NHS Forest
Green space for health

nhsforest.org

A project run by

CENTRE for SUSTAINABLE HEALTHCARE
inspire • empower • transform

Integrating the NHS Forest into Local Nature Recovery Strategies

The NHS Forest initiative aligns closely with the Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS), aiming to enhance biodiversity and promote Nature-Based Interventions (NBIs) on NHS estates. By working with us, councils can support LNRS's goals of restoring nature and improving environmental sustainability, especially in urban areas. The NHS Forest's key objectives:

1 Improve Biodiversity: Enhance the ecological diversity of NHS estates by planting trees and contributing to local green infrastructure and the visibility and value of the NHS Green Estate.

2 Enable NBIs: Utilise green space to support sustainable healthcare systems and provide therapeutic environments for patients, staff and local communities.

We recognise the challenges of competing land use within NHS estates and work to advocate for the importance of green spaces. We aim to inspire and support trusts to make the best use of their green spaces for both biodiversity and humans.

How the NHS Forest fits into LNRS

Tree planting initiatives: Thanks to Defra's Nature for Climate Fund and the Trees Call to Action Fund, we have been able to offer over 150,000 trees to NHS England sites. These trees are sourced from Plant Healthy certified nurseries and come with all necessary planting equipment. This scheme is currently available until March 2025. Although our current grants do not cover ongoing maintenance, we provide detailed aftercare advice to support long-term tree health.

Health and wellbeing: Green spaces on NHS estates provide vital areas for rest and recovery for patients and staff and support mental health through nature-based therapies. We often run training and webinars covering these themes and have a wealth of resources and case studies available through our NHS Forest network.

Ecological diversity: By planting a variety of tree species, we ensure that NHS estates contribute to local biodiversity and ecological resilience. Our tree offer includes fruit trees and Tiny Forests, which are especially good for biodiversity.

Integrated Care System (ICS) mapping: Creating green space maps at the ICS level helps identify opportunities for tree planting and woodland creation. We can then integrate these findings into NHS regional spatial data for strategic planning.

Research and policy work: The NHS Trees and Woodland Valuation Pilot Study compiled with Forest Research aimed to quantify and assess the contribution of trees to ecosystem services on NHS estates. It valued the benefits of trees and woodland on NHS estates at thousands of pounds. Our Space to Breathe report quantified the positive effect green space has on mental and physical wellbeing for staff across multiple NHS sites.

Potential measures and contributions

Tree Equity Score (TES): We worked with American Forests and the Woodland Trust to develop this UK tool which assesses variables to identify areas where tree planting can most effectively address health disparities. It guides strategic planting to maximise benefits for underserved communities.

Tree planting support: We provide comprehensive support including training, guidance on planting and aftercare. Trees planted on NHS estates will have the long-term benefit of increased canopy cover which will contribute to pollution reduction and temperature control. The trees will also help control water runoff and support habitat creation.

Measuring impact: We collect data on tree planting efforts and feedback from NHS trusts. We then track the positive outcomes related to biodiversity and human health creating a catalogue of case studies and a large and vibrant network.

Human benefits: Accessible green spaces, especially those in urban areas where many NHS sites are found, are hugely beneficial for human physical and mental health. Increased tree cover is linked to fewer instances of respiratory disease due to improved air quality and fewer heat-related deaths thanks to the cooling effect of tree canopies. A view of trees has even been shown to reduce recovery times.

Summary

By incorporating the NHS Forest into LNRS, councils can drive significant improvements in local biodiversity, support sustainable healthcare and enhance the wellbeing of their communities. This partnership not only aligns with national environmental goals but also fosters a greener, healthier future for all.