

England's Community Forests

Trees for Climate Programme

Year 6 Impact Report (2025/26)

Funded by UK Government



Introduction

Led by England's Community Forests, Trees for Climate is providing social, economic and environmental transformation across the country.

Year 6 of the programme saw over 2.5 million trees planted across 2,325ha of new woodland, meaning over 10 million trees have now been planted since the start of Trees for Climate. With a significant proportion all government-funded tree planting since 2020 coming through the programme, we are in turn having a significant impact on community access to nature, flood prevention, carbon sequestration and nature recovery.

And we are determined to go even further. The future of the programme has now been confirmed, with planting continuing into a seventh year in 2026-27. The programme will also benefit from a new strategic delivery partnership, made up of ECF, the National Trust, the Woodland Trust and the Community Forest Trust, which will help us maximise the positive impacts of Trees for Climate on people, places, and planet.



About England's Community Forests

We are a diverse and growing network of 15 unique Community Forests, each working in partnership with their local communities, landowners and businesses to help nature recover and regenerate the landscapes in and around our largest towns and cities.

Our roots go back over 30 years, with Community Forests now forming the biggest environmental regeneration initiative in England. We're recognised in the Planning Policy Framework and are highlighted in Government's Environmental Improvement Plan, playing a key role in shaping woodland creation and nature recovery policy both nationally and locally.

We provide free guidance and support to landowners and managers to help plan, fund, and plant new woodland of all sizes in both rural and urban settings. Our long-term commitment to the areas where we work ensures trees and woodlands are at the heart of communities, unlocking countless benefits for people and places.




Carlisle
North East
Community Forest
Newcastle
Sunderland
Durham
Middlesbrough
Tees Community Forest
Raise: Cumbria
Community Forest
Scarborough
Barrow-in-Furness
White Rose Forest
York
Humber Forest
Leeds
Hull
Huddersfield
City of Trees
Liverpool
Manchester
The Mersey Forest
Chester
Derbyshire's
Heartwood
Greenwood
Community Forest
Nottingham
Derby
Forest Of Mercia
Wolverhampton
Bedford
Forest of Marston Vale
Milton Keynes
Swindon
Great Western
Community Forest
Upminster
Thames Chase
Community Forest
Bristol
Bath
Forest of Avon
Plymouth
Plymouth and South
Devon Community Forest

Trees for Climate: background

The Trees for Climate programme launched in November 2020 and is playing a significant role in the Government's commitment to address climate change and carbon mitigation through tree planting and woodland creation.

It forms part of the national Defra Trees Programme, which in turn aligns with the England Tree Action Plan and the Environmental Improvement Plan and their aims to increase tree cover, improve woodland management, and enhance forest resilience. The programme is also bringing about much wider social, economic and environmental transformation across the country.

Trees for Climate's pipeline for 2026-27, with over 3,000 hectares on the pipeline as of September 2026.



Benefiting people and planet

Through the planting of millions of trees, Trees for Climate is reducing the impacts of climate change, capturing carbon, and protecting communities from flooding.

What's more, the Community Forest approach has the power to connect more people and nature, bringing about much wider social, economic, and environmental transformation.

Engagement, Health, and Wellbeing
Our work engages tens of thousands of people in tree planting, connecting more people with nature and providing a wealth of health and wellbeing impacts. Many of our projects take place in the most deprived areas of the country, meaning we can benefit those that need it most.

