



JULY 2012

IRVINE ROAD AREA RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION

newsletter

Your voice in the local community

<http://www.irara.org.uk>

COMMUNITY
ORCHARD
Special Edition

COMMUNITY ORCHARDS HAVE ARRIVED. THE GOVERNMENT RECOGNISES THE VALUE OF GREEN SPACES IN URBAN AREAS AND IS SUPPORTING PEOPLE WHO WANT TO SET UP NEW ORCHARDS OR PRESERVE EXISTING TRADITIONAL ORCHARDS, LIKE THE ANCIENT ORCHARD IN IRVINE RD.

Help us set up your own local community orchard

The 100 year old orchard between Irvine Road and the Irvine Road Field will soon be up for sale. The executors want to do a deal with a local property developer to build houses on it, destroying the orchard and its wildlife, which includes many rare and protected species. We want to turn it into a community orchard for the benefit of local people and the surrounding schools.

The Irvine Road orchard is one of the rarest environments around. English orchards have been disappearing at an alarming rate since the 1950s, with over 60% having already gone. There are less than 900 orchards left in Essex, with only 7 in urban areas. Colchester has 2 on the outskirts, which means they are likely to be built on in the near future, and 1 within the existing urban area – the Irvine Road orchard.

Add to that the fact that we know the orchard is over 100 years old and (apart from a brief spell during WWII) has not been tilled in that time, and it's easy to see what a truly rare natural environment it is.

These are the reasons why everyone agreed that it should be designated a Local Wildlife Site and a Private Open Space in the Local Development Framework (LDF) of 2011, the current standard by which local planners are required to abide.

How would a Community Orchard work?

Community orchards are now a known quantity and have the support of the Government, most education authorities and local councils. In principle an existing or proposed orchard is bought or leased by the local authority, the local community, or a registered charity (like the Essex Wildlife Trust, in this case) and administered by the local community.

A community orchard can be run in conjunction with sympathetic landowners, but there is no realistic prospect of that happening in this instance.

Who would pay for it?

Surprisingly, you might think, funding is available from a number of sources to buy or lease areas of land such as the Irvine Road orchard, and if planning permission is denied (which it should be) the value of the land will decrease dramatically. Our research shows that the idea is perfectly feasible if we can show a significant benefit to the community.

Who would benefit?

In the broadest sense, everyone would benefit as an essential part of the Green Chain which stretches from Irvine Road to Lexden Park would remain intact. The orchard itself would provide a valuable outdoor educational resource for the local schools, totally in line with current educational policy of getting children out of the classroom and in touch with their natural environment.

The Sites Allocation Document in the LDF states quite categorically:

“Public and private open space, sport and recreation facilities will all be protected by one policy, DP15 in the Development Policies DPD.

It also says:

6.16 New allocations on the Proposals Map consist mainly of minor alterations; the identification of open spaces within residential areas, including new open spaces recently adopted by the Council; and a more consistent approach to the allocation of school playing fields. A new area of private open space is shown west of Irvine Road in Colchester.

Development, including change of use, of any existing or proposed public or private open space, outdoor sports ground, school playing field forming part of an educational establishment and allotments (as identified on the Proposals Map) will not be supported unless it can be demonstrated that:

(i) Alternative and improved provision will be created in a location well related to the functional requirements of the relocated use and its existing and future users;

(ii) The proposal would not result in the loss of an area important for its amenity or contribution to the green infrastructure network or to the character of the area in general; and

It achieves the aims of the Colchester Parks and Green Spaces Strategy.

We have 3 secondary schools and 2 primary schools in the area and the orchard is within walking distance of all of them.

What can we do?

IRARA has managed to get an Area Tree Preservation Order placed on the whole orchard, but this will need to be confirmed by the Colchester Borough Council Planning Committee, and all representations have to be in by August 8th 2012.

