

# Traditional Orchards in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough



Dr Nigel Russell NE

“Protecting what we have - Creating for tomorrow”  
A guide for Local Authorities



Martin Skipper Designs

**EAST OF ENGLAND**  
Apples & Orchards Project

Written, designed and produced by Huntingdonshire District Council with thanks to the Cambridgeshire Orchard Group.



## Traditional Orchards

Traditional orchards in Cambridgeshire are sites with 5 or more fruit trees, grown on vigorous rootstocks. There are usually a number of varieties of fruit trees in a given area, with Apple and Plum predominating in Cambridgeshire. The Wisbech area is noted for its culinary apples: particularly Bramley Seedling, which lives to a great age. The area around the Isles of Ely was also renowned for top fruit production for jams (Chivers), local use and wider distribution. The parishes around Bluntisham and Colne have a number of old Plum orchards, the produce of which also went to the jam factories.



Orchards have tremendous landscape, wildlife and cultural value. They have been identified as worthy of an Action Plan in several counties, including Cambridgeshire, and are recognised as a National Habitat Action Plan (HAP).

Traditional orchards are an equivalent to parkland landscapes: composed of mature plantings of large fruit trees with grass underneath. Fruit trees 'age' rapidly and have the characteristics of veteran trees with fissured bark, mosses and lichens, and old wood for nesting holes. They are often in unimproved grassland and surrounded by hedging.



These orchards act as a living museum: containing many varieties of locally raised, or rare fruit, not available on a commercial scale.

## Survey Results

Census returns show a drastic decline in orchards in Cambridgeshire from 1950 when there were 5,000 hectares to 1,000 hectares in 2000.

The Phase 1 Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Orchard Survey has assessed the distribution and condition of all types of orchard in the region. The Phase 1 survey (2005) identified some very shocking figures.

A total of 343 orchard sites were surveyed: having been initially identified from the OS Explorer 1:25,000 Millennium Edition maps.

25% of the orchards shown on the map have been lost whilst another 25% of still significant blocks of orchard have been reduced in size. The majority of these sites have been converted to arable or horse grazing land, some 13% have been used for residential development.

68% of Cambridgeshire's remaining traditional orchards, on 89 sites, are found in just 12 parishes, with hot spots in 6 parishes around Wisbech and in the Cambridge/ Huntingdon/Ely triangle.



OS second edition (1927) map showing the distribution of orchards around the Wisbech fruit belt.

OS 1999 map showing the distribution of orchards around the Wisbech fruit belt.



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## Contacts:

### Local Planning Authorities

Refer to your local authority to contact Local Planning and Tree and Landscape Officers.

### Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Biodiversity Partnership

Box No: ET1001  
Castle Court, Castle Hill,  
Cambridge CB3 0AP

☎: 01223-718573

Email: [Fabiola.Blum@cambridgeshire.gov.uk](mailto:Fabiola.Blum@cambridgeshire.gov.uk)  
[www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/biodiversitypartnership](http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/biodiversitypartnership)

*Biodiversity Action Plan on traditional orchards, Biodiversity Checklist for landuse planners and developers, Orchard Survey results: Phase 1, orchard management fact sheet from the Farmers' Pack, funding information, CWS criteria updates.*

### Natural England (N.E.)

Eastbrook, Shaftesbury Road,  
Cambridge CB2 8DR

☎: 08456 024094

Fax: 01223 533777

Email: [Enquiries.east@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:Enquiries.east@naturalengland.org.uk)

*Grant aid for traditional orchard management through Higher Level Stewardship scheme for both capital and management works.*

### East of England Apple and Orchard Project (EEAOP)

School House, Rougham,  
Kings Lynn Pe32 2SE

☎: 01328 838403

Email: [info@applesandorchards.org.uk](mailto:info@applesandorchards.org.uk)  
[www.applesandorchards.org.uk](http://www.applesandorchards.org.uk)

*Voluntary organisation formed to promote the conservation of traditional orchards and local orchard fruit varieties in the East of England. Advice, training, publicity including Apple and Plum Days. Young fruit trees of local varieties for sale.*

### National Orchard Forum

[www.nat-orchard-forum.org.uk](http://www.nat-orchard-forum.org.uk)

*Information about other local heritage orchard groups in the UK.*

## How other organisations are helping protect Orchards

### SURVEY

The East of England Apples and Orchards Project (EEAOP), together with Cambridgeshire Biodiversity Partnership, completed a Phase 1 survey of the county in 2005.

Phase 2 of the survey was started in 2006 in order to expand the initial survey. It is essential to know more about the detail of what remains, such as the structure of the orchard and its associated habitats, the flora and fauna within it, and its management, in order to advise appropriate management in the future. Subsequently, the Phase 2 survey has identified the remaining traditional orchards which require more detailed biodiversity survey work.

