

Fruit & Nut Village



2040 Plan

January 2023



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Executive Summary

The purpose of this document is to explain why Fruit & Nut Village CIO came into being, the long-term vision that drives it, briefly, what has been achieved to date and what it hopes to achieve over the next two decades.

Fruit & Nut Village brings community volunteers together to plant and care for orchards and forest gardens in public places that have relevance to people's lives. This work supports a vision of a future where '**our communities grow and are surrounded by abundant, perennial food.**' In carrying out this work Fruit & Nut Village reduces isolation, improves mental and physical well-being for active volunteers, increases biodiversity and helps to counter the effects of climate change.

A year-round programme of regular activity is delivered, currently across three Birmingham neighbourhoods (Balsall Heath, Druids Heath and Stirchley), on a total of over 40 sites. Activity includes tree planting days, orchard care workshops, propagation workshops, weekly forest garden care days, and regular community events. Over 1000 people have engaged with Fruit & Nut Village since it was established and a diverse and committed group of regular volunteers continues to grow.

The work that Fruit & Nut Village delivers, helps to build stronger communities, it brings the benefits of fresh air and physical exercise to its volunteers and local residents feel greater pride in their neighbourhood.

Building on this successful model, Fruit & Nut Village has developed a set of nine, measurable goals that it aims to achieve by 2040.

Driving the increased production of perennial food in accessible spaces will remain at the heart of this plan; offering members of the community lifestyle choices that are free of financial expenditure; allowing people to connect with others as fellow creators rather than customers, will all continue to be central to the approach of Fruit & Nut Village.

However, in addition to this, Fruit & Nut Village intends to strengthen its position, improve its offer and extend its reach. It will do this by increasing its influence with the local authority and becoming more closely involved in relevant planning and decision-making processes, offering knowledge, expertise and local connections.

Recognising the potential for health and social care benefits, Fruit & Nut Village will raise awareness of its work with professionals in the sector and position itself to, more formally, accept referrals. The programme of skill development sessions offered by Fruit & Nut Village will also increase and include formal training and qualifications.

Underpinning these goals will be a bigger and better-connected network of Fruit & Nut Villages across Birmingham, built from the bottom up by the communities that benefit, 'cross-pollinating' each other by sharing experience, knowledge and resources.

1.0 Our vision at Fruit & Nut Village is:

“Our communities grow and are surrounded by abundant, perennial food”

What do we mean by communities?:

A community is a collection of people, across a city, ward, neighbourhood or even at a more local level. In support of our vision, communities may be led by Fruit & Nut Village CIO (FNVCIO) or inspired by FNVCIO. These communities live among collections of plants that are growing together and are mutually, ecologically supportive; more broadly these collections extend to include animals, fungi and even microorganisms living in our growing spaces.

What do we mean by grow?:

Grow literally means to take cuttings, seeds and small plants and care for them as they increase in size. Grow also means to expand in a positive fashion whereby more connections are made between our engaged individuals and between the communities we support or inspire.

What do we mean by perennial food?:

Perennial foods will grow back from their roots or their stems every year, or they are present all year around. Every year the plants will grow a little larger if the conditions are right, until they reach their full-size. These plants include fruit and nut trees (e.g. apples and walnuts), edible bushes (e.g. gooseberries and redcurrants), perennial vegetables (e.g. some kales, rhubarb and artichokes), herbs (e.g. mints, lavender and sages), edible flowers (e.g. hollyhocks and alliums) and edible ground cover plants (e.g. strawberries).

2.0 What is a Fruit & Nut Village?

A Fruit & Nut Village is a local area containing a number of perennial food-growing spaces, representing a range of growing styles.

The Fruit & Nut Village could be based upon a city ward, a neighbourhood or some other natural grouping of people and their local spaces. The area designated need not be a tightly-defined area, offering potential for nearby partners to become part of the overall “Village”.

A Fruit & Nut Village should contain examples of orchard growing as well as at least one forest garden. The orchard spaces should demonstrate different growing styles, for example: trained fruit; linear orchards; traditionally laid-out orchards; informal and mixed orchards. Perennial growing spaces can be wide-ranging in their nature and include soft fruit growing, herb beds, a multi-grafted “family tree”, asparagus, kale or other perennial vegetable beds.

The different growing-spaces will attract different individuals and groups to work upon them, but the overall Fruit & Nut Village should bring these different people together to create a broader community of connected individuals. People come together to enrich their lives, meet others and make friends, learn skills and to support their neighbours, amongst many other potential benefits.

3.0 Current Position

3.1 Work to date

Working across three neighbourhoods of Birmingham, FNVCIO creates, develops and improves orchards, forest gardens and other perennial food growing spaces. We bring people together, build community and create short, medium and long-term experiences to benefit our volunteers and visitors to our growing sites. We work on sites that date back as far as 2010 but we have really been working hard to develop sites since 2017.

FNVCIO activities are undertaken to inspire, educate and bring enjoyment to people. By bringing neighbours together either as volunteer working groups developing, planting and caring for growing sites, or as local people, passers-by and visitors enjoying the wide variety of edible plants in public spaces, FNVCIO encourages stronger communities and happier, more-engaged individuals who are less isolated and better linked to their communities.

The benefits of fresh air, physical exercise and understanding of healthy eating are added to by the improvement in mental wellbeing that results from greater social engagement, development of new skills, a sense of agency and pride in one's neighbourhood. We deliver regular, year-round, work sessions, caring for forest garden sites; planting trees and bushes in the winter; propagation, tree grafting and pruning workshops and also occasional, but regular community events such as Wassails, Apple Days and story-telling events.

