

Devizes Area Board Project

1. What is the project?

Ring Fence £5k to help in the purchase of additional land to extend the offering at Drew's Pond Wood

The Drew's Pond Wood Project was set up by Lorna Llewellyn and Stuart Hislop in 1990. Its aim was and is to conserve Drew's Pond Woods to enhance the woodland habitat, and to improve the recreational value of the site. Following the development of the old County hospital site, which included the Woods, for residential housing in 1996 the Drew's Pond Wood Project and local Community campaigned to protect the site for the future. The group's mission is to manage the site to enhance biodiversity and promote sustainable community use

The approximate area of the current site is 6.04 hectares. It has been awarded Local Nature Reserve status and has become a County Wildlife Site. Ownership was transferred to Kennet District Council in perpetuity for the benefit of local people in the mid 1990s. Since the Local Government reorganisation in 2009 Wiltshire Council now owns the land of the local nature reserve

The current site is buffered on all sides but is at risk from development on the North East where the land is owned by a private land owner. Since the project began, it has been the aim of the group to incorporate this additional land which consists of a large open green space (old cricket ground) and a small orchard of approximately 50 trees. The orchard has not been cared for in recent years and it is the intention to rescue the trees, manage the site for wildlife and revive it as a community enterprise.

The current land owner is looking to sell the land and is willing to sell it to the Drew's Pond Wood Project if they are able to acquire the required funding. The desire to purchase the land and use it for the benefit of all is supported by the local community as well as by Devizes Area Board, Roundway Parish Council, Wiltshire Wildlife Trust and Devizes Town

The immediate aim is to secure the land for the community before it is lost. It is the aim of Wiltshire Council to wherever possible transfer these types of assets to the community to run. However, the group is not set up as a charity and the advice is that the best option is for Roundway Parish Council (within which lies the land) to take over the ownership of the new land as it lies within their parish boundaries and they are already involved in supporting the project. However once the land is secured, all relevant partners will discuss where the asset of the existing wood and the new land should be held and what the best arrangements will be for the long term sustainability of the project.

2. When will the project take place?

There is currently a window of opportunity to purchase the land. It is hoped that this can be completed as soon as possible

3. What are the Community benefits/evidence of need/desired outcomes?

The Local Nature Reserve is already greatly valued and well used. Present users would benefit from the addition of the adjacent land for public use. The current network of paths could be extended. The topography of the site has great potential to improve use for those with disabilities –presently constrained by the steep nature of the LNR. Discussion with many regular walkers at the LNR has shown that the desire for recreational use of the new areas exists, and is a popular idea. A number of community groups are facilitated at Drew's Pond Wood e.g. Self unlimited Rowde (learning difficulties), Wiltshire Young Carers, The Well-being Group, Braeside Education Centre –the experience of these and others would be enhanced

Initial discussion with other potential user groups shows support for the proposal, and suggests that the local community would use the site in a variety of ways e.g. Wansdyke School are enthusiastic to get children involved in a Community Orchard; Drew's Pond Wood Project Volunteers are keen to undertake conservation management of the Orchard Trees and habitat, and to create new paths and seating; Drew's Park Village Association have agreed at their AGM to support this application, and expressed an interest in raising money, and in the future helping to organise community events and cricket matches. Community Orchards are a valuable asset that bring many benefits in terms of health, local food production, wildlife education, recreation. Many excellent examples exist, and we would hope to create a similar scheme.

Traditional orchards have been identified as 'priority habitat' by Natural England in the U.K Biodiversity Action Plan. The orchard in question was part of the County Asylum and first appears on 1939 edition of O.S map

4. Who will manage/be responsible for this project?

Management of the site will be taken on by the Drew's Pond Wood Community Group with support from Roundway Parish Council, Wiltshire Council and other partners.

Discussions have begun to take place with key partners including Wiltshire Wildlife Trust regarding the best way that the project can be taken forward and sustained in the future. This includes questions such as:

- Who is best placed to own all the land (Existing site included)?
- Do the current governance arrangements need to be changed?
- Do we need a business plan that includes financial arrangements to support the vision?
- Who needs to be involved – Aster? WWT? Etc.

5. Costs/quotes/ match funding?

The land on offer is currently being valued. An offer of £20k has been made by another developer and we are therefore working on matching this offer. The current owner has indicated that this would be acceptable.

An application is currently under way with Landfill grants for £10.5k

The local community will also make a contribution of about £500

Roundway Parish Council and WWT have also indicated that they would be willing to consider providing some funding

The Devizes area board is therefore being asked to ring fence up to £5k to help purchase this land.

6. Additional information

It is recommended that £5k be ring fenced for this project but with the conditions that:

- 1) All other funding is obtained
- 2) The land is bought and kept in perpetuity for the benefit of the whole community