



THE ORCHARD POCKET PARK

Management Plan 2021 – 2025



Orchard Pocket Park, Eaglethorpe, Warmington

Management Plan 2021 - 2025

Aims of the Management Plan

The aim of the Management Plan is to provide a framework for decision making and the further development of the Orchard Pocket Park in terms of both amenity and biodiversity, over the next five years (2021 – 2025). It will facilitate the discussion and agreement necessary to secure the required level of budgetary provision that will enable the objectives set for the orchard by the Parish Council, to be achieved.

Terms of reference

1. The Management Plan will be specific to the Orchard Pocket Park, located in Eaglethorpe, Warmington. It will not include the Pocket Park at Big Green, Warmington, nor any other community asset within the village.
2. The Management Plan will be based on the objectives set by WPC and also defined by the concept of the pocket parks movement, as stated by NCC.
3. Input, advice and comments from those with local knowledge, expertise or current involvement will be actively sought and encouraged in the formation of the Management Plan. Where there is a conflict in opinion, compromise will be used to ensure that the overall objectives set by WPC are achieved.
4. The Management Plan may include recommendations for further advice to be obtained before an activity is completed. This does not mean that the activity should be removed from the plan; rather appropriate advice should be sought prior to the activity commencing.
5. The Management Plan will specify activities to be completed by volunteers and / or contractors. All public liability insurance cover for the area and those who use it, together with actions / risk assessments etc. are the responsibility of WPC.
6. The Management Plan includes recommendations for the measurement and reporting of delivered activity vs. plan, and suggestions for future activities / initiatives that could be undertaken. It is the responsibility of WPC to measure and build on the success of the Management Plan through the approval of appropriate reporting and review processes.

Site location

- Grid reference: Landranger series No.142 TL 074915
- Area: 0.44 acres (0.18ha)
- Access Point: from Peterborough Road walk into Eaglethorpe and follow the road until the Pocket Park is reached on the left of the road

Land Ownership

From 1997 Warmington Parish Council (WPC) held the Orchard Pocket Park on a 21 year lease from Northamptonshire County Council. Negotiations towards the purchase of the site by WPC started in 2017, and were successfully completed in 2021.

As WPC owns the land, it is required to oversee any decisions and budget and has a responsibility to keep all users safe.

WPC has full public liability insurance cover for the area. For this reason all actions / risk assessments etc. are the responsibility of WPC, and any decision about the future management of the orchard must take into account the council's obligations.

Site Description

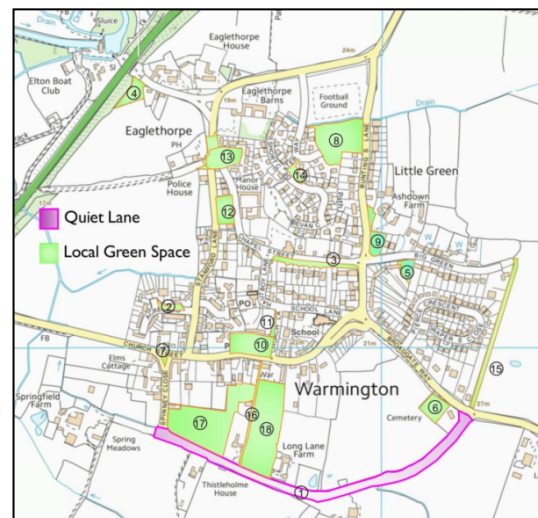
The orchard provides a unique amenity within the village. Located within historic Eaglethorpe, near Warmington Mill and adjacent to the Nene Way, the orchard is used by both local residents and visitors to the area (right). A Public Footpath runs through the orchard from the entrance, along the eastern boundary and on into Chair Field beyond.

Prior to the construction of the Warmington Bypass (A605) in 1995 the site, a small orchard in grassland, was within the grounds of Warmington Mill House. Since the



creation of the orchard pocket park in 1997 the area has been fenced, hedges planted and new fruit trees introduced. Seating, a notice board and a litter bin have been provided. Some planting of bulbs, seeds and locally grown wildflowers was undertaken during the establishment phase of the pocket park, with various levels of success. Limited development and management has led to a gradual but progressive decline of the space since the last Management Plan was produced for the period 2002 – 2006, in relation to both habitat and amenity.

The Orchard Pocket Park is allocated as a Local Green Space under Policy W5 of the Warmington Neighbourhood Plan (WNP) made by resolution of East Northamptonshire Council on 17th December 2019. It is area 4 on Map 6 of the WNP, shown right, and is listed as number 4 of spaces protected by Policy W5 (table on page 30 of the WNP).



