

Thousands of trees planted in Leeds to reduce flood risk and mitigate climate change

The scheme aims to reduce flood risk to 1,048 homes, 474 businesses and key infrastructure along a 14km stretch of the River Aire upstream of Leeds train station.

The project is a collaboration between the Environment Agency, Leeds City Council, the University of Leeds and the River Stewardship Company and aims to store and slow the flow of flood water after heavy rain, create new habitats and store carbon, making Leeds more resilient to climate change.

Students from the University of Leeds will study the effects the trees have on the depth and speed of flood water to inform similar projects in the future.

Fiona Sugden, The Environment Agency's Natural Flood Project Manager for Leeds, said:

This tree planting programme is fantastic news for Leeds and is being replicated across the River Aire catchment as part of the Leeds Flood Alleviation Scheme's Natural Flood Management Programme.

The creation of a woodland area at the Brownlee Triathlon Centre will have multiple benefits for people and wildlife – reducing flood risk downstream, benefitting the environment by creating new woodland habitat, enhancing biodiversity, helping mitigate climate change and providing valuable data to help us understand how well natural flood techniques perform.

The Triathlon Centre is a real asset for students and the local community, and we hope that visitors will also be able to learn about how effective natural flood management can be.

James Wright, Head of Grounds and Gardens at the University of Leeds, added:

We are delighted to have been a key partner in this scheme and assisted in the planting of 5,000 trees as part of the Leeds Flood Alleviation Scheme Natural Flood Management Programme. This work has involved exceptional collaboration between academic and operational colleagues at the University of Leeds and the Environment Agency.

The site will provide significant research opportunities for University of Leeds students and academics for many years undertaking research in a range of specialisms. The site provides a great engagement opportunity for the local community to fully understand the range of natural flood management solutions installed in the Aire Valley catchment and research undertaken at the University.

Councillor Helen Hayden, Leeds City Council's Executive Member for Infrastructure and Climate, said:

This is an excellent example of the types of natural techniques being used across the River Aire catchment to build the city's resilience to climate change. The wider natural flood management programme, which is a key part of the next phase of the Leeds Flood Alleviation Scheme, will significantly reduce flood risk to previously affected residents and businesses downstream in Leeds, whilst also bringing other benefits such as capturing carbon and habitat creation.

The trees were planted by the River Stewardship Company on the Bodington Playing Fields site between February and March 2021, and were initially grown at The Arium Nursery in Leeds.

For more information about the LeedsFAS visit www.leeds.gov.uk/fas.

If you have land and would like to know more about how you could be involved in a Natural Flood Management project, please get in touch with the project team. Email: LeedsFAS.nfm@environment-agency.gov.uk