

Your Questions Answered.

When did tree planting start? In 2020, during the pandemic (respecting the rules of social distancing)

Where are you planting trees? On private land, after negotiation with landowners.

How do you decide what to plant where? Many people have been consulted including Northumberland County Council (NCC). Their ecologist has advised on appropriate trees for our specific location as well as wildlife habitat improvements. NCC Highways stipulated that no large trees should be planted next to the road. An NCC tree officer has advised on specie selection and tree care. An NCC archaeologist asked us to avoid tree planting on sites of archaeological interest. Landowners have had input on specie selection as they know their soil, drainage and micro-climate conditions. They also want to avoid planting adjacent to hidden watercourses and land drains. Forestry England have advised on specie selection to address climate change. The Environment Agency review our plans, especially planting next to the River Tyne.

What species are you planting? The focus is on our native broadleaf tree species.

What is a native broadleaf tree? Deciduous trees that are native to the UK. We are using the Royal Horticultural Society recognised list of true native species to make our selection. Some tree species hybridise in the local environment. We are trying to source true natives for our project, especially from local suppliers.

Why a native linear arboretum and not woodland? An arboretum is a place where trees are cultivated for scientific and educational purposes.

Ovington Parish Council (OPC) does not own any land. Discussions with landowners revealed that many are using government farming initiatives to develop copses and large scale planting. OPC agreed with landowners to mainly plant alongside public footpaths to create tree diversity and wildlife corridors. Looking at footpath maps allowed us to develop two loops to create a linear arboretum. The aim is to showcase tree diversity, help wildlife, encourage active living, carbon sequestration and an educational environment.

Who is the arboretum for? Everyone will be able to benefit through a simple country stroll to the local schools using the arboretum as a living classroom. There are plans to create interpretation boards and nature-specific trails to help identify plants and animals that live in or near the trees.

How can a native linear arboretum be as colourful as for example, Westonbirt Arboretum? We are mixing trees together in hedgerows and free standing plantings to give colour and interest throughout the year via flowers, fruits and changing leaf colour. This also benefits local wildlife.

Where has the money come from to pay for all this? We are extremely grateful to local people for making donations and fundraising through village activities and the support of Ovington Community Group (OCG). Additionally we have been successful in bidding for funds from Northumberland Climate Action Fund, The Thornton Family Community Fund, Woodland Trust and The Northern Forest.

Who provides the trees? We benefitted from NCC 'free tree scheme' and have had huge support from Woodland Trust and from local small growers. Other trees have been purchased from UK tree nurseries.

Who does the planting? A host of super volunteers within Ovington, other nearby villages and towns, plus groups such as Ovingham Community Orchard and Whittle Dene CIC. We have also reached out to other groups such as CPRE, Tyne Rivers Trust volunteers and community groups in Prudhoe and Hexham.

What about maintenance of the trees? Volunteer days in spring and autumn each year tackle tree maintenance. Some landowners have agreed to undertake maintenance for trees planted on their land. Professional services are needed to supervise some areas such as the River Tyne planting. Contractors are needed for power tool work. Such services will be funded by OPC using the Tree Fund.

How do you trace trees you have planted? We have a kind volunteer in Ovington who uses mapping software to plot trees as they are planted. This enables us to identify what is where.

Do you know where the oldest trees are in the parish? There are some venerable and noteworthy trees around the village, eg. along the back lane up to Overdene and along the higher level of footpath alongside Whittle Dene. We do have volunteers identifying these for the official register Ancient Tree Inventory, held by the Woodland Trust. This is painstaking work and will take time. You can view trees already identified on the Ancient Tree Inventory site. (ati.woodlandtrust.org.uk)

Is there a plan? Yes, OPC have a detailed long-term plan. There will be tree planting throughout 2024 when the linear native tree arboretum will be launched through a series of events. After that the focus will be on maintaining the tree stock we have and replacing any dead or diseased trees.

Is there a website? Yes! www.ovingtontrees.co.uk. This provides digital maps, information on trees and specie selection, self-guided walks, surveys of wildlife found, plus a host of other information. Linked to the website are social media campaigns to reach out to as many people as possible.

How do we find the route? Digital maps are held on our website www.ovingtontrees.co.uk. Waymarkers and interpretation boards are being developed and will be installed when we have gained planning permission.

