



North East Community Forest

Annual Report 2025/26

6 April 2025 - 5 April 2026



Foreword



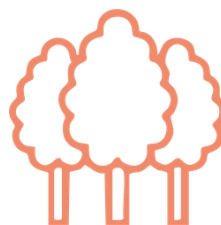
2025/26 has been an important year for the North East Community Forest as we move from establishing the programme to delivering long-term impact across the region.

One of the most significant developments has been the confirmation of our government funded Trees for Climate Phase 2 programme until 2030. This investment provides the confidence and stability needed to retain our Forest Team, continue creating woodlands, supporting communities and increasing tree cover across the North East over the coming years. It is a strong vote of confidence in the work being delivered by our partners and the growing contribution of the North East Community Forest to national woodland creation targets.

As one of England's newer Community Forests, we have already demonstrated what can be achieved through partnership working. However, our ambition extends beyond tree planting alone. We want to create a resilient and sustainable programme that continues to deliver environmental, social and economic benefits for decades to come. Looking ahead, we will focus on securing new sources of investment alongside public funding, helping us to expand our reach, support more communities and unlock further opportunities across the region.

I would like to thank all of our partners, local authorities, communities, volunteers, landowners and supporters for their continued commitment. Together, we are delivering lasting benefits for the North East's people, places and environment.

Lloyd Jones
Forest Manager



**North East
Community
Forest**

About the North East Community Forest

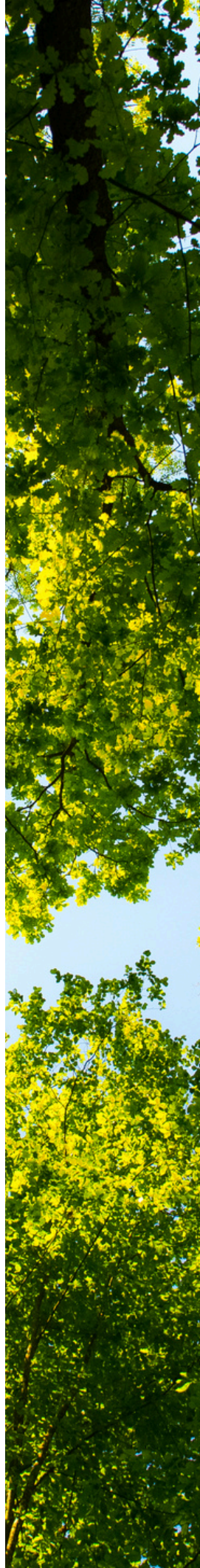
The North East Community Forest (NECF) is a regional partnership that works with communities, landowners and organisations to create new woodlands, plant trees and enhance green spaces across the North East. Our aim is simple: to deliver lasting benefits for people, nature and climate through increased tree cover and greener, healthier places.

As part of England's Community Forests network, we contribute to a shared national ambition to use trees and woodlands to transform landscapes, support biodiversity, tackle climate change and strengthen communities. To learn more about the England's Community Forests network, visit:

www.englishcommunityforests.org.uk

The following pages showcase the outcomes achieved through partnership working and community action during the year. To learn more about our projects, partnerships and long-term vision, visit:

www.northeastcommunityforest.org.uk



A year of progress

2025/26 was a year of significant progress for the NECF, driven by strong partnerships, strategic planning and community engagement across the region.



Watch the video:
Scan the QR code
or click [here](#)

Highlights

- The Forest Plan 2025 - 2050 and Delivery Plan 2025 - 2030 approved, providing a clear framework for future investment and action.
- Winner of the Community Stewardship category at the Newcastle Lord Mayor's Design Awards for work with partners on Tiny Forests and Newcastle's Town Moor.
- Trees for Climate Phase 2 funding confirmed, alongside the national parliamentary launch of England's Community Forests programme.
- Supported the Playful Green Planet open call with the Royal Society of Arts (RSA), helping Ouseburn Farm secure £50,000 for a flagship nature-based play and learning project in Newcastle.
- Celebrated the planting of England's Community Forests' ten millionth tree; a Sycamore Gap sapling, on Newcastle's Town Moor in partnership with the National Trust, and the Freeman of Newcastle Upon Tyne.
- Launched a new website, improving access to information, resources and opportunities to get involved.



