A tree for every resident in North Norfolk

North Norfolk District Council
Tuesday 25 July 2023

Summary

A tree planting project to plant 110,000 trees, one for each resident in North Norfolk, to improve biodiversity across the district, engage with communities on the climate and ecological agenda, and sequester carbon.

Councillor Nigel Lloyd, Portfolio holder for Climate and Environment up until May 2023, said “The 110,000 trees project has been fantastic and the council has been so inspired to see how many in North Norfolk have embraced the importance of it too. In over 130 events, we’ve worked with so many incredible volunteers in the community and delivered over 110,000 trees across North Norfolk.”

The problem

The increase in carbon emissions from human activity needs to be addressed, and the North Norfolk coast and its communities in particular, are being severely impacted by climate change. The rate of coastal erosion is increasing exponentially each year, and more action is needed to be taken. In 2021, North Norfolk as a district, had a carbon footprint of 783 ktCO2e, and the council has pledged to support the district to reach Net Zero by 2045. To achieve this, everyone across the district needs to reduce their carbon footprint, and to draw down carbon from the atmosphere.

Blessed with fantastic soils for farming, North Norfolk has seen much of its woodland, hedgerows and other natural habitats removed over the last century to make space for agriculture and food production. The sterilisation of our countryside has impacted on our natural environment, and it is well documented that the UK is one of the most nature depleted countries in Europe. The natural habitats of North Norfolk are a key part of what makes it so special, and if we don’t support and enhance our natural spaces, biodiversity, the climate, our communities, visitors and local economy will suffer.

The solution

Recognising the challenges facing our natural environment, we designed the 110,000 tree project which stated that 110,000 trees, one for each resident in North Norfolk, would be planted to help offset the council’s carbon emissions in our 2019 - 2023 corporate plan. The project team developed a tree planting strategy for the project, and broadened the scope to include the additional benefits of improving biodiversity across the district, and

engage with community groups on the climate and ecological emergency. The tree project was available to all communities across North Norfolk, a largely rural district with 45 miles of coastline. It is home to the North Norfolk Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and has many important natural habitats, including chalk streams, broads (manmade lakes), salt marsh, chalk reefs and woodlands.

The project's aims were threefold:

- To help increase biodiversity across the district
- To engage with the community on the climate and ecological emergency
- To sequester carbon

As well as the Corporate Plan, the project was also referenced in the council's Net-Zero Strategy and Climate Action Plan, which was adopted in 2022. The tree strategy embodied the idea of "the right tree in the right place", to ensure that each site was suitable, and every tree had the best opportunity to grow.

Planting plans for each site were created and mapped, and where possible, mixes of native trees and shrubs were encouraged to improve biodiversity. We did not put many restrictions on what type of planting could be funded by the project, as long as it met the projects aims, used native species and adhered to the "right tree in the right place" ethos. This allowed us to support some really interesting planting schemes, including a DEFRA funded Miyawaki Forest trial project, in partnership with Norfolk County Council. Our trial started in 2022, and we are helping to test whether or not the methodology works in our soils and climate. To date the results have been amazing, so much so we have planted another three. More information on the methodology and what we have done can be found here.

To help ensure the trees were looked after and maintained, planting and care information was made available on the project's website, and participants were asked to sign an agreement accepting responsibility and ongoing maintenance for the trees. A mix of local and national suppliers were used, with stipulations made on biosecurity, UK grown stock and biodegradable tree guards.

Trees were initially delivered by the project officer, but as the project developed, nurseries that offered delivery services were utilised. This greatly helped to free up staff resource.

Timeline

The project was launched in 2019, with a completion date of March 2023, to fit within the sitting administration's term of office.

Initially, every Parish and Town Council, and school were contacted about the project. An application form was developed and made available on the Council's website. The project was also promoted via the Council's social media and through local media outlets. Annual tree giveaway events helped to raise the profile of the project and often led to more applicants wanting more trees or hedging. Each application was reviewed on its own merit, with some applicants requiring more support than others. Checks were conducted on each application including:

- A desk top survey of the site using DEFRA's Magic Map to check soil types, land designations etc., and the Forest Research tool to see which trees would be suitable
- A site visit to gather more information and ensure the planting site was suitable - checking for utilities near the planting site for example, and what tree species were growing locally

The first tree was planted at the Council Offices in Cromer. The Covid pandemic slowed the project down, with only 4,441 trees being planted in the first year, but the recruitment of a dedicated lead officer in November 2020, meant planting increased to a high of 51,742 in the 2021/22 planting season.

