



# The Mersey Forest Comparator Study



ECOLOGY

STEWARDSHIP

ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING

LANDSCAPE & URBAN DESIGN

**ENVIRONMENTAL REGENERATION**

A Report by:



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***Appendix 1 Strategies Review: Objectives & Actions***



## **1. Introduction**

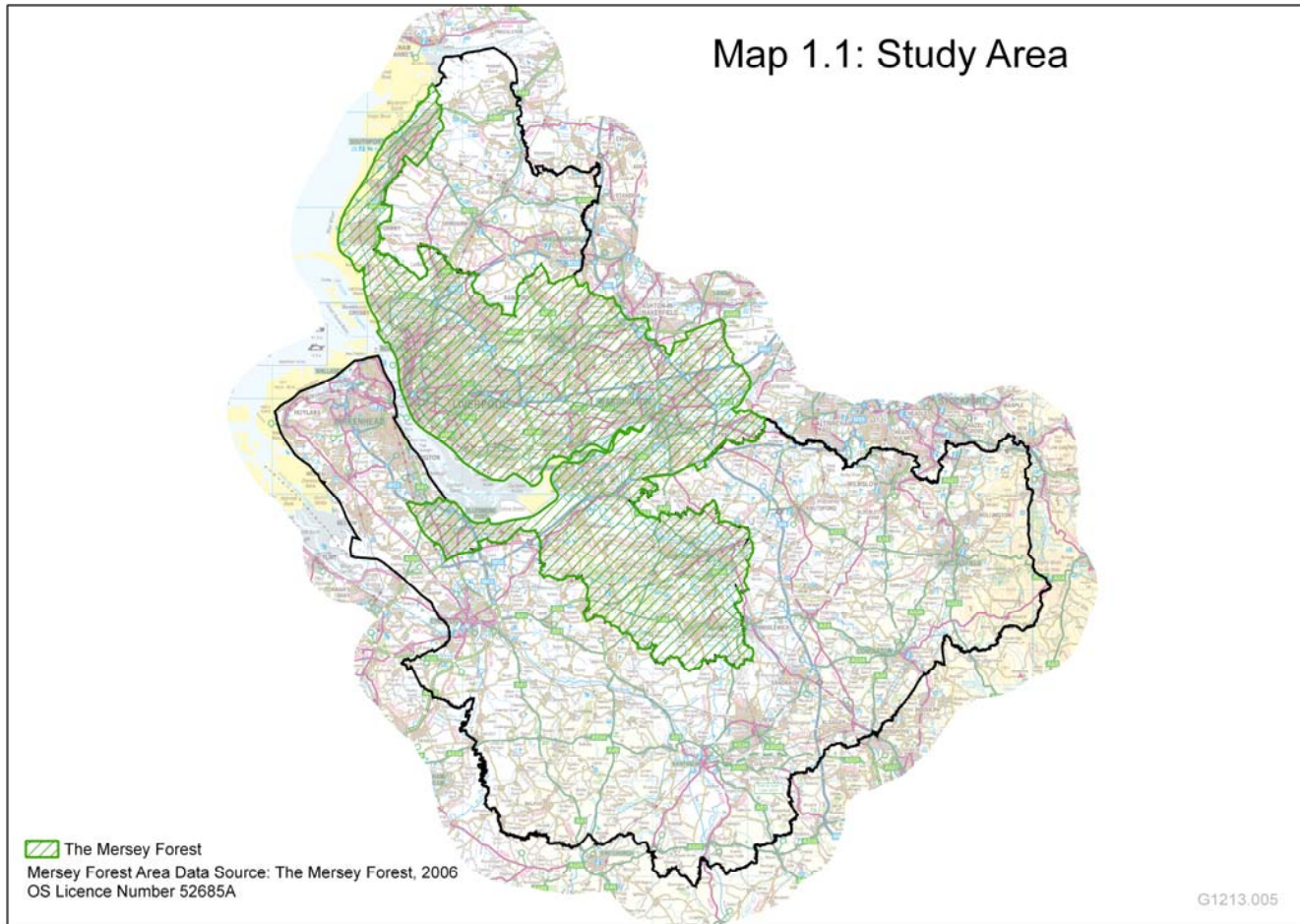
### **Background: The Mersey Forest**

- 1.1 Initiated in the early 1990's, the Community Forests programme sought to deliver environmental, social and economic benefits to local communities through:
- Increasing woodland cover and improving the environment;
  - Providing for access, recreation, art and culture;
  - Regenerating local economies;
  - Encouraging community development and lifelong learning.
- 1.2 The Mersey Forest Partnership is the biggest and one of the most successful of the 12 Community Forests in England, covering the 9 Local Authority areas of Sefton, Liverpool, Knowsley, St. Helens, Warrington, Halton, Vale Royal and Ellesmere Port & Neston (both in Cheshire County).
- 1.3 Since its creation in 1994, has made significant achievements in each of these areas, including:
- Transforming 4000 hectares of land into community woodland and associated habitats;
  - Providing 600km of new access routes;
  - Creating 150 new jobs;
  - Delivering 36,000 community events and campaigns.
- 1.4 The implementation of activity at this scale has only been possible because of a wide ranging partnership of organisations that share the overall Forest Vision and assist in a variety of ways to deliver change on the ground.

### **The Comparative Study**

- 1.5 This study assesses these and other outputs in terms of the environmental, social and economic impacts of community forestry in the Mersey Forest area in comparison with adjacent areas not covered by the initiative – specifically West Lancashire, Wirral, Chester, Crewe & Nantwich, Congleton and Macclesfield, as well as those parts of Vale Royal and Ellesmere Port & Neston outside the Mersey Forest boundary (map 1.1).

- 1.6 The study also considers trends over time – assessing characteristics of the Community Forest area prior to the Community Forest's existence as compared to the present day, where possible using benchmarks and baseline data to illustrate expected trends over the study period against actual results.
- 1.7 The study considers activity and outputs across environmental, social and economic agendas, as well as identifying information and data 'gaps', through two workstreams:
- i. Identifying and collating comparator criteria: identifying the most suitable and available data that will best illustrate both the current situation and any trends over time within and outside the Mersey Forest boundaries, and allow the comparative analysis in terms of social, economic and environmental impacts;
  - ii. Analysis of the results: demonstrating the impact of the Forest Partnership in comparison with non-Mersey Forest areas and before & after characteristics, as well as providing an assessment of the Forest's relative and contemporary value in relation to the region's key strategies and high level agendas.
- 1.8 Where historic data was unavailable, it was not possible to carry out an analysis of the trends over time that activity may have contributed to. Equally, data restrictions outside of the Mersey Forest boundary have precluded some comparisons between areas within and areas outside the Forest area. As a result, this report presents all of the possible comparisons that could be made given the available data.
- 1.9 Throughout, it is recognised that there may be other factors than the Forest Partnership's activities that may have influenced / are influencing local conditions and characteristics. This is explored further in the comparator criteria analysis, and - wherever possible – any other potential contributory factors and their degree of influence are noted.



## 2. Identifying and Collating Comparator Criteria

2.1 The first stage in carrying out the study was the identification of appropriate comparator criteria, and collating the relevant data and information that would best illustrate both the current situation and any trends over time within and outside Mersey Forest boundaries, in terms of:

- Social impacts – on communities, quality of life;
- Economic impacts – contributions to economic prosperity;
- Environmental impacts – comparing current environmental attributes and trends over time;
- Cross cutting impacts – wider impacts across the social / economic / environmental agendas, such as innovation and research.

### **Data Sources**

2.2 Primary data sources for both inside and outside the Community Forest area have included:

- |                       |                       |                  |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| - Countryside Agency  | - Forestry Commission | - Woodland Trust |
| - English Nature      | - Local Authorities   | - Census 2001    |
| - Groundwork Cheshire | - National Statistics | - BTCV           |

2.3 The Mersey Forest has been collating data on its activities and outputs for more than 10 years. As such, it has a database of readily available information for inclusion in this study, reflecting the actual outputs and impacts of TMF against projected baselines over time.

2.4 However, in comparison, the same level of information was not always available outside of the Community Forest – in terms of the quality, detail and extent of data found. Similarly, trend and baseline data was often difficult to obtain.

2.5 Throughout, it is recognised that community forests deliver a mosaic of woodlands and other natural habitats and open spaces that is often not reflected in other public green spaces provision. However, to provide a consistent and concise approach that enables comparison across the study area, the term “*greenspace*” when used in this report represents community woodland mosaics and other green space provisions such as parks, gardens, etc.



