

Evaluation Report

Growing Orchard Communities in South Devon



Orchard Link
October 2017



Executive Summary

Why Orchards?

Orchards are a distinctive feature of the South Devon landscape. Almost every farm had an orchard to provide cider, juice, cooking and eating apples for the family, workers and the wider community. 60% of England's orchards have disappeared since the 1950s. In Devon, the figure is higher still at 90%.

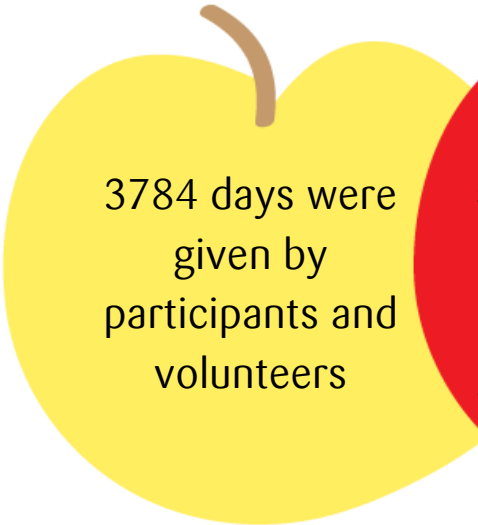
This project has tackled this issue by working with volunteer community orchard groups to improve their skills and expertise in order for them to safeguard the ongoing good management of existing orchards in their parishes. We also worked with them to help them to better engage their communities to engender a sense of ownership of these important shared spaces in their villages.

The project has been hugely successful with thousands of people enjoying the fruit of the community orchard groups labours! The sites are now well managed by 23 groups of skilled and enthusiastic volunteers, with action plans to take them forward for the next 5 years. They are thriving with the support of their communities and each other, as well as the wider Orchard Link network.

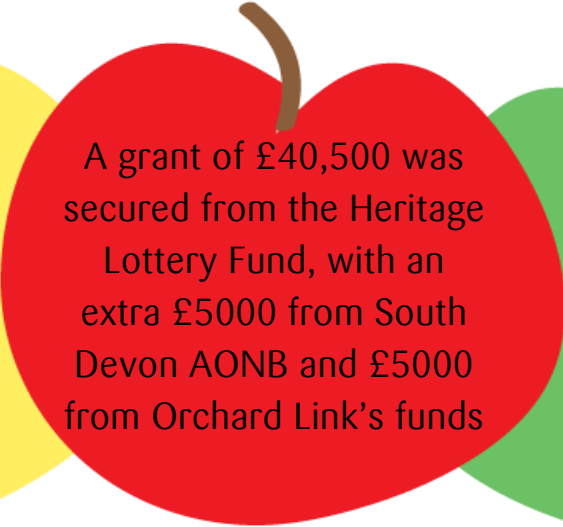


Feed the trees event – Cornwood community orchard


Growing Orchard Communities... The fruits of our labour!



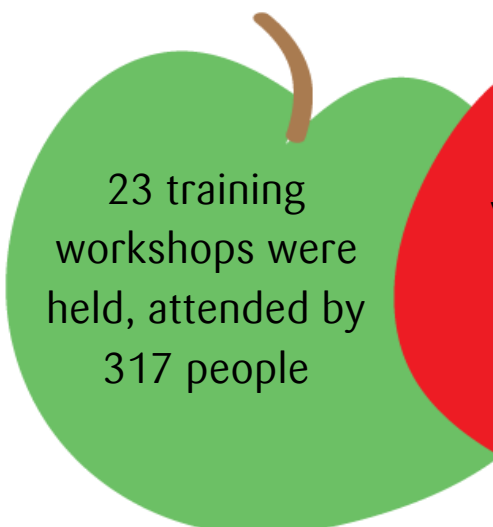
3784 days were given by participants and volunteers




A grant of £40,500 was secured from the Heritage Lottery Fund, with an extra £5000 from South Devon AONB and £5000 from Orchard Link's funds




