



About the Forest of Marston Vale

The creation of the Forest of Marston Vale offers a blueprint for environmentally led social and economic regeneration; planting trees and transforming landscapes; attracting inward investment and encouraging community participation; creating a home for wildlife and delivering biodiversity; providing opportunities for leisure and employment; engendering a sense of place and a pride in those who live and work within the Forest.

The Forest of Marston Vale is a forest in the making; covering an area of 61 square miles between Bedford and Milton Keynes, it's one of England's Community Forests which together form the country's largest environmental regeneration initiative.

Working with local communities and partners, the Forest vision is to deliver environmental regeneration through increasing tree cover to 30%, transforming perceptions of the once-degraded area to stimulate social and economic regeneration, whilst providing major landscape, recreation, biodiversity, and quality of life benefits.

- In 1991, the Government designated 61 square miles between Bedford and Milton Keynes as one of 12 Community Forests across England, an ambitious new national programme, and the vision of creating the Forest of Marston Vale was born. To drive that vision forward, the **Forest of Marston Vale Trust** was created by the founding partnership of the Local Authorities, Natural England, the Forestry Commission and local industry. As an independent charity, the Trust's role has been, and remains, to lead on creating the Forest of Marston Vale.
- Previously home to the London Brick Company, the Marston Vale landscape was once dominated by over 100 brick chimneys. The industry's decline left a legacy of a despoiled landscape littered with abandoned clay pits and major landfill sites – an area environmentally impoverished. At the time of being designated, the Forest area had just 3.6% tree cover, compared to nearer 10% for England at that time and an average of around 35% across Europe.
- A core target for creating the Forest is increasing tree cover to 30% – a ten-fold increase from the starting position in the early 1990's – as a means to transform the social, economic and environmental prospects of the area. The Forest of Marston Vale Trust, working with local communities, businesses and partners, has already increased tree cover to over 15% – a truly impressive achievement.
- The creation of the Forest is rooted in positively exploiting the incredible power and versatility of trees and woodlands. Trees make life better for all of us – for people, for wildlife, for the planet. They help to cool and clean our air, lock up carbon, reduce flooding, provide sustainable raw materials, and are our best hope in combatting the climate crisis. They create rich spaces where people can connect with nature, improve their physical health and boost their mental wellbeing. Trees and woodlands give us all this, and much more, making them one of the most beneficial land uses.
- Proactively engaging local communities and stakeholders is central to the Trust's approach to creating the Forest – we couldn't have achieved all we have without their support. Local volunteers also play a crucial role – so much so that in 2015 the Forest of Marston Vale Volunteers won the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service. In 2019/20 volunteers donated over 10,000 hours of their time to support a broad range of activities essential to the Trust's success.
- Having been an enthusiastic partner in delivering the 3-year, DEFRA-funded, *Trees for Learning* project, the Trust has recently begun a new planting initiative with local schools as part of our *Trees for Communities*



programme. The project involves children planting trees and connecting with nature; the first steps in inspiring a new generation to love and understand the natural world.

- Two plus decades spent planting millions of trees hasn't only been about transforming the landscape, it's also boosted the local economy, growing a new sense of place and helping set the scene for future growth and prosperity. Between 1995 and 2015, £22m of inward investment was attracted to create the Forest.
- The emerging Forest landscape is already providing annual benefits worth over £12.8m – meaning that every £1 invested in creating the Forest of Marston Vale so far has generated an estimated £11 of social, economic and environmental benefits. That's an incredible return on investment for the local area – and we're only at the halfway point in creating the Forest, so the potential value is even greater.
- The Trust has a strong history of forging mutually rewarding partnerships with local businesses. As companies become more conscious than ever of their environmental impact, an increasing number are discovering the opportunities working with the Trust can bring, and how supporting the Forest can directly benefit their own environmental ambitions. These relationships are further enhanced by the ability deliver training and events at the Forest Centre, a social enterprise located in the Millennium Country Park, which covenants all profits to the Forest of Marston Vale Trust.
- In 2019, the Forest of Marston Vale became only the fourth forest in the UK to be accredited to The Queen's Commonwealth Canopy, a unique network of forest conservation initiatives, which involves all 53 countries of the Commonwealth.
- In 2020, *Trees for Climate*, a new 5-year tree planting programme to be delivered nationally by England's Community Forests was conceived and launched. Building on Community Forests' impressive history of delivering tree planting and woodlands in and around towns and cities – where they provide the greatest benefits to people – the programme aims to plant over 6,000 hectares and is supported by Defra as part of delivering the Government's ambitious targets for increasing tree cover.

