

the *greeninfrastructure*
of sustainable communities



England's community forests

making the difference

About this report

This report is aimed at policy makers, developers and planners. It shows how England's Community Forests and their partners are helping to create better places. The report focuses in particular on how Community Forests are helping the Government to deliver its growth agenda.

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making the difference

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making the difference



Large scale planting at the Forest of Marston Vale. Photo: Forest of Marston Vale

Foreword

Community Forests are inspirational. Created around the edges of twelve cities in England, they are transforming landscapes, regenerating economies, and improving the immediate environment whilst providing accessible green spaces for people and wildlife. Local communities are the driving force behind Community Forests and they all reflect local needs and ambitions.

England's Community Forest Programme was set up in 1990 by the Countryside Agency as a 40 year vision. Since then, woodlands around our towns and cities have become more important than anyone could have imagined and today, more than half of the population lives in, or is within easy reach of, one of the twelve Community Forests. From the Great North Forest on the outskirts of Newcastle-upon-Tyne to the Thames Chase Forest in the South, all of the forests are helping to create sustainable communities across the country.

The Department understands that a crucial building block in the development and delivery of sustainable communities is the provision of green infrastructure which includes parks, woodlands, open spaces, and pathways. Community Forests are a well-established

way of delivering and managing this green infrastructure and the Community Forest Programme is now the market leader to which others turn for guidance.

Delivering sustainable communities, growth, and regeneration, is at the heart of the Government's agenda. The Community Forest Programme, with its aim to establish trees, woodland, and green spaces as essential components of creating better places to live and work, is an important way of achieving this.

The innovative Community Forest model has never been more relevant for delivering much-needed benefits across a broad range of social, economic and environmental agendas. It is also meeting Sustainable Communities Plan and Cleaner, Safer, Greener policy objectives within Communities and Local Government and across other parts of Government.

Improving our quality of life and our quality of place is central to the work of the Community Forests and the Department. We look forward to watching Community Forests flourish and to continuing our work with them and their partners to turn policies into real change on the ground.



Baroness Andrews

Baroness Andrews OBE

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER SECRETARY OF STATE,
COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT





“The success of Community Forests is down to the hard work of the partners in the project working closely together with local communities. I commend the Community Forest Programme as a model and inspiration to others.”

Tony Blair, PRIME MINISTER

Introduction

England's Community Forest Programme is a hugely successful model for community involvement, inclusion, environmental regeneration and green infrastructure creation. Community Forests are being shaped by local people, in partnership with a range of organisations, and they are having a significant impact on the countryside around our towns and cities.

The Community Forest Programme has developed and delivered some of England's most effective models for multi-function community forestry, incorporating economic regeneration, rural development, recreation, access and conservation into their work. Community Forests also address the challenging issue of social exclusion by involving local communities at all stages of development and ensuring that the benefits of forests are accessible to all.

The expertise and knowledge of the Community Forest Programme is more relevant today than ever before. Community Forests themselves have already changed the way that policy makers regard England's woodlands – the Government's new Forestry Strategy, which is to be published in 2007, will focus more on the needs of those living on the fringes of urban areas and it will also recognise the multiple benefits that forestry can deliver in terms of economic regeneration, rural development, conservation, recreation and access

– a change in emphasis that will put Community Forests at the heart of Government policy.

Since the Community Forest Programme began it has:

- planted more than 10,000 hectares of woodland;
- opened up 16,000 hectares of woods and green spaces for recreation and leisure; and
- restored and created more than 4,000 km of foot and cycle paths.

An independent evaluation carried out in 2005 by Land Use Consultants found that the Community Forest Programme had delivered value for money and exceeded targets by:

- providing increased woodland cover (now accounting for roughly 15 per cent of new woodland since 1999);
- improving environments and opportunities for access, for art, and for culture;
- simultaneously regenerating local economies; and
- delivering landscape, biodiversity and heritage benefits.

For every pound of public money spent in the Community Forests, another £3 has been drawn in from the private and voluntary sectors.

The Community Forest Programme has delivered some of England's most effective models for multi-function community forestry

the green infrastructure of *sustainable communities*

Creating great places



Outside the Forest Centre Café. Photo: Forest of Marston Vale

Creating places where people want to live and work is emerging as one of the key thrusts of the Government's agenda following the establishment of the department for Communities and Local Government.

Community Forests are helping to achieve this by restoring degraded landscapes, reclaiming brownfield sites, and improving the environmental quality of the areas in which they are located.

strategy to tackle such sites, and the Community Forest Programme hopes to continue to help to address this issue.

The creation of community woodlands can also bring back into public use sites which have previously been regarded as off limits because of problems like anti-social behaviour. Two such community woodlands, the Herrington and Hetton Lyons country parks in Sunderland, are now used by a wide cross-section of the population.