12 editions of The Apple Press were sent out to 117 subscribers




23 training workshops were held, attended by 317 people




£137,150 worth of volunteer in-kind time and non-cash contributions were given



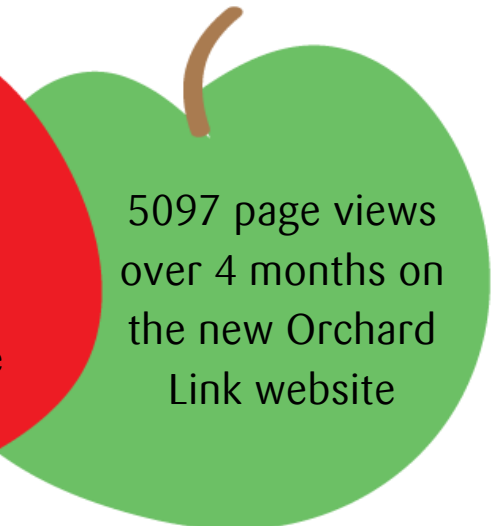
5460 photo views on our Flickr page, 176 views on YouTube



23 community orchard groups took part



5 core groups volunteered 631 days of time and put on 56 community events attended by 1636 people



5097 page views over 4 months on the new Orchard Link website

What we wanted to happen

The Growing Orchard Communities project was designed to link community orchard groups to the wider Orchard Link network. It aimed to support local people to manage healthy orchards for the whole community to enjoy.

It was delivered by Orchard Link and supported by the South Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty team. A grant of £40,500 from the Heritage Lottery Fund was matched with additional funding from South Devon AONB Sustainable Development Fund and Orchard Link

23 community orchard groups from across South Devon have been part of this exciting project. The project was launched at Sharpham House and community orchard in November 2015

The project was made up of 2 main strands of work – community engagement and landscape enhancements. By taking part in this project, the planned outcomes were:

For the community orchard groups:

- Volunteers would be trained in the skills they needed to properly care for and manage their sites.
- Volunteers would be linked in to the wider Orchard Link network for further support, resources and training opportunities.
- Volunteers would meet, and get to know, other volunteers from similar community orchard groups participating in the project.
- Learning and information would be shared through an online toolkit, as well as using online social media sites.



The green roof of the new community shelter – Dartmouth community orchard

For the community orchards:

- The sites would be better managed and thrive as an important and valuable space in the community.

For the communities:

- There would be a better sense of involvement in the activities and events in the community orchards.
- There would be an increased understanding and awareness of the importance of orchards in the landscape, especially in South Devon.



Blossom Day celebrations, Huxhams Cross community orchard

For Orchard Link

- There would be a new Orchard Link website with improved content, booking system and online toolkit and case studies for use by community orchard groups. Learning from the project would be shared here as well.
- Volunteers from the committee would be trained in skills needed to update and manage the new website.
- Volunteers from the committee would be trained in skills needed to better support the community orchard groups as ongoing members.

What actually happened

The Orchard Communities

The orchard groups we worked with all wanted to involve more people from their local communities in looking after and enjoying their orchards, as well as ensuring that their members had the skills needed to ensure that their orchard sites were healthy and well managed.

Volunteers would be trained in the skills they needed to properly care for and manage their sites.

We ran a programme of workshops, training, networking and skill sharing events throughout the project. The total attendance by volunteers at these days was 551; they are now using these skills and knowledge to help members of their own communities find out more about their local orchards.

“I have personally valued the skill and enthusiasm and support of your organisation, gently moving us forward. Simply – many thanks for all your support over the last two years.”

