

## **Colwall Orchard Group comments for the Colwall Village Design Plan**

### **Introduction**

Colwall Orchard Group was set up to conserve, promote and celebrate traditional orchards in Colwall. As at 20 March 2013, we had 124 volunteers and supporters on our contact list, of which 4 families and 67 individuals are paid up members. We held a meeting on 24th May to gather views on the village design plan. This submission has been circulated round the membership by email to gather further views from those unable to attend the meeting.

### **Colwall orchards**

Colwall is at the heart of the 'Three Counties' of Herefordshire, Worcestershire and Gloucestershire – renowned orcharding counties in England. Colwall has a long history of orcharding with the earliest known orchard in the village, at Cummins farm, dating back to 1577. Initially there were only farmstead orchards, but in 1858, Stephen Ballard purchased 3 farms on the western flanks of the Malvern Hills and planted up 300 acres of orchards. The orchards were productive until about 1960, after which they went into decline and many were bulldozed flat. There are now about 45 traditional orchards left in the village, making it an important focus for orchards in Herefordshire. (Note: there are also notable expanses of bush orchard, but these do not have a comparable biodiversity interest).

Traditional orchards are a priority habitat in the England Biodiversity Action Plan, and also support a range of priority BAP species such as noble chafer beetle, mistletoe tortrix moth, lesser spotted woodpecker and various bats. Our orchards are particularly important for conservation both for their diversity of fruit tree varieties and their assemblage of deadwood invertebrates. Many surviving orchards in Herefordshire are cider orchards with a restricted range of cider varieties. Orchards in Colwall were planted to sustain a complex fruit processing business supplying a range of fresh fruits, bottled fruits, fruit pulps, vinegar and other fruit products eg glace cherries. Hence we have an excellent range of varieties of many species of fruit, with a long harvesting season.

Orchard trees have a relatively short life span and start to hollow and decay much earlier than oaks etc, so they are particularly valuable habitats for animals that live in deadwood. There has been excellent continuity in this deadwood resource from the ancient Malvern and Colwall Chase through to the orchards of the present day. A survey by the foremost expert in this group of animals has shown that our Colwall orchards are the best known in Britain for their assemblage of deadwood invertebrates. The orchards, the surrounding unimproved fields with small blocks of natural woodland and the natural style of gardens in the village, with their remnant orchard trees and Victorian plantings, create a complex interlinked suite of habitats. This connectivity is going to be particularly important to help wildlife survive the changes that climate change will bring.

In addition to their nature conservation importance, the orchards have considerable landscape value and contribute to the quality of life of people in Colwall, through their aesthetic, social and historic value. COG brought the Bulmer Foundation to Colwall in 2008 to carry out a community evaluation of the orchards. This found that people valued their conservation and landscape value, but also their social value, particularly our COG activities providing volunteering opportunities to conserve orchards and re-instating traditions such as Wassailing.

On this basis, Colwall Orchard Group considers it imperative that all the remaining traditional orchards in Colwall are protected from development and encroachment. We have been trying to help orchard

owners to manage their orchards to extend their life span, whilst replanting new trees to replace the annual losses. We hope to continue this work subject to funding for our work.

### **Related orchard heritage**

Ribbon development along Walwyn road, and around the sites used for the former fruit processing business, has already encroached on many of the orchards (with the consequence that it is no longer obvious to casual visitors that we have an important orchard resource). Colwall Orchard Group has purchased one of the old Apple Packing Sheds, and we intend to restore this to its traditional form. We would like to see the other remaining Sheds etc restored in a similarly sympathetic manner, perhaps used to provide modern workshop spaces. We do not wish to see these remaining sites used to develop further housing on a 'brownfield infill' basis.

### **Village demographics**

Colwall Orchard Group is perhaps unique in the village in bringing together people of all ages and from all walks of life through our events, our volunteering opportunities and through the allotments at Colwall Village Garden. Our observations are as follows;

Preschool and primary school age – we provide plenty of opportunities to engage this age group and consider that there is generally good provision in the village, although many of the designated recreational areas have very 'traditional' play equipment and do not reflect the current thinking about wild play spaces. Maintaining the school is essential to maintain the vibrancy of this village.

