

Deptford Park Community Orchard

Tree Selection Proposal

This proposal offers a selection of fruit trees and bushes for the Deptford Park Community Orchard that have value and meaning for each part of the community that surrounds and uses the park. The purpose is to create a real sense of connection and ownership between those who live around the orchard and the trees themselves.

A community orchard is a space where different parts of the community can come together, build new relationships with each other and with the green space around them. To support this, we have attempted to choose fruit species and varieties that 'represent' the memories, current needs and hopes for the future of different parts of the community. We hope that this not only will give everyone something to connect with and draw them into using the orchard and taking care of the trees, but will also give them stories to take pride in and share with others.

The most immediate value of fruit trees lies in the fruit that they produce. The priority then is to select fruit that people want to eat and use and enjoy. Yet an orchard is also a way of connecting with the past, with the local history and heritage of existing communities. Finally, planting an orchard is also a long-term commitment that will provide a legacy for the community, connecting those who plant it with those who will live there in 10, 20, even 50 years time. We need trees that will endure in the face of change – both local and global (eg. climate change) – and continue to be productive for many years. And we need to design a space that will become more attractive, useful and abundant over time, passing down to each generation something richer than went before.

To bring together the past, present and future of Deptford, the proposal below builds on some of the stories and connections kindly shared by local people connected with the DeptfordFolk friends group, and through a community mapping workshop in November 2017. These connections and stories include:

- The legacy of 17th century polymath horticulturalist John Evelyn, and his famous gardens at Sayes Court. Here he planted 300 fruit trees, more than 50 different varieties, including a Mulberry tree that still survives. Deptford Park was originally a market garden belonging to the estate of the Evelyn family, renowned for its onions, celery and asparagus.
- Grinling Gibbons (1648-1721) was a Dutch-British sculptor and wood carver. Known as the 'King's Carver'. Lived in Deptford. Friends with John Evelyn. Most of his work was in Lime Wood (Linden). Style was intricate natural forms including flower garlands and fruit. Gibbons created baroque arch carvings out of pearwood for The Orangery at Kensington.
- Keogh – the developer that built much of the housing surrounding Deptford Park
- Molins Machine Company, founded in Deptford 1912. Jose Molins began in Havana in 1874, making cigars & cigarettes. Sons devised cigarette packet machine. Became an munitions factory during the war. Most factories closed 1950, but some lasted until 1985.

- History of Docks and Dockyards. Royal Navy. Henry VIII Dockyard. Convoy's Wharf. The Slave Trade. Closing of the docks and decline of industry.
- Trinity House navigation safety org. founded here.
- North Deptford known as Deptford Strand (part of St Nicholas Parish)
- The Surrey & Kent Canal
- River Ravensbourne / Deptford Creek.
- Historically Deptford part of Kent, also of the 'Blackheath Hundred'
- Colin Blythe, famous cricketer
- Individual oral memories of the area.
- Other famous Deptfordians – chartist, George Julian Harney (1817-1897); Danny Baker; Gary Oldman; Tsar of Russia studied shipbuilding in Deptford for 3-months;
- Neptune Chemical Works once lined the former Surrey Canal between Trundleys Road and Evelyn Street. A major development of the area is planned, named Neptune Wharf.
- Deptford Station is the oldest passenger station in London.
- Albany Theatre – host to **Apples & Snakes** performance poetry company.
- A thriving Vietnamese community lives around the park.

Some of the fruit species suggested were:

- Plum
- Medlar
- Quince (“good for lots of recipes”)
- Russet apples
- Cherries
- Mulberry
- Bramley apples
- Apricots
- Pears
- Figs
- Almonds (One resident remembered their being a row of almond trees across the park in the 1950s)
- Blackcurrants
- Raspberries
- Gooseberries
- Cider Apples

THE ORCHARD MAP

On the aerial view below, is a suggested layout of fruit bushes, trees, seating and a picnic table designed to position the orchard as the central outdoor community space in the Deptford Park. It is a place to sit and enjoy the space, to take care of the trees and harvest fruit, or to meet each other, eat and celebrate.



The proposed orchard consists of three main components:

1. A triangular orchard of medium sized fruit trees and soft fruit bushes. This will be the central gathering space in the park for community celebrations and tree care events; or just quiet time amongst the trees.
2. The renewal of an avenue of larger fruit trees between the playground and western exit of the park. The aim is to complement the remaining ornamental cherry trees with blossoming (and fruiting) trees of equal stature.
3. A picnic table / seating surround by soft fruit bushes. A space for friends or family to come together to eat and enjoy.