Jonny, Wembury community orchard group

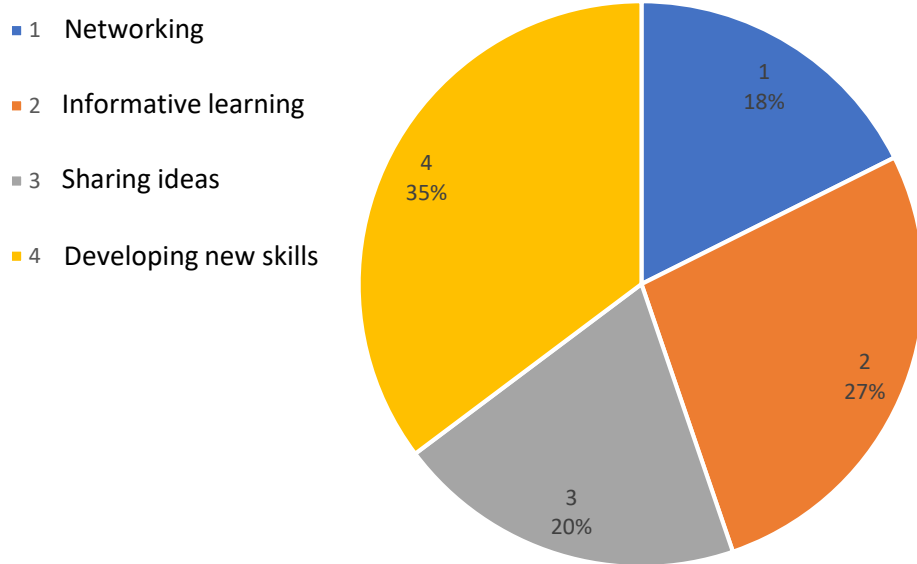


Cordon planting workshop, Hemerdon community orchard

The data collected from the training and workshop day feedback forms show that participants thought that developing new skills was the most useful part of the

sessions. This was backed up with further learning from the leader, the information provided or shared from each other.

Feedback form responses - What did you think was most useful about the day?

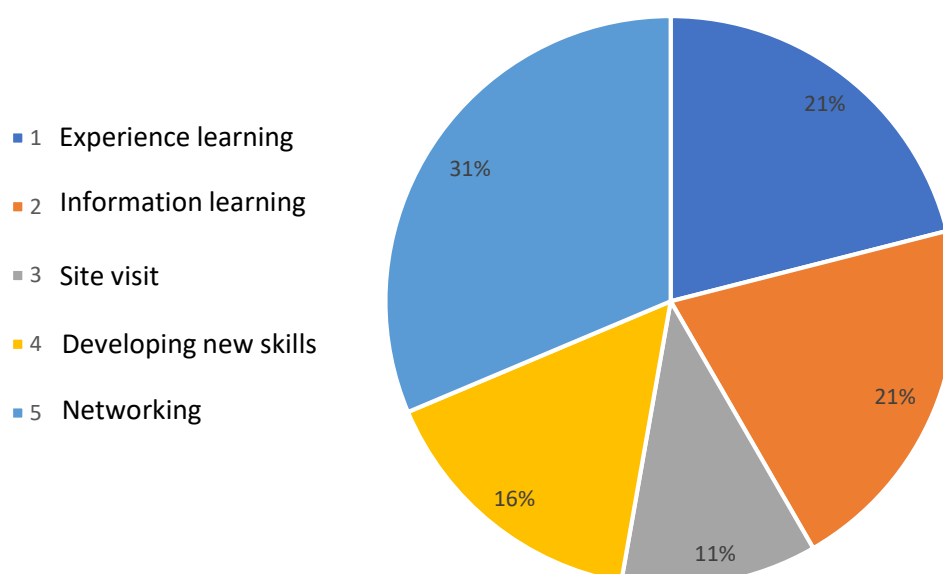


Celebrating Orchards - Spring network day, Lupton community orchard

Volunteers would meet, and get to know, other volunteers from similar community orchard groups participating in the project.

We set up a network of community orchard volunteers who can now support each other in growing their own community orchards. They have got to know each other through the project and are able to get in touch with each other. This element of networking came out very strongly in the feedback from the volunteers taking part in the workshop and network days programme:

Feedback form responses - What did you enjoy most about the day?