**Data selection**

- 2.6 Perhaps unsurprisingly, the most readily available data was on woodland cover and management, with the Forest Partnership holding detailed records on the Community Forest area, and Forestry Commission holding central records of woodland planting and management (via Woodland Grant Scheme and Woodland Inventory statistics), and the Woodland Trust holding accessible woodland data.
- 2.7 Several filters can be applied to this data to provide a range of illustrations across the economic, social and environmental spectrum, including image, biodiversity and public greenspace resources.
- 2.8 Economic data relating directly to woodland provision is somewhat limited, since there are many other factors that can and do affect economic performance. However, by mapping activity against economically important geographic features (such as brownfield land, transport corridors) and recording economic features (e.g. tourism and house prices), it is possible to illustrate associations between greenspace and image as well as impacts on local economies.
- 2.9 Social illustrations have been informed by deprivation and minority group data, available through National Statistics and Indices of Deprivation records. An analysis of deprivation / exclusion against patterns of activity within and outside the Community Forest area can begin to illustrate beneficiaries and identify specific social benefits – such as health, community participation, and accessibility of greenspace.
- 2.10 Other natural environment organisations (including Groundwork and the Wildlife Trusts) were identified as the most likely sources of data and information on the cross cutting impacts of environmental initiatives outside of the Community Forest area. This particularly considered project generation and leverage of funding.

**Comparator criteria**

- 2.11 A review of the available data and information directed the identification and selection of comparator criteria to show both the differences pre- and post-implementation and those within and outside of the Mersey Forest area, and also provide an understanding of monitoring approaches in terms of data availability outside of the Community Forest.

2.12 As a result, the comparator criteria selected for analysis in this study were:

<b><i>Economic Illustrations:</i></b>
Regeneration of brownfield land to public greenspace
Greening of strategic routes and transport corridors
Provision of tourism resources
Contribution of greenspace provision to house prices
<b><i>Social Illustrations:</i></b>
Public awareness of natural environment resources / initiatives
Community participation and voluntary opportunities
Proximity of woodland and greenspace to excluded / deprived groups
Contribution of public greenspace to health
<b><i>Environmental Illustrations:</i></b>
Woodland cover
Woodlands under management
Non-woodland habitats created
Woodland planted
<b><i>Cross-cutting illustrations:</i></b>
Natural environment funds levered in
Development of new projects / initiatives

2.13 The particulars of the data used, its source/s and availability are discussed further under each of the comparator criteria results and analyses in the next chapter.

### **3. Results and Analysis**

3.1 This chapter presents the findings of the data collation exercise, using maps, charts and data tables for each of the comparator criteria to demonstrate the impact of the Forest Partnership's activities when compared with adjacent, non-Mersey Forest areas and to illustrate 'before & after' characteristics of areas where the Partnership is active.

#### **Economic Illustrations**

3.2 The first two economic comparator criteria relate to the contribution of woodlands and greenspaces to an area's image – known to be a significant consideration for those looking to invest or relocate in an area. Specifically, we have considered the regeneration of brownfield (derelict, underused or neglected) land via woodland and greenspace provision, and the proximity of woodlands to key strategic transport corridors.

3.3 The house prices comparator assesses whether the provision of quality natural environments in residential areas can positively affect house prices, and from that whether any conclusions can be reached as to the desirability of an area.

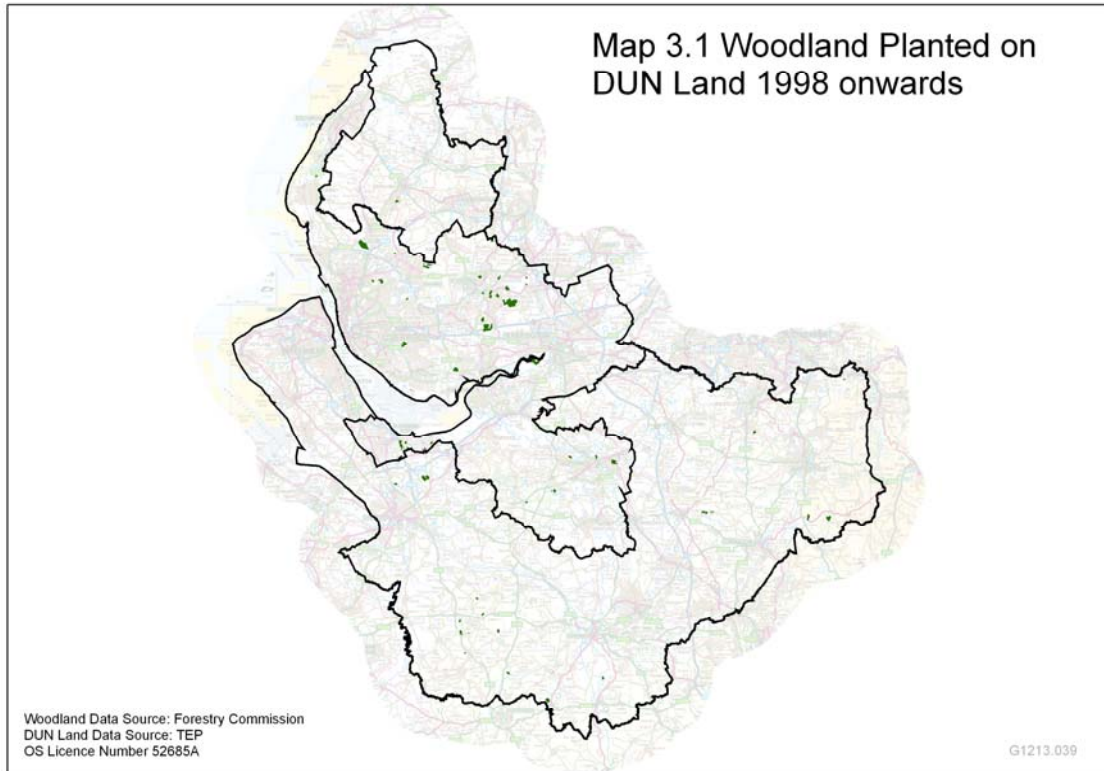
3.4 Finally, the study considers the area's natural environment tourism resources, as a key element of the region's wider tourism appeal and economic value.

#### ***i. Regeneration of brownfield land to public greenspace***

3.5 The map utilises Woodland Grant Scheme (WGS) figures from Forestry Commission correlated against known brownfield sites from the DUN (Derelict, Underutilised and Neglected) Land Survey<sup>1</sup> to illustrate the level of planting on brownfield land since 1998.

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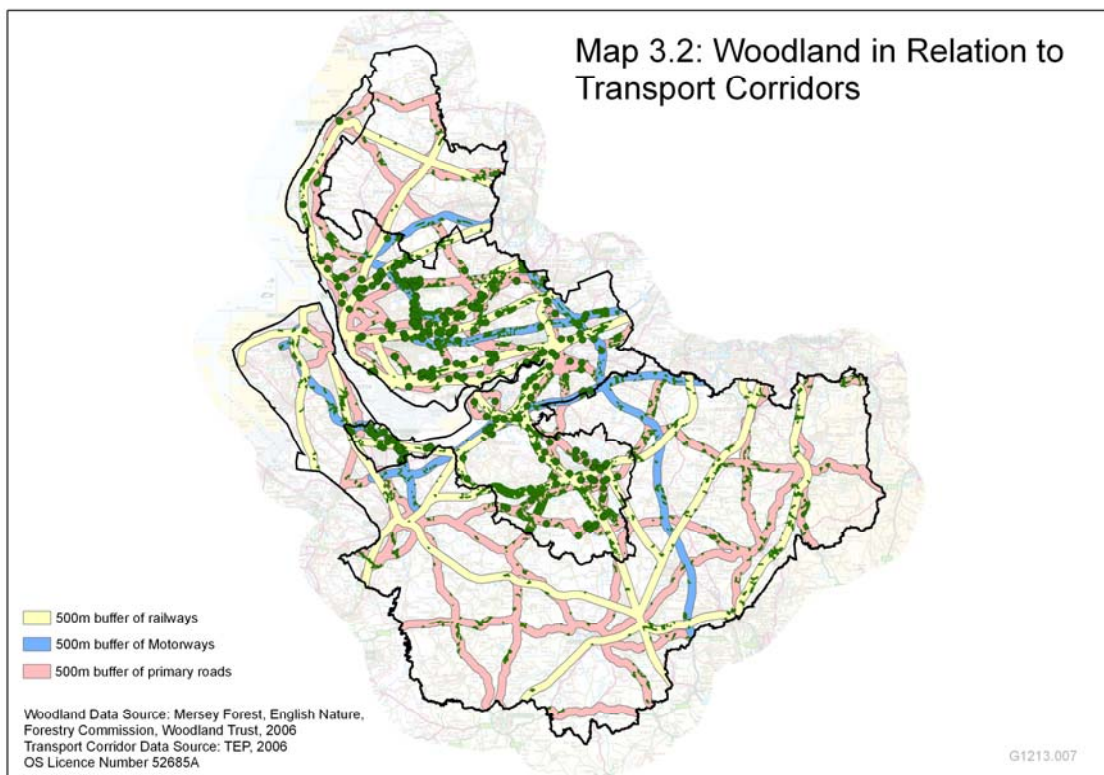
<sup>1</sup> The DUN Survey (2001) TEP



- 3.6 The WGS figures indicate that 7.8% (228 ha) of known brownfield land from the DUN Survey has been regenerated to woodland in The Mersey Forest area, compared to 1.6% (45ha) outside.
- 3.7 However, by using wider woodland location data from the Forestry Commission (FC), English Nature (EN) and The Woodland Trust (WT) a more detailed picture can be gained.
- 3.8 An analysis of the amount of woodlands on DUN land using this wider data set clearly shows that areas within the Mersey Forest are performing better than neighbouring areas. Comparing both the area and percentage of DUN land that is woodland shows that activity to reduce DUN via woodland creation is much higher within the community forest, with 18.8% (551 ha) of DUN land covered by woodlands within the Mersey Forest compared to 14.1% (393 ha) outside. When combined with additional data held for within the Community Forest area, the percentage rises to 22%.

