

News story: New Northern Forest gets Government backing

Ambitious plans to create a new 'Northern Forest' along the M62 corridor have been kick-started today following an announcement by the Prime Minister Theresa May.

Following backing from the Environment Secretary Michael Gove, over the next 25 years the Woodland Trust and Community Forest Trust are aiming to plant more than 50 million trees from Liverpool to Hull, with the government today providing almost £6 million to launch the first project of its kind for more than a quarter of a century.

Spanning more than 120 miles between the cities of Bradford, Leeds, Manchester and Liverpool, the proposed Northern Forest will help boost habitats for woodland birds and bats and protect iconic species such as the red squirrel – alongside providing a tranquil space to be enjoyed by millions of people living in the area.

The announcement forms part of the government's upcoming 25 Year Environment Plan, which will set out how we can be the first generation to leave the environment in a better state than we inherited it.

Further details on the Government's strategy to build an environment fit for the future will be set out this week.

Prime Minister Theresa May said:

It is vital that we leave our planet in a better state than we found it, with cleaner air, stronger protections for animal welfare and greener spaces for everyone to enjoy.

Progress is being made. We're investing over £3billion in improving air quality, tackling marine pollution by banning harmful microbeads and increasing sentences for animal cruelty to five years.

But to create an environment fit for the future we can't stop there, and that is why we are supporting the creation of this new Northern Forest and will shortly be setting out our ambitious vision to further support the environment and protect its good health for generations to come.

Environment Secretary Michael Gove said:

Trees are some of our most cherished natural assets and living evidence of our investment for future generations. Not only are

they a source of beauty and wonder, but a way to manage flood risk, protect precious species, and create healthier places for us to work and live.

This new Northern Forest is an ambitious and exciting project that will create a vast ribbon of woodland cover in northern England stretching from coast to coast, providing a rich habitat for wildlife to thrive, and a natural environment for millions of people to enjoy. This new forest will help us deliver a Green Brexit and help to deliver on our pledge to leave the environment in a better state than we found it.

Austin Brady, Director of Conservation at the Woodland Trust, said:

The Northern Forest will accelerate the creation of new woodland and support sustainable management of existing woods right across the area. Planting many more trees, woods and forests will deliver a better environment for all – locking up carbon on a large scale, boosting wildlife habitat and greening our towns and cities.

The Woodland Trust and Community Forests will use new and innovative mechanisms to engage communities and a wide range of partners in delivering the forest.

With the Government backing growth, investment and jobs across the Northern Powerhouse as part of efforts to create an economy that works for everyone, the Woodland Trust and Community Forest Trust estimate this new forest will generate more than £2 billion for the country's economy. The area's breathtaking scenery and landscape is famous across the world, and this scheme will help bolster it for future generations.

The first planting will begin in March this year, supported by funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund, at the Woodland Trust's 680-hectare Northern Forest flagship site at Smithills, Bolton. The Woodland Trust is already committed to investing over £10 million in this project and several others over the wider forest area.

The Northern Forest will connect the five Community Forests in the north of England – the Mersey Forest, Manchester City of Trees, South Yorkshire Community Forest, the Leeds White Rose Forest and the HEYwoods Project – with green infrastructure and woodland created in and around major urban centres such as Chester, Liverpool, Leeds, and Manchester.

It will follow on from the successful National Forest, which transformed 200 square miles of industrial site in the heart of England. The forest now attracts over eight million visitors a year and has seen wildlife like otters, water voles and dragonflies flourish.