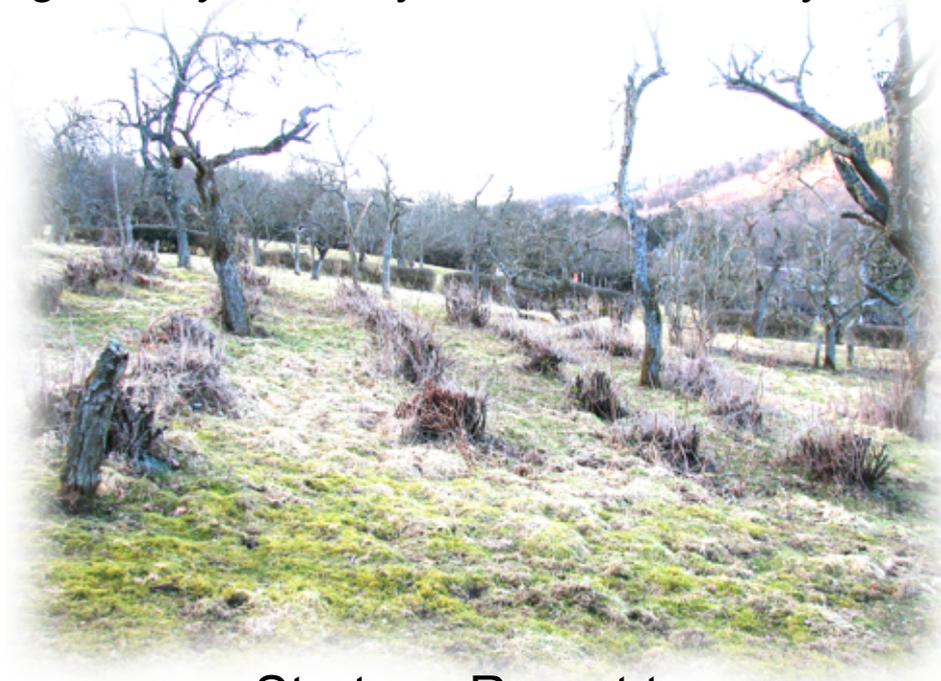


# Summary

## Reviving the Clyde Valley Orchards; the way forward



### Strategy Report to:

Rural Development Trust

Clyde Valley Orchard Group

Clyde and Avon Valley Landscape Partnership

20<sup>th</sup> June 2011



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by Dr Crispin W. Hayes  
CW Hayes Associates  
Cupar, Fife, KY15 5SQ.  
0845 458 8335  
[www.eco-consultancy.co.uk](http://www.eco-consultancy.co.uk)

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## Summary

### Background

This report sets out the process of developing a strategy and an action plan for reviving the orchards of the Clyde valley alongside identifying projects for implementation over the next five years. It will inform the development of the Landscape Conservation Action Plan (LCAP), a key component of the Stage 2 bid by Clyde and Avon Valley Landscape Partnership (CAVLP) to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) as part of a partnership project that will run until 2016.

The orchards in the Clyde Valley are of historic, cultural and landscape importance. At one time, they made a significant contribution to the local economy, providing jobs for many local people in cultivation of a range of soft and tree fruits and tomatoes over the past two hundred years, however the income generated from these activities has steadily declined. The orchards themselves make a significant and important contribution to both the scenic value and landscape character of the Clyde Valley.

The important contribution to the landscape has been under threat as traditional orchards decline in economic importance and orchards fall out of active management regimes. However, over the past few years, interest in orchards has begun to grow and some new owners with an interest in growing fruit, have begun to revive old orchards.

The decline of the orchards of the Clyde Valley is a relatively recent story, played out over the last two to three decades. The orchards of the Clyde Valley were worked much later than elsewhere in Scotland, due to the predominance of plums. Apples were the former dominant species, for which the Valley was well known however now plum trees predominate, and have done so since the late Victorian era. This creates a limitation on the products that can be made, because in the current market, the range of value-added products from plums is quite limited. In the long-term, a return to a greater number of apple trees will enhance the utility of the fruit produced.

### Review

A review of previous studies in particular the Ironside Farrar 2001 orchard survey has shown that by far the majority of trees were plum however, numbers of trees do not relate directly to the quantity of fruit produced. A mature apple tree will produce many times the fruit of a young plum tree and of the apple trees in the Valley the majority are culinary varieties, again limiting their commercial scope. While there were some shortcomings, such as the age of the

data, these studies provide an important and solid foundation for developing projects aimed at reviving traditional orchards in the Valley.

Biodiversity studies have been carried out in the orchards, and more are in progress. However the biodiversity case for orchard habitats has yet to be made strongly for orchards in the Clyde Valley. No endemic species have been found so far, and the biodiversity knowledgebase for orchard habitats is in need of further growth.

