

government's claims that they are complying with all international laws and obligations are highly questionable... we urge you to address this level of pushbacks in the European Union as a matter of priority."

According to Tsarnas supporting refugees forms part of defending human rights for all. He believes the indifference of many members of the public and politicians to the desperate plight of those seeking to reach Europe through Greece is allowing the police and other state forces to increasingly act violently towards other groups, including workers and students.

"It is inevitable that there will be deaths of people who are risking everything for the prospect of a better life," he added.

### Shot at the border

Between 1993 and 2020, 40,555 refugees and migrants have died after coming to Europe, according to United for Intercultural Action. They include Fatma, a Syrian woman, who was shot by a Greek border guard as she and her husband and six children sought to cross into Greece via the Evros river near Edirne last year. Other Syrian refugees were also shot dead by border guards around this time.

Nearer to home, deaths among migrants and refugees seeking to cross the English Channel included a family of three children who perished in October 2020. Britain has since left the EU. Nevertheless, said Anya Edmond-Pettitt of the Institute of Race Relations: "The UK cannot abandon all those trying to reach here. International conventions still apply, like the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, requiring safe and legal family reunion routes for children."

"Maritime search and rescue of vessels in distress at sea is accepted the world over. We must pressure the government and all parties to uphold these lifesaving measures."

MARK METCALF

## Christmas trees help tackle climate change in St Annes

### Trees stabilise and expand existing dunes

Along the sand dunes at Lytham St Annes, Lancashire, are two dense rows of Christmas trees in various stages of decay. Five coastal rangers toil away, digging more trenches. A digger drives back and forth, dropping the trees into place. So far, the rangers have buried over 1,000 trees – with another 1,500 to go.

It's heavy work for a team of five. In normal times, the three-day event attracts volunteer groups from across the county. Last year's workforce was 450 strong, and 1,500 donated trees were buried. Tree donations almost doubled in 2021. This created a dilemma for the Fylde Sand Dunes Project organisers.

### Protecting older dunes

The trees are a curious talking point for visitors. For many residents, the project is a convenient way to dispose of their decorations in exchange for a donation to the local Trinity Hospice. It is also part of a wider conservation effort that has cleaned up the roads and helped to protect this coastal town.

The part-buried trees play a vital role in sea defences, and prevent sand from piling up on the roads. This has been a nuisance for local residents for years, but it has significantly improved since the conservation project began in 2012.

Climate change has led to more extreme weather and the risk of storm surges and sea-level rise is ever-increasing. The trees play a huge role in mitigating those risks.

Geomorphological researcher at Hull University, Josh Ahmed, said: "As storms become more frequent and intense it's important



Volunteers on the sand dunes

that programmes like this are undertaken to stabilise and expand existing dune systems as they will provide critical protection to coastal communities against climate change."

Since 2012, an extra 60 metres of protection has been added through a range of techniques including the Christmas tree burials. Behind the two visible rows of trees the sand hills range from several feet all the way up to the fully formed roadside dunes. The nearest ones are last year's efforts

The sand is trapped and anchored by the needles and branches of the trees, which provide the first line of defence against high tides. Some will get washed away.

"This just means that they have done their job effectively and taken the brunt of the force to protect the older dunes behind," said Pennington.

The Fylde Sand Dunes Project is a project between Lancashire Wildlife Trust, Fylde Council and Blackpool Council, funded by the Environment Agency.

LUCINDA HERBERT

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### NEW LEEDS PODCAST

The new episode of the podcast Leeds in Conversation features Eve Roodhouse, Leeds City Council's chief officer for culture and economy, discussing the council's Our Centres project, which looks at "how Leeds can adapt to the long-term transformational changes and challenges it is faced with". Residents can put questions to guests for the monthly podcast, available on major audio platforms.

### JOHN LEWIS CLOSURE

The closure of John Lewis will be "sad" for Sheffield, according to the city council, but the store will still be tied to a lease with the council for its city premises. In a statement, the council said: "Whatever agreement is reached, the council have the benefit of the building and the overall site in the centre of the city."

### CULTURE INQUIRY

MPs have launched an inquiry into how the north's cultural industry can recover after the pandemic. The Northern Culture All Party Parliamentary Group, supported by Northumbria University, is calling for evidence from "key voices and stakeholders... on how to increase diversity, sustainability, accessibility and resilience". For info email [northerncultureappg@devconnect.co.uk](mailto:northerncultureappg@devconnect.co.uk).

### HULL LEGAL SERVICES

Hull University has re-launched its legal mediation centre, available to local businesses and individuals in need of mediation to solve civil law disputes such as consumer, tenancy or employment problems. Through a contract with Hull City Council, it will also provide final-year law students with real-world experience. For info email [fb1p-business@hull.ac.uk](mailto:fb1p-business@hull.ac.uk).

Got an event, campaign or story from your area? Call 0161 831 5563 or email [news@bigissuenorth.co.uk](mailto:news@bigissuenorth.co.uk)