

## **Trees for Iffley's Glebe Field?**

Richard Vernon, FOIV. 6 August 2019.

### 1. Introduction

#### History

The Glebe Field was saved in 1996 from being built over due to the generosity of John and Joan Critchley who purchased it from the Church Commissioners and passed it to the Oxford Preservation Trust (OPT) for the benefit of Iffley Village.

#### Current Situation

The present situation is that the field is mostly left to grass and wild flowers except for a strip of old trees & undergrowth on the upper eastern part of the field. Two walnut trees were planted a few years ago below these trees, one doing well and one, having nearly died, now has four lateral branches coming into leaf. The grass both below and above the line of old trees is cut annually by a farmer, and allowed to dry before baling and removal to feed livestock. OPT's Rachel Sanderson regularly organises working parties of volunteers, from the village and outside, to clear growth of brambles, ivy on the walls and such like.

#### This Project

An Iffley resident suggested to Friends of Iffley Village that trees might be planted in the Glebe Field, as a contribution to mitigating climate change, which is driven in large part by the huge clearing of forests elsewhere. The matter was referred to me as FOIV Committee member for Greenspaces. I brought the suggestion to the attention of two most closely interested parties before raising it at the FOIV Annual General Meeting on 14<sup>th</sup> May 2019. The two parties were the Oxford Preservation Trust, who are responsible for the long term management of the Glebe Field, and Mary Tate, as representative of John and Joan Critchley whose generosity led to the field being preserved for the community rather than being built on.

The case was raised during the FOIV AGM on 14<sup>th</sup> May and a number of ideas put forward there and in subsequent emails. These were collated and put on the FOIV web site with an invitation for more views. Views covered several different forms of land use, which are summarised in the table below. A more detailed report was prepared and sent on 20<sup>th</sup> June to The Vicar, Mary Tate (for the Critchley family), FOIV Chairperson, OPT and the Rose Hill and Iffley Low Carbon group, with an invitation to comment and also to send it to others interested. Resultant suggestions have been collated under subject headings in an Annex. They range from retaining the status quo to establishing a community orchard, a mown grass sward for community events, a small woodland area and a wild flower meadow. Apart from the first they are not mutually exclusive as each needs only a portion of the field.

2. Table of Suggested Uses of Glebe Field, in declining order of likely importance to Iffley Village

<b>Id</b>	<b>Land Use</b>	<b>Positives<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Negatives</b>
1	Mown grass sward for social events	1. Allows social events 2. Needs only perhaps 30m square.	1. Needs mowing. <sup>2</sup> 2. Needs mowing early e.g. April, May, perhaps x 2 p.a. 3. Needs improved access for wheel chairs.
2	Wild Flower Meadow <sup>3</sup>	1. Insect encouragement 2. Attractive appearance 3. Can be done on any size piece(s) of the field. 4. A bee-keeper already has hives in the field.	1. Needs some knowledge and actions to favour wild flowers over grass. eg - timing of mowing, - use of Yellow Rattle flowers
3	Community Orchard	1. Local food source 2. Source for Iffley Apple Juice for Iffley shop. 3 Ameliorate climate change 4. Needs only small area. 5. Attractive appearance 6. Wildlife encouragement	1. Needs much work esp. in 1 <sup>st</sup> five years. 2. Needs mowing between trees to avoid fire risk, and preferably weeding around trees. 3. Needs some professional knowledge. 4. Need to talk to Wolvercote Community Orchard members.
4	Woodland - native trees	1. Ameliorate climate change 2. Refuge for wildlife – birds, mammals, insects	1. Needs mowing x2 per year to (a) keep fire risk low (b) permit tree growth in early years.
5	Hay field for farmer	1. Farmer managers 2. No change needed from current practice – nothing for us to do.	1. Contra ecological issues: favours meat production & precludes trees. 2. Does little if anything to favour wild flowers: grass predominates. 3. OPT has to pay farmer £500 p.a. for the work
6	Grazing for horses	1. Interesting visually 2. Possible source of income and 3. Manure for gardeners.	1. In 2014 complaints from neighbours about flies. 2. Management reported difficult to find good tenants due to the site and the lack of a shelter.

<sup>1</sup> All options maintain attraction of a 'green' field in the village.

<sup>2</sup> All options require mowing except 5. Hay field and 6. Horse grazing. Can the Village fund a motor mower, kept nearby, securely?

<sup>3</sup> See advice below from The Royal Horticultural Society.

### 3. Suggestions Received

Items in quotation marks are taken from peoples messages.

