

4. Regreening with one million trees



Situation

Global warming is having a profound effect on our planet and there is a scientific consensus that climate change is occurring, and that human activities are the primary driver. Our PC21 strategic priority for nature is to protect and enhance the natural environment. Tree planting is important as it is part of NI Water's carbon off-setting for its capital programme and operational activities.



Action

We have identified an opportunity to plant trees to contribute to these strategic priorities; whilst also preparing for Government legislation around carbon emissions and improving our water quality. NI Water also owns c. 11,300 hectares of land and 66% of this is considered to be agricultural, (i.e. where we can potentially plant the trees).

The planting of trees within our catchments will help enhance the natural environment providing: flood alleviation, shade for spawning fish and habitats for wildlife. It will also act as a buffer against pollutants and nutrients, stabilises river banks, slows overland flow of water draining from the catchment and prevents livestock encroachment, thus sustainably improving the quality of the raw water abstracted for treatment at our treatment works. Alleviating bankside erosion and soil loss means potentially lower turbidity, colour and carbon in the raw water. This can result in the reduction of treatment chemicals required. Tree planting also helps with flood alleviation, provides shade for spawning fish and habitats for wildlife and acts as a buffer against pollutants and nutrients.

It is recognised that Carbon offsetting, whether by tree planting or other carbon sequestration, is an essential part of our journey to Net Zero and forms an integral part of our Climate Change Strategy.

Results

42,000 trees have been planted to date; 14,400 at Fofanny, and 26,550 at Dunore. The next phase plans to plant over 140,000 trees; 132,200 at Annalong, and 8,750 at Fofanny. The grant application for these two sites has been submitted, with notification of award of the grant to be sent in October/November 2021.