The Forest of Marston Vale began as part of a pioneering and ambitious national programme to create Community Forests. Much has changed since that time and yet the core proposition of environmentally led regeneration has remained extremely relevant and contemporary over time.

The Government's 25-year Environment Plan promotes investing in natural capital, supports Community Forests and sets ambitious targets for tree planting, whilst the National Planning Policy Framework recognises the importance of Community Forests in planning decisions. All of this provides a positive context to help accelerate the next phase of the Forest's creation. Moving forwards there are huge opportunities, but there will continue to be challenges to overcome.

The proposals for a growth corridor along the Oxford-Cambridge Arc demonstrate the area's potential as a strategic development corridor and are the latest example of the development pressure that's existed throughout the Forest's existence. The agreed, long-term vision for creating the Forest provides a strategic framework for influencing whatever change may come. Creating the Forest is about placemaking; it's about creating a new 'sense of place' and an opportunity to demonstrate how environmental regeneration can redefine an area and transform its prospects.

The Forest of Marston Vale is already taking shape – physically, socially and economically – providing benefits that are fuelling the regeneration of the area. By working in partnership across the public, private and charitable sectors, incredible things have already been achieved. Now we need to collaborate on this next phase of the Forest's growth, pushing further forward on creating the Forest landscape, and demonstrating how much more benefit can be achieved by creating the Forest as a legacy for future generations.

Planting trees and using woodlands to make life better for people and wildlife in the Marston Vale



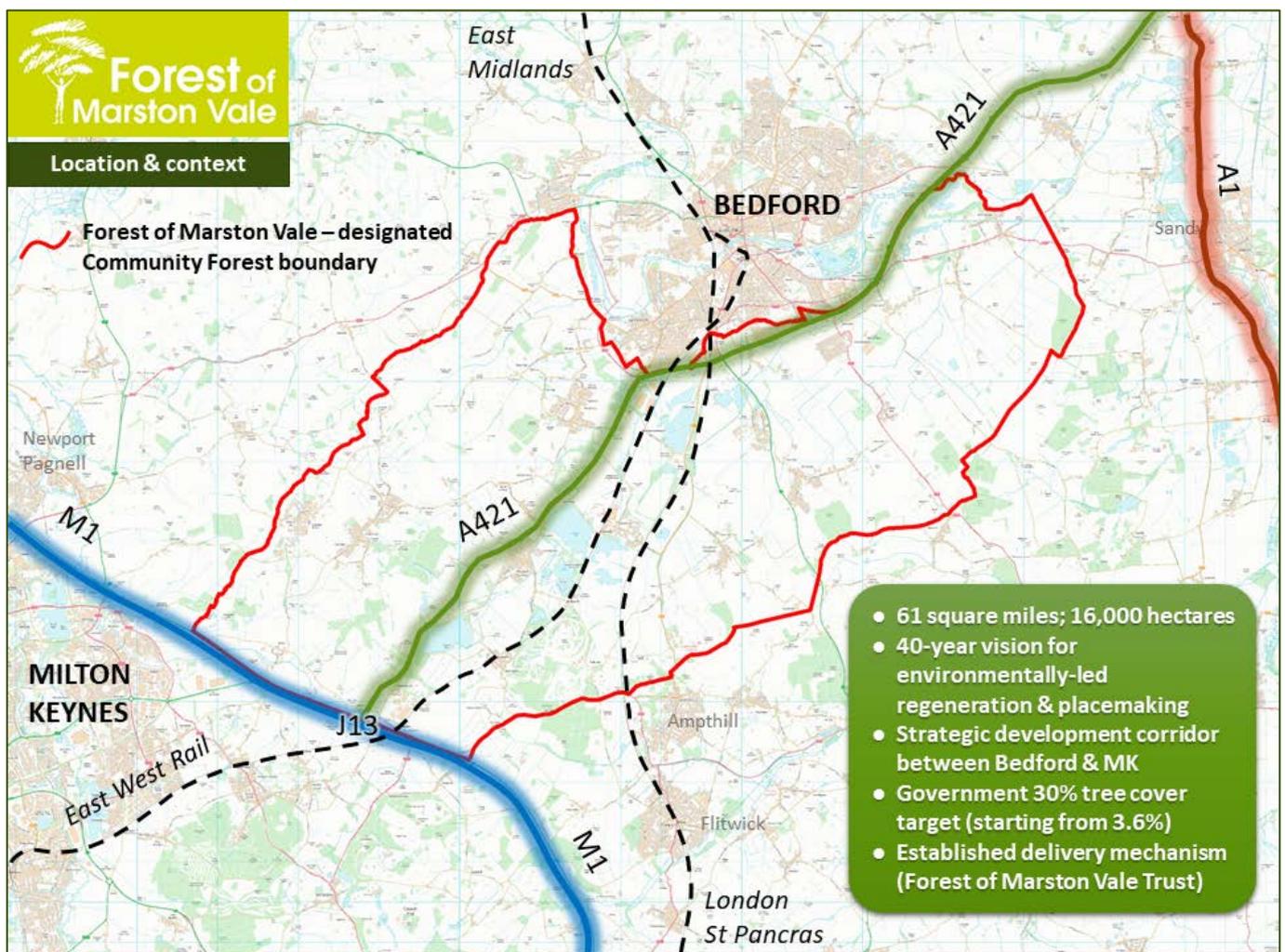
The Forest Centre & Millennium Country Park

