

Information submitted by Jon Stokes, Director of Trees, Science & Research, Tree Council.

Dear Councillors

At the request of the Portsmouth Tree Wardens, I am sending you some information about how The Tree Council regards the fruit tree planting that is happening in Portsmouth.

Portsmouth is one of the most densely populated urban areas in the UK. It also has a relatively low number of trees per resident, something that the Portsmouth and Southsea Tree Wardens have been trying to improve over the last 20 years. The project that has been developed by the Tree Wardens and The Charles Dickens Community Orchards, is to my knowledge one of the most exciting community orchard projects in the UK, because of its aspiration to bring suitable fruit trees to residents throughout the city, which builds on the rich heritage of the city and its connections through Dickens to fruit trees.

The scale of the communities efforts are amazing – with now 60 orchards being designated and planted and over 899 fruit trees having been planted throughout the City over the last 5 years.

Speaking as part of the National Orchard Group, we know orchards are priority habitats under the UK's Biodiversity Action Plan. The reason they are special is that fruit trees are particularly good habitats for wildlife because they are "early senescent". This means they get 'old' relatively quickly and develop veteran features such as hollow trunks, rot holes, dead wood and sap runs. These features are important for over 400 species of saproxylic invertebrates that live on decaying wood. These include Stag Beetle, Violet Oil-Beetle, and the beautiful and very rare Noble Chafer beetle. It's not all about the decay either though, as fruit tree blossom is an important source of nectar for pollinating insects including bees, hoverflies and butterflies. Orchards can have ponds and hedgerows which provide habitat for amphibians such as great crested newts, birds and mammals, such as hedgehogs and voles. And because orchard trees are more widely spaced than trees in a dense woodland, they let in more sunlight which makes them particularly good for flying insects who need the warmth, such as bees and butterflies.

The orchards being created in Portsmouth also allows for community engagement with a huge range of people and communities, providing not only trees for biodiversity and climate change (both of which are vital), but also developing a source of free and community based fruit available to anyone in the city. The natural bounty that is being created, has already been used to provide free food and fruit to foodbanks like Landport Larder, North End Pantry and community cafés.

I hope this information is useful in helping you to develop your biodiversity and other strategies over the next few years, and on behalf of The Tree Council I would like to express our enthusiasm for the work that is being carried out in the city to bring people, wildlife and trees together through the exemplary use of orchards. Long may it continue and we will continue to support wherever we can.