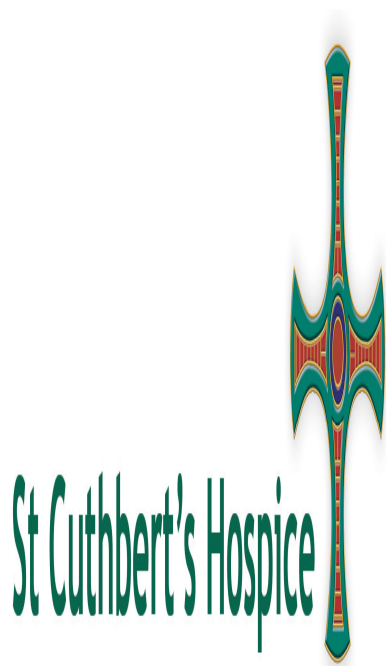


Case study



Service
Bespoke Software

Feb 2025

Smarter routes, bigger impact: How Waterstons transformed tree collections

The annual Christmas Tree Recycling programme at St Cuthbert's Hospice is a vital fundraiser, but behind the scenes, the process was as complex as it was time-consuming.

This year, we helped them to develop a system that resulted in:

- A 23% increase in collections
- Raising over £10,000
- Efficiencies equivalent to a whole day's hospice funding

The Challenge



The pain points were clear: managing dozens of postcodes, volunteer groups, tree sizes, and fluctuating availability all at once.

Everything had to be manually added to a mobile app, saved elsewhere, and curated with plenty of patience. If volunteers cancelled, reassigning their workload wasn't straightforward.

Then there was the issue of balancing the collections themselves. Christmas trees come in all shapes and sizes, and some were much more labour-intensive than others. Avoiding overburdening volunteers was a priority, but tricky to manage with the existing setup.

The real crunch, though, came with timing. St Cuthbert's couldn't start planning routes until all donations were in, leaving just a few days to organise everything. Planning routes with Google Maps and a lot of manual work was the only option, and while it got the job done, it was far from efficient.

And finally, all this to be done without a large business systems budget which enterprise-level businesses would have access to solve these problems.

What we delivered

As part of our 30th anniversary charity challenge, we gave St Cuthbert's Hospice some much-needed support to streamline the entire process.

Here's what we provided:

- A documented process to make everything clearer for future years.
- A 'Skeleton Document' to keep all addresses organised in one place.
- A tool, Route XL, designed for route planning that transformed the way collections could be managed.
- Remote support to ensure the new process ran smoothly.

The numbers



This year was a record-breaker for St Cuthbert's Hospice. With 769 trees collected (a 23% increase from 2024) and approximately £12,000 raised, this provides three days of vital hospice care to the community. The average donation per tree also increased by over £2 compared to last year, making the scheme more impactful than ever.

The new process allowed the team to manage this increase effortlessly and raise an estimated £4,800 more than 2024, the equivalent to funding more than an entire day of hospice services.

The process

Once the donations closed, we imported all the addresses into Route XL. The system quickly generated efficient routes for each volunteer group, breaking down the workload in a way that was easy to follow and much faster to prepare.

The volunteers received clear instructions with QR codes linking to a volunteer's map application of choice, and customer-provided notes for each Christmas tree collection.

The solution

We introduced a route-planning web application that worked out the most efficient routes based on distance. It also allowed addresses to be split into 'rounds' of around 40 trees, with each round assigned to a volunteer pair. These routes could be developed weeks before the volunteer arrived, and tweaks could be made last-minute. This means that redistributing work was simpler if someone couldn't make it, ensuring that no group was overwhelmed with too many collections.

Time savings & staff impact



What once took a full day to organise was now completed in a matter of hours. This efficiency was crucial, especially during a tough year where St Cuthbert's faced redundancies, including their Community and Events Manager.

The time saved allowed the remaining staff to focus on supporting volunteers and running other fundraising campaigns, such as the Great North Run, which also saw an increase in registrations.

Feedback and improvements

Volunteers were pleased with how much easier it was to manage their collections. There were a few small areas for improvement, such as making printed text larger, adding missing phone numbers, and tweaking occasional routing inefficiencies. However, these were minor issues that can be easily resolved next time.

A word from the hospice

"I wanted to say a massive thank you to you all and Waterstons for all of your support with this year's scheme. It was such a weight off our mind knowing that we had your support with the routing and it saved us so much time compared to previous years. Overall, the volunteers found the routes really easy to use which was a big bonus."

— Erin Wright, Community Fundraiser

Looking ahead

With a few small tweaks, the process will be even more efficient next year. But for now, we're proud to have made such a big difference to a campaign that supports an incredible cause.

Here's to an even smoother 2026!

To discover how you can improve your business process and create seamless efficiency, enquire with us today at info@waterstons.com.
