



Transformation through forests

A vision for a positive future
2026-2050



“We are aiming to go further, branching out to new national forests and beyond.”

Foreword



This Vision for the National Forest is timely. It marks a bold reset for both the charity and the place. I am delighted to be endorsing something so ambitious and to be putting down a marker for ourselves, for government and for our partners. At its inception, the National Forest was still only a concept, a wild idea that gathered momentum, political support and the backing of partners to make it a reality.

I hope this Vision strikes a similar chord, as a catalyst to stretch our imagination and galvanise efforts once again as we strive for even greater success.

Dr Tony Ballance
Chair of the National Forest



At the National Forest we like to think big and challenge ourselves to do more; to be bold enough to meet the expectations of our stakeholders, to match the commitment of our partners and to justify the contributions of our funders. The National Forest has always been a small organisation with a big reach, a regional initiative with national impact. With this Vision, we are aiming to go further, branching out to new national forests and beyond, truly reflecting the ‘national’ in our name.

Ultimately, it’s a Vision to inspire hope in a new generation and the belief that forests are our future.

John Everitt OBE FRSA
Chief Executive of the National Forest

The power of forests

The future of England will be shaped by the landscapes we choose to grow.



Forests are not relics of the past. In the modern world, they are living landscapes, places where people live and work, where businesses grow, where nature thrives and communities find connection. They are mosaics of woodland, farming, waterways, homes and enterprise, woven together by trees and accessible greenspaces.

For over thirty years, the National Forest has shown what is possible when forests are designed for the future. What began as a bold regeneration initiative in the Midlands has evolved into something far greater: a model for transforming landscapes, lives and livelihoods. A greenprint for prosperity.

Today, as the pressures facing the country intensify, the case for transformation through forests has never been stronger. We are entering a decisive decade, one that will shape our landscapes, communities and economy for generations to come. As we do so, we need a step change in our ambition: not just to continue the good work of the National Forest within its 200 square mile boundary, nor simply to seed new national forests to replicate this success, but to grow a connected network of forests across England and to harness their power to drive the renewal the country needs.

It's a bold new vision that puts forests at the heart of a positive future and challenges us all to come together and create something truly transformational.

Why now

With urgent threats facing the nation, there is a clear need to act now.

Climate instability is bringing more extreme weather, flooding and heat, threatening homes, farms, food security and infrastructure, and requiring rapid progress towards long-term resilience.

Nature loss continues to threaten wildlife, weaken ecosystems and reduce natural services that underpin food production, clean water and air.

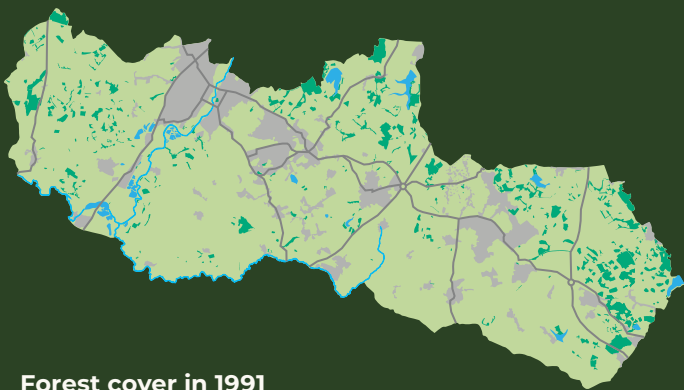
Health inequality and social isolation are rising, with millions lacking access to quality greenspace, contributing to obesity, poor mental health and wellbeing.

Economic uncertainty means businesses need investment, skills and innovation to unlock growth and support transition, particularly in areas experiencing social and economic challenges and disparities.

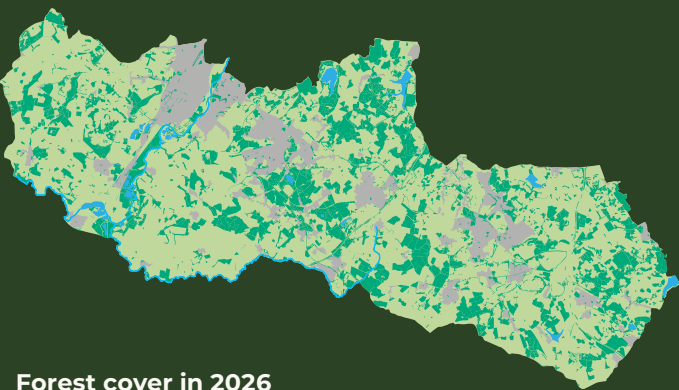
Forests can be a catalyst to overcome these threats, driving forward positive impacts on climate, nature, health and economy.