3.2 The need for the work

We see our work as very significant in being able to benefit:

- 1) Local people's diets
- 2) Local people's leisure time
- 3) Local people's physical and mental wellbeing
- 4) Local people's education and employability
- 5) The battle against climate change
- 6) The battle against biodiversity loss
- 7) Community cohesion

The above benefits are all needed immediately. Our world is already suffering from climate change and biodiversity loss whilst Birmingham residents are being impacted to a greater degree by a range of national and international economic difficulties. We are living through a mass extinction, a climate crisis, an epidemic of poor health and a disconnected populace.

Although the impacts of FNVCIO are small at present, we can make significant impacts upon the above factors by 2040 if we act quickly.

4.0 Plan

By 2040 the work of FNVCI0 will provide, to the people of The West Midlands, and beyond:

CHANGE

1. Reducing the need to use commodified, indoor, marketed spaces for leisure.
2. Allowing people to meet and connect without the need for financial expenditure.
3. Benefiting our shared environment.

COMMUNITY BENEFITS through:

1. CONNECTION
2. COHESION
3. RESILIENCE
4. ACTIVE community members
5. Community EMPOWERMENT

LIFESTYLE development opportunities

1. We can engender in people, a DESIRE to work as part of FNVCI0.
2. Helping residents to shift thinking to "GIVING" rather than "TAKING" from FNVCI0 activities.
3. A new way of living - not as a customer but as a creator.

SANCTUARY

1. Somewhere to BELONG.
2. A FAMILIAR, SAFE, ENJOYABLE, COMMUNITY destination.

KNOWLEDGE

1. EDUCATING people.
2. Bringing people together to share SKILLS.
3. STRENGTH through learning at any time of life.

5.0 Measurables

5.1 Outcomes

We aim to deliver upon the following measurable outcomes, between now and 2040.

1. FNVCIO will strive to encourage Birmingham City Council to prioritise the planting of food-producing species upon their land.
2. FNVCIO will enable City Councillors to recognise the wide values of forest gardening and orchard creation e.g. informal meetings.
3. FNVCIO will become involved in Birmingham City Council planning decisions to consider how Fruit & Nut Villages will interact with new and existing developments.
4. “Cross-pollination” between Fruit & Nut Villages will be driven.
5. FNVCIO will offer, or enable others to offer, some formal training and qualifications to local people in the development of perennial food-growing spaces e.g. Birmingham Botanical Gardens / University of Birmingham / National Trust tie ins.
6. FNVCIO will drive the increased production of both local food and food-bearing plants.
7. FNVCIO will support other individuals, groups and organisations to develop a Fruit & Nut Village in every neighbourhood.
8. FNVCIO aims to see the development of Self-emerging (Bottom-Up) Fruit & Nut Villages
9. We will position ourselves to accept referrals from health and social care professionals and identify key organisations and schemes e.g. NNSs,

5.2 Mechanisms of delivery

We are likely to apply the following mechanisms to deliver the above Outcomes. This is a framework and, by no means an exhaustive analysis of how this 2040 plan will be delivered.

1. We will continue to develop and care for our sites to a high standard. These perennial sites have huge educational value and show what we refer to when talking of Fruit & Nut Villages. We will engage local City officials at our existing sites and inspire them with the work we are delivering. We will champion the use of City Council land for food production.
2. Our exemplar sites will “speak for themselves” as sites valued by residents for a range of reasons, discussed earlier in this document.
3. We would like to become a partner in decision-making, or to have the needs of local people to be surrounded by perennial, edible growing recognised when planning decisions are made. This would include both the removal or destruction of perennial food plants or growing areas as well as the introduction of such spaces to an area under development.
4. Skills, resources and knowledge will be passed between different Fruit & Nut Villages. This could be, for example, through tool sharing, the recruitment of groups with prior experience with a task or through demonstration of propagation techniques.
5. We will make efforts to develop relationships with educational and skills providers in the area, perhaps, developing a formal course whereby local people can learn all of the necessary skills required to develop and care for forest gardens and orchards.
6. Our activities will, inevitably, increase the production of food within our Fruit & Nut Villages.
7. Some of our Fruit & Nut Villages will be created in a “Top-Down” direction, effectively selecting areas in which FNVCIO will work, yet other Fruit & Nut Villages will be encouraged to develop

from the “Bottom-Up” with local groups coming together to drive their own perennial food space development.

8. We will use our on-line map to promote what we do, to bring communities together and to identify where perennial food-growing spaces already exist.
9. We will work alongside significant stakeholders in the area delivering social and health care services, identifying where we can link our activities with the needs of service users.

5.3 Measurement methods

1. Engaged City Councillors and officials.
2. Formal visits to sites will be recorded.
3. Increased inclusion of food-bearing perennials within new developments. Reduced destruction of pre-existing perennial food spaces.
4. We will be able to record much of the linking that takes place between separate Fruit & Nut Villages
5. We do not have an educational partner at this time, therefore, as soon as a partnership is established, we will be able to show success.
6. Estimates of food produced from our own sites will be possible. The broader impact of our work will be more difficult to show.
7. From the current three Fruit & Nut Villages we might expect to see nearer 180 by 2040.
8. Bottom-Up Fruit & Nut Villages will be identifiable through their recognition on our website.
9. We do not currently receive high numbers of referrals from health and social bodies. We will be able to record and count how many people join us through this route with ease.

Helen Tomkins
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