

Tree planting policy

This policy sets out the COPSE guiding principles for responsible tree planting. COPSE is committed to the “Right Tree in the Right Place, for the Right Reasons” (Source: Surrey Nature Partnership).

Biodiversity and Climate Change

Owing to their size and structural complexity, trees influence macro, meso and micro-climates and provide many kinds of habitat for other species through their complex interrelationships with other plants, fungi, and animals, both above and below ground.

The COPSE Tree Planting Policy aims to:

Mitigate climate change and biodiversity loss

As Community Orchard fruit and nut trees may live more than eighty years they offer CO₂ sequestration within the tree itself, their understorey, associated lichens, and root zone fungi. In addition, they provide important habitats of a multitude of invertebrates and vertebrates.

Aid adaptation to climate change

Community Orchards can contribute to remedial solar shading and passive cooling, storm shelter, water absorption and surface flooding deflection, and filtration of particulate pollutants to offer locally improved air quality.

Enhance biodiversity

Low-maintenance Community Orchards can deliver for biodiversity where appropriate site management creates complimentary associated habitats, such as wildflower meadows and native hedgerows. Veteran fruit trees, provide a specific habitat-type called Traditional Orchards, recognised by Natural England as being important for communities of specialist woodland fauna and flora, in need of conserving at the Landscape Level. Community Orchards can support additional features to promote biodiversity, including bug hotels, bat and bird housing, multifunctional shelters, bee and butterfly friendly understorey planting, bee hives, wildlife ponds, wildlife friendly security fencing, composting areas, water capture and water management systems.

Bring People and Nature Together

Community Orchards provide a space for communities to enhance their well-being and develop a deeper understanding of their interconnectedness with nature and explore ways to adapt to our changing climate.

Trees and Hedgerow Locations

To uphold the principle of the ‘Right Tree in the Right Place, for the Right Reasons’ COPSE takes into consideration the following when assessing sites for a prospective community orchard:

- Can the local community easily access the orchard without the use of non-sustainable forms of transport (petrol or diesel fuelled vehicles)?
- How many trees can be sustainably planted in the available space? The size of community orchards can vary considerably, from a cluster of trees on a small green within a housing development, through to substantial orchards created within large urban or semi-urban spaces. An orchard is defined by Natural England as a minimum of six fruit or nut trees, within 20m of each other’s crown edges.

- What are the specific strengths and weaknesses of the site? Consideration is given to soil type, quality and drainage, water supply, terrain, sunlight, other trees in the vicinity, neighbouring land or developments, adjacent/peripheral wildlife habitats, possible air/water pollutants, public access, range of potential uses of the orchard, requirements/aspirations of stakeholders, disabled access, other uses for the site (such as dog training and picnicking), access and storage of equipment and/or machinery, site security and Health and Safety of the public in and around the space.
- Can site disturbance be kept to a minimum? We prefer to use a 'light touch' approach. We will identify trees, plants and wildlife that should be protected and further supported.
- Are there established trees on the site? Where a site has healthy established trees we will incorporate these into the design of the orchard. There is no environmental benefit in removing a healthy mature, or maturing tree, to replace it with shorter-lived young trees. We regard trees as being 'locally notable' and 'next-generation locally notable' and therefore particularly worthy of protection, if they are mature/maturing, healthy, aesthetically pleasing, well positioned in the landscape, or offering a potential amenity or focal point for the community. We protect all veteran/notable, ancient and late ancient trees. See Appendix 1 for *General Tree Care Guidance*.
- Can green spaces be linked? We encourage the linking of green spaces through the creation of pathways and 'corridors' that support wildlife, outdoor exercise, and socialising.
- Can an edible hedge be accommodated? We support the planting of edible hedgerows wherever possible.

Community Engagement for Planting Choices

Community Orchards are negotiated spaces. We undertake community engagement activities to establish local preferences for example, when trees bear fruit (term-time or during summer holidays), the height of the tree for fruit picking, and how well the fruit keeps in storage, as well as taste, appearance, eating preferences (fruit-type, dessert or cooking). These considerations are balanced with factors such as heritage tree stock, local and regional appropriateness, disease resilience, space available, and specific local environmental factors. We aim to source trees in the south of England through specialist suppliers of British heritage fruit and nut varieties.

Aftercare

Aftercare is essential for a planting regime. COPSE provides a two-staged aftercare service:

- Stage 1. COPSE monitors the trees on a regular basis (ideally for three years after planting) while the trees are young and vulnerable to weather stresses.
- Stage 2. During this phase we work with the local community to establish a community group (ideally for five years after planting), to maintain the orchard in the longer term.

Funding

We are a not-for-profit Community Interest Company (CIC). We work with trusts and charities to support our work, including sourcing free trees from the Woodland Trust National tree planting programme and other organisations, such as the Peoples Trust for Endangered Species who supply fruit trees for existing Traditional Orchards.

Appendix 1. General Care Guidance for existing Important Trees

Our policy is to apply the Ancient Tree Forum guidance to the care of locally notable or next-generation locally notable trees, veteran/notable, ancient and late ancient trees, as follows:

- Ensure that all necessary consents are obtained for work to be carried out in any area that is Designated for its nature conservation, natural amenity or archaeological interest, including but not limited to, a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), National Park, Scheduled Monument, Green Belt, Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space (SANG).
- Avoid or mitigate any potentially adverse practices (e.g. involving soil compaction or chemical applications), at least within protective areas around individual trees or groups. The Root Protection Area (RPA) should ideally extend in all directions from the tree stem to a distance equal to 15 times its diameter, or five metres beyond the canopy, whichever is the greater.
- For groups or rows of trees, e.g. in avenues or hedgerows, a collective RPA consisting of a buffer strip should, if feasible, be established. In a hedgerow, the aim should be to provide good soil conditions both for the older trees and their younger successors, while also enhancing habitats for wildlife, including birds, small mammals and invertebrates.
- If a notable tree, or next-generation notable tree, is in good health and if the conditions do not appear to have changed significantly, we keep to the existing management regime.
- If the soil conditions have significantly deteriorated, try to ameliorate them, whether or not the tree is in good health. Options may include mulching or aeration.
- If the tree is in poor health, try to determine whether this can be attributed to adverse growing conditions. If so, assess whether it is feasible to ameliorate the conditions.
- Protect notable trees and next-generation notable trees from the effects of any intended change in agricultural, silvicultural or horticultural land use. For example, if grazing land is to be converted to arable use, a different set of guidelines for protecting trees should be followed. Be aware that notable trees can be harmed even where the change of land use (e.g. from grazing to horticulture) involves disturbance that might not appear very radical at first sight.
- Do not create any permanent vehicular access route, gateway, ditch or underground utility route within the RPA of a notable tree. If an access route or gateway already lies within the RPA, it should, if feasible, be removed or re-designed, according to advice from a suitably qualified arboriculturist.
- Protect young and near-mature trees where they are the potential successors of the current generations of notable trees.
- Take advantage of available grant aid for tree protection, where compatible with management objectives.

Adapted from: Lonsdale, D. (2013). Ancient and other veteran trees: further guidance on management. London: The Tree Council. ISBN: 978-0-904853-09-4. www.ancient-tree-forum.org.uk