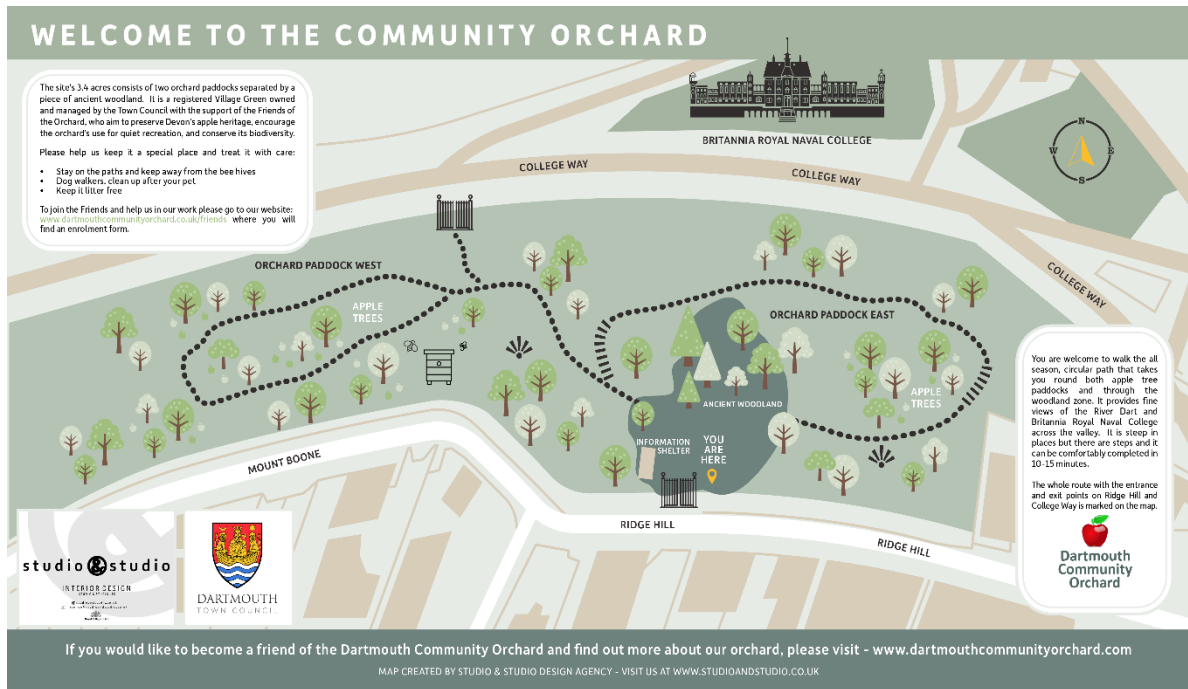


Dartmouth Community Orchard

Management Plan



Plan Scope

The plan covers the following aspects of the Orchard's management: fruit trees, grassland, woodland, wildlife & biodiversity, infrastructure, and aspects of its use by the community.

Plan Development

<i>First plan published</i>	January 1996
<i>New plan published by FoDCO:</i>	July 2015
<i>Woodland Zone Supplement added:</i>	November 2015
<i>Revision 1:</i>	December 2017
<i>Revision 2:</i>	February 2021
<i>Revision 3:</i>	October 2022

Priorities updated annually

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Authors

Peter Shaw (Friends of Dartmouth Community Orchard)

Matt Horan (Head Gardener)

with additional input from Committee members of the Friends of the Orchard

**Aerial View of the Orchard
with the Three Zones referred to in the Plan**



1. Aims & Key Stakeholders

Overall Aim

To maintain the Orchard in good condition as a local green space and registered Village Green, and conserve its character in the long term.

Aims

1. To conserve the Orchard as a traditional Devon orchard by managing the apple tree stock.
2. To promote its use by the whole community for quiet recreation and suitable events, ensuring that it is accessible and safe.
3. To enhance the Orchard's biodiversity through sympathetic management of it as a wildlife habitat and part of the network of green spaces in and around Dartmouth.
4. To promote understanding of its apple heritage, history, and wildlife and encourage its use as a local educational resource.
5. To assist in monitoring its use.