How can we get involved? OPC work closely with OCG to set up events, such as tree planting, maintenance or fundraising. If you would like to be kept up to date then the OPC website is regularly updated with tree project progress. You can join OCG's mailing list to be updated on events or go to their Facebook page (www.facebook.com/OvingtonVillage/) You may also email contact@ovingtontrees.co.uk



Our Story.

Recognising ash dieback in local trees, a Parish Councillor campaigned to have a professional independent survey of the whole parish free-standing trees. Ovington Parish Council (OPC) engaged an independent ecologist to conduct the survey which revealed over 60% of free standing trees were ash and nearly all had evidence of ash dieback disease. The ecologist's report recommended urgent planting of a wider variety of trees.



*The green dots represent the positions of Ash trees in the local area.
The Purple dots represent other species.*

OPC held a public meeting to explain the report and its findings. A small group of local villagers agreed to form a team to undertake the tasks needed. OPC appointed a Project Manager to oversee all needed.

OPC doesn't own any land, so any planting would need the permission of landowners. OPC did not know all the landowners in the parish. There was only a very small fund available for tree planting and it soon became apparent this would not buy many trees and certainly wouldn't provide essential tree protection to stop rabbits and deer eating the new tree growth.

Undeterred, the team took on small activities within the village area planting 50 trees sourced from a local grower. Permission from two landowners was gained. This support led to a family day of planting with the support of Ovington Community Group (OCG). This included fun activities for children and free refreshments for all involved. Northumberland County Council (NCC) supported the event with the Queen's Green Canopy funding for trees. A video of the day is now on the NCC website as an exemplar of what can be done.

A further family event was arranged by OCG. This was a treasure hunt to find the location to plant trees and to collect treasure on the way back. Hot refreshments and activities in Ovington Social Club on their return made it a great family day out.

Discussions with other landlords enabled perimeter free standing tree planting around selected large fields and the creation of mini copses. Trees were obtained from local private donors and from other NCC free tree schemes. The success of these events encouraged the team to be more ambitious. The concept of a linear native tree arboretum was created. A route was agreed with OPC and plans started with OCG to generate the funds needed.

A huge number of volunteers were needed for land clearance. A volunteer manager from Tyne Rivers Trust provided excellent support bringing experienced volunteers to help with land clearance and supervise specialist planting along the River Tyne. Ovington and Ovingham residents rallied to the call for help and OCG again rose to the occasion providing delicious sustenance in cold and sometimes wet weather.

A landowner near Ovingham did a huge amount of land clearance, calling in favours and rallying local scouts to help too. The two long hedgerows were planted by over 100 different volunteers who engaged in land clearance and tree planting. Many more volunteers helped with planting free-standing trees and hedgerows in other locations.

In future years, work will be needed to maintain the trees and hedgerows planted. Power tool work will be contracted by the project, but a lot of volunteers will still be needed to clear overgrowth from around specimen trees planted.

If you, or anyone you know, can spare some time to help in the autumn and early spring do please get in touch. There are always tasks that need to be done.

We did not appreciate the magnitude of work taken on or the challenges we faced. Progress often seemed like three steps forward then two steps back. However, villagers rallied with expertise in different areas to help. Experts in IT, advertising, social media, accounting, design, ecology, carpentry and our local potter all provided skills that helped make this happen. Fund-raising to create a tree mural promoted the tree project. Stalls at the annual village fete raised funds and awareness. OCG regularly provided volunteers with tasty refreshments. Liaison with nearby groups (Prudhoe Pathforce, U3A, CPRE) enabled a wider range of help. Local libraries displayed information about tree planting events. NCC Climate and Environment team shared expertise. The Project Manager gave talks at local schools to encourage engagement and to help the schools with their tree planting schemes to complement Ovington Tree Project.

By the end of 2024 we shall have planted over 4000 trees. All planting has been done by a superb team of volunteers in often challenging weather. One area of the arboretum showcases the species that can grow in this part of Northumberland. This is a row of free-standing trees between Ovington and Overdene.



Planting begins!

This is not the end of the project. Work continues to ensure that the planted trees thrive. Engagement with the local communities and schools will bring the arboretum to life. Walking routes and digital guides encourage outdoor activity, provide year round interest for visitors and an outdoor classroom for the schools. Our website provides tree species lists, tree identification guides and wildlife survey results. As the trees mature they will capture carbon, their root structure will compact the riverbank to prevent future scouring and also absorb arable run off. Also, their canopy will capture crop overspray. The new hedgerows provide wildlife corridors benefitting existing wildlife and encouraging the return of lost species.