Community Forests have changed the way policy makers regard English woodlands

Restoring landscapes

One of the main objectives of the Community Forest Programme has always been the restoration of landscapes degraded by past activities. The brickworks in Marston Vale, Bedford, are a good example of this as new woodland has been established around a 61- square mile area of existing and former clay pits, stretching from the M1 motorway to Bedford itself.

Value for money

New woodlands represent exceptional value for money, bringing back into use unsightly and contaminated brownfield eyesores which can drag down the reputation of an entire area. The planting of each hectare of community woodland costs about £10,000 – a much lower cost than other 'soft end' uses of brownfield land, such as parks. Only large public open space and nature conservation sites have lower capital costs, and informal woodland is cheaper to maintain than grassy open spaces. A report carried out by the Community and Countryside Research Unit at the University of Gloucestershire estimated that, over the long term, the annual public benefit deriving from a community woodland worked out at more than £4,000 per hectare each year.

Reclaiming sites

The reclamation of brownfield land is an important objective for the Community Forest Programme. In 2002 and 2003, nearly half (46 per cent) of new woodland planted by the Community Forest Programme was on previously used sites. Much of the woodland planted is in areas identified by the Government regeneration agency, English Partnerships (EP), as 'hardcore' brownfield land, and it is not commercially viable to bring this back into use – more than half of the 64,000 hectares of brownfield land across England falls into this category. EP has been commissioned to draw up a national brownfield



Community tree planting, Kent Road West, Manchester. Photo: Red Rose Forest

Manchester's green streets

A poor physical environment is one of the most common factors which links areas experiencing low housing demand in the North and the Midlands. Many of these areas, which have been designated for financial assistance under the Government's housing market renewal programme, contain little or no common public space.

The Red Rose Forest is working to improve Greater Manchester's physical environment by injecting some greenery onto the streets of Greater Manchester. The aim of the 'Green Streets' project, which covers the boroughs of Manchester, Salford and Trafford, is to stimulate local housing markets by creating better quality environments. The initiative has become

increasingly focused on the conurbation's housing market renewal areas.

Rather than just planting trees, 'Green Streets' asks residents to take an active role at every stage of development, from consultation to fundraising, delivery and aftercare. Their aim is not only to encourage communities to take ownership of the trees and plants provided, but to encourage greater social interaction and so generate a renewed sense of pride in the area. *"We're working in places where people don't talk to one another. We say you have to consult with your neighbour to specify where the trees should go,"* says the project's co-ordinator Peter Stringer.

Creating great communities



Community coming together for South Yorkshire Wood Fair. Photo: South Yorkshire Forest Partnership

The emphasis on community has always sat at the heart of the Community Forest movement and this is now shared increasingly across Government.

Over the last sixteen years, the twelve Community Forests have found innovative ways of engaging with local communities by involving them in projects to improve their environment which have also provided opportunities for excluded sections of the community to gain access to the outdoors. The Community Forest Programme offers a valuable means of engagement with new and growing communities in the Government's designated growth areas where new communities are being forged and where existing communities are learning to live with new neighbours. Building community spirit, addressing social exclusion, and creating healthy communities are all spin-offs from the Community Forest Programme.

Building community spirit

Community Forests have shown that they are valuable mechanisms for fostering community spirit, the essential building block for any new neighbourhood.

With a Community Forest, local communities are always involved in the instigation, design, planning, implementation, and maintenance of a project. This close involvement both builds and consolidates social capital as does the resulting woodland – people identify more strongly with attractive landscapes than with degraded environments.

Community Forests work hard to get local people involved. For example, the Mersey Forest team based

in Warrington has produced a comprehensive guide for communities wanting to improve their local woodlands and wanting to get involved in long term stewardship. The 'Friends of the Woodlands Guide' covers matters such as how to set up a community group, writing a development plan, training, and the skills needed to undertake management and improvement works. As part of The Mersey Forest's Community Contracting Initiative, Friends' Groups also receive personnel support and funds to achieve their aims.

Developing Forest Centres for visitors has also fostered community spirit by providing a point of focus and by offering facilities to host events, as well as being an important source of income for the ongoing task of woodland creation. The development of a volunteers' group in the Forest of Marston Vale in Bedford, for example, has largely depended on the existence of a Forest Centre.

Woodlands uniting communities

Proof that community woodlands can become treasured by local people is seen in Swindon where, with the help of the Great Western Community Forest project, more than 10,000 local people have planted 53,000 trees over the last twelve years, turning 53 acres of former waste tip into Shaw Forest Park.

This dedication was put to the test in 2004 when Shaw Forest Park was proposed as the site for Swindon's new Football Stadium. The proposal was rejected and those who had opposed it founded the 2,000-plus Shaw Forest Protection Group which now works in partnership with the local authority to further development and protect the site.