Key Stakeholders

1. Dartmouth Town Council (DTC – owner)
2. Members of the public using the Orchard
3. Community groups, especially:
 - Friends of Dartmouth Community Orchard (FoDCO)
 - Dartmouth Green Partnerships (DGP)
 - TQ6 Community Partnership (TCP)
4. Orchard Link (OL)
5. Devon Wildlife Trust (DWT)
6. South Devon AONB (SDAONB)
7. South Hams District Council (SHDC)
8. Defence Lands Agency through Britannia Royal Naval College (BRNC)
9. Bodies providing grants, sponsorship, and services

2. Brief Description of the Orchard

The Dartmouth Community Orchard occupies a 3.4 acre (1.37 hectare) site lying between College Way to the north and Ridge Hill / Mount Boone to the south. To the west is the Fire & Ambulance station, and to the east, residential properties. It falls within the South Devon AONB and the portion around the Ridge Hill entrance lies within the Dartmouth Conservation Area.

It holds approximately 150 apple trees of at least 60 different varieties in two paddocks separated by a remnant of old woodland. The paddocks are essentially meadow lands with a variety of grasses and vascular plants.

It is available for unrestricted public access throughout the year and is regularly used by residents and visitors for exercise, quiet contemplation, dog-walking, picnicking and play. An all-weather path links the two gated entrances on Ridge Hill and College Way, and there are paths round each of the paddocks and through the woodland zone, with steps in steep places. Seats are located in key positions. It is bounded on the south side by a wall and round the other sides by a stock-proof fence.

Its value as an area of biodiversity is derived from its structural complexity and mosaic of habitats supporting a broad range of wildlife species – birds, mammals, reptiles & amphibians, insects, lichens, fungi, flowers, grasses and trees. It also a “corridor” or “stepping stone” within a wider network of green spaces in and around the mouth of the River Dart.

There is documentary evidence that an orchard has existed on this site since at least 1840 and it is now the only remaining orchard of the nineteen recorded in and around Dartmouth in 1945.

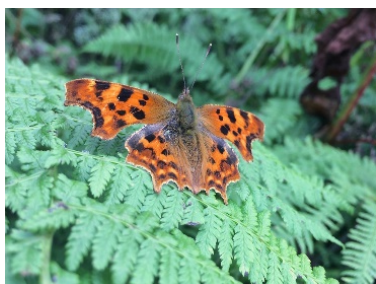
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3. Current Situation

The schedule of regular work carried out by the Head Gardeners team plus the work carried out during the winter months (November – March) by volunteers has maintained the site in good condition. Notable works since the last version of this management plan include:

- Completing the all-weather surfacing of the path network.
- Installation of a new, high quality notice board at the Ridge Hill entrance together with a plaque denoting the orchard's status as a Village Green.
- Planting two native broadleaf trees in the woodland zone in commemoration of Queen Elizabeth II's Platinum Jubilee.
- Removal of the internal kissing gates at the boundaries between the woodland zone and the paddocks to improve access for those using the orchard with disability scooters or children's pushchairs.
- Introduction of two bee hives.
- Installation of additional bird and bat boxes to promote bio-diversity.
- Restarting of community events after a hiatus because of the pandemic.

On the negative side, ash dieback disease has become a significant threat to the numerous ash trees in the orchard. One very large tree has had major crown reduction works carried out in the interests of safety and smaller trees have had boughs removed. Several other trees are showing extensive symptoms of the disease and will have to be culled.





4. Annual Work Schedule & Background

The Head Gardeners work schedule, is set out below.

