

Runcorn Road Recreation Ground

Community Orchard & Wellbeing Proposal

Prepared by: Restore Habitat UK

Prepared for: Barnton Parish Council and Cheshire West & Chester stakeholders

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Proposed concept layout showing orchard planting, growing beds, berry corridor, seating and retained open recreational space.

Proposal Vision

A community-led proposal to enhance biodiversity, wellbeing and local engagement while retaining public recreational use.

Website: restorehabitat.uk **Email:** info@restorehabitat.uk

Executive Summary

Restore Habitat UK proposes the enhancement of Runcorn Road Recreation Ground through the creation of a community orchard, wildlife-friendly green space and wellbeing area designed to benefit both residents and nature while retaining the site's existing recreational use.

The proposal has been developed in response to growing community interest in accessible outdoor spaces that support mental wellbeing, biodiversity and positive community engagement. The aim is to create a welcoming environment that can be enjoyed by all age groups while preserving the existing play area and informal recreational space currently used by local residents.

The proposed enhancements include

- Community orchard planting
- Raised growing beds
- Biodiversity improvements for pollinators and birds
- Retention of open recreational space
- Native berry and wildlife planting
- Seating and quiet wellbeing areas
- Volunteer and educational opportunities

The project is intended to remain primarily community-focused and accessible to residents during daytime hours. The design has been intentionally revised following community feedback to ensure that informal recreation and general open space use is retained within the site.

Importantly, Restore Habitat UK is not currently seeking significant financial contribution from the Parish Council for the delivery of the project. The charity intends to pursue grant funding, sponsorship opportunities, volunteer support and donated materials where possible.

Summary Outcome

The proposal seeks to provide long-term environmental and social value through improved biodiversity, enhanced wellbeing, education, volunteering and a peaceful inclusive outdoor environment.

About the Site & Opportunity



Current view of Runcorn Road Recreation Ground showing the existing open character and surrounding residential context.

About Runcorn Road Recreation Ground

Runcorn Road Recreation Ground has long served as a valued local green space within the community and continues to provide an important area for informal recreation, children's play and outdoor enjoyment.

- Existing public green space
- Quiet and peaceful setting
- Accessibility by foot for nearby residents
- Established play area
- Natural separation from busy roads
- Existing community attachment and history

Why this proposal was developed

Restore Habitat UK identified the site as having strong potential to support greater biodiversity, community food growing, wellbeing activities, educational opportunities, volunteer engagement and increased positive use of green space.

Core Principle

The proposal has been designed around the principle of enhancement rather than replacement.

Existing Considerations & Community Need

The proposal recognises several important considerations raised through community discussion and previous council conversations. These considerations have directly influenced the revised concept layout and phased approach.

- Narrow site access
- Limited nearby parking
- The importance of retaining open play space
- Long-term maintenance requirements
- Ensuring accessibility where possible
- Preserving the peaceful character of the area

Community Need

Across the UK there is increasing recognition of the importance of accessible green spaces, nature-connected wellbeing, outdoor community engagement, informal recreational environments and biodiversity enhancement within villages and urban areas.

Projects that combine recreation, nature and community participation are increasingly recognised as valuable assets that support both environmental goals and public wellbeing. This proposal seeks to deliver those benefits at a local level for the residents of Barnton.



Current view showing the retained open character of the site and the opportunity for sensitive enhancement.

Community Interest & Engagement

Initial public engagement regarding the proposal demonstrated strong levels of community interaction and interest within a short period of time.

Metric	Outcome
Positive reactions/interactions	108+
Public comments/discussion	70+
Volunteer offers/support	Multiple
Local media engagement	Achieved
Community groups engaged	Multiple
Layout revisions following feedback	Completed

Community members publicly expressed support for biodiversity improvements, community orchards, seating areas, food growing and mental wellbeing initiatives. The proposal additionally generated local media interest, discussion with councillors and stakeholders, and engagement with community groups and organisations.

Supportive comments commonly referenced the value of community-led green spaces, positive impacts on mental wellbeing, increased biodiversity opportunities, community pride and educational opportunities for younger generations.

“The level of engagement demonstrated clear community interest in improving and positively utilising the recreation ground for future generations.”

Community Feedback, Considerations & Proposed Solutions

Restore Habitat UK recognises that any proposal involving a valued public green space must carefully consider the views, concerns and priorities of local residents. The revised concept layout and proposed delivery approach have been developed with these considerations in mind.

Consideration Raised	Proposed Response
Retention of recreation space	Restore Habitat UK has liaised with residents and taken onboard local knowledge regarding how the space is currently used. Following feedback, the revised layout retains a larger open recreation area at the lower section of the site which residents felt would remain suitable for informal recreation and play. Consideration could also be given to removing the existing blue MUGA and replacing it with a goal post positioned backing onto the orchard area, helping reduce the likelihood of balls leaving the recreation ground.
Parking limitations	The recreation ground is already publicly accessible and current parking issues appear limited. Concerns raised by nearby residents regarding future parking pressures are acknowledged. Should parking become an ongoing issue, there may be scope for discussions regarding potential residents-only parking measures in surrounding areas if deemed appropriate by the relevant authority.
Access constraints	The Parish Council currently obtains access to the site approximately six times per year through neighbouring land. By coordinating larger material deliveries alongside these existing access arrangements, it is believed that site access for works and improvements can be managed without significant issue.
Long-term maintenance	Restore Habitat UK intends to coordinate volunteer involvement, phased implementation, grant funding opportunities and community participation to support ongoing maintenance and upkeep of the site.