The emphasis on community has always been at the heart of the Community Forest movement and this is now shared increasingly across Government



Tree planting at Lidlington. Photo: Forest of Marston Vale: Craig Cannon

Planting the seed of community

The Forest of Marston Vale in Bedford has been busy providing some of the social glue that will bind the growing area's new communities together. More than 1,300 people have been involved in the creation of new community woodlands through 13 separate community events. *"I was blown away by the number of people who come to community planting events. You can't imagine that 300 people would come out on a cold day and enjoy getting wet and muddy,"*

says Woodland Development Manager, James Russell, adding that the best way of convincing potential sponsors and funders that the project is worth backing is to bring them to such an event. The commitment of the Forest of Marston Vale to community consultation has extended to giving local people the right to name the new woodlands that it has created.

Creating great communities

Combating social exclusion

Community Forests include or are next to some of the most socially deprived wards in England. Two examples are Harold Wood and Cranham East, next to Thames Chase Community Forest in Greater London, which are both ranked in the lowest quartile of local councils wards for social deprivation. Traditionally, many of the people living in such areas have felt excluded from the countryside and the recreational facilities that it offers. Breaking down the barriers that discourage groups (including less able visitors and ethnic minorities) from enjoying the countryside has been an increasingly important part of the Community Forests' mission.

Community Forests have sought to improve access by developing recreational activities such as identifying leisure routes and offering guided walking tours. A good example is the Greenwood Community Forest in Kirby-in-Ashfield which has produced walking packs to encourage people to use the forest. Also the Great North Forest's 'Bridging the Gap' project in Gateshead has worked with representative organisations from disabled and ethnic minority groups to arrange countryside trips.

Recreational facilities in Community Forests often link into wider networks. Forest teams liaise with local public transport providers to secure bus routes into forest areas and to ensure better signposting from stations. The Community Forests are also designed with the needs of excluded groups in mind, often offering improved access for less able visitors by building paths to a high, wheelchair-compatible standard.

Bridging the gap between town and country

The Forest of Avon forged links within one of Bristol's poorest communities by creating the 2km-long Lawrence Weston Greenway connecting the city to the surrounding countryside. The Greenway can be used by cyclists and walkers, and it passes through the west Bristol estate of the same name.

The Greenway, which reflects the Community Forest Programme's wider remit to extend its activities into urban areas, was identified as a priority under the local Single Regeneration Budget Programme. It has improved linkages between the estate's housing areas and local facilities such as schools and sports centres, thus reducing the need for car travel. It has also provided an important link in the Sustrans National Cycle Route which connects Bristol city centre with the surrounding countryside.



Foot and cycle paths linking town and country in Bristol. Photo: Forest of Avon



Public art for use by children at Thames Chase. Photo: Thames Chase

Making woodland fun

Thames Chase Community Forest in Greater London has used public art as a way of getting young people interested in their natural environment. The project commissioned sculptor Andy Frost to design a piece of play art, which became Thames Chase's 'Millionth Tree' in 2002. On the side of the tree is a special children's door which leads to a series of ladders within the trunk, and young visitors can view the surrounding area from an enclosed platform using nest chick periscopes. The aim of this, and other art projects undertaken by the Forest, is to change the perception that woodland is inaccessible.

Tackling youth disadvantage in Staffordshire

For the last five years, the Forest of Mercia has been running a programme for children excluded from mainstream education. Working alongside Staffordshire County Council's Children and Life Long Learning Department, the New Educational Opportunity Programme offers 30 placements each year. The young people taking part in the programme receive tuition in the core curriculum areas of numeracy and literacy. They are also encouraged to take a National Vocational Qualification in Land Management.

Participants are expected to be properly prepared for a day's work – an important step is taking responsibility for their own actions. Attendance rates at the project are high and there have been few occasions of unacceptable behaviour leading to young people being barred from the programme.



Street Dance: Park Life Project at Greenwood Community Forest. Photo: Greenwood Community Forest

Promoting good health

A healthy community is well on the way to becoming a sustainable one and a key pre-condition for becoming healthy is access to good quality and welcoming recreational facilities.

Community Forests contribute to the Government's preventative health agenda by providing accessible green space close to where people live. Lack of access to good quality green space is one of the most important factors preventing people, particularly those on low incomes, from exercise. Community Forests provide recreational facilities in areas where alternatives are limited. Defra's rural strategy highlights the importance of the countryside as a recreational resource for those living in urban areas – just 20 per cent of private woodlands are open to the general public, whilst community woodlands are accessible at all times.

Park Life: green space for health

Park Life, an innovative project funded by Sport England and delivered by the Greenwood Community Forest, is helping those living a stone's throw away from green spaces to take part in new ways of increasing physical activity.

Seven parks sitting within the areas of poorest health in Greenwood are the focus for visits from those who are typically under-represented. Rangers and sports development officers from partner organisations have shared their experience and expertise and have run more than 120 events.

Over two years, the project has enabled 7,900 children and adults to enjoy street dance, armchair aerobics, and archery in Greenwood's outdoor gym. One hundred volunteers have helped out and 18 people have been trained in leadership skills and coaching.