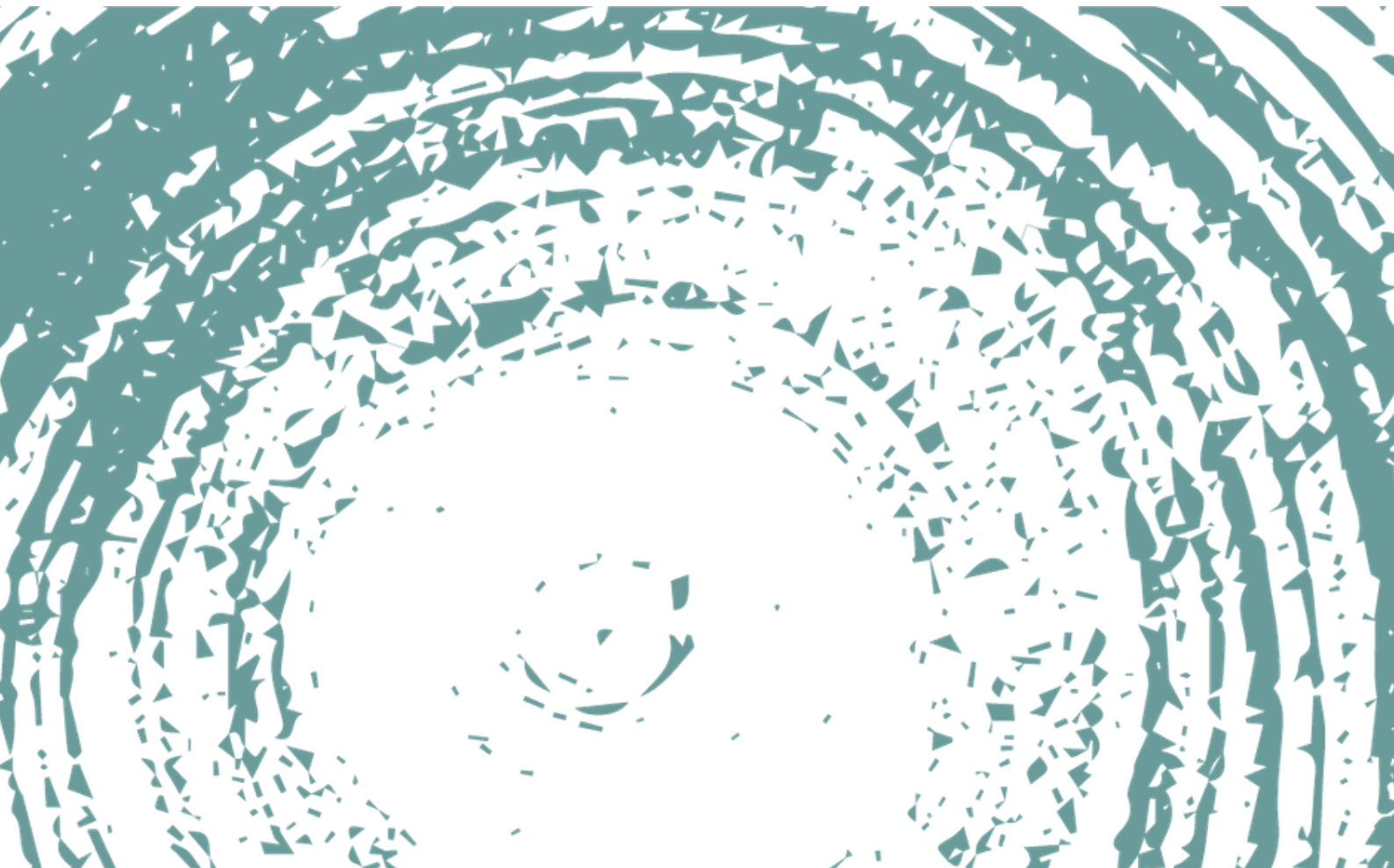
Enhancing Wildlife
All our new woodland sites are designed to contribute to local ecological frameworks. We've already provided thousands of additional hectares of usable space for woodland species, greatly enhancing biodiversity.

Public Access and Value
Most new woodlands planted by us have either full or partial public access and once established, these woodlands could welcome millions of annual visitors.

Education, employment, and skills
Our work creates and supports a range of green jobs, including those employed in the wider tree supply chain. We work with partners to support training and employment in green skills, as well as with schools and education providers, helping to inspire the next generation.

Trees for Climate: our commitments

- Mitigating carbon through tree planting, and making a significant contribution to net zero
- Improving climate resilience, by supporting natural flood management, providing shade and reducing the heat island effect
- Improving water and air quality
- Supporting increased public access to woodland, especially for those in areas of greatest need
- Enhancing habitats for wildlife and biodiversity
- Increasing opportunities for community engagement, supporting better levels of health and wellbeing, especially in areas of greatest health inequality
- Taking innovative approaches and delivery practices, and sharing learning to advance the whole sector
- Supporting employment and skills development, including aiding a reduction in reoffending through targeted schemes




White
Rose
Forest

Our last planting season in numbers

In year 6 of the Trees for Climate programme (2025-26), we worked together to deliver...

Over

2.5 million

trees planted

2,325ha

of new woodland created across 799 different sites

22,995

local people engaged - from farmers to school children

182,000m

of hedgerow created

77%

of woodlands planted have full or partial public access

Please note: *The delivery figures in this report differ from the Forestry Commission's Key Performance Indicators (KPI) for the annual provisional woodland statistics. This impact report is based on actual planting data, including planting activity that has taken place beyond the end of the financial year (31 March 2026). The Forestry Commission's KPI annual statistics, by contrast, are calculated using planting data only up to 31 March 2026, in line with the standard financial year reporting cycle. As a result, this report may show higher delivery numbers, reflecting planting completed after the financial year cut-off but before this report's publication date.*

Our achievements to date

And since the start of 2020, Trees for Climate has...



Planted over **10 million trees** across **3,521 different local schemes** and **8,913 hectares** of new woodland.



Provided an estimated **544,969m3 of flood water storage capacity** each year, equivalent to roughly 864 Olympic swimming pools.



Planted trees that are expected to **sequester 44,861 TCO2e per year** – valued at between £7.4m to £22.1m and roughly equivalent to what 32,600 cars emit each year.



