

Local Authority Treescapes Fund case study: Gloucestershire and Partners

Gloucestershire's ecosystems and cities are being strengthened against threats such as ash dieback through the Local Authority Treescapes Fund; planting trees to restore flood defences and wildlife corridors.



The challenge



Ash is a dominant tree in Gloucestershire's landscapes, providing up to 70% of the current tree cover in some areas. Ash dieback, first confirmed in Gloucestershire in 2016, has now affected trees in both urban and rural settings, and trees are expected to succumb to the disease across the county. Gloucester City alone has approximately 500 standalone Gloucester County Council owned ash trees in open spaces across the city, all of which are in peril. Due to safety concerns Gloucestershire County Council have a multi-year programme to fell a conservative estimate of 32,000 Gloucestershire County Council owned ash trees along public highways. Some private estates have also been felling roadside ash trees which still have economic value. Following the ravages of Dutch elm disease

(which was once a dominant tree in some of Gloucestershire's landscapes), ash dieback is creating even larger gaps in an already diminished network of trees in hedgerows, shelterbelts, and lining watercourses.

The violet click beetle is a flagship species known to spend its life cycle in veteran ash trees. Trees that are wide at the base with openings within the tree to allow internal rot are especially significant and need to be conserved for longevity. In Gloucestershire, the violet click beetle seems to rely solely on ash. If the beetle cannot adapt locally to beech or oak (as in Windsor Great Park), the species may eventually be lost to ash dieback. With only three known populations in the country, this loss will be significant. To mitigate



this, stumps of felled ash trees are being left as tall as possible to give the beetle a fighting chance.

Furthermore, over 5,000 homes were flooded in the 2007 flood event in Gloucestershire. Climate change will make extreme weather events that lead to flooding more frequent and severe. Since declaring a Climate Emergency in 2019 the county council has committed to planting one million trees by 2030 and to planting two trees for every one highways ash tree that is felled. As ash dieback is already having a high impact on the abundance of trees in riparian habitats, quickly replacing trees in such locations is seen as a local priority.

Grant used

The LATF is a grant scheme for partnerships formed by local authorities (LAs), to drive an increase in non-woodland tree planting across our landscapes, in parklands, riparian zones, urban areas, beside roads and footpaths, small linear woodlands, copses, and shelterbelts.



Objectives

- Tree replacement for trees lost to ash dieback
- Protected species conservation
- Community and volunteer led tree planting projects
- Flood mitigation and prevention



Partners within the bid

- Gloucestershire County Council (Sustainability & Highways teams)
- Forest of Dean District Council
- Gloucester City Council
- Stroud Valleys Project
- Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG)
- Wotton Climate Action Network



Photo credit: Deborah Roberts.
LATF tree planting in Salmon Springs

Councillor David Gray, cabinet member for environment and planning at Gloucestershire Country Council said,

"As part of our goal for Gloucestershire to become a carbon neutral county, we are committed to planting one million trees across Gloucestershire by 2030. This includes a major programme to protect diversity and plant two trees for every infected ash tree which must be felled due to ash dieback. We are working together with our partners and the local community to achieve this ambitious goal and thanks to the Local Authority Treescapes Fund, the number of trees we have planted this year has almost doubled, which is fantastic news."



The solution: restoring urban and rural treescapes

As laid out in the Gloucestershire Tree Strategy, the treescape restoration plan will take a 'Doorstep to Landscape' approach, with an urban 'doorstep' element, a 'landscape' countryside, hedgerow, and flood management element. All work will be undertaken both in consultation with and using volunteers from local communities. In the Forest of Dean and Gloucester City, the 'doorstep' element will see urban ash dieback replacement trees planted in the most deprived communities across the county. 100 replacement trees will also be planted in Westgate Arboretum, Tuffley Park, The Oval, The Lannett, Greyhound Gardens, The Triangle, and Grange Road Garden.

Meanwhile, the 'landscape' element will include work by the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) to enhance a vital ecological corridor between the Dixton Hill and Bredon Hill sites of special scientific interest (SSSI), enabling passage for the violet click beetle from the latter special area of conservation (SAC). Further volunteer-led work will provide space and activities for people to reconnect with nature. The Wotton Area Climate Action Network and Stroud Valleys Project will be planting in farms, schools, green spaces, roadsides, council housing, amenity areas and private land. Importantly, tree planting in Salmon Springs by the Stroud Valleys Project will help to reduce the risk of a re-run of the devastating floods of 2007.



LATF planting at Salmon Springs in Gloucestershire

Community engagement

Key to the success of this project was the engagement of the parish councils as soon as possible with the community – asking which areas they'd like to see planted. It was clear that this was really appreciated by a broad range of people across different areas and with different reasons for tree planting. The funding from LATF helped to sustain interest from emerging volunteer groups, and because hopes are high to continue this enthusiasm in the future

the county council has recruited a tree officer. Through partnership, benefits were shared by all. The Highways Team were able to utilise their existing procurement know-how to order and deliver all tree stock to parish councils, FWAG utilised their connections to help reach even more landowners, and Wotton Climate Action Network and Stroud Valleys Project provided vital volunteers on the ground.

To find out more about the LATF

please visit www.gov.uk/guidance/local-authority-treescapes-fund

Front cover photo credit: Deborah Roberts, LATF planting in Salmon Springs