Emily Lee from Sport England has been impressed: *"The Park Life project leads the way in demonstrating how effective and innovative partnerships can engage schools and communities so that they use country parks and green spaces for sport and physical activities. Park Life has had a tremendous impact on local residents and continues to achieve Sport England's aim of creating an active nation."*

A healthy community is well on the way to being a sustainable one

the green infrastructure of **sustainable communities**

Creating great communities



Group walk at the Forest of Marston Vale. Photo: Forest of Marston Vale

Woodlands are important for health because they provide ideal settings for moderate exercise, like walking, which the Government's public health strategy prioritises. A study carried out in Western Australia showed that access to large, attractive, open green spaces led to a 50 per cent increase in regular walking. Medical evidence also shows that both pulse rates and muscle tension, two key clinical measures of stress, drop significantly after as little as three minutes in natural green surroundings.

Providing recreational facilities in the form of community woodlands is in line with Government health policy which is increasingly shifting to the prevention of illness rather than its treatment. Just 37 per cent of men and 25 per cent of women get the minimum 30 minutes of moderate exercise five times a week which public health advisers recommend. The cost of this physical inactivity is an estimated £8.2bn in England alone.

Community Forests deliver significant mental and physical benefits. Involving people in planting and caring for the landscape can be therapeutic, and trees boost health by improving air quality, reducing conditions like asthma and allergies. Woodlands in and around urban areas are especially effective because they mitigate air pollution for a large proportion of the population.

Walking the way to healthy growth

Many Community Forests have rolled out the Countryside Agency's 'Walking the Way to Health' initiative. The Forest of Marston Vale has been the vehicle for spreading this initiative in Bedford. At the end of March 2006, 946 people had registered with the project and had taken a total of more than 9,000 walks. The project had also trained 116 leaders, of whom 62 were taking regular walks, and they now provide a basis for the long-term sustainability of the initiative. The walks include a weekly walk from the Forest Centre suitable for adults with learning disabilities, particularly those living in residential care.

Encouraging economic growth



Family using a repaired bridge across the River Ivel at Blunham, Beds., on Route 51 of the National Cycle Network. Photo: Forest of Marston Vale

The true value of Community Forests needs to be assessed over decades because of the time it takes for woodland to mature.

It is clear that forests and woodlands increase the attractiveness of surrounding areas, spurring wider economic regeneration and even newly-planted woodlands are an invaluable asset for communities and wildlife.

One of the biggest factors currently shaping the development of the Community Forest Programme is the Government's Sustainable Communities Plan. This Plan, launched in February 2003, identified four growth areas across the wider South East. This is one of the Government's measures to remedy the acute and long-standing under-provision of homes. Between them, the four growth areas in the Thames Gateway, Milton Keynes – South Midlands, London-Stansted-Cambridge-Peterborough, and Ashford areas, are intended to deliver 200,000 homes above existing plans to 2016.

More recently, the Communities and Local Government department has identified a further 29 new growth points in the south and the midlands, where smaller scale interventions are designed to bring forward a further 100,000 dwellings above planned provision.

Creating green infrastructure

The provision of good quality open space is particularly relevant in the context of the Government's designated growth areas, where the most pressing need is to remedy the acute lack of housing. Children, especially, need safe and secure places to play in order to grow up healthy and strong. The creation of green space is vital to the success or failure of these growth areas, particularly where high density housing is being provided, and a green infrastructure of parks, woodlands and foot and cycle paths, is seen as a crucial building block in the development of sustainable communities. Community Forests are widely recognised as successful providers of this essential green space – a vital component for the economic and environmental success of the Government's growth areas and for creating sustainable communities. Not only is the Community Forest Programme able to deliver and manage such spaces, it also encourages cross-boundary working, providing a mechanism for public and private sectors to co-operate.

One of the biggest factors shaping the development of the Community Forest Programme is the Government's Sustainable Communities Plan

the green infrastructure of **sustainable communities**

Encouraging economic growth



Green space in South Essex on the edge of housing. Photo: Pixelwork

Attracting developers

Good quality green space is important for selling development, as the originators of the iconic Milton Keynes advertising campaign of the 1970s recognised. Areas containing quality green space are more attractive to potential residents: a CABI Space survey showed that 91 per cent of people said that public spaces created a better quality of life. Planting woodlands can also facilitate development in other ways: CABI Space's document 'Start with The Park' recommends woodlands as an effective interim use for land that might be redeveloped in the future. Planting trees well in advance of development creates an attractive environment for residents and businesses when they move in, and new urban extensions can be planned around Community Forests planted on the urban fringe. Green spaces can thus add value to domestic and commercial properties and attract investment.

There is a strong link between the provision of high quality green space and increased property prices as demonstrated by CABI Space's report 'Does Money Grow on Trees?' It highlights an emerging body of evidence showing the correlation between good tree cover and increased house values. This includes a study carried out for the Forest of Dean which concluded that 20 per cent tree cover within an area added more than 7 per cent to house prices.