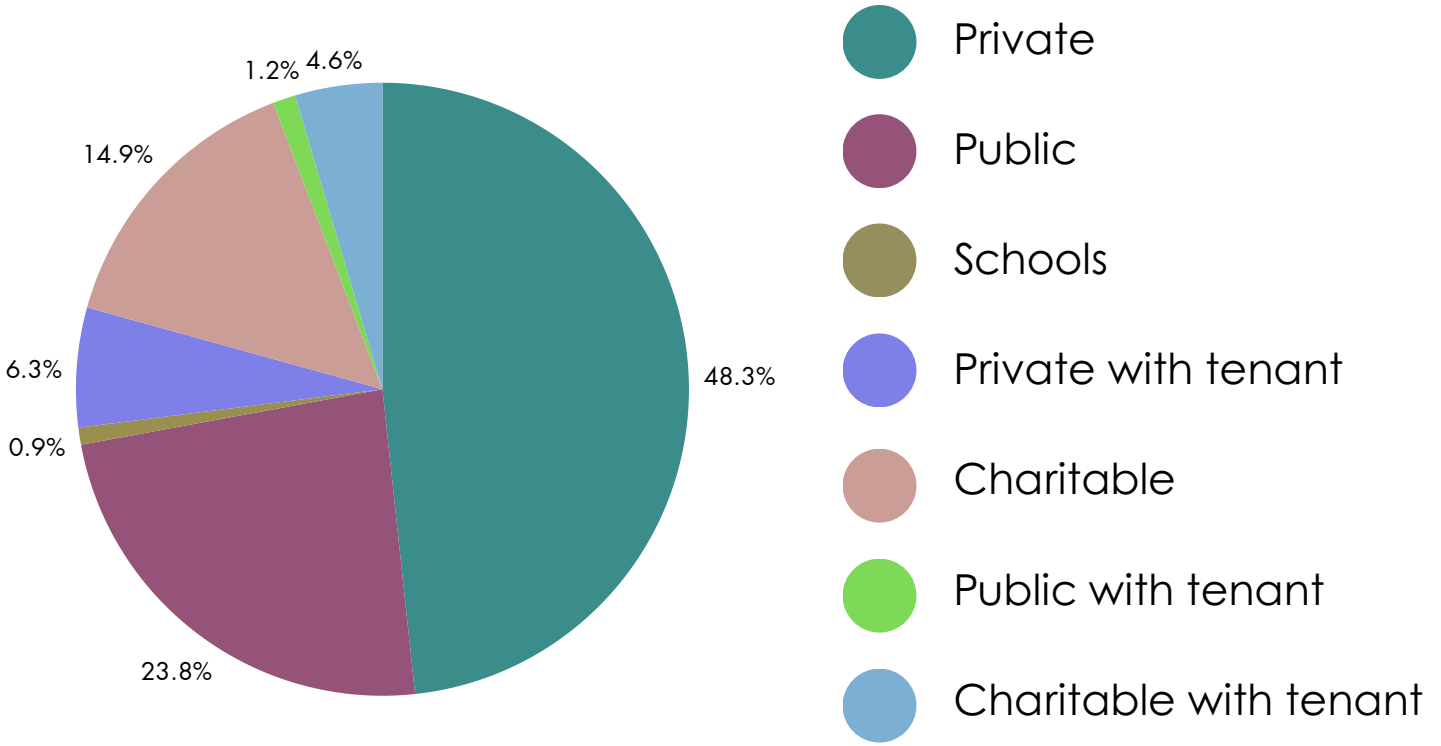
Ensured that **880,500 households are now near accessible woodland**, unlocking £72.48m in welfare benefits.



