

THE INNOVATION JOURNEY

Blijham, a rural village with 2,610 inhabitants in the northern Netherlands, is known for its clean air and ancient trees. Since 2014, the village council has been developing a plan for a large arboretum that integrates an existing orchard and food forest. This project aims to create a greener, more vibrant landscape. With the support of the local authority, which owns 170 hectares of open countryside, the village council secured a LEADER grant in 2019. Lineke Lamfers played a crucial role in raising funds and uniting various parties through her leadership during her term on the village council.



Figure 1. Tree planting by Lineke Lamfers, chairwoman of the Blijham village council, and Bart Huizing, alderman of the municipality of Westerwolde, on 4 March 2021.

The grant helped finance the landscape design, attracting sponsors like the Groningen National Programme, the Province of Groningen, Google Eemshaven Data Centre, and the Prins

Bernhard Cultural Fund. Between 2020 and 2023, ten themed tree gardens and a 6.7km public footpath were created. Around 200 trees have been labelled with their scientific names, the adopters names, and their special memories, being given an extra emotional meaning.



Figure 2. Volunteers planting trees

THE INNOVATION IMPACT

The arboretum project has enhanced biodiversity, cultural-historical value, landscape aesthetics for ecotourism, and the quality of life for residents and wildlife for the local society. The footpath, surfaced with olivine split to absorb CO₂, reflects the council's careful consideration of environmental, social, and ecological impacts.

Building on the project's success, the village council is now addressing other challenges, such as securing a new village hall and building more houses for younger residents. The arboretums creation has greatly improved the quality of life in Blijham, boosting biodiversity and strengthening the socio-cultural identity. The residents take pride in their designation as 'the arboretum village'.

USEFUL LINKS

www.dorpsraadblijham.nl/arboretumdorp