

Leicestershire Tree Charter



In the last 10 years, we've planted over 150 native trees on our dairy farm. They're incredibly important to us, helping to capture and store carbon, provide homes and food for wildlife, shade and shelter for our cows, as well as improve soil health and clean water. All while adding beauty of our small corner of the Leicestershire Wolds landscape.

Ruth Grice, Dairy Farmer
near Melton Mowbary



Foreword

I'm delighted that we are joining our friends at the National Forest in signing up to the Tree Charter. By doing this, we're announcing our intent to continue preserving and enhancing our trees and woodlands for the benefit and enjoyment of county residents and visitors.

The County Council currently manages around 321,000 trees (including 404 hectares of woodland), but with diseases such as Ash Die Back placing more trees under threat, the authority's strategy and action plan, adopted in May 2020, will see the number of trees across the county increase dramatically – with the ultimate



aim of planting 700,000 trees – one for every person in the county.

Together with our partners, we're facing the challenges of Ash Dieback and other tree diseases head on. The County Council has stepped up its safety inspections of trees in response to the threat that Ash Dieback poses. Ash is one of our most common native trees and is incredibly valuable to for wildlife, so we want to protect trees where we can, and replant other tree cover where we can't.

We're committed to work together with partners, landowners and the people of Leicestershire to ensure a better future for our trees and woodlands. Through actions such as planting even more trees, in both urban and rural environments, and managing existing woodland carefully we can help to achieve these ambitions and help towards our ultimate aim of being a net zero county by 2045.

**Blake Pain CC,
Leicestershire
County Council**



In 2021 the National Forest celebrated the planting of its 9 millionth tree. Along with all our partners and landowners that have contributed to this success story we are hugely proud to have increased forest cover from 6% to 22%. Woodland cover has trebled and is now approaching twice the national average for England.

The National Forest is an important asset for Leicestershire, not least the c100,000 county residents that live here. It's woodlands provide natural spaces for play, de-stressing and recreation which in turn improve residents well-being and sense of place. They provide opportunities for new green enterprise and innovation, supporting tourism, culture and arts, forestry and other local products and services.

In less than 30 years, the industrial landscape of the former coalfields has been transformed from black to green and the National Forest is reconnecting the ancient forests of Needwood and Charnwood.

We are now facing a much greater challenge. The climate crisis means we have to be more ambitious and respond with urgency. The creation of the National Forest can give us hope that it is not too late to act to reverse biodiversity loss and nurture changing landscapes that deliver vital ecosystem services such as improved air, soil and water quality, as well as helping to reduce and store greenhouse gases from the atmosphere.

The Leicestershire Tree Charter is a statement of intent, our commitment towards ensuring a safer and securer future for residents of the National Forest and Leicestershire. Through bringing greater cross sector leadership and urgency to these issues we can galvanise action for a better future.

**John Everitt,
Chief Executive,
National Forest
Company**



Leicestershire is one of the
least wooded areas of the
country, with only

6%

of land covered
by woodland.



Why do we need a Tree Charter?

Trees and woodlands improve the quality of our lives. They improve air quality and reduce air pollution, producing oxygen as part of their natural growing process. They absorb carbon dioxide and help to mitigate against climate change. They retain water and stabilise soils, thereby reducing flood risk. They help nature to recover, restore wildlife rich habitats and provide corridors for wildlife populations to grow and move. They enable us to enjoy and connect with nature where we live and work, enriching our health and wellbeing.

Leicestershire County Council and the National Forest Company are committed to ensuring that, by working in partnership with others, we are able to maximise these benefits for our residents, businesses and wildlife.

Following the publication of **A Green Future: Our 25-year plan to improve the environment** in 2018 and its objective to achieve 12% tree cover by 2060, the Government has launched **The England Trees Action Plan 2021-2024**. This is a call to action for all of us to play our part in increasing tree cover across the nation, delivering huge benefits for people, nature, climate and the economy.



Climate change and biodiversity loss

Leicestershire County Council declared a Climate Emergency in May 2019. In December 2020 the Council pledged a target to become a carbon neutral council by 2030 and achieving 'net zero' across the county by 2045. The Council recognises that carbon sequestration by trees and woodlands will play a critical role in helping to achieve this.

