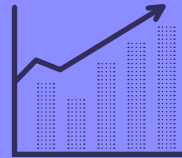


The Northern Forest

Setting the scene for growth



Our environment has a dramatic and positive impact on our economy.¹ Trees particularly create attractive environments for business investment and development; they bolster our urban and rural identities; they have a direct influence on property values; and of course, they create the spaces and places that we all want to visit, relocate to or work in.

The fact is that if we want to see greater prosperity across the north of England, it has to be green. We need to plant trees and protect those we already have.

There are two ways in which trees and woodlands affect our economy. Firstly, through direct and practical services: cleaning and cooling the air, slowing the flow of floodwater and producing food and timber. The second benefit, though less direct, is perhaps even more powerful; it's the way they transform how we feel about ourselves and the places where we live.

The Northern Forest is a partnership of:



Manchester
City of Trees



WHITE ROSE
FOREST



THE MERSEY
FOREST
more from trees



WOODLAND
TRUST

Adding value, with trees

Developers are increasingly recognising that green spaces and amenities are vital for successful, fully let major development schemes. Many international marketing experts recognise what's known as 'the airport experience' for overseas visitors and investors. Along linear transport gateways – road, rail or cycleway – we should be planting more trees, particularly as evidence shows that commuters' quality of life is also enhanced by tree-lined routes.²

For house prices and housing market renewal, trees are critical too. Right across the world the evidence shows that being near woodland and having street trees can and does enhance the attractiveness and value of properties. And if our aesthetic experience is enhanced, we are more likely to feel a stronger bond of community, a stronger identification with place and people we share it with.

In a recent issue of the international journal *Urban Forestry & Urban Greening*³, researchers looked at the impact street trees had on property values in Portland, Oregon. For rental values, they found that a tree on a rental plot saw monthly rent increase by \$5.62; if there was a tree in the street outside, rent went up by \$21. They found that a street tree boosted overall property value by \$7,000 (around £5,300 at the time of writing). Another Portland-based study put the contribution even higher, estimating that a home's value could be boosted by over \$22,000 if it was on a tree-lined avenue.⁴

In England, the Forestry Commission asked the District Valuer for the North West to look at their investments in green infrastructure and assess the effect on property values of a multi-million pound programme to turn brownfield sites into thriving community woodland.

At Bold Moss in St Helens, a former colliery site, the study⁵ looked at derelict industrial land that had been transformed into community woodland alongside nearly 600

new homes. The District Valuer found property values in the area had risen by £15m as a direct result, and new development worth £75m had been attracted to the area. Another study in North West England showed that homebuyers would be willing to pay £7,680 per household for views of broadleaved woods.⁶

The evidence is strong, too, for the attractiveness of business locations that boast decent green space.⁷

One example, cited by Groundwork UK, is Riverside Park Industrial Estate in Middlesbrough where extensive planting of trees helped to attract new high-profile occupants. Occupancy rose from 40% to 78%; attracted more than £1m of private investment, 28 new businesses and more than 60 new jobs.⁸ Another study showed that landscaping improvements in Portland Basin, Tameside, and Winsford, Cheshire, has brought 16% and 13% of net growth in employment respectively.⁹

After the trees have boosted job numbers, the evidence is that commuters would like to see them, too. A 2003 Forestry Commission report revealed a strong preference for green commuting routes; and the amount that workers might be willing to pay for woodland views on journeys to and from home was around £226.56 per year per household.¹⁰

Money grows on trees

The UK has a problem with productivity. For every £1 generated by a worker here in the UK for example, German workers make £1.35. The so-called UK productivity gap has been

growing since the early 'noughties' and is now a significant cause for concern, particularly as Brexit looms large on the horizon.¹¹

A report commissioned by Glasgow City Council showed that businesses located next to newly regenerated green space had better staff retention and morale, directly related to the pleasant environment.¹²

If workers can see nature from their workspace, studies show that they report fewer ailments and greater job satisfaction. Even bringing the green indoors with office plants helps to speed up the completion of work and reduce stress levels.^{13,14}

A greener setting can make life better for clients and customers too. One study of central business districts in the United States set out to test the idea of a 'retail urban forest' and showed study participants two 'Main Street' scenarios, one with a dense urban canopy and one denuded of trees. People were asked which street would be likely to get their custom. The results showed that trees made people feel like the place had a more positive atmosphere and that they'd be more likely to visit, spend more, stay longer and even be willing to pay a higher price for parking.¹⁵

An earlier study by the same team also found that trees help to form more positive consumer experiences in central business districts, in this case increasing willingness to visit and pay a higher price for goods by around 11%.¹⁶



Invest now, avoid disappointment

It's hard to put a price on beauty.¹⁷ That said, if you're asking developers, cities and investors to plough more cash into planting trees, you need to give them an informed estimate of the value of that investment.

A recent Woodland Trust report on the economic contribution of woodlands estimates the total aesthetic value of the UK's woodlands at around £2bn. If you add in the other services they deliver, from water management to food and timber, their value comes in much higher at around £270bn.¹⁸ That's existing woodland. We could generate an even greater return if we plant and protect.

With plans to build 650,000¹⁹ new homes across the Northern Forest area in the next 20 years, we urgently need a strategic plan that will significantly increase woodland and canopy cover, including more street trees. If the studies into property value are factored in, with each home potentially worth around £5,000 more if it has street trees or a woodland view, that's more than £3.2bn potential uplift in real value to our housing stock across the region.

The time to create a Northern Forest is now.

We can't do this on our own. This is a once in a lifetime opportunity and we need your support.

If you would like to get involved in delivering the Northern Forest – whether as a financial supporter, landowner, partner, or in any other way – please visit thenorthernforest.org.uk

Join us



Footnotes

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