



A Greener Wirral

Wirral Tree, Hedgerow and Woodland Strategy 2020-2030



Foreword



I am very proud to unveil Wirral's very first Tree Strategy, a comprehensive plan developed in consultation with residents and a range of stakeholders. Almost everyone agrees that planting more and more trees can only be a good thing for the environment and for people's health and wellbeing. Our commitment to planting is a big part of what we're doing as a council and as a borough in response to the climate emergency, but this strategy is about much more than just planting trees. It's about investing in expertise, planting the right trees, in the right places; having specialists who will help us to inspect and protect our trees; and working with local groups and you – our residents – to make Wirral greener together.

Councillor Liz Grey,
Cabinet Member Environment and Climate Change, Wirral Council

The Tree Council is delighted to have been part of the development of the Wirral Tree Strategy. The Strategy has been created by a unique partnership between the local authority, Tree Wardens and other community partners, and local and national tree organisations. It sets a model for the development of other Tree Strategies and will be a valuable contribution to thinking about national tree policies. We look forward to working with all the partners in the future, as the Strategy is used to create a tree rich environment for the people and wildlife of the Wirral.

Sarah Lom,
CEO, The Tree Council



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Wirral Council has created a visionary and pragmatic strategy for expanding trees, woodlands and hedgerows. Friends of the Earth strongly supports the ambition to double tree cover through tree planting and natural regeneration, alongside practical initiatives to protect existing trees.

Danny Gross, Trees campaigner, Friends of the Earth



“Climate change and biodiversity loss are the greatest challenges we currently face. Trees must be an essential part of how we tackle them. Planting, protecting and encouraging natural regeneration of trees are all activities which store carbon and restore wildlife habitats. We must prioritise them alongside other major changes to how we live and work”

(The Tree Council)



The Changing Climate



In July 2019 Wirral Borough Council declared a climate emergency.

As a direct result, a number of plans have been specifically developed to reduce the impact of climate change. These include the Cool 2 Climate Strategy for Wirral, Wirral's new Local Plan, its Blue and Green Infrastructure study, pollinator plans, and last but not least the Wirral Tree, Hedgerow and Woodland Strategy for 2020-2030.

Together with local organisations under the umbrella group of Wirral Initiative on Trees (WiT), Wirral Borough Council has developed the Wirral Tree, Hedgerow and Woodland Strategy. The strategy is the first of its kind in the UK to be developed through partnership with a wide range of community groups and has also been shaped by full consultation with the public. Its focus is to preserve and plant enough trees in Wirral to establish healthier and more environmentally sound living conditions for us all. The strategy can be found in full here: wirral.gov.uk/treestrategy

Trees are our natural 'armour' against climate change. They capture carbon dioxide and store it in wood and other growth, removing it from the atmosphere. Hedgerows and woodland provide vital habitats for wildlife. For these reasons, the strategy sets out best practice for managing and increasing Wirral's trees and hedgerows, following the UK Committee on Climate Change recommendations to increase forestry cover.

This summary document outlines our vision to grow Wirral's tree and hedgerow cover and our three-point plan to make it happen. Through public participation – working with our many local groups and you, our residents – we will protect and regenerate what we already have and plant more trees and hedges for a greener, happier, and healthier Wirral.

The Green Solution



Trees, hedgerows, and woodlands are an essential part of nature. This green infrastructure or network of green spaces supports the future health of a wide range of insects, animals, birds and plant life within our environment and improves our quality of life too.