Secondary School Children – we have not so far attracted these, but hope to increase our contact with this age group through work with the schools and scouting organisations. Our observations suggest that there are very few opportunities for informal recreation or social interaction for this age group in the village.

Young families – our 'empty nester' volunteers are concerned that their children cannot afford to set up home in the village, especially if they do not have tertiary qualifications to enable them to find work in the higher paid professions. Our experience of younger families also suggests that they struggle to afford homes in the village. There are too few work opportunities in the village.

Established families – our volunteers tend to be older and from professional backgrounds, reinforcing our suspicion that there is insufficient affordable starter housing for young families the village. We are also being approached by 'back to work' organisations requesting volunteering opportunities for the unemployed (including those with health problems) as there are few 'starter jobs' available for this group in the vicinity.

Empty nesters and active retired folk – form the bulk of our volunteers. Whilst we cater for the more active elderly, we do not, at present, have facilities for less abled people in the village. As the established families age, the older age group will increase naturally, so we do not consider that we should further skew the age profile of the village by providing more retirement flats.

On the allotments, we have a high proportion of allotmenters from the social housing areas in the village and from new developments around the village such as Brookmill Close and Covent Garden. This strongly indicates that these developments do not have sufficient garden space to allow people, especially amongst the less well off, to be able to grow their own food.

### **In summary**

- we consider the immediate surrounds of the school should be protected from infill development to preserve the option for expansion of the school facilities, addition of pre-school and/or wrap around care and the provision of better facilities for dealing with the traffic generated by the school drop offs/pick ups.

- we feel that there should be more affordable and social rented housing in the village, suitable for young families and those in lower paid work. Whilst we appreciate the temptation to increase the density of dwellings in affordable housing developments, we consider that these homes should have sufficient garden space for young children to play and for families to grow their own food.
- Community Infrastructure Levy monies should be used more constructively to support key community provision in the village (see separate section below)
- We note that there is considerable green space in the village under the ownership of Festival Housing. This is currently being managed as uniform mown grassland with few trees – there is plenty of scope to make more imaginative and productive use of this land. (including establishing new generations of fruit trees and orchards)
- The CIL monies should also be accessed to meet other established needs within the village, for example providing a new Scout Hut, which could also provide recreational and social interaction opportunities for secondary school children and young adults.
- It would be great if new developments could meet the highest BREEAM standards, incorporate the latest micro-generation technology, communal heating systems etc and include provision for bicycle storage and re-charging of electric vehicles.
- We feel that there should be more provision for small scale workshops etc to provide a good mix of employment for younger people and families.
- We consider that there should be more provision for recreation and social interaction of secondary school age children and young people in the village. This could include opening existing buildings in the Downs and the Elms complexes to more innovative community uses.
- We do not feel there is any merit in providing further retirement flats, which could further skew the age profile in the village.

### **Community Infrastructure Levy**

We are aware that developers have to lodge a Community Infrastructure Levy with Herefordshire Council and we feel the Parish Council should attempt to source funding from this pot to make various improvements to the community provision in village, for example:

- support for our allotment site (we still owe £50k on our purchase of this site and need further funding to install electricity, refurbish the Apple Packing Shed and provide further facilities)
- provision of further allotments, if our waiting list gets too long
- support for the ongoing management of traditional orchards, including funding for replacement tree planting
- More creative management of public greenspace in and around the village, including
  - provision of further community orchards
  - more imaginative wildplay space for young people (see [www.freeplaynetwork.org.uk](http://www.freeplaynetwork.org.uk)).
  - Funding for further specimen trees within the village
  - Funding to plant and protect hedgerow trees in the hedgerows eg new oaks and limes, damsons and mirabelles etc
- Support for community activities, including further research into the history and value of landscape features in the village

### **Transport issues**

The Unitary Development Plan and work on the Core Strategy for Herefordshire has identified Colwall as a village with potential for further development on the basis of the presence of the railway station. Several of our volunteers presently, or have in the recent past, used rail transport for commuting purposes and it is notable that those going to Birmingham commute from Great Malvern rather than

Colwall, due to the unreliability, and lower frequency, of trains coming through the tunnel to Colwall. Hence, we feel this premise is flawed, and does not justify cramming lots of new houses into our village! We would resist higher levels of new housing in the village, especially in view of the recent infill developments that have been approved. Those of our volunteers who commute north by car report considerable commuter traffic around the Wyche cutting and feel that this road is now at carrying capacity.