- 3.9 Further, using the most recent monitoring figures available<sup>2</sup>, a comparison with other Community Forests in England shows that Mersey Forest is ahead of all other Forests for woodland planting on reclaimed land, delivering 48.14 ha of the 145.89 ha annual total in 2003/4, clearly demonstrating the significance of the Partnership's performance in this area.
- 3.10 The partnership's work in regenerating brownfield land has directly contributed to two major projects being implemented in the area: the Capital Modernisation Fund initiative and the Newlands programme – two multi-million pound research and implementation projects with an aim of transforming a number of sites and over 500 hectares of brownfield land across the Forest area and Beyond, in which the Forest Partnership has played an integral role.

**ii. Greening of strategic routes and transport corridors**



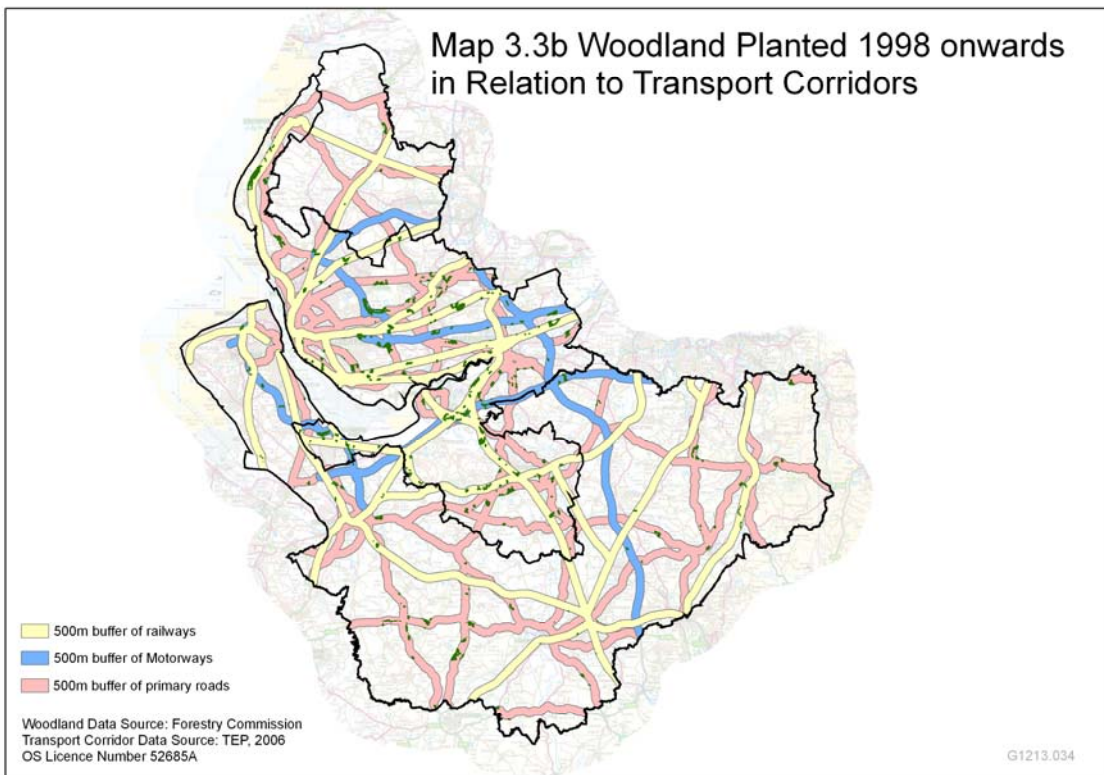
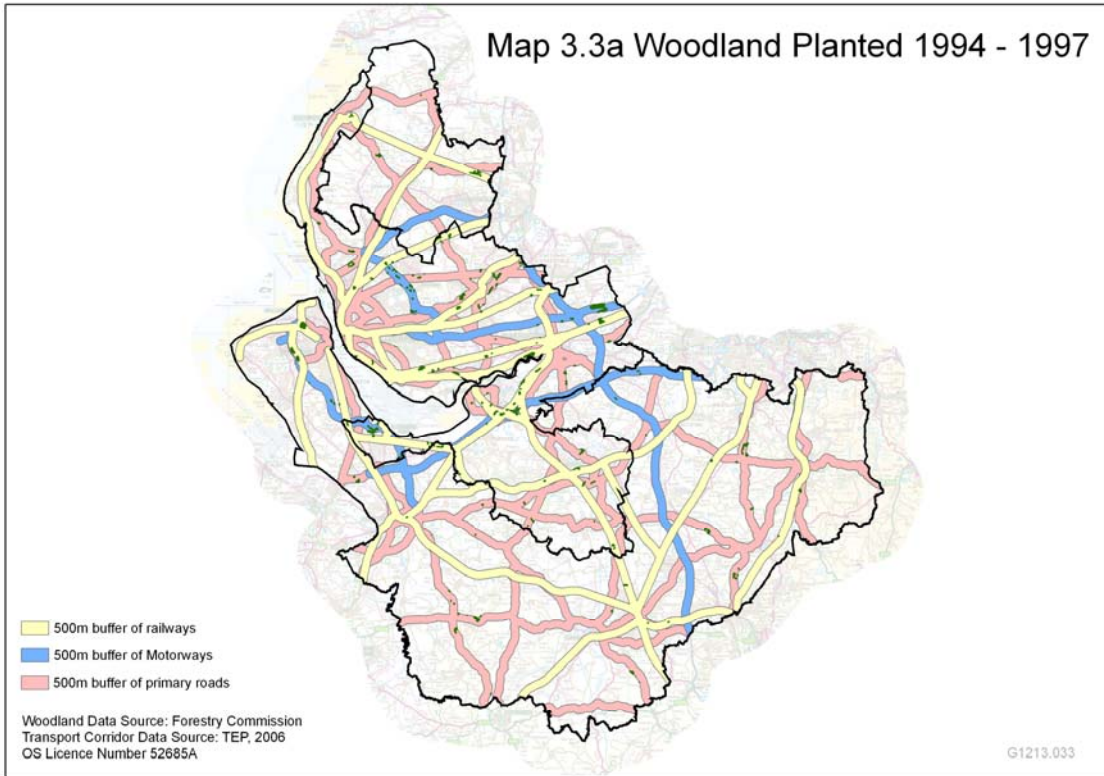
- 3.11 Again, this map considered all woodlands from the data sources described above. Strategic transport routes (motorways, primary A roads, and major rail lines) were mapped with a 500m buffer that was then overlaid on the woodlands data to illustrate those woodlands in proximity to these corridors.

<sup>2</sup> Community Forests Monitoring Report 2003 / 2004 (2004) Project Partners Research for The Countryside Agency

- 3.12 Two issues can be considered using this map. Firstly, it could be claimed that the more complete dataset available for the Mersey Forest area (in terms of woodlands) clearly results in a stronger illustration within the community forest than outside. However, if we remove the woodlands data provided by the Forest Partnership, we can use only the FC, WT and EN datasets to make a direct comparison between levels of woodland in relation to transport corridors within and outside the Forest area. In this case, the data still demonstrates how the Mersey Forest area out performs neighbouring areas both in percentage and area, with woodland covering 8.7% (824 ha) of motorway buffers, 5.3% (1,662 ha) of primary road buffers and 6.4% (1,647 ha) of railway buffers within TMF against 3.4% / 340 ha (motorways), 3.8% / 1,264 ha (primary roads) and 2.6 % / 746 ha (railways) outside.
- 3.13 Considering the full set of data and viewing only the Mersey Forest area itself, the map demonstrates a strong correlation between woodland location and transport corridors in the community forest, with a total woodland area within the buffer of 5,141 ha (7.73%). In fact, the Forest's 10 year target for planting alongside or within range of key transport corridors has been exceeded by 140%.<sup>3</sup> This achievement is clearly demonstrated in the following two maps, which illustrate woodland planting in proximity to transport corridors from 1994-7 (map 3.3a) and from 1998 to the present day (map 3.3b):

