

# 21 years of growth



## England's Community Forests come of age

**England's Community Forests are a national asset.** Over half of England's population lives within easy reach of a Community Forest. Our maturing woodlands are becoming magnets for recreation, boosting local economies and setting the scene for future growth and prosperity.

Each Community Forest is strategically located to support the jobs and growth agenda across key city regions and urban clusters. Our footprint includes the Northern Powerhouse, Thames Gateway, M4 Growth Corridor and D2N2.

As our woodlands have grown up we've developed a range of answers to the complex problems of our towns and cities. Our Forests:

- enable sustainable development, creating attractive places to live and work
- boost health and wellbeing
- help adapt to climate change
- connect people to their landscape and each other
- support timber and biomass production
- help to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour

We have achieved sustainable improvements to the quality of life and place in some of the most deprived parts of England, as recognised by national planning and environment policy.

We have demonstrated our ability to manage large scale projects and programmes and "gear up" investments to maximize community and environment benefits.

Alongside local communities we have created major new assets for England: new landscapes to pass on to a new generation.

Like our trees, we've proved resilient to the changes of the past two decades. Our track record in joining up strategic issues has driven innovation and developed our skills to take on future challenges.

*“We have found a strong economic case for woodland planting. 250,000 ha of new woodland located near towns and cities can generate net societal benefits in excess of £500m per annum.”*

**- UK Government’s Natural Capital Committee, 2015**

## Challenges and solutions

There are big challenges ahead for our economy, our environment and our people. We’re developing our response to these challenges based on our 21 years of experience:

### HEALTH

We face a **health crisis**, with an ageing population and increasing levels of poor mental health and rising obesity levels in both young and old.

Our work is adapting environments to make healthy lifestyle choices easier, in line with the current strategy for public health in England. We also develop programmes that use our environmental assets as tools in promoting healthier living and improved self-management of long-term conditions.

### CLIMATE

We face an **environmental crisis**, including a changing climate creating pressure on ageing infrastructure to meet the projected increase in flooding, and an urgent need to reduce air pollution in urban areas.

We’re pioneering the use of green infrastructure approaches to tackle urban heat islands and flooding risks.

### HOUSING

There’s a **housing crisis**, with pressure on our countryside and a potential threat to biodiversity and our natural economy.

We’ve shown how biodiversity can thrive in and around towns and cities and new developments with the right interventions and the connecting of people with their local landscapes. Community Forests were originally conceived as a tool to protect and enhance the greenbelt.

### ECONOMY

There is an urgent need to **rebalance our country’s economy**, encouraging new jobs and growth.

The work of the Community Forests is helping to set the scene for sustainable jobs and growth in some of the country’s key investment areas.

### WOODLANDS

We face a real **threat to our woodlands**, with a risk that England is deforesting, potential devastating impacts of new tree diseases and pests while at the same time there are reduced resources for tree planting and woodland management.

We’re working hard to develop new income streams and gear up resources for woodlands. The Community Forests have a strong track record at joining up agendas and resources across sectors.

### WILDLIFE

Our **wildlife and habitats** continue to come under sustained pressure in the face of development, land management practices and the growing implications of climate change.

We’re working with Government, the voluntary sector and communities to help protect, restore and create new habitats and opportunities for wildlife and to develop better and more joined up local ecological networks.



## A strong track record

### Health

The Mersey Forest's *Natural Choices* programme used the environment and woodland to improve health in areas with significant health need and little green space. Over 2000 participants on average increased their wellbeing by over 18%, with evidence of ongoing behaviour change.

### Growth

"Trees lead to jobs" – the view of Peel Holdings, developer behind one of Europe's largest regeneration sites at Wirral Waters. This is why the Community Forest *Green Streets* programme has planted over 1000 new street trees to help set the scene for investment in the area.

### Housing

The Forest of Marston Vale has trebled woodland cover between Bedford and Milton Keynes, providing a growing 'desirability' to a once-degraded, post-industrial landscape. 20,000 homes are now set to be built within this transformed setting, with the woodland performing as vital green infrastructure for growing and new communities.

### Biodiversity

The Great Western Community Forest is creating an extensive network of wildlife habitats connecting the North Wessex Downs to the upper reaches of the River Thames via urban Swindon. This enriched landscape is benefiting the growing population of Swindon, off-setting pressures of the town's expansion while also protecting wildlife.

### Climate

Our *Cool Cities* programme will accelerate our award winning work on adapting towns and cities to projected climate change, tackling flood risk and the urban heat island in some of our most vulnerable communities.

### Community

Greenwood Community Forest has developed and supported a network of over 50 Friends, walking and health groups made up of more than 1000 volunteers that play a vital role in creating, maintaining and promoting Nottinghamshire's green spaces. These groups put local people in the driving seat of efforts to reach Green Flag standard, working as active partners with local authorities in managing green spaces.

### Resources

The Community Forest Partnership has demonstrated the ability to attract investment from a wide range of sources, securing over £200m to develop their work over the past 21 years. Thames Chase Community Forest secured **£14 for every £1** invested by partners during 2011-2014.

### Education

Greenwood Community Forest has worked closely with local schools to help them use woodlands and green spaces to improve their curriculum outcomes. This approach has been found to galvanise both pupils and teachers and is cross-curriculum, with lessons ranging from creative writing and video to mathematics.



**WE'VE ACHIEVED  
THREE TIMES MORE  
TREE PLANTING  
THAN THE  
ENGLAND AVERAGE**



**MORE THAN  
1,000,000 PEOPLE  
HAVE VOLUNTEERED  
IN THEIR  
COMMUNITY FOREST**



## A shared agenda for action

Over the past 21 years, the Community Forests have worked together at a national level to support, inform and challenge and deliver policy and strategy.

Locally, each Forest has found its own identity, responding to challenges and opportunities in their local area.

Community Forests have always worked in partnership with government departments and agencies, providing a short chain from policy to delivery. Through learning from innovative action on the ground, we help to shape future policy too.

We want to continue to work at a national level, with government and others to:

- Build Community Forests into the plans for building a new economy, rebalancing growth, attracting investment and creating jobs.
- Use the role set out in National Planning Policy Framework for Community Forests effectively, ensuring that they are a key element of the Community Infrastructure Levy.

- Ensure that Community Forests' role in improving health and wellbeing is recognised and supported by the Department of Health, regulatory bodies, Public Health England and local commissioners.
- Develop the case for payments for Ecosystem Services, particularly for the water management function of our urban forests. We need to build the case in the AMP 7 negotiations with water companies/OFWAT.
- Develop a major new national programme of community woodland planting and management to reduce the risk of deforestation in England. We welcome the government's commitment to a new tree planting programme, but it is not enough. Government sponsored action for trees needs to respond to the National Capital Committee's challenge to increase planting in and around our urban areas.
- Play our part in the development of the proposed 25 Year Plan to restore the UK's biodiversity, using our two decades of experience to inform the strategy.

### Contact us:

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