

# Urban Tree Challenge Fund case study: Durham County Council

The Urban Tree Challenge Fund (UTCf) first opened in 2019 and has held three rounds of funding. Durham County Council has submitted bids in all three rounds and has been successful in each.



UTCf planting in shared open green spaces

## The challenge

One keen focus for the council is to increase canopy cover in areas of deprivation, the chosen neighbourhoods have been targeted as areas with little tree cover and are made up of shared open space, with few private gardens and limited trees or ornamental planting. Most of the planting sites are in settlements in the top 10% of deprived areas in England – others are ranked within 30% most deprived<sup>1</sup>. There is a real need across the UK to improve public health in these areas as lower household incomes reduce opportunities for more formal exercise. It's also recognised nationwide that better managed green space close to where people live increases amenity value and has the potential to improve quality of life and wellbeing. Introducing trees into these areas will improve the local environment and contribute to the health and wellbeing of communities.

<sup>1</sup> Index of Deprivation 2019 from the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government



*"Space for Trees will secure a much greener, more resilient and pleasant environment that everyone can enjoy"*  
Durham County Council

## The solution

During the first two rounds, the projects saw 1,139 standard trees planted across 14 towns and villages across County Durham. A further 11,230 smaller trees were planted to extend existing woods, which includes ancient semi-natural woodland. All these sites are situated at the heart of communities and are easily accessible and visible.

Work continues this winter through round three and a total of 799 standard trees are to be planted by the end of next season. Match funding was provided in the form of labour from a dedicated and experienced skilled workforce within the council. Overall, across the three rounds of UTCf, the council aims to plant 1,938 standard trees, along with over 11,000 younger trees (whips).

## Grant used

The UTCF is a key government offer to level up access to nature across the country, planting trees in socially deprived urban areas with low canopy cover, in proximity to healthcare and educational facilities. By requiring match funding from communities and local authorities, the UTCF drives value for money while also engaging local communities in efforts to fund-raise for, plant and maintain trees.



UTCF planting close to homes

## The benefits

The new trees will help remove carbon from the atmosphere and deliver a greener and healthier environment. Improved green space offers possibilities of increased social activity, improved community cohesion and local attachment. Trees and green space can help connect people back to nature. Many of the sites selected are alongside roads and these trees can help to reduce noise levels and provide a visual barrier.

UTCF has given the council opportunity to build on past and present tree planting and woodland management programmes and links in well with the current initiatives. The Durham Woodland Revival and Durham Woodland Creation Scheme provide opportunities for educational programmes with local schools. Planting trees on areas of mown grass near housing can provide an important introduction to the natural world for children. This will hopefully increase knowledge and understanding of trees, nature, and wellbeing, which will then support the recent Woodland Improvement Grant agreements. This Forestry Commission grant will fund a five year programme of management on all 1,800 ha of council-owned woodland.

These collective programmes will help bring people together and strengthen communities. This work has

the potential to contribute to a shift in attitude among local people to value green spaces.

Cllr Mark Wilkes, Durham County Council's Cabinet member for neighbourhoods and climate change, said: "Our communities have been overwhelmingly supportive of the trees being planted in their areas. The scheme has inspired people to engage with us and ask for more trees, which is really encouraging and shows how beneficial green spaces are to residents' wellbeing, as well as the added climate benefits such as carbon absorption and improved habitat for wildlife."

"This was a good opportunity to increase the county's tree cover with funding to plant large standard trees. We also had a partnership with two social housing providers who were actively looking to plant trees in and around their housing and were keen to be part of the programme.

"As the UTCF rounds have progressed, there has been better connections and working between teams involved in the various stages – from the application, site identification and planting, to management and monitoring and the claims process. It has been a cross-team effort which has benefited the efficiency and effectiveness of the scheme."

## To find out more about the Urban Tree Challenge Fund

*please visit*

[www.gov.uk/guidance/urban-tree-challenge-fund](http://www.gov.uk/guidance/urban-tree-challenge-fund)