#### Social Events e.g. Summer Party

The lower grassed area has been used for a summer party, with tables and chairs set out and food prepared, sometimes with music too. It does not fit in too well with the use of the field for hay or horses. The minutes of FOIV Committee meeting of 18-3-2019 report that the Glebe Field was 'impractical' for FOIV's 2019 Summer Party (grass too long) and for this and other reasons the Committee agreed to drop the event for this year and revisit the matter in 2020.

#### Trees

The nearby Oriel College field off Meadow Lane, has been planted with common traditional English tree species. "A square well-spaced pattern would allow tractor mowing in two directions, advantageous to both hay-making and avoidance of the fire-risk of a build-up of undergrowth. It would be good for carbon fixing and hence amelioration of climate change. But it would not look 'natural'. A slightly off-set rhomboid pattern might look better and still allow easy mowing between rows in 2 directions."

The Rose Hill and Iffley Low Carbon group already have a programme for tree planting and could be valuable partners. They point to the importance of consultation with the nearby community, ideally seeking their involvement.

#### Community Orchard

Several asked whether a community orchard could be considered. It would occupy a small part of the Glebe while leaving space for a mown area for social events and other land uses.

Lorna Froud, a recent arrival in Iffley, reports that in their local community of Earley, near Reading, there were various projects to establish community orchards. They helped develop an understanding of the links between growing food and healthy eating, provided a focus for communities and increased the numbers of rare native fruit varieties. Trees were sourced from the National Fruit Collection at Brogdale ([www.nationalfruitcollection.org.uk](http://www.nationalfruitcollection.org.uk)). She said too that the Orchard Project ([www.theorchardproject.org.uk](http://www.theorchardproject.org.uk)) provides support and advice to communities and local authorities wanting to plan and plant an orchard. They can help design, plant and maintain community orchards and are great at training local volunteers. Often these projects were supported with funds from the Big Lottery Fund Local Food Programme.

It was suggested that Iffley lacks sufficient younger people to manage a community orchard 'well'. Subsequent yields are much improved with skilled pruning in early years. Successful such orchards such as one at Wolvercote, probably have many people involved. It would be worth visiting and discussing with its members. "If you want to see a beautifully functioning community orchard I think the one at Wolvercote opposite the Perch is delightful." See <https://www.oxfordpreservation.org.uk/content/community-orchard-and-allotments-lower-wolvercote-opposite-trout-pub> from which the following is copied.

In 1934, the land opposite The Trout pub was under threat from development. OPT stepped in and bought it with the support of Philip Leslie Agnew, the publisher of Punch, in memory of his son, Ewan Agnew. Part was turned into allotments, still used today, and 60 years later, in 1994, the remaining area became a Community Orchard. The orchard was planted by the Wolvercote Tree Group, and today many rare and unusual apples, pears and quinces flourish, many of them local varieties.

The easiest fruit to grow is apple. But Iffley has many apple trees in peoples' gardens such that formerly, I am told, there was an apple surplus. This has been reduced now with the successful Iffley Shop apple juice project, to which this community orchard could contribute.

In Meadow Lane there is a stand of 10 fruit trees recently planted by the Friends of Meadow Lane Nature Park. "At Friends of Meadow Lane Nature Park (MLNP) we are very much in favour of community involvement in local Green Spaces, and like the idea of a Community Orchard being planted at the Glebe Field. At Meadow Lane we have just, with the Council's help, cleared a big hole in an enormous bramble

patch and planted 8 locally-sourced, apple trees, all native to this region, and two other fruit trees, to make a mini orchard. We plan to plant some more next winter.”

“Friends of Meadow Lane Nature Park are in the process of establishing a small orchard area within the Meadow Lane Nature Park, and our first ten trees are in the ground - mainly apples, plus a Blaisdon plum (donated by one resident) and damson tree. We hope to expand it year by year. An important benefit from a global warming perspective would be to make 'carbon free' local fruit available, so avoiding all the emissions in growing, packing, transporting and storing fruit using industrial supply chains.”

“my own opinion is that to provide the greatest benefits to local people and the environment, fruit trees should be planted. Depending on the number of trees there is space for, given the need to keep a good area of open grassland, this could create a 'community orchard' with Apple Day events etc, or just remain a low-key local resource.”

In the case of an orchard, there may be a risk of theft of fruit. Better to site an orchard behind the row of trees, out of sight. Another thought better in the front part of the field in full view of the road.

Ben Raskin’s book *The Community Garden Handbook* (2017, £10) is a useful reference for planning such a project.

### Climate Change Implications

One pointed out that trees absorb carbon dioxide thus helping reduce the threat of climate change whereas cutting hay for cattle exacerbates it through their production of methane.