Background

The Orchard Pocket Park was the first Orchard within the pocket park movement; a concept developed by Northamptonshire County Council in the early 1980's. *"Pocket Parks are local public green spaces which are owned, looked after and cherished by local communities for peaceful enjoyment and the protection of wildlife."* (North Northamptonshire Council)

Two previous Management Plans were produced for the setting up of the pocket park (1996 – 2001) and its establishment (2002 – 2006). The stated aims of these plans were to manage the orchard as a traditional orchard containing local and other varieties of fruit trees, to increase the wildlife value of the site, and to encourage enjoyment and appreciation of the orchard and wildlife interest by the local community. This updated Management Plan will continue with the original intention, with specific objectives and strategies for its development.

Factors that would encourage the local community to visit the pocket park more often, as suggested in feedback received through the Warmington Neighbourhood Plan Consultation Survey (2018) included better signage, the provision of seating / picnic tables, bins and information boards, suggested activities for children such as nature trails and the use as a venue for community 'events' such as nature talks or demonstrations of tree pruning. While the comments supported the orchard as providing a 'quiet place to sit' and being important in terms of habitat and biodiversity, there were also requests for it to be 'better maintained' and 'less overgrown'. These comments have been taken into consideration within this Management Plan.

A small group of volunteers continue to maintain the orchard but the range and frequency of activity is constrained by both time and available resource. A shift towards more 'added value' tasks undertaken by volunteers will increase future levels of satisfaction and participation. Routine and labour intensive activities such as path cutting and clearance will still be required, but will involve the support of contractors.

Risk Assessment

A robust and comprehensive risk assessment has been carried out, and includes risk to both visitors and volunteers.

Objectives for 2021 – 2025

Objective 1 - To manage the orchard as a traditional orchard, containing local and other old varieties of fruit trees, with consideration for habitat and wildlife

- Maintain and improve the health and productivity of the orchard fruit trees, through appropriate annual maintenance.
- To ensure the long-term continuity of the orchard, by providing a range of tree ages: replacing trees when they die and considering grafting new varieties.
- To actively seek ways of identifying the varieties of fruit trees within the orchard, beyond those for which records are currently held: to record and produce a planting plan and to publicise the varieties of fruit trees present. To encourage visitors to recognise and utilise the available fruit.
- Preserve, maintain and enhance the habitats associated with a traditional orchard i.e. fruit trees, veteran trees, hedgerows and grassland.

Objective 2 – To enhance biodiversity within the orchard

- Protect, maintain and enhance biodiversity of the area through the implementation of the management plan, with the overall aim of:
 - Increasing diversity by the introduction of appropriate new plant species
 - Allowing natural regeneration of existing plant species through the adoption of an appropriate annual management regime
 - Reduce dominance of vigorous and invasive species, such as nettles, thistles and buckthorn
- Identify and record changes in levels of biodiversity over time.

Objective 3 - To encourage enjoyment, learning and appreciation of the orchard by the local community and visitors alike

- Ensure that the orchard is accessible, inviting and provides appropriate amenity facilities
- Provide information that is useful, interesting, beneficial or educational
- Encourage more volunteers to become involved in the future maintenance of the orchard
- Consider ideas for future activities or community events that could take place in the orchard

The importance of traditional orchards

Traditional orchards can be described as those dominated by older, less intensively managed, 'standard' trees that are planted at relatively low densities. They can have significant ecological value and diversity. The total area of traditional orchards within the UK has declined drastically in recent years and the conservation of those that remain is a high priority. In 2007 traditional orchards became recognised as a priority habitat under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UK BAP).

Aside from the old fruit trees that provide a good habitat for lichen, mosses and fungi as well as insects, invertebrates and birds; the orchard contains hedgerow and grassland habitats. Much of the orchard wildlife depends on this mosaic of different habitats, and the management of these associated habitats as part of a 'whole' is important for the overall biodiversity.

Appendix 1 (Traditional Orchard Habitats) identifies and categorises the type of habitats that exist within the Orchard Pocket Park, together with their contribution to biodiversity. Careful, sympathetic management will ensure that these habitats are maintained and enhanced for future benefit - for both wildlife and amenity value.