### REGULATIONS

Anyone wishing to change the use of orchard land should first contact Natural England to see if Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Regulations apply to their case.

### MANAGEMENT

Funding for management of traditional orchards is available under the Higher Level Stewardship administered by Natural England. The scheme offers payment for capital works including restorative pruning of old fruit and nut trees, and new plantings of traditional varieties. In addition, annual payments fund maintenance pruning and sympathetic management of orchard grassland

### MARKETING

Purchase of locally produced apple juice, fruit, chutneys and baked goods for sale at farmers markets and farm shops, supports local producers. Likewise, the inclusion of traditional fruits in vegetable box schemes. This increases the awareness and appreciation of the importance of local varieties and locally grown food.



### PROMOTION

Apple and Plum Days, and food festivals organised by Common Ground, EEAOP or local authorities, have a valuable role to play in increasing interest.

### COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP

Local communities may either acquire existing orchards or plant up new areas of land to create Community Orchards. Several grants are available to facilitate this.

## What Local Authorities can do to help.

The effective use of the statutory planning system to protect existing orchards is dependent upon commitment from the councillors and officers involved.

### STRATEGIC PLANNING POLICIES

Strategic policy documents, within the planning policy framework, which refer specifically to the natural environment, orchards, biodiversity, landscape or cultural history, can be used to defend existing orchards.

At a National level, the key document is Planning Policy Statement 9: Planning for Biodiversity and Geological Conservation.

At a Regional level, the Regional Spatial Strategy, with particular policies on Environmental Resources should be used. The Cambridge Planning Sub-region has recently produced a Green Infrastructure Strategy in which special mention of traditional orchards could be made.

Locally, policies which make specific reference to orchards should be incorporated into the Local Development Framework and Supplementary Planning Documents. (For example: South Cambridgeshire District Council's Biodiversity Strategy includes specific actions for traditional orchards.)

Reference to National and Local Biodiversity Action Plans is invaluable.

### TREE PRESERVATION ORDERS (TPOs)

The Town and Country Planning Regulations 1999 make it possible to place a TPO on fruit trees, not in commercial production, where it is in the interest of amenity to do so. Any fruit trees, within a proposed development site, considered worthy of retention, should be protected by a TPO.

### CONSERVATION AREAS (CAs)

Anyone wishing to fell a tree, not in commercial production, within a CA must notify their Local Authority of their intention to do so. If the Local Authority considers the tree(s) worthy of protection it may make a TPO.

### ALLOCATION OF DEVELOPMENT SITES

An allocation for development should be made only after a full assessment of the biodiversity value of the site has been made. If a potential site contains a traditional orchard every effort should be made to exclude it from the initial allocation. (Refer to the Biodiversity Partnership's checklists for Land Use Planners and Developers)

### PRESERVE EXISTING ORCHARDS ON DEVELOPMENT SITES AS COMMUNITY ORCHARDS

If a traditional orchard site is allocated for development, calculations of housing numbers or density should exclude the orchard on site. This will enable the orchard to be kept and planning permission given which conditions the retention and protection of the trees. Such orchards can be retained as Community Orchards as part of the public open space, giving a delightful, established, traditional landscape. Such a feature will add value to the overall development.

Planning conditions may be used to implement any management and replanting necessary to secure the long term viability of the orchard.



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### NEW COMMUNITY ORCHARDS ON NEW DEVELOPMENTS

New orchards can be created as part of the landscape scheme required for areas of public open space. The use of local varieties of fruit is to be encouraged.

Whether keeping or creating traditional orchards, it is essential that sufficient funds are available for the specialist long term management of the orchard. Funds may be earmarked for this through the use of a Section 106 Agreement.

### DESIGNATION OF COUNTY WILDLIFE SITES

County Wildlife Sites have a degree of protection conferred on them within the Local Development Framework. Specific County Wildlife Site (CWS) criteria for traditional orchards are currently under development.

## Losses and Threats

Loss of orchards has been caused by four main factors:

### ECONOMIC CHANGE

a) Changes in the economics of fruit growing in the 1970's, together with changes in the use of local apples and plums as bulking agents in jam, reduced the local market. Grubbing out grants were offered to fruit growers who wished to convert to arable.

### NEGLECT

b) Alternatively, orchards were not managed when they were no longer profitable. Lack of pruning caused large limbs to break off and the trees to decay and fall apart. Trees became overgrown with brambles.

### CHANGE TO HORSE GRAZING

c) There has been a large increase in horse riding and the need for grazing. Recently orchards have been bought for this purpose and either grubbed out or killed by grazing damage.



### DEVELOPMENT

d) Many orchards are on the edge of villages and have been seen as a development opportunity. Trees are either not protected by planning law or absorbed into gardens and the orchards fragmented or trees lost.

