



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs



Forestry Commission

The Woodland Creation Accelerator Fund is designed to help local authorities accelerate woodland and tree planting plans, providing local authorities with financial support to boost capacity and resource, helping them to employ, train up and bring on board professional expertise to drive and accelerate tree planting and woodland creation commitments.

Launched in 2022, the Fund has been promoted by ADEPT, on behalf of Defra and the Forestry Commission.



CASE STUDY - City of Trees

Carly Harper from City of Trees in Greater Manchester, explains more about the programme and the impact it is having on the area.



Background and context

City of Trees is a Greater Manchester-based charity and one of the 15 community forests in the UK. This initiative, funded by the Forestry Commission through the Greater Manchester Combined Authority – aims to create a cleaner, greener environment for all citizens of Greater Manchester and we do that through tree planting. We work to overcome the barriers of tree planting to accelerate tree planting efforts in the region, which includes working with local authorities and private landowners to unlock land.

The Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) identified an urgent need for additional resources to tackle various challenges and to accelerate the pace of tree planting. These challenges ranged from identifying suitable sites, to navigating complex stakeholder engagement and addressing the long-term maintenance of planted trees. Additionally, we faced significant barriers as we did not have staff with the knowledge, expertise or skills to lead on this.

When the Woodland Creation Accelerator Fund was announced, GMCA applied to the with a bid to recruit four new posts. Nearly £300k of funding was awarded from the Fund and they commissioned City of Trees to carry out the project.



Recruitment

In addition to advertising the posts through our own social media channels and relevant jobs websites, City of Trees – along with the 10 Greater Manchester authorities, the combined authority and through the City of Trees Greater Manchester Forest Partnership – advertised the job internally. This provided a platform to publicise the posts through internal structures and external contacts. As one of 13 Community Forests, we also had another network for spreading the word far and wide.



This approach allowed us to secure a team with diverse experience and knowledge. That's important, because the project extends beyond tree planting, aligning with broader climate change and nature recovery objectives. Together, my team and I aim to catalyse change in local authorities, fostering a sustainable, nature-centric approach.

We advertised for four posts in total: a Woodland Creation Accelerator Fund coordinator and three project officer posts. The project officer roles would be very much focused on taking sites forward from concept to delivery, but there needed to be a means for bringing these sites forward.

Therefore, the requirements of the coordinator role - in addition to managing the project officer team - were to engage with multiple and often hard to reach partners, to sell to them the importance, benefits, and relevance of planting more trees and woodlands.

There is a challenge to recruit diversely in the tree planting sector, however City of Trees maintained a commitment to inclusivity throughout the process, by actively seeking candidates from diverse backgrounds.

The team has received ongoing training and support. This has included internal learning programmes and relevant external training, including resources offered by the Forestry Commission.

In addition, we've been actively involved in the regular WCAF webinars and the forum – these have been instrumental in keeping us informed of the latest developments and best practice.

Success stories, challenges and next steps

In this area, we have two main barriers – finding the right space for the right trees and addressing the long term maintenance of trees after the initial planting phase. Despite the enthusiasm for tree planting, sustaining momentum and securing funding beyond the funding term remain ongoing challenges.

Through the WCAF funding, we have been able to provide capacity to local authorities that otherwise didn't exist, to find land across the districts suitable for planting. City of Trees has a dedicated team emerging that engages with private organisations for green Corporate Social Responsibility events, to bring in additional funding for officers' time to explore funding opportunities available.

Collaborating closely with partners is essential to identify viable land and efficiently manage this. Additionally, we consider behaviour change as crucial: our role involves convincing, inspiring and persuading individuals and groups about the benefits and positive impacts of tree planting.

Since recruiting the three project officers and one project manager in January 2023, our team has made significant progress. We've enhanced stakeholder engagement, by broadening our communication with landowners and strengthened relationships with key stakeholders across multiple sectors. In doing so, we have begun to build trusted relationships which are now bringing forward land previously inaccessible to the organisation.

We've also accelerated site identification, identifying planting sites much earlier in the season, therefore optimising planting efforts for the 23/24 and 24/25 seasons. This means we've secured landowner agreements earlier, allowing the City of Trees delivery team to focus on resource allocation and delivery of planting schemes. In the first nine months of the Woodland Creation Accelerator Fund funding, 247 new planting sites were identified and this work continues at pace



One example is our work with Transport for Greater Manchester (TFGM), who are a large landowner in the area. Previously, we had encountered challenges in identifying suitable sites and getting through to the right people. Over the 10 months since Woodland Creation Accelerator Fund has been running, we've identified 10 potential sites, with one slated for planting this year and an additional nine in the pipeline for the next.