Like the rest of the UK, biodiversity in Leicestershire is in decline and this is of significant concern. Urgent and effective action to reverse this loss is required. New government policies and strategies are emerging which will support action where it will have the most beneficial impacts. Trees will be at the heart of this, whether it is delivered as biodiversity net gain through the planning system or localised targeting through a Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

In December 2020 the council pledged to be a

'net zero'

county by 2045



Leicestershire trees and woodlands

Woodland cover across Leicestershire is estimated to extend approximately 6% of the county, compared to an average of 10% across England. Whilst woodland cover has increased slowly across Leicestershire over the past two decades, a significant proportion of this change has come through the ongoing creation of the National Forest.

The National Forest was established in the early 90's and has since transformed the landscape across the north west corner of Leicestershire, increasing forest cover in this area from 6% to 22%. It is an inspiring story of regeneration which has transformed a post-industrial and scarred landscape, it has revitalised communities and invigorated new enterprises. The

National Forest is an exemplar demonstrating that trees can act as a catalyst for real and positive change.

Leicestershire County Council manages approximately 321,000 trees (including 404 hectares of woodland) comprising of individual specimens, tree groups and woodlands across a wide portfolio of land, including highways, County Parks, Schools and other properties. The County Council has in place an agreed Tree Management strategy to ensure the long-term conservation, sustainability and development of the precious tree stock for the people of the county and future generations.

The **best time** to plant a tree was 20 years ago... the **second best time** is **now!**

Pests and diseases

The devastating effects of Dutch elm disease can still be seen within the rural landscape of Leicestershire and accounted for a reduction of more than half of all trees in the county between 1980 and 1998. The challenges presented by new pests and diseases place further pressure on our tree resources and are likely to result in the further decline of our native trees. The most significant of these is Ash Die Back, which is now affecting a significant proportion of our ash trees.

A Tree Charter for Leicestershire

This Tree Charter recognises that these wide-ranging benefits are not restricted to a specific geography and can be replicated across our wider landscape – Leicestershire - in our towns and villages, on farms, country parks and open spaces and embedded in the design of new housing and employment developments.

Together, Leicestershire County Council and the National Forest Company are committed to maximising the value of trees and have identified three key drivers for action: to support a secure and safe future, to enhance the wellbeing of our communities and to facilitate sustainable enterprise.

Through the signing of this charter, we are committing to work in partnership to share learning and expertise, to develop new and innovative approaches and to ensure effective use of resources and funds.

We are calling for action to ensure future generations can enjoy the wide-ranging services and benefits that trees and woodlands bring to our towns, cities and countryside.



Our Vision

Trees and woodlands enhance our quality of life: they support wildlife, help combat climate change and add beauty to our towns, villages and countryside. But they face unprecedented challenges. We want to protect and enhance Leicestershire's trees and woodlands so that they will continue to benefit future generations. We want to increase tree planting throughout the county to strengthen and enhance our landscapes and our economy. And we want to rekindle people's relationship with trees and woodlands, making them integral to all our lives.



Action for Leicestershire's trees and woodlands

Drivers for action

To support a secure and safer future

- ▶ More carbon stored within trees and woodland, alongside wider carbon reduction targets.
- ▶ Accelerated nature recovery from trees and hedgerows better connecting wildlife habitats.
- ▶ Strengthened resilience in trees and woodlands with effective management of pests and diseases.
- ▶ Reduced risk of floods and more shade to help climate adaptation with targeted planting in rural and urban settings.

Tree charter outcomes

- ▶ Improved air, soil and water quality.

Drivers for action

To enhance the wellbeing of our communities

- ▶ Enhanced wellbeing with people of all ages and background spending more time outdoors connecting with nature.
- ▶ Greater equity with everyone having access to trees or woodlands close to where they live.
- ▶ Increased participation, with communities and volunteers enhancing and caring for new and existing woodlands.
- ▶ Improved satisfaction and greater sense of place from a landscape enriched by trees.

Tree charter outcomes

Drivers for action

To facilitate sustainable enterprise

- ▶ Greater resilience in our economy through locally grown timber/wood products and renewable resources.
- ▶ Growing culture, arts, tourism, and leisure sectors inspired by nature, trees, and woodlands.
- ▶ More and greener jobs supporting our environmental, land and development sectors.

Tree charter outcomes

Whilst conducting research for our Neighbourhood Plan, it became apparent that the people of our Parish were passionate about trees. Planting more of them and protecting those we have were by far the biggest environmental concern for residents. Over the coming year we plan to plant thousands helping to improve the visual aspect and biodiversity in our little corner of Leicestershire.