A model of transformation



Forest cover in 1991



Forest cover in 2026

Three decades of landscape-scale change in 200 square miles of the National Forest.

Over the past thirty years, the National Forest has transformed this part of the Midlands, connecting the ancient forests of Needwood in Staffordshire and Charnwood in Leicestershire. From a once fragmented and degraded landscape, the National Forest has emerged as a thriving mosaic of wildlife-rich habitats, a network of accessible greenspaces on the doorstep of communities, and a vibrant green economy.

This has been achieved through the planting of more than ten million trees, driving up Forest cover from around 6% in 1991 to more than 26% today. What is all the more remarkable is that this has happened alongside the construction of thousands of new homes, been integrated into the farmed environment, enjoys the support of business and industry, and is championed by local people. The National Forest now stands as proof that nature, communities and enterprise can all grow together.



Before



After



It is a partnership model, bringing together the private, public, voluntary and community sectors behind a shared strategy, aligned incentives, supportive policy and coordinated investment. Proven in practice, it can be replicated elsewhere where the right opportunities exist to grow trees and deliver lasting change.

The National Forest's transformation, made possible by sustained funding from Defra, demonstrates the extraordinary long-term value that targeted investment from a mix of sources can generate. This huge range of benefits has cost less than building just five miles of new motorway.

In the first National Forest Vision, published in 1994, Sir John Johnson, the chair of the Countryside Commission, described the Forest as 'a symbol of hope for the nation', a bold initiative in the UK's response to the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio. More than three decades on, that hope has taken root. What began as an aspiration is now a living demonstration that bold ambition, sustained commitment and strong partnerships can reshape landscapes for generations. Today, that same spirit of hope and determination guides the next phase of transformation as we look beyond the boundary of the National Forest to inspire transformation across England.

Forest achievements to date



A forest for
nature

10 million
trees planted

22% of the
Forest classed as
wildlife-rich
habitats



A forest for
communities

76% of households have
access to greenspace within
15 minutes' walk

90% of schools
engaged in regular
outdoor learning



A forest for
enterprise

Visitor economy
increased by over **30%**
over the last 20 years

Nearly
750,000
tonnes of carbon sequestered

“The transformation of this part of the Midlands from some of the least wooded and most industrial parts of the country into the National Forest has always struck me as a story of remarkable healing. I have always felt a deep connection to trees; they are silent companions, guardians of our history, and a gift to future generations. With ten million now rooted across this landscape, the National Forest has become a living archive of hope, community, and all the stories still to come. At a time when we all feel the weight of our responsibility to the planet, the National Forest shows what can be achieved when people come together with care, vision, and patience. The planting of ten million trees is not simply a milestone; it is a profound promise to the future. I am proud to support this extraordinary work and hope it inspires many more to recognise the power of trees to transform our world for people and wildlife alike.”

Dame Judi Dench



A vision for a positive future

A new vision for the future

A new vision for the future

A greenprint for transformation, locally, regionally and nationally.

Imagine an England restored by trees; where forests act as green lungs connected together by woodland corridors, and trees weave their way through living and working landscapes. This is our Vision of transformation through forests. It is a Vision that is not defined by geographical boundaries, not limited to environmental change alone, and not constrained by time. It is a Vision that recognises the long-term commitment needed for forests to thrive and demonstrates the far-reaching impacts they can bring.

The Vision is borne out of our National Forest Mission to grow forests for the future: restoring nature, connecting

communities, and enhancing enterprise. The transformation we are creating is future focused. In a rapidly changing climate and world, we must shape landscapes that can adapt, regenerate what has been lost, and inspire new ways of living. Our forests are firmly rooted in the belief that our key ambitions, nature, communities and enterprise, must work together to deliver lasting change. They are the three pillars of transformation, guiding our work and reinforcing each other. Together they form an integrated, replicable model for how forests can deliver measurable benefits locally, regionally and nationally.

