







# Contents

Bloomfield Community Orchard, Bath	3
Butterfield Green Community Orchard, Hackney	5
Horfield Organic Community Orchard, Bristol	7
Lowick Community Orchard, North Northumberland	9
New Mills Community Orchard, Derbyshire	13
Ringmer Community Orchard, Lewes East Sussex	15
South Park Community Orchard, Darlington	17
St Ann's Community Orchard	19
Sunnyside Rural Trust, Ivy House Lane, Berkhamsted, Herts	21
Waltham Abbey Gardens Orchard, Lee Valley Park	23



#### Introduction

The Government recognises the value for communities of green spaces – parks, orchards, allotments, gardens etc – and, as part of the localism and decentralisation agenda, has committed to measures that will enable individuals and communities to gain access to the land they need.

Community orchards are a great example of the localism and decentralisation agenda working at the grass-roots level and illustrate Big Society in action. They are places for people to come together and use the open space as a focal point for community activities. They also promote the health benefits of fresh produce and outdoor exercise for people of all age groups.

The case studies have been chosen as examples of Big Society in action; being community led or where a community group works closely with a local authority to optimize the potential of open green space and promote the wider benefits through community orchards. Some sites have been awarded a Green Flag Award – this is where the community orchard has been judged to have met a national standard in terms of site quality and management practices recognised by the green sector. The Department for Communities and Local Government are working with the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens (FCFCG) to explore ways communities can have greater access to land for food growing and assist those who want to grow their own food – an FCFCG case study is included.

These case studies illustrate the great work that is going on in communities to create and manage community orchards for the benefit of local people. They are not intended as a comprehensive list of all community orchards. We will update and add further information as it becomes available. If you have a community orchard that is a good example of a community venture and you would like featured in this collection of case studies, please get in touch by emailing:

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A 'how-to guide' on setting up your own community orchard is also available on the Communities and Local Government website:

www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/orchardshowto





# Bloomfield Community Orchard, Bath

#### example of Big Society in action

## Background

 Peter Andrews and Tony Ambrose, two local residents whose homes back onto the Bloomfield Allotments in Oldfield Park in Bath, noticed that four allotments in the middle of the site were completely untended. They decided it would be a good idea to create a community orchard for the whole neighbourhood to enjoy.

# Approach

 Peter Andrews called a meeting to discuss setting up a community orchard. For the scheme to come to fruition it had to win the support of Bath and North East Somerset Council. Luckily the council allowed the group to take over the four plots at a reduced rate and gave permission for the land to be used as a community orchard. This decision was key to the success of the orchard as there are often local bye-laws prohibiting the planting of trees on allotment land.





- Peter then held a meeting to discuss the project design. A decision was made to plant apple trees, a willow hedge and wild plants. A pond was dug to promote wildlife in the orchard and a place to sit was provided nearby.
- The project was designed to be managed in a light touch hands-off manner with meetings taking place just three or four times a year to deal with business and site maintenance.

### Result

• On the 23 October 1999, two years after its inception, the orchard held its first Apple Day with its creators and supporters celebrating its success.

#### Impact

• Previously underused allotment plots are now producing a communal crop of fruit and fostering neighbourly cooperation which will be enhanced through the exchange of horticultural tips and recipes, and the shared appreciation of the beauty of the fruit trees in a valued green space.

### Partners and funding

- The group asked various organisations for sponsorship. This proved to be an effective way to raise the money required. The idea of financing the planting of apple trees was not deemed to be in any way a controversial or political act by potential sponsors and they recognized the community benefits.
- South West Electricity gave the group money to buy as many trees as they needed for the orchard. Wessex Water bought the liner and plants for the pond. Shell sponsored the mower and Marks and Spencer also provided financial support.
- Local people also donated spare water plants for the pond in the community orchard.

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# Butterfield Green Community Orchard, Hackney

#### example of Big Society in action

## Background

- The orchard was created to prevent an underused area of the local park from being used as a dog run where owners of unsociable dogs closed the gates at either end of the area and let their dogs loose. This made it impossible for people to walk in this area of the park due to the resulting dog dirt.
- The park was also home to drug sellers, drug users and prostitutes.

# Approach

- The gates at either end of this area of the park were removed and 27 trees and 12 fruit bushes were planted in February 2007.
- The idea for the fruit trees came from the head of a local enterprise company, which grows food in urban areas.
- At the time of this idea the park had a new and sympathetic parks manager and she encouraged the newly created park users group and supported their work.
- The users group received grants for notice boards and benches.







