

Managing the Community Orchard

1. Community Orchards need ownership. Visits around community orchards in this country and abroad show that orchards quickly decay unless the local community is actively involved. This way they come to believe that they "own" the Orchard.

2. Establishing a Community Orchard. It is not too difficult to find volunteers willing to create a Community Orchard - to dig holes and plant trees, hedges and wild flowers. It is a one-off activity.

3. Maintaining a Community Orchard. It is much more difficult to persuade volunteers to keep coming back to cut the grass, dig out the weeds, water the plantings, mulch and prune the trees, and deal with diseases. These tasks go on throughout the year and need trained management.

4. Winning ownership. The community needs to be attracted into the Orchard. The fruit is theirs to pick and eat but that is an isolated event in the autumn. Other ways must be found to bring the public in. This strengthens the community spirit and might lead to some of them becoming active volunteers who will help maintain the Orchard.

5. Events in the Orchard. Community Orchards elsewhere have adopted a variety of ways to bring in the public: picnic chairs and tables, barbeques, kids play areas, tennis courts. Some even have live animals which help keep the grass under control. I believe we should be going down a similar path towards making it a truly Community Orchard.

6. What to do? Some would prefer to see the Orchard barren of any such attractions. The Council has just decided to install benches for people to sit on but picnic tables and barbeques have received a hostile local audience. Annual picnics have been held and enjoyed by the community which makes it difficult to understand why picnic tables and barbeques are still out of favour. Organised games have been enjoyed at these events.

7. Using what is there. The Community Orchard is a small site that has been landscaped sensitively. The aim is to encourage biodiversity whilst not compromising appearance. Recent removal of some of the protective fencing has opened up a space that has been long neglected and in need of major weeding and levelling. Members of FoMC and BruNK have set about renovating this site, in the course of which they realised it could make a perfect boule terrain for public enjoyment. The City Council's Executive Councillor for Public Places and the Head of Streets and Open Spaces have been told about these plans.



8. Legal restrictions. Being aware that the Orchard is on common land, checks were made of the legal position. Section 3.1(a) of the *Cambridge City Council Act 1985* allows the Council to "set apart such parts of any public open space or Common within the city as they think fit for the purpose of games and recreation and for purposes ancillary thereto and lay out and adapt the same for those purposes". FoMC is licensed to manage the Community Orchard and that licence enables volunteers to carry out "work involving hand tools and powered hand tools", "grass cutting", and "weed control" and makes specific reference to paragraph 2 of the 1851 byelaws in allowing FoMC to "dig or plough up any such Common Pasture, or any part thereof".

- Draft -

Andrea Rainer, Executive Councillor for Public Places
Toni Ainley, Head of Streets and Open Spaces

Boule terrain in the Community Orchard

I am not sure to whom I should address this missive.

A few members from the Friends of Midsummer Common (FoMC) and the Brunswick and North Kite Residences' Association have started playing boule on a flat piece of land in the Community Orchard. Others in the Community have expressed an interest in taking part. Enquiries have been made for a team to join the Cambridgeshire boules league.

It was quickly realised that the land being used was too bumpy to play the game properly. So a few of us have been levelling a 12m x 3m strip of land and removing grass and weeds to meet national playing standards. This gardening can be reversed at any time.

I am aware that the Orchard is on Common land and we have been careful to comply with the law. Section 3.1(a) of the *Cambridge City Council Act* 1985 allows the Council to "set apart such parts of any public open space or Common within the city as they think fit for the purpose of games and recreation and for purposes ancillary thereto and lay out and adapt the same for those purposes".

The Council's licence with FoMC for the Midsummer Common Community Orchard enables volunteers to carry out "work involving hand tools and powered hand tools", "grass cutting", "weed control" and "painting and decorating". And the licence makes specific reference to paragraph 2 of the 1851 byelaws saying that FoMC may "dig or plough up any such Common Pasture, or any part thereof".

I believe we are doing nothing wrong but feel that I should put our recreational intentions and works on the record. I am happy to discuss this further if you so wish.

kindest regards
Dick Baxter