

Environment, Leisure & Green Infrastructure Team



Benefits of adding to our tree canopy

Trees help to reduce CO2

Excess carbon dioxide (CO2) is building up in our atmosphere, contributing to climate change. Trees absorb CO2, removing and storing the carbon while releasing oxygen back into the air. In one year, an acre of mature trees absorbs the same amount of CO2 produced when you drive your car 26,000 miles.

Trees help prevent soil erosion

Trees help to stabilise slopes and slow run off holding soil and water in place.

Trees help to reduce water pollution

Trees reduce runoff by breaking rainfall thus allowing the water to flow down the trunk and into the earth below the tree. This prevents stormwater from carrying pollutants to the ocean. When mulched, trees act like a sponge that filters this water naturally and uses it to recharge groundwater supplies.

Trees clean the air

Trees absorb odours and pollutant gases (nitrogen oxides, ammonia, sulphur dioxide and ozone) and filter particulates out of the air by trapping them on their leaves and bark.

Benefits of adding to our tree canopy

Trees provide shade and reduce temperatures

Average temperatures have risen significantly in the last 50 years as tree coverage has declined and the number of heat-absorbing roads and buildings has increased. Trees cool the urban areas by up to 12°C, by shading our homes and streets, breaking up urban “heat islands” and releasing water vapor into the air through their leaves.

Trees help us with our mental health

Many studies have demonstrated the positive effects of trees and countryside for our mental health. Trees help to beautify our environment often blocking ugly buildings and reducing dust, noise and glare from busy roads.

Trees can be a source of sustainable fuel and food source

Managed appropriately trees can be used as a sustainable fuel source and during their life provide us with endless supplies of nutritious food.

Trees can have a positive impact upon house prices

Trees can bring a positive look and feel to a community which has an impact on house prices thus driving up investment.



Legislation and strategy

- Environment Act of 2021, Sets obligations on Local Authorities to manage their assets in a way which will improve air and water quality, increase biodiversity whilst targeting resource efficiency and waste.
- The office of environmental protection is to be established to develop strategies and monitor progress.



Environmental Sustainability and Carbon Reduction Strategy 2022 - 2032



Environmental Strategy

We have developed an environmental strategy which reflects the structure of the act and sets out areas of work which will contribute to the achievement of local and national targets.

The strategy sets out an ambitious target to become Net Zero as a Council by 2032 and as a Borough by 2050 as well as increasing biodiversity and nature based solutions.

How? Four high level objectives

Capturing and storing carbon in woodlands and other natural habitats

Achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions	Protect and enhance the natural environment
Use all resources efficiently and minimise waste	Adapt to the impacts of climate change

*Protecting, extending and connecting areas of natural habitat
Helping to improve air quality by reducing harmful emissions*

Planning and adapting the Borough's built and natural environment to withstand the impacts of climate change, e.g. reducing and managing flood risk



Updates

- The winter season of 21/22 12,000 new trees were planted
- Significant work was undertaken to ensure the species is planted in the most appropriate location
- The winter season of 22/23 we intend to plant another 12,000 trees
- The arboricultural team fell roughly 200 trees a year
- Ash dieback could cause the death of 80% of our native Ash species costing the UK £15m and decimating our stock
- We estimate that we could have 14,000 Ash trees



Canopy cover

Our ambition is to increase our canopy cover therefore mitigating the affects of increasing storms and disease and reducing our carbon release.

Funding

The Council has successfully acquired £393,000 for the planting of trees, aftercare and associated activities. This is for 7,500 tree whips, 225 heavy standards and 125 fruit trees. Funds come from 'Urban Tree Challenge Fund', 'Local Authority Treescapes Fund' and Trees for Cities.

In addition £60,000 has been acquired for a Community Tree and Woodland Officer in partnership with Trees for Cities, who has worked with local communities to plant 7,500 tree whips in 2022/23 and a further 7,500 this winter.

Internal engagement

- Very close cooperation with internal teams around planting locations.
- Tree planting areas agreed by the asset strategy group
- Engagement with ward members
- Transport coordination
- All trees planted and maintained by Horticultural Services, ensuring additional employment opportunities using secured revenue funding.

External engagement

The Council engaged with over 400 volunteers in 2021/22 to help plant 7,500 trees. This amounted to nearly 1,000 hours of time worth almost £10,000.

A similar programme of engagement is anticipated for 2022/23

A Queens Green Canopy event was held at Barleyfields School last winter, with a second scheduled for Daffodil Park in Billingham to kick start this winters tree planting programme.



Challenges

- We need to be able to manage our existing woodland as well as planting new trees. This is essential in terms of carbon reduction and biodiversity uplift
- Ongoing maintenance is a challenge although the recent funding allocation included a 3 year maintenance revenue fund. With the correct species of tree, planted in the right location we will be able to minimise our obligations
- Although significant work has been completed with schools and the general community we still need to do more.
- The funding for the Council's Community Tree and Woodland Officer runs out in March 2023.