Government's pledge to green space provision

The UK Government is recognising the importance of green space through its commitment to providing high quality open land in the Thames Gateway. The 'green grid' being planned across the Gateway is designed to connect the region's open spaces which range from formal municipal parks in inner London to the wild marshlands on the Essex and Kent coasts. This 'Greening the Gateway' strategy emphasises the Government's commitment to green space by recommending that a natural framework, including trees and woodland, should be established well ahead of development. In support of this, the Government has provided £20m for green space within the Thames Gateway. The Barker Review of housing supply has recently recommended that 10 per cent of its support for housing infrastructure should be allocated to green infrastructure projects. The Government has responded by earmarking £38m for such projects from the growth area fund. Authorities across the growth areas also have access to the £660m from the Government's Safer and Stronger Communities' Fund.

Growth in action

The Forest of Marston Vale in Bedfordshire is emerging as a key mechanism for delivering green infrastructure in the Milton Keynes and South Midlands (MKSM) growth area.

The Vale itself is centred on the 'Brickfields', a 61 square mile area of existing and former clay pits stretching ten miles between the M1 motorway and the southern fringe of Bedford. The prime driver behind the establishment of this Community Forest in the early 1990s was restoring the landscape degraded by the huge clay pits dug out by the brick industry. Now an equally important task is establishing the green infrastructure for the Vale which has been identified as a strategic development corridor for 16,000 new homes. The housing plans include urban extensions along the A421 to the south of Bedford at Kempston and the village of Wootton. Over the last two years, the Marston Vale Trust has received two tranches of Government growth area funds (GAF) totalling £5.2m.

One of the projects delivered with GAF funding was the acquisition of 21 hectares of farmland which will form part of a 'green gateway' for those entering Bedford from the Marston Vale. The National Cycle Network Route 51 passes through the Gateway, providing an environmentally sustainable connection between Bedford and its rural hinterland. GAF funding has also helped to finance the creation of 70 hectares of publicly accessible green space: more than 100,000 native shrubs and trees have been planted across the Vale using seeds collected from adjacent ancient woods. The funding has also attracted a further £3.5m worth of investment in green infrastructure, achieving a gearing ratio for the supporting councils of 20:1.

The second GAF allocation has enabled the acquisition of 121 hectares of the former gravel workings which will form the core of the new Bedford River Valley Park. In addition a Master Plan to guide the delivery of the 898 hectare park is being prepared. As well as opening up three and a half square miles for public access, the park may include a variety of sports and leisure facilities including a 2.3km rowing lake which it is hoped will be ready in time for teams training for the 2012 Olympics.

How green space delivers economic growth

Creating an attractive environment can boost an area's economic performance. Anecdotal evidence suggests that tree-rich environments are a powerful factor in attracting and retaining businesses. A recent survey of CEOs ranked quality of life as the third most important factor shaping their investment decisions after availability of skilled labour and access to domestic markets. One survey of inward investors showed that 33 per cent give the attractiveness of the environment as an important reason for choosing their main site. Developers and business park owners often use greenery in their marketing material, and high-tech companies are particularly attracted by a good environment. The Monkton Coke Works, on the edge of the Great North Forest near Gateshead, is being developed as one of the north east's flagship economic investment sites following a programme of woodland planting carried out with the help of the Community Forest.

Many of the areas being lined up for regeneration and growth are currently unattractive, either because of the legacy of polluting industries or because they have been the location for unsightly landfill operations, such as at Thames Chase in Greater London. Woodland is a cost-effective way of improving this physical environment and it can improve the image of similarly degraded areas. Community Forests have a particularly important role in shaping these perceptions as they are often situated on the approaches to major conurbations: the North West Development Agency recognises the key role of its two Community Forests (Red Rose and Mersey) in repositioning its image. English Partnership's national brownfield strategy recognises that providing quality green space is an important factor in creating the right environment for development.

An analysis of the area surrounding the former Bold Colliery in St Helens carried out on behalf of the Forestry Commission showed that the creation of community woodlands by Groundwork enhanced local property values in the surrounding areas by a total £15m. The report, carried out by the district valuers' office, showed that an extra £75m worth of development had been brought forward as a result of the community woodland. While growth trends across the St Helens area were much lower than the national average, the reverse was the case in those areas closest to the former colliery which had been planted with trees.

Creating an attractive environment can boost an area's economic performance

Encouraging economic growth



Urban fringe in Bristol meets greenspace. Photo: Forest of Avon

Improving the urban fringe

The economic and social case for investing in green infrastructure on the rural/urban fringe is strong because this is where the impact of property values is greatest and where most people can enjoy the new provision. The importance of attracting investment gives extra strength to the case for facilitating woodland creation within and near urban areas which are in need of regeneration.