- There has been an increase in the community working together since the orchard was created with local children showing an interest in where food comes from and older people getting out of their homes more and becoming less socially isolated.
- A new community of people who contribute to the work in the orchard has developed. People work together and families with children attend events which are put on by the orchard group.
- The orchard group frequently receives e-mails from people wanting to thank them for the difference the orchard has made to their lives.
- A current focus for the orchard group is the best means of tackling incidents of vandalism that have developed over the last year.

# Funding

- Original funding came from the council's Local Parks Dept, a local social enterprise and from the local community who paid to sponsor or adopt a tree.
- Since then there have been grants from the London Woodland Grant Scheme for native hedging as well as from Capital Growth and Groundwork East London.
- The orchard is maintained by the orchard group, but the local council mow once a year and provide material for the woodchip path.

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# Horfield Organic Community Orchard, Bristol

example of a Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens project

# Background

• The project started in response to the loss of traditional orchards and apple varieties, and the wish of members of the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens to grow and eat local and organic fruit.

# Approach

- In May 1998 the first meeting took place to begin clearing some overgrown plots on the margins of an allotment association site.
- Community and public engagement is achieved through events and open days, and by taking part in neighbourhood forums, local food and other networks.
- The orchard is managed by a small committee, and by the harvest-share members who take part in working meetings on the site. Subgroups look after areas such as composting, markets and events.

- Working meetings take place twice a month during the growing season, and once a month in winter. Members share responsibility for the care of trees and bushes, mowing the grass, battling weeds, and harvesting fruit. Those with little fruit-growing experience learn by doing, and working alongside more experienced members.
- In spring 2011 the group was reconstituted as an independent community association. The group has an annual general meeting to review the year, and plan ahead. There are also regular planning and social meetings in members' homes.

- The orchard hosts visits from community food and growing projects. The group organises public events such as Wassail, training workshops, and an annual Apple Day celebration in October that brings in more than 300 local people.
- The orchard is a wildlife haven. Beneficial insects such as bees, ladybirds, hoverflies, and lacewings are encouraged. Shelters have been built to attract slug-eating slow worms and hedgehogs, and a small pond is home to frogs.
- Orchard members enjoy an agreed share of the harvest, learn specialist fruit-growing skills, and have the pleasure of working and socialising with others in a green oasis in a densely populated area. The wider community benefits through open days and at events – where they can learn about growing fruit using organic methods in ways suited to urban gardens and allotments, and buy local produce.

#### Funding and partners

 Avon Organic Group (the parent organisation until spring 2011) paid for 20 trees, and Horfield and District Allotment Association gave a rent holiday for the first year of the project. Two environmental grants from Bristol City Council paid for more trees and a polytunnel. In 2008 an Awards for All grant to Avon Organic Group enabled the building of a compost loo, a shelter, some raised beds, and the purchase of a shipping container for secure storage of equipment and tools. Annual membership subscriptions, donations, and money raised at events cover the basic running costs.

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# Lowick Community Orchard, North Northumberland

example of Big Society in action

## Background

- 'Lowick in Bloom', a recent initiative by a small group of villagers taking part in the Royal Horticultural Society's 'Britain in Bloom', has created a new community spirit in the village.
- Living close to Lowick at Hunting Hall and as enthusiastic environmental conservationists, Karen and Tom were inspired by this initiative and wanted to contribute to their local community.
- They decided to offer the use of 1.8 acres of land at Hunting Hall Farm to create Lowick Community Orchard.
- A grant from Natural England made it possible to plan and build hard paths, a car park and provide seating for the orchard.







# Approach

- Research was carried out into local fruit tree varieties, the availability of heritage fruit trees and their suitability for planting in North Northumberland and the size of rootstocks.
- A meeting was held in the local village hall to launch the community orchard project and tree sponsorship leaflets were distributed.
- The idea of tree sponsorship was then promoted throughout the autumn and winter.
- Planning permission for vehicle access from the road was then applied for and to create a car park and a sheltered seating area.
- Karen and Tom went on a community orchard training course.
- The positions in which the trees were to be planted was staked out and trees were grouped according to rootstock and fruit. The spacing of the stakes was carefully measured for each rootstock.
- The orchard was created in April 2011 when 52 local people from the age of two to 80, worked together to plant 82 heritage fruit trees.
- Each tree was sponsored by a member of the public. In total 50 heritage varieties were planted several of which have interesting histories described on signs throughout the orchard.
- Local school children helped to produce artwork for signs and leaflets.
- The orchard has been entered in an organic farmers and growers organic conversion scheme.