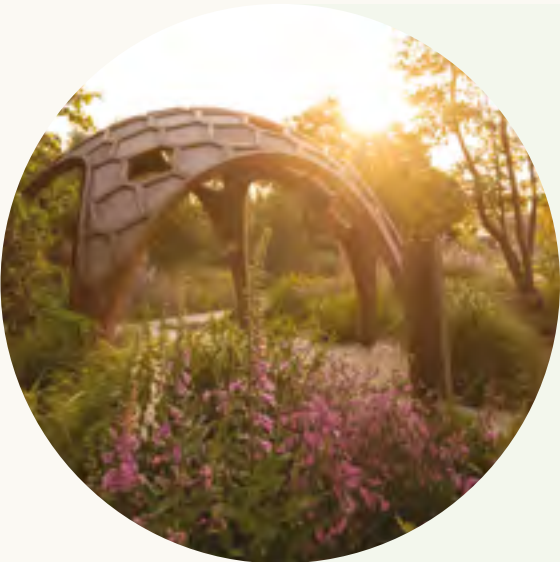
Our Vision:
Transformation through forests

Our Mission:
Grow forests for the future: restoring nature, connecting communities, and enhancing enterprise

“The transformation we are creating is future focused.”

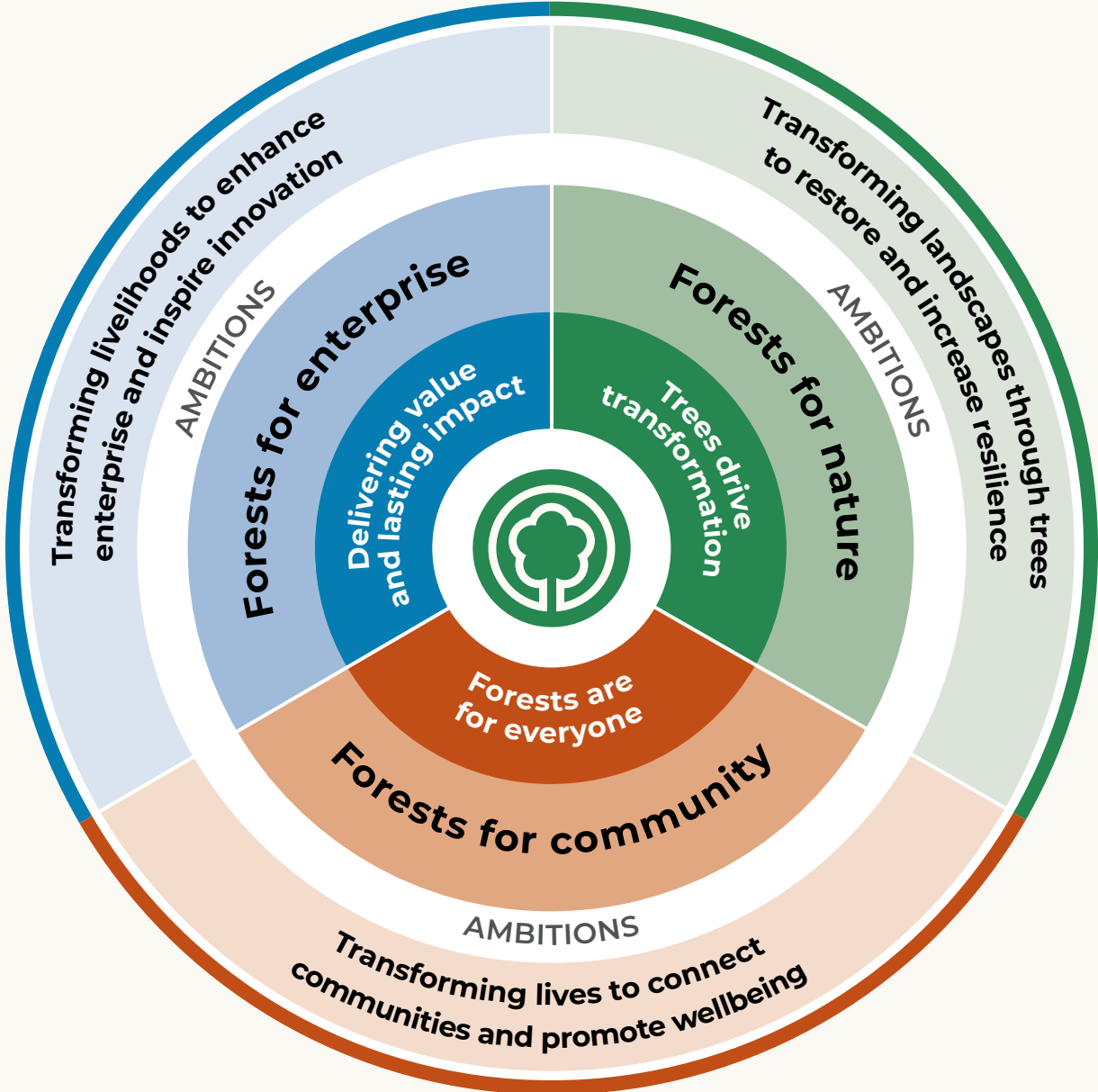
Our Values

- **Trees drive transformation** – The starting point for our work is trees. We believe that trees are the catalyst for transformation and that the benefits they provide can be far reaching.
- **Forests are for everyone** – Forests should be inclusive and accessible to everyone. We believe that engagement with forests should not be restricted by geography, culture or ability so that their impacts can be felt by all.
- **Delivering value and lasting impact** – Investment in forests provides significant returns. We believe our work provides great value for money and delivers long-term change.



Our Ambitions

-  **Forests for nature** – Transforming landscapes through trees to restore nature and increase resilience.
-  **Forests for communities** – Transforming lives to connect communities and promote wellbeing.
-  **Forests for enterprise** – Transforming livelihoods to enhance enterprise and inspire innovation.



Our Impacts and Measures



Forests for nature

IMPACT:

For nature we will expand wildlife-rich habitats and improve their condition, creating resilient landscapes that support biodiversity and climate adaptation.

MEASURES:

At least a third of the area as tree and woodland cover

All wildlife-rich habitats in active management

Mechanisms:

Creation

Management



Forests for communities

IMPACT:

For communities we will increase access to greenspace and engagement with nature, enhancing wellbeing and fostering a sense of connection to the natural world.

MEASURES:

All households within a 15 minute walk of greenspace

All residents regularly using greenspace

Mechanisms:

Access

Engagement



Forests for enterprise

IMPACT:

