

New Community Forest created in the North East to support a greener future

The North East Community Forest sees six local authorities joining forces with environmental organisations to plant trees across the region.

The initiative aims to plant up to 500 hectares of trees by 2025, with a long-term goal to increase canopy cover across the north east to 30% by 2050 – almost double the current national average.

The partnership will work with people in the community, businesses and landowners with the aim of bringing forests and woodlands to those most in need across Newcastle, Gateshead, North and South Tyneside, Sunderland and Durham.

Thousands of trees will be planted in the first year – up to 25ha, or around 35 football pitches – thanks to £480,000 in funding from Defra's Nature for Climate Fund.

Forestry Minister Lord Goldsmith said:

I am delighted to welcome the North East Community Forest to the expanding network of Community Forests across England. Supported by our £640 million Nature for Climate Fund, we will plant many thousands of trees and help rewild areas that are most in need.

Our economies, livelihoods and well-being all rely on nature, and tackling the impacts of climate change and biodiversity loss are at the heart of this project.

Spending time in nature – particularly around trees – is proven to boost our physical and mental health and wellbeing, so I am pleased this project will be accessible to communities in Newcastle, Gateshead, North and South Tyneside, Sunderland and Durham.

Cllr Clare Penny-Evans, Newcastle City Council's cabinet member for climate change and public safety, said:

We know that trees and woodlands are of incredible importance to the people of the North East.

They help us create liveable and sustainable communities, contributing to our efforts to tackle climate change, supporting economic and social regeneration, and – particularly in a year when we've all spent more time at home – providing welcome opportunities

for relaxation and leisure.

Independently, the region's councils have been working towards their own planting targets, with some great successes, but in coming together and becoming the North East Community Forest, we can supercharge those ambitions for the benefit of all.

If trees are planted in the right place, we know that we can reduce the risk of flooding, create new habitat for wildlife, improve air quality, provide positive impacts on human health and wellbeing, boost the economy, provide new jobs, provide timber for sustainable building and energy production and store thousands of tonnes of carbon.

And not only will this protect and enhance our existing tree stock, green our streets and create woodland in our cities, towns and villages, it will give some of our more deprived neighbourhoods access to nature and improve community wellbeing in many ways.

Paul Nolan, Chair, England's Community Forests, said:

Today, the North East Community Forest has joined our thriving partnership of Community Forest organisations from across the country, all of whom are working to transform the landscapes and communities in and around our towns and cities.

This is an incredibly exciting moment for the people of the North East as their new Community Forest sets out to create greener, more tree-filled and accessible spaces for all to enjoy, encourage biodiversity to thrive, support local economic growth and help the city region tackle climate change.

We warmly welcome the North East Community Forest to our network and look forward to working side by side with all those involved.

Anyone interested in potentially becoming involved with the project can find out more at www.newcastle.gov.uk/northeastcommunityforest or email northeastcommunityforest@newcastle.gov.uk to be kept up to date with information and opportunities as they become available.