

Plan to replant millions of trees in central England slows down  
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The National Forest Company

THE ambitious plan to [reforest](#) a swathe of central England is slowing down. The UK's visionary National Forest scheme aims to turn a third of a 500-square-kilometre area near the city of Derby into forest.

But the last few years have seen successive drops in the amount of new [planting](#) and the goal may not be reached for another half a century.

The scheme celebrates its 25th anniversary this year and has transformed abandoned industrial landscapes such as opencast mines and quarries into woodland. Some 8.5 million trees have been planted, boosting forest cover to 20 per cent.

But the rate of planting has dropped from over 500 hectares a year at its peak in the early 2000s to a new low of 110 hectares in the year 2015-2016. "We're down to 100 hectares a year at a push," says John Everitt, chief executive of the National Forest Company.

The causes are partly economic. Land prices are rising and the landowners who form the backbone of the voluntary scheme have more options for their land, including tourism spin-offs from the forest. What's more, much of the easily converted land has already been planted and resources are now being diverted to managing the forest.

But Everitt says the target has not changed. "We still want to be ambitious," he says. "Even if it takes decades, that's fine because forests are a long-term venture."

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