The bulk of the development due to take place in the Government's designated growth areas will happen on the edges of towns and cities as this is the most sustainable way of using existing transport infrastructures and services. The recently published Barker Review of Land Use Planning recommends that local authorities take a more "positive approach" to applications which include measures to improve degraded stretches of green belt, such as providing open access woodland.

An independent evaluation of the Community Forest Programme by Land Use Consultants concluded that the long-term approach taken by Community Forests has been important in building confidence on the rural/urban fringe areas, and that Community Forests are playing an important role in brokering between landowners and funding bodies to assist the regeneration of the green belt. This can be seen in the Newlands' project where the North West Development Agency has provided £20m to the region's two Community Forests to carry out land

reclamation. Another example is in Marston Vale in Bedford where the Community Forest's experience of the land market has been invaluable in securing sites for planting new woodland. The study concluded that Community Forests offer an integrated framework for providing and managing green infrastructure on the rural/urban fringe.

Using woodlands to soften housing developments

One of the Great Western Community Forest's key roles is to respond to the Regional Spatial Strategy which indicates that Swindon should make provision for 35,000 new houses over the period 2006-2026. In response to this, the Great Western Community Forest team is working on a mitigation plan for the first of the three new urban extensions to accommodate the extra houses. This includes the creation of woodland and other publicly accessible green space on council-owned farmland to the south of the development area.

To achieve this, the Community Forest is working in partnership with Swindon Borough Council's forward planners to ensure that Green Infrastructure Planning is embedded into the statutory planning system and that the principles and aspirations contained within the Forest Plan will be used to shape the work.

Community Forests are playing an important role in brokering between landowners and funding bodies to assist the regeneration of the green belt

Looking to the future



Looking out over Canvey Island and Shell Haven in South Essex. Photo: Pixelwork

Improving environmental quality and responding to climate change

The provision of woodland can be a powerful mechanism for improving local environmental quality and can also be a key tool in responding to climate change.

- Trees are effective tools for dealing with air pollution. Broadleaved trees have a surface area up to twelve times greater than the ground they overshadow which helps to absorb polluting gases such as carbon dioxide, as well as trapping dust and atmospheric particles. Trees also help to reduce pollution by reducing wind speed, so enabling heavy polluting particles to settle.
- Forests help to deal with surface waters and flooding problems by providing natural mechanisms for preventing surface run-off following excessive downpours. Rain is more likely to evaporate in leafy woodland areas, reducing the amount of run off into rivers, while root fibres trap soil particles,

helping to cut erosion. By enabling the urban environment to absorb excess water, woodland can reduce flood risk and subsequent repair costs.

- A further environmental benefit is the cooling impact of woodland, likely to become an increasingly important factor as a result of global climate change. Work carried out by the ASCCUE project at the University of Manchester shows that surface temperature depends very largely on the extent of green cover, with trees being particularly important for the shade they provide. Modelling work in Greater Manchester found that the maximum surface temperature of woodland is 12.8 degrees lower than that of the city centre on a hot summer day, a gap which it calculates will increase as temperatures rise. Adding 10 per cent green cover to high density residential and town centres areas was shown to keep maximum surface temperatures at or below current levels.

“Planners and green space managers must increase vegetation cover in urban areas and provide cooler areas to which people can escape.”

Susannah Gill, ASCCUE
PROJECT RESEARCHER.

the green infrastructure of *sustainable communities*

Looking to the future



Woodchipper in action at South Yorkshire Forest.
Photo: South Yorkshire Forest Partnership



Photo: Forest of Marston Vale

Renewable energy

Community Forests have been helping to develop England's fledgling biomass fuel industry, and the Department of Trade and Industry is working to stimulate demand for biomass by making it one of the fuels included in the Renewables Obligation. Despite biomass being one of the most effective mechanisms for stabilising atmospheric carbon dioxide, its use as an energy source has been slow to get off the ground. Community Forests provide an ideal vehicle for promoting the use of wood fuel for heat and power generation in line with the Government's aims of switching from fossil fuels to renewables

Creating demand for renewable energy

The South Yorkshire Forest has probably been more active than any other Community Forest in promoting renewable energy. The project has employed a wood energy co-ordinator to create local demand for wood fuelled renewable energy and to help suppliers to become commercially

viable. Partly thanks to the Community Forest's efforts, the county has seen the installation of more wood burning power plant capacity than in any other part of the UK, and the project is planning to create a network of wood fuel stores across south Yorkshire. In Sheffield there are two biomass installations running in community housing schemes with feasibility assessments taking place at five more sites, including schools and other housing schemes.

The project has also helped to install wood burning boilers at a number of council-owned buildings in Barnsley. Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council has set up the largest wood burning boiler in a 155-flat social housing block where the replacement of coal with wood made a significant contribution to the council's 40 per cent reduction in CO₂ emissions and they predict they will hit a reduction of 60 per cent by 2010. The network of wood fuelled boilers in south Yorkshire has already reduced CO₂ emissions by over 3,000 tonnes per year.