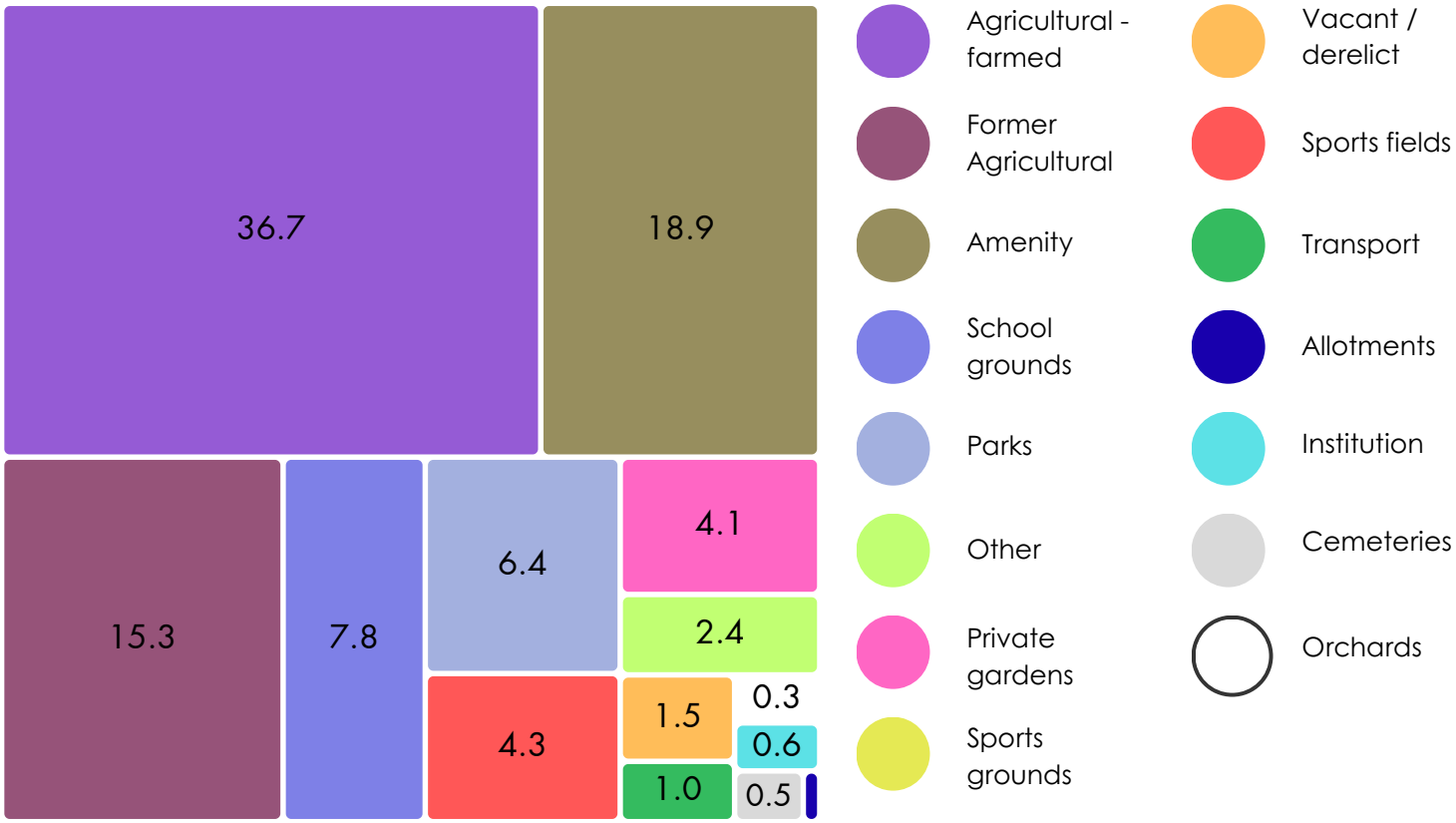
Delivered **£8 worth of economic benefit for every £1 invested** by Defra into England's Community Forests.

2025-26 delivery breakdown

Land ownership (%)

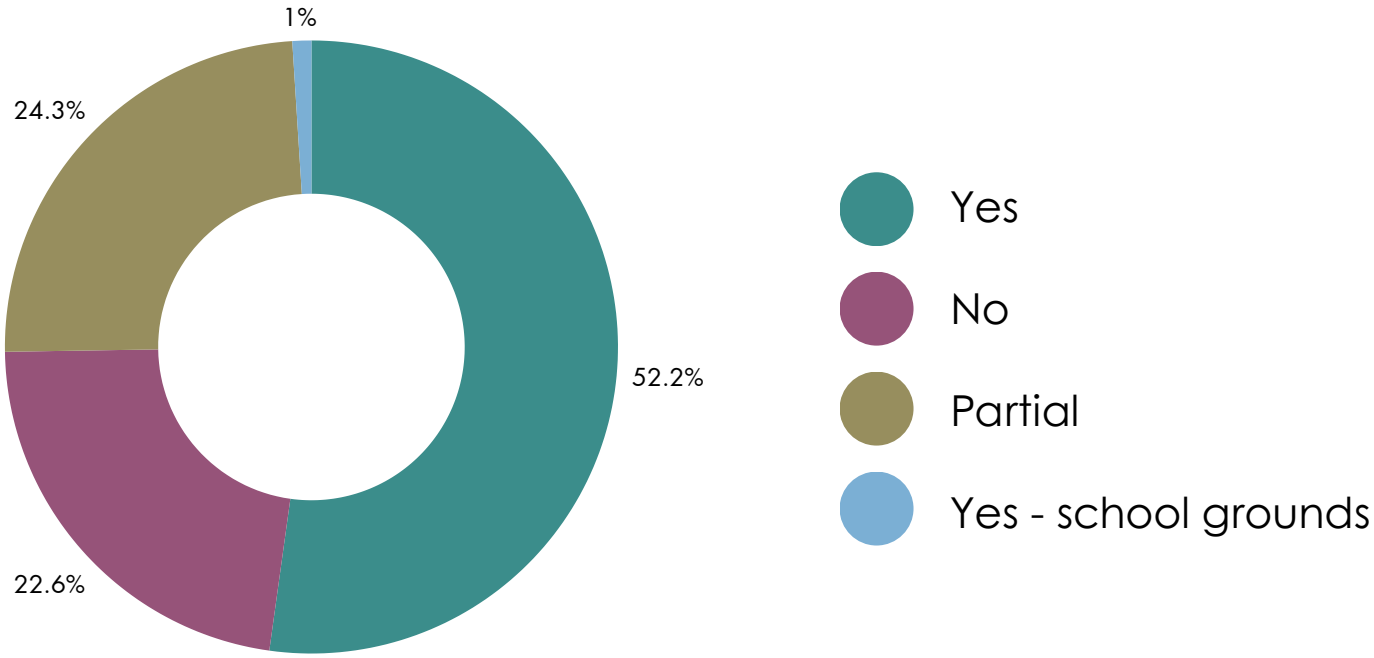


Prior land type (%)