### Result

- The local community now have a community orchard of 82 fruit trees, including apple, cherry, crab apple, damsons, greengage, medlar, pear and plum. They have also planted 190 metres of mixed fruiting hedge plants and the orchard is sown with floristically enhanced grass seed.
- The orchard has become an appealing, welcoming area, open to the public, with hard paths winding between the fruit trees, seating, picnic benches, planters full of herbs and plants for companion planting.
- There are very few wheelchair/pushchair friendly places in the local countryside, therefore good disabled access has been provided in the orchard. Signs and raised beds are at wheelchair height and picnic tables have long ends to accommodate people in wheelchairs.
- The new site, with special areas of long grass and wild flowers, has increased biodiversity in a previously agricultural field.
- Local fruit varieties have been propagated for the orchard which will help conserve these traditional varieties.
- The orchard has been put forward for a special award by the Royal Horticultural Society's 'Northumbria in Bloom'.

- Enhanced community cohesion has been created by, working in the orchard. New friendships have been formed and new skills developed.
- The community has developed a pride in their environment. The new orchard, as part of the successful work of 'Lowick in Bloom' to improve the village, has made it a valued and much loved place to live and despite the economic climate house prices have risen!
- Community events have been held in the orchard such as 'the Blessing of the Orchard' and a community picnic.
- Karen and Tom organised a concert to raise money for Lowick Community Orchard, 'Lowick in Bloom' and the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain. More than 100 people attended in Lowick Church, making use of an under-used building. The performance was by highly skilled local teenage musicians, studying at national and international music schools and colleges.
- More people are exploring local farmland conservation trails and footpaths. The orchard is linked into a network of trails and signs to encourage the public to walk in the surrounding countryside.
- The orchard is part of an educational access scheme Hunting Hall Farm Higher Level Stewardship Scheme – run by Natural England. Through work in the local school, the scheme has already helped children explore heritage fruit varieties and their historical links. This will be developed in the future as a local farm classroom is completed and more wildlife trails are linked into the site.

### Partners and funding

- J.D. & M. Burn of Hunting Hall offered the use of 1.8 acres of land for the orchard.
- The orchard is covered by Hunting Hall's Educational Access grant from natural England. Funding has been received for paths, seating and interpretation.
- All the trees have been sponsored by members of the public. The orchard group raised £1,763 for trees from the public and offered sponsored trees as green gifts at Christmas and provided gift sponsor certificates.
- The group received a donation from Frontier Agriculture (Lowick Silos).
- The group received a donation of two trees (and a lot of support) from R V Roger Ltd the nursery that supplied trees.
- The group received advice and help from Bob Sherman of Garden Organic, Border Organic Gardeners, Northern Fruit Growers.
- Hospice Care North Northumberland donated snowdrop bulbs and helped the group to plant them.
- Students from St. Mary's Music School in Edinburgh played at the fund raising concert and their headmistress attended the concert. St John the Baptist Church kindly let the orchard group use their premises for this concert and the vicar performed the blessing of the orchard.

- 'Lowick in Bloom' have given essential support; working with the orchard group, and providing lots of advice.
- Till and Glendale Rotary Club looked after all the orchard finances and several other rotary clubs sponsored trees.
- Roger Manning carried out a wildlife survey and a Royal Society for the Protection of Birds farmland bird survey.
- Wooler Nursery donated bags of soil enhancer to the orchard.
- The Milestone Society were tremendously excited about finding the lost local milestone by the new orchard hedge and have been supportive of renovation attempts.

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# New Mills Community Orchard, Derbyshire

#### example of a Green Flag Community Award winning project

# Background

• The orchard is on the site of a former 16th century orchard. The land had for many years been used for grazing. When it became free a group of people, with the full support of the parks manager approached the local town council and requested the land for a community orchard.

## Approach

• From the beginning the group has had community involvement, which has included local schoolchildren involved in planting, logo design and ongoing educational activities and links with other community groups to encourage use.







- Community events have been an important part of the scheme. These have included two highly successful Apple Days as part of the New Mills Festival, a stall at the One World Festivals and this year the group is holding another Apple Day and working as part of a local festival to help create and host in the community orchard some 'graffiti knitting' - a concept which involves festooning the local area with knitted objects from apples and pears through to lollipops and even a car with the surreal twist of being made of wool.
- Use of the orchard encouraged by regular newsletters delivered to local people, leaflets widely distributed, website, events and frequent press coverage.
- Tree adoption and memorials schemes.
- Links also forged with other Derbyshire community orchard groups at Hayfield, Buxton and Bradwell.
- Created a section in the local library for books on orchards and fruit growing.

- The group has been approached by fledgling groups for advice and support in starting their own community orchards.
- They have recently been asked to explore setting up another orchard on the other side of town with local community help.