The Trust's 'Forest Team' is based at the Forest Centre & Millennium Country Park.

The Millennium Country Park is the flagship site in the Forest of Marston Vale, covering 556 acres and comprising a mosaic of woodland, wetland, grassland and open water, it includes large areas of new reedbed (a national priority habitat) as well as 7.5 miles of multi-user recreational access routes. The site was first awarded the coveted Green Flag award in 2007, acknowledging it as one of the best green spaces in the country, and it has proudly retained this status ever since. The Park is also home to the Forest Centre, a purpose-built visitor centre and conferencing facility, and the operational headquarters of the Forest of Marston Vale Trust.

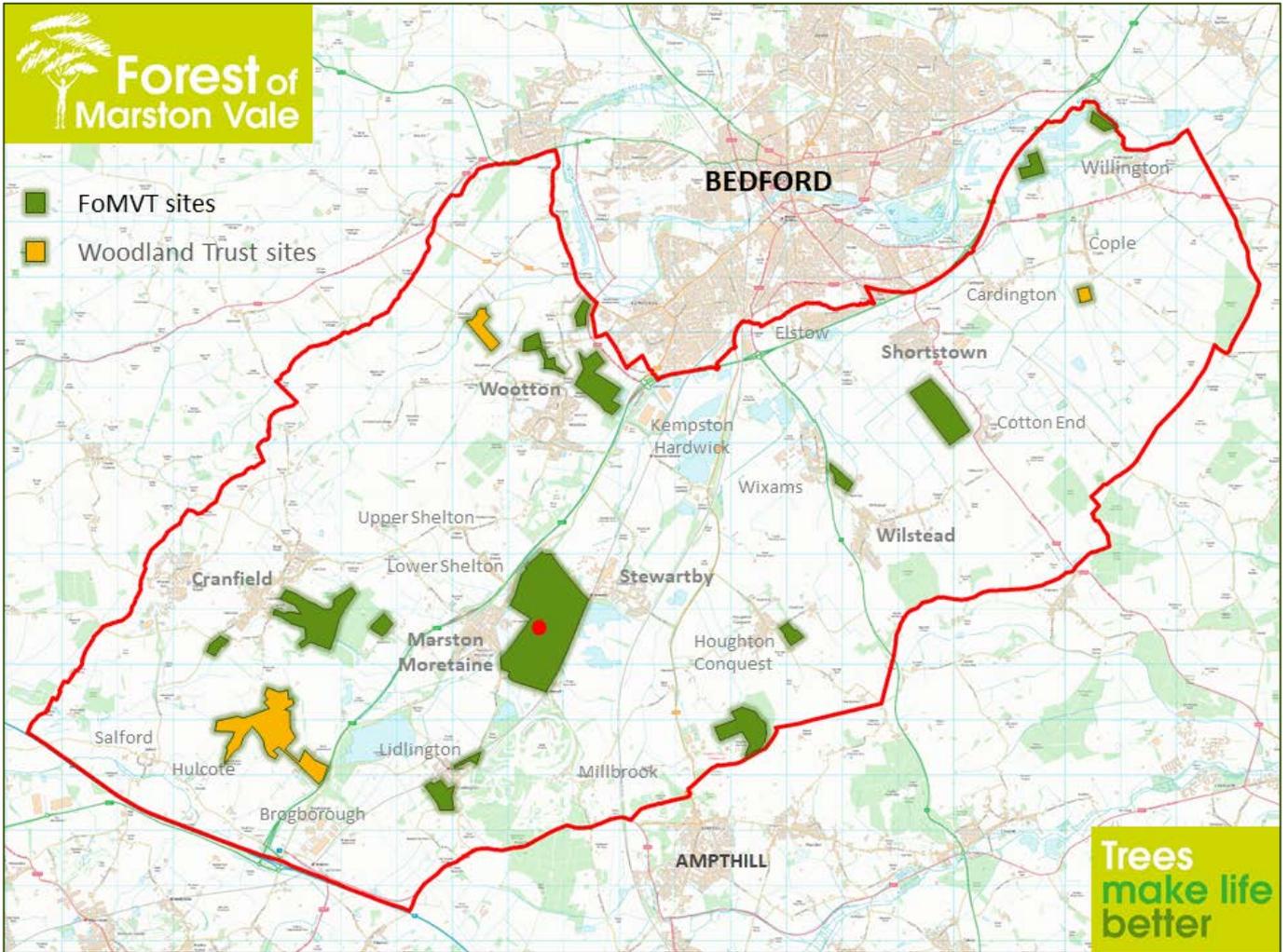
The site combines three main elements; creating habitats where wildlife can flourish, providing a venue for both passive and active recreational activities, and the operation of the Forest Centre as a social enterprise to generate funds for the Trust to support its charitable work to create the Forest of Marston Vale.

Location of the Forest of Marston Vale





Forest area (incl. Forest of Marston Vale Trust land ownership)



May 2021



A few examples of past projects

Rectory Wood, Cranfield

Seventy hectares (174 acres) of arable farmland acquired by the Trust in 2003. A diverse funding package of c.£450,000 was assembled in <6 months to enable purchase. Cranfield Parish Council's support of £10,000 proved pivotal as a powerful lever with national funders in unlocking remaining funds. It buffers the ancient semi-natural woodland of Marston Thrift, a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), by absorbing potentially damaging recreational pressure from expanding local communities, helping to protect it and also providing additional adjacent habitat for wildlife to colonise.

- Overall project cost of c.£1.6m and planted in five phases over 10 years between winter 2004 and winter 2014;
- Over 100,000 native trees and shrubs planted, almost all grown from locally collected seed; in excess of 3,500 people involved in tree plantings events – schools, companies, local groups & the public;
- Already receives c.50,000 visits per annum (recorded);
- Encompasses the NCN Route 51 cycleway, linking it to the Forest Centre;
- Accommodates the sustainable drainage solution (SuDS) for the Home Farm residential development site – a functional greenspace, as well as being attractive to people and wildlife;
- Completes and links up a potential c.500ha area of natural greenspace in mixed ownership, to which Rectory Wood is the gateway – providing the last piece of the jigsaw, so-to-speak;