Our impact in 2025/26

Creating benefits for people, nature and climate across the North East

PEOPLE



Over 11 k
people engaged

4,274 volunteers

117 volunteer planting
events

Over **31 k trees** planted
by volunteers

4,733 volunteer hours

100 staff facilitating
tree-planting events

Over **180k** digital reach
and engagement
through social media

NATURE



158 ha
created or enhanced

6.2 km new hedgerow

27 ha open space
habitat created

224 planting sites

9.4 km new footpaths

CLIMATE



Over 125 k
trees planted

£4.2 million secured

Over **49 k** tonnes of
CO2 captured over 30
years

Trees for Climate
Phase 2 funding
secured



Impact in action



People

Communities, volunteers, schools, landowners and delivery partners have been at the heart of NECF's success, helping to plant and care for trees, and connect people with nature.



Nature

From new woodlands and hedgerows to orchards and open spaces, NECF is helping create a stronger, better-connected natural environment across the North East.



Climate

By increasing tree cover and securing long-term investment, NECF is supporting climate resilience, carbon capture and greener places for future generations.

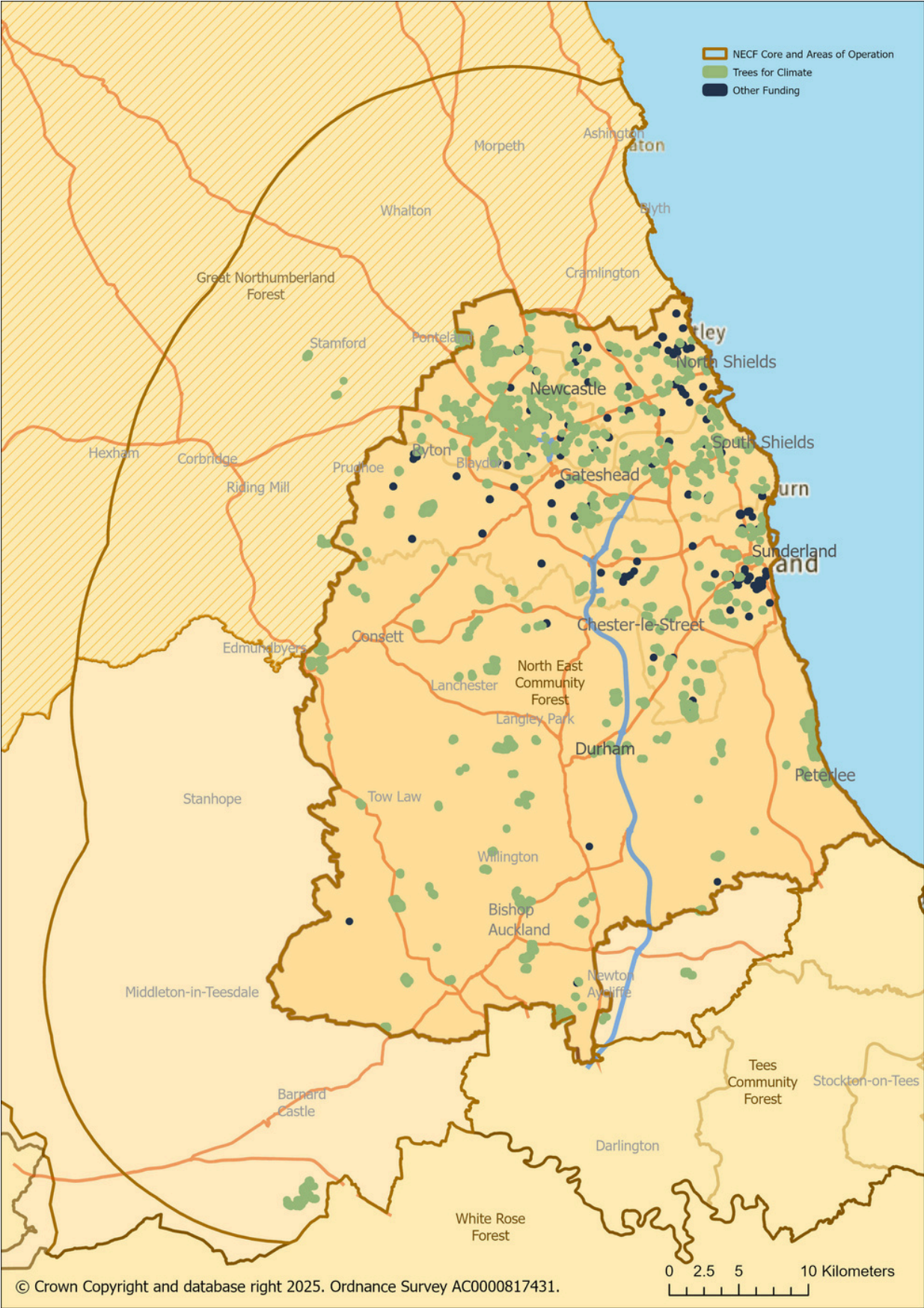
During the **2025/26** planting season, the NECF has planted **125,375** trees, creating **158.21** gross hectares of new woodland, trees, hedgerows, and open space habitat.

