

## **Government backs ambitious new Northern Forest plans for 50 million trees**

The Woodland Trust and the Community Forests have won Government support for their plans to create an exciting new Northern Forest that will comprise of over 50 million trees, planted over 25 years and stretching from Liverpool across to Hull with the M62 as its spine.

In an announcement by Environment Secretary Michael Gove, the government has pledged £5.7 million to launch the project, which will be part of the government's upcoming 25 Year Environment Plan, which sets out how we will be the first generation to leave the environment in a better state than we inherited it.

Spanning over 120 miles across the cities of Bradford, Salford, Hull, Leeds, Manchester and Liverpool, the proposed new Northern Forest will help provide natural flood management, boost wildlife habitat for woodland birds and bats and protect ancient woodland areas and iconic species such as the red squirrel, alongside providing a tranquil space for millions of people living in the area and generating more than £2 billion for the country's economy.

The Northern Forest will both accelerate the creation of new woodland and support sustainable management of existing woods right across the area. Many more trees, woods and forests will deliver a better environment for all by: improving air quality in our towns and cities; mitigating flood risk in key catchments; supporting the rural economy through tourism, recreation and timber production; connecting people with nature; and helping to deliver improvements to health and wellbeing through welcoming and accessible local green spaces.

It is estimated that the new tree planting would also support action on climate change, by locking up an estimated 8 million tonnes of carbon.

With a population in excess of 13m that is expected to rise by 9% over the next 20 years and with woodland cover at just 7.6%, well below the UK average of 13, and far below the EU average of 44%, the North of England is ripe to reap the benefits of such a project.

### **Austin Brady, Director of Conservation, Woodland Trust said:**

“England is losing tree cover. Existing approaches to increasing the extent of sustainably managed woods and increasing woodland cover are stalling and existing delivery mechanisms, such as Community Forests are under threat. A new Northern Forest could accelerate the benefits of community forestry, support landscape scale working for nature,

deliver a wide range of benefits, including helping to reduce flood risk, and adapt some of the UK's major towns and cities to projected climate change. The North of England is perfectly suited to reap the benefits of a project on this scale."

**Paul Nolan, Director of the Mersey Forest said:**

"Northern Forest is ambitious but achievable. Woodland Trust and the Community Forests have a track record of delivering new woodlands with communities. Our proposals look at where new planting can have the most impact; addressing some of our most difficult issues such as improving health, reducing flood risk and setting the scene for inward investment. It will directly deliver more than £2 billion for the country's economy."

**Guy Thompson, Project Manager White Rose Forest said:**

"The Leeds City Region is committed to expanding its tree and woodland cover as part of its strategic economic plan . Building on our successes to date ,we very much look forward to working with the Woodland Trust and our Community Forest partners along the M62 to make the Northern Forest a reality and provide the many economic and health benefits for all our communities and businesses."

**Tony Hothersall, Director, City of Trees:**

"The Northern Forest offers an amazing opportunity to link up many of the community based projects across the region. By working together we can enhance the resilience, attractiveness and sustainable economic future of the North, whilst reaping the many benefits trees bring.

"The Northern Forest also means we can really kick start higher levels of tree planting. Planting rates are dramatically low and in 2016 only 700 hectares of trees made it into the ground against the Government's target of 5000 hectares a year; there is a need for drastic change."

-Ends-

## Notes to editors:

There are currently five Community Forests that sit within the proposed area for the Northern Forest including: City of Trees, White Rose Forest, Mersey Forest, HEYwoods and South Yorkshire Forest.

The Woodland Trust is the largest woodland conservation charity in the UK. It has over 500,000 supporters. It wants to see a UK rich in native woods and trees for people and wildlife. Established in 1972, the Woodland Trust now has over 1,000 sites in its care covering over 22,500 hectares. Access to its woods is free.

The Northern Forest covers an area of 13 million people and has 7.6% woodland cover - well below Europe's average. Across England, only 10% of our land area is covered by woodland. In Scotland that stands at 18%, and in France, Germany and Spain it is 31%, 33% and 37% respectively.

Flood alleviation will be one outcome of the Northern Forest plans. The Northern Forest plans could reduce the risk of flooding for an estimated 190,000 people.

One study based in the Northern Forest area showed that a view of a natural landscape added up to 18% to a property's value, and that homebuyers would be willing to pay £7,680 per household for views of broadleaved woods.

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