Key grant funders include WREN, Forestry Commission, Bedfordshire County Council, ODPM/DCLG, BIFFA, Woodland Trust, Heritage Lottery Fund, & English Nature/Countryside Agency/Natural England;

Key tree sponsors include Timberland (26,100 trees), Blue Chip (5,000 trees), Ricoh (4,000 trees), Pearce Recycling (3,400 trees), HSBC (2,000 trees), Cawleys (2,000 trees), & IKEA Milton Keynes;

Bedford's Green Gateway, Kempston Rural

A strategic 'green wedge' of new woodlands and greenspace between Wootton and Kempston, assembled through targeted land acquisition by the Trust. It has expanded from an initial 8 hectares (20 acres) in 2001 to a cluster of sites totalling nearly 80 hectares (200 acres) by 2016. Collectively these sites provide a green buffer between the expanding urban fringe and the expanding village of Wootton, enhancing the setting for both, and providing significant new green infrastructure for the existing and new residents of both communities to enjoy.

- Overall project cost of c.£3.2m, of which £2.9m secured;
- >100,000 native trees and shrubs planted across 7 sites
- >2,500 people involved in tree plantings events – schools, companies, local communities & general public;
- Funding mix dominated by a balance between developer contributions (£106) and Growth Area Funding, plus grants and corporates;
- Land acquisition, purchasing via off-market deals with known local landowners, was the key mechanism;
- Accommodates alignment of final off-road section of NCN Route 51 cycleway;
- Accommodates proposed alignment of B&MK Waterway Park, enhancing the setting for this new infrastructure;

Key funding sources include Developer contributions (£106), ODPM/DCLG, Bedford Borough Council, Forestry Commission, WREN, & Woodland Trust;

Key tree sponsors include Timberland (18,500 trees), Blue Chip (15,000 trees), HSBC (14,000 trees), Berkeley Homes (13,000 trees – carbon offset), Barclays (6,000 trees), Ricoh (4,000 trees), & Pearce Recycling (1,000 trees);



Shocott Spring, Eastcotts

Some 52 hectares (126 acres) of arable farmland between Shortstown and Cotton End, acquired by the Trust in 2005. Shocott Spring was planted in three phases – 2005/6 (25ha), 2007/8 (14ha) & 2010/11 (13ha) – with the woodland creation process used to engage the neighbouring communities to aid community cohesion and increase local pride. The Trust deliberately targeted Eastcotts parish for providing major new greenspace as it had been noted as having one of the lowest amounts of greenspace per capita in the East of England.

- Overall project cost of c.£1.5m, of which £1.4m secured;
- >80,000 trees and shrubs planted;
- Around 1,500 people actively involved in creating the new woodland, with some 1,400 local households directly consulted – consultation process praised by Audit Commission;
- Mixed woodland, with areas of both broadleaf and coniferous tree species, based on community consultation feedback;
- Accommodates the one millionth new tree to be planted in creating the Forest of Marston Vale;
- Clear timber production objective for areas of the new woodland (e.g. softwood and high-quality hardwood);
- Used as one of several sites nationally for developing the Government's new Woodland Carbon Code as the national quality standard for those looking to invest in woodland creation for carbon sequestration;
- New 'distance trail' added to encourage recreational use of the site;

Key funding sources include, ODPM/DCLG, Forestry Commission, WREN, BIFFA, Veolia, Developer contributions (£106), Bedford Borough Council, & Lottery (People's Millions);

Key tree sponsors include Timberland (23,000 trees), HSBC (10,000 trees), Blue Chip (14,000 trees), Trust Insurance (3,000 trees), & Carbon Neutral Company (9,000 trees – carbon offset);

Folly & Granary Woods, Lidlington

A pair of smaller sites either side of Lidlington village, 13 hectares (33 acres) and 3 hectares (7.5 acres) respectively. Folly Wood lies to the south of Lidlington, running from the top to the bottom of the slope of the Greensand Ridge, whilst Granary Wood lies north of a recent development (a 13% expansion of the community) on the northern edge of the village. Together they 'book end' the village with accessible greenspace.

