

MEETING PAPER

Subject: Gunton Community Park Community Garden

Meeting: Extraordinary Assets, Inclusion and Development (AID) Committee Meeting

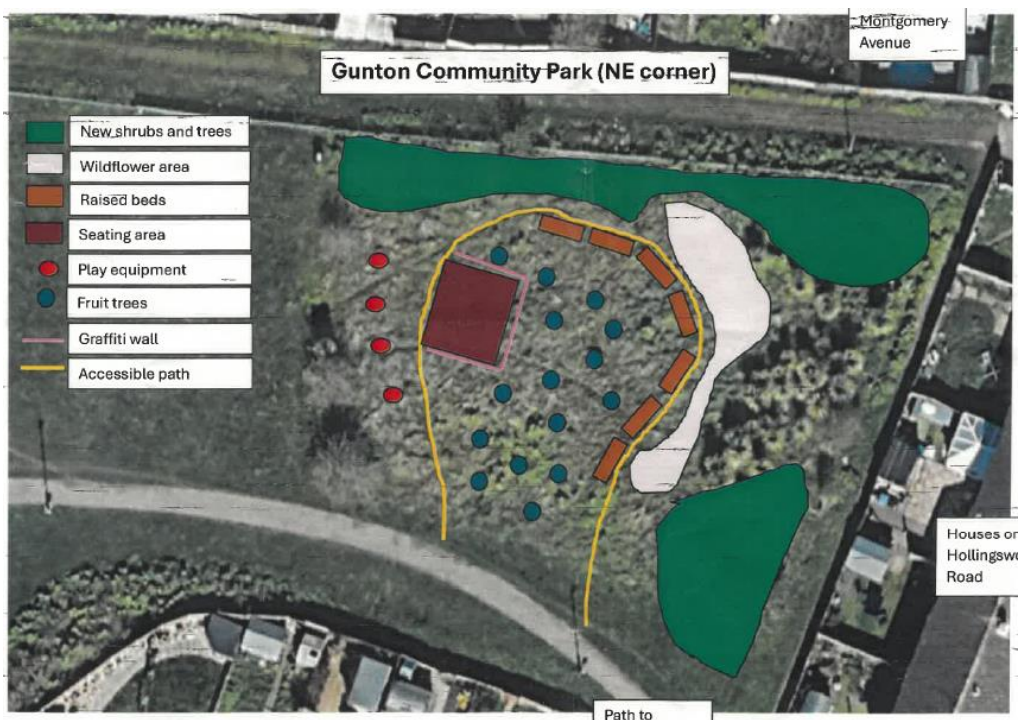
Date: 13 March 2025

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~/NON-CONFIDENTIAL

The Town Council received an approach from The Conservation Volunteers (TCV) in February 2024, following their discussions with the Gunton Estate Residents' Meeting Hall's Management Committee, to transform the far north-east corner of Gunton Community Park into a reflective space/community garden/food growing area.

It was understood TCV would work to establish a group of local volunteers to develop and maintain the site; a group which would become self-supporting over time, guided by both the Management Committee and the Town Council.

The AID Committee gave its support for community engagement to take place, and after some amendment of the initial draft plans put forward, gave its support to the following broad design:



Officers met with a representative with TCV on site and were also supportive of this approach, in the absence of more detail at that stage. In giving its approval of this approach, the AID Committee asked officers to liaise with TCV on the detail of what would be planted as part of the first phase of works.

