

## Partnership for People, Wildlife and the Planet

180 community projects and habitat improvements. Petersfield, Hampshire is a typical case study

Network Rail (NR) and The Tree Council (TTC) Charity Registration 279000

## BIG Biodiversity Challenge Award Category: **Community Engagement**

### Project overview

The Network Rail/Tree Council partnership began in 2020 to do one thing, plant 20,000 trees. However, since 2022, it has focused as much on community engagement as on planting. 180 communities are learning skills and enjoying health benefits, with 350,000 trees/hedgerows established. The Petersfield study typifies this programme.

### What were the biodiversity conditions on site prior to the enhancement?

An iTree survey, commissioned by The Petersfield Society before the project, identified that the condition and diversity of urban trees could be improved, as well as local nature connectivity. There was a need for greater garden biodiversity and resident engagement with the natural world.

Responding to the survey, the local community worked with TTC to find sites across the district to increase hedgerow length and habitat connectivity. In addition, with support from NR/TTC, the community decided to increase fruit tree planting as a means of introducing additional, appropriately sized garden canopy cover, and to develop food resilience.



*Working together for the love of trees: TTC*



*Petersfield Tree Festival fun: Tina Knowles*

### What were the reasons behind this project?

The Petersfield project, like the other 179 community projects, was designed to meet three sets of objectives - those of the local community, Network Rail (NR), and The Tree Council (TTC).

The local community wanted: greener gardens for biodiversity/food; to support wildlife at the local allotment and further afield; to learn new skills.

NR wanted to meet the objectives of the Varley Review: to help deliver government's 25-year environment plan; improve communication with communities; and provide training for employees and volunteers.

TTC's mission was to bring everyone together and provide the knowledge and tools for best-practice tree and hedgerow establishment.



*Campfire community: TTC*



*Miyawaki method Micro-Forest: TTC*



*How to plant and care for a tree: Dominic Quinn*

## What were the biodiversity measures taken?

To support biodiversity and engagement NR and TTC, with the many Partners and local volunteers, have:

- PeCAN ran a successful orchard trees and hedgerow giveaway scheme (trees at reduced cost), with participants committing to planting and caring for trees in their gardens. This will bring structural diversity and sources of forage for insects (1,011 fruit trees including 10 walnuts and 13,650 hedgerow whips planted)
- Created a Miyawaki method Micro Forest at Petersfield's Adhurst Allotments in partnership with Hampshire Forest Partnership. This will help support the dormouse population in the long-term (1,400 trees)
- Diversified the allotment boundary hedgerow and built hibernacula (winter homes for reptiles and amphibians) to increase site biodiversity for a range of species. This includes birdlife, reptiles and amphibians (slow worms, frogs, toads and grass snakes) mammals (voles, dormice, stoats), invertebrates and pollinators
- Installed hazel hedging at the allotment as structural protection for newly sown wildflower meadow zones (3,600 whips planted across the site)
- Altogether 2.4kms of additional hedging planted, bringing shelter and biodiversity gain through the increased connectivity of habitats.
- Celebrated the Petersfield Tree Festival in National Tree Week and a separate Hedge Festival with allotment holders and town residents, helping guide, engage and entertain people of all ages. TTC, East Hampshire District Council (EHDC) and Hampshire Forest Partnership teams all attended the fruit tree and Hedgefest days to help with plant distribution and knowledge sharing.
- Started a small-scale community tree nursery, teaching tree seed propagation, plus grafting and pruning skills.
- Provided more tools and helped the allotment to develop its work as a community training and nature hub.

There are additional activities over the wider Petersfield area:

- A Pocket Parks Programme supporting Petersfield Town Council to create smaller green spaces for wildlife connectivity and residents' enjoyment



*Wildflower meadow with hazel hedging: TTC*



*Christmas orchard trees giveaway: Tina Knowles*

### Further information

The project brings a wide range of community groups and funders together to improve local biodiversity, wellbeing and communication at a time when NR has been undertaking works around a local level crossing on South Western's London to Portsmouth route. The breadth and depth of positive engagement is unprecedented for a local climate action network.

Volunteers from NR, TTC and the community worked together on winter planting and summer maintenance. NR Southern sustainability team, including Directors, volunteered together, learning Miyawaki planting methods and how to create a wildlife-friendly 'dead hedge'.