This is a significant success for us and shows the power of our dedicated workforce, wholly focused on site surveying, opportunities and selection.

These efforts have led to enhanced collaboration, opening up planting opportunities from a wider pool of landowners, increasing resource availability both internally and within the ten Greater Manchester Districts, and the consideration of new sites that were previously overlooked due to time and resource constraints.

It has also enabled several senior level workshops to be delivered to local authorities which has helped to elevate the importance of the tree agenda. It has been instrumental in more sites being brought forward for assessment as potential planting locations, including sites that were frequently not known to the green space leads.

These workshops were designed to engage senior executives and officers - the facilitated sessions involved key stakeholders in discussions about tree planting opportunities. The workshops not only explored historical planting initiatives and stakeholder engagement but also included strategic discussions on upcoming development plans, major infrastructure programs and land related priorities. Additionally, collaborative engagement with organisations and stakeholders was emphasised, contributing to successful outreach and alignment of messaging with decision-makers.

Because our team isn't about the delivery of the tree planting, we have been able to build a network through what I term the 'power of the daisy chain.' By leveraging existing connections, we expand our reach beyond traditional landowners, discovering opportunities in unexpected places, such as lands owned by builders referred by farmers.

However, given the scale of the number of trees that need to be planted, it's still a challenge. Funding for the longer term maintenance of these trees must be considered – often the discussions focus on the planting and then establishing the trees for the first three years. But what about after that? We've still got to find that money to maintain those trees and right now, local authorities are facing lots of unmanaged woodlands because they simply don't have the funding in place to look after them.

We reduce the burden of ongoing maintenance through our sustainable planting designs, use of mulch and deer shelters in the planting stages, and ongoing engagement with communities. This takes place via our planting days, working with 'Friends Of' groups to support planting after establishment, and our work in partnership with community payback schemes to support our woodland management commitments.

Currently, our priority is identifying woodland creation sites for the ongoing year, with a goal of securing additional locations. Next year, our focus is on expanding partnerships with educational institutions, such as colleges and universities, Manchester and Salford Diocese and collaborating with NHS providers. We're also extending our outreach to social housing providers in Greater Manchester, building on successful initiatives and maintaining support for local authorities.



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For more information about the Woodland Creation Accelerator Fund visit: www.adeptnet.org.uk/projects/woodland-creation-accelerator-fund

More information about ADEPT can be found on its website: www.adeptnet.org.uk

About ADEPT

The Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning & Transport (ADEPT) represents 'Directors of Place' from county, unitary, metropolitan and combined authorities along with directors of local enterprise partnerships, sub-national transport bodies and corporate partners drawn from key service sectors.

ADEPT members are at the very heart of maximising clean sustainable growth, delivering the projects that are fundamental to creating more resilient communities, economies and infrastructure. Over 14.7 million households in England – and two thirds of the population – rely on services provided by ADEPT members. These services include housing, environmental and regulatory services, planning, economic development, culture and highways and transport. The Association represents members' interests by proactively engaging central Government on emerging policy & issues, responding to consultations and enquiries, and promoting initiatives and research aimed at influencing Government policy. For more information on ADEPT please visit the website: www.adeptnet.org.uk

City of Trees

City of Trees is the community forest charity for the Greater Manchester area, working with public, private and third sectors to ensure the benefits of trees and woodlands are realised. They plant trees for people; trees to create better, greener places; to boost health and wellbeing; to enhance green skills; and to tackle the climate and biodiversity emergency. Proud to call Greater Manchester home, they are passionate about growing the urban forest one tree at a time.

City of Trees runs its Citizen Forester engagement programme, a practical way for people play their part in planting and looking after trees, engaging a wide range of audiences - examples of which include local residents, corporate groups, people looking to get back to work, and people affected by dementia. Anyone can be a Citizen Forester, it is about contributing to a greener Greater Manchester and improving their own health and wellbeing outcomes by getting involved.

City of Trees also makes up the Greater Manchester part of the Northern Forest, stretching from Liverpool to Hull For more information visit the City of Trees website www.cityoftrees.org.uk