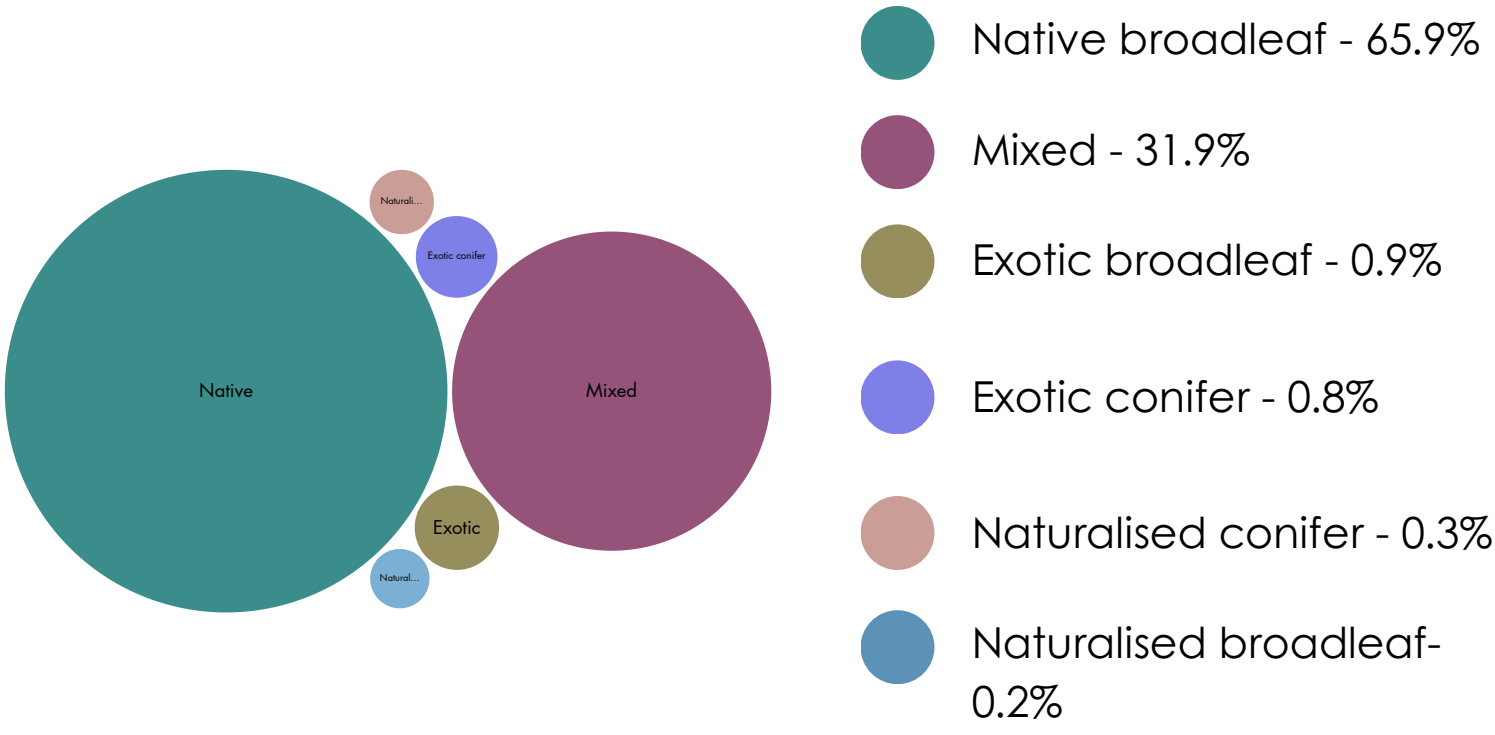


2025-26 delivery breakdown

Land access (ha)



Planting type (species)



Natural Flood Management and Water Quality

The Environment Agency has produced a prioritisation map identifying where nature-based solutions such as tree planting are likely to be most effective in slowing the flow of water and reducing flood risk. We use this map to assess how our planting through Trees for Climate supports flood mitigation and water quality.

In the sixth year of Trees for Climate, we planted **433 sites (1,018 ha)** on land identified as having high suitability for natural flood management. And since the beginning of the programme, **4,330 ha** have been planted on high-priority natural flood management land.

We estimate planting from the Trees for Climate year 6 will provide an additional **544,969 m3 of flood water storage capacity every year** once established. Total planting to date will provide an additional **2.2 million m3 of annual flood water storage capacity**, contributing to flood risk mitigation. That is equivalent to roughly 864 Olympic swimming pools!