Future events will be held to entertain and inform locals and visitors of the value of our local environment and how to protect and maintain the area. These events will also be in partnership with other local environmental organisations.



Tree Diseases and Pests.

Sadly, although our local trees look lovely, some are diseased and dying. Local diseases include ash dieback, acute oak decline, and dutch elm disease. There is also a real threat of dothistroma needle blight, to such an extent that Woodland Trust no longer supply scots pine trees. Some of our local ash trees will need felling within five years as they have the disease. Other mature trees that are in wetter areas in summer or near irrigated fields/gardens seem to be doing better. We are nurturing saplings from these trees in case they demonstrate resistance. At present these saplings are NOT being planted in fields in case they succumb to the disease and help the spread of the disease. Elms are still growing locally, but as hedgerow species and are cut regularly. This way the stems do not develop thick bark preferred by the beetles that cause dutch elm disease.



The wilting and dying leaves plus the tell-tale diamond-shaped lesions

Ash Dieback

Ash dieback can affect ash trees of all ages. Younger trees succumb to the disease quicker but in general, all affected trees will have these symptoms:

Leaves develop dark patches in the summer.

They then wilt and discolour to black. Leaves might shed early.

Dieback of the shoots and leaves is visible in the summer.

Lesions develop where branches meet the trunk. These are often diamond-shaped and dark brown.

Inner bark looks brownish-grey beneath the lesions.

New growth from previously dormant buds further down the trunk. This is known as epicormic growth and is a common response to stress in trees.

Ash dieback (*Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*) is a fungus which originated in Asia. It doesn't cause much damage on its native hosts of the manchurian ash (*Fraxinus mandshurica*) and the chinese ash (*Fraxinus chinensis*) in its native range.

However, its introduction to Europe about 30 years ago has devastated the european ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) because our native ash species did not evolve with the fungus and this means it has no natural defence against it.



Yellow-tan coloured spots and branches with the 'Lion's tail' look.



Dothistroma Needle Blight

In the UK, symptoms of dothistroma needle blight are most visible between June and July. Symptoms include:

Needles develop yellow and tan-coloured spots and bands which turn red over time. Older needles are more affected.

The needles might have an overall brown or reddish colour instead of distinct banding which makes it hard to distinguish.

Infected needles are shed within a few weeks of being affected.

Branches with shed leaves have a 'lion's tail' look with only tufts of the year's needle growth left at the end.

Dothistroma needle blight is a fungus which causes premature needle drop. It can cause a loss of yield in commercial forestry, and in severe cases, death of the tree.

Acute Oak Decline

What does acute oak decline look like?

Trees over 50 seem to be the worst affected and mature trees can die within five years. Symptoms include:

General thinning of the crown. This can be quite sudden, occurring over a two-year period.

Extensive stem bleeding - this looks like dark weeping patches on the stem.

Dark fluid that seeps through vertical cracks between pieces of bark and runs down the tree trunk.

Stem bleeds that can stop and heal as the tree recovers from a stressed state.

As the tree becomes stressed, secondary pests and diseases begin to take advantage of the weakened tree.

What is acute oak decline?

Acute oak decline is a combination of factors which cause oak trees to become stressed. Environmental stresses like soil conditions, drought, waterlogging and pollution can all impact the tree. Insects, fungi and bacteria then move in on the vulnerable tree and push it into decline.



The difference between a healthy oak and a tree infected with Acute Oak Decline.

Dutch Elm Disease

There are five symptoms of dutch elm disease:

Clusters of yellow leaves that wilt and fall.

Shoots that die back from the tip.

Twigs that bend down in a 'shepherd's crook'.

Dark streaks underneath the bark of twigs, or dark spots and rings in the cross-section.

Dutch elm disease (*Ophiostoma novo-ulmi*) is a fungal infection which is spread by the elm bark beetle. It is named after the team of Dutch pathologists who carried out research on the diseases in the 1920s.



A beetle that transmits the fungal infection, and the obvious beetle burrows.

How to Avoid Pests and Diseases:

ONLY buy UK cultivated trees and plants for your garden. Imports are checked at ports, but not EVERY plant, just samples from huge batches imported.

Do not plant non-native ornamental garden plants in the countryside.