Design Changes Made Following Feedback

- Increasing the retained open grass area
- Reducing the footprint of planting zones
- Retaining informal recreation space
- Positioning orchard planting away from central recreation areas
- Maintaining open visibility across the site
- Creating a more balanced mix of recreation, biodiversity and wellbeing space

This approach aims to ensure the recreation ground continues to function as a flexible and welcoming community space while also delivering environmental and social improvements.



Revised layout showing the relationship between proposed planting, retained recreation space, growing beds and seating.

“The proposal has evolved through community engagement and aims to enhance the recreation ground while respecting its existing role within the community.”

Proposed Site Layout & Features

The revised concept layout has been designed to balance existing recreational use, biodiversity enhancement, community wellbeing, food growing opportunities, accessibility, visibility and long-term practicality.

Community Orchard Area

The orchard area would consist of a mixture of fruit-bearing trees selected for community enjoyment, seasonal interest, pollinator support, educational value and long-term sustainability. Potential species may include apple, pear, plum, cherry and damson.

Berry & Wildlife Corridors

Native berry-producing shrubs and wildlife-friendly planting would support birds and pollinators, create seasonal food sources, improve biodiversity and provide natural visual enhancement.

Raised Growing Beds

Raised beds would provide opportunities for community food growing, educational projects, seasonal planting, volunteer involvement and intergenerational activities.

Seating & Wellbeing Spaces

Quiet seating areas would support reflection, informal social interaction and outdoor wellbeing activities while maintaining passive oversight of the surrounding recreation ground and play area.

Walking Path, Seating & Retained Recreation Space

Orchard Perimeter Walking Path

To improve accessibility, usability and community enjoyment of the orchard space, the proposal includes a non-planted perimeter pathway surrounding the orchard and planting areas.

- Allow residents to comfortably walk around the orchard
- Create a natural circulation route through the site
- Help maintain separation between planting zones and recreation areas
- Improve maintenance access
- Provide opportunities for informal exercise and wellbeing walks

Seating Areas

Small seating areas and benches would be positioned periodically along the perimeter path and throughout quieter sections of the site. These seating areas would encourage relaxation, social interaction and quiet enjoyment of nature.

Retained Recreation Space

A substantial open grass area has intentionally been retained within the revised layout to continue supporting children's play, open recreational use and community flexibility.



Concept view showing how planting, growing areas and open space could work together while retaining the green character of the site.

Community, Wellbeing & Educational Opportunities

The proposal aims to create more than simply an orchard or planting area. The wider vision is to establish a flexible outdoor community space capable of supporting a range of positive activities for residents of different ages and backgrounds.

Mental Health & Wellbeing Opportunities

- Informal wellbeing walks
- Outdoor mindfulness sessions
- Quiet reflection spaces
- Seasonal volunteer days
- Gardening and planting groups
- Community support meetups
- Nature engagement sessions

The recreation ground has the potential to provide a calm and welcoming environment that supports both physical and mental wellbeing within the local community.

Educational & Youth Opportunities

- Tree planting days
- Community gardening
- Bird and pollinator monitoring
- Wildlife identification sessions
- Seasonal harvest activities
- Outdoor learning experiences

Intergenerational Community Use

By retaining open recreation space while introducing seating, walking routes and environmental features, the recreation ground can continue supporting multiple forms of community use simultaneously.

Project Delivery & Implementation

Restore Habitat UK proposes a phased and community-led approach to delivering the project in order to minimise disruption, allow gradual development, maintain flexibility, encourage community involvement and ensure the site remains usable throughout implementation.

Phase 1 - Site Preparation & Initial Improvements

Initial site clean-up and preparation, marking out pathways and planting areas, installation of initial seating, creation of raised growing beds and volunteer engagement days.

Phase 2 - Orchard & Wildlife Planting

Orchard tree planting, berry and wildlife corridor planting, pollinator-friendly planting, additional seating installation and informal perimeter pathway establishment.

Phase 3 - Community Engagement & Wellbeing Activities

Community planting days, nature-based wellbeing sessions, gardening groups, educational activities, seasonal community events and volunteer maintenance days.

Delivery Principle

The intention is to deliver improvements progressively rather than through large-scale redevelopment works.

Funding, Costs & Financial Approach

Restore Habitat UK recognises the financial pressures currently faced by local councils and community organisations. As such, the proposal has been designed with a strong emphasis on phased delivery, volunteer involvement, grant funding opportunities, community support and sustainable long-term management.