Case study

Garesfield Wood

Barlow, Gateshead

North East Community Forest

Gateshead Council supported by England's Community Forests and NECF successfully acquired 40ha of farmland and adjacent woodland, near the hamlet of Barlow, to create a new, publicly accessible, native broadleaved community woodland, on the watershed of the Barlow and Derwent valleys. As well as providing new woodland habitat the project will protect the valuable ancient woodland of Huntley Gill, while providing grassland, scrub and wetland habitats at this beautiful location.

The project will increase the biodiversity value of the site, while providing benefits for climate adaptation, including improved air quality and flood amelioration, while increasing the existing woodlands resilience to climate change. Community involvement in the woodland creation has allowed local schools and residents to develop a sense of ownership and long-term commitment to this developing wildlife haven.

The site lies on the watershed between the Barlow and Derwent valleys, wetlands have been created to slow the flow of water across the site, assisting in flood alleviation as well as providing important habitat.

Public Access and Value

We operate where the need is greatest; our footprint contains an estimated 1.8 million households in the top 10% most deprived nationally. More trees and accessible woodlands contribute to healthier, more liveable and more economically rewarding places.

The **Woodland Access Standard** states that:

- No person should live more than 500m from at least one area of accessible woodland at least 2ha in size
- There should be a woodland of at least 20ha in size within 4km of people's homes

Around **143,391 households** are meeting now the standard thanks to intervention by the Trees for Climate programme.

Estimates made using the Outdoor Recreation Valuation Tool (ORVal) predict that sites from Year 5 of the Trees for Climate programme's woodland planting will receive **10.3 million visits per year**, with an **annual welfare benefit of £32.1 million**. Trees for Climate sites across all years are expected to receive **29.6 million visits annually**, with an estimated **welfare benefit of £93.7 million**.

Wider greenspaces in the footprint of the programme are estimated to receive around **1.3 billion visits per year**, with an **annual welfare benefit of approximately £4.1 billion**.

Case study

Belmont Green

Wroughton, Wiltshire

Wroughton Parish Council wanted to improve the quality of the natural environment within the parish and promote a healthier lifestyle for all their residents. The improvement of the available open green spaces within the parish will provide a more wildlife rich environment as well as creating more attractive outdoor environments to encourage local residents to engage with informal recreation activities and enjoy the outdoor spaces.

The vision was to enhance and improve the area both aesthetically and environmentally for the benefit of local residents and wildlife. Local residents use the area for informal recreation as well as been the main access route for school pupils attending both Ridgeway Secondary School and Wroughton Junior School.

The primary focus of the scheme was to commemorate the '80th Anniversary of VE Day' by the establishment of an avenue of 27 Ornamental Flowering Cherry trees – to reflect the number of World War Two fallen soldiers listed on their war memorial – leading to a single, large memorial English Oak tree. To further enhance the scheme there was the additional companion tree planting nearby of a small traditional orchard, as well as a new mixed native hedgerow with trees. The avenue of Ornamental Flowering Cherries has been underplanted with a mix of native wildflower plugs and bulbs and the creation of an adjacent small wildflower meadow to provide more diverse wildlife friendly habitat.

Enhancing Wildlife

Local Nature Recovery Strategies and the Nature Recovery Network aim to create more joined up habitats to promote biodiversity. An ecological network is a system of habitat patches connected via surrounding parts of the landscape, within which a species or group of species can disperse.

This indicator evaluates the potential of planting by the programme to improve the connectivity of woodland habitats by quantifying the projected change in the extent of ecological networks.

Once established, Trees for Climate planting from Year 6 is predicted to provide **between 1,816 to 3,596 ha of additional usable space for woodland species**, depending on their dispersal ability.

This contributes to a total of **7,119 to 14,423 ha of new ecological network**, which in turn will increase the total size of the woodland network over the footprint of England's Community Forests to **between 504,224 and 1,795,516 ha**.



Case study

Bathampton Meadows

Bath

Bathampton Meadows, owned by the National Trust, is a significant wildlife corridor, linking the city of Bath with the surrounding countryside. It is publicly accessible and widely used by the local community for walking, dog walking, cycling, birdwatching and as a green space for local families and people. The corridor provides a sound and pollution buffer from nearby main roads. It's also home to bat, bird and butterfly species, as well as a wild population of beavers.

This year, Forest of Avon partnered with the National Trust to support their vision for tree and hedgerow planting at the Meadows. Over winter 2025-26, planting included nearly 10,000 trees forming new wood pasture and 1.5km of hedgerow.

The new hedgerow will provide vital habitat for insects, birds and other wildlife. 10 species were chosen for the hedgerow, with consideration given to soil-type and condition. Diversity of species selection will ensure fruit and blossom through the different seasons, providing food for birds and nectar for pollinators across more of the year.

Contributing to Net Zero

Trees can sequester substantial amounts of carbon in biomass and soils, as well as reducing urban air pollution by absorbing gases, capturing particulates and altering ambient airflow. In urban areas, they can also play a significant role in mitigating the urban heat island effect.

The trees planted in Year 6 of the Trees for Climate programme are expected to sequester an additional **10,755 tonnes CO2e per year** over their lifetime (ca. 100 years), **valued at £1.8 to £5.3 million annually** using the non-traded price of carbon.