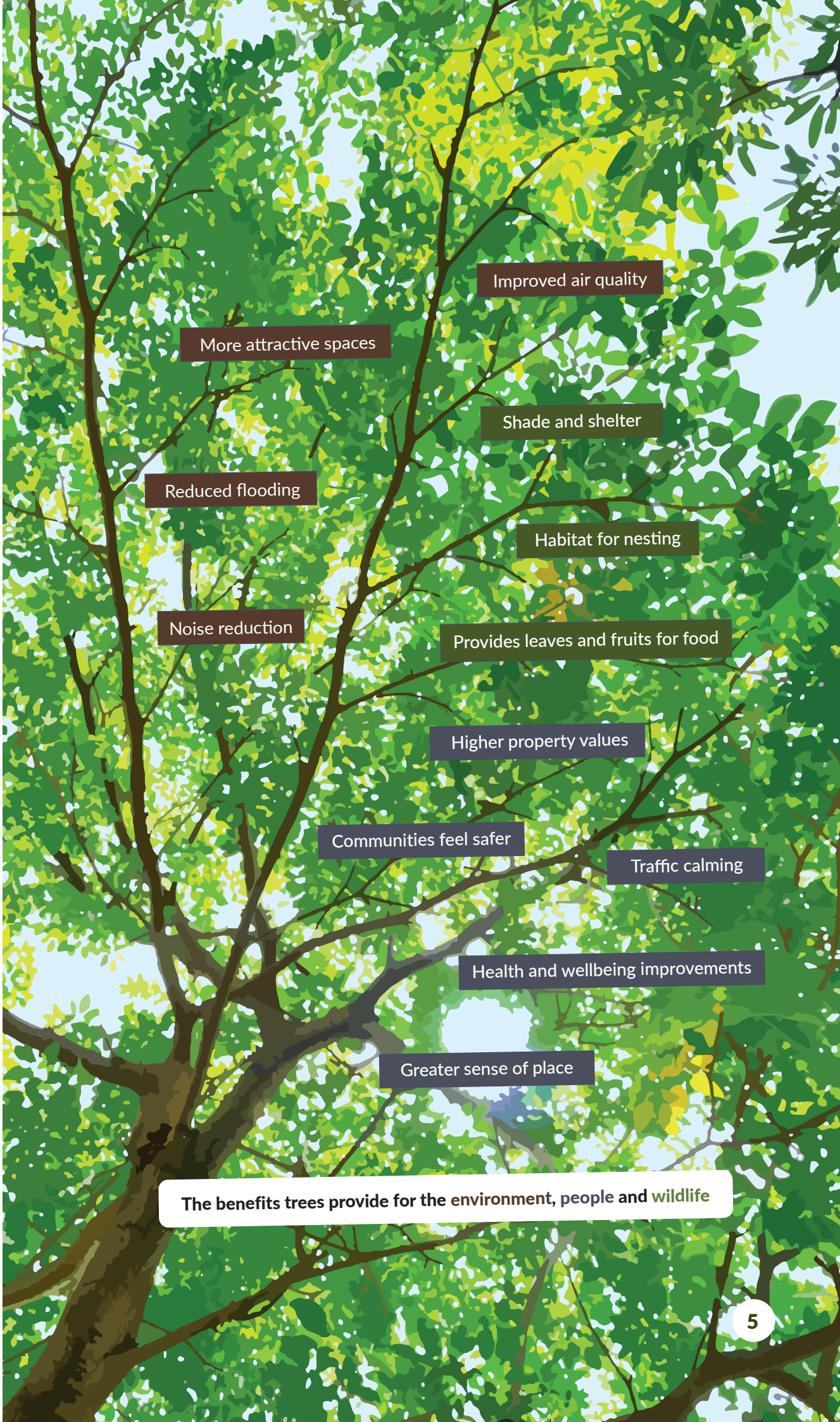
Trees are a cost-effective way to improve the environmental quality of our urban areas, delivering physical, social and economic well-being as well as mitigating climate change. They also improve storm water management, air quality, biodiversity and provide us with a more pleasing place to live.

In urban areas trees have been shown to reduce levels of air pollution and the shade they provide cools city streets. They can also boost people's wellbeing, with research showing that a two-hour dose of nature a week significantly improves health.

Hedgerows are an important but undervalued part of our green infrastructure. They provide a range of benefits for people and act as wildlife corridors – connecting wildlife populations and the large number of animals and pollinating insects they support.

In addition to the challenges posed by a rapidly warming world, the UK is also facing a biodiversity crisis. Biodiversity is the variety and variability of all living things that supplies oxygen, clean air, water, pollination, pest control and other benefits to people and wildlife.

Preserving our existing trees and hedgerows and planting many more climate resilient trees in our urban and rural areas will help us all play our part in tackling climate change, boosting biodiversity, and creating healthier and more pleasant places to live.



