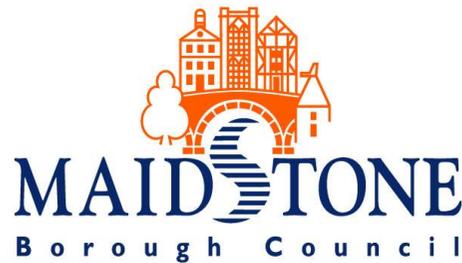


Maidstone's Biodiversity Strategy

A Local Biodiversity Action Plan

Phase 1: 2009 – 2014

HAP 8: Traditional Orchards



Traditional Orchards Action Plan

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Traditional Orchards Action Plan

Description

- 1.1 Traditional orchards are defined as orchards that are managed in a low intensity manner as opposed to those intensively managed for fruit production. Traditional orchards are areas of grassland with open grown trees similar to wood-pasture and parkland. However the traditional orchards are distinguished from other habitat types by certain characteristics. Tree species composition is usually primarily from the Rosaceae family with a dense arrangement of the trees. Traditional orchards are often only planted on a small scale and can include plantings of nuts (particularly hazelnuts, including cobnuts but also walnuts). The herbaceous vegetation growing around orchard trees is managed through grazing or cutting whilst grafting and pruning to increase the yield of fruit or nuts from the trees.
- 1.2 Historically, the main concentrations of orchards have been in Kent, Devon, Somerset and the three counties of Gloucestershire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire, although the types of fruit grown has varied widely between and within these areas. Within the borough the main areas traditional orchards are found is within the Mid Kent Fruit Belt (in central areas of the High and Low Weal and Greensand)
- 1.3 Traditional orchards can occur on a wide range of soil types and on slopes ranging from steep to level with any aspect. These areas often have ponds and other wetland features present due to the need to water livestock. There are also often hedgerows surrounding traditional orchards, which can provide food, shelter and corridors to other habitats for a wide range of species.
- 1.4 The trees within traditional orchards often decay quickly and so provide crevice and hollow nesting sites for birds such as spotted flycatchers and can also provide roosts for bats. The bark itself supports many fungi, moss and lichen species. The decaying wood of old fruit trees supports the rare noble chafer beetle (*Gnorimus nobilis*) a UK BAP species.
- 1.5 Traditional Orchards can not be created easily as they require specific variety of local fruit breeds and take many years to mature and achieve their full biodiversity potential.

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National status

- 2.1 The estimated extent of traditional orchards in the UK (28,750ha), puts the habitat at the rarer end of the scale compared to existing priority habitats.
- 2.2 The decreasing profitability of top fruit production over the last 50 years has led to a significant decline in the area of orchards, particularly the older ones. Grubbing grants in the 1980's contributed to their reduction, but the decline has continued and Defra Statistics show a 52% fall in the area of dessert apples in Kent between 1994 and 2004.

Local status

- 3.1 The Mid-Kent Downs Orchard Project estimated that there were 107 ha of traditional orchards found across 65 sites in the borough, however this figure is likely to be an underestimate as in total there was an additional of 464 ha of potential traditional orchard habitat, however the data for these was not sufficient to fully classify the site as a UK priority traditional orchard.
- 3.2 Of the traditional orchards identified none are designated SSSI.
- 3.3 Approximately 3 ha, within 3 sites, are found within designated Local Wildlife Site (LWS). None of the 3ha of traditional orchards within LWS is currently under an environmental stewardship or has been under environmental stewardship in the last 5 years.
- 3.4 Currently 66 ha (62%) of traditional orchards identified within the Orchard Project is in a favourable condition.

Factors causing decline in biodiversity

- 4.1 Intensification of agriculture - traditional orchards were planted at about 150 trees per hectare with pasture beneath. Modern orchards are often planted on dwarf rootstocks at 2,200 trees per hectare, they are grubbed up every 12-15 years, they are sprayed with pesticides (up to once a week during the summer), they are heavily pruned, and a strip of bare earth is maintained beneath the trees.
- 4.2 Increased imports of foreign fruit.