- The orchard is in a natural beauty spot high on a south-facing hillside. It is well used by both locals and visitors to the town as a picnic area. It is also popular with local schools, local art and photography groups.
- The group prides itself on being organic and on making no charge to the community for produce, which is available to gather as it ripens.

# Funding and partners

• Funding for the initial 100 trees was secured from the Healthy Living Network and Greenwatch in 2005. Approximately £9,000 was secured for access and habitat improvements; planting, tools; artwork; signing and interpretation; and publicity and training from 'Breathing Places' lottery award in 2007.

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# Ringmer Community Orchard, Lewes East Sussex

#### example of Big Society in action

## Background

• Ringmer Community Orchard was founded by members of the Ringmer Village community near Lewes, East Sussex . The idea for an orchard arose from the Ringmer Community Action Plan and its aim is to help tackle global warming support the rich heritage of fruit trees in the area and provide an educational resource for local schools.

### Approach

• A farmer donated the land and the trees were planted by the local community in December 2005.







- The site is used to teach people fruit tree management skills, to support students at Ringmer Community College completing their Duke of Edinburgh awards and for local primary schools' workshops. The site has developed into a plot of some 50 traditional fruit trees on an acre of land managed organically by the local community.
- There is a schools' activity pack which suggests activities that can be undertaken at the orchard and provides links to aspects of fruit growing which can be connected to school work from primary through to college age.
- There are also community events for people to visit the orchard and help look after the trees which includes weeding, mulching and protecting them from caterpillars.

### Partners and funding

• The orchard was created with support from Anthony Tasker of Broyle Place Farm, Ringmer Parish Council, Ringmer Community College, Lewes District Councils' Sustainability team, Common Cause, Awards for All, East Sussex Food and Health Partnership, The Mettyear Trust and the Big Lottery Fund.

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# South Park Community Orchard, Darlington

#### Green Flag Community Award winning site

### Background

- South Park Community Orchard, Darlington was created in 2009 and is located within a public park.
- The idea for the orchard arose when the park team visited a neighbouring park with a community orchard which inspired them to create their own.

## Approach

• It was decided to build the orchard on park land within an area of the park which was rarely visited by park users. By building the orchard in this location, it attracted visitors to this part of the park and helped revitalise it.



• The orchard has brought greater diversity to the park; introducing an element of community ownership and enhancing people's knowledge of food growing.

#### Funding and partners

• The orchard was initially funded by Darlington Council who provided the first 18 trees. Subsequently an additional 10 trees were planted by Telecommunications Company Orange following a nationwide tree planting campaign.

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# St Ann's Community Orchard

#### example of Big Society in action

### Background

• The St Ann's Community Orchard stands on the world's oldest and largest allotment site which in 2001 was half-tenanted and at risk of being sold. To avert this risk the community orchard was created to demonstrate that the overgrown plots were being used.

# Approach

• Initially 12 unused plots were cleared and planted by local residents and school pupils many of whome were Learning Support teenagers from the local comprehensive school who visited weekly throughout their time in years 10 and 11.







- A community orchard has been created with over 2000 visitors a year. One-hundred plus monthly community activity days have been held as well as many hundreds of sessions for children.
- St Ann's Allotments employs three highly trained members of staff who have skills in teaching and play-working. Their work is based in the Forest Schools philosophy that positive outdoor experiences encourage and inspire individuals.
- The Forest Schools scheme aims to help people by allowing them to participate in engaging, motivating and achievable tasks and activities in a woodland environment each participant has an opportunity to develop intrinsic motivation, sound emotional and social skills. These skills can then be developed to allow individuals to reach their personal potential.
- Forest Schools has demonstrated success with children of all ages who visit the same local woodlands on a regular basis and through play, who have the opportunity to learn about the natural environment, how to handle risks and most importantly to use their own initiative to solve problems and co-operate with others.
- Forest School programmes run throughout the year, for about 36 weeks, going to the woods in all weathers (except for high winds). Children use full sized tools, play, learn boundaries of behaviour; both physical and social, establish and grow in confidence, self-esteem and become self motivated.
- Forest Schools develop:
  - self awareness
  - self regulation

- intrinsic motivation
- empathy
- good social communication skills
- independence
- a positive mental attitude, self-esteem and confidence.

### Partners and funding

• St Ann's Allotments (not for profit voluntary organisation of gardeners of which the orchard is part) has recently had five-year funding through the Heritage Lottery Fund as part of capital works to restore the site. However, the orchard receives very little of this funding having been self funded since its inception, largely through small grants and the selling of direct services to schools and other organisations.

