

## Background

Over more than 15 years the Irvine Road Area Residents' Association worked to protect the Irvine Road Orchard through a succession of campaigns. Most notably, it secured a Tree Preservation Order on the trees within and surrounding the Orchard and succeeded in getting the Orchard designated as a Local Wildlife Site in the Local Development Plan.

However, a change of ownership triggered a series of events that led to the community, led by the Residents' Association, to form a new charity that negotiated a 50-year lease with the new owner, a property developer. The charity took on the lease began May 2021 and we also secured a five-year option to purchase a 999 year lease for £45,000. The Orchard now covers 60% of the original area while the remaining 40% is given over to residential development that has now been built.

The charity's purpose is “to promote, for the benefit of the public, the conservation, protection and improvement of the physical and natural environment of the Irvine Road Orchard, Colchester”.

In addition, this is very much a community orchard for the benefit of residents of the local community and, increasingly, much wider. Monthly work parties attract 10-15 people undertaking management of the site of which the trees are a historical feature with many of the orchard trees dating back an estimated 60+ years, with unimproved grassland as well as new and old boundary hedges that, together, make up this wildlife haven. In suburban Colchester, the site holds a sizeable stag beetle population, foxes, two types of woodpeckers, visiting badgers and deer, and a range of fungi and insects that we are continuing to discover.

We hold open days to share and improve awareness and understanding of the site including ‘nature trail days’ for younger people and the community production of apple juice attracted over 100 people. The site has been used by the community for training events such as fruit tree pruning, fungi identification, visits by local councillors and the local civic society as well as initial visits by the local natural history society with a view to further wildlife surveys. The Orchard Facebook page (see below) provides testament to the benefits that the Orchard is generating.

In securing a long term lease the Irvine Road Community Orchard would retain its status as a community asset for local residents and the wider community, and bring significant wildlife benefits close to where those people live and, increasingly, work. Societal benefits will include enhancing social cohesion (residents with a common purpose), enhancing health and well-being (by providing activities that benefit peoples physical and mental health) and environmental benefits (securing an important wildlife site)

Irvine Road Community Orchard is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation, charity number 1183649

Further details and accounts can be viewed from Charity Commission website at: <https://register-of-charities.charitycommission.gov.uk/charity-search/-/charity-details/5134302>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/category/community/Irvine-Road-Community-Orchard-926338227389815/>