



North East  
Community  
Forest

# Forest Plan Summary

2025-2050

# Introduction

The North East Community Forest is shaping a greener, healthier future for North East England. Through woodland creation, tree and hedgerow planting, we are working to transform landscapes and communities.

The Forest Plan sets out a clear, long-term strategy to guide that work, with an ambitious vision and key objectives: to expand and connect woodlands; increase tree canopy cover in both rural and urban areas; support the management and protection of woodlands, trees and hedgerows; and foster a culture that values these natural assets across the region for the benefit of people, nature and climate.

The Plan promotes the environmental, social and economic benefits that woodlands, trees and hedgerows bring to local communities. It provides a framework for coordinated action, investment and engagement supporting the region's contribution to national climate and nature recovery goals.

Developed collaboratively with the North East Community Forest Partnership and informed by research, mapping and community engagement, the Plan reflects both local priorities and national ambitions. It will guide delivery, influence policy, attract investment and support the long-term stewardship of treescapes across North East England.



## Our Vision

“A thriving, resilient sustainable, multipurpose forest that delivers lasting benefits for people, economy, nature and the environment across North East England for generations to come.”

# What is the North East Community Forest?

The North East Community Forest was established in 2021 as part of England's Community Forest network. Covering an area of around 1,246 square miles (3,235 km<sup>2</sup>), it is home to 1.9 million people, with an additional 2.7 million living within an hour's drive. The Forest spans the full geographical boundaries of Gateshead, Newcastle, North Tyneside, South Tyneside and Sunderland, as well as main urban and coastal parts of County Durham. To strengthen ecological connections with neighbouring landscapes, a 10-mile halo around the boundary extends into the more rural areas of Durham and Northumberland.

The Forest consists of a diverse network of trees, woodlands and hedgerows. This includes trees in gardens, streets, parks and urban areas as well as those found along roads and railways, adjacent to rivers and lakes, on agricultural land and throughout the wider countryside. Together, these green spaces form a rich mosaic of habitats and a connected treescape that supports biodiversity, improves wellbeing and contributes to climate resilience, helping to make the region greener, healthier and more resilient for the future.

## What are England's Community Forests?

Established over the past 30 years England's Community Forests (ECFs) are located in and around some of the country's largest towns and cities. Each is a collaboration between councils and local, regional and national organisations, working to deliver a shared 25 year vision for landscape improvement known as a Forest Plan.

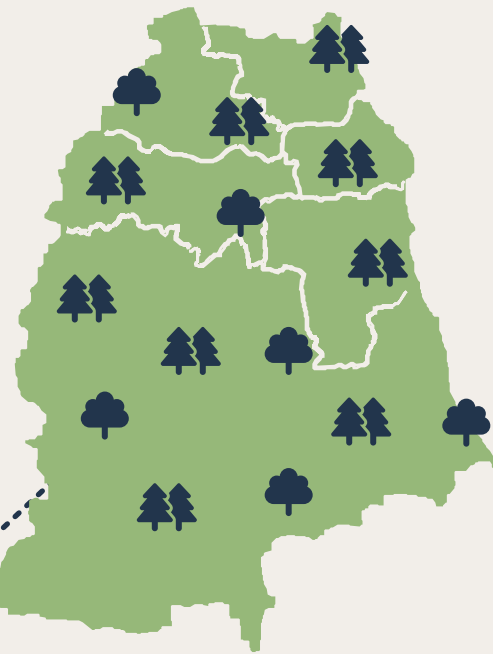
There are currently 15 Community Forests, including the North East Community Forest. Collectively, the work of the Forests has formed the largest environmental regeneration initiative in England, driving urban, economic and social renewal. They champion green infrastructure and high-quality environments that benefit millions of people.

## What is the Community Forest Trust?

The Community Forest Trust (CFT) is a UK-based charity that supports, enables and champions the work of England's Community Forests. The CFT works to promote and support the development of community forestry initiatives across England.



## The North East Community Forest



Map of the 15 Community Forests in England

# England's Community Forests Aims:



## Support regeneration and growth

Making towns and cities more attractive places in which to live, work and do business; attracting new investment and creating jobs.



## Support local communities

Harnessing the enthusiasm, commitment and knowledge of local people; helping them improve their local area and enhancing health and wellbeing.