- The projects have a combined overall cost of c.£625,000, of which c.£575,000 has been secured;
- >20,000 trees and shrubs planted in total;
- Around 1,250 people actively involved in total;
- Granary Wood was planted in 2006/7 and Folly Wood in 2011/12;
- Folly Wood designed to prioritise biodiversity, landscape and amenity objectives, with areas left unplanted to allow semi-acidic grassland and heathland to develop over time;
- Granary Wood was funded largely by the adjacent development and delivered by the Trust via a 30-year lease as part of the £106 obligation on David Wilson Homes;
- Folly Wood was acquired by the Trust in just 3 weeks in March 2007 in response to a short-term funding opportunity;
- The panoramic views from the top of Folly Wood provide an rare vista across the changing landscape of the Marston Vale;

Key funding sources include, ODPM/DCLG, Forestry Commission, Center Parcs, WREN, Developer contributions (£106), Central Bedfordshire Council, & Woodland Trust;

Key tree sponsors include Blue Chip (15,000 trees), General Electric (500 trees), Neville Funeral Service (350 trees), & Guy Salmon Jaguar (350 trees);



Conquest Wood, Houghton Conquest

Eight hectares (20 acres) of arable farmland bought by the Trust in March 2004 and converted to a community woodland in 2004/5. Conquest Wood lies on the edge of Houghton Conquest, closely linked to one of the village's recreation areas, and compliments existing nearby woodlands. The new woodland was designed with input from the local community and lower school, and is now used by the school.

- Overall project cost of c.£315,000, all of which has been secured;
- >14,000 native trees and shrubs planted;
- Around 500 people actively involved in creating the new woodland;
- Deliberately small-scale community approach to woodland creation, reflecting the local scale of the project;
- New entrance and access links direct into the village provided in c.2008;

Key funding sources include, ODPM/DCLG, Forestry Commission, Developer contributions (\$106), Houghton Conquest Parish Council;

Forest Centre & Millennium Country Park, Marston Moretaine

The Millennium Country Park is the flagship site in the Forest of Marston Vale, covering 225 hectares and comprising a mosaic of woodland, wetland, grassland and open water. It includes large areas of new reedbed, (a national priority habitat), as well as 12 km of multi-user recreational access routes. The Park also accommodates the Forest Centre, a purpose-built visitor centre and conferencing facility which serves as the operational headquarters for the Trust. The site was first awarded the coveted Green Flag award in 2007, acknowledging it as one of the best green spaces in the country, and it has proudly retained this status ever since.

- A £6m project overall, harnessing Millennium Commission lottery funding and major landfill tax funds;
- Owned and operated by the Trust as a charity and social enterprise, at no cost to local taxpayers;
- Purpose-built site combines three main elements; creating habitats where wildlife can flourish, providing a venue for both passive and active recreational activities, and the operation of the Forest Centre as a visitor centre and conferencing venue;
- Completed and opened in early 2000, the Forest Centre and Millennium Country Park have become a premier 'countryside' attraction, receiving over 150,000 visits to the Forest Centre and around 450,000 visits to the wider Millennium Country Park annually;
- The Park includes 8km of multi-user routes for cyclists and pedestrians plus a 4km dedicated horse trail for equestrians. It includes a Wetlands Nature Reserve providing areas of reedbed, native woodland, hay meadow and grazed pastures, which have already been visited by the original three target species for the project – bittern, marsh harrier and bearded tits – and continues to thrive with increasing biodiversity value year on year;
- A key function of the Forest Centre is to generate revenue for the charity to not only provide for the management of the surrounding Millennium Country Park, but also contribute to the wider creation of the Forest of Marston Vale;
- The success of the Forest Centre demonstrates how intelligent use of a major capital investment can be used to create a successful business and leisure facility that generates sufficient revenue to ensure high quality greenspace provision on a financially sustainable and independent basis;