

NHS Forest to plant 150,000 trees

Wednesday 2 August, 2023

The NHS Forest project, led by the Centre for Sustainable Healthcare, is set to grow as it prepares to plant an impressive 150,000 additional trees on NHS sites. Thanks to the generous support from the Nature for Climate Fund managed by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), these trees will be supplied for free to NHS locations across England from October 2023 to March 2025. The project will also benefit from oversight by the Forestry Commission.

The NHS Forest aims to create around an extra 94 hectares of vital tree coverage. This adds to the 100,000 trees planted since the project launched in 2009. The NHS Forest's efforts align with the UK Government's climate strategy, which commits to the planting of new woodlands with a target of 30,000 hectares per year of woodland creation by 2025.

From biodiversity to air pollution, trees provide remarkable benefits to both people and wildlife. Planting trees on healthcare sites creates better places to live and work. Trees provide privacy and seclusion for staff and patients, help to cool buildings in hot summers, provide cleaner air, create habitats for native wildlife and store carbon. Trees also play a vital role in saving lives and valuable NHS resources by improving air quality and improving population health. It is estimated that the total cost to the NHS and social care system of caring for people affected by air pollutants between 2017 and 2025 will reach £1.6 billion. By planting trees and woodlands, the NHS estate can play a key role in disease prevention.

Defra Forestry Minister, Trudy Harrison said: "We are proud to be supporting the planting of 150,000 trees at NHS sites across England through our Nature for Climate Fund, which will increase access to nature within our communities.

"These new trees will help make the NHS estate be a greener and healthier place for staff and patients alike, as well as helping moderate temperatures, reduce air pollution and reduce the risk of surface water flooding."

Dr Miriam Dobson, Project and Evidence Lead for Trees and Woodlands at the Centre for Sustainable Healthcare, explained more: "We're excited to start on this ambitious project to plant an additional 150,000 trees on NHS sites. Trees and woodlands are a crucial tool in helping to improve our environment. We urgently need to maintain, develop and connect trees and woodlands, particularly in areas with the greatest health inequalities. The NHS estate is a critical asset in achieving this vision. By focusing our efforts on strategic planting, we can maximise this positive impact.

"The NHS Forest project supports sites not just with free trees, but also important expert advice on where to plant trees, which trees to plant and how to maintain them. This is a key part of the process. We want to see these trees survive and thrive and provide the greatest benefit to the communities around them."

The impact of green spaces on staff wellbeing is also important. NHS staff sickness rates are increasing which is leading to more money being spent on emergency staff cover. Access to green space can help mitigate this. Recent research published by Business in the Community found that employees with a view of nature take 23% less sick leave.

The NHS Forest project has already made a positive, genuine difference to sites across the UK. Ginnie Abubakar, Cancer Support and Information Services Manager at Mount Vernon Cancer Centre, shared her experience: "Since we started working with the NHS Forest project, there has been fantastic engagement on site. We've seen patients walking through our woodland walkway, taking time to sit and look at the environment and that's been amazing. I've also had more staff than ever before suggesting meeting outside which has had a great effect on staff wellbeing and morale. Our hope is to get everyone involved in creating a greener future and making a positive impact on the wellbeing of our communities."

NHS sites are invited to join the NHS Forest project and register to receive free trees. Visit their website at <https://nhsforest.org/> to get started.

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- The Centre for Sustainable Healthcare (CSH) inspires and empowers people to transform healthcare for a sustainable future. Collaborating with partners both within and outside the healthcare sector, CSH engages professionals, patients and the wider community in understanding the connections between health and the environment, while reducing healthcare's resource footprint. For more information see <https://sustainablehealthcare.org.uk>
- The NHS Forest is a network of healthcare sites working to transform their green space to realise its full potential for health, wellbeing and biodiversity, and to encourage engagement with nature. The initiative is run by the Centre for Sustainable Healthcare, an independent UK charity, as part of its Green Space for Health Programme. For more information visit: <https://nhsforest.org/>
- For more information on the cost of air pollution to the NHS:
- For more information on the woodland creation targets:
- For more information on green space and employee wellbeing:
- For information on NHS staff sickness rates:
<https://www.nuffieldtrust.org.uk/resource/all-is-not-well-sickness-absence-in-the-nhs-in-england>
- For information on why green spaces are important for the NHS:
<https://nhsforest.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Space-to-Breathe-Full-Report-.pdf>

For media enquiries relating to CSH, the Green Space for Health Programme, and the NHS Forest, please contact una.devlin@sustainablehealthcare.org.uk

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