**Article in a Dental Practice newsletter on Robert Walker**

*Robert started the Social Orchards project as a hobby in 2018 on the back of a £10k grant from the environmental charity Groundwork as part of the Tesco's "Bags Of Help" programme.*

*The objective for Social Orchards was to provide free fruit in publicly accessible areas by supplying street trees and planting in communal spaces throughout South London; (coining the term 'permissive scrumping'). Community food-growing in this way has now spread through parks and sports grounds, schools and colleges, churches and hospitals, city farms and community gardens, enabling various voluntary and charitable organisations to enhance their public spaces.*

*Initially the funding had been intended to deliver an orchard on sites close to the River Wandle in Carshalton, but fairly soon planting had spread to other locations along the Wandle Trail from Croydon to Wandsworth. With additional donations, we were able to look further afield throughout the Wandle Valley Regional Park (green spaces within 200 metres either side of the river) and then reached out across London with planting sites from Wembley to Walthamstow.*

*With further funding over subsequent years, Social Orchards have now planted over 1250 fruit trees across 97 sites, (and these numbers keep rising, with lots more in the pipeline). Social Orchards have now raised over £22k towards planting trees throughout London.*

*Adding trees to our living environment boosts public health through nutrition and greater wellbeing, it supports biodiversity, provides shading, slows flooding and cleans our air, as well as fighting climate change by locking up more carbon.*

*To date, Social Orchards have worked with a wide assortment of community organisations including a food bank, local authorities, housing/resident associations, the National Trust, London National Park City, numerous "Friends Of" park groups, Network Rail, NHS Trusts etc etc.*

*Eventually, it is hoped that some groups will choose to start developing some of these orchards into multi-layered high-yield "forest garden" spaces using "permaculture" methods, featuring groups of interdependent plants growing symbiotically in "guilds". As a Director of the National Forest Gardening Scheme, Robert hopes to create example sites to raise awareness;*

*"By mimicking the structure and function of forest ecosystems we can gain a number of benefits. Edible forest gardening is not necessarily gardening in the forest, it is gardening like the forest."*

[*https://nationalforestgardening.org/forest-gardening/forest-gardening-overview/*](https://nationalforestgardening.org/forest-gardening/forest-gardening-overview/)