## Create Better Places

Enriching and enhancing biodiversity and the environment, creating new facilities for recreation and leisure and making our towns and cities more sustainable and resilient to a changing climate.

# The Forest Partnership

The North East Community Forest is overseen by a Forest Partnership, which brings together the local authorities of Durham, Gateshead, Newcastle, North Tyneside, South Tyneside, Sunderland and Northumberland alongside the North East Combined Authority (NECA) and a wide range of national, regional and local charities and agencies.

Newcastle City Council acts as the accountable body and hosts the dedicated Forest Team, which is responsible for coordinating delivery, funding, staffing and overseeing the delivery of the Forest Plan. Each Council plays an active role in managing and delivering projects across the Community Forest.

The Partnership is committed to community engagement providing opportunities for people to get directly involved, whether through planting trees, managing woodlands, or improving local green spaces. Everyone is encouraged to contribute to achieving the shared vision for a greener, healthier and more resilient North East.

## Local authority partners



## Local authority supporters



## Combined authority



## National partners



## Regional partners



# Why Trees Matter

Woodlands, trees and hedgerows are powerful nature-based solutions for tackling climate change, restoring biodiversity and improving public health. In the North East, expanding tree cover offers a chance to address health inequalities particularly in urban and underserved communities, whilst creating greener, more resilient places.



## Benefits of Trees and Woodlands

### For People

- Boost mental health and reduce stress.
- Encourage physical activity and healthier lifestyles.
- Lower rates of obesity, heart disease and respiratory issues.
- Provide shade and reduce exposure to heat and UV rays.
- Support children's learning and play through forest schools.
- Enhance urban areas raising property values, attracting visitors and supporting local economies.
- Offer cultural, heritage and aesthetic value.
- Provide shelter for livestock and support farming.
- Create jobs and grow the forestry and timber sector.

### For Nature

- Provide habitats for wildlife and pollinators.
- Improve water quality, river health and aquatic biodiversity.
- Protect and enrich soils.

### For Climate

- Capture and store carbon in trees and soils.
- Clean the air by absorbing pollutants.
- Cool urban areas and reduce energy use in buildings.
- Reduce flooding through natural water management.

# Trees, Woodlands and Hedgerows in the North East

The North East is home to a rich and varied landscape stretching from coastline to countryside to towns and cities. Trees, woodlands and hedgerows are an important part of this landscape, shaping its character, enhancing its natural beauty and reflecting the region's rich cultural and ecological heritage. They play a key role in daily life, supporting wildlife, improving wellbeing and strengthening local identity.

## Tree and Woodland Cover

Within the Forest boundary there are approximately 32,000 hectares of woodland, representing 10% land cover in 2025, below the UK average of 13.5% and far behind the EU average of 40%. This highlights the importance of expanding and restoring woodland in the region.

## Tree, Woodland and Hedgerow Character

The types of woodlands and trees are shaped by the region's current and historic environments and landscapes. They include broadleaved, coniferous and mixed woodlands, along with hedgerows, scattered trees and small copses. These features connect habitats, enrich rural and urban environments, supporting wildlife and ecosystems.

## Woodland Management

Around 50% of woodland is sustainably managed privately, and 10% is managed publicly. Leaving 40% unmanaged, often in small, fragmented, privately owned sites. This imbalance limits restoration and resilience and makes it harder to involve communities. Increased management is essential to building stronger connections between people and nature.

## Access to Woods

Only 13% of woodland is publicly accessible and just 5% of households have woodland with the Woodland Trust recommended Access Standard (2 hectares within 500m, 20 hectares within 4km). Improving access will support recreation, wellbeing and strengthen connections with nature.

## Tree Equity

Tree cover is not evenly distributed. Areas with low canopy cover often overlap with high levels of deprivation, meaning communities most in need of green space have the least access. This impacts health, wellbeing, and climate resilience.

- 42% of urban residents live in areas with a Tree Equity Score (TES) above 80, compared to 69% nationally.
- Only 6% live in areas meeting the ideal TES of 100, compared to 15% nationally.
- Almost 30% live in areas with TES below 70, three times the national average of 10%.

Deprived communities are most affected by the limited coverage. Expanding and connecting trees, woodlands, and hedgerows will help address these inequalities, delivering benefits for health, wellbeing, biodiversity, and climate resilience.