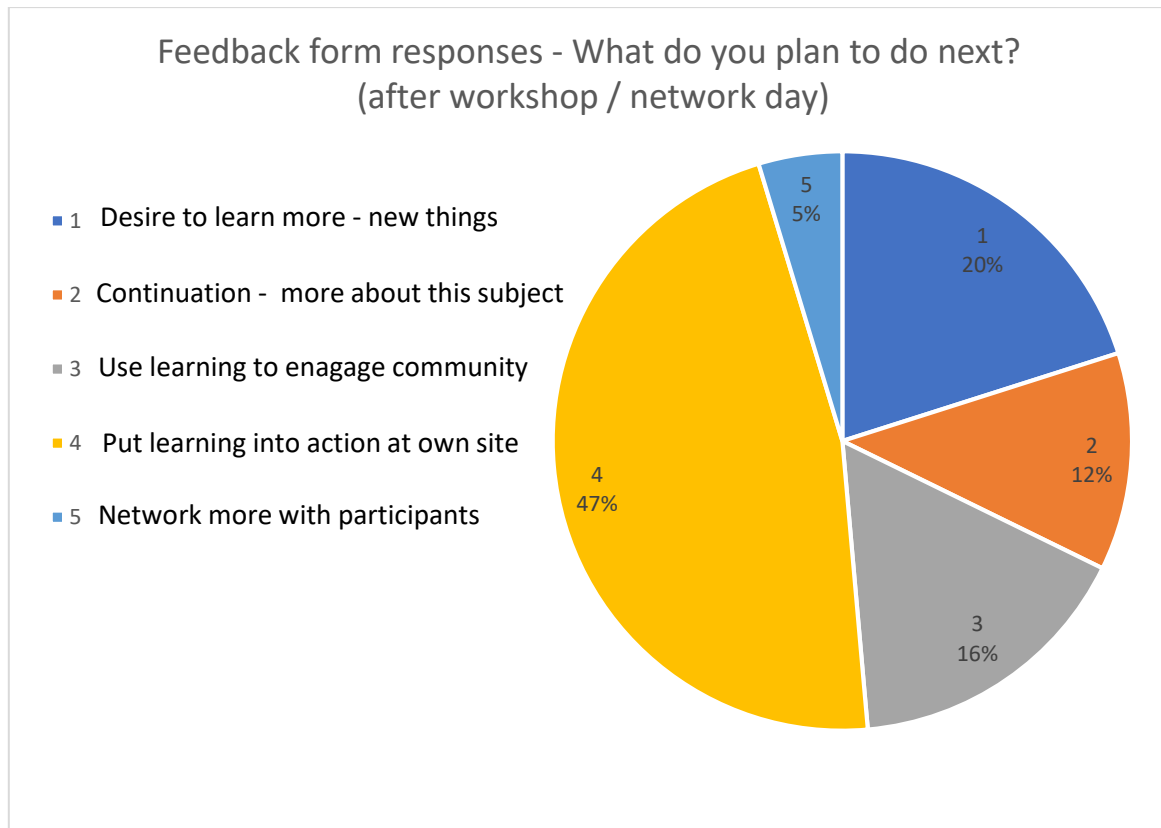
“Firstly, thank you for organising/hosting a fantastic day on Saturday. It was my first networking event with Orchard Link and I learnt a great deal from it.” *Duncan, Autumn network day participant*

Volunteers would be linked in to the wider Orchard Link network for further support, resources and training opportunities.

Volunteers from the committee would be trained in skills needed to better support the community orchard groups as ongoing members.

By taking part in the training and workshops we have got to know the community orchard volunteers and better understand their needs. One member of the

committee is now the community orchard representative. Orchard Link are committed to continue to work with the community orchard groups when planning their workshops, events and training programme to ensure that relevant courses are put on. Feedback showed that the participants were intending to put the learning into action back on their own sites and use this to engage their communities



There would be a better sense of involvement in the activities and events in the community orchards.

There would be an increased understanding and awareness of the importance of orchards in the landscape, especially in South Devon.

