choose to go the Vicary's field Community Garden to press the apple juice. Everyone goes home with a few bottles of apple juice and several bags of apples.

Decoy Orchard and Vicary Field Community Garden are both part of Transition Newton Abbot. They have joined forces to pay for a joint indemnity insurance. Had this not been the case, they would have been unable to afford the insurance cover.

In our discussions, the following was noted,

- a) there is a very large cherry tree which causes a shadow to a large part of the Orchard. This cherry tree is approximately 40 foot high by 24 feet across with a girth of about 4 feet.  
The group considers that removal of this tree will enhance the light for the trees behind it. (12 trees). To have it removed they will need funding.
- b) They have very little money in the bank at present, and I have provided them with the necessary contact details, to see if they are eligible for a grant from the town council and to see if any of the district and county councillors have any community funds left.
- c) In October every year they have an open day event, which is normally attended by around 20 to 25 members of the public. They do not wish to increase the numbers of visitors much due to the amount of produce going around, but a small increase can be accommodated for. Those that do attend

can take home some apples or pears and indeed assist with pressing apples to take home some fresh apple juice.

- d) It was also suggested that maybe this is a prime site for some beehives, and I have again put Ellen in touch with the local beekeepers Association.

Further details of the Apple harvest day will be provided near the time, and I would hope that some residents who have not visited before taking the opportunity to do so.

In conclusion, this is a very quiet little gem which needs nurturing and looking after and protected from any possible development. It has potential but also has the danger of becoming too well-known and spoilt by well-intended visitors.

It is true that the volunteers could do with some assistance at times, including financial, but I do believe and agree with Ellen that this needs to be regulated and monitored to ensure that this Orchard continues to thrive, produce fruit and remain a haven for wildlife.

Report provided by Councillor Michael Joyce