# Our Impact 2021-2025



**540**

hectares of new woodland established



**£12.7m**

investment secured from Government Nature for Climate Fund



**112**

hectares of open space enhanced, including glades, pathways, grasslands and herbaceous plants



**167,653**

tonnes of carbon dioxide projected to be captured by year 30



**516,918**

individual trees planted



**29,701**

linear metres of new hedgerow planted



**265**

volunteer tree planting events



**6,161**

volunteers involved



**47km**

of new footpaths created to improve access



**13,751**

hours of volunteering time



**54,213**

trees planted through volunteer efforts



**554**

sites with trees planted on

# Our Impact 2021-2025

## Through Trees for Climate funded Projects (2021-2025)

(Data derived from Liverpool John Moores University)



### Natural Flood Management and Water Quality

226.5 hectares of woodlands, trees and hedgerows have been planted on land with a high suitability for Natural Flood Management. The total gain in water storage is estimated to be 117,754 m<sup>3</sup>/year.



### Public Access and Value

94% of sites planted have full or partial access, including school grounds.

192,211 more households across the area now pass the Woodland Access Standard (living within 500m of a woodland).

Once established, new woodlands could generate 10.6 million annual recreational visits valued at £ 32.6 million per year.



### Enhancing Wildlife

Tree planting has added 496 hectares of usable space for woodland species. This has created an estimated 769 hectares of connected woodland network.



### Contributing to Net Zero

Estimated increase of 5,354 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> sequestered annually.

Equivalent economic value of £1.54 million per year (based on non-traded price of carbon).

# Local & National Policy

The Forest Plan is shaped by national, regional and local policies that guide tree planting, climate action and nature recovery. It reflects the Government's commitment to tackling climate change, enhancing biodiversity and increasing woodland cover, serving as both a framework and delivery mechanism to turn these ambitions into practical action on the ground.

## Key National Policies

**Environmental Improvement Plan:** Sets a target to increase tree canopy and woodland cover in England from 14.5% to 16.5% by 2050.

**Net Zero Strategy (2021):** Commits to trebling woodland creation rates in England, contributing to the UK's goal of planting 30,000 hectares annually by 2025.

**National Planning Policy Framework:** Recognises approved Community Forest Plans as material considerations in planning decisions.

# Supporting Local and Regional Key Strategies and Policy Goals

The Forest Plan aligns with and supports:

- **Net Zero North East England:** by reducing carbon emissions and supporting green skills and jobs.
- **North East Combined Authorities' Environment, Coastal and Rural Investment Plan:** by expanding access to nature, promoting sustainable farming and boosting landscape resilience.
- **Nature North Strategy:** by linking woodland creation with nature recovery and socio-economic benefits.
- **Local Planning Policies:** embedding Forest Plan objectives into Local and Neighbourhood Plans and ensuring trees are considered in land use decisions.
- **Green Infrastructure Strategies:** by promoting street trees, community orchards and connected treescapes for health, biodiversity and climate resilience.
- **Tree and Woodland Policies:** by supporting canopy cover targets, protecting existing trees and promoting best arboricultural practice.
- **Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS):** by delivering woodland and hedgerow priorities across three LNRS areas.
- **River Basin and Catchment Plans:** by improving water morphology and water quality, reducing flood risk and enhancing biodiversity through tree planting along waterways.



# Bringing People and Nature Together

This tree was planted on the 17th April 2024 to commemorate the launch of the South Casey Inn Woodland. Funded by the North East Community Forest Partnership with DEFRA.



# Our Vision for 2050

By 2050, the North East of England will have a thriving, resilient treescape where trees, woodlands and hedgerows are abundant, healthy and deeply woven into the region's landscapes.

Through strong partnerships with communities, local authorities, businesses, industry and landowners, we will create, protect and manage these natural assets to enhance biodiversity, strengthen climate resilience and improve people's health and wellbeing. Guided by innovation and sound environmental principles, our approach will ensure that both rural and urban landscapes flourish for generations to come.

Every tree planted and nurtured will serve a purpose, improving air quality, supporting wildlife, strengthening local economies and creating greener, healthier places. By championing the value of trees and inspiring collective action, we will enrich lives, drive nature recovery and support climate adaptation.

Rooted in a long-term commitment to environmental stewardship, our work will ensure trees are planted with purpose, managed with care and valued for their role in building resilient communities.