Task	Who	When	Frequency	Time per occasion	Total hours per year
Fruit tree management					
Formative pruning	DTC/ (volunteers)	Dec - March	1	21	21
Watering newly planted trees	DTC	July - August	4	2	8
Mulching newly planted trees	DTC	March	1	4	4
Clearing base of existing trees	DTC	June - October	5	5	25
Planting new trees (not including supply)	DTC/ (volunteers)	Dec - March	1	4	4
Woodland Zone Tree Work					
	DTC/Contractor	Jan-Dec	Ongoing	-	-
Bee Keeping					
	Pamela (Orchard Volunteer)	Jan-Dec	Ongoing	-	-
Grassland Management					
Cut back grass from paths	DTC	April - Oct	8	1	8
Autumn meadow cut	DTC	Sept	1	40	40
Removal of cut grass	DTC (cadets)	October	1	30	30
Cutting village green	DTC	April - Oct	14	1	14
Scrub and Invasive Plant Control					
Hemlock treatment	DTC	March	1	1	1
Remove Bramble in line with MP	DTC	Feb and Nov	2	4	8
Manage growth of undesirable species	DTC	April - Oct	8	1	8
Manage woodland - Removal of	DTC	November	1	42	42

unwanted saplings etc					
Biodiversity Management					
Erect bird boxes	Volunteers	Nov – Dec			0
Monitoring of wildlife	Volunteers	Jan – Dec			0
Infatrustructure Management					
Removal of ivy from boundary wall	DTC	November	1	24	24
Improvement to paths (including supply of stone)	DTC (cadets)	Jan – March	1	21	21
Stock-proof fence boundaries repairs	DTC/ Contractor	Jan-Dec	Ongoing	-	-
Seasonal photographic record	DTC	Jan – March	12	-	-

Background to the Work Schedule

Fruit Trees

All the apple trees have been numbered, mapped, and an inventory of varieties created where known. The inventory is described in Appendix 1 and is available on request. The programme of care includes:

- A rolling programme of appropriate pruning according to the tree's age.
- Supporting trees that are leaning too much.
- Removing old, dead and diseased trees or leaving them *in situ* as standing dead wood for biodiversity reasons.
- Planting new trees using traditional Devon varieties and mulching round their bases to suppress weeds.
- Increasing light and good air circulation for nearby apple trees by cutting back overhanging trees and shrubs, particularly along the College Way boundary.

Grassland

Restoring the grassland to a meadow-like condition is a priority to promote wild flower diversity. Works include:

- An annual cutting of the grass at the end of autumn to control 'thug' plants like hogweed, nettle and winter heliotrope.
- An interim cut to create paths to and around the trees at the beginning of the fruiting season to ease access for those picking apples.
- Raking up and removing all arisings after the cuts to maintain an impoverished soil that favours wild flowers.
- Monthly cutting of the grassy entrance area at the Ridge Hill entrance and along the sides of the paths around the orchard.
- Clearing bramble and nettle scrub throughout both paddocks to maintain it at approximately 10% of ground cover.
- Spot spraying the invasive and highly toxic hemlock water-dropwort as necessary.

Woodland Zone

The area of old woodland at the centre of the orchard is vital to its bio-diversity.

Works include:

- Inspecting the mature trees regularly (minimum 5 year rotation) by an external arboricultural consultant especially those at the Ridge Hill entrance.
- Planting native trees to ensure succession.
- Thinning invasive cherry, sycamore and scrub on the woodland floor to keep it open for woodland flowers.
- Controlling encroachment into the paddock areas so that apple trees are not robbed of light or smothered.
- Periodically coppicing hazel stools.

Wildlife & Biodiversity

Good management of the apple trees, grassland, and woodland are the key enhancing bio-diversity. Additional actions include:

- Maintaining healthy colonies of bees in the hives.
- Installing bat and bird boxes.
- Planting new hedgerows and maintaining existing ones in good condition as flight lines for bats and corridors or nesting habitat for other wildlife.
- Building habitat piles and hibernacula at various points in each paddock to provide cover and winter shelter for small mammals, slowworms, toads, etc.
- Promoting insect life – a cornerstone of biodiversity – by providing small dew ponds, ‘bug hotels’, and a supply of deadwood.
- Creating sources of early and late season nectar by naturalising bulbs in the grassland, e.g. crocus, and planting yellow rattle to help improve the sward.