Botanical Survey

An initial botanical survey of the Orchard Pocket Park in 1996 concluded "Botanically, there is very little of interest in this area, which is essentially an area of species-poor rank grassland with scattered trees. No rare or scarce plants

are present, and a great deal of the area is infested with convolvulus and stinging nettles” (Dr. M Wigginton, 1996.) A later survey identified plant species that were present in the orchard, some having been introduced in 2002. A recent botanical survey (July 2021) has been undertaken by ecologists to show net losses / gains in the intervening years, as well as an indication of species distribution (Appendix 2 Botanical Survey). The findings have been taken into consideration within this Management Plan to ensure that the existing level of biodiversity is maintained and further enhanced. It should be noted that apparent absence to find species listed earlier has little significance and there are several reasons for this, not least that many of these species will have finished flowering and so be quite inconspicuous in high summer. For this reason, it is recommended that the survey is ongoing and potentially expanded to include fungi and invertebrates in order to provide a more complete picture of biodiversity. The survey also noted the wide infestation of nettles within the orchard, due to the inherently rich soil, and which requires a regime of repeated cutting and / lifting out with the root systems. It is recommended that this action is prioritised and will be beneficial in terms of conservation, noting that a targeted effort within specific areas is more likely to control the infestation over time than spreading effort thinly across the whole site. Buckthorn, another highly invasive species was noted within the hedgerows and encroaching into the adjacent grassland areas. For this reason, cutting close to the hedges was recommended as a means of arresting its spread. More generally, the survey recommends that management of the site should include a spring cut (March / early April) and again in late September or October. Removal of clippings to reduce the amount of nutrients going back into the soil is advised, and it would be beneficial to dispose of clippings off-site. If it is necessary for clippings to remain, the area in which it is piled will encourage nettle growth so should be selected carefully; the only benefit being that grass piles do provide habitat for reptiles.

Increasing Biodiversity

Over 97% of UK wildflower meadows have been destroyed since the 1930s. Restoring flower-rich habitats, together with good management, ensures the survival and natural spread of wildflower species. It is also beneficial for the wildlife they support, for the environment, and for local communities through contact with nature. Where species are to be introduced into the Orchard, these should only be UK native species (not domestic, hybridised species) and wherever possible local to Northamptonshire. Such species are both resilient and opportunistic and, given the right conditions, will move naturally around the landscape. Restoring habitats, by regeneration from the natural seed bank within the soil or colonisation from plants in adjacent areas, are the most effective and ecologically robust methods for improving plant diversity in the long-term. Ecologists have kindly offered to provide locally sourced wildflower seeds, although these may need to be supplemented with additional seed purchased from approved suppliers. Native bulbs and seedlings of approved species have similarly been offered (e.g. foxgloves, snowdrops, aconites).

The aim of this Management Plan is not to create a ‘pictorial meadow’ within the orchard – planting annual flowers (such as poppies and cornflowers) that are highly colourful but require intensive management that involves ground clearing and seed sowing every year. Instead, the aim is to restore and regenerate much of the existing grassland meadow with predominantly perennial plants – species that grow and flower each year, re-appearing from their underground roots each spring. As perennials take a few years to establish, the display in the first year of introduction may not provide an immediate ‘wow’, but will improve and become more impressive each year when correctly managed through annual cutting. Appendix 3: (Restoration and Regeneration of wildflower meadows) outlines the principles and approach necessary for managing meadow areas.

Management Zones

Different zones have been created within the orchard, based on the route of the current paths (Appendix 4: Zones). By adopting a zonal approach, individual areas can be managed in different ways according to the habitat type, biodiversity, intentions and constraints; but which together ensure that the overall objectives of amenity and biodiversity are met within a traditional orchard site.

Zones also allow for activities and development to be phased - delivering a significant improvement to a small area will be more noticeable than having a small impact over a wider area. This is beneficial for both community perception as to how well the orchard is being managed, and also more rewarding for those who volunteer to maintain the orchard. In addition, defined zones make it easier to provide clear instructions or information to those undertaking activities within the orchard – be they volunteers, contractors or visitors. Appendix 5: (Management by Zone) summarises the habitats found within each zone, together with strategies for their management over the next five years. Also shown are the amenity benefits and provisions for each zone.

Paths

Paths around the orchard must be kept clear to allow visitors to access and explore the orchard, to benefit from its amenity and wildlife, and to be able to harvest the fruit. This is particularly challenging at times of the year when the natural growth of vegetation is rapid.

The paths require cutting every 4 weeks during the months of March /April – September / October, and it is important to remove all cuttings to reduce the nutrient level within the soil. Removal of nettles and thistles from the pathways will, together with regular cutting, reduce their presence over time. Due to their invasive nature, and their current dominance within adjacent grassland zones, this will be an on-going task for several years.