Oke Park Wood in Bristol providing communities in Bristol with access to important greenspace. Photo: Forest of Avon

Carbon offsetting

Community Forests have begun to find independent sources of financial support by tapping into the growing demand for carbon offsetting schemes. Trees have an important role to play in the UK's efforts to meet its Kyoto climate change targets, under which the UK Government has committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 12.5 per cent of 1990 levels by 2010. Trees lock up carbon in wood, thereby reducing the UK's net greenhouse gas emissions, and the Edinburgh Centre for Carbon Management has estimated that one hectare of mature oak will offset 275 tonnes of carbon dioxide over 100 years.

Increasingly companies are seeking to offset their carbon emissions through a range of activities, including planting trees. This provides opportunities for Community Forests to work with organisations to create carbon offset forests. For example, the Forest of Marston Vale in Bedford has worked with The Carbon Neutral Company, using financial support from Berkley Homes, Luton Airport, and Barclays Bank when creating the woodland in Bedford's Green Gateway.

The role of the planning system

The planning system is essential for providing both policy and financial support for green infrastructure. Given that forestry has to compete with other high cost conventional infrastructure, it is especially important to use the tools provided by the recently reformed planning system.

Tree planting as a framework for new development and as an after-use for terminated development is already encouraged by the planning system. More specifically, Planning Policy Guidance Note 17: Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation emphasises the important contribution that public spaces can make to people's quality of life and in supporting other Government objectives, such as urban renaissance, and social and community cohesion. The more recently published Planning Policy Statement 3: Housing, stresses the need for planners to take account of access to family-friendly parks and play areas when assessing the design quality of new development. As the Government's 'Greening the Gateway' implementation plan stresses, it is important that green infrastructure delivers a range of benefits, including recreation, education, better water quality, lower air pollution, and protection for biodiversity.

These benefits can often be delivered at little cost to the public in the form of developers' contributions through section 106 agreements.

Looking to the future

Community Forests liaise with planners and developers at an early stage in the planning process in order to maximize green space benefits. Delivering green space through the planning system ensures that it can be planned alongside other infrastructure, such as sustainable drainage systems and walking and cycling paths. It also means that green space strategies can be drawn up in tandem with economic regeneration strategies and with flood risk assessments. The Thames Gateway in particular has the potential to become a world class demonstration of how nature conservation can be successfully integrated into development. The recently launched interim framework for the Gateway includes plans to create a Thames Estuary Parkland which will provide a green framework for the development being planned in this vital regeneration zone.

Community Forests are working closely with local authorities to establish the concept of green infrastructure in local and regional planning documents. For example, input from the South Yorkshire Forest has helped to ensure that green infrastructure is included in the Sheffield City Region Development Plan. Also the Mersey Forest in Warrington has worked to ensure that an integrated network of green spaces and development opportunities is central to 'The Mouth of the Weaver Masterplan' which aims to improve the quality of life and regeneration potential of Halton and north Cheshire. Green infrastructure plans and strategies are being developed across the growth areas, with active involvement of Community Forests where they are affected. Northamptonshire, Bedfordshire and Luton, and Cambridgeshire have all produced plans over the last year. The Cambridgeshire Green Infrastructure Strategy, which was commissioned by Cambridgeshire Horizons, and was highly commended at this year's Landscape Industry Awards, was largely funded by the Communities and Local Government department with additional input from the Forestry Commission.

Planning forward to get ahead of the game

Watling Chase Forest, which is located close to the London-Stansted-Cambridge-Peterborough growth area, has worked with its local authority Hertsmere to develop a supplementary planning guidance (SPG). The aim of this guide is to highlight the importance of the Watling Chase Community Forest and to explain how development proposals within it can help achieve its objectives. The SPG has been used to secure a number of improvements to the Community Forest area: Arsenal Football Club paid £40,000 to improve rights of way around its new training ground at London Colney when it

secured permission for the facility in 1998. The money was then used to improve a section of the Forest's Timberland Trail and to provide a 3.5 km link with the Great North Cycle Route.

Working with developers

The Forest of Marston Vale will see 16,000 new homes and 19,000 new jobs created as part of the Government's Growth Agenda. The Forest Team has targeted land close to the allocated development sites for providing a collar of new accessible green space and community woodland – known as Bedford's Green Gateway – for the benefit of existing and new communities.

Bedford's Green Gateway will accommodate surface waters from the development in the area, deliver a range of habitats including wet woodland, open water, open grassland, and native woodland, and will accommodate a new off-road section of National Cycle Network Route 51 linking Oxford to Cambridge.

Starting with just the concept, the Forest negotiated eight hectares of land and £65,000 to deliver community woodland which became Van Diemens Land (VDL) Wood. The developer, Gazeley Properties Ltd planned to build large distribution warehouses for Asda and Argos and two smaller distribution units. Gazeley amended the application and changed the two smaller units to one large unit. In doing so, Gazeley purchased and donated to the Forest, an additional 11 hectares of arable land adjacent to VDL.

