

Launch of major 'source to sea' natural flood management drive

The collective ambition of multiple organisations across South Yorkshire to respond to the climate and nature emergency was marked with the first batch of planting of what will be 38,000 trees to better protect homes and businesses across the region from flooding.

The November 2019 floods generated huge support to further develop a catchment-based approach to managing the risk of flooding at a landscape scale along the River Don.

By investing in nature based solutions like tree planting, peat restoration and wetland creation, it is possible to help slow the flow of water, reducing flood risk downstream in a way that complements more traditional engineering such as flood defence walls and embankments.

These measures also naturally absorb carbon from the atmosphere, playing an important role in the region reaching net zero emissions, and will contribute to the vision of a Northern Forest across South Yorkshire.

By coming together for the launch of the initiative, partners across the region demonstrated their shared ambitions for collaboration across the catchment, and in doing so, rising to the challenges of the climate and nature emergencies.

Councillors and senior staff from organisations across the region including Environment Agency, Sheffield, Doncaster, Barnsley and Rotherham Councils, Sheffield and Rotherham Wildlife Trust, Don Catchment Rivers Trust, Sheffield City Region, the Woodland Trust, Forestry Commission and Moors for the Future were in attendance for the event at Brooks Bank Farm, near Underbank Reservoir, Stocksbridge.

The farm is a 45 acre Yorkshire Water holding at the headwaters of the River Don. The land is coming out of agricultural tenancy and being managed by Yorkshire Water, supported by Sheffield and Rotherham Wildlife Trust and the Woodland Trust, to deliver wider environmental outcomes to complement and support their one million trees planted target as part of the Northern Forest initiative.

This work supports the wider River Don catchment natural flood management programme which is in its early stages being led in partnership by the Environment Agency and Sheffield City Council to slow and store flood waters using nature-based solutions like tree planting and peat restoration to better protect homes and businesses.

Helen Batt, Environment and Business Manager at the Environment Agency said:

The commitment of multiple agencies to work together to reduce and

mitigate flood risk, is a powerful component of South Yorkshire's response to the Climate Emergency. No one organisation can do it alone and a collaborative, partnership approach is essential in restoring nature at scale, reducing emissions and responding to the climate emergency.

There has been some fantastic work delivered in partnership across the River Don catchment over the years to help slow the flow of floodwaters using nature based solutions. But to achieve the ambition we all have for South Yorkshire in the face of the climate emergency, a scaled up approach is essential. Our collective ambition is to plant millions of trees, and create or restore hundreds of hectares of wetland and peatland habitat across the Don Catchment to help deliver a region resilient to climate change.

Mayor of the Sheffield City Region, Dan Jarvis, said:

As the world faces a climate emergency, which South Yorkshire felt the full force of during November 2019's floods, we all have a responsibility to care for our planet and protect our environment. I am therefore pleased to support this crucial work.

Last year I harnessed the support of 120 cross-party MPs to grow the Northern Forest. By planting 50 million trees, the Forest will help habitats thrive, a woodland culture to flourish, contribute to tackling climate change and reduce the risk of flooding.

It's great to see these new trees being planted as part of the Northern Forest, improving the environment for wildlife and helping to protect communities from further flooding.

Richard Emmott, Head of Corporate Affairs at Yorkshire Water said:

This tree-planting project has taken place on Yorkshire Water land and is an excellent example of partnership working which is happening all over Yorkshire. As the second biggest landowner in Yorkshire, we are working with other landowners, local authorities and third sector organisations to coordinate our approach to the problems that effective land management can help tackle – such as flooding and the climate emergency. We are keen to be ambitious with these partnerships.

As well as planting one million trees by 2030, we are also involved in peat restoration schemes across our uplands, and we are looking at innovative ways that natural flood management schemes in catchment areas can help reduce flooding issues.

Roy Mosley, Head of Conservation at Sheffield and Rotherham Wildlife Trust

said:

We have been working cooperatively with partners for many years on nature-based approaches to natural flood management. Through the Sheffield Lakeland programme, funded by the Heritage Fund, we are delivering a Working with Water project that is supporting farmers in the uplands to make interventions to slow flows and protect and improve vital wildlife habitats. Further downstream, working with EA and RMBC we developed and delivered the award-winning natural flood storage area – Centenary Riverside. This Local Nature Reserve (LNR) protects an economic development zone from flooding and supports a host of wildlife including wetland birds and butterflies.

Richard O'Callaghan, Regional External Affairs Officer at the Woodland Trust said:

The work that is going on here in the River Don catchment is an excellent example of partnership working to achieve landscape-scale environmental improvements for nature and people alike. This is what the Northern Forest is all about – we know that the right trees in the right place can provide multiple benefits and yet the North of England has tree cover well below the national average. By working together with landowners, public bodies and organisations who share our vision, we can ensure that trees play their full role in combating the crises in climate and biodiversity as well as making the North a better place to live, work and raise a family.