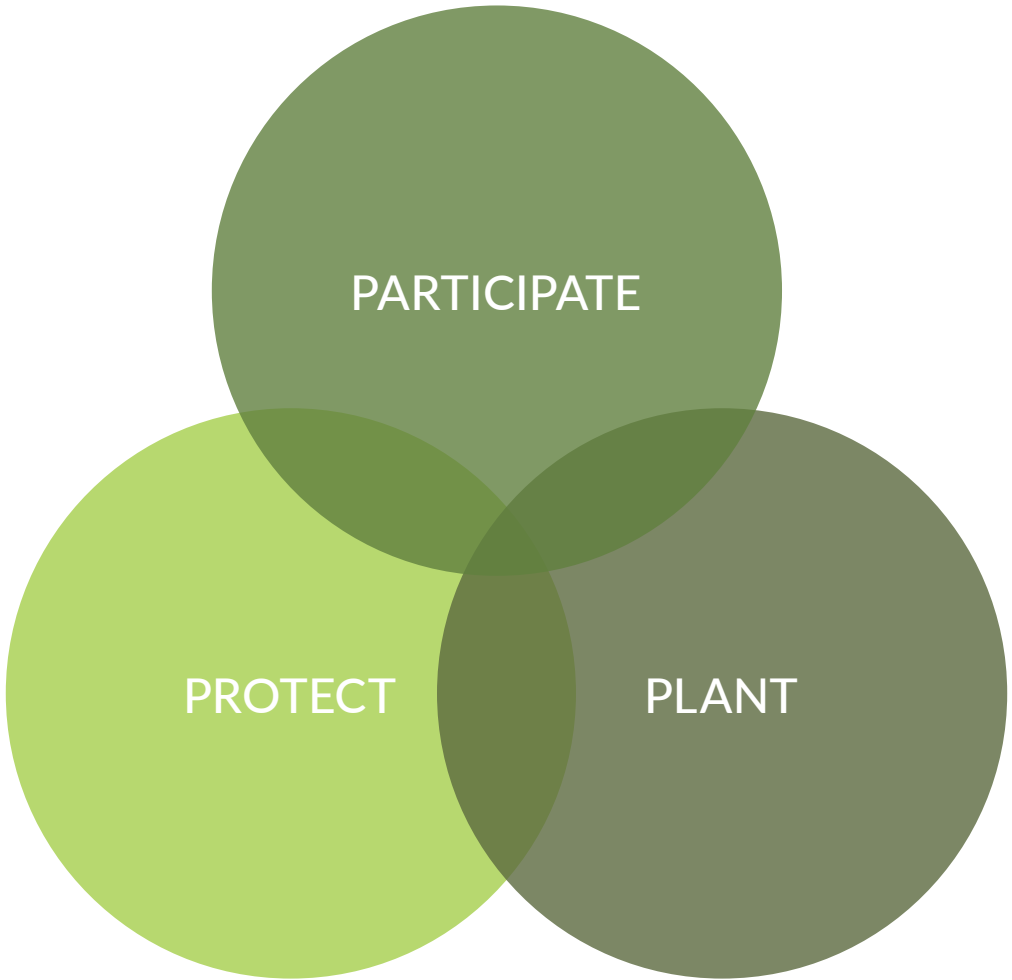
Wirral's Urban Forest Plan



Wirral's Tree, Hedgerow and Woodland Strategy looks at the next ten years but lays the foundations for an ambitious plan spanning the next fifty years and more.

The aim of our strategy is to actively protect and increase Wirral's urban forest – the green infrastructure in our urban environment of parks, gardens, woods, trees in streets, footpaths, green spaces and hedges, that all benefit our environment so significantly. Achieving this requires a plan for how we care for and regenerate our existing stock, where and how we plant new trees and hedges, and how we do this together as a community. Accordingly, our plan centres around participation, protection, and planting.

In committing to plant 210,000 trees over the next decade, we recognise the need for a cross-disciplinary working group of local experts, stakeholder organisations, and council officers and members which will be set up to support with the wider implementation of the strategy and monitor its progress via annual review. Establishing an accurate record of Wirral's existing canopy cover early on will provide an important baseline for measuring this progress. By building strong partnerships and working together, we will achieve our vision for a greener Wirral.



Participate

To encourage the participation of local people and community groups so that we can work together to protect our existing trees, woodlands, and hedges and plant more.



Protect

To protect and care for Wirral's existing trees and restore and maintain hedgerows and woodlands, while also encouraging appropriate natural regeneration.