For enterprise we will strengthen the forest economy and drive economic uplift, creating jobs, skills, and innovation.

MEASURES:

Increased jobs in forest-associated sectors

Increased economic uplift from habitat creation

Mechanisms:

Jobs

Growth



Branching outwards

To realise this Vision over the next twenty-five years, our focus will be on three interconnected areas of activity:



1. Delivering in the National Forest

Directly delivering at least 33% tree and woodland cover, access to greenspace on every doorstep, and a thriving forest economy for the National Forest.



2. Enabling new national forests

Supporting the creation and long-term success of three new national forests, sharing expertise, building partnerships, and embedding a proven model for delivery.



3. Championing a Forest Network for England

Inspiring action by bringing partners together to grow a connected Forest Network for England.

At its heart, our Vision is simple but powerful: to grow forests at scale, embedded in the places where people live and work, and connect them into a wider, resilient forest network. Proven over 30 years, this approach offers a greenprint for how England can meet the challenges of the coming decades—not in isolation, but through an integrated, landscape-scale approach to deliver transformational change.

1. Delivering in the National Forest

Restoring nature, connecting communities and enhancing enterprise for a resilient forest by 2050.

As we look forward to 2050, our focus is on the next phase of transformation in the National Forest, for nature, communities and enterprise. Having initially invested in ‘creation’, planting trees to establish the Forest, and moved from creation to ‘management’ as trees began to mature, we must now shift from management to ‘resilience’, to create lasting change and ensure the benefits can be felt by generations to come.



“We must now shift from management to resilience to create lasting change.”