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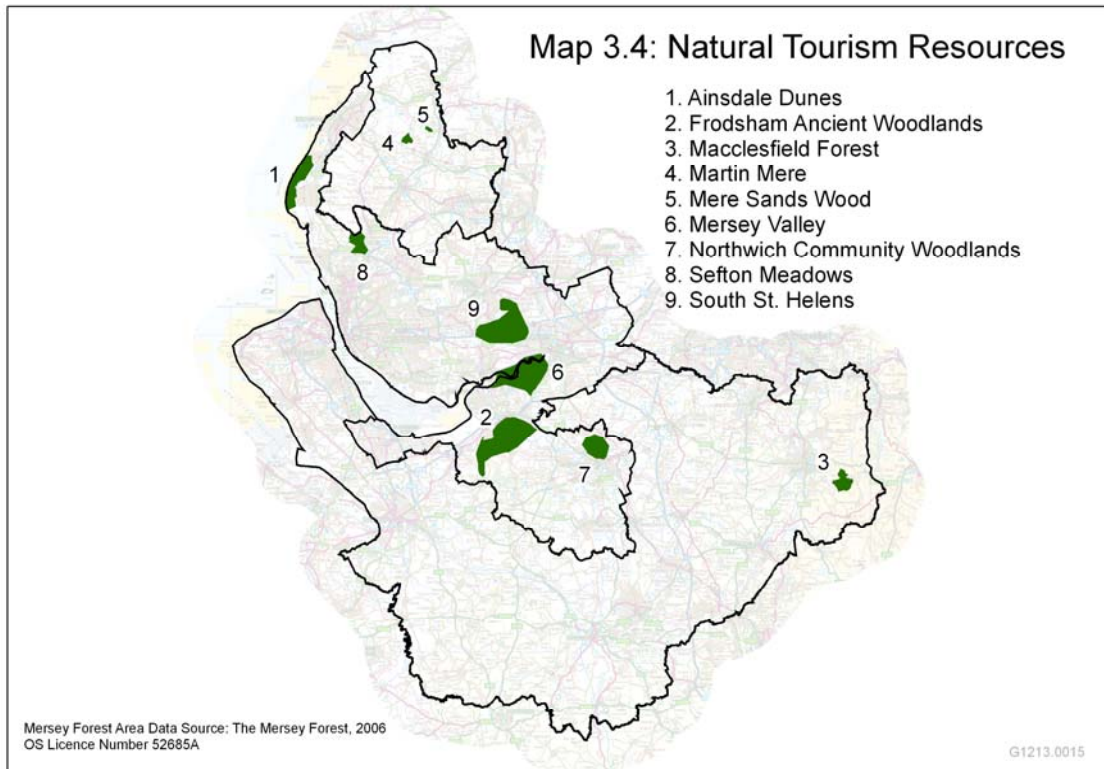
<sup>3</sup> The Mersey Forest 2005





**iii. Provision of tourism resources**

- 3.14 The Mersey Forest Business Plan for 2005-10 specifically includes actions relating to tourism and the development of opportunities for natural tourism assets, under both their ‘delivering sustainable economic benefits’ and ‘engaging people’ goals – encouraging and enabling business opportunities, skills development, image improvements and health and well being benefits.
- 3.15 The map illustrates the extent and spread of natural tourism resources within the Forest area when compared with outside, showing several areas where woodland and habitat development is effectively delivering or presenting an opportunity for the development of new tourism and recreational resources. Clearly, the potential for economic and social outcomes through natural tourism is much more significant within the community forest area, as such natural tourism resources simply do not exist in the same number or to the same extent as within the Forest area.





**iv. Contribution of greenspace provision to house prices**

- 3.16 At a recent conference<sup>4</sup>, a substantial amount of evidence was put forward supporting the concept of healthy and attractive environments increasing economic wealth – particularly in relation to property prices (business park rental rates and residential property). Several academic studies have also identified complex relationships between property prices and proximity to woodland, and it is generally felt that there is a premium associated with housing in close proximity to (particularly permanently protected) woodlands and green spaces.<sup>5</sup>
- 3.17 A report<sup>6</sup> for the Countryside Agency also highlighted a correlation between the economic objectives of the Community Forest programme and the role of landscape change in Regional Economic Strategies, specifically in relation to improving the environment near housing and increasing property values.
- 3.18 The link between house prices and proximity to good quality community woodlands was explored in detail in relation to Colliers Moss, a reclaimed colliery and power station in the St. Helens area that is a key site within the Mersey Forest. An investigation by the District Valuer<sup>7</sup> used a series of ‘beacon’ locations (local streets) as typical examples of the areas surrounding the site, and – accounting for other factors that may affect property prices in the area (such as general house price inflation, infrastructural developments and improvements to individual properties) – analysed property values prior to and on completion of the regeneration work, and at 2 further five year intervals.
- 3.19 The report concluded that the improved environment and availability of the community woodland *directly and uniquely* enhanced property values in the surrounding area by £15m (against baseline increases), with individual house prices increasing as follows:

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<sup>4</sup> Making Place Profitable: the First Transnational Conference on Creating a Setting for Investment, September 2006 [www.environment-investment.com/conference2006](http://www.environment-investment.com/conference2006)

<sup>5</sup> ‘Shades of Green: Measuring the Value of Urban Forests in the Housing Market’ (2005) Mansfield et al

<sup>6</sup> ‘Economic Impacts of the Community Forest Programme’ (2003) Penn Associates

<sup>7</sup> Bold Colliery Community Woodland: District Valuer’s Report on Property Values (2004)

Date	Opinion of House Value (£)				
	Beacon Location 1	Beacon Location 2	Beacon Location 3	Beacon Location 4	Beacon Location 5
1985 (pre)	£15,000	£9,000	£14,000	£9,000	£9,000
1991 (post)	£40,000	£18,000	£25,000	£18,000	£21,000
1996	£35,000	£23,000	£30,000	£24,000	£25,000
2004	£65,000	£55,000	£50,000	£35,000	£26,000
Total Increase	£50,000	£46,000	£36,000	£36,000	£15,000

3.20 Further, the report also found that as a result of the regeneration project, new development to the value of £75m was realised – illustrating through this one example the economic contribution and catalytic effect of environmental improvements on an area.

3.21 Whilst it is impossible to extrapolate directly from this research to all housing in the Forest area, the fact that planting to date has been predominantly sited close to residential areas (with 66.2% of all planting in the Mersey Forest area within 300m of urban areas) should mean that there has been a contribution to the local economy through increased property values.

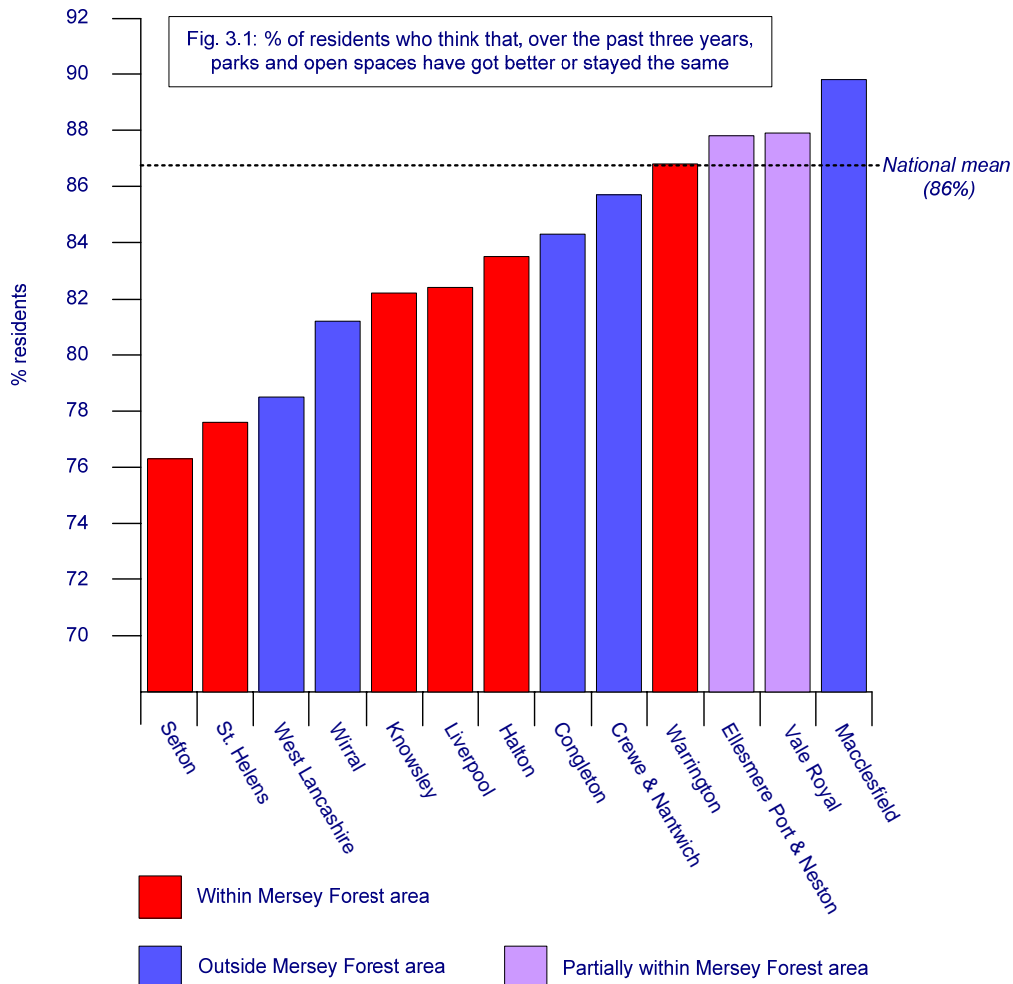
3.22 However, there is a clear need for further research to verify any wider conclusions of value added for the Forest as a whole outside of the Colliers Moss study area, but given the weight of research being carried out and supporting the general concept, it is not unreasonable to anticipate that a similar economic impact would occur in and around other Mersey Forest sites.

