

Fryent Country Park Management Plan: Section 9

Orchards



Fryent Country Park has four orchards, several hedges of fruit trees and a number of individual fruit trees. Bush Farm Orchard and The Pightle are orchards of former farmsteads. The Mounds Orchard is more recent having been planted on the park-side of the mounds alongside Fryent Way and extends for approximately one kilometre. Masons Field Orchard is also recent. Several hedgerows have been restored with high proportions of fruit trees of old varieties. Fruit trees also occur naturally in old hedgerows and occasionally in scrub and woodland.

For wildlife, orchards provide a diverse habitat or rather a variety of habitats with fruit trees, often with hedged perimeters, rough grassland, a mix of open sunny to partially shaded areas, and often additional features that may include paths, log-piles, ponds and bee hives.

At Fryent Country Park the emphasis is on traditional orchards, taken to mean the old farm or traditional orchards with old and large fruit trees. That is different from an orchard of closely-spaced, short-lived trees on dwarfing rootstocks as in some production systems. At Fryent Country Park the emphasis is on old varieties and species: arbitrarily defined as species that occur naturally at the Park, varieties with an association with Middlesex and varieties that were grown prior to 1900.

Bush Farm Orchard:

The Bush Farm orchard dates from 1597 (when it featured on the All Souls College map) or earlier. Restoration commenced in the 1990s when the former area was fenced-off from the horse grazing. The trees then present included Black Mulberry, Bullace, Common Hawthorn and Hybrid Hawthorn. Hops regrew. A perimeter hedge planted alongside a fence also has fruit trees, while a cobnut plantation of Kentish Filberts (Hazel nuts) was added. The orchard has a small pond, log-piles and bee hives.

The Pightle:

The Pightle was the home orchard of Hill Farm and had become so overgrown with Elm suckers that its significance was only rediscovered during recent years. Now largely restored, the orchard contains partial rows of Cherry, plus a Pear and Hop. Recently planted trees include old varieties of apple and damson. A perimeter hedge is being restored. Adjoining the orchard but also within the former area of the farmstead are a Crab Apple and a presumed plantation of Elders in two rows. The Capital Ring footpath goes through part of the orchard.

Masons Field Orchard:

Planted in the south-west corner of Masons Field, 2011-2015 as part of a Heritage Lottery Fund assisted project to restore Masons Field. Additional fruit trees were planted alongside the Bramble Lane.

Mounds Orchard:

Planted since about 2000 on the park side slopes of the roadside mounds along both the east and west sides of Fryent Way. Several hundred fruit trees of old varieties and Alder Buckthorn were planted, creating an orchard that is also visible to road users along Fryent Way. Fryent Way was constructed in about 1935, and the mounds in 1986-1990 to restrict unauthorised vehicle access. The mounds consist of various waste (clay, rubble and other items), capped by approximately 20cm of topsoil. The mounds total approximately 1,600m in length. The mounds vary in width from about 2-27m; and in height from approximately 0.7 to 4 metres. The Mounds features are taken here to include also the mown top and mown roadside edges of the mound, partly planted with low-flowering plants attractive to bees and butterflies; the pedestrian walkway and the roadside verges planted with cultivated varieties of Daffodil by the Friends of Fryent Country Park in the 1990s (approximately 22,000 bulbs). The mounds were seeded with a wildflower / grass mix, supplemented with an amenity grass mix. The construction of the mounds caused the loss of existing habitats, including old grassland at Richards West; and of hay meadow. The mounds also further bisected and obscured views of the historic landscape of the park in that they were at approximately right angles to the direction of the hedge-lines from east to west. Conversely the mounds landscaped the road traffic and noise from park users and reduced road noise as heard by some local residents.

Hedgerow orchards:

Hedgerows typically contain shrubs of wild fruits including, at Fryent Country Park, Blackthorn (Sloe), Hawthorns (Woodland, Common and Hybrid), Elder, Crab Apple, Bullace, Pear, Cherry Plum, Bird Cherry, Dog Rose, Field Rose and species of bramble. Several of the hedgerows within the Park have been restored with old varieties of fruit trees particularly desert apples including the Pinner Seedling variety, damsons and plums. Those are hedges 217, 528, 529, 530, 531, 532 and a new hedge towards the top west of Short Down East. Hedgerow are detailed in another section of this Management Plan.

General guidelines for managing the orchards and fruit trees

Organic Standards: The fruit from the orchards, hedgerows and other fruit of Fryent Country Park is certified as organic. Ensure compliance with the Soil Association Organic Standards.

The top three principles for pruning fruit trees, based on apple trees, are provided here. For more detail on techniques consult books, websites or training on pruning fruit trees:

- Our style guide to managing the shape of orchard fruit trees is to aim for an 'open-centre' or wide goblet shape. The outer branches extend laterally to the fruit-bearing tips. Vertical branches, that would otherwise have proved difficult to pick or to prune, are removed from the centre (goblet) of the tree. This increases the light to the fruit to improve ripening; and air-circulation to reduce humidity and disease. Subsequent maintenance is also easier as this reduces work at height and safety issues as all work can be done from the ground. Picking of the fruit is also easier. Tree growth is directed to lateral branch and fruit production rather than to the growth of central leaders.
- Fruit (apples) grows from wood that is at least two years old. When pruning it is these fruit buds that need to be retained. Think of a scarecrow with extended arms and outwardly pointed fingers. Avoid pruning the buds at the tips of the lateral growths (it is not a privet hedge!).
- Prune out instead young sappy growth, vertical stems, stems that are crossing within a tree and to reduce growth that is too crowded.

