

<b>Agenda Item No:</b>	5
<b>Committee:</b>	Cabinet
<b>Date:</b>	7 November 2025
<b>Report Title:</b>	Fenland Inspire! - Wisbech Park Orchard



## **1 Purpose / Summary**

- 1.1 To provide information regarding the potential removal of the Wisbech Park Orchard from the area of the old bowling green adjacent to the Pavilion.

## **2 Key Issues and Background**

- 2.1 The orchard was originally a project initiated by the Wisbech in Bloom Chair and coordinated by a previous FDC Parks Manager. The trees and trellis were maintained by the In Bloom volunteers with the support of the FDC contractors who cut the grass pathways.
- 2.2 With the sad passing of the Chairman in 2023, the group continued to maintain the area to a lesser extent, finally culminating during spring 2025 when the current Chair of Wisbech in Bloom handed back responsibility for the orchard to FDC Open Spaces Team as the In Bloom group no longer had the capacity to maintain either the orchard or the two large beds in the woodland area.
- 2.3 Following the completion of the Pavilion, the orchard area has seen an increase in Antisocial Behaviour (ASB), particularly in the central area where people congregate to drink. Additionally, drug paraphernalia has also been found in this space. Further the apples from the tree are being used as projectiles towards the pavilion building and passing members of the public.

## **3 Recommendations**

- 3.1 That Cabinet notes the contents of the report.
- 3.2 That Cabinet notes that the local In Bloom group who began the orchard project no longer have the capacity to maintain it.
- 3.3 That Cabinet recognises the potential negative publicity regarding the removal of the orchard, whilst also acknowledging the positive impact the orchard removal will have on reducing antisocial behaviour in Wisbech Park and enabling alternative use of the space.
- 3.4 That Cabinet instructs officers to remove the orchard within Wisbech Park due to the increasing antisocial behaviour taking place and to make a donation of fruit trees to the Wisbech Community Orchard.

Wards Affected	Wisbech Wards	
Forward Plan Reference	N/A	
Portfolio Holder	Cllr Jan French	Deputy Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Parks and Open Spaces
Report Originators	Kevin Wilkins Phil Hughes	Open Spaces Contract Manager Head of Leisure Services
Contact Officers	Phil Hughes	Head of Leisure Services
Background Papers	N/A	

#### **4 BACKGROUND AND INTENDED OUTCOMES**

- 4.1 The Wisbech Park orchard was a project initiated by the Wisbech in Bloom and coordinated by a previous FDC Parks Manager about a decade ago to reflect the heritage of the town with regard to orchards.
- 4.2 The trees and trellis have been maintained by the In Bloom volunteers for the past decade with the support of the FDC contractors who cut the grass pathways. More recently, with the In Bloom group decreasing in number, they have 'handed back' maintenance of the orchard to FDC.
- 4.3 Due to the persistent anti-social behaviour resulting from the orchard's ability to hide people it is intended to remove the orchard. Additionally, this prime location in the centre of the Park is under consideration for a Fenland Inspire! project, with the orchard removal being initial facilitating work.
- 4.4 This work will include the removal of all trees, trellis and support wires with reinstatement works to the bowls green area so to leave it in a seeded and level condition and available for use in potential Fenland Inspire Projects.
- 4.5 Whilst the careful removal and then the replanting of the trees at the Wisbech Community Orchard Site has been considered, the actual likelihood transplanted trees survival is relatively low. To mitigate the removal of the trees, it is proposed that the Council supplies locally purchased fruit tree stock to the Wisbech Community Orchard and other community spaces as part of the overall scheme. This approach will ensure that trees are growing elsewhere, reducing the risk of transplanted trees failing following considerable cost to remove and replant, and this approach will also reduce the overall cost of this project.
- 4.6 Capital costs for the scheme are in the region of £10,000 to be funded from the Fenland Inspire! programme as this forms facilitating work for the Wisbech Park bowls green proposal for the site.

## **5 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 5.1 With the increased ASB and Wisbech in Bloom handing responsibility of future maintenance and stewardship of the site, it is felt that the removal would serve the best long-term interests of the park.
- 5.2 It is planted on the original site of bowls green and, prior to the successful funding application and construction of the pavilion which is adjacent, with further projects planned for the area and the orchard no longer being community maintained, it now presents a significant hurdle to these works.

## **6 IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 It is likely that in the short term there will be negative press and social media cover regarding this change. Community feedback will also be negative during and following the removal even with the FDC communications team's pre-project information.
- 6.2 Whilst the Friends Group and Wisbech In Bloom are aware of the plans for removal have been floated, FDC can expect negative feedback on social media/press regardless of sound reasons given for its removal. The mitigation of supplying new tree stock to the community orchard may lessen this to some extent

## **7 CONSULTATION**

- 7.1 Local elected Members are aware of the ASB taking place in the park and are also committed to improving community facilities within the park.

## **8 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 8.1 The only alternative option is for the orchard to remain. This option would mean continued ASB from within the orchard and no potential to use this space for alternative, more desired, community facilities.

## **9 IMPLICATIONS**

### **9.1 Legal Implications**

No legal implications.

### **9.2 Financial Implications**

- 9.3 The cost of this project will be in the region of £10,000, funded by a capital project.
- 9.4 The General Fund Budget Estimates and Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) Report, agreed by Cabinet and Council in February, projects a financial shortfall for 2025/26 of £1.432m increasing year on year amounting to around £3.4m by 2027/28.

9.5 Although there are currently many uncertainties regarding the budget for 2025/26 and the MTFS, there remains a significant structural deficit which the Council will need to address

**9.6 Equality Implications**

Not applicable.