A Forest for Nature

Our Vision is for a connected National Forest landscape where wildlife thrives, ecosystems function at scale and healthy air, soils and water provide the essential natural capital for a resilient future. With ten million trees planted and the National Forest land area now at more than 26% Forest cover, we are well on the way to creating our future forest. But there is so much more to do.

We will continue with the Forest's creation by increasing tree and woodland cover to at least 33%, planting over 150,000 trees and creating more than 150 hectares of new forest habitats each year. Our mapping demonstrates that this is possible without compromising other land uses. Creation will focus on priority areas where trees can deliver the greatest impact: reducing flood risk, stabilising soils, improving water quality, and linking habitats that enable wildlife to adapt and move. A greater emphasis on agroforestry and linear habitats, planning and urban greening, strategic connections and integrated land use will be needed to ensure that the additional tree and woodland

cover is targeted to the right places and can provide the most benefit. **This work will directly contribute to the Government's Environmental Improvement Plan target of at least 16.5% tree and woodland cover in England by 2050.**



Our Impact:
Expand wildlife-rich habitats

Our Aim:
At least 33% tree and woodland cover



Our Impact:
**Improve the
condition of
wildlife-rich
habitats**

Our Aim:
**All wildlife-rich
habitats in active
management**



During the last decade, huge progress has been made in bringing woodlands and other habitats in the National Forest into active management. With more than 70% of woodlands now being managed, well above the national average, the next step is to get all wildlife-rich habitats into good management by 2050, with 600 hectares to be brought into or retained in active management each year. The emphasis will be on how management can increase resilience, to reduce effects of drought, wind, fire and flood on habitats, and threats from pests

and disease. Our research highlights the positive impacts our work is already having with significant increases in both the abundance and richness of species in the Forest over the last thirty years; butterfly species such as the purple emperor are now returning, dormouse populations are expanding, and nationally declining woodland birds are on the increase.

This work will directly contribute to the Government's Environmental Improvement Plan target to create or restore over 500,000 hectares of wildlife-rich habitat and to increase species abundance in England by 2042.





A Forest for Communities

We believe that forests can be transformational for communities, connecting them to nature and each other to improve both physical and mental wellbeing. Our Vision is to ensure that all our urban and rural populations, our least and most deprived communities, residents and visitors can understand and engage with the National Forest so that its benefits can be felt by everyone.

Creating accessible woodlands and greenspace has always been a central feature of the National Forest. Work over the last thirty years has resulted in more than 76% of households in the National Forest now having greenspaces on their doorstep. We will continue to prioritise access to bring this figure to 100%, with better targeting of access where it can have the biggest impact, connecting existing access routes, addressing disparities and mitigating any access lost. In addition, priority areas for more focused access work will include the Heart of the National Forest, with continued improvements to the Green Network of off-road trails, the National Forest Way, to upgrade

facilities, and more specialist provision for cycling and horse riding. **This work will directly contribute to the Government's Environmental Improvement Plan commitment to ensure that everyone has access to green and blue spaces within a 15 minute walk from home.**



Our Impact:
**Expand
access to
greenspace**

Our Aim:
**All households
within a 15
minute walk of
greenspace**



Our Impact:
**Increase
engagement
with nature**

Our Aim:
**All residents
regularly using
greenspace**



We know that without the support of people, the National Forest will not succeed. That's why learning, volunteering, arts and leisure have always been integral to our work. Huge strides have already been made, and we will go further to provide regular outdoor learning within all of our schools and early years settings, ensure all households have forest-volunteering activities close to home, continue to provide place-based creative activities across the Forest, and encourage use of accessible trails and forest sites for all residents. Moreover, we will

transform the current Conkers visitor centre into a flagship engagement and learning hub that brings people closer to nature, inspiring the next generation to appreciate the wonder of forests and to take action for the National Forest into the future.

This work will directly contribute to the Government's Environmental Improvement Plan commitments to boost children's connection with nature and increase people's time spent in nature to support both physical and mental health.





A Forest for Enterprise

Forests create opportunities and can inspire placemaking. That's why the National Forest is home to the Royal British Legion National Remembrance Gardens, the National Football Centre at St George's Park and many more landmark attractions.

