

**WEST SWINDON PARISH COUNCIL****Update on Backlands****1. Background**

- 1.1 West Swindon Parish Council set up a Backlands Working Party in 2018 to review former play areas and backland areas. The purpose was to agree a plan of action to improve these sites or agree a longer term plan of maintenance.
- 1.2 The Backlands Working Party concluded that many of the spaces were former play areas and as a result included infrastructure such as walls and pyramids that proved to be difficult and expensive to remove.
- 1.3 A number of meetings were held with representatives from Swindon Borough Council including grounds maintenance, housing and community forest. It has proved difficult to secure a commitment from Swindon Borough Council to agree steps for future maintenance. The Parish Council has committed to build reserves to enable some investment in these spaces.
- 1.4 In the last 18 months the Working Party has met infrequently however other initiatives such as the Allotment Working Party and work within the Planning & Environment Committee regarding tree planting and community orchards have each identified opportunities to improve backland and former play areas with community gardening or community orchards. A summary is set out below:

Site	Action
<b>Group 1</b>	
Affleck Close	Potential for community orchard planting
Beaulieu Close	Potential for community gardens/shared allotmenting
Deerhurst Way	Potential for community orchard planting
Edington Close	Potential for community orchard planting
Ely Close	Potential for community planting in brick shrub beds
Kirkstall Close	No action determined
Longthorpe Close	No action determined
Markenfield	Potential for community orchard planting
Salzgitter Close	Potential for community orchard planting
Stamford Close	Potential for community orchard planting
Stansfield Close	Potential for community orchard planting
Warneford Close	Potential for community gardening

Site	Action
<b>Group 2</b>	
Brandon Close	Potential for community orchard planting
Chandos Close	Potential for community orchard planting
Crawford Close	Potential for community gardening
Cowdrey Close	No action determined
Gainsborough Way	No action determined
Godolphin Close	Potential for community gardening or return to shrub bed
Sidney Close	No action determined

Site	Action
<b>Group 3</b>	

Castleton Road	No action determined
Oasthouse Close	No action determined

- 1.5 Community orchard and general tree/hedgerow planting is a key initiative that is being undertaken in partnership with Swindon Borough Council Community Forest team who are leading on the acquisition of trees/saplings, underground checks and landowner permissions including Swindon Borough Council. This is a significant resource that makes orchard planting potentially achievable. It does however mean that the Parish Council must work in partnership and within the framework and timeframes enabled by the Community Forest Team.
  
- 1.6 The Parish Council would most likely need to invest in the removal of paving, debris and bricked areas to open up some of these spaces for planting. The Council's earmarked reserves for backland areas could be used to support the cost of this. Costs for updating brick planters for community gardening and/or installing new planting areas would also need to be considered.
  
- 1.7 The Backlands Working Party could meet to agree a prioritisation list for areas designated for potential community orchard planting and agree consultation approaches for both community orchards and community gardens.

**2. Recommendations:**

- 2.1 That Councillors note the report and consider next steps for the Backlands Working Party in order to support work to improve backland and former play area sites in West Swindon.

Paula Harrison  
 Parish Manager