TCV provided the following list of trees/shrubs:

Rhamnus frangula	40-60cm	1u1	25
<i>Alder Buckthorn</i>			
<i>Last stocks available</i>			
Prunus padus (UK201)	40-60cm	1+0	1
<i>Bird Cherry</i>			
<i>SOLD OUT, sorry</i>			
Malus sylvestris (UK403)	40-60cm	1+0	25
<i>Common Crab Apple</i>			
Cornus sanguinea (UK404)	25-50cm	1+0	25
<i>Common Dogwood</i>			
Acer campestre (UK403)	40-60cm	1+0	25
<i>Field Maple</i>			
Salix caprea (UK403)	40-60cm	1+0	25
<i>Goat Willow</i>			
Viburnum opulus	20-40cm	1+0	25
<i>Guelder Rose</i>			
Crataegus monogyna (UK406)	40-60cm	1+0	25
<i>Hawthorn</i>			
Corylus avellana (UK405)	40-60cm	1+0	25
<i>Hazel</i>			
Ilex aquifolium	30-50cm	p9	1
<i>Holly</i>			
<i>SOLD OUT, sorry</i>			
Quercus robur (UK403)	30-50cm	1+0	25
<i>English Oak</i>			
Ligustrum vulgare (UK405)	40-60cm	1u1	50
<i>Common Privet</i>			
Sorbus aucuparia (UK202)	25-50cm	1+0	50
<i>Mountain Ash/Rowan</i>			
Pinus sylvestris (UK302)	15-30cm	Cell grown	40
<i>Scots Pine</i>			
Betula pendula (UK107)	20-40cm	1+0	50
<i>Silver Birch</i>			
Euonymus europaeus (UK403)	60-80cm	1u1	25
<i>Spindleberry</i>			

Castanea sativa (UK40) <i>Sweet Chestnut</i>	40-60cm	1+0	25
Juglans nigra <i>Black Walnut</i> <i>Substitute for Juglans regia which is SOLD OUT</i>	40-60cm	1u1	25
Viburnum lantana <i>Wayfaring Tree</i> <i>SOLD OUT, sorry</i>	40-60cm	1+0	1
Prunus avium (UK403) <i>Wild Cherry</i>	40-60cm	1+0	50

Officers were surprised to see the sheer number of trees TCV are proposing to plant on this small site, and would consider several of these species are not appropriate for this environment. Just as an example, Scots Pines can grow to 60ft, and the plan is to plant 40 of them.

In addition to this, the trees TCV are proposing to plant are only 15 – 80cm in height. As the Town Council knows from experience, such small and vulnerable trees require a significant amount of nurturing and watering, and are unlikely to survive in an exposed public open space. The Town Council has already moved to planting more established trees in its parks and open spaces. We have asked East Suffolk Council's Tree Officer to comment on the proposals and are awaiting his feedback.

TCV are proposing to use a Japanese planting method, where the trees are planted in high density, but have acknowledged that not all will survive, and have only offered three volunteer task days over the next few months to tend to the site, which means that day-to-day nurturing of the young trees will fall to our Grounds Maintenance Team, which was not what was anticipated when the AID Committee gave its support to this project. With there being no ready water supply at the site, regular maintenance of the garden will be difficult, and the volume of water required to be transported to site on a regular basis would go against the Town Council's climate and environmental policies.

As referenced above, when the AID Committee gave its approval to the proposals in principle, it was understood that a group of local volunteers was to be established to take on this project and others in the town. Officers understand from the Management Committee there has been little interest from local residents in working on this project, therefore responsibility for the maintenance of the community garden remains unclear.

Officers outlined their concerns to TCV and offered a site visit to review the plans in context, with a view to amending the plans and working out a way forward. This was declined at the time, but TCV were insistent they had to publish dates for work to commence on site. The Grounds Maintenance Team have been undertaking site preparation works as and when time allows, so we advised that the dates would have to be as late in March as possible (I understand 25, 26 and 27 March have now been published as the dates for works to begin on site), however, the Grounds

Maintenance Team does not consider the site to be in a suitable condition for planting at this stage.

Officers do not consider the plans in their current form to be feasible. For other sites, we have previously ordered a mixed palette of established fruit trees, and could do the same with ornamental species as well. We need a steer from this Committee as to how it would like to proceed. Officers would suggest an orchard-style community garden, with a wildflower area and 20 or so ornamental trees spread out across the site. Ornamental species will not grow too big and crowd the site. Planting should be perennial and low maintenance, and the garden should become as self-sufficient as possible, particularly as it is looking unlikely there will be a regular volunteer group tending to the site.