We worked with 5 core groups who received some extra funding to run events to encourage people from their community to get involved in their orchards. Their learning and experiences have been written up as [case studies](#), shared in the new Orchard Link website. **Altogether the five groups put in 228 volunteer days organising and planning 56 events. A further 403 volunteer days were put in to help run the events, which were attended by just over 1600 people from the local communities.**

“It was lovely having everyone, adults and children in the orchard - crafting benches, carving a sign, making a noticeboard, drinking tea and sitting around the fire. It felt like we were all creating this community space together and that all that love and enthusiasm would live on in the things that we made. It was lovely to see the orchard becoming not just a place where we grow trees but a place where we celebrate together, learn together and come together as a community.” *Fiona, participant at community orchard event*



Sign making at wildlife bioblitz event, Beeson community orchard

“The community orchard working weekend was very well organised, convivial and constructive. Ticked all the boxes and the labours brought forth fruits galore” *Simon, Huxhams Cross resident.*

Other community orchard groups, outside of the core groups, also put on community events, from Apple Days to Blossom Picnics and Feed the Trees to Wassails.

“Just to thank you for such an inspiring re-enactment and wassail workshop last autumn, so good that Modbury did its own last Saturday - over a hundred people came, helped by the vicar, the town crier, sausages from the Beavers, mulled apple juice and some great singing from the school... All your notes and print outs were vital in the planning - we wouldn't have had a clue otherwise! Wassail has certainly grabbed everyone's attention here and we already have more names to help with expanding our Galpin street orchard.” *Charlotte, Modbury community orchard group*

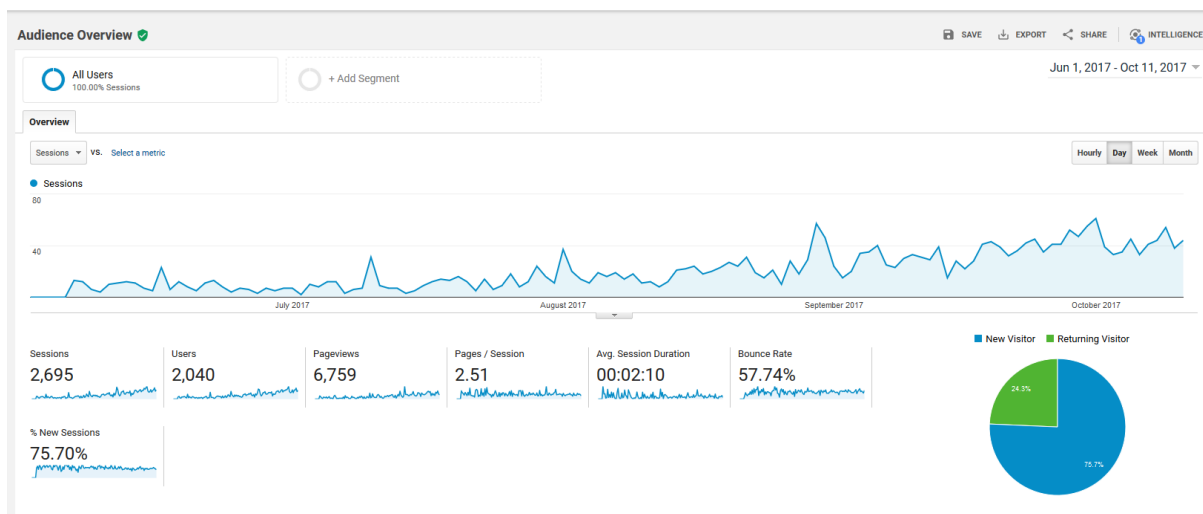


Wassail! Modbury community orchard

A digital resource

Learning and information would be shared through an online toolkit, as well as using online social media sites.