Our planting projects have included **6,219** linear metres of new hedgerow established, including in-hedge trees, **9.44 kilometres** of new footpaths laid within woodland creation sites and more than **27 hectares** of open space developed, including rides, glades, pathways, grasses, and herbaceous plants.

11,454 people have engaged with the NECF programme, including **4,274** volunteers who planted **31,451** trees across **117** events, contributing over **4,700** hours.

This has all been possible thanks to **£4.2 million** in funding secured to support woodland creation and community engagement. This remarkable work is projected to remove approximately **49,094** tonnes of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere over the next 30 years.

2021 - 2026 Projects



Trees for Climate in Action: Case studies from across the North East

Every project featured on the following pages has been supported through the Trees for Climate programme.

The case studies that follow showcase the breadth of activity delivered during the year and the positive impact Trees for Climate funding is having across the region. They reflect the wide range of organisations, landowners and communities working together to increase tree cover and enhance the natural environment.

Additional funding and partner contributions are acknowledged within individual case studies where applicable.



Wideopen Library Orchard

North Tyneside



In February 2026, an underused area of grassland at Wideopen Library was transformed into a community orchard and wildlife-friendly green space through a partnership between North Tyneside Council, Wideopen Library and the North East Community Forest.



210 trees planted in total



10 fruit & nut trees included



40 metres of new hedgerow

The orchard has also been designed with community benefit at its heart. Fruit produced on the site will be used by library groups for cooking demonstrations and food-sharing initiatives, helping to bring people together while promoting healthy, local produce. The improved green space offers a more attractive setting for library visitors and creates new opportunities for learning and community engagement.

The project created a compact orchard featuring apple, pear, plum, walnut and damson trees, alongside a new hedge that provides a natural boundary and additional habitat for wildlife. Designed to enhance biodiversity, the planting will strengthen wildlife corridors, improve local air quality and provide shade around the library during warmer months.



Belmont Community Woodland

County Durham

Working in partnership with Belmont Parish Council and Durham County Council, this project transformed an area of amenity grassland beside Belmont Community Centre into a new community woodland designed to enhance biodiversity, improve the landscape and create a more welcoming space for local people. Planted in March 2026, the woodland provides a natural buffer between a busy road and the parkland, while increasing shelter for visitors and creating valuable new wildlife habitat.



🌳 **673 new trees planted**
🛠️ **140 volunteers**
💛 **225 hrs of volunteer time**



Community involvement was at the heart of the project. Two planting events brought together residents, local organisations, young volunteers, scouts and Durham University students, helping to create a strong sense of ownership and pride in the new woodland. The events were exceptionally well attended, demonstrating the community's enthusiasm for improving local green spaces.

As the woodland matures, it will deliver long-term environmental benefits, including increased biodiversity, carbon storage, improved surface water management and opportunities for informal learning and outdoor activities. The planting also enhances the wider parkland, creating a richer and more diverse environment for people and nature.

Links with Nature (second phase)

Sunderland



The Links with Nature project is creating a connected network of green spaces across 12 sites in Sunderland's Coalfield area, improving habitats for wildlife while helping more people connect with nature. Delivered in partnership between the North East Community Forest, Durham Wildlife Trust, Sunderland City Council, Microsite and Wear Rivers Trust, the project combines habitat restoration with volunteering, community engagement and wellbeing activities.

 **2,494 trees planted across the project**
 **4,805 hedge plants established**

Tree planting has been a major part of this work, with 2,494 trees and 4,805 hedge plants established across the project to date, helping to increase biodiversity, strengthen habitat connectivity and enhance local green spaces.



During 2025/26, a further 213 trees were planted at Success Railway and Hetton Lyons Country Park with support from Trees for Climate funding.

Community involvement continues to play a key role in the project. At Success Railway, members of Sunderland's Environmental Green and Sustainable (EGS) Group and their families took part in a dedicated planting day, helping to establish new trees after learning about the role trees play in improving air quality, reducing flood risk and supporting wildlife. Supported by Durham Wildlife Trust, participants also made bird feeders, providing a fun, hands-on activity that helped reinforce the importance of creating habitats for local wildlife.