The trees planted under the programme since 2020 are expected to sequester an additional **44,861 tCO2e per year** over their lifetime (ca. 100 years), **valued at £7.4 to 22.1 million** using the non-traded price of carbon. That is roughly equivalent to what 46,900 cars emit each year!

As a whole, natural habitats in the footprint of the programme are projected to sequester around **9.3 million tCO2e each year**.



Case study

Bishops Hall Park

Brentwood, Essex

Since the start of 2026, Thames Chase Trust and Brentwood Borough Council have collaborated to organise and plant a new woodland at Bishops Hall Park using the UK government's Trees for Climate grant.

The aim of this project was to create a new woodland that is accessible to the local communities within Pilgrims Hatch and Brentwood. It also aims to provide new connecting habitat for wildlife and sequester more carbon from the atmosphere.

This project planted 1 hectare of new woodland at Bishops Hall Park. In total, 949 trees were planted. For this particular project, 12 tree species were used to create a diverse, climate resilient, and habitat rich mix to ensure that this woodland has the best chance of flourishing and providing quality habitat for wildlife.

These species included: Oak, Silver Birch, Dogwood, Rowan, Hazel, Hornbeam, Crab Apple, Wild Cherry, Beech, Elder, Field Maple, and Small-leaved Lime.

Engagement, Health and Wellbeing

60% of the most health-deprived neighbourhoods are within a Community Forest catchment. By improving the quality of both our environment, and our daily lives, England's Community Forests are reducing the burden on NHS resources and empowering people to maintain or regain employment, which in turn supports families and the economy.

In year 6, **22,995 members of the community were actively engaged in tree planting** through the Trees for Climate programme.



Case study

Heage Primary School

Belper

Derbyshire's Heartwood Community Forest

Heage Primary School is set in a rural landscape, with open playing fields and a strong connection to its local community. Like many primary schools, it is a place where outdoor space plays an important role and where there was clear potential to introduce trees that would grow alongside the pupils themselves.

Derbyshire's Heartwood Community Forest worked with the school to turn that opportunity into a well-considered tree planting scheme. The Heartwood team supported the school's forest school leader, Caroline, to create a planting design that balanced practical constraints of a working school, with a big ambition for learning and nature. And from the outset, it mattered that the trees would feel like they belonged to the children.

Through a free Heartwood tree planting grant, we designed and delivered a scheme covering just over half a hectare and planting 422 trees. This includes mixed native planting on the school field with oak, silver birch, crab apple, aspen and wild cherry, a small orchard in an underused carpark area with apple, pear, cherry and mulberry, and individual standard trees such as lime, hornbeam and oak.

Shaded, sheltered outdoor areas supporting play, exploration and calm learning experiences, encouraging positive relationships with the natural world from an early age.

Education, Employment and Skills

Trees can play a vital role in education, helping students and children understand the natural environment and the impact that woodlands can have on our places, health, and wellbeing.

The woodland creation sector is also an increasingly vital employer, helping deliver and maintain vital trees in the places where they are needed most.

In year 6 of Trees for Climate, **8% of all projects were in collaboration with schools**, allowing opportunities to support wider working with educational partners through projects such as Forest School and Woodland Outreach, which help to connect children to nature.

Over 200 posts were directly employed in Year 6 of Trees for Climate, with even more roles being supported through the programme, including land agents, woodland contractors, and those employed in the tree supply chain.



Case study

Bilborough College

Bilborough, Nottinghamshire

Following previous connections with the college and Greenwood Community Forest, Bilborough College were offered a grant to plant standard trees and create new habitats. Over a third of the standard trees were enthusiastically planted by over 20 of the Eco Committee and staff.

Following consultation with the college to ensure the right tree was planted in the right place, trees planted Included Rowan, Wild Cherry, Silver Birch, Downy Birch, Alder, Aspen and Field Maple.