What we have all learned during this project is a great resource that can be used by community orchard groups anywhere. To make sharing this easy, we have built a new website for [Orchard Link](#) which is full of advice, information and an [online toolkit](#) of resources, free to download for community orchard volunteers anywhere. The website site is already being well used with 6759 page visits since the Google analytics were installed in June 2017. You can see from the table below there has been a steady increase in use.



We have an image sharing site on [Flickr](#), with over 600 photos uploaded; new community apple songs on [Soundcloud](#); films and videos on [YouTube](#) and a project page on [Facebook](#). We also produced a project e-newsletter – The Apple Press. 12 issues were sent out via Mailchimp to 117 subscribers

“I find your website very useful and regularly peruse for advice and tips.” *Pat, Bruton, Somerset*

Volunteers from the committee would be trained in skills needed to update and manage the new website.

We ran a website editing training course for the Orchard Link committee to give us the skills we need to provide content for, and update the new website. This was very successful and volunteers who were complete novices are now able to confidently and competently manage our own website.

“Really useful and now group (committee) uploading info to website; The hand out you did was excellent.” *Website training workshop for Orchard Link volunteers*

We also ran a series of training events for community orchard volunteers on how to use social media, sharing and archiving digital images, writing blogs and uploading materials to online websites. These were very well received and an invaluable resource for the volunteers.

“It was immensely helpful for a computer duff like myself to have the undivided attention of Nathan. He was brilliant. Never mind about bus fare. It was a trifling sum compared with what I was given!” *Wendy, Totnes Community orchard.*



Digital media workshop, Fowlescombe Farm

The Community Orchards

The sites would be better managed and thrive as an important and valuable space in the community.

The continued good management of these community orchards is vital to the success of this project. As well as equipping the volunteers with the skills they need to look after the sites, we also helped them to write simple 5-year management plans and provide site specific expert advice and mentoring. They were also able to draw down a small site improvement grant to carry out some of the works identified in their plan. (This was funded by small locality grants secured independently).

These plans and advice will ensure management continuity of the orchard sites and has helped some of the groups attract further funding.

“We had a great day today! Charles did a good hour of pruning theory first. Then we pruned several differently aged trees to give us experience. Back to village hall for lunch with homemade cakes. Finally, back to orchard and pruned nearly ALL the other trees. So, many thanks to Charles and everyone for a brilliant day AND a good job done!!” *Penny, Holbeton community orchard group*



Orchard appraisal training, Week community orchard

The numbers!

This project has helped orchard groups to look after their sites as important and enjoyable resources for their communities.

The total volunteer contribution (as specified by HLF guidance) made to the project totals **£137,150** and is equivalent to **1283** volunteer days.

These volunteers ran events in their community orchards which were attended by **2501** members of the community.

This project has been a great success, we have worked with hundreds of people, from local residents, orchard volunteers and school children, to cooks, artists, keen amateurs and friendly experts!



Celebrating Fruitfulness – Autumn network event, Holbeton community orchard

Here is what some of the people involved had to say

“The weekend really brought our community together in a way that I haven't felt before. It was creative, supportive and bonding to all get together and work to create something of beauty for the orchard. The vibe was one of willingness and happiness. I feel like the orchard evolved in quite a substantial way that weekend, with a lot of community energy put in to it. Basically, it was a really great weekend!” *Sarah, member of community at orchard event*



Community workday, Huxhams Cross community orchard

“I really liked your recent Newsletter. I’ve forwarded it to all our Friends encouraging them to attend. I think you and Sara have done a great job with the range and variety of the events you have created, the way you’ve drawn people in with your enthusiasm, and the practical ways in which you have engaged people. Thank you.” *Peter S. Dartmouth community orchard group*



In training!