Kym Barratt, Tree Warden for
Broughton and Old Dalby



Woodstone Primary School



Over the years we have been lucky enough to be involved in planting many, many trees not only in neighbouring National Forest woodlands but also within our own school grounds. To see the benefits, you only have to observe the children playing and learning within those wooded areas. Their mental wellbeing, as well as their academic resilience are both enhanced by the experience. It also gives them the opportunity to 'get back to nature' and learn about the fauna and flora of our local area.

Patrick Mullins/Grace Clement –
Woodstone Primary School



The NFC's Creating a Forest for Learning project has worked with Woodstone Primary since the project began in 2016, supporting their development of outdoor learning through funding for staff training and for enhancing their school grounds. Woodstone is now a Champion school and in partnership with NFC is sharing best practice with schools both within and beyond the National Forest.



Here at Woodstone we are really lucky to have lots of space filled with trees. All the children here love trees, not only because they make everywhere look beautiful (particularly in spring), but also because we get to play and learn in them. We have enjoyed finding out about different types of trees and what their leaves look like so we think trees really help us learn but we also get to climb and hide in amongst them which really helps us relax.



Louisa and Jessy –
Woodstone Year 6 pupils



Through this charter we commit to:

Working Together

Together, we will engage local communities, landowners, charitable organisations, the public and private sectors to set clear priorities and develop joint approaches to deliver the Tree Charter ambitions.

Developing an Evidence Base

We will collate the evidence needed to demonstrate the importance of Leicestershire's trees and woodlands in helping to decelerate climate change, reverse biodiversity loss, provide essential eco-system services and improve the long-term resilience of our environment.

We will establish current baselines and set the targets needed to ensure our communities are safe and our economy is sustainable for the long-term.

Putting Evidence into Action

We will be evidence-led in our efforts ensuring that new trees and woodlands maximise the benefits for our three drivers for action, whilst also acting to protect existing tree health and woodland resilience. Together, we will:

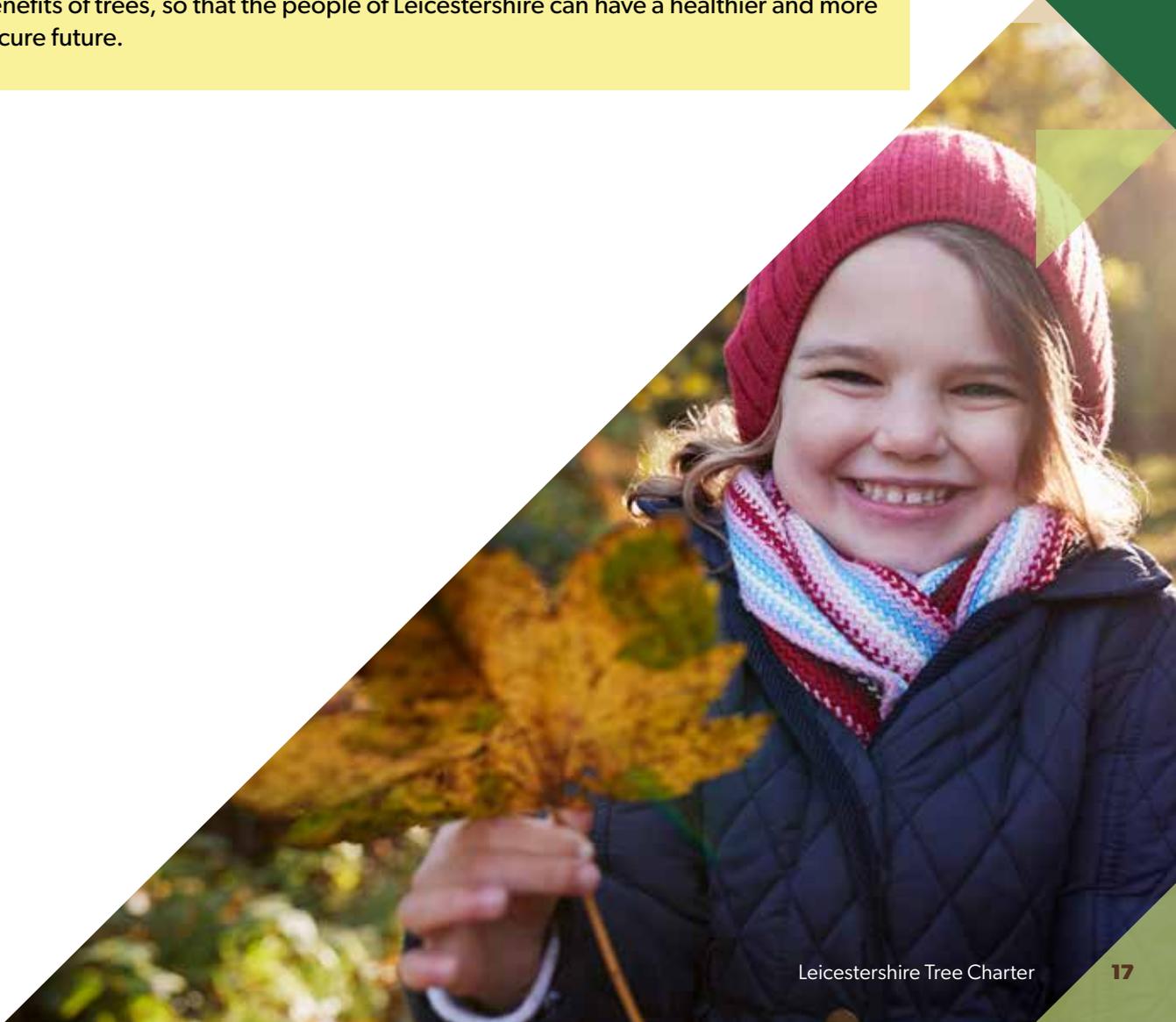
- ▶ Target tree planting in locations that will help to reduce flood risk, improve air and water quality, and connect and enhance our biodiversity networks.
- ▶ Choose species which can deliver, and balance, a range of benefits including carbon sequestration, biodiversity enhancement, landscape, and sustainable timber production.
- ▶ Plant trees close to where people live and work to improve accessibility and wellbeing benefits.
- ▶ Promote good woodland management, including increasing the number of well supported volunteer opportunities.
- ▶ Encourage outdoor and woodland learning for children and young people to help them connect and understand the importance of nature, whilst also experiencing the wellbeing benefits of being outdoors.
- ▶ Support landowners to diversify approaches to land management, and enterprise, that incorporate increased tree cover.
- ▶ Ensure that trees are considered as part of future transport, housing, and employment infrastructure.

