

## Oakington Community Orchards Project (OCOP)

We are a small team set up to manage the community orchards. If you are interested in helping out, or would just like further information, please contact us at [oakcomorchards@gmail.com](mailto:oakcomorchards@gmail.com)



The Community Orchards in Oakington were planted between 2012 & 14 to utilise available land and create an attractive resource for the village. This Year the Parish Council has agreed a plan, where the majority of the Recreation Ground orchard is left uncut through the summer, but with meandering pathways and picnic spots cut to provide pleasant spots for all the family. There will also be a small patch where we are going to try to encourage a wider variety of wild flowers. Over the winter the whole orchard will receive more regular mowing.

The trees in both orchards are Heritage Fruit Trees historically grown in this part of Cambridgeshire, selected from the East of England Apples & Orchards Project Catalogue.



The trees in the **Mill Road Orchard** were planted in 2012, they were half standards which means they were more than two years old and had had the initial branch formation in place on straight trunks 1 – 1.5m in height. The soil is fairly loose and reasonably nutrient rich, the trees are planted close to a new wood, planted 1989 and heavily shaded on the east side so do not receive sun until midday and are also shaded from the evening sun by the houses and gardens across the road on the west side. The canopy from the trees on the east has started to extend over the fruit trees and the roots are competing with them for water. Two trees as a result have died and been replaced in early 2020 with trees from the other orchard. The trees had little or no pruning for several

years and have become misshapen as they have grown towards the light, also have had low yields due to the lack of new growth. Pruning over the winter 2019/2020 has been initiated to improve their shape and additional supports have been used to try and straighten the bent trees which have been growing away from the shade. Beneath the trees the flora has started to change due to the increased shade with a predominance of Stinging Nettles and Green Alkanet which particularly likes damp and shady environments. These are outgrowing the grass and other dead nettle species that were originally there. The ground has been leased by the Parish Council for 8 years.



The trees in the **Recreation Ground Orchard** were planted between 2012 and 2014 progressively from North to South across the field. A large tree was cut down in the south-west quadrant, but the stump and roots were not removed. The trees planted were “Maidens” which means that they required formative pruning for the first 3 years after planting; there appears to be a variation in the quality of formative pruning, so that the first plantings have reasonably good shapes but later plantings were not pruned sympathetically. The soil on the

north side is fairly deep and reasonably fertile, however the soil on the south side is poor and thin with the underlying Gault (heavy clay) being near the surface. The south side of the orchard is heavily shaded from a high bank of trees along the edge of the brook; the east and west sides are shaded to a certain extent by the hedge rows and the north side by the tall trees along the cemetery hedge, although obviously this is not so important, as it does not block the sun. The trees in the most southerly row were also competing with the roots from the bank of trees for moisture and are in their rain shadow, as most of the rain comes on a south-westerly wind. The ground around the stump has sunk as the roots from the original tree die back. It can be clearly seen that, despite the fact they were only planted 2 years apart, the trees on the south side have made little growth, compared to those in the north-east corner. Despite the initial care and attention the trees received in the early years they have suffered from the lack of attention for several years, some have died or been damaged by wind or “passers-by”. The two Chivers Delights which died were replaced in 2019 by Laura Lawrence. All the trees, bar one, have now been moved from the most southerly row to more hospitable spots, most in the same orchard, but two were relocated to Mill Road. The ground belongs to the Cemetery.

February 2020 saw the launch of the OCOP, supported by Gerry Cavander and Graham Tregonning. In recent years the community orchards have suffered from lack of attention. We are a small team of volunteers, who give the orchards some much needed TLC. The orchards can be a great asset for the community, providing residents with the perfect shady spot for a picnic, some free fruit and a place to introduce your children to wildflowers.

If you would like to join us, in return for two hours per month, working in the orchards, you will receive training in fruit tree management, which could be useful, if you have or are planning to have fruit trees of your own.

In January each year we will also provide free advice/training to anyone who has their own trees, but does not wish to join the OCOP. If you are interested in helping out, or would just like further information, please contact us at [oakcomorchards@gmail.com](mailto:oakcomorchards@gmail.com)