The National Forest has shown the economic uplift that can be generated by trees, kick-starting diversification, new enterprise and business establishment. Our Vision is for a vibrant, interconnected local economy that grows alongside the National Forest itself, with investment unlocked through partnership, planning and market confidence. This will drive coordinated development in infrastructure, transport, skills and facilities, alongside growth in destinations, markets and products, creating a economic forest ecosystem.

With trees now more than thirty years old, the National Forest is at a stage where it can be the catalyst for a new wave of green growth with high quality homes, land-based diversification, tourism and leisure development, and an expansion of health and creative

industries. In particular, we will focus on transformative tourism, to support new accommodation, attractions and services aligned to the Forest, and on agricultural transition to encourage agroforestry and trees on farms to improve food production and support diversification to new markets. We also believe that the Forest economy will be strengthened further by partnering with colleges, businesses and authorities to create a new Forest Enterprise Hub as a regional base for training, a small business incubator, a place for innovation and a centre for research and development.

This work will directly contribute to the Government's Environmental Improvement Plan objective to harness nature as a driver of sustainable economic growth, skills and wellbeing.

Our Aim:
**Increase jobs in
forest-related
sectors**

Our Impact:
**Strengthen
the Forest
economy**





We know that trees drive an uplift in property prices, encourage inward investment, increase environmental resilience, and improve the wellbeing of employees to increase productivity. Improving the conditions to drive economic uplift further now involves major projects to build the destination and more integrated working to reduce barriers.

Flagship projects include continued land restoration and development in the Heart of the National Forest and the transformation of the Conkers visitor centre; as well as the next steps towards establishing Charnwood Forest as a UNESCO Global Geopark.

We will also support the re-opening of the Ivanhoe Rail Line to passengers to revitalise the gateway towns, from Burton Upon Trent to Leicester to improve connectivity for all across the National Forest landscape.

Shaping policy support for the Forest alongside local government reorganisation, and ongoing work with the planning system will help to facilitate green growth and investment.

This work will directly contribute to the Government's Land Use Framework commitments on housing, as well as support investment and delivery of the Green Finance Framework.



2. Enabling new national forests

Supporting new national forests across England.

Having long held an aspiration to replicate the National Forest model, the government's commitment to establish three new national forests in England now provides that opportunity. The new national forests are being selected in different parts of the country as landscapes large enough to demonstrate need and deliver impact whilst small enough to have their own sense of place. Each forest will tell its own unique story of transformation based on their particular history, partners and geography.

They will be guided by the transformation model of nature, communities and enterprise, with goals to drive a significant increase in tree and woodland cover, access

and engagement, and economic uplift. The new national forests will also help to accelerate delivery of the government's Environmental Improvement Plan, contributing to targets for trees, nature, access and wellbeing. With the first new national forest in the West of England, the second to be in the Oxford Cambridge Growth Corridor and the third in the North of England or Midlands, they will be our newest forests, central pillars in the landscape change we aim to bring about and an inspiration for what can be done.



***“In these places,
development can
drive positive change.”***

Whilst pump-priming funds from Defra are being provided to kick-start these initiatives, long-term success will depend on putting in place sustainable funding arrangements, governance and programmes, drawing on a range of public, private and place-based investment. The National Forest will take on a facilitating role for these new national forests, acting as the Grant Manager for Defra investment as well as providing a strategic steer and support to this growing family of national forests. Centralised services such as mapping, evidence, policy, funding and marketing will generate a bigger voice and economies of scale to deliver a common purpose.

With an emphasis on innovation, the family of national forests will look to be pioneering and ambitious for the sector, convening partners across each region to collaborate, accelerate delivery and test new approaches.

Where National Parks and National Landscapes are focused on protecting some of our most special areas, national forests are landscapes without protected area designations, where transformation is part of their purpose. In these places, development can drive positive change, restoration can bring about improvements and trees can help unlock aspiration and ambition.

