

The Northern Forest

Green growth for the North



The Northern Forest is a standout example of how **investment in nature can drive real and sustained economic growth** while also **benefiting people, places and the planet**. The programme was launched in 2018 with a bold, transformational vision to plant at least **50 million new trees** over 25 years, across **10,000 square miles of Northern England**. It has already delivered at pace, at scale, and has the clear potential to deliver much, much more.

The Northern Forest...



is home to 13 million people



drives 19% of our country's economic activity

Woodland cover

30% EU

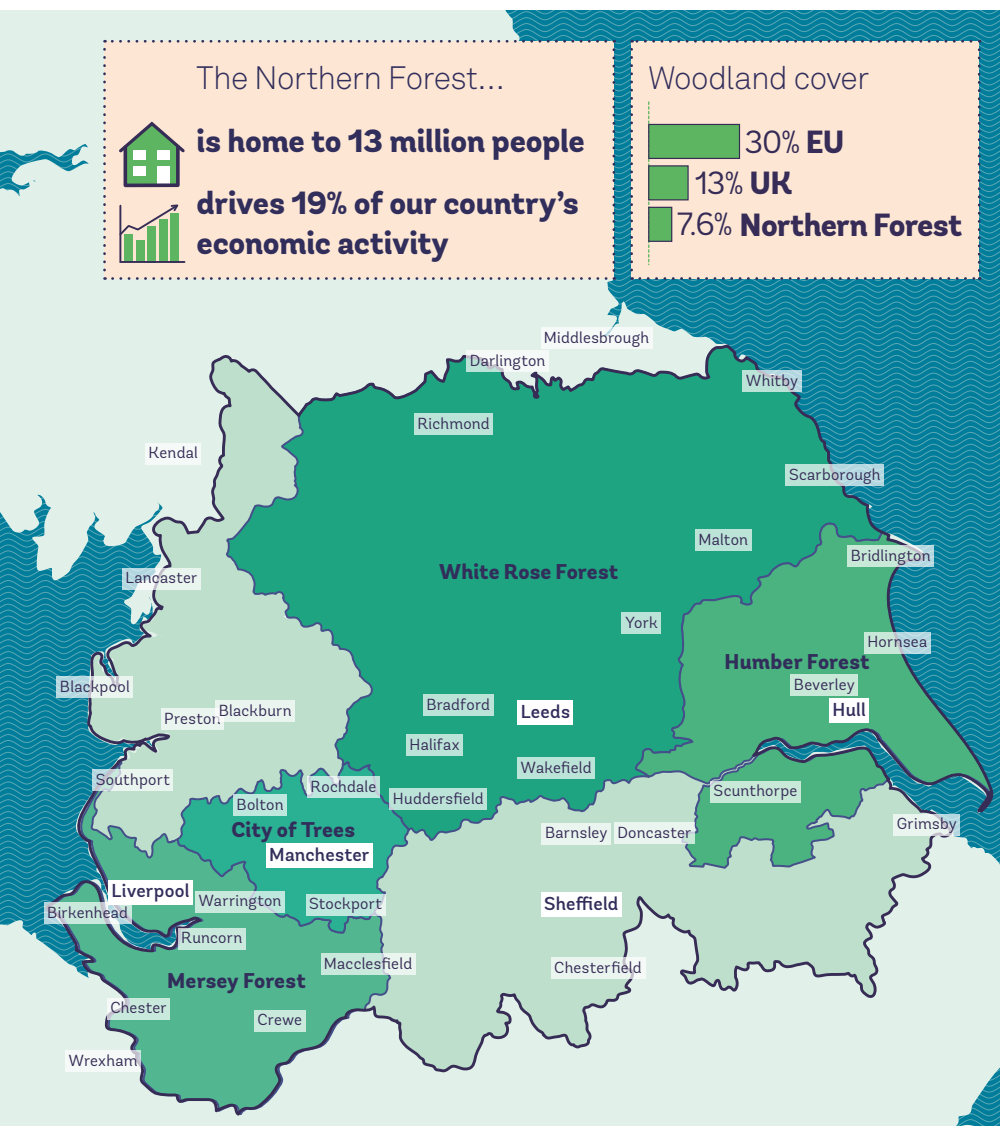
13% UK

7.6% Northern Forest

The big green uplift

So why is this needed? The Northern Forest covers a geography that is home to **13 million people and that drives 19% of our country's economic activity**. It is proud and industrious, but it is also an area where poor health in particular is holding back our potential and our productivity.

There is a direct and powerful link between the quality of the environment and the health of people in local communities. There is also a clear inequality faced by the North that the Northern Forest seeks to urgently address: the region enjoys fewer of the benefits of trees than others; it has just 7.6% woodland cover, far below the UK average of 13% and even further below the European average of 30%.



 **Humber Forest**

 **City of Trees**

 **WOODLAND TRUST**

 **THE MERSEY FOREST**
more with trees

 **White Rose Forest**

 **Community Forest Trust**



Powerful delivery, through partnerships

Stretching from Liverpool to Hull, this Defra-funded transformational programme is led by a dynamic partnership of the Woodland Trust and four of England's Community Forests – The Mersey Forest, City of Trees in Greater Manchester, the White Rose Forest and Humber Forest, together with the Community Forest Trust, and working with many other partners, including the private sector.

Scale, speed and impact

Ten million trees are now in the ground. That's what's been delivered since the 2018 launch. So far the Northern Forest programme has delivered an unprecedented level of impact and value to the economy and to local communities:¹



Bringing people and nature together.



