A new Northern Forest
The Woodland Trust’s Doug Edmondson has laid foundations here beside the Pennine Way – a landscape denuded by sheep, but which he’s no stranger to urban invasions. His babies. There are 20,000 young saplings here, tickling into burgeoning woodland – 1,000 acres of mud and marsh – the new Northern Forest. The idea is a bold one: to plant trees in the ground across the north of England, latterly for the Woodland Trust’s biggest ever tree-planting adventure, the new Northern Forest. The idea is to add 50 million trees across the industrial north by 2043, and we think it will cost £500 million. The goal is revolutionary: to turn streets, fields and hills green all the way along the M62 corridor, transforming life for people and wildlife in Liverpool, Manchester, Sheffield, Leeds and Hull. And with no less than Theresa May giving her personal backing to the project, we’re all system go. That’s why we need a sea change: something to really shake it up.

The bookish trees of Doug’s work here beside the Pennine Way is sowing the seeds of exactly that. Over the last three years, his work alongside Moors for the Future has transformed 1,000 acres of mud and marsh into burgeoning woodland – and now that scheme will be a template for the Trust’s biggest ever tree-planting adventure, the new Northern Forest. The idea is to add 50 million trees across the industrial north by 2043, and we think it will cost £500 million. The goal is revolutionary: to turn streets, fields and hills green all the way along the M62 corridor, transforming life for people and wildlife in Liverpool, Manchester, Sheffield, Leeds and Hull. And with no less than Theresa May giving her personal backing to the project, we’re all system go. That’s why we need a sea change: something to really shake it up.

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How the Northern Forest will take root

The natural health service, which has seen 1,000 prescription? That's the startling idea behind the £10 billion, says project boss Clare Connor-Walton. The next phase will develop five off-the-shelf ‘green gym’ groups, and just meditating in the forest since 2015.

“We've a 21-strong consortium backing this, and just meditating in the forest since 2015. Natural Health Service, which has seen 1,000 prescription? That's the startling idea behind the £10 billion, says project boss Clare Connor-Walton. The next phase will develop five off-the-shelf ‘green gym’ groups, and just meditating in the forest since 2015.

Some folk assume barren moorland is the perfect place for active health. So why not offer nature on the high street? That's the startling idea behind the £10 billion, says project boss Clare Connor-Walton. The next phase will develop five off-the-shelf ‘green gym’ groups, and just meditating in the forest since 2015.

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The forest blueprint suggests 10% of our 50 million saplings should be sunk into freshly acquired land. Planting the rest will require enough landowners to take trees to their breast: for sustainable timber or renewable energy perhaps, for outdoor learning or outward bound.

Mr Gove is talking about a green Brexit," Simon adds, "so maybe farmers will get to swap their well-earned grants for payments that deliver clean water, clean air and recreation.”

Reformed subsidies won’t provide the full half-billion pound the forest needs however, and Paul Nolan’s prospectus also floats some pioneering ideas for funding streams, such as new ‘nature bonds’ that encourage corporate backers to support a more sustainable ecosystem.

Big business is pricking up its ears. A major insurer is talking to us about the potential, aware that hills full of flood-sapping trees could mean lower claims in the long run. Sawmills and biomass firms are eying the likely timber value from miles of well-managed new woods. And Yorkshire Water, a big beast in these parts, has already pledged to plant a million trees under the Northern Forest umbrella.

That’s where our man Doug Edmondson comes back in. Doug has been partnering with White Rose Forest and the National Trust to turn the uplands into oakwoods, and says those 20,000 saplings above Marsden Mill are a drop in the ocean of what could soon spring up on the Pennine hills.

“Yorkshire Water has agreed to let us survey its entire estate – that’s 15 river catchments and 700 sq km of ground. It makes total sense, because if you had to design a clean-air machine which also reduces flood risk, you’d pretty much invent a tree. If we can find the cash to make it happen, the Northern Forest starts here.”

If you would like to get involved in delivering the Northern Forest – whether as a financial supporter, landowner, partner, or in any other way – please email enquiries@woodlandtrust.org.uk

The idea of a new Northern Forest is magical, its breadth of ambition inspirational. The chance to link cities to the countryside and create woods growing usable timber while providing homes for nature and places for people to play must be grasped.”

Sir Harry Studholme, Chairman, Forestry Commission

We love the Northern Forest

It is vital that we leave our planet in a better state than we found it, with cleaner air, stronger protections for animal welfare and green spaces for everyone to enjoy. That’s why we are supporting the creation of this new Northern Forest.”

Theresa May, Prime Minister

The Northern Forest chimes brilliantly with our work in Leeds: we’re planning trees and green infrastructure into every new development here. We’d like to be hands-on with making it happen, sharing best practice across the north.”

Judith Blake, Leader, Leeds City Council

Trees provide a dizzying array of benefits, and I’m right behind creating a Northern Forest with a range of broadleaf and conifer, so we can support new jobs and trim the nation’s reliance on wood imports.”

Stuart Goodall, Chief Executive, Confederation of Forest Industries

Manchester City of Trees will lead on delivering the Northern Forest in our patch, planting three million saplings – one for every citizen here. It’s a superb idea that will help us become the UK’s greenest city-region.”

Andy Burnham, Mayor of Greater Manchester