Maintenance

On-going maintenance is vital in order to meet the WPC objectives for the Orchard Pocket Part. Wildflower 'meadows' require annual management if they are to develop and flourish, and not become dominated by the naturally invasive characteristics of nettles and thistles. Soil nutrient levels need to be reduced by the removal of vegetation rather than allowing it to die back naturally and further enrich the soil. Fruit trees require pruning to ensure they remain healthy and productive – and at a height that enables the fruit to be accessible to pick.

It is not possible for the orchard to be maintained by volunteers alone due to the limited resource available. In order that WPC achieves its objectives for the Orchard Pocket Park, the use of contractors to undertake certain activities is essential and requires an annual budget provision. Appendix 6 (Maintenance activity by resource) suggests how resource could best be allocated to ensure that the orchard is managed appropriately, and by the most cost effective means possible.

Amenity Value

Amenity values are the characteristics that contribute to, and enhance, people's appreciation of an area.

It may be the surroundings that provide a space for relaxation, or physical elements such as the provision of seating that determine how people are able to enjoy their time in the orchard. The opportunity for people to become more engaged with nature and to learn more about the flora and fauna may, for others, add value. WPC has a desire, and a responsibility, to ensure that the Orchard Pocket Park provides a valued community amenity.

Much of the amenity value associated with the pocket park is delivered through its character (a traditional orchard) and the habitats and wildlife present therein. For this reason the initial primary focus of this Management Plan is on providing a maintenance strategy. Once this is successfully underway, attention can turn towards providing a higher level of amenity value for both the local community and visitors alike. Appendix 7 (Amenity Value) suggests ways that this could be achieved. Although some actions can and should be delivered within the short term, others will need to be subject to ongoing review and development, taking into consideration the evolution of the pocket park over time and the timing of WPC budget discussions and allocations.

Phased Activity

The Management Plan provides direction for the beneficial development of the Orchard Pocket Park in terms of habitat and amenity value over the longer term. It is important to understand that change cannot and will not be immediate – not least because, although managed, the orchard is a natural habitat. It is therefore also important to manage expectations: the orchard cannot realise its full potential as a community amenity, until some of the initiatives for managing the different habitats and zones have had an opportunity to deliver positive changes. For this reason a phased approach is suggested for the next 5 years; but will require ongoing focus, review, measurement and support, if the objectives set by WPC are to be achieved.

	Habitat Priorities	Amenity Priorities
Phase 1 Short term: 'tactical fixes' 3 – 12 months (2021 / 2022)	Annual Cutting Regeneration zone Targeted removal / control of invasive species Biodiversity survey - additions Fruit trees – markers for known varieties Siting of nest boxes	Path clearance Improvement around entrance Re-instate finger post signage Additional picnic bench Awareness: What is a pocket park? What is the management plan for the orchard & why?

Phase 2 Medium term: 'strategic fulfilment' 2 – 3 years (2022 – 2024)	Habitat development – maintenance / removal or control of invasive species / introduction of desirable species Formative & restorative management of fruit trees, identification and plans.	Awareness, information, education: Flora & Fauna - what is there, what does the habitat support, why is it important? What have you seen / can you find? Orchard - What varieties, history, type of fruit (eat / cook), encourage use
Phase 3 Long term: 'visionary aims' (2024 +)	Ongoing management and maintenance Management Plan 2026 - 2030	Community Engagement / Involvement – events, 'talks' etc.

References / Further Reading

- Orchard Pocket Park Management Plan: 1996 – 2001
- Orchard Pocket Park Management Plan: 2002 – 2006
- Warmington Neighbourhood Plan (2018)
- Northamptonshire Biodiversity Action Plan 2015–2020
- Natural England Technical Information Note TIN020 - Traditional orchards: orchards and wildlife (2010)
- www.theorchardproject.org.uk (guides / advice)
- Plantlife (www.plantlife.org.uk)
 - The Good Meadow Guide
 - Keeping the Wild in Wildflower
 - The Good Verge Guide
- Northamptonshire Highways - Guidance Notes – Highway Cultivation 2014
- The Wildlife Trust (Beds, Cambs & Northants) – www.wildlifebcn.org/wildlife
- northamptonshirewildlife.co.uk
- wildflowersuk.com
- Grow Wild UK (RHS Kew)
- Buglife.org.uk
- The Woodland Trust (www.woodlandtrust.org.uk)