Garesfield Wood, Barlow

Gateshead

Garesfield Wood represents one of the most ambitious woodland creation projects delivered through the North East Community Forest to date. With support from England's Community Forests and the North East Community Forest, Gateshead Council successfully acquired 40 hectares of farmland and adjacent woodland near Barlow.



This created a rare opportunity to establish a large new publicly accessible woodland, while securing the long-term protection of the ancient woodland at Huntley Gill Local Wildlife Site.



Since the site was bought, it has been transformed through the planting of more than 37,500 native trees, creating a diverse woodland landscape alongside wetlands, grassland, scrub and open habitats. Situated within an area identified as a priority for woodland creation through the South of Tyne and Wear Local Nature Recovery Strategy, the project will strengthen habitat connectivity and support nature recovery across the wider landscape.



32.73 ha gross planting area



140 volunteers involved

££ Additional funders include; Gateshead Council, Northern Powergrid, Trees for Cities and the Tree Council Network Rail Fund

The woodland has been designed to deliver multiple environmental benefits. New wetland habitats and water management features will help slow the flow of water across the site, contributing to natural flood management while supporting wildlife. The project has also been registered with the Woodland Carbon Code and is expected to make a substantial contribution to long-term carbon sequestration as it matures.

Community participation has been at the heart of the project. Supported by Living Woods CIC, nine planting events engaged local residents, volunteers, council staff and three local primary schools in creating the new woodland. Through their community planting programme, participants played a direct role in shaping the site's future, contributing more than 400 volunteer hours and helping to establish a lasting green space that will benefit both people and wildlife for generations to come.



As the woodland develops, over 1.6 kilometres of new footpaths will connect with existing public rights of way, providing greater access to nature, opportunities for recreation and improved wellbeing for local communities.

"This project is a fantastic example of how strategic investment in nature can deliver long-term benefits for people, wildlife, and the climate. We're proud to support Gateshead Council in creating a thriving woodland that will be enjoyed for generations." Lloyd Jones - NECF Forest Manager



Community tree planting programme

South Tyneside



During the 2025-26 planting season, South Tyneside Council worked in partnership with Living Woods CIC to deliver four community tree planting events across the borough. Together, 87 volunteers contributed 348 hours of their time, helping to plant approximately 2,800 trees and hedgerow whips at Wark Crescent, Campbell Park and Brockley Avenue.

The events brought together residents, councillors and local partners, with pupils from Epinay School making a particularly valuable contribution across multiple planting sessions. The new trees and hedgerows will help improve biodiversity, enhance local green spaces and support the borough's environmental ambitions.

-  2,800 trees and hedgerow whips planted
-  4 community planting days
-  87 volunteers involved from Epinay School, the local community, and councillors
-  348 volunteer hours contributed
-  3 planting locations across the borough



Watch the video:

Scan the QR code or click [here](#)



New Warlands Farm Community Orchard

County Durham



The North East Community Forest worked with the North East Autism Society (NEAS) to create a major new community orchard at New Warlands Farm in Burnhope, County Durham. The project transformed 3.43 hectares of land into a thriving orchard landscape featuring fruit trees, native hedgerows and a flowering cherry avenue.

The orchard was shaped and planted by learners from NEAS's Employment Futures programme, creating a space that delivers environmental, wellbeing and learning benefits while helping develop practical skills in horticulture and land management.



A total of 2,111 trees were planted across the site, including 514 orchard trees and 244 metres of native hedgerow.

Learners at the heart of delivery

Just six dedicated learners played a leading role in planting the orchard, contributing around 480 volunteer hours across 16 planting events.

Supporting biodiversity

More than 550 flowering fruit and orchard trees will provide food and habitat for pollinators and wildlife, helping to increase biodiversity across the farm.

A space for wellbeing

The orchard is open to service users and families, offering a calm community space that includes a National Trust Trees for Hope sapling grown from the seed of the Sycamore Gap tree.

Learning for the future

The orchard will support training and work-based learning for neurodivergent people, providing opportunities to develop skills in horticulture, agriculture, orchard management and future juice and cider production.

Looking ahead

The orchard forms part of a wider vision for New Warlands Farm, supporting plans for a visitor centre, exhibition space, café and cidery. As the trees mature, the site will continue to provide opportunities for learning, wellbeing and community engagement while creating lasting benefits for nature.