We need as many people as possible to write or email the CBC Planning Department in support of the TPO, the contact details are:

Liam McKarry, Environmental & Protective Services
Colchester Borough Council, PO Box 8899, Rowan House
33 Sheepen Road, Colchester
email: liam.mckarry@colchester.gov.uk
Telephone: 01206 282469

Representations need to be relevant to local planning law and the purpose of the Tree Preservation Order. Important points to remember are:

1. The orchard is designated a Local Wildlife Site in the current Local Development Framework, and is protected from development. The LDF states that there should be a 'presumption against development'. In other words, developers should be required to come up with exceptional reasons for building. As far as we can see, there are none. There is no prospect of 'affordable housing' being built in the orchard, and the numbers of dwellings under discussion won't make any difference to any 'housing shortage'.

2. The orchard is designated a Private Open Space in the current Local Development Framework, and is protected from development unless any developer can prove no loss of 'an area important for its amenity or contribution to the green infrastructure network or to the character of the area in general'. Even a small number of houses would wreck the orchard.

3. The Orchard is home to a wide variety of birds, insects, mammals, fruit trees and plants. It has been virtually undisturbed for a century and is one of only a handful (about 7) of traditional urban orchards left in Essex.

Animals known to live and feed in the orchard include: Various types of Bats; Foxes; Muntjac deer; Roe deer; hedgehogs; Stag beetles; Noble chafers; Great Crested Newts; Song Thrushes; Sparrowhawks; Herons; Greater Spotted, Lesser Spotted & Green Woodpeckers; Blackcaps; Chiffchaffs; Sedge warblers, Garden warblers; Pied wagtails; Yellow wagtails; Tawny owls; Little owls; Wrens; Goldfinches; Coal tits; Bullfinches; Various types of frogs, toads; Rose Chafers etc., etc.

4. There is no benefit to the local community from housing development, but potentially a massive disruption, including a significant road safety hazard to the large numbers of schoolchildren who have to cross the junction of the Chase twice a day to get to school.

5. There is a considerable potential benefit to the local community in preserving the area as a Community Orchard, particularly to the local schools as an easily accessible and virtually free outdoor

educational resource, fully in line with current educational policy.

In terms of studying the natural environment, it doesn't get much better than an ancient orchard full of rare and protected plants and animals, right on the doorstep.

6. The orchard is an important part of the local green infrastructure network as it provides undisturbed shelter, food and nesting sites for a large variety of birds, insects & mammals who rely upon the wider area to forage for food. As such it is specifically protected from development in the LDF.

7. Becoming a community orchard would finally settle the status of the land, ensure that it does not fall into dilapidation and provide a ready-made workforce (us) to provide the minimum of upkeep and maintenance required.



The Irvine Road orchard has, in the past been a home for colonies of domesticated bees, as well as a continuing source of traditional apples, plums and damsons.

Traditional orchards are an important link with the natural environment in urban areas where access to any green open space is limited.

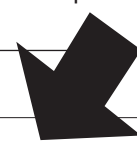
To preserve its character, the orchard needs to be maintained and public access carefully regulated.

It is only about 2 acres in total, so any house building at all will effectively wreck it.

Join us on Facebook:
[www.facebook.com/irvine road orchard group](http://www.facebook.com/irvine-road-orchard-group)



If you are not already an IRARA member, please consider joining now. The more households we can claim to represent, the better our chances of saving the orchard.



Member of Federation of Colchester Residents' Associations

Member of Open Spaces Society

Irvine Road Area Residents' Association

Membership application/renewal form 2012/13

Annual membership of IRARA is £3.00 per household and is open to anyone living in Athelstan Road, Audley Road, Capel Road, Irvine Road and adjacent parts of Maldon Road and Shrub End Road.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Email address: _____

I wish to receive newsletters via: email hard copy

Telephone No: _____

I/We wish to apply for membership

I/We wish to renew our membership

Do you think the association should continue to fight for the preservation of our public open space for the benefit of local children? Yes No

Would you be interested in helping with some of the association's activities (for example, leaflet drops, litter clearing etc.) Yes No

Please fill in this form and hand it to your representative or send it to: Daniel Fox, IRARA Treasurer, 33 Irvine Road, Colchester CO3 3TR.