



Introduction

Over the next year, Great Boughton Parish Council is looking to develop a community orchard, (approx. 0.36 hectare) on Thackeray Drive field, with wildflowers meadows and extra tree planting. The Parish Council owns a number of open spaces/ play areas and maintains these through funds raised by the Parish Council precept. To achieve major improvements, the Parish Council applies and secures additional external funding from a variety of sources. Thackeray Drive field is an important open space in the parish, but could be considered as a 'green savannah' with a very open aspect, few trees and limited wildlife value, especially when compared to other open spaces owned and maintained by the Parish Council.

History

Prior to the development of the Vicars Cross estate mainly from the 1960's (See Appendix 1), there was an orchard where the area is now, one of many orchards in the area. Appendix 2 shows the approximate location of the field on a series of maps of the area, with the orchard clearly visible in 1950. The Parish Council old logo (Fig 5) shows the fruit blossoms and cherries, pears and apples which once grew in abundance in the local orchards and a number of original fruit trees survive in local gardens.

The field has been used for football for well over 20 years and the limited tree planting was undertaken in approx. 2003-2005 (Appendix 3/4). On the aerial photo of 2010, the old field boundary can be seen running west from the scout hut towards the trees across the junior football pitch. Near the western boundary a slight dip marks where this boundary was, probably left undisturbed for approximately 50 years and hopefully this old field boundary can be carefully 'excavated/ investigated' during the planned earth works.

Current use

The field is a popular open space, used by dog walkers, formal and informal football, keep fit, dog training, scout activities and over the last two years by a circus during June. During 'lockdown' use greatly increased, including picnics and distanced family gatherings. It is important that these activities continue and these proposals will greatly enhance the whole area for all.

In 2017, the Parish Council was awarded Sport England funding to substantially upgrade the two football pitches in conjunction with Vicar Cross Dynamos. One of the conditions of the funding was that the football pitches would be safeguarded for 25 years and the proposals will not directly affect the football pitches, but will provide some shelter/ shade for spectators.

Proposals (Appendix 5)

- Development of 'meadow orchards' with wild flowers around the existing trees on the north western section and the grassed areas on south western section. As these areas have top soil, to reduce the nutrients to encourage wildflower, the top soil would be stripped and used for an earth sculpture on site. The orchard species could be a range of fruit (apple, pear, cherries and damson etc.), hopefully using old Cheshire varieties, with a variety of nut trees as well. Under the trees would be sown a mix of traditional annual cornfield wildflowers (poppies, corn cockle etc.) along with a spring or summer meadow mixture. Mown grassed paths would be maintained through and around the orchard areas.
- Additional planting in the A41 hedge, in between the mature Ash trees. Unfortunately, ash dieback may affect these trees in the very near future and therefore it is important to ensure this sound/ pollution barrier and wildlife corridor is maintained and safeguarded.
- Planting of a 'soft fruit avenue'. On the field side of the A41 hedge is a slight slope, resulting from the spreading of topsoil/ sub soil from the drainage works to the football pitches in 2017. At the moment is a grass area with some thistles (good for goldfinches) and these would be added to with raspberries, gooseberries etc.

- Building and planting 'incredible edible' raised planting beds in front of Vicar Cross Community Centre to grow vegetables (beans, courgettes etc.) that our local community can pick and cook.
- Development of row a of avenue trees alongside the main car park. This will provide a great asset in future years as a shaded and sheltered avenue. These could be specimen trees and we may look to accept request for 'memorial trees'.

Interpretation/ Signage

There is an opportunity to update the signs at the entrances to the field and include interpretation boards regarding the history of the site and detailing the various enhancements.

Community Involvement

At all stages, it is important that the local community is consulted upon these proposals and that any ideas are listened to and given due consideration. Involvement can be extended by local people donating plants/ bulbs and time for volunteering during the development, implementation and maintenance of these proposals. Hopefully a 'Friends of Group' would develop to provide a sounding board and help with volunteering.

