



From a seed of an idea; to a community project that bears real fruit.

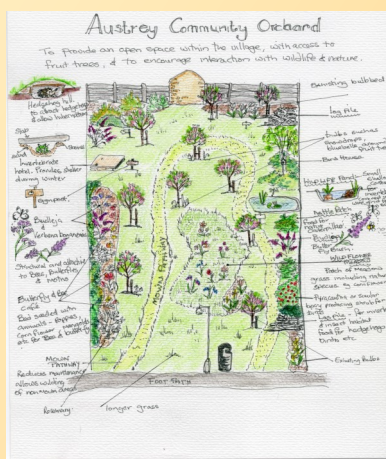


Sometimes an opportunity comes along that is just too good to miss, it might be a little scary, but you feel that, with some work and dedication, it might be able to create something special. During the NDP Review, a suggestion had been made that it would be wonderful to have a Community Orchard in our midst. This project started with a government fund to support local tree planting initiatives to commemorate the Coronation of King Charles III. Community groups were offered chance to grow their own King's Or-chards for free with a grant from the Coronation Living Heritage Fund. As there was an unloved and uninspiring patch of land available, in the village, off the appropriately named Orchard Close



all the signs seemed to be suggesting that the Parish Council give it a go! A successful application to the fund was soon sent off and the council gathered ideas about what sort of thing the community would like to see. Overwhelmingly, the interest was in supporting nature creating a haven for insects and wildlife and providing a welcoming space for all Austrey residents to enjoy.

Once the grant was successful, a group of village volunteers spent many hours clearing the plot of old and forgotten plants and bushes. The heritage varieties of apple and pear trees were provided and planted in their new home and the Community Orchard was up and running!



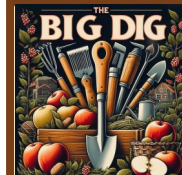
In the spirit of all good makeovers, a plan was created with a view to making the most out of the site, creating habitats for vertebrates and invertebrates, and planting in a way that was sustainable and practical. The plan included a "bug café" of annuals and perennials, a wildflower meadow to attract pollinators, log pile "mini beast hotels, hedgehog houses and allowed for "making room for nature " by retaining patches of nettles, ivy and brambles which are important food plants to indigenous creatures.

To get equipment and plants, a call was put out to the community for donations of plants, logs feeders, bulbs and seeds as we needed to start again from scratch. Newton

Regis Garden Centre were first to sponsor the project, with discounts and donation of plants and compost, which was a brilliant start to the makeover., and their support was invaluable. As usual, Austrey residents were generous with their time and donations

and, as village gardeners started their Spring Garden maintenance, plants for the orchard poured in. All that was needed now was people to plant them!

After a long wet winter, it was a delight to welcome spring with the first blossom on the Austrey Community Orchard apple trees!



Austrey volunteers dig in!



In May we invited volunteers to take part in the first Community "Big Dig" event and a brilliant turn out of eager diggers turned up to create planting spaces and fill them with flowers and herbs.

The younger gardeners worked so hard and it was so rewarding to see how they were willing to get involved, digging out weeds, scattering seeds to create a wildflower meadow and barrowing loads of bark chippings as mulch.



Work continued through the summer and the Orchard blossomed into life, especially the wildflower meadow created by the children. Benches were donated and a bird feeder station which were upscaled with painted wild creatures.



During the summer holiday, Austrey youngsters were invited to enter an art competition, the subject was wildlife and the winner would cut the ribbon at the orchard's official opening in September.

The quality of entries was excellent, with all the entries showing brilliant creativity. The winners of each age group received prizes (sponsored by Asda) and all entrants received special Austrey Orchard wild flower seed packets, which were presented at the opening on Saturday September 7th. The overall winner Dexter cut the ribbon in the presence of, Local MP Rachael Taylor, Parish and District councillors and a host of Austrey villagers.



Cakes were sold in support of the Austrey Community's Remembrance project and all visitors had the opportunity to meet and learn about Bramble the owl, who joined the celebrations with her handler Sandra. The first major event at the orchard and the first fruits on the trees arrived together!



Austrey Orchard Remembrance Bed

Finally in 2024, as part of the village Remembrance Day project, a new raised flower bed was created to introduce a small place of peace and contemplation. The new bed includes rosemary for remembrance, a small collection of roses and cyclamen and is underplanted with bulbs.

Hopefully, visitors to the Orchard will find that it is a lovely place of calm, to recollect and remember loved ones and spare a thought for all those who have suffered as a result of military conflict across the world.