### The community groups are motivated and well-supported and the programme has an ongoing legacy.

- Individuals who planted fruit trees will receive a newsletter with guidance on tree and hedge pruning and care
- Trial of a NR security hedge as a possible long-term alternative to traditional fencing, enhancing biodiversity while delivering rail side safety improvements
- 'Rail Roots' station wellbeing initiative, working with Petersfield Community Garden, Fitzroy Rural Skills, Hampshire Community Rail and Petersfield School. This will see the greening of Petersfield Station, which will distribute locally grown fruit. The project will link to a local Free Shop Food Bank, supporting low-income families and those who would benefit from wellbeing support
- The Petersfield Hub will support a sister project at Swaythling Station at Southampton, where there is also a community Free Shop

It's too early to give exact biodiversity gains however, significantly increased local connectivity will benefit wildlife and a beautiful little dormouse has already been found snoozing in the mulch heap!



*Learning new pruning skills with The Tree Council:  
Tina Knowles*



*Beautiful little dormouse found snoozing in the mulch heap:  
Phil Paulo*

## Project Team

- Local Organisers – Petersfield Climate Action Network (PeCAN), Petersfield Community Garden
- Funders – NR Southern Region, The Tree Council, East Hampshire District Council, Hampshire Forest Partnership, Petersfield Society
- Volunteers – Adhurst Estate Allotment, Petersfield School Eco Club, Sheet Scouts, PeCAN, NR Southern Region, The Tree Council

## What was the motivation for carrying out the enhancement?

Network Rail and The Tree Council were inspired by the Petersfield Community's energy for action. We wanted to help support, develop and extend their ambitious local programme as an important initiative in an ever-growing and sustainable network of individual projects across the UK.

From Glasgow to Penpont, from Liverpool to Petersfield, 'doing one thing' has rapidly become 350,000 trees planted and cared for (254,000 since November 2022) to help tackle the climate and nature emergencies.

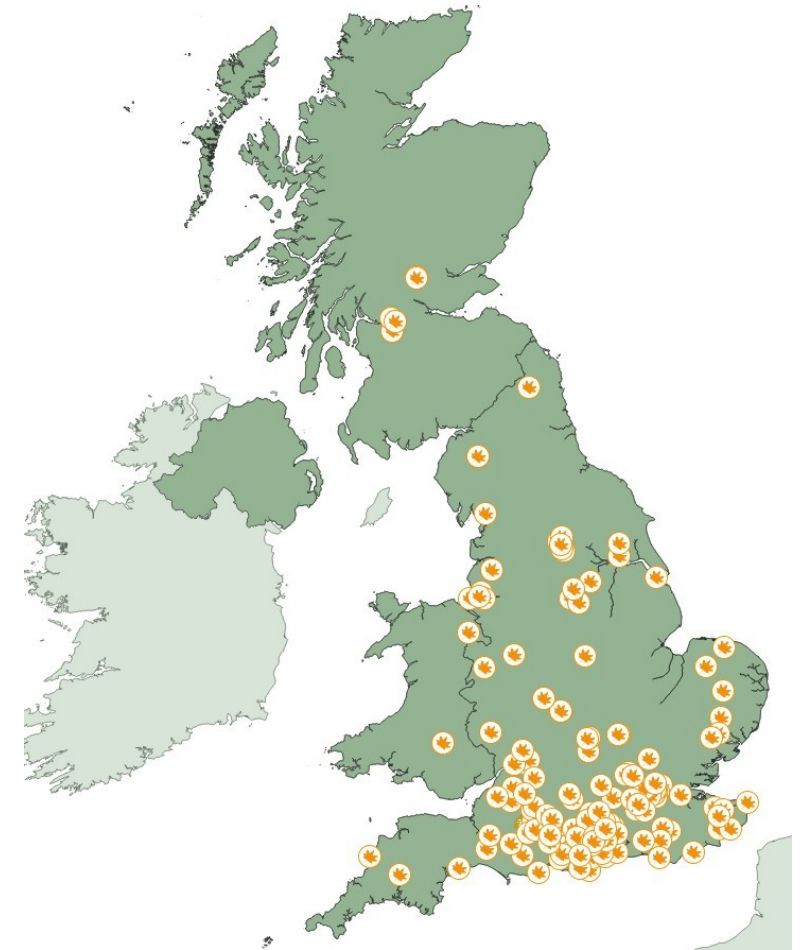
We're at 180 projects now, but there are 22m people who live within 500 metres of the railway, so we'll keep on going!



*NR Southern volunteers undeterred by rain!  
Amelia Gabriel*



*Steaming on with the mulch: TTC*



*'Doing one thing' with 180 communities ... and counting*