The Northern Forest has brought over 300,000 additional households to within a ten-minute walk of woodland, and that means **almost an extra one million people having access to nature**, cleaner air and better health.



Flood risk is down, across the Northern Forest.

The programme has seen 425,000 cubic metres of additional water storage created, slashing risk by a third across these areas planted and **saving the government money on flooding**, which costs the public purse £2 billion a year.



A nature-based carbon solution.

Approximately 19,000 tonnes of carbon per annum is locked up in the trees we have planted, rooted in the 3,500 hectares of habitat that has been created – **supporting the government's net zero ambitions** alongside nature recovery.



More money to areas that need it most.

Working in some of the most deprived areas of the UK, the Northern Forest is contributing **£43 million of economic uplift** every year through natural benefits.

Delivery in action

Photo: McCoy Wynne



Unlocking investment in Birkenhead

At Birkenhead's docklands, a once bleak and contaminated landscape is being turned into **a biodiverse and thriving housing and office development**. The growth of Wirral Waters began with a **major tree planting programme worth £1.2 million**, led by The Mersey Forest team working in partnership with Peel Group – breathing life into the docklands and also helping expand the area's tree canopy and natural environment, unlocking land for new homes.

Photo: City of Trees



Green jobs for Greater Manchester

City of Trees is helping individuals from non-traditional backgrounds to get involved in green jobs through its **Roots to Work project**, which has helped those without any practical experience take the first steps towards a career in environmental conservation. City of Trees has also launched its own in-house contractor team, which now **employs six urban foresters**.

“It makes you feel like you are giving back to society and you are part of a community”

Danny, a Citizen Forester

Flood risk tackled in West Yorkshire

Leeds City Council has worked with the Environment Agency on the city's Flood Alleviation Scheme, which has seen **over 410,000 trees planted in the River Aire's catchment area**, through the White Rose Forest, adding to the Northern Forest tree target and also building climate resilience for businesses – working to prevent events like the 2015 Boxing Day floods in Leeds city centre, which cost £500 million.

Supporting farmers in East Cheshire

The Mersey Forest and Cheshire Wildlife Trust supported agroforestry at Wincle Grange, which saw the **planting of 11,000 trees over 35 hectares** to create a sustainable farm model for the future – enabling cattle to graze amongst trees to shelter from the elements, and creating woodland corridors to make connections for wildlife movement across the farm.

Photo: Eric Wright



Citizen Foresters – a force for nature

City of Trees' Citizen Forester volunteering programme helps to grow the urban forest, for and with the people of Greater Manchester. **Volunteers take part in hands-on woodland activities** such as tree planting, maintenance and woodland management led by the City of Trees team. For example in Haslam Park in Bolton, **55 local residents and 250 school children planted 1,360 trees**, with local businesses taking part too.

Green value added?



**Jobs created. Cleaner air.
Greater quality of life. Flood
risk down. Biodiversity gain.
Carbon locked up.**



Research shows that for **every 100 hectares of woodland planted, 25 temporary jobs are established**, and a further **six permanent roles** are created.¹



Trees, nature and green infrastructure across the North underpins our valuable visitor economy, which is worth **£12.3 billion per year**.²



Accessible urban green space in the North is estimated to **provide £780 million per year in avoided costs of physical and mental health conditions**, so delivering the Northern Forest increases those benefits.³

¹ https://www.camecon.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/The-economic-costs-benefits-of-nature-based-solutions_final-report_FINAL_V3.pdf

² <http://transportforthenorth.com/wp-content/uploads/Visitor-Economy-and-Transport-in-the-North-Executive-Summary.pdf>

³ <https://www.naturenorth.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Nature-North-Investing-In-Nature-For-The-North.pdf>

Jubilee woods with Royal Mail

The Royal Mail has **invested in an eight hectare woodland in St Helens** on land acquired in 2023 as part of the Queen's Green Canopy project, with support of The Mersey Forest and Community Forest Trust. The site sits near its North West Parcel Hub in Warrington and celebrates the late Queen's Platinum Jubilee, when people all over the UK were invited to "Plant a tree for the Jubilee".

Public-private partnerships

Groundbreaking work has been done by the Woodland Trust at Snaizeholme in the Yorkshire Dales, where land secured through donations, charitable trusts and corporate partners enabled the White Rose Forest to deploy Defra funding to create almost **300 hectares of woodland** – contributing to flood alleviation for areas downstream, such as York.

Securing the site helped to unlock further financial support from corporate partner, Aviva, who are **donating £10m to the Woodland Trust's work** across the UK.

In addition, across the Northern Forest the **Woodland Trust's MOREwoods programme** has been supported by Lloyds Banking Group, who have also contributed to the acquisition and planting at the Hayhills Farm Wood site in West Yorkshire.

The Northern Forest demonstrates the transformative power of investing in nature. Planting millions of trees can boost the economy, build communities, improve public health and drive nature recovery, all at the same time.

Working together, the Woodland Trust, The Mersey Forest, City of Trees (Greater Manchester), the White Rose Forest, the Humber Forest, and the Community Forest Trust are bringing the Northern Forest to life.

Find out more, visit thenorthernforest.org.uk



humberforest.org



cityoftrees.org.uk



woodlandtrust.org.uk



merseyforest.org.uk



White
Rose
Forest

whiteroseforest.org



Community
Forest
Trust

communityforest-trust.org