The project concluded with a celebration event where project participants were invited to witness the "110,000th" tree being planted, and were thanked for their support with cake!

Stakeholders

The project was open to all communities, schools, businesses and residents across North Norfolk. Efforts were made to engage with landowners and local environmental groups to find suitable locations for the creation of larger community woodlands. These failed to materialise, but good relationships were forged that created other opportunities, such as with hedge planting schemes instead.

The project board was appointed and headed by the Assistant Director for Sustainable Growth, along with the Climate and Environment Policy Manager, the Climate and Environment portfolio holder, the project lead and members of the comms and finance teams. The Countryside Ranger team and Council Tree Officer were also instrumental in supporting the project. Helping to identify suitable sites, offering advice to the project lead and passing on leads.

By the end of the project, planting schemes were completed with:

- 18 Town and Parish Councils
- 17 Community Groups/charities
- 5 schools/universities
- 4 businesses
- 4 land owners/farmers
- 29 private landowners
- Hundreds of individuals across the county via the tree giveaway events

Impact

In total **115,820** trees were planted (118,260 including other planting projects with partners) across 134 planting projects. 37 different native species of tree and shrub were used. Of these, **61,952** were planted as trees and if planted together, at 2m spacing, would cover an area the equivalent of **35 foot pitches**. The remaining **56,268** were planted as hedging, and if planted as a continuous double-row hedge, would cover **11km**.

6 Miyawaki Forests were created (three as part of the DEFRA trial) along with edible hedges, an agroforestry project, community orchards and a community tree nursery. The Miyawaki Forests in particular have drawn interest from across the country and even Canada and the U.S.

Though difficult to calculate due to the relatively small scale and dispersed nature of the planting projects, we estimate that over a 100 year period, this project could sequester **8,730 to 9,809 tCO2**. The additional habitat and new or improved wildlife corridors, will also help to increase this figure as they develop and lock down more carbon. The additional benefits the project achieved, particularly around community engagement, could also increase this figure significantly, as many more people have been inspired to do more planting.

The biggest success of the project has been working with the different communities and building relationships that have already provided additional benefits for our communities, and the wider district. For example, through the project a Wildlife Friendly Village group were informed about additional Council funding that was available for sustainable projects. They successfully applied to this fund to have the village pond restored, working with the Norfolk Wildlife Trust. Not only do they now have a fantastic habitat and feature in their village, but ponds are a great carbon sink, additionally contributing to the Councils wider Net Zero aims. The final benefit was the purchase of a water bowser for the Countryside Ranger team. This will help maintain the Miyawaki Forests and other tree planting during dry periods, greatly increasing the trees survival rate.

Lessons learned

- Include hedgerow on its own merit. It was originally suggested that the project counted 8m of hedgerow as 1 tree. This vastly disadvantages hedgerow creation, which is an important habitat in its own right, for creating wildlife corridors
- Pre-plan projects as much as possible out of the planting season. This helps to reduce the workload during the planting season. It also allows more projects to be completed, as just the delivery and planting needs to be completed, rather than the whole process
- Pre-order tree and guard stock from suppliers to help meet demand
- If the opportunity had arisen, we would have made use of woodland creation funds such as the Woodland Trust's MOREwoods scheme and Forestry Commissions England Woodland Creation Offer. Unfortunately, finding suitable land for this proved very difficult during the project period.
- Plant strategically with partners to improve habitats and wildlife corridors
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The total cost for the project was just under £150,000 and was funded from the Council's own reserves.

Next steps

This project is now complete, but the success of the project, and enthusiasm from its participants needs to be harnessed. Options are being explored with other partner organisations and communities, and could include additional tree planting, or other habitat creation.

Through the project, a better understanding of how nature based solutions can help to reduce the Council's carbon footprint, and bring many additional benefits, has been developed. These will hopefully be factored into future projects, along with exploring the possibility of developing a local carbon trading scheme.

Lessons learnt have been shared with local councils and partner organisations, to help support other planting schemes.

Links, contacts and credits

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