### Social Illustrations

3.23 The comparator criteria selected under the social heading largely considered social exclusion – specifically, how activities impact on excluded and minority groups and deprived communities in terms of greenspace provision, participation and health benefits.

**i. Public awareness of natural environment resources / initiatives**

3.24 Data available through the Audit Commission's Area Profiles indicates that perceptions of public open and green spaces generally are poor in across the entire study area (when compared with the national average), including the Mersey Forest area – although three Local Authority areas within the Forest Partnership do meet or exceed the national average compared to only one outside:



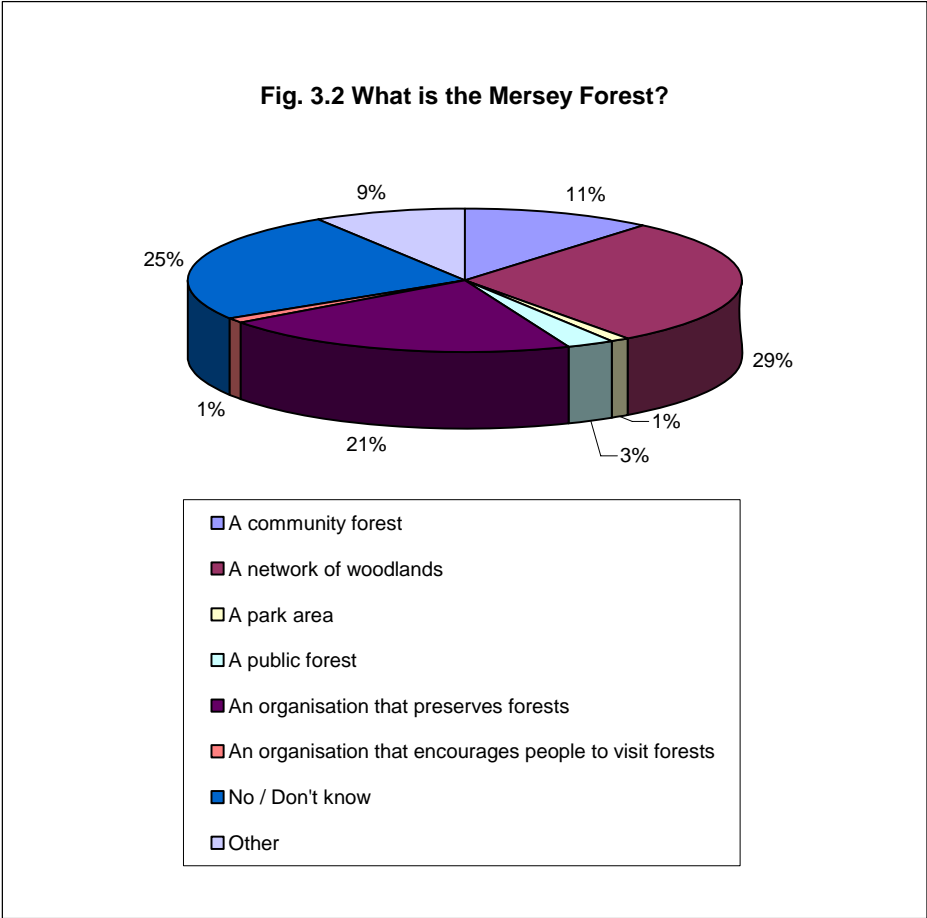
3.25 These generally poor perceptions of parks and open spaces are likely to be a reflection of the urbanised nature of the Forest area, where open spaces and parks are limited in their extent, can be associated with anti-social behaviour and may include disused and brownfield sites. Also, these perceptions are based on parks and similar open spaces (e.g. sports fields) and do not really reflect the natural woodland and other habitats of The Mersey Forest.

- 3.26 This is particularly important when considering a recent evaluation<sup>8</sup> of the Community Forests Programme, which found that the potential impact of a community forest strongly correlated with people's awareness of community forestry, particularly in raising the importance of the urban / rural fringe and linkages between urban and rural areas, and through increasing awareness of the benefits of high quality environments. Equally, limited awareness and lack of understanding of community forests also reduced public commitment and ownership of community forest and other associated natural assets.
- 3.27 Within the Mersey Forest, awareness raising and involvement is consequently a key activity, and the Partnership's success in this area is clear when the Area Profiles perceptions of parks and open spaces are compared with more specific perceptions of The Mersey Forest itself.
- 3.28 There is clearly a different picture of community woodland resources as opposed to the more general open spaces, with a recent survey<sup>9</sup> indicating that 52% of people had heard of The Mersey Forest, and 76% of those able to give a good description of what the Forest actually is.
- 3.29 This survey, carried out in locations close to key Mersey Forest sites, found that in fact 62% of residents felt their local environments had improved over the past 10 years with regards to woodlands, trees and green spaces – although the lower levels of awareness of The Mersey Forest may indicate that these residents did not necessarily associate such improvements with TMF activity. This appears to reflect the 'indirect' nature of community forests' contribution to the protection and provision of high quality landscapes, as identified in the Countryside Agency's evaluation.

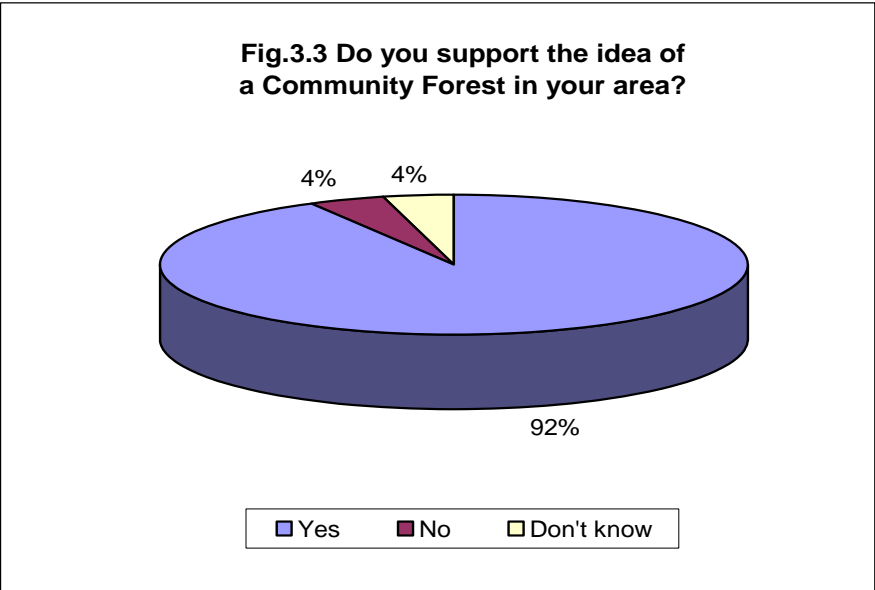
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<sup>8</sup> 'Evaluation of the Community Forests Programme' (2005) LUC & SQW for the Countryside Agency

<sup>9</sup> 'Mersey Forest Benchmark Survey' (2006) Vision 21 for The Mersey Forest