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# Sunnyside Rural Trust, Ivy House Lane, Berkhamsted, Herts

#### example of a Green Flag Community Award winning site

## Background

- Sunnyside Rural Trust was established in 1990 and provides training and employment services for over 70 adults with learning disabilities on a daily basis. The Trust's aim is to enhance the lives of disadvantaged people through individually tailored training programmes with an emphasis on horticulture and the environment.
- The Trust is committed to contributing to the local food strategy and creating sustainable food sources that support the environment and its community.

## Approach

- Berkhamsted Town Council generously leases the land to Sunnyside Rural Trust and actively supports the development. The site needed a lot of work and with support from volunteers managed to create an orchard in a single year.
- The Trust have developed and currently manage a heritage orchard, wildlife area, soft fruit orchard, conservation area, allotments, gardens and willow coppice. Volunteers and community support to help with tasks throughout the site are welcomed. The Trust have put benches across the site for







the public to enjoy the beautiful views across the orchard and local area.

• The Trust uses the fruit, vegetables and herbs grown on the site to create healthy, wholesome meals for service users. They use excess fruit and vegetables for jam and chutney making. The Trust also produced 900 bottles of apple juice each year from our heritage trees.

#### Impact

- The Trust gives individuals the opportunity to experience a variety of tasks that they just wouldn't or couldn't do at home and, through the establishment of a social enterprise, creates employment opportunities for these same people. Surplus produce is sold in the farm shop and on a market stall.
- The heritage orchard provides people with learning disabilities with stability and support so that each person has the opportunity to develop their skills and confidence, fulfil their potential and gain a sense of personal achievement.
- The orchard also helps raise people's awareness and understanding of the contribution that physical activity and a good diet, using home grown organic produce, can make to everyone's wellbeing and good health.
- The space creates respite away from the hustle of daily life. The public are welcome to walk around the orchard, bring their families, dogs and soak up the peace and quiet.

#### Funding and partners

- The Trust works in partnership with Berkhamsted Town Council to make creative use of allotment land. The Trust has a contract with Hertfordshire County Council to offer training and employment services to adults with learning disabilities.
- They receive valuable support from their local community through volunteering, funding and publicity.

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# Waltham Abbey Gardens Orchard, Lee Valley Park

#### example of a Green Flag Community Award winning project

## Background

- Waltham Abbey Gardens has a long history. It was originally the site of the last abbey to be dissolved by Henry VIII later becoming the formal gardens for the local manor house on the Denny estate. It was then used as small holdings and market gardens when it was brought by the Lee Valley Regional Park Authority. The orchard is now owned by the Abbey Gardens Trust and managed by the Park under a lease agreement.
- During the small holding phase, the orchard was run commercially with a dense planting of a number of varieties of fruit tree, including apples, pears, plums and cherries. Over the years, the area was allowed to deteriorate, with the majority of fruit trees dying and significant scrub encroachment.
- In an effort to rejuvenate the orchard, it was decided to support local volunteers to clear the scrub and restock the trees, whilst also allowing locals to collect the fruit for personal use.







# Approach

- The majority of the land at Waltham Abbey Gardens was purchased as part of the initial land holdings of the Lee Valley Regional Park Authority, including the rose garden, farm house and Cornmill Stream, with the orchard area being leased at this time. The orchard was already established, but deteriorated over time.
- Lee Valley Park has established a very active volunteer group, initially for conservation work, but expanding to cover all aspects of the Parks activities. It was decided to run the orchard as a community facility in 2007, both to encourage local involvement and ownership, and to allow people to 'sample' the produce. The grassland within the orchard was also converted to a hay meadow at this time.
- Apple Day was celebrated in 2008, with samples of the apples from the orchard, but since then this has been combined with a much larger event, King Harold's Day, commemorating the death of King Harold II who had significant connections with the town.
- There is currently little in the way of infrastructure within the orchard, but it should be seen as part of the wider site, where there is good provision of benches etc.

#### Impact

- Apple pressing and sampling have proved very popular at community events, encouraging many children to try the locally grown apples, some for the first time, and many whose parents have said did not like apples. In addition, there appear to be more people collecting apples (and other fruit) for personal use than previously, having seen that this is an accepted practice at this site.
- The replanting of the orchard by a number of local groups was started in 2008, but is currently on hold pending surveys to establish whether or not the area was used as a monastic burial site.

#### Funding

• The orchard management is currently funded through the Lee Valley Park revenue budgets, but, being a community project, grant aid may be sought for such elements as interpretation, new stock or machinery for harvesting/pressing the fruit.

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