### Wild Flowers

“It seems to me that it is a large enough area to have a wild flower meadow, a tree area and a mown area for social events for the use of the village which is what I think the Crichtleys hoped it would be for. The latter does not have to be huge. The last FOIV party there was "lost" in such a huge area. Also there is the problem of access for people in wheelchairs as the entrance does not make this easy.”

Joanna Mathews, an amateur botanist, and Richard Vernon, examined the Glebe Field on 21<sup>st</sup> May 2019 for wild flowers, with the assistance for a short time from Merlin Porter of Rose Hill. Fifteen flower species were ‘identified’ (without taking specimens) and recorded. Grasses were not identified but constituted by far the greater bulk of the open field vegetation. The presence of nettles in some patches indicates higher fertility so could be used for trees but avoided for a wild flower area.

Wild flowers are already recognised as a component of the Glebe Field but they could be provided with an area where they would receive greater encouragement by enhancing their competitiveness over the usually more dominant grasses. There has been a catastrophic reduction in insects, including bees, in the UK over the last half century and wild flowers contribute to their welfare. The Royal Horticultural Society has useful advice on the establishment of wild flower meadows - <https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profile?pid=446>.

Royal Horticultural Society on Wild Flower Meadows on its website

- **Established spring-flowering meadows:** Cut in July and for the remainder of the summer to reduce the vigour of coarse grasses and to allow flowers such as cowslips, fritillary, lady's smock, selfheal and bugle to prosper. Leave un-mown from February to July.
- **Established summer-flowering meadows:** Don't mow until late August or September, after wildflowers such as knapweed, devil's bit scabious and lady's bedstraw have set seed. Use this summer-flowering meadow regime for meadows with plants flowering at various times, including spring and summer species.
- **For meadows at all stages:**
  - It is usually a good idea to leave the initial mowings in situ for a few days to allow seed to drop to the ground but then it is important to collect mowings to reduce soil fertility.
  - Aim for the first cut to be 5-7.5cm (2-3in) high. Subsequent cuts can be lower.

Coincidentally, Monty Don presented a BBC TV programme on the importance of wildflower meadows to the wider environment, on Wed 12<sup>th</sup> July 2019.

It can be viewed at

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/m0006nz2/gardeners-world-2019-episode-18>

### Grazing Animals

At the 9 December 2013 meeting of FOIV it was noted that residents living close to the Glebe Field had contacted JE (Chair) with complaints about poor care of the field by the tenants (failure to remove manure, and problems with mud, trees and walls). There followed a meeting with the neighbours, attended by JE, RV and the Vicar and Mary Tate representing the Critchley family, and subsequently with representatives of OPT and Savills who were contracted to manage the letting of the field. The field's location, lacking nearby riding pathways and a shelter for the animals, meant it was difficult to let the site and find good tenants.

In recent discussions about alternative land use options the issue of flies due to horses was again raised. It seems when horses had been there, they had had a tendency to collect on the North side of the Glebe Field, where they caused a nuisance to local householders.

### Status Quo

Mary Tate, representing the current generation of the Critchley family, reported "We all agree that the Glebe Field should remain a rural open space and we do not support either the planting of trees or the establishment of a community orchard."

## 4. Conclusion

The current generation of the Critchley family's preference is given above. It's not clear to me how village social events requiring a mown sward would fit in with this and with the current practice of hay making. Other suggestions cover various uses, which are not mutually exclusive as most require only a part of the Glebe Field.

A community orchard, with perhaps 10 – 20 fruit trees, would not need much area, nor would an area set aside for social events. A woodland area of native trees might be larger. An area for social events would need to be adjacent to the entrance and would require early mowing in time for such events, and improvements to the field access for wheel chairs.

Such uses would allow the rest of the area for a wild flower meadow and if the Summer Flowering model, as in the above RHS text, might still be compatible with mowing for hay by a farmer, though he should be consulted on the minimum area to be worth his while along with the OPT payment he receives.

Proposals for the management of OPTs places are considered by the Trust's Land Committee which meets on a quarterly basis. OPT consults with its neighbours and the local community if significant changes to management are proposed and this would be the case in Iffley where the glebe is so such an important village asset by the church and there are so many stakeholders. If a change is what is wanted and agreed, OPT would then work with everyone to make the alterations. Regular volunteer commitment to site management on a weekly and monthly basis is essential at many of OPTs places including the Community Orchard at Godstow, nature reserves at Wolvercote Lakes, Heyford Meadow and Simons Land, and in the wild gardens and woods at Boars Hill.