Growers have reported that the poor economic returns of growing fruit for wholesale led to the gradual closure of the business throughout the Valley. Even local wholesale markets such as Glasgow provide insufficient return to cover the cost of picking. Never-the-less there is an unmet demand for fruit in Scotland and the challenge is to connect buyers with producers. The retail market for fresh fruit is strong but it is of short duration (without investment in storage facilities) and prices are held down by imports and supermarket competition. Thus it can provide only a minor part of a business income. The wholesale market is difficult because there are few wholesale buyers in Scotland. However, there appears to be a healthy opportunity for niche products such as premium apple juice, other value-added products, and non-fruit orchard products such as honey. Both direct selling and the wholesale of value-added products have been successful for other producers. Those buyers paying the most expect the highest quality. Fruit for juice needs to be of a higher quality than that for cider production. Apples have the most ready sizeable market in terms of wholesale, though local plums still have a significant retail opportunity but their season is very short.

The existing policy framework and funding provides little direct support to orchards in the Clyde Valley, and indirect support is weak. Policies on the historic environment are not applied to orchards, and recognition and protection of the orchard habitat is not proactively implemented. Local producers have not benefited from SRDP funding or other agri-environmental schemes. Conversely the situation in mainland Europe is very different. EU rural development funding is widely used to support traditional orchards there. Nature conservation organisations are more active in recognising the biodiversity benefits of extensively managed orchards, to the extent that in Germany one has promoted an orchard juice programme called Streuobst that helps to secure the longterm biodiverse management of orchards.

## **Consultation & Survey**

Engaging and listening to the community is a vital part of developing and then implementing a revival of the Clyde Valley orchards. Without a significant element of the community actively supporting the strategy, it will not be successful in the long-term. Throughout the strategy development the community have been invited to be part of the process.

Early in the process there was a public meeting to jointly develop a vision and a consultation of all orchard keepers and supporters on the draft strategy followed. This consultation received responses from nearly half of the community of orchard owners and supporters.

The key outcomes of the keeper consultation were that:

- there was clear support for a revival and the draft strategy;
- keepers have limitations in capacity especially around maintenance;
- there was firm support for a new community business and a brand to be established;
- there was a willingness to engage with the developing revival process.

A questionnaire-based survey of orchards was also undertaken to update previously held data, and to determine current practices. Around half of recorded owners responded. A wide range of useful data has been collected, about the trees and their condition, the fruit and its use, and the management of the orchards.

The key outcomes of the updating survey of orchards were that:

- the orchard resource has contracted since 2001,
- there has been a significant loss of plum trees though they still form around 65% of orchards trees;
- capacity to manage the orchards including picking all the fruit is limited;
- there remains a sizeable un-utilised fruit resource which goes to waste;
- income never exceeds costs in the current economic framework; and
- there is significant potential for high biodiversity but some management methods, such as treatment of the orchard floor, need to be amended.

## **The Strategy**

The vision for reviving the orchards of the Clyde Valley is to ensure that a critical mass is established of working traditional orchards that provide fruit and value-added products in a way that ensures economic sustainability, but that are managed extensively for biodiversity, heritage and aesthetic benefits.

At its core the strategy for the revival of the orchards is concise and simple:

- working the orchards creates the most secure future;
- new products and new markets are identified & exploited in order to make economic use of the fruit;
- maintenance of the mature orchards is recognised as a costly but un-economic activity, and a grant system is created to bring the orchards back into order;
- balanced & careful management of orchards is incentivised so that the interests of production and biodiversity can both be met;
- rural businesses that work directly and indirectly with the orchards are created and fostered, and bolster the local economy and employment;
- cultural activities around the orchards, together with awareness-raising, education & training are given a high priority.

## **Recommendations & Action Plan**

15 projects are identified to implement the strategy over the next 5 years. The projects are built around 4 themes as shown below:

### Research to Develop the Knowledgebase

- K1 Survey of Orchard Resource, Historical mapping, and GIS Project
- K2 Deepening Biodiversity & Management Plan Project
- K3 Fruit Variety Collaboration Project

### Enterprise Development

- D1 Clyde Valley as a Brand & Orchard Products Market Project
- D2 Community Business & Orchard Products Project
- D3 Supporting Local Environmental Standards Project
- D4 Woman Rural Entrepreneur Project

### Engaging and serving the Needs of Orchards

- E1 LP Orchard Grant Scheme Project
- E2 Old Orchards, New Revival Project
- E3 Certification Assistance Project

### Outreach for Engagement with Wider Community

- C1 Young People Education programme
- C2 iOrchard Project
- C3 Advantage Volunteer & Training programme
- C4 Fruitful Fairs Project
- C5 International Connections Project

A project delivery framework is proposed that reflects the importance of continuity and perseverance. The task is considerable and the community must be engaged fully in order to ensure that they join the journey to revive the orchards. The project management is proposed to mainly rest with RDT, because it has the capacity, skills and experience to undertake this work now; it is also an autonomous legal body. It should manage on behalf of the whole client group and the wider community. Projects involving orchard work should be managed by a new social enterprise, indeed the organisation's start up should be based on these. The new social enterprise should in time build capacity to be able to take on more of the wider project management. CVOG has an important role to play as an interface with the community for all projects. Indeed, it has an important role to play as a key partner in the whole revival. Developing the capacity of the organisation is a task that needs to be undertaken if it is to play its role to the fullest extent.

An inventory of orchards that forms the draft Register of Heritage Orchards for the Clyde Valley is given in the Appendices.