Raising Awareness

Through implementation of this charter we will increase understanding of the wide range of services and benefits that trees and woodlands provide, to all areas of our society and trees and woodlands provide for people, communities and businesses. We will do this through our communication channels and through events to share and celebrate our work. We hope that this will inspire lasting changes to perceptions, behaviours, and actions when it comes to trees.

Embedding Action into Policy

We cannot do this alone, the importance of trees, woodlands, and other natural habitats cross over many different policy areas – climate emergency, health, planning, environment, education, economy, community. Collectively, we can ensure that our local strategies and policy-making value, integrate and maximise the benefits of trees, so that the people of Leicestershire can have a healthier and more secure future.





We fully appreciate the wide variety of benefits that both ourselves and our purchasers can glean from having trees on our developments. Trees are vital in that they give us oxygen, reduce our carbon footprint, stabilise the soil and help prevent soil erosion, as well as sustaining many birds and animals.

The presence of trees on developments creates a sense of harmony between residential and landscaped areas, providing our purchasers close access to nature and encouraging them to spend time outdoors. This then increases surveillance, a sense of community and discourages anti-social behaviour, as well as benefitting mental health and wellbeing.

Trees create an immediate enhancement and sense of maturity to our developments, raising the overall feel and quality of the scheme.

Peveril Homes



Peveril Homes created 82 new homes at a site in Moira at the heart of the National Forest in North West Leicestershire. The site includes trees, green space and a storage pond which attracts wildlife. A connecting trail to Hicks Lodge National Forest Cycle Centre was created as part of the development. TBC



Ed Milner, Milner Forestry, Markfield, Leicestershire

The Milner family farm in northwest Leicestershire, in the south eastern corner of the National Forest.

As the first private landowner to plant trees in the young National Forest, my grandfather put the farm's poorer arable land to trees. A small amount to start with, then committed 200 acres.

We've built a thriving biomass business, using the tree thinnings from our own and neighbouring woodlands; we produce 5,000 tonnes a year and it is all used within 15 miles of the yard. Sustainability is really big for us. Shipping material from one end of the country to the other makes no sense, takes the point of being green out of it.

The managed woods attract butterflies and birds we haven't seen for years, including yellowhammers and bullfinches. It was definitely a good move for us, putting our poor land into trees.

A total of 315 acres of woodland has been created with the support of the National Forest Company (NFC) over a number of years. The business has also received grants through the NFC's woodland management and woodland economy support schemes.