Plant

To plant at least 21,000 trees annually following the principle of the 'right tree for the right place' and to plant woodlands and hedgerows in rural and urban landscapes.

WIRRAL 2030

Plant over
210,000 trees
in ten years

Increase the
climate benefits
of tree cover

Double Wirral's tree
canopy by the time the
trees are fully grown

Develop our wildlife
corridors by planting and
regenerating trees and hedgerows

Ensure the most
resilient tree population
by "planting the right trees
in the right places"

Work with
communities
to deliver
the vision

Encourage appropriate natural regeneration

Replace the number of trees lost
unavoidably many times over

Establish a clear map
of Wirral's tree stock
and its benefits

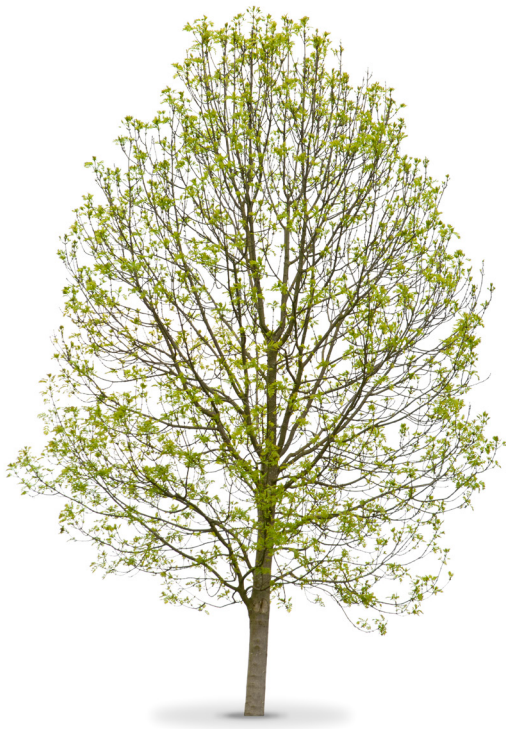


Participate

Trees are key to our sense of place, identity, and pride in local communities. It is essential that local people and groups in our communities are at the heart of what we do.

The Council will →→→

- Ensure that a robust partnership and community engagement programme is designed to fuel the delivery of the strategy. This will enable us to connect with residents and our local groups, both online and via sustainably printed information or face-to-face local meetings.
- Encourage residents to get involved with local tree planting and propagating efforts to reassure you that trees unavoidably lost will be replaced many times over by the new trees being planted.

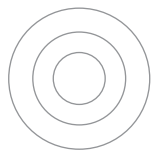


We already have

The Council has had many successes working with schools, children, and families. Through our Eco-Schools we have raised children’s awareness of climate and eco-system related issues, with schools planting over 15,000 trees in the last two years.

What you can do

Your involvement in growing and planting trees, whether it be the council’s planting proposals or those of community or private sector interests, will create a sense of ownership for our new and expanded trees and woodlands. We will also support community efforts to raise money and apply for funds for projects to plant trees, woodlands and hedgerows so that we can expand Wirral’s tree cover together.



Protect

To improve the size and quality of Wirral's urban forest, we need to start by continuing to protect and care for our existing trees and hedges. This includes actively managing our woodland areas and wildlife sites such as Dibbinsdale, The Dungeon, The Beacons and Eastham Country Park which are an irreplaceable part of our history. Ancient woods are home to more threatened species than any other habitat in the UK. Dead and dying trees have many benefits as they provide important habitats for wildlife, can provide a historical record, and can take on sculptural qualities.

The Council will ➤➤➤

- Support a survey of all Wirral's trees to form a single database. This will help us to map out what trees we have, what condition they are in and their ecosystem value, where there are gaps to fill with trees or hedges, and where we need to add variety or new species that will be more resilient to climate change and disease.
- Support a comprehensive review of Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) and conservation areas to reassess historical orders and potentially implement new orders to protect Wirral's trees. We will also review and strengthen enforcement policies to ensure the protection of existing trees, woodlands and hedgerows.
- Assess trees that might be dangerous or pose a risk as part of good management. Sometimes we may need to fell trees if they are in danger of injuring people or if there is a risk that disease would impact other trees, but felling is always our last resort. If we must cut down a tree, we will always plant at least two replacement ones with up to eight planted depending on the size of the tree felled.
- Seek to protect and manage existing hedges and promote 'wild' hedging which is better for nature. Existing urban hedges are often neat, clipped, sterile habitats but more natural 'wild' hedges improve biodiversity.
- Help people to appreciate the value of our trees, woodlands, and hedges by developing information and delivering education campaigns.