Hopefully, our local schools will get involved in the ideas and use the area to show their pupils the importance of healthy eating and the natural environment, and encourage them to respect it by involving them in the creation and running of orchards.

Fruit

As the orchard develops, there will be a range of fruit during the seasons for the local community to pick and use. In addition, in conjunction with Great Boughton in Bloom, 'Apple Days' could be arranged where apples and pears from the orchard are picked/ collected and produce from local fruit trees are pressed for fruit juice for people to take away.

Timescales

November to December is the ideal planting season and therefore, if support and funding can be secured early in 2021, the earth works could be undertaken in autumn 2021 and the main planting winter 2021/ 2022.

Funding

The Parish Council has some funding set aside for field improvements and this could be matched against a range of funding e.g. Heritage Lottery, Landfill Tax, Cheshire West and Chester Council. At this stage, it is difficult to estimate a broad budget and this will depend upon the elements of the proposals taken forward.

Maintenance and management

The Parish Council will still be responsible for the long term management of this area and as the site enhances, there will be changes in the week by week maintenance especially to the grass cutting regime for each meadow and mown paths etc. Luckily, it is a site that does not suffer from much vandalism, largely as there is little on the field, but contingencies need to be in place for any damage to the trees etc.

As the orchard trees grow, new skills will be needed to look after them, such as pruning to ensure fruit development etc. It is hoped that a number of community days can be arranged to help look after the orchard trees. Leaf storage areas will be created as part of the scheme to produce leaf mould for mulching the tree planting and the raking involved in gathering leaves could provide the short sharp volunteering opportunities.

Partners

As we develop the above proposals, there will be a range of partners that the Parish Council will look to work with, including Cheshire Wildlife Trust, Mersey Forest, Cheshire West and Chester Council, Transition Chester, Oldfield Primary School, Cestrian Scout Group, Great Boughton Library, Vicars Cross Dynamos etc.