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- 4.3 Conflict between commercial and conservation objectives in the management of traditional orchards, as some of the features which are of most benefit to wildlife, particularly dead wood, can be damaging to fruit production.
- 4.4 Traditional orchards can be threatened by development. A large proportion of the surviving orchards exist around towns, villages or close to farmsteads.
- 4.5 Neglect

Current local action

- 5.1 Tree preservation orders can be used to protect important orchards and nut platts in the borough.
- 5.2 Agri-environmental schemes specifically for the management, restoration and enhancement of traditional orchards.
- 5.3 Currently 66 ha of traditional orchard in the Maidstone Borough is under such an agri-environmental scheme or has been in the last 5 years.
- 5.4 The 'Orchards for Everyone' project (Jan 2010 - Dec 2010) run by KCC Countryside Management Partnerships (CMPs) is collecting valuable data on the distribution of traditional orchards, increase awareness of the biodiversity importance of the habitat and provided advice to owners regarding management of sites.

Funding resources

- 6.1 The Environmental Stewardship Scheme provides funding the maintenance, restoration and enhancement of traditional orchards.

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National plan objectives and actions

7.1 As this is a relatively new priority habitat there is currently no national plan or targets.

Local plan objectives and actions

7.1 The Kent BAP Traditional Orchard Habitat action plan objectives and targets cover habitat conservation and restoration. The action plan aims to maintain the current extent of old orchards in Kent (1666 ha) and secure appropriate management of all existing and restored/recreated traditional orchards by 2020. The plan has set area specific targets on restoration and expansion of traditional orchards, with a total target of restoring 60 ha of degrading and creating another 60ha of traditional orchard by 2015. Specifically, the action plan highlights that at least 15 ha of traditional orchard should be restored and an additional 15 ha created within the Maidstone Borough. Nut Platts are a particular feature of the countryside in Maidstone Borough – particularly on the Greensand Ridge and are worthy of special focus within this Action Plan.

Maidstone's objectives

9.1 Maidstone's objectives are;

1. **Maintain traditional old orchards and nut platts remaining in (or restore them to) favourable managed condition.**
2. **Increase knowledge of Traditional Orchard and nut platt status and distribution**
3. **Develop more community orchards and nut platts and increase awareness of current community orchard events.**
4. **Restore and expand via agri-environmental schemes and targeted planting of new trees.**

Traditional Orchards Action Plan

Objectives and targets

Objective 1: Maintain traditional old orchards and nut platts remaining in (or restore them to) favourable managed condition

Target 1: All identified orchards and nut platts in favourable condition (Identification involves owner's agreement to retain)

LAG	ACTION	TARGET START DATE	TARGET END DATE	KEY EXTERNAL PARTNERS	PROGRESS
1.	Ensure that Maidstone's Local Development Framework contain policy to protect traditional orchards and nut platt habitat	2010	2010	ALL	
2.	Ensure all traditional orchards and nut platts of local importance are designated as Local Wildlife Site (LWS)	2010	2026	ALL	
3.	Target agri-environmental schemes at traditional orchards and nut platts	2010	2014	NE CMPs	

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Objective 2: Increase knowledge of Traditional Orchard and nut platt status and distribution

Target 2: Re-Assess the orchards identified in the Orchard Project as possibly traditional to gather further information to determine their priority status

LAG	ACTION	TARGET START DATE	TARGET END DATE	KEY EXTERNAL PARTNERS	PROGRESS
4.	Continue supporting the Orchards for Everyone project and dissemination of data to all partners. Look to extend funding for this project with a focus on nut platts .	2010	2026	ALL	Planning Policy (PP) currently financially support this project

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Objective 3: Develop more community orchards and nut platts and increase awareness of current community orchard events.

Target 3: Search for 1 new site within the Maidstone Borough to develop as a community orchard and nut platt and continue to support the Lenham Community Orchard

LAG	ACTION	TARGET START DATE	TARGET END DATE	KEY EXTERNAL PARTNERS	PROGRESS
5.	Continue to support the community orchard at Lenham and hold community events.	2010	2014	CMPs MVCP	
6.	Search for a suitable site to develop as a second community orchard/nut platt in Maidstone Borough.	2010	2015	CMPs	

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Objective 4: Restore and expand via agri-environmental schemes and targeted planting of new trees.

Target 4: Restore and expand traditional orchard/nut platts by using appropriate management techniques by at least 15 ha by 2014, 17 ha 2019 and 19 ha by 2026 (Total Area: 19 ha by 2026).

