

Wider application

Low cost urban forestry can improve the appearance of vacant land within two to three growing seasons. There are tens of thousands of hectares of land suitable for temporary treatment across the UK and, whilst much of the resulting young woodland may need to be sacrificed when development eventually takes place, there is usually scope for retaining some of the planting as a feature of any regeneration scheme.

Further information

National Urban Forestry Unit

This leaflet is one of a series produced by the National Urban Forestry Unit. NUFU is a charitable trust which provides a national focus for the exchange of information and good practice in urban forestry. If you would like further information on other case studies, or if you have examples of good practice to share, please contact:

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Middlesbrough REACT

Middlesbrough REACT has been established through a partnership comprising Groundwork South Tees, The Tees Forest, Middlesbrough Council and the Countryside Agency. It brings community forestry into the heart of Middlesbrough, demonstrating that trees, woodlands and greenspace can add value to existing urban regeneration initiatives.

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Further reading

Castella (2001) *The Tees Corridor Environmental Strategy*

Entec UK Ltd (2004) *REACT 2002/2003 Summary Achievements*. The Countryside Agency

The Countryside Agency and Groundwork (2004) *Unlocking the potential of the rural urban fringe*

Tees Valley Partnership (2003) *Tees Valley Vision*

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Urban Forestry in Practice

Interim greening of a vacant development site



CASE STUDY 50

Interim greening of a vacant development site

Introduction

The appearance of vacant development land can be significantly improved by temporary tree planting. Increased tree cover provides valuable screening and helps to transform derelict, underused and neglected land into a community asset. In conjunction with other regeneration activities this can help to create an attractive and prosperous place in which people want to live, work and invest.

Specific example

Project name and location

TEESSIDE RETAIL PARK, MIDDLESBROUGH, UK

Grid reference: NZ 469 187

Project partners

- Middlesbrough *REACT* (Regeneration through Environmental ACTION): a partnership consisting of The Tees Forest, The Countryside Agency, Groundwork South Tees & Middlesbrough Council
- The British Land Company PLC
- Tees Valley Partnership

Background

In 2002 the Countryside Agency launched seven national pilot programmes to explore ways in which the community forestry approach to environmental enhancement could be integrated into existing area-based regeneration initiatives. The Middlesbrough *REACT* partnership brings together expertise and good practice in community forestry, geographical information systems (GIS), planning, community development, life-long learning, landscape architecture and training for the unemployed.

Funding for this project was secured through the *Single Programme* from One North East, the Regional Development Agency. This programme aims to implement the Tees Valley vision of “a competitive and sustainable economy, and a confident, vibrant society along with a liveable and sustainable environment”.

Involving local opinion leaders helped to raise the profile of the temporary planting initiative



Project objectives

- To utilise tree and woodland planting as an interim use of development land to enhance environmental quality and improve people's perception of the area
- To create training opportunities for the long-term unemployed
- To integrate community forestry with an existing regeneration programme

Site description

Teesside Park was acquired by British Land in 1992 and extended in 1998, to provide 31,500 m² (3.15 ha) of retail and leisure space on a site covering 19 ha. Middlesbrough *REACT* used geographical information systems (GIS) to overlay accurate information regarding land use, transport corridors, area based initiatives (ABIs), tree cover, landfill sites and deprivation indices. This information helped to define the interim greening project area, target resources, identify opportunities for tree planting, produce site maps and plans and develop a convincing funding bid.

Planting at the margins of the site occupies relatively little land and increases the prospect of temporary planting being integrated with the eventual development



A 1.1 ha vacant development site was identified as being suitable for temporary tree planting. This former playing field, bounded by busy roads and fenced against public access, was surveyed for its existing habitats, soil composition and the presence of underground services. A planting plan was then produced featuring mainly pioneer tree and shrub species. There were no immediate proposals for built development, but a written agreement was made between Middlesbrough Council and the landowner, British Land Company PLC, to ensure that temporary greening would not hinder future planning applications submitted by the company. It was decided to confine the planting to belts around the perimeter rather than greening the whole site.

Project implementation

After a period of consultation and review, the project was implemented by Tees Forest trainees: local unemployed people working towards City and Guilds qualifications and learning skills in horticulture.

The site was rotovated and container-grown trees and shrubs, stakes and other planting materials were sourced locally to reduce transport costs. The planting scheme was designed to be consistent with the National Vegetation Classification (NVC) habitat system and consisted of native species well suited to local site conditions. These included hawthorn, blackthorn, hazel, common alder, crack and goat willows.

A maintenance schedule was prepared to ensure successful tree establishment through effective weed control, regular tree health inspections and the replacement of dead trees.

Results

- Training for 18 long-term unemployed trainees in tree establishment and ongoing maintenance
- 800 native trees planted
- A shift in the environmental image of Teesside Park
- An improvement to the environmental image of the Tees Corridor
- Planning for positive use of vacant land by developers and local planning authorities