3. Championing a Forest Network for England

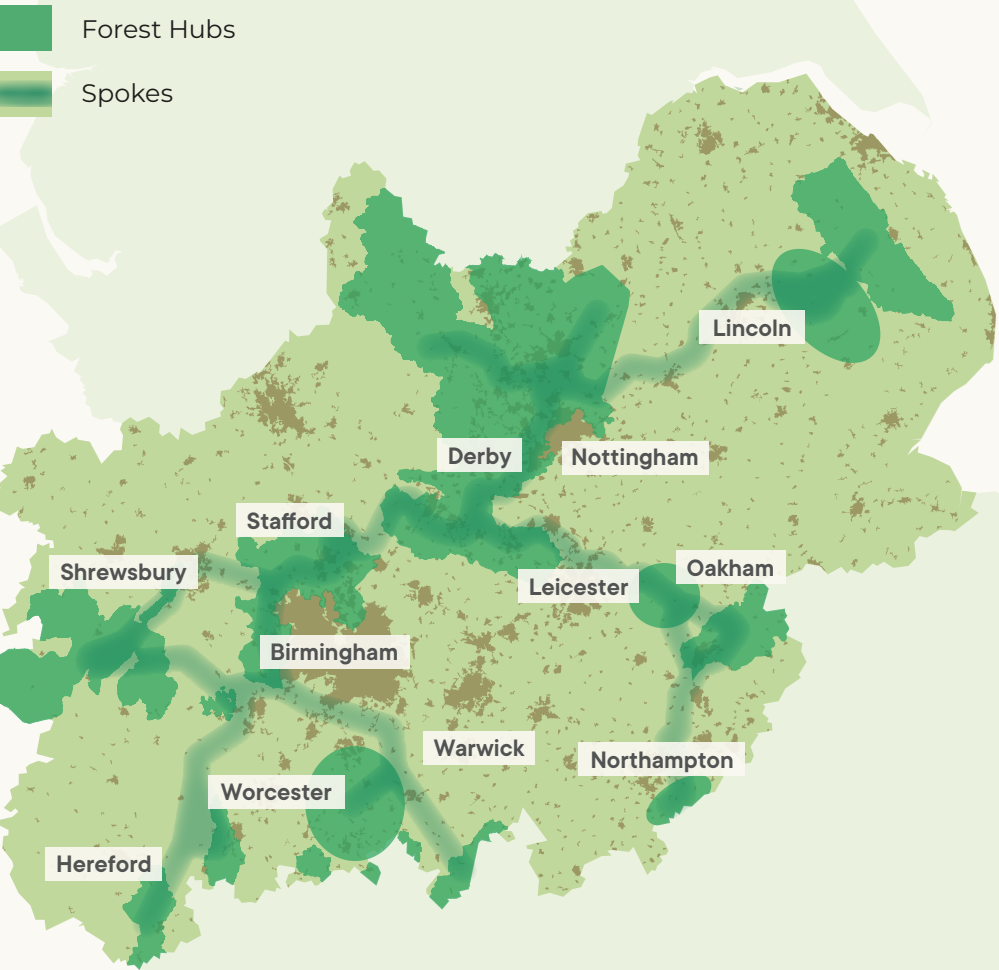


Connecting up our fragmented landscapes to build a Forest Network for England.

Taking inspiration from the National Forest, we believe that a more strategic approach is now needed to drive delivery of our tree and woodland cover targets to 2050. With better national datasets highlighting constraints and opportunities for tree planting, Local Nature Recovery Strategies setting out local ambitions for woodland and other priority habitats, and the need to better integrate land use for housing and farming, now is the time for developing an England-wide spatial framework for trees and woods. This is our challenge to the sector.

The government's Land Use Framework also supports this approach as we look to prioritise competing demands on land and find new ways to deliver multifunctional benefits. The work of the Midlands Forest Network has shown how it is possible to identify priority hubs for increased tree planting and woodland creation, alongside connecting spokes that can reduce habitat fragmentation. If repeated across each region of England, this can create an integrated tree and woodland cover map for the country to help target capacity and funds where there is least constraint and most benefit—where the right trees can be put in the right place for the right reason. And such an approach will benefit other goals too, such as housing, food production, access and biodiversity.