Now that we no longer have Schweppes lorries negotiating the railway bridge, we consider that the time would be right to reconsider the road layout, either making it a two way carriageway, or at least installing a cycle lanes in both directions.

We feel more could be done to encourage cycling, including provision within new build of sufficient garage/shed space at street level for the secure cycle parking. Ledbury Area Cycle Forum recommends space equivalent to one bike per bedroom. If the storage area was supplied with electricity, it could also be used for recharging electric mobility scooters, bikes etc thereby reducing car-dependency amongst the less able.

We value the network of the footpaths highly, and commend the excellent work of the Parish Council in maintaining these paths.

### **Location of new development**

As a conservation organisation, we would like to see orchards, Colwall Green and other areas of high wildlife value protected from development and the landscape value of the village maintained.

Within the village, as stated above, we would strongly resist any further encroachment on the orchards, especially Broadwood, Snatford, Maybole, Cowl Barn, Stamps and Cummins (we can provide maps of these sites and the other orchards, if required).

We do not consider that there should be any development to the south west of the railway line in the main village. We would like to see the existing 'green wedges' between Colwall Stone and Colwall Green maintained. We do not consider any of the land along Church road to be appropriate for further development.

We would not wish to see any of the existing shops, licensed premises or business units converted to housing.

On the positive side, we consider that there may be scope for some infill around the former quarry workings behind the Winnings, and on intensively managed arable land in the fields behind the village hall and in the arable wedge (not the football field) between Colwall Green and the railway.

Historically, the focus of Colwall village lay in successive farmstead hubs at Oldcastle, Evendine, Cummins etc. Some members of the Group felt that one option for providing additional housing, without undue impact on the village centre, is the sympathetic development of small 'hamlets' around the peripheral farms eg at Cummins, Flapgate, Chance's Pitch and Petty France. However, other members were opposed to this idea.

### **Building design principles**

Colwall Village has evolved over the centuries and hence does not have a single unifying design style. However, some of the buildings in the village, particularly within the conservation area, do have considerable architectural merit and the Ballard's concrete and limestone lodge houses are a particularly unique feature of the village. Whilst the recent development at Covent Garden reflects the surrounding

architecture well, some of the earlier post 1960's developments and other more recent infill developments have not been sympathetic.

We would support the retention of the existing conservation area within the village, and feel it should be extended to include the orchards behind the housing front.

When allowing development within the village, we feel more attention should be given to the following (in relation to surrounding properties):

- The colour and texture of bricks and other walling materials
- The colour and texture of roofing materials
- The general shape, height and roof profile of the building(s)
- The position and size of the building relative to the plot it sits in – we need to resist densification on both social grounds (see above) and to avoid creating wildlife –free zones in the village
- The design and materials of the boundary walls, hedges, railing and gates (we do not consider fencing, or hacienda style 'gateways' to be appropriate anywhere within the village).
- Wherever possible, existing trees should be retained in development sites and further planting of specimen trees and fruit trees should be encouraged.

### **Trees in the village**

We consider the lime trees to be a key landscape feature of the village, and the scent of the lime blossom to be highly evocative of our village. We wish to see these lime avenues maintained.

The Victorian plantings within the Ballard houses and along the Ballard Avenues is also characteristic of the village, but sadly many of these trees are reaching the end of their normal life span. We consider that CIL monies should also be made available to support judicious replanting and aftercare of specimen trees to maintain this feature into the future. These could include plantings of perry pears, which have similar landscape stature and longevity.

We very much regret the loss of the Village Tree Warden and feel this post should be reinstated.

### **Other notes**

We are also aware of the considerable historic importance of water features in the village, particularly the concentration of former open air swimming pools. Some of our members have suggested that one of these pools (perhaps the one on the Down's site) should be restored for open air bathing.

We would be happy to meet representatives of the Parish Council to discuss our submission in more detail, if you would find this helpful. We can also provide detailed maps of the orchards, past and present, and more information on their biodiversity interest, if this would be helpful for the CPC submission.

Helen Stace  
on behalf of Colwall Orchard Group  
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**Colwall Orchard Group comments for the Colwall Village Design Plan**

