

TREES are not just for the birds

Braunston Parish Council Climate Action includes: "Carbon sinks to be provided by planting trees and other flora that retains and protects biodiversity".

Carbon sinks

The natural carbon sinks are sea, land, wetlands and forests/trees. These sinks have been absorbing the large amounts of greenhouse gases (GHGs) from burning fossil fuels (coal, oil, and gas) since the start of the industrial revolution. They are becoming saturated but we continue to burn vast amounts of fossil fuel, releasing GHGs and increasingly warming the planet. Attempts to provide technical alternatives to these natural sinks have to date had limited success. Worldwide only 48 power stations have been or are planned to be fitted with carbon capture and storage facilities. The 18 currently operating capture only 0.1% of the world's current output of GHGs; capturing the GHGs already in the atmosphere is proving difficult and costly, and little progress has been made. As the amount of sea and land cannot be increased, and the amount of wetlands only marginally, many climate scientists are proposing major increase in the world's area of forests and widespread planting of trees.

Trees

A tree is composed of at least 50% carbon. When growing it typically absorbs approximately 6 kilograms of GHGs per annum and when mature, after about 10 years, 22 kilograms per annum. Additional woodlands and trees are expected to play an important role in extracting GHGs from the atmosphere to meet the Government's target of zero emissions by 2050.

The UK Government's advisory panel, the Committee on Climate Change, states that the government should increase tree planting threefold by 2030: from the current 9,000 hectares a year to 27,000 hectares a year. This will boost forest cover from 13% to 19%. Depending on tree type, the typical density of trees per hectare is 1,000 to 2,500.

An example of the recognition of the part that trees can play in reducing GHGs in the atmosphere is the National Trust's announcement in January 2020 that it aims to plant 20 million trees on its lands by 2030. This will cover a further 18,000 hectares bringing the area of woodland up from 10% to 17% of the Trust's lands, approximately in line with the recommendation of the Committee on Climate Change.

In November 2019 the government launched a £50 million woodland guarantee scheme to encourage farmers and landowners to plant up to 11 million trees by 2022.

Suggestion: Braunston Climate Action Network will in the next few months develop the Parish Council's initiative and present proposals on how Braunston can become involved with further tree planting.