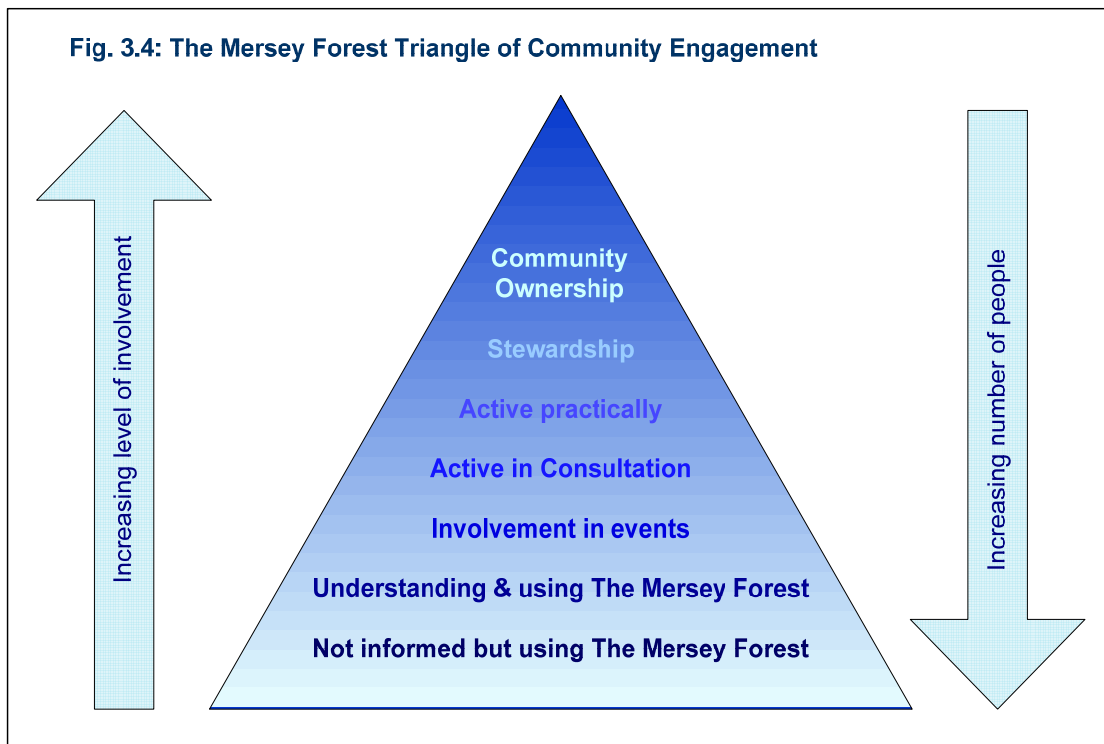
3.30 However, once an explanation of The Mersey Forest had been given, 92% supported the idea of a community forest in their area:



3.31 Again, these findings seem to support the findings of the Countryside Agency's evaluation, in terms of how an increase in understanding of community forests can result in a high level of community support.

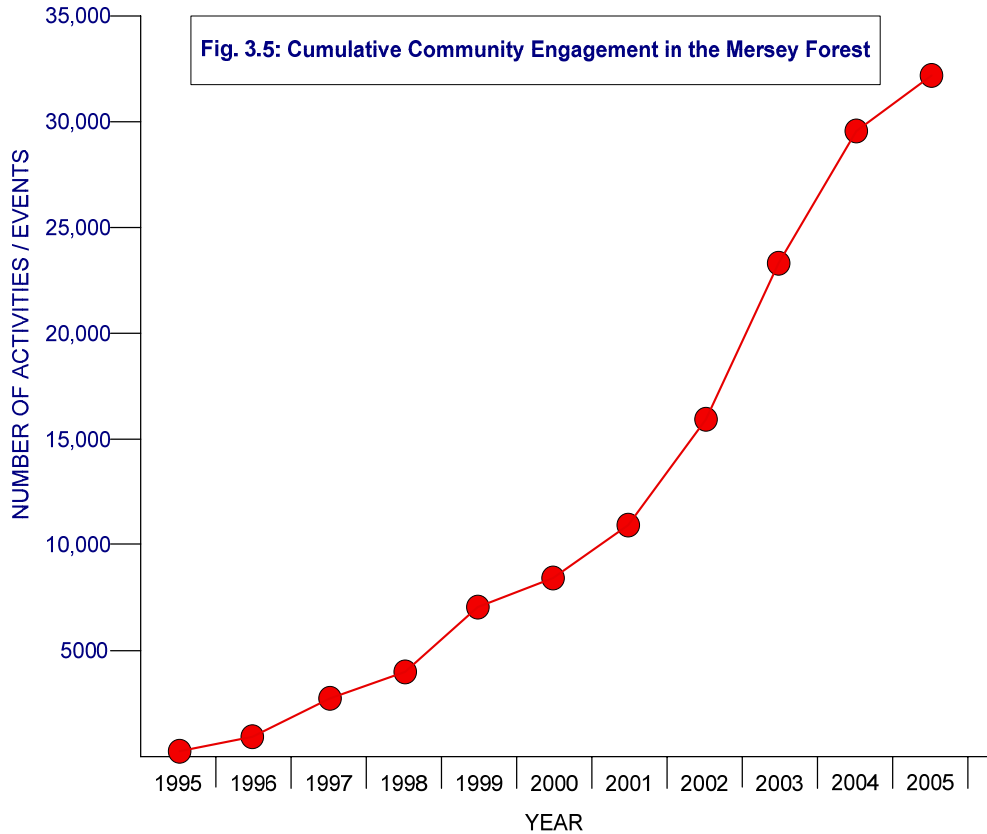
**ii. Community participation and voluntary opportunities**

3.32 The Forest Partnership actively encourages and enables participation across all sectors of the community, using 'The Mersey Forest Triangle of Engagement' as a concept for community involvement that provides a structured programme of involvement for all, and influences all areas of its work:



3.33 As well as guiding the quality of the community participation experience – enabling people to have the level and intensity of involvement that best suits them - this approach has led to the Partnership providing almost 31,500 community events in the 10 years from 1995 -2005<sup>10</sup>:

<sup>10</sup> Data provided by The Mersey Forest Team



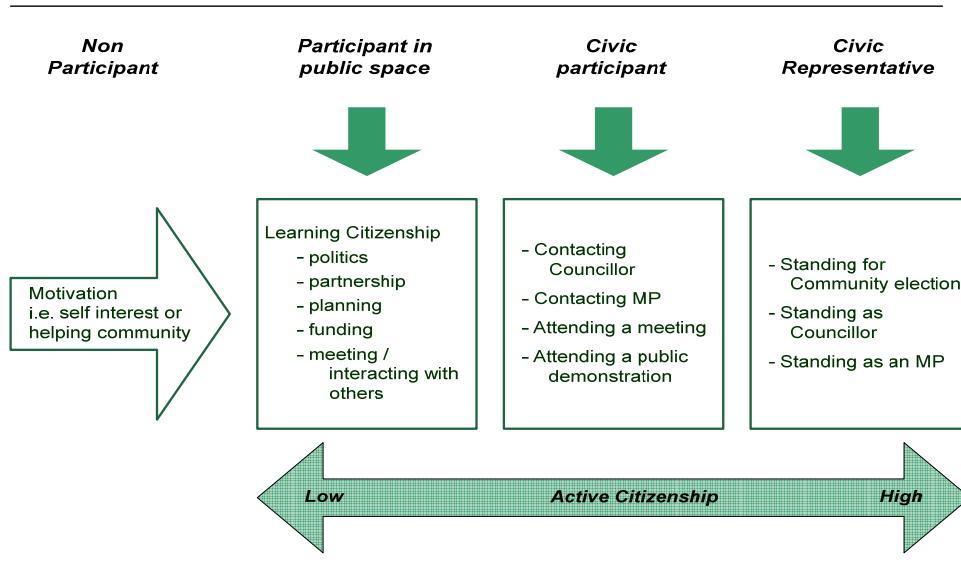
- 3.34 Such a structured and inclusive approach is generally not reflected outside of the community forest area, with figures specifically relating to levels of participation in other parts of the study area largely unavailable.
- 3.35 However, the Forest Partnership is not unique in its desire and active encouragement of local participation: both Groundwork and BTCV have similar approaches.
- 3.36 BTCV considers inclusiveness, accessibility and choice as key values central to their operation, and has demonstrated its commitment to these principles via a range of programmes including People's Places (which provided funding and project management support to environmental projects in less advantaged communities), and Environments for All (offering outreach and support to black, minority ethnic and marginalised groups wishing to engage in environmental improvements). Many of these opportunities are marketed and delivered in co-operation with the Forest Partnership in the community forest area.

3.37 It is difficult to draw any direct conclusions when comparing the volunteering and training figures for the Forest Partnership and BTCV, as the BTCV figures only specify Liverpool and Sefton within the Forest area, and outside refers to Chester (which in fact includes Vale Royal and Ellesmere Port & Neston – parts of both are covered by the Mersey Forest), rather than covering the entire community forest and study area. However, a simple review of the table indicates that outputs from BTCV’s activities within the Mersey Forest area are comparable to those outside<sup>11</sup>:

Output - number of:	Chester	Liverpool	Sefton	TMF <sup>12</sup>
Tasks	472	309	126	435
Volunteers	999	712	379	1,091
Groups	8	30	10	40

3.38 Similarly, although data relating to the number of participants is not available, Groundwork has a long term commitment to supporting disadvantaged communities, providing training and support to help people get more involved in making decisions about where they live and to understand the benefits that sustainable development can bring. They also have a proposed model of building active citizenship through knowledge and skills development via ‘open space’ projects:

Fig. 3.6: Route to Active Citizenship via Public Space



<sup>11</sup> Figures provided by BTCV, for April 2005 – March 2006

<sup>12</sup> Combined Liverpool and Sefton figures



- 3.39 Therefore, it could be said that opportunities for community participation and volunteering are equally available within and outside The Mersey Forest – indeed, Groundwork and BTCV are both part of the Forest Partnership.
- 3.40 However, the ‘quantity’ of participation is simply at another scale within The Mersey Forest as compared to outside, and their fully inclusive framework and process for engagement has clearly enabled the significant and rapid rise in the numbers of events – and consequently participants – over the past 10 years of the community forest’s operation (as shown in figure 3.5). This scale of involvement is likely to be a contributory factor in the high levels of awareness of the Forest.
- 3.41 The effectiveness of this level of opportunity and involvement is perhaps best demonstrated through Community Contracting Initiative (CCI): providing support to local community groups with an interest in improving their local woodland in the long term. CCI groups follow a structured and planned approach (the ‘CCI Model’) and receive a package of funding and professional support from a wide range of partners to undertake the long term stewardship of woodlands in The Mersey Forest, enabling not only the maintenance of the woodland habitat, but also skills development, educational activities and social events for the community. There are 12 CCI groups active across the Mersey Forest area.