- 🌱 3.43ha planted area
- 🌳 2,111 trees planted
- 🍏 514 orchard trees
- 🦋 244m native hedgerow created
- 🛠️ 16 planting events
- 😊 6 learners involved in planting
- 💛 480 volunteer hours
- 👣 126m new footpath created



Watch the video: Scan the QR code or click [here](#)



South Wellfield First School

North Tyneside

Working with South Wellfield First School, North Tyneside Council, Northumberland Wildlife Trust, and the North East Community Forest helped create a new orchard, hedgerow and wildflower meadow on school grounds.



Pupils from Years 3 to 6 took part in planting activities and outdoor learning sessions, gaining hands-on experience of caring for nature and learning about the role trees play in supporting wildlife and tackling climate change.

The new planting has created valuable habitat for birds and pollinators while enhancing the school's outdoor learning environment and forest school activities. As the orchard matures, pupils will continue to learn through harvesting fruit, growing produce and exploring biodiversity in a space they helped create.



951 trees planted



14 orchard trees established



186m of hedgerow created



0.21ha of wildflower meadow established



120 pupils involved



1.03ha enhanced for nature and learning

Partnership Funding

Trees for Climate funding, combined with additional support from the Tree Council, helped create an enhanced planting scheme that benefits both wildlife and pupils. The planting activities gave pupils first-hand experience of nature, biodiversity and climate action while helping to enhance their school grounds.



All Saint Church, Gosforth

Newcastle

The North East Community Forest and Northumberland Wildlife Trust worked alongside All Saints Church, Gosforth, local volunteers, and Scouts to transform an area of mown grass into a new wildlife-friendly community space.



Across two community days, volunteers helped establish a diverse mix of trees, shrubs and hedgerow species designed to increase biodiversity, improve the appearance of the church grounds, and help manage surface water. The planting includes a variety of species that will provide blossom, fruit, seasonal colour and valuable habitat for wildlife throughout the year.



 **53 trees planted**
 **6m of hedgerow created**
 **23 volunteers**

The project also included a learning session on tree identification, tree care and the importance of local woodlands. It combined hands-on learning with community action, creating a greener space that will benefit people and wildlife for years to come.

Watch the video:
Scan the QR code or
click [here](#)



Emmaus Youth Village

County Durham

Emmaus Youth Village completed an ambitious woodland creation project during the 2025/26 planting season, transforming 8.24 hectares of land into a diverse landscape of woodland, orchard, wetland and meadow habitats. Designed with both wildlife and people in mind, the project has created new opportunities for recreation, learning and wellbeing, while strengthening the site's environmental value.



Community planting events helped establish a sense of shared ownership from the outset, and the completed scheme will continue to benefit visitors, local residents and young people for generations to come. The project provides a lasting example of how environmental enhancement can support both nature recovery and community engagement.



- 🌳 7,486 trees planted
- 🍏 152 orchard trees established
- 🛠️ 150 volunteers involved
- 🌱 1,250 trees planted by volunteers
- 🤝 450 volunteer hours
- 📅 July 17 6 planting events
- 🌳 8.24 ha of gross woodland area

Watch the video:
Scan the QR code
or click [here](#)





Partnership working

Delivered through collaboration between Emmaus Youth Village, the Roman Catholic Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle, North East Community Forest, Southern Green Landscape Architects, Microsite, Oases, the local community - including several schools and some corporate supporters.

Looking ahead

Future plans include pond and wildflower meadow creation and additional habitat enhancements, extending the environmental and educational value of the site.

More than a woodland..

“The project will also, most importantly, give young people from across the region the opportunity to get in touch with nature, have fun whilst encouraging respect for the environment.

Simon Green, Director, Southern Green Landscape Architects



Growing Support

Thanks to the generosity of local residents and businesses, more than **£10,000** was contributed towards tree planting and nature recovery projects across our six core local authority areas during 2025/26

By supporting us, they are helping to enhance the region's natural environment while contributing to community wellbeing and creating lasting local impact. In recognition of this commitment, we now feature our business supporters' logos on our new website.

Our Green Finance Supporters

Alongside public funding, the NECF also secured **£66,000** in green finance income through partnerships with organisations including Carma, The Tree Council, Trees for Cities and One Tree Planted. This contribution has helped deliver projects across the region, highlighting the growing role of private and charitable investment in creating greener, healthier places.



North East Community Forest Partnership

Local Authority Partners



Local Authority Supporters



Combined Authority



National Partners



Regional Partners