The Forest secured Growth Area Funding and acquired and delivered an additional 21 hectares of land adjacent to Bedford's Green Gateway. With an additional 1,200 homes and the planned construction of Bedford Western Bypass, the Forest negotiated an additional 25 hectares of land and a £356,000 planning gain from the developer consortium.

Bedford's Green Gateway will extend over 75 hectares and will prevent coalescence of the expanding Bedford and Kempston with the neighbouring village of Wootton which will also see an additional 1,200 new homes. The visual impact of the Bypass will be screened from Wootton by the new woodlands. The local community has been key to deciding on the design, and naming the woods, and local and national businesses have matched bids to ensure the successful delivery of Bedford's Green Gateway.

Since 2000, the Forest has secured a total of £2.7m in land and direct contributions from developers towards the creation of the Forest of Marston Vale.

The Thames Gateway has the potential to become a world class demonstration of how nature conservation can be successfully integrated into development



The Forest Centre at Marston Moretaine. Photo: Forest of Marston Vale: Martin Green

Sustainable economic models for Community Forests

At the inception of the Community Forest Programme, the Countryside Agency committed to matched funding for ten years, to allow the forests to establish themselves and to demonstrate their value. In April 2007, central Government support for Community Forests will end and they will have to rely instead on local or regional sources of support.

The response of individual forests to the challenge of securing their futures has been as diverse as the forests themselves. All the forests have common aims but very different local opportunities and challenges, with solutions ranging from establishing charitable trusts, through to building effective relationships with business, to ever-closer working relationships with local authorities. All Community Forests are working creatively to secure their long-term futures.

Many Community Forests have begun to find their own sources of funding and to capitalise on the opportunities presented by the development process through section 106 agreements. In addition, the increasing focus on green issues in companies' ethical investment policies has created new commercial funding options for Community Forests, as have carbon offsetting and renewable energy.

Corporate Partnerships now present an important source of funds for Community Forests and, given that climate change is now high on Government and corporate agendas, the opportunity for partnerships with the corporate sector has never been better.

Funding the Forest of Marston Vale

"Local authorities are criticised for not putting enough money into managing country parks. We are delivering and providing green space outside of traditional thinking," says the Forest of Marston Vale Business Development Manager, Ian Foll.

The Forest of Marston Vale's activities are split into two organisations: the Marston Vale Trust is a charitable vehicle to secure resources to deliver projects, whilst a wholly-owned trading arm, Marston Vale Services Ltd, employs the Forest Team and operates the Forest Centre.

As a charity, Marston Vale Trust is able to attract a much wider mix of funding than if it were a public sector organisation. It has received grants from the National Lottery and it employs a business development team to secure funding. The Trust is now supported by a mix of self-generated income, donations from sponsors, and core funding from the area's local authorities. The money raised from sponsorship and section 106 agreements is used to develop new woodland. A key element of the Trust's income is generated by the £6.3m Forest Centre, which opened in 2000 and is located in the Millennium Country Park. This generates revenue for the Trust by providing good quality conference facilities and catering for the 140,000 visitors to the Forest Centre each year. The Centre is also home to a range of like-minded organisations which work in partnership with the Forest Team including Groundwork, Bedfordshire's Green Business Network, the Energy Efficiency Advisory Centre and the Forest Volunteers.

The Community Forest Programme has attracted high levels of private and voluntary sector support, pulling in £42.9m between 1990 and 2003

The way forward



Wiles Wood tree planting. Photo: Forest of Marston Vale

The Community Forest Programme is an extraordinary success story. By putting Community Forests at the heart of the Government's agenda for sustainable communities, it has transformed landscapes, regenerated economies, and improved the environment for everyone.

There is now an urgent need to use Community Forests as a model for creating sustainable communities in the future

Community Forests have played a vital role in helping to achieve a wide spectrum of Government objectives, particularly in the Government's designated growth areas. By providing green infrastructure and by developing solutions on an environmental, social and economic level, the Community Forest Programme has showcased some of England's most effective models for multi-functional community forestry, all of which are essential for creating sustainable communities.

Restoring damaged landscapes, repairing fractured communities, and nurturing economic growth, are all just as important today as they were when the Community Forest Programme began. And they are still relevant to us all – as individuals, as communities and as businesses. There is now an urgent need to use Community Forests as a model for creating sustainable communities in the future.

Creating better places to live and work is central to the Community Forest Programme as it works to deliver sustainable communities in a cost-effective and inclusive way.

The Government has recognised the importance of creating sustainable communities if long-term growth is to be achieved. The Communities and Local Government department translates this imperative into a deliverable plan which recognises that an integrated approach to creating communities is essential and that this approach must include the planning and delivery of green infrastructure.

England's Community Forests have delivered social, community and environmental benefits across the country and are a proven model of how working in partnership can create high quality green infrastructure for growing and prospering communities.

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