Orchard specific notes:

<p>Bush Farm Orchard:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage the orchard in a traditional style with the main areas of fruit trees relatively open and with clear sight-lines (free of scrub and other obstacles). Work towards a similar style throughout the top-fruit, bullace and cobnut areas. • Bullace copse: Reduce the number of Bullace suckers to retain a more open feature continuous with the other parts of the orchard, as above. Manage or prune some of the Bullaces so that the branches with fruit are within reach. Retain also the Wild Service Trees. • Hedge-lay the perimeter hedgerow, working clockwise, so as to maintain the boundary at a reasonable height, light to the orchard, and views in and out. The hedge will replace the fence over time. Leave un-laid, the top-fruit trees on the hedge line. • The cut vegetative material from the hedge-laying, pruning, and other works can be laid into the hedge on the exterior of the orchard or placed in the open compost towards the south-west of the orchard. • Woodland trees, e.g. Walnut, Ash, Oak, Bird Cherry should be pollarded where possible to reduce shading of the other fruit trees. • Maintain an internal, perimeter path. • Cut 80-90% of the orchard grassland, in rotation, preferably after 1st July (any season except during the spring). Leave approximately 10-20% uncut, until the following year. • Hops: Where growing adjacent to the Hops, high pollard the Bullace stems as living stakes to support the hops and gate trellis. • Maintain the pond. • Encourage a low-growing, Alder Buckthorn, Bramble and dead-hedge around the central bee-hive area. 	
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<p>The Pightle Orchard</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue the restoration of the orchard, encouraging the more recently planted trees and reducing shade to the established trees. • The mature Cherry Plums should be retained; though appropriately spaced young suckers can be pruned as lower-growing trees to enable fruit-picking. • The Pightle Orchard also has relatively large areas of grassland habitats, particularly alongside the Capital Ring and other paths. Those open areas should be maintained. 	
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage the formation of a low hedge on the perimeter, currently created as a dead-hedge. • Promote the fruit trees beyond but in the vicinity of the orchard including Crab Apples, Apples, Plums, Damsons. • Elder plantation: continue to reduce the shade around the Elders so as to present the plantation as a feature. 	
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Masons Field Orchard	
The orchard trees are continuing to grow. Main tasks include keeping the circulation space open, particularly by reducing growth of bramble. The trees alongside Bramble Lane would also be more of a feature if bramble is reduced from below the trees (though the bramble in the hedgerow should be retained).	

Mounds Orchard	
Manage the fruit trees as for the other orchards.	
The associated linear habitats include the grassland top of the mound and the slope down to the pedestrian path alongside Fryent Way. Encourage the management of a low-flowering, low-maintenance mown grassland providing an attractive display and value to butterflies and invertebrates. That alongside Long Down is a good example with Common Bird's-foot Trefoil and Oxeye Daisy.	
Currently the Council's contractor's ride-on-rotary mowers are set at approximately 4cm, the same height as for the verges and cut approximately every three weeks during the growing season. The cutting height could be raised to 10-12.5 cm and/or cutting undertaken every 6 weeks, or swathes left uncut in rotation.	
Roadside verges: Spring Daffodil display.	
Invasive species: Hemlock has mainly been controlled and any new plants should be pulled or cut, with gloved hands. Japanese Knotweed was introduced with the waste used to construct the roadside mounds in the 1990s. As the Park is certified as Organic, cultural methods are used to control the Knotweed, principally a combination of crushing stems and smothering with membranes.	
Brush: If large quantities of brush / cuttings are created, then those can be stacked in neat windrows of dead hedges at the lower edge of the mounds (orchard side of the paths).	
The Friends of Fryent Country Park organised the Daffodil planting in the grass verges alongside Fryent Way.	

Fruit trees in hedgerows	
<p>Old varieties of fruit planted into hedgerows should be on a vigorous rootstock so that the trees can cope in London Clay soils prone to water-logging in winter, drying in summer, exposed locations to wind and competition from other hedgerow trees.</p> <p>Select also for:</p> <p>Shade tolerance</p> <p>A low height at maturity if possible, for ease of picking.</p> <p>Low maintenance (tip bearing, no need for pruning; and/or tolerant of over-pruning)</p> <p>Pre- 1900, lowland English varieties (i.e. cultural varieties similar to those that could have been grown in local farmstead orchards.</p> <p>Dessert varieties preferred: to enable visitors to sample.</p>	

More information

See also the Management Plan sections on ‘Hedgerows’ and ‘Woodland’.

Barn Hill Conservation Group. www.bhcg.btck.co.uk

The Orchard Project. Barn Hill Conservation Group have worked with organisations including The Orchard Project to provide venues for and to train local volunteers. Orchard training is also available at other locations. Information can also be exchanged with other community orchard groups.