At this stage, Restore Habitat UK is not seeking significant direct financial contribution from the Parish Council for the delivery of the project.

Proposed funding approach

- Environmental grants
- Sponsorship initiatives
- Volunteer labour and support
- Community funding opportunities
- Donated materials

Financial Principle

This approach aims to minimise financial burden while maximising community benefit.

Long-Term Security & Partnership Proposal

Why long-term security is required

Restore Habitat UK's proposal is intended as a long-term community and environmental investment rather than a temporary project. The nature of orchard establishment, biodiversity improvement and community infrastructure means that meaningful benefits would develop gradually over a number of years.

For this reason, long-term security of tenure is considered essential to allow the project to become viable and sustainable.

Importance of a long-term licence agreement

- Provide stability for future planning
- Support applications for external grant funding
- Protect environmental improvements made to the site
- Allow responsible long-term investment into the site
- Encourage volunteer and community confidence
- Create accountability regarding ongoing maintenance and management

Why a 25-year licence is considered appropriate

The proposed 25-year term reflects the lifespan and establishment period of orchard planting, the gradual nature of biodiversity improvement, the need for phased investment, the expectations commonly associated with external funding opportunities and the desire to create lasting community value rather than temporary improvements.

Governance, Management & Responsibilities

Restore Habitat UK proposes a structured and community-focused approach to the long-term management of the recreation ground improvements. The charity would seek to work collaboratively with the Parish Council to ensure the site remains safe, accessible, well-maintained, community-focused and environmentally beneficial.

Public Liability & Risk Management

Restore Habitat UK currently holds public liability insurance covering volunteer and community activities.

- Risk assessments where appropriate
- Volunteer coordination and oversight
- Method statements for organised works
- Safeguarding considerations for organised activities involving children or vulnerable groups where required

Ongoing Partnership & Review

Restore Habitat UK welcomes ongoing dialogue with councillors, community feedback, partnership working and periodic review of the project's progress and operation.

Conclusion & Request for Support

Restore Habitat UK believes the Runcorn Road Recreation Ground presents a unique opportunity to create a long-term community asset that enhances biodiversity, community wellbeing, positive outdoor engagement, environmental education, informal recreation and community pride.

Request to the Parish Council

- Supporting the proposal in principle
- Supporting collaborative development of the project
- Working in partnership to deliver long-term community and environmental improvements
- Entering into discussions regarding a long-term licence agreement
- Allowing the charity to pursue external funding opportunities linked to the site

Final Statement

This proposal represents an opportunity to create something lasting for the village: a greener space, a healthier space, a more biodiverse space and a more community-focused space.

Reflection, Wellbeing & Community Resilience

Across the UK, communities are increasingly facing pressures linked to mental health and wellbeing, rising cost of living, reduced access to nature, declining biodiversity, loss of traditional orchards and wildlife habitats, and increased social isolation.

Mental Health & Nature Connection

Research consistently demonstrates strong links between access to green spaces and improved wellbeing. Studies have linked regular access to nature with reduced stress and anxiety, improved mood, increased physical activity, reduced social isolation and improved community connection.

Decline of Orchards & Wildlife Habitat

Traditional orchards and wildlife-rich community green spaces have declined significantly across the UK over recent decades. The proposed orchard and wildlife planting areas would help increase pollinator-friendly planting, provide seasonal food sources for birds and insects, introduce additional tree cover and improve biodiversity value within the site.

Children, Nutrition & Access To Fruit

National studies have repeatedly highlighted concerns regarding fruit and vegetable consumption amongst children across the UK. Community orchard and growing initiatives can help encourage healthier eating habits, increase curiosity around food growing, improve engagement with nature and make fresh produce more visible and accessible within the community.

Appendix A - Potential Community Activities & Age Group Engagement

Early Years & Young Children

- Nature trails
- Seasonal planting days
- Sensory nature activities
- Pollinator education
- Bug hunts
- Wildlife spotting
- Pumpkin and sunflower growing
- Outdoor storytelling sessions

Older Children & Teenagers

- Wildlife photography
- Conservation volunteering
- Outdoor wellbeing sessions
- Gardening projects
- Seasonal events
- Duke of Edinburgh-style volunteering opportunities
- Community project participation
- Informal social and seating areas

Adults & Families

- Community gardening
- Seasonal harvest activities
- Informal social gatherings
- Volunteer projects
- Orchard maintenance days
- Nature walks
- Outdoor wellbeing sessions
- Family planting days

Appendix A - Continued

Elderly Residents

- Quiet seating and reflection
- Community gardening
- Informal social interaction
- Intergenerational activities
- Gentle walking routes
- Wildlife observation
- Wellbeing groups

Mental Health & Wellbeing Opportunities

- Nature-based wellbeing walks
- Informal peer support sessions
- Quiet outdoor reflection spaces
- Gardening and conservation groups
- Mindfulness in nature activities

Community Principles

- Inclusive
- Community-led
- Informal and accessible
- Intergenerational
- Nature-focused
- Wellbeing-oriented



Illustrative view of the type of planted community space that could be created through phased delivery.