The first instalment of our Network and Training Workshops programme has been sent out to all community orchard groups signed up to The Growing

“Please can I reiterate the children's enjoyment for the project. I know the group I took to the orchard loved being part of the filming process. The party during the weekend was a success and something which I hope the orchard friends promote next year too.” *Bonnie Chivers, Head of primary school, Dartmouth Academy*



'This is our Orchard' Film making with school children, Dartmouth community orchard

“Once more well done with Saturday's finale. You and your team should be proud of the benefits many groups have gained from involvement in the GOC project.” *Peter G, Dartmouth community orchard group*



Finale Celebration event, Totnes

Reviewing the project

Recording

We monitored attendance and gathered feedback throughout the project in a number of ways. This information was used to help plan further workshops and activities, record engagement and assess our progress. It was discussed at the bi-monthly project steering group meetings. This included;

- Feedback sheets completed after every workshop and network event.
- Recording informal comments made by telephone and email.
- One to one meetings with core groups to look at progress, evaluate success and plan further activities and events.
- Telephone conversations with community orchard co-ordinators to discuss the project progress.
- Informal feedback at events.
- Final project feedback sheets for community orchard groups.
- We also made an evaluation song and a film at our finale celebration! – it can be seen on our YouTube page [here](#).



Interviewing participants to make the evaluation film, Finale event, Totnes

Revitalising

Groups who have taken part have felt that they gained a lot from the experience. Some of them were floundering or lacking in volunteers and energy. The feedback we have received is that this project has been able to kickstart their enthusiasm and helped them encourage more people to join them in looking after the sites. This in turn has led to a re-vitalising of the groups and helped the stalwart members be reinvigorated, sharing their knowledge and passion for the orchards. More events

have attracted more people and the communities around the orchards involved have a greater understanding and link to these green spaces in their villages.

“It has revitalised the community working in the orchard and local interest which in turn has enabled much improved tree care. The orchard looks really well cared for and people are aware of the events and have already been asking about future events (juicing day). Thank you very much for your support – this project has really helped us to re-engage with our community orchard and we will try to maintain this enthusiasm. Our top tip is wheel barrow jousting – it went down a storm!” *Gill, Cornwood community orchard group*



Wheelbarrow jousting at Feed the Trees community event, Cornwood community orchard

Relationships

The opportunity to meet other volunteers doing the same thing in other villages and parishes has been paramount to the success of this project. The mingling of ideas and a shared passion for orchards has meant that everybody got on really well and enjoyed taking part. This led to a feeling of achieving something bigger than just working in the 23 small orchards, and became more about working towards safeguarding and caring for orchards across South Devon. These relationships will last longer than our project and will be an important legacy for the volunteers involved. To help this, the South Devon Area of Outstanding Beauty unit have agreed to work with Orchard Link to host an annual gathering for community orchard group volunteers, with the first one being in Spring 2018.

“An unexpected outcome of the project for us was the added value of networking with other orchard volunteers and an enhanced relationship with Orchard Link.” Peter S, Dartmouth

“By taking part in this project we have made new friends – nice friends that are interested in the same thing.” Kaz, Hemerdon community orchard



Christening the new bench made at community workshops, Newton and Noss community orchard

Resources

An important and valuable output of the project has been the [online toolkit](#) which is available on the Orchard Link website. This has been built up using ideas, activities, notes from workshops, leaders crib sheets and templates. It is already being well used and will help people running community orchards anywhere with access to the internet! We have also been able to build a resource kit which can be used by community orchard groups which includes display material, banners, a gazebo and extra press hire equipment.

“It’s been wonderful. The funding meant we could really get started with the project. The advice and support from Tess Wilmott (Orchard Link volunteer) was invaluable. Although we have struggled to attend many of the events those that we have been to have been fantastic. Resources online have been brilliant and are looking forward to having more time to explore the network of support and other orchards which has been built through this project.” Zoe, Foxhole community orchard group



Tissue blossom made using a worksheet from GOC online toolkit

Repair

We now have orchards across the project area which are well managed and in a healthy condition. They have action plans which will provide a consistent approach to management and volunteers who are well trained to carry out the necessary tasks. Orchard Link will continue to provide excellent training for the volunteers as part of their ongoing events programme.