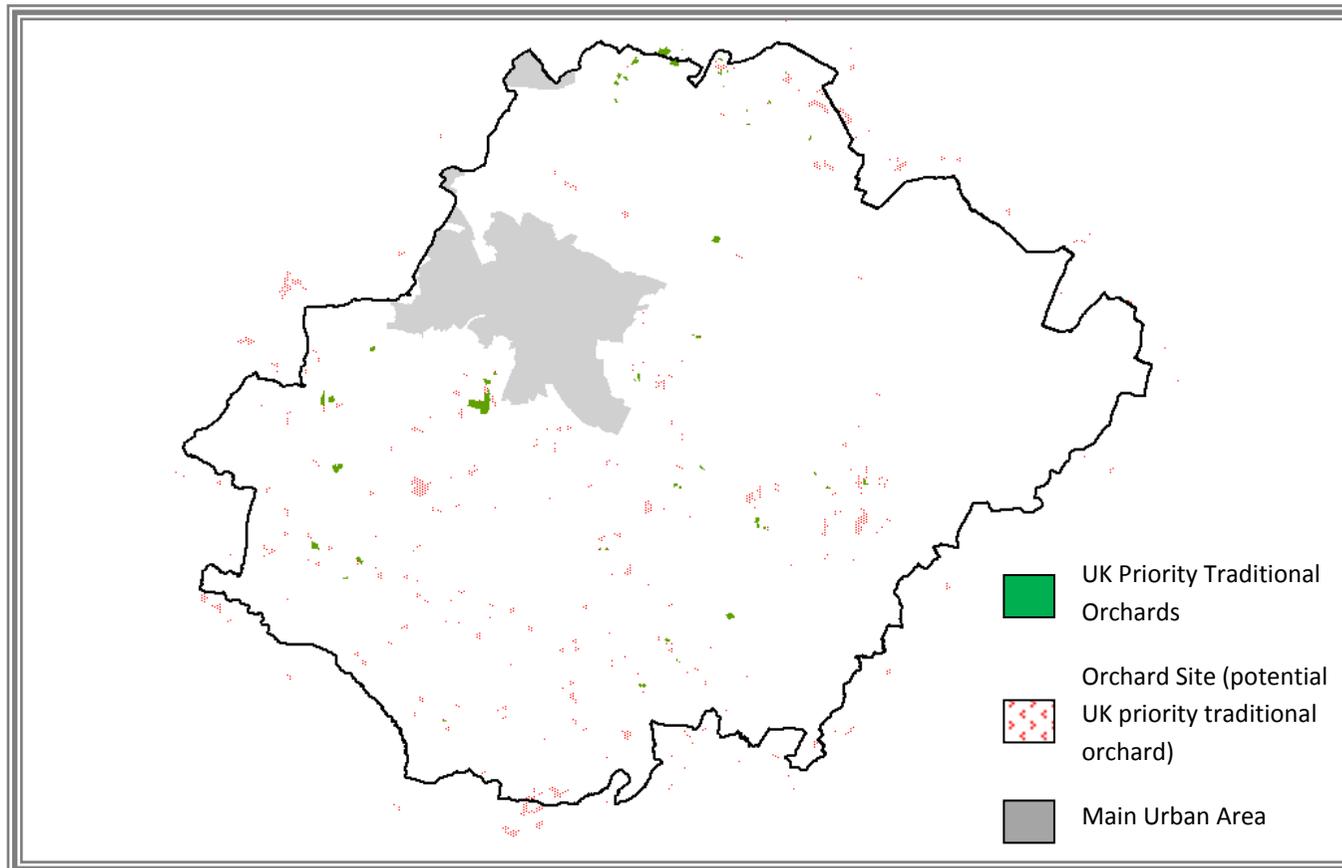
LAG	ACTION	TARGET START DATE	TARGET END DATE	KEY EXTERNAL PARTNERS	PROGRESS
7.	Identify sites that are suitable for tree planting and record this within survey information and relay to NE for targeted agri-environmental schemes	20010	2026	CMPs NE	
8.	Target agri-environmental schemes to restore at least 15 ha of traditional orchard/nut platt	2010	2015	ALL	
9	Target agri-environmental schemes to expand at least 15 ha of traditional orchard/nut platt	2010	2015	ALL	
10.	Support wider Orchards for All project	2010	2016	CMPs	

Traditional Orchards Action Plan

Traditional orchards distribution

10.1 The distribution of traditional orchards can be seen in figure 1.

Figure 1 Distribution of Traditional Orchards in Maidstone Borough



Data Source: Orchards for Everyone' project (2008 data)