**District Dispatch**

As the autumn and winter months draw in, and many of us retreat indoors for warmth and comfort, it’s very much the opposite for our strategic wildlife corridors project officers! For them, winter is action time, when they get outdoors and work with communities across our district to give nature a helping hand.

Over the last couple of months, they’ve been taking part in an ongoing project to remove floating pennywort from the Pagham Rife. This is a highly invasive plant that can smother habitats, block waterflow, crowd out native plants and take oxygen from fish and insects. It's difficult to completely remove as it can re-grow from small pieces that break free, but this latest round of clearance work will help keep the rife clear for the immediate future.

Other recent projects have included carrying out a bat survey at Reed Farm, and installing several different types of boxes for bats, owls and hedgehogs. During the bat survey, there were sightings of several different species including Daubentons, Pipistrelles, Soprano Pipistrelles, Serotine and Noctule.

They have also been working on ecological assessments to create a management plan for two freshwater habitats that contain Great Crested Newts. This is our country’s rarest newt and is protected by law, but sadly it’s facing great decline due to habitat fragmentation and loss. The plans being created for these freshwater habitats will ensure that both this and other species can flourish.

The team have recently installed two new Barn Owl nestboxes near the Maybush Copse community woodland at Chidham, providing nesting and roosting opportunities for this iconic species, which is often seen in the area.

Our wildlife corridors are an important way of creating better, joined up habitats that are essential to many different species, and I look forward to hearing more about the different projects our team will be carrying out over the winter months.

I’m also pleased to let you know that applications for the second round of our Community Orchard scheme are open. Community Orchards are collections of fruit or nut trees grown in public spaces and shared by local people, and we now have £9,000 available for community groups across the district.

Last winter we supported almost 40 new orchard trees as part of the scheme, including apples, pears, cherries, greengages, plums, and crab apples. This raises the total number of orchard trees planted through the Tree Chichester District scheme to 178 since 2022. This will help provide healthy, fresh produce to local communities for decades to come.

Community groups, parish councils and schools who are interested in planting a community orchard in their area can find out more by emailing treescheme@chichester.gov.uk by 17 January 2025. Successful applicants will need to have completed their planting projects before the end of March next year.

In addition, we also have funding available to help plant trees, hedgerows, small-wooded areas (copses) and orchards in specific areas of the district where planting could help increase links between habitats and help our environment adapt to the changing climate.

Planting new trees benefits our district in so many ways, from improving biodiversity and boosting carbon storage, to enhancing the natural beauty of our local landscape for everybody to enjoy. This is why we are encouraging landowners to use our targeted tree scheme to plant trees and hedgerows on their land. The scheme aims to better connect our woodland areas, allowing different species to move and migrate for food and to breed, while also helping restore the historical loss of trees.

If you’re a landowner in the district, I’d encourage you to find out more about our targeted tree scheme, and check whether you’re eligible for a grant. You can visit [www.chichester.gov.uk/treescheme](http://www.chichester.gov.uk/treescheme) or email our Tree Project Officer for details and advice: treescheme@chichester.gov.uk

Best wishes,

Cllr Jonathan Brown

Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Environmental Strategy at Chichester District Council

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| A logo with text on it  Description automatically generated | **Terri Foster**Senior Communications OfficerCommunicationsChichester District Council |

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