# Targets

## By 2030

- Create **500 ha** of new woodland
- Create **500 ha** of trees outside of woodland (such as in parks, streets, open spaces, along boundaries, farmland and working landscapes through agroforestry)
- Involve **8,000** people in the planting, design and maintenance

## By 2050

- Create **5,000** hectares of additional trees, woodlands and hedgerows
- Ensure **80%** of woodlands are sustainably managed (up from our existing 60% baseline)

## Long term ambition

- Achieve **30% tree canopy cover** across the North East of England
- Meet the **3/30/300** Rule
  - Every person should be able to see at least **three trees** from their home
  - Every neighbourhood should have at least **30% tree canopy cover**
  - Every household should be no more than **300 metres** from a park or green space of at least 1 hectare

# Forest Plan Key Themes



## People

Enriching lives and livelihoods through greener spaces and community involvement



## Nature

Supporting ecological recovery and helping biodiversity thrive



## Climate

Strengthening resilience, mitigating climate change and adapting to environmental challenges

# Forest Plan Key Objectives

To bring about the vision the North East Community Forest will focus on three key objectives:



## Objective 1

### Expand, Establish and Connect Trees, Woodlands and Hedgerows

Encourage and support the establishment and planting of well-connected, diverse and thriving trees, woodlands and hedgerows, prioritising areas of greatest need. By doing so, we will maximise benefits for people, nature and climate.



## Objective 2

### Protect, Restore and Sustain Tree, Woodland and Hedgerow Ecosystems

Support responsible and sustainable management practices that protect, restore and improve the health, biodiversity, and resilience of trees, woodlands and hedgerows, ensuring long-term benefits for people, nature and climate.



## Objective 3

### Foster a Thriving Tree, Woodland and Hedgerow Culture

Inspire and support greater participation in the creation, management, and use of trees, woodlands, and hedgerows. By raising awareness of their value, we will cultivate stronger connections between communities and the natural environment.

# Forest Plan

## Guiding Principles

To support the delivery of the Forest Plan, we have developed a set of guiding principles that reflect our shared values and long-term vision. These principles provide a foundation for decision-making and delivery, ensuring that our work is inclusive, sustainable and responsive to the needs of people, nature and climate.

They help shape how we work with communities, partners and landscapes, embedding fairness, resilience and collaboration into every aspect of the Forest Plan.

## Principles of the Forest Plan

1. Collaboration, Connection & Co-Creation
2. Community Engagement & Participation
3. Youth Engagement & Empowerment
4. Equitable Access, Inclusion & Wellbeing
5. Right Tree, Right Place, Right Purpose, Right Time
6. Collaborative Partnerships for Greater Impact
7. Ethical & Sustainable Forestry
8. Evidence-Led & Transparent
9. Planning for the Future, Acting Now
10. A Thriving & Sustainable Woodland Economy
11. Nature Recovery & Climate Resilience
12. Protecting Ancient Woodlands & Veteran Trees

A photograph of two young girls participating in a tree-planting activity. They are crouching in a grassy field, focused on planting a small sapling into a hole in the ground. The girl on the left has long red hair and is wearing a pink jacket and purple gloves. The girl on the right is wearing a white knit hat with a pom-pom and a pink jacket. In the background, several other young trees are planted in rows, each supported by a wooden stake. The scene is outdoors with a soft, natural light.

**We Are Shaping Landscapes  
for Generations to Come**

# Delivering the Forest Plan

## Working together

Collaboration is at the heart of the North East Community Forest. By working together with individuals, organisations and communities, we can collectively achieve the Forest Plan and create lasting positive impacts across the region.

## North East Community Forest Team and Partnership

Delivering the North East Community Forest Plan is a collaborative effort. The Forest Team works alongside a range of partners local communities, Local Authorities, landowners, schools, businesses and public bodies to create lasting change for people, nature and climate.

We continually strengthen and develop partnerships across public, private, charitable, research and community sectors locally, nationally and internationally. As part of England's Community Forest network, we amplify our voice and impact through shared learning and coordinated action. As a Forest Team, we play a central role in enabling, coordinating and supporting stakeholders to take action.