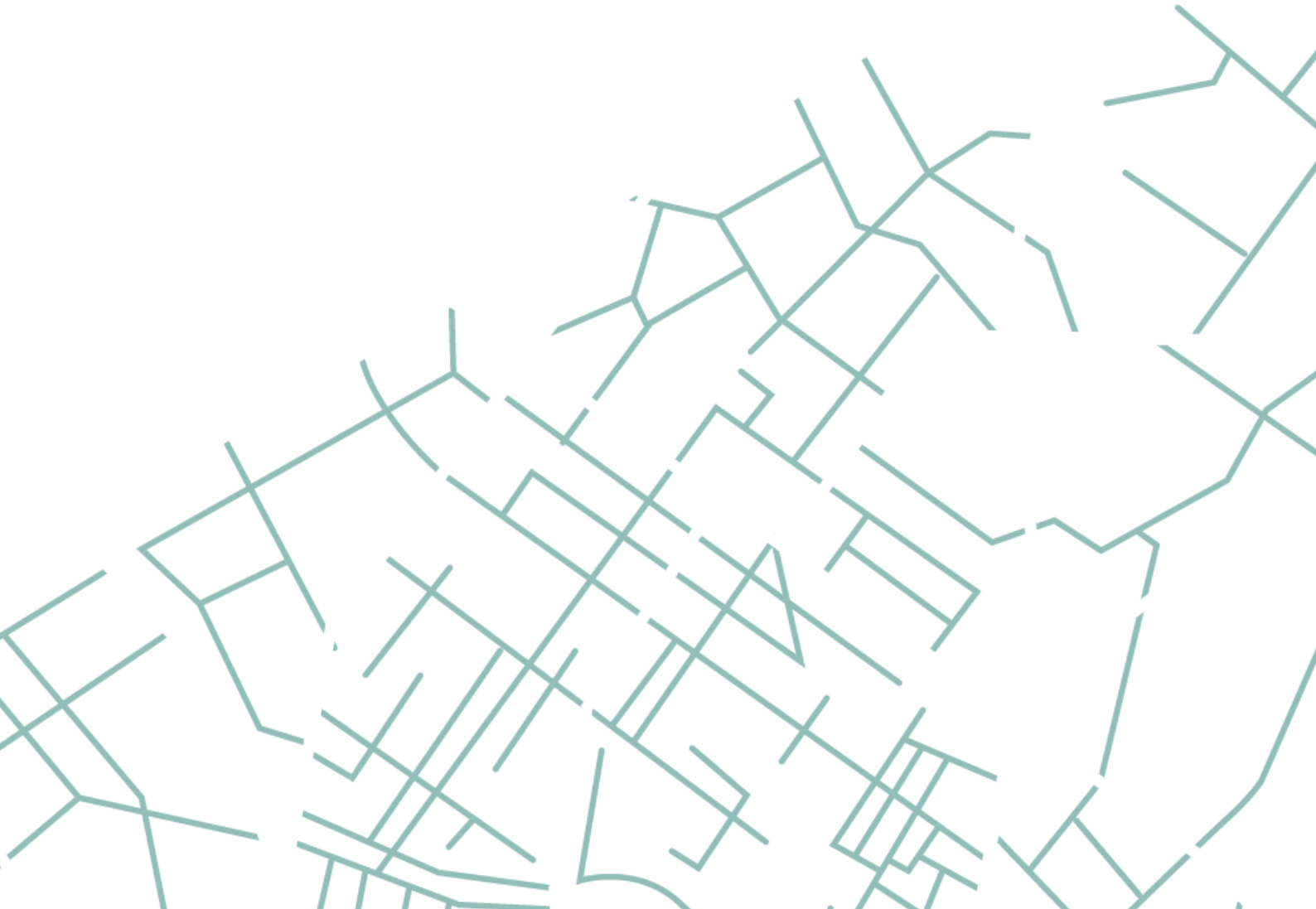
Bilborough College have agreed to take on the watering of the trees as part of their current maintenance schedule and have further Trees for Climate funding to introduce inclusive curved benches and a further new habitat creation in the form of a new wildflower area.

In total, 33 standard native trees have been planted, and future new habitat creation is being planned by the Eco Committee at Bilborough College. The planning and planting of these trees, and planning for future new habitat creation has given the Eco group a focus and this has contributed to the college's Climate Action Plan.

Looking to the future

Our ambitious but achievable plans will continue to make a significant contribution to Government's national goals, increasing woodland cover, improving biodiversity, and creating a healthier and happier society. We will continue to establish thousands of new woodland areas, bring existing woodland under sustainable management, connect with and engage a million people, and increase access to woodland for more than 40% of the population. In addition, we will increase habitat connectivity by 25% and support species recovery helping to reverse nature loss whilst delivering £1 billion of natural capital benefits.

England's Community Forests network is innovative and adaptive – and with a new phase of the Trees for Climate programme continuing into 2026-27, we are ready to help shape a future where trees and woodlands are an even greater priority for us all.



Want to get involved?

Whether you are a landowner keen to plant trees or an organisation eager to establish partnership opportunities with your nearest Community Forest, we'd love to hear from you.

Get in touch:
englandscommunityforests.org.uk/contact-us/

Follow us on social media:
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#EnglandsCommunityForests
#TreesforClimate

England's 15 Community Forests are:

City of Trees

Derbyshire's Heartwood

Forest of Avon

Forest of Marston Vale

Forest of Mercia

Great Western

Greenwood Community Forest

Humber Forest

North East Community Forest

Plymouth and South Devon

Raise: Cumbria Community Forest

Thames Chase

The Mersey Forest

Tees Community Forest

White Rose Forest

Thank you

The success of Trees for Climate is all thanks to the partnership approach we take, from collaborating with our many local communities and strategic delivery partners to working alongside national colleagues including at Forestry Commission, Natural England, and of course the ongoing support from Defra and national government.

So we'd like to thank all our partners for working with us to make Trees for Climate such a success!

Funder

Funded by UK Government

Accountable body

Cheshire West and Chester

Working in partnership with

National Trust

WOODLAND TRUST

Community Forest Trust



englandscommunityforests.org.uk