1: Triangular Orchard

12 x medium-sized (semi-vigorous) fruit trees

1. **Kumquat** – One of the few citrus trees to do well in the London climate. To represent the thriving Vietnamese community in Deptford. At Lunar New Year, the Tet Festival, many northern and central Vietnamese families traditionally buy and plant a kumquat tree – a symbol of prosperity. The fruit is then candied and enjoyed as a delicacy. In 2018, the lunar New Year will be Friday, 16th February 2018 (year of the Dog). An additional link is with Citrus House, a housing block on Alverton Street.
2. **A 'Family' Apple Tree** – This is where a number of varieties are grafted to the same 'rootstock'. The aim is to represent a living 'pomona' (an encyclopedia of different apple varieties), to link with Pomona House, one of the blocks on the Deptford Park Estate.

3. **Hazel Tree** – variety Kentish Cob. The Hazel is intended to represent Hazeltree House, another block on the Deptford Park Estate. The Kentish Cob has been chosen as Deptford was historically part of Kent.
4. **Almond**, variety Ingrid. One of the residents at our recent community mapping workshop shared a memory of there being almond trees in a row across the park in the 1950s.
5. **Almond**, variety Robijn. Same reason as above.
6. **'Czar' Plum Tree** – Although named after Czar Nicholas II, who visited the UK in 1874, this variety has been chosen to link to Tsar Peter The Great's connection with Deptford (he is often credited erroneously with planting the Mulberry at Sayes Court).
7. **Medlar** - Chosen for culinary qualities, beautiful blossom, and unfamiliarity (less likely to have tree stripped of fruit).
8. **Quince** – Similar to above, the quince is a useful culinary fruit yet is less vulnerable to anonymous mass harvesting.
9. **Apple, Reverend W. Wilks** – One of best cooking apples available, London variety.
10. **Apple, Claygate Pearmain** – A sweet russet, popular Victorian variety. Originally bred in Claygate, Surrey, this variety has been chosen to represent The Grand Surrey Canal that passes close to Deptford Park
11. **Apple, Pitmaston Pineapple** – This famous variety has been chosen to represent Deptford's connection with shipping and particularly the Slave Trade. Pineapples were an important luxury commodity in this country and depended on plantation slavery. William Pitt, was the Prime Minister when slavery was abolished in this country.
12. **An as yet undetermined fruit variety to represent the industrial heritage of the area surrounding the park** – this could be either the Molins Machine factory or Neptune Chemical Works (connecting with contemporary development Neptune Wharf).

The orchard trees will also be interspersed with nitrogen fixing shrubs such as Russian Olive (*elaegnus angustifolia* unrelated to olive plant) & Sea Buckthorn. In addition to making nitrogen available to the fruit trees, and producing edible berries high in anti-oxidants, these will also help to demarcate the edges of the orchard while the trees are establishing themselves.

2: Avenue of Large Blossoming Fruit Trees

5 x large (vigorous) fruit trees

NB. Because of the risk of Specific Replant Disease, it may not be advisable to plant other 'stone-fruit' (prunus) species in the same position as the former cherries.

Heritage Pear Varieties x 3

John Evelyn was particularly fond of pear trees and had many varieties in his gardens at Sayes Court. Many of the varieties planted by John Evelyn have been lost, but a few survive – such as Swan's Egg & Williams Bon Chretien. Where available – we will attempt to plant these. Another reason for planting pears is that they often struggle on weaker rootstocks on urban soils. Pears grown as vigorous standards tend to do a lot better.

Bramley x 1

Apart from their famous culinary qualities, bramley apples are particularly vigorous trees and create a great habitat for insects, lichen, fungi and mistletoe.

Black Mulberry x 1

King James variety. There is a historic mulberry tree still surviving on the former site of John Evelyn's gardens at Sayes Court. The plan would be to plant a mulberry at the orchard, and then possibly graft a cutting from John Evelyn's tree to the new tree in its second season of growth. (Another idea might be to try and grow seedlings from the fruit of the Sayes Court tree with local school children – though this would take longer). John Evelyn was born under King James I reign, who attempted to stimulate the silk industry in London by planting Mulberries.

3: Soft Fruit Picnic Area

Finally, a picnic table and seating would form the central feature of a soft fruit corner. Whilst fruit trees take many years to establish and become productive, soft fruit bushes will provide fruit in from their first season. This is an important way of engaging people with the orchard. Many soft fruits are more tolerant to partial shading, such as that in this corner of the triangle. These may include:

- Gooseberries
- Blackcurrant
- Whitecurrant
- Raspberries
- Thornless Blackberries.

FINAL WORDS

We hope that some of the ideas here feel right. At the very least we hope that they inspire some discussion and ideas about the space. Please don't hesitate to get in touch to discuss or ask questions about any aspect of this proposal.

Ryan O'Kane

Project Manager (London)
The Orchard Project / Helping Britain Blossom

ryan@theorchardproject.org.uk