# Delivering the Forest Plan

## Local Authorities and Combined Authorities

Key partners in delivering the Forest Plan. They help embed tree and woodland priorities into planning (Local Plans), climate and nature recovery strategies, ensuring alignment with wider environmental and community goals. We support the development of local tree and woodland strategies, advise on integrating trees into transport, infrastructure and regeneration projects and promote sustainable woodland management. By aligning with regional investment plans and policy frameworks, authorities help coordinate action across the Forest area ensuring woodland creation, access and stewardship are part of long-term place-based planning.

## Local Communities

We work alongside communities to support local priorities and create opportunities for involvement. Engagement is inclusive and responsive to different needs, life stages and backgrounds. We promote wellbeing and nature connectedness and actively involve underrepresented voices. Communities are empowered to co-create, lead and steward tree and woodland projects.

## Schools and Colleges

We support schools in establishing and caring for trees, woodlands and hedgerows; even in small spaces. Trees are embedded into school life through outdoor learning, spontaneous play and Forest School activities.





# Delivering the Forest Plan

## Farmers, Landowners and Land Managers

We provide tailored advice to help landowners and farmers establish and manage trees, woods and hedgerows. We recognise diverse land management goals and support approaches that enhance food security, soil health, biodiversity and climate resilience. This includes creating hedgerows, marginal land planting and agroforestry.

## Businesses and the Private Sector

We encourage businesses to support the Forest Plan through CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) and ESG (Environmental, Social and Governance) commitments. We help identify land opportunities for tree planting and promote a culture of trees within workplace environments. Businesses can get involved through green finance, volunteering, pro bono support and collaborative partnerships.

## Charities, Voluntary Groups and Third Sector Organisations

We work with charities and community organisations to connect people with nature and deliver projects that promote wellbeing and biodiversity. These partners play a vital role in mobilising volunteers, supporting education and leading community-led tree planting and habitat restoration. Through advocacy, grants and collaborative initiatives, they help extend the reach of the Forest Plan and create opportunities for skills development, social action and long-term stewardship of treescapes across the North East.

# Funding

Government targets for tree planting, woodland creation and nature recovery have led to a growing range of funding opportunities in recent years.

Since 2020, the Trees for Climate programme, funded by the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), has been central to financing large-scale tree planting across England's Community Forests network. Over the past five years, this programme has served as the primary source of capital and revenue funding for the North East Community Forest.

In addition to this core funding, the Forest Team has successfully secured complementary funding from our six local authority partners alongside successful grant applications to organisations including the Forestry Commission, Defra, Tree Council, Trees for Cities, Carma and One Tree Planted. This has been further enhanced by unrestricted donations from businesses and local residents.

This funding has enabled the establishment of trees, hedgerows and woodlands, the development of a dedicated Forest Team and the delivery of specialist expertise, project management and partnership coordination across the region.

To implement the Forest Plan, the Forest Team will continue to:

- Identify and secure additional funding from public, private and charitable sources.
- Diversify funding streams, with a growing proportion expected from non-public sector investment (e.g. green finance, biodiversity net gain and carbon markets).
- Direct resources effectively, ensuring that community groups, landowners and stakeholders have access to information, practical support and funding opportunities.
- Provide advice and guidance on funding applications and best practices for establishing and maintaining trees, woodlands and hedgerows.

A growing proportion of future funding is expected to come from non-public sector sources, helping to diversify investment and strengthen long-term delivery.





# Delivery Plan (2025–2030)

To support the implementation of the Forest Plan, a five-year Delivery Plan will guide activity from 2025 to 2030. It will comprise three core components:

- **Action Plan** – outlining key actions, goals and measurable targets aligned with the Forest Plan’s vision and objectives.
- **Business Plan** – detailing operational delivery, resource requirements and financial planning.
- **Marketing and Communications Plan** – setting out our approach to stakeholder engagement, public communications and promotional activity.

The Delivery Plan will be refreshed every five years to ensure continued alignment with evolving priorities and opportunities.

## Annual Reporting

Supporting both the Forest Plan and the Delivery Plan will be our Annual Report, which tracks progress against objectives each financial year. The Forest Team has produced annual reports since its inception in 2021/22. These reports provide transparency and accountability and can be accessed via our website.

# Find out more

For more information, please visit  
[northeastcommunityforest.org.uk](http://northeastcommunityforest.org.uk)

If you have any questions or would like to get involved in supporting our work, contact us at  
[info@necf.org.uk](mailto:info@necf.org.uk)

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