***iii. Proximity of woodland and greenspace to minority / deprived groups  
and***

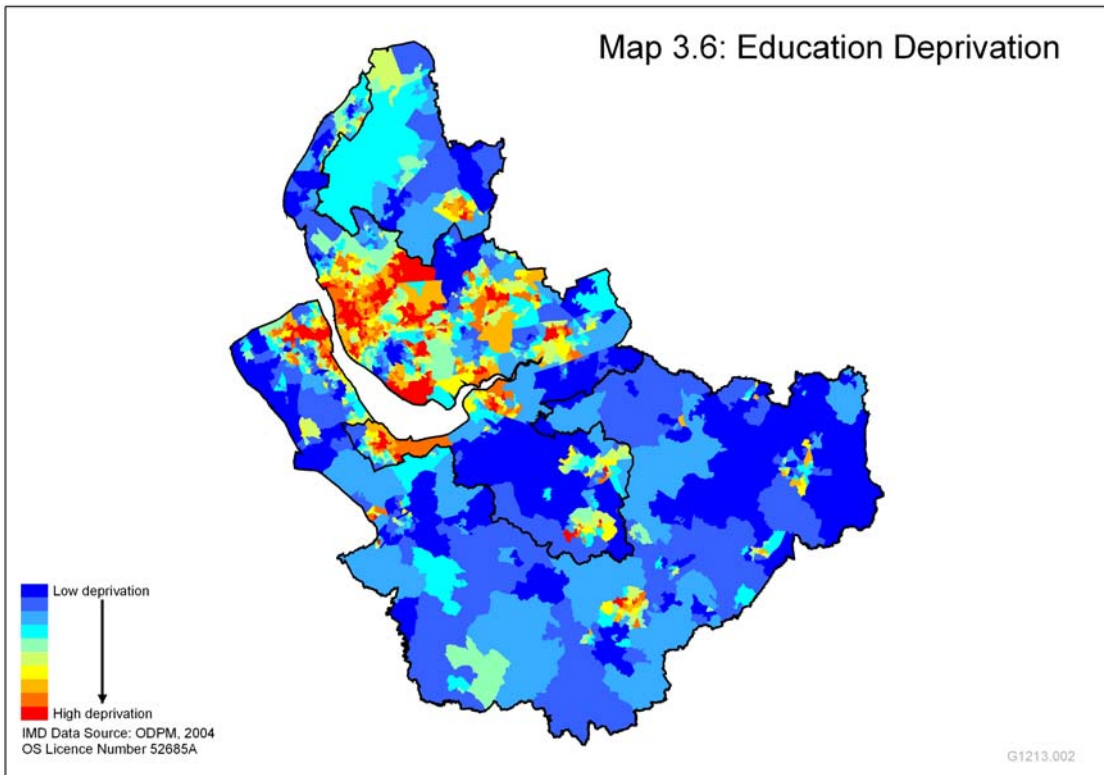
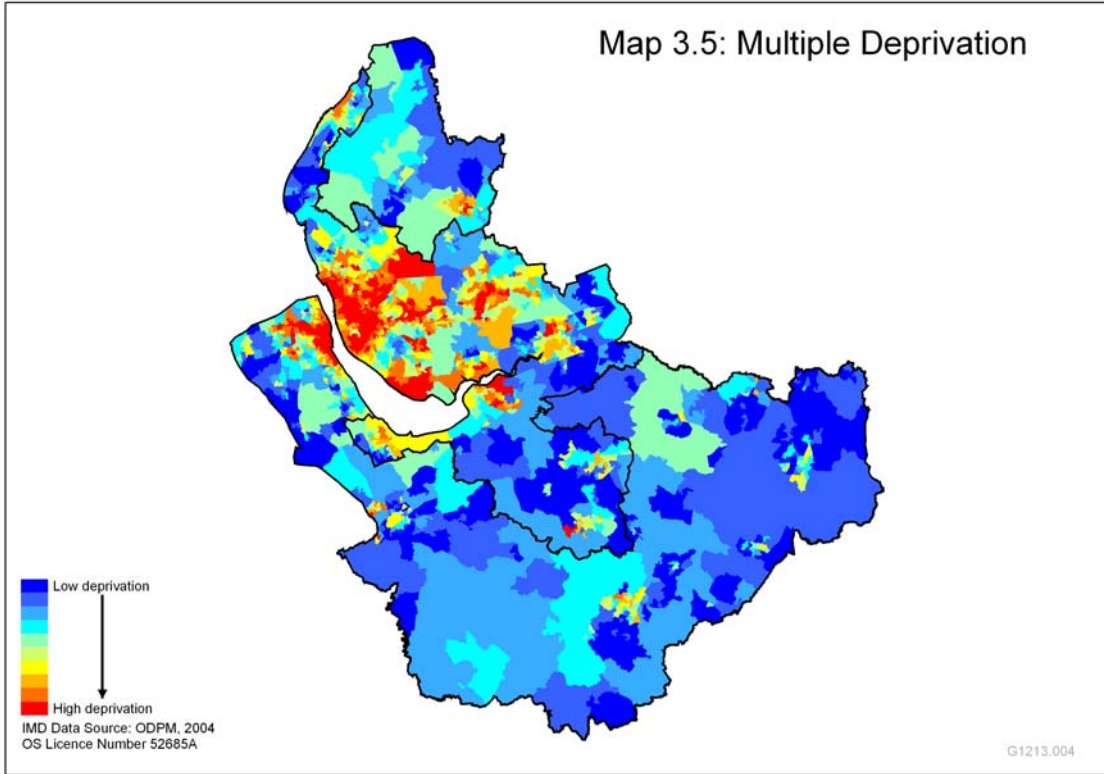
***iv. Contribution of public greenspace to health***

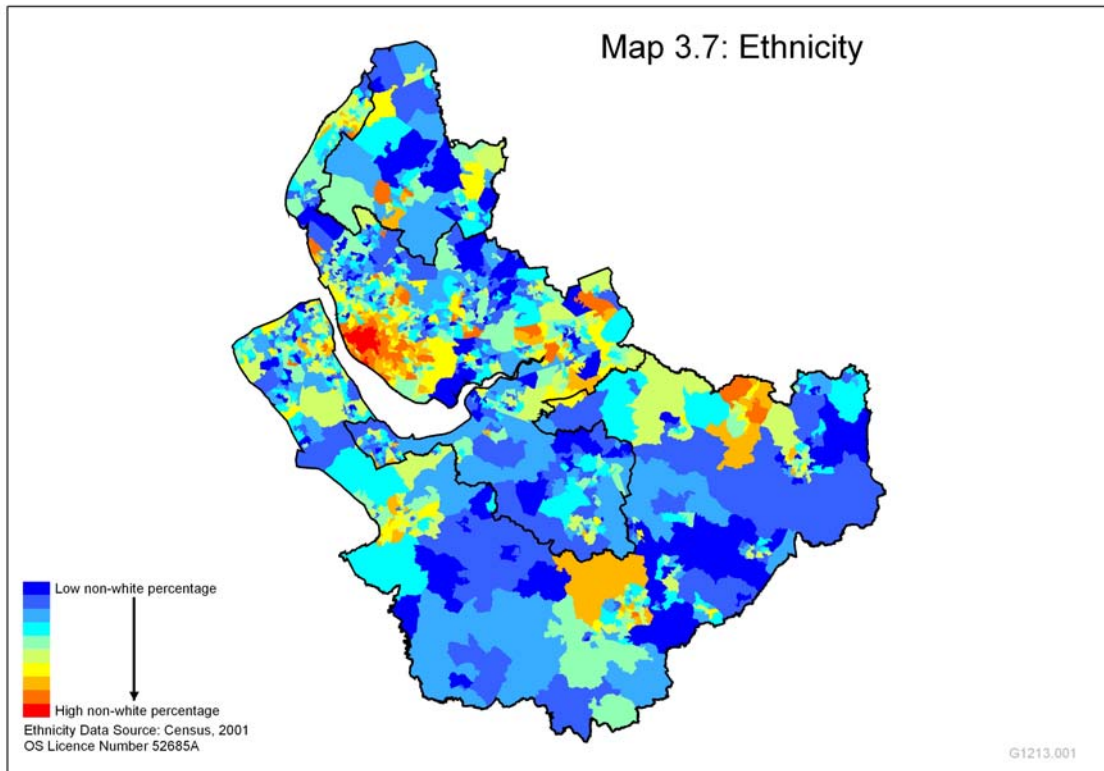
- 3.42 The benefits woodlands can bring can make a significant contribution to quality of life and well being – and may be particularly felt where deprivation is high, or there are issues of exclusion.
- 3.43 The following maps illustrate the most deprived<sup>13</sup> / non-white<sup>14</sup> communities across the study area.