Midlands Forest Network

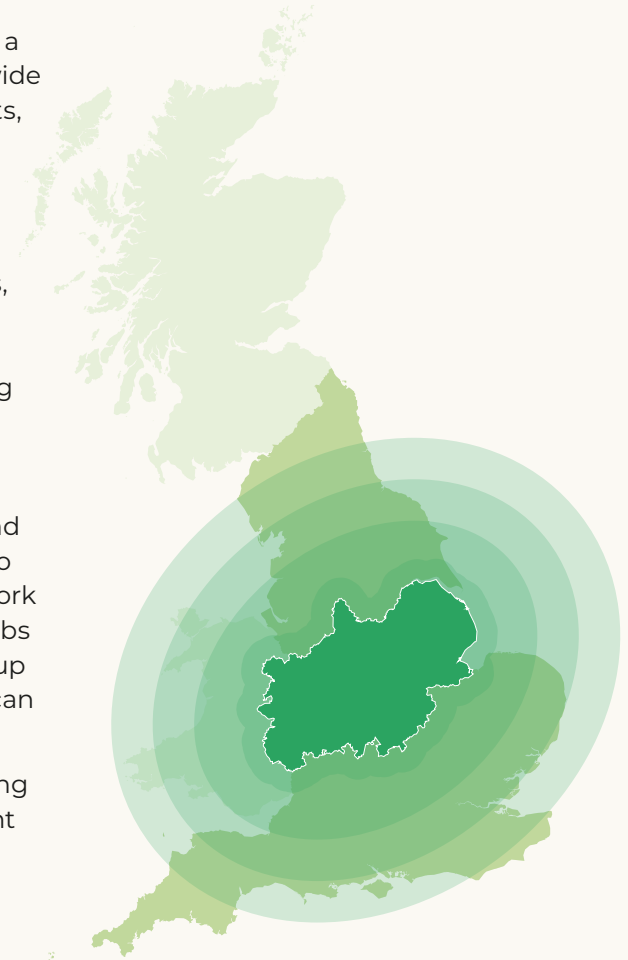


“Now is the time for developing an England-wide spatial framework for trees and woods.”



As has happened in the Midlands, creating a network for England will require a sector-wide effort, working with the Community Forests, the Public Forest Estate, public bodies, private landowners, voluntary partners, farmers, corporates and others. It will speed up decision-making and provide greater certainty for existing grant schemes, as well as helping to better align funding already available and other investment. The National Forest will take on a convening role for this work, continuing to champion the Midlands Forest Network as it moves into its next phase towards delivery, and advocating for a Forest Network for England with partners. New national forests can also play their part to drive forward mapping work in their regions, helping to establish the hubs and spokes needed to grow a truly joined-up network. By harnessing all our efforts, we can make this vision a reality.

It's a compelling image of forests connecting beyond their boundaries, creating a resilient landscape through which wildlife can move, people can travel and businesses can grow, and one that offers the real hope of nationwide transformation.



“Spending time in nature has always reminded me how powerful the natural world can be in restoring both landscapes and people. What the National Forest has achieved over the past thirty years is extraordinary. Ten million trees represent far more than a number. They represent hope, resilience and a belief that we can repair what has been damaged. Projects like this show that when we commit to nature for the long term, the benefits reach far beyond the trees themselves and into the health and wellbeing of communities.”

Ben Fogle



Be part of the transformation

Help grow forests for the future.

Transformation through forests is a bold Vision for us all, whether landowners, partners, businesses, funders or individuals. It is a chance to play our part in getting behind a plan for positive change to landscapes, lives and livelihoods.

With a proven model, value for money proposition and growing momentum,

the National Forest is now ready to help inspire the sector to scale-up its efforts for the future. Realising this Vision will require collective action, long-term commitment and new voices.

If you share our ambition, we would love for you to get in touch.

Partner with us

Work alongside us to deliver lasting change, bringing expertise, land, ideas and ambition to grow forests at scale.



Support us

Help fund transformation on the ground, enabling tree planting, habitat restoration and community engagement where it matters most.



Give your time

Play a direct role in the forests, from volunteering and skills-sharing to helping create and care for places where nature, people and business can thrive.



3
new national
forests

100,000
hectares of new
woodland creation
in the Midlands
Forest Network

A new
**Forest
Enterprise
Hub**

4 million
more trees in the
National Forest

**£10
million**
to transform the
Conkers visitor
centre



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