



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 - Tees Valley

Clare Ross, Net Zero Programmes Lead from the Tees Valley Combined Authority, explains more about the programme and its impact.



Background and context

Led by the Tees Valley Mayor, the Tees Valley Combined Authority is a partnership of five local authorities: Darlington, Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland and Stockton-on-Tees. Tees Valley is home to large industrial economy, with a low woodland cover of around 6-7% and urban street tree cover being notably some of the lowest in England at 6%. The geography of the area contributes to this, as it is coastal, on an estuary and has a large established industrial area. Surprisingly about 60% of the area of Tees Valley is agricultural which including arable and mixed farming.

When the Tees Valley Combined Authority developed the Tees Valley Net Zero Strategy we realised that while it had been effective at developing a plan for reducing emissions in the industrial cluster, we realised that we needed to look at nature-based solutions for carbon removals. In addition, there was not a cohesive woodland creation strategy across the area, although most of our local authorities have developed a tree strategy.

As part of this nature recovery, the Tees Valley Mayor developed our 'Trees on Tees' programme: an ambitious plan to plant one million trees and increase woodland creation in Tees Valley. This ambition required more resources and so we looked at the funding available for tree planting and woodland creation.



A steering group was set up representing the local authorities, the Tees Valley Nature Partnership and the Forestry Commission, with the Woodland Trust acting in an advisory capacity. This group worked across the combined authority area to make a consortium bid for funding from the WCAF. Our idea was to increase the number of officers in the consortium, to create a dedicated woodland creation team.

In 2023, we were awarded £300,000 from the Fund. TVCA was also awarded funding from other sources including £83k from the North East and Yorkshire Net Zero Hub.



Recruitment

We began a recruitment campaign in April 2023 with an initial aim to recruit four and half officers across five local authority areas. However, that would have meant different pay structures, so all officers were employed directly by TVCA, ensuring a unified approach and smoother collaboration. During recruitment, focus was placed on attracting people with a genuine interest in tree planting, preferably with relevant experience in woodland creation.

Given the aim to recruit from a wide pool of applicants, and due to a critical shortage of employees with woodland advisory experience, there was no minimum degree qualification, instead seeking applications showing strong interest and enthusiasm. We also worked hard during the recruitment process on inclusivity.

Four and half roles were recruited: a project coordinator and four project officers, one part-time. The part-time project officer is a botanist with experience in environmental projects and habitat assessment – they collaborate with officers to identify sites suitable to ensure planting the ‘Right Tree in the Right Place’.

An initial priority was to identify skills gaps and source appropriate training. This has included training in geographic information systems (GIS), botanical knowledge, woodland design, project management and environmental impact assessment.

The Forestry Commission provided valuable training via a series of webinars which has been incredibly useful. We also reached out to our local Forestry Commission Woodland Officers who provided training in regulatory matters and the England Woodland Creation Offer (EWCO). The Community Forests in our area, including the White Rose and the North East are also operating a Halo funding agreement and have provided invaluable support, as have the Woodland Trust.

The team plays a pivotal role in facilitating tree planting projects, forging partnerships with local authorities, private landowners, businesses and community groups. We operate as a dynamic ‘one-stop shop’, sourcing land, advising landowners on optimal approaches.



Success stories, challenges, and next steps

The team has faced several challenges. Two officers recently left the project and there is an issue in the environmental sector of offering short term contracts in a competitive market.

As everyone who works in woodland creation will know, it can also be difficult to find suitable land on which to create woodlands. This is due to agriculture being in transition and conflicting interests for land use. Another issue is the commencement of green finance such as Biodiversity Net Gain and Nutrient Neutrality which is competing for land use.

We recently had the fantastic news that we have been successful in securing Community Forest status for Tees Valley. This Community Forest status will supercharge our ambition to plant one million trees by providing access to ECF funding, which is supported by the multi-million-pound Trees for Climate fund, part of Defra's Nature for Climate Fund.

The England Community Forest national network works with local communities and landowners to plant trees across England to improve the natural environment, protect communities from flooding and improve access to green spaces in urban areas. We would not have been able to achieve this without the Woodland Creation Accelerator Fund. We are still working closely with Forestry England promoting the 'Partnership Offer' and with the Forestry Commission and for example hope to offer joint grant advice 'Surgeries'. The TVCA will also be the Responsible Body for the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.





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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

About Tees Valley

The Tees Valley Combined Authority was created in April 2016. Its purpose is to drive economic growth and job creation in the area.

It is a partnership of five authorities; Darlington, Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar & Cleveland and Stockton-on-Tees, working closely with the business community and other partners to make local decisions to support the growth of our economy.