Infrastructure - Paths

Providing year round accessibility and improved safety is a key benefit to the local community. Works needed to maintain this include:

- Keeping the all-weather paths in good condition.
- Renewing steps as needed

Other Infrastructure

Keeping the site perimeter secure is important so that the integrity of the orchard is maintained and small children and dogs off the lead are safe. This requires:

- Maintaining the wall along the Ridge Hill / Mount Boone boundary in good repair; similarly the stock-proof fence along the other boundaries.
- Ensuring the gates, seats, and shelter are well maintained.
- Providing useful information for orchard users with attractive notice boards and panels.



5. Community Engagement

Events

An Apple Day in October is the main community event of the year. It involves picking and collecting windfalls, preparing and pressing them, and bottling the juice (approximately 200 litres). Most is taken by visitors in exchange for a donation, but an amount is donated to the Food Bank. The event generally attracts 60-70 people. The Friends also run a stall at the Food Festival on Children's' Day, demonstrating apple pressing.

A spring event focusses on members of the Friends and their families.

Occasional events like bat walks and moth nights take place in collaboration with organisations like Devon Wildlife Trust.

Friends of the Orchard

The Friends Group currently numbers approximately 190 members. Only a minority is active in contributing practical help at events or working parties, but the size of membership indicates the orchard is valued as a green space in the town. The principal activities include:

- Running the events described above and raising funds through them.
- Contributing many hours of voluntary work towards the upkeep of the orchard, involving scrub clearance, hedge planting, tree pruning, etc.
- Carrying out feasibility studies for improvements to infrastructure, e.g. securing an electricity and water supply into the orchard.
- Obtaining grants from other organisations and making significant donations from their own pockets to fund projects.

Partnerships

The principal partnership is between Dartmouth Town Council and the Friends. There is a high degree of co-operation, both in carrying out short and medium-term maintenance work and longer term work to secure its future, for example, with Village Green designation.

BRNC officer cadets work in the orchard as part of the College's outreach programme. Their work is invaluable, particularly in renewing the paths and steps infrastructure, and carrying out some of the heavier work needed to maintain the orchard in good condition. Typically they contribute *circa* 200 hours of work each year.

Educational links with Dartmouth Academy, the Scouts, Guides, and Brownies are established and youngsters from all of these groups visit the orchard at various times to learn about its apple heritage and wildlife.

Community Usage

Use of the orchard for exercise and quiet recreation by individual members of the community has increased over the past 4-5 years. During the Covid-19 pandemic, it was well used by local people taking their daily exercise according to the regulations. Summer sees an increase in its use for informal socialising; some minor abuse occurs occasionally by small groups of young people in the evenings.

Picking apples for personal consumption remains popular in the late summer and autumn; instances of systematic tree stripping are generally infrequent. Although not a formal group, dog walkers have become major users of the orchard since sheep grazing stopped in the early 2000's. Generally, they are responsible about clearing up dog mess, but not always. There is only one bin for dog mess at the Ridge Hill entrance emptied regularly by SHDC. Finally, the community (individuals and groups) has been generous in donating trees for the orchard. They are planted in memory of loved ones or pets, or to celebrate anniversaries, etc. The policy for such donations ensures that traditional Devon varieties are chosen and labelling is consistent and appropriate.

6. Further information

Please access our website: <https://www.dartmouthcommunityorchard.co.uk/> where you will find additional information including a short history of the orchard, the Friends' constitution, the memorial tree policy, etc.

Apple Tree Inventory

The inventory is a supplementary set of documents to this Management Plan. It consists of:

1. A sketch diagram showing the locations of the numbered trees.
Each tree has a metal tag with its number that approximately corresponds to its place on the sketch map.
2. A list of the known apple varieties in the orchard with an indication of their location, type (cider, dessert, culinary), and picking dates.
3. A numbered inventory of all the trees in each paddock with their names (where known), type, estimated age, condition & pruning history, and the nursery from which they came (where known).

A copy of this inventory is held both by the Town Council and the Friends and is available on request.