We already have

The Council has already established four additional tree officer posts to bring new expertise and ensure joined up approaches to the care and management of our trees, hedgerows, and woodlands.

What you can do

As a member of the public on the ground you are in the best position to spot signs of tree disease, vandalism and other woodland issues in your local areas. You can make a difference and by working with local groups, you will be able to inform and support our strategy and we will be able to provide you with good information on and reasoning for any planned works.



Plant

To increase Wirral’s canopy cover and green infrastructure we will plant over 21,000 new trees annually and plant hedgerows in rural and urban landscapes. By following the principle of the ‘right tree for the right place’, new trees will grow to a large size appropriate to each individual site and we will ensure the most resilient tree population possible.

The Council will ➡➡➡

- Ensure all opportunities are taken to plant new trees and hedgerows to support wildlife and public amenity value and encourage natural regeneration where appropriate. Planting native trees will promote biodiversity and planting a wider range of species will ensure that more trees can withstand pests and disease. We will also need to consider the future suitability of new trees in the context of climate change given their long lifespan.
- Support local tree nurseries to provide tree stock which is climate resilient, free from non-native diseases, and appropriate for Wirral’s environment. This will include stakeholder groups, schools, and volunteers collecting seeds and cuttings of suitable trees and growing them on.
- Identify suitable locations to plant trees on our landholdings and work with partners to identify additional areas such as road verges to be planted up.
- Use the Council’s Tree Risk Assessment Management tool to make key decisions around maintenance and felling, updating management and action plans on an annual basis.
- Respond to Ash Die-Back and any other pests or diseases which threaten Wirral’s existing, new, and replacement tree cover.
- Always explore the option of hedgerow planting, when considering new planting in urban areas, to provide a diverse range of wildlife habitats and to help connect our green infrastructure. We will endeavour to plant hedgerows in urban areas where they can provide the best value for example by schools, hospitals, and along roads.



We already have

The Council has been successful in its application to the government’s Urban Tree Fund Challenge and is matching the £300,000 award. This means a total of £600,000 is being put towards planting more than 1,700 new trees in around 50 urban locations across the Borough, with planting planned to start in November 2020.

What you can do

You can get involved at all stages of the planting process, from recommending good plots for planting in your local areas like road-verges as many did in our public consultation, to getting stuck in to collecting seeds and planting with local environmental community groups, many of whom fall under WiT’s umbrella. Together we can increase Wirral’s tree cover, make our trees more resilient to climate change and disease, and improve our wildlife habitats.



Growing Together



Facing a Climate Change Emergency we need to act quickly.

The good news is that our trees, hedgerows and woodlands are a part of the green solution. We encourage you to participate to help us protect our green heritage and all the wonderful trees and woodlands that make Wirral a great place to live. We also want you to recognise that our trees and hedges are like nature’s highways. They create corridors for wildlife to live and move happily with us. Our green infrastructure needs care and repair and it needs improvements. We need to plant more trees and hedges. A lot more. By planting the right trees in the right places, we can make our tree population more resilient and improve our habitats for wildlife. By doing so we will reduce the carbon dioxide in our atmosphere and play our part in tackling climate change. And the bonus is that all these trees will also make where we live more enjoyable places to be. So, we hope our vision excites you. If you would like to find out more or get involved you can contact Mike Cockburn, Lead Commissioner for the Environment: mikecockburn@wirral.gov.uk

We can make a difference. Let’s act now.



- WiT brings together:**
Wirral Tree Wardens
The Friends of Wirral Parks Forum
Wirral Environmental Network
The Wirral Society (CPRE)
Wirral Wildlife (part of Cheshire Wildlife Trust)
Wirral Countryside Volunteers
Urban Beekeepers Association
Conservation Area Groups Wirral
- with contributions from*
Urban Trees
Merseyside & West Lancashire Bat Group
Natural England

Wirral Borough Council and WiT would also like to acknowledge the substantial contribution of The Tree Council and Forestry Research.