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<sup>13</sup> From the Indices of Deprivation 2004

<sup>14</sup> Census 2001 data – does not consider white ethnic population (e.g. Eastern European) – this data is not currently available but should be considered in future assessments as appropriate



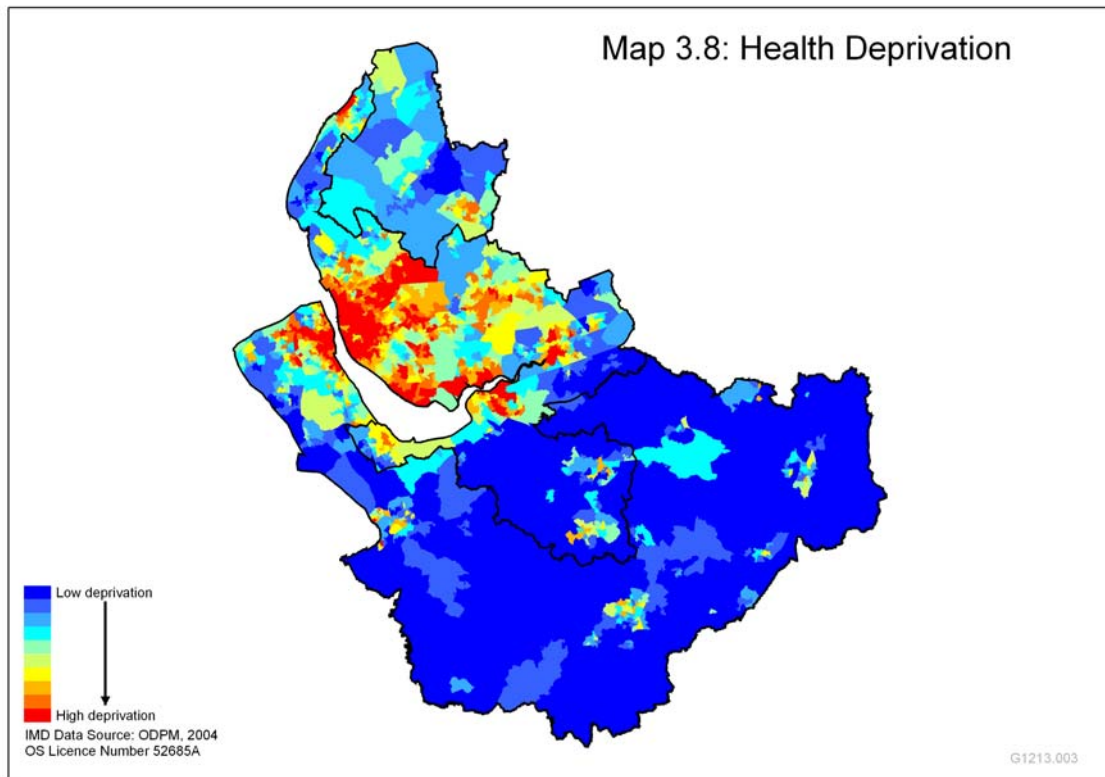


3.44 The Mersey Forest encompasses the major urban area in and around Liverpool, and as such perhaps understandably the maps illustrate a higher level of (education and multiple) deprivation for the Forest area as compared to outside the community forest – indeed, the Forest area was created based on these landscape and community needs. Similarly, the higher percentages of non-white population are largely seen inside The Mersey Forest – yet it should be considered that the actual non white population in the area is only around 0.1%.

3.45 The health benefits of trees and woodlands has recently been summarised in a Forestry Commission report<sup>15</sup>, which described how woodlands and trees in particular can bring many health and well being benefits, including providing attractive environments for physical activities, reducing pollution and acting to reduce stress through stimulating the senses. In addition, woodlands are inexpensive to visit – an important factor when considering health inequalities and social inclusion.

<sup>15</sup> Trees & Woodlands: Nature's Health Service (2005) Forestry Commission

- 3.46 The Forest Partnership is actively involved in enabling and delivering community events that focus on health and the natural environment. The REACT 'Liverpool on the Move' project is one example of this. Targeted at black and minority ethnic groups, young and disabled people, the event aimed to tackle obesity and cardio vascular conditions and inactivity through involvement in community forest type activities and engaging participants in physical activities
- 3.47 In viewing the health deprivation map, we can see that within the Mersey Forest area there are areas of particularly high health deprivation when compared with neighbouring areas:



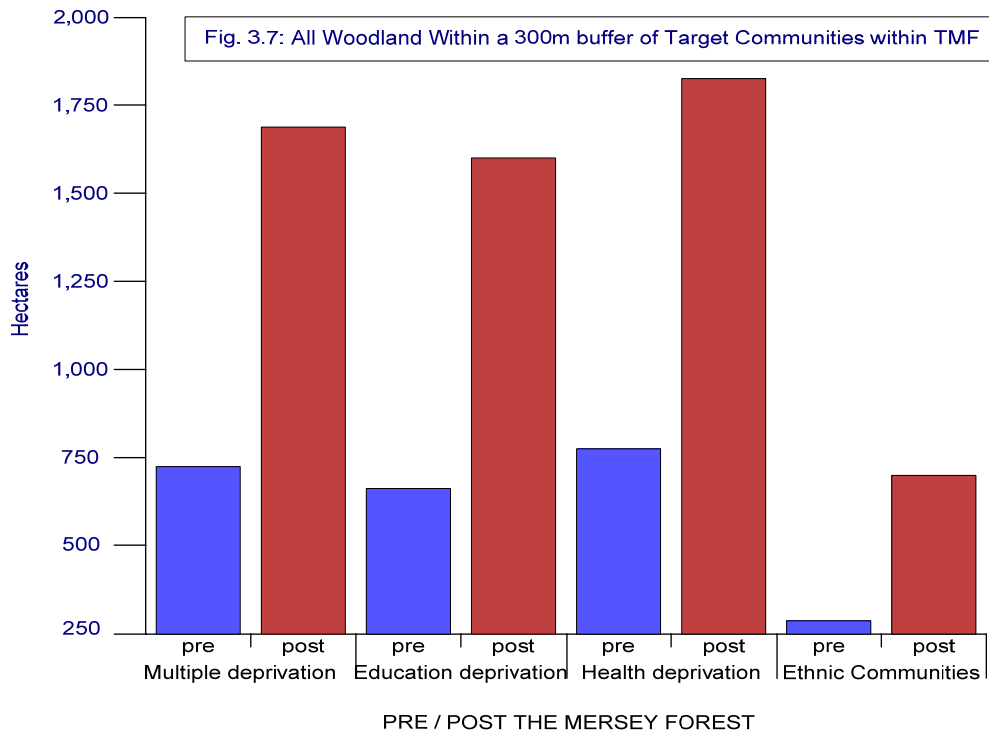
- 3.48 If we consider the impact of The Mersey Forest on deprived communities (in health, education and multiple deprivation terms) and on those communities with a higher non-white population, we can get a more informed picture by looking at woodland cover<sup>16</sup> in proximity to these target communities pre The Mersey Forest in comparison to the present day:

<sup>16</sup> Using the full set of woodland cover data within the Mersey Forest: from The Forest Partnership, Forestry Commission, English Nature and The Woodland Trust

<b>woodland area (ha) within 300m buffer of most deprived areas</b>			
<b>Multiple Deprivation</b>			
Area (ha)		%age woodland cover	
Pre TMF*	Present day	Pre TMF	Present day
731	1,684	2.8%	6.6%
<b>Education Deprivation</b>			
Area (ha)		%age woodland cover	
Pre TMF	Present day	Pre TMF	Present day
663	1,609	2.7%	6.5%
<b>Health Deprivation</b>			
Area (ha)		%age	
Pre TMF	Present day	Pre TMF	Present day
777	1,825	2.9%	7.1%
<b>woodland area (ha) within 300m buffer of areas with most non-white population</b>			
Area (ha)		%age woodland cover	
Pre TMF	Present day	Pre TMF	Present day
286	707	2.9%	7.1%

