

A new home for RefuTrees

In 1996, months after the destruction of nearly 1,000 mature trees to make way for the Newbury bypass in southern England, a new forest began to emerge. Clear of the canopy's shadow, new seedlings – oak, silver birch, sweet chestnut – had found space to grow.

The 'Third Battle of Newbury' was the culmination of a four-year campaign, and the biggest fight of Britain's anti-road movement. Through the harsh winter, protesters lived in tree-houses and tunnels, creating over 30 camps. The trees were eventually felled in early 1996 but construction didn't begin properly until the summer – when the young trees had sprouted.

'We fought for a long time to try to stop the parent trees being chopped down,' says Newbury veteran Phil Pritchard, 'so we felt an urgent motivation to take at least some of the new trees somewhere where they could grow to maturity.'

He replanted a few at his Newbury allotment and re-homed others in Cornwall at a permaculture project. There are now Newbury 'refutrees' thriving all over Britain.

'It's a sign of hope,' says Pritchard. 'Although the Newbury bypass got built, lots of other roads got scrapped. I think many environmental issues that are now mainstream would have remained very marginal if it hadn't been for people taking action.' ■