“Without the support of the group, the orchard would have never been planted in the first place and would most likely have fallen into disrepair, whereas it has kept going. The number of trees has doubled this year. Whilst the group here in the Village, can hardly be described as thriving, there is now an established orchard, slowly maturing, which would only take a few people with time and vision, to start flourishing.” *Jonny, Wembury community orchard group*



Cordon planting work party, Hemerdon community orchard

Reflections

This project has given Orchard Link the opportunity to properly engage with community orchard groups – a new direction for Orchard Link as most of the members have been traditionally drawn from private orchard owners. We have understood more fully how these sites are a very important resource for the community, with the value of the actual growing and production of fruit coming second to the value of the open, sociable, community ‘owned’ green space. There is so much more to the community orchard than the apples...

Some of the groups engaged more than others, this was invariably down to the time and energy of the members or the objectives of the groups. Even though they had all stated their commitment on the initial consultation and the project agreement, they were not all able to commit as much as they first specified. We struggled to find ways around this despite our best efforts to be clear in communicating the opportunities and expectations of the project.

“These activities were very empowering, especially for those who consider themselves unskilled. It brought community residents into the orchard who had never previously been involved and it gave people a sense of ownership of the orchard space. Many children were also involved, especially carving the sign or simply playing while their parents worked. Of all the activities, this hands on creative session was the most energising for the project. Subsequently there has been a marked increase in the numbers attending work days as well as an increase in use of the orchard as an amenity space. The seating area has also brought in teenagers who like hanging out there especially during the evenings” *Daverick, Huxhams Cross community orchard group*



Sign carving at community workday, Huxhams Cross community orchard

Lessons learned from running the project

The things that worked well in running the project included:

1. Having detailed discussions with our community orchard groups, well in advance of submitting the funding bid, ensured that the *Growing Orchard Communities* project genuinely met their needs.
2. Having a small but effective project steering group in place from the outset allowed us to guide the work, review progress and make adjustments to the programme.
3. Employing the South Devon AONB Unit provided us with dedicated and effective project management and administration, so that Orchard Link volunteers didn't get overwhelmed with organisational work and could focus on strategic project guidance and fully participating in the networking, learning and skills sharing.
4. Bringing in a wide range of professionals to run activities and training courses – from musicians to carpenters, from environmental educators to story tellers, from tree pruning experts to IT specialists, injected a high degree of expertise and creativity to the project.
5. By running the activities over a two year period, with a spread of meetings, courses and events throughout, we had time to develop good working relationships with the groups and volunteers, and provide plenty of opportunity for informal networking between the participants.

Things we would do better or differently another time:

1. Some of the groups that initially committed to taking part in the project did not fully “show up” and make the most of the opportunity available to them: we would need to be more clear and assertive in setting out our expectations and commitments in future.
2. We had hoped that volunteers from the participating groups would become more engaged in the running of Orchard Link as an organisation, but this has not materialised, and we do not currently have a solution to this.

The legacy of the project:

1. From the feedback received, we know that the project has had a real “capacity building” impact on the participants, in terms of new skills, confidence, ideas, vision, contacts and energy. For some of the groups, the project has acted as a real catalyst for change. This is exactly what we wanted to happen.
2. The orchard sites are now being much more skilfully and effectively cared for, with on-going management plans and greater levels of community involvement.

3. Orchard Link has developed a new sense of purpose and direction, and has acquired the skills and resources to embrace this and continue its work with community orchard groups in the future.

“We now have a use for the apples growing in the community orchard and provide a pressing service for apples brought in for community use. There is a better awareness of the orchard and apples. The Wassail got people to the orchard who might not normally go. The Wassail has introduced a great community event and gathering in an unusual time of the year. And... the public have been tasting REAL apple juice and loving it!” *Charlotte, Modbury community orchard group.*



Celebrating biodiversity, Summer network day, Broadleigh farm orchard

Finally....

We would like to thank our funders at Heritage Lottery Fund and South Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

But most of all we would like to say a huge **thank you** to the many volunteers who spend their weekends and spare time looking after the orchards and sharing their passion for these amazing places with their communities.