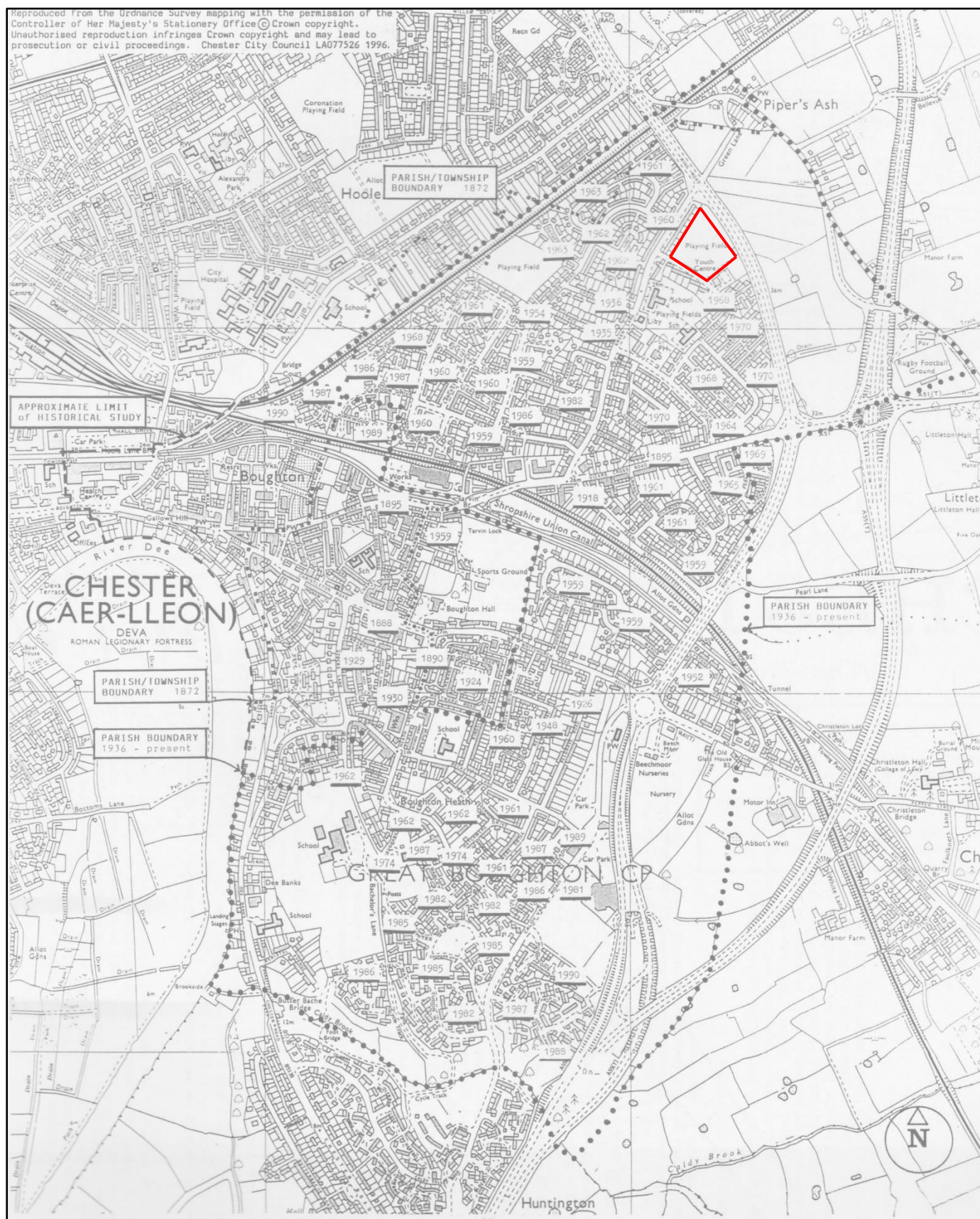
Next steps

The next steps are to consult on the proposals, develop a board budget and then contact a number of potential funders to secure their commitment. We welcome comments, ideas and involvement in these proposals and we look forward to hearing from you.

Contact

Kath Lloyd,
Clerk to Great Boughton Parish Council
Phone 01244 637277, Mobile 07709512348
<http://www.greatboughtonparishcouncil.org.uk/>

Appendix 1: Time zones for the development of Great Boughton houses



Appendix 2: Maps

Fig 1: Tithe map 1849



Fig 2: Ordnance survey map C 1875

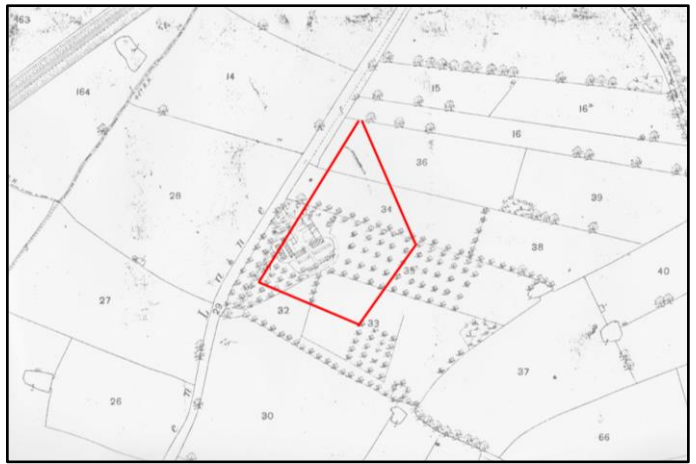


Fig 3: Ordnance survey map 1950



Fig 4: Present Ordnance survey map



Fig 5: The old Great Boughton logo



Appendix 3: Aerial photos

Fig 6: Aerial from between 1999-2003



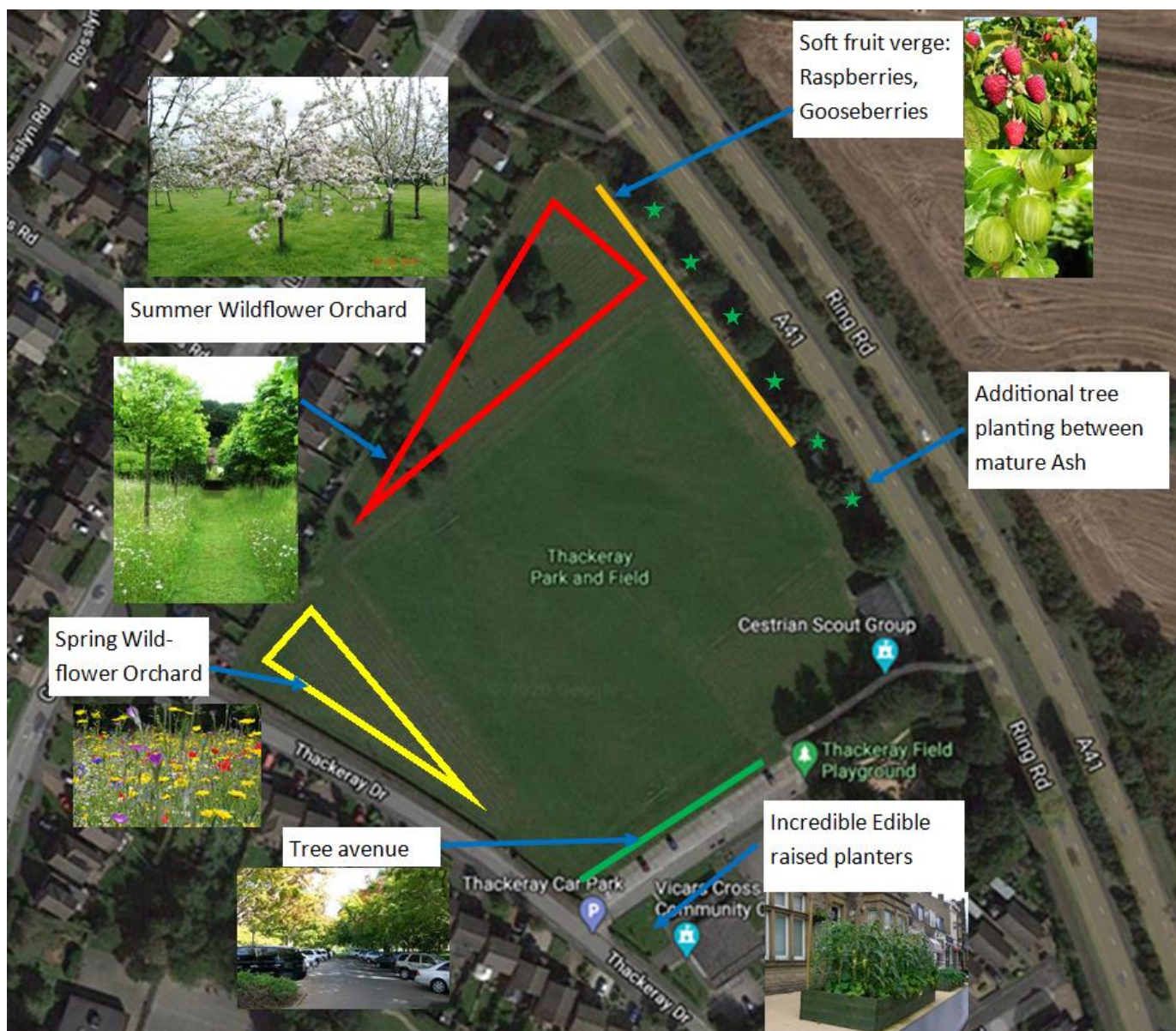
Fig 7: Aerial from 2010



Appendix 4: Current Photos



Appendix 5: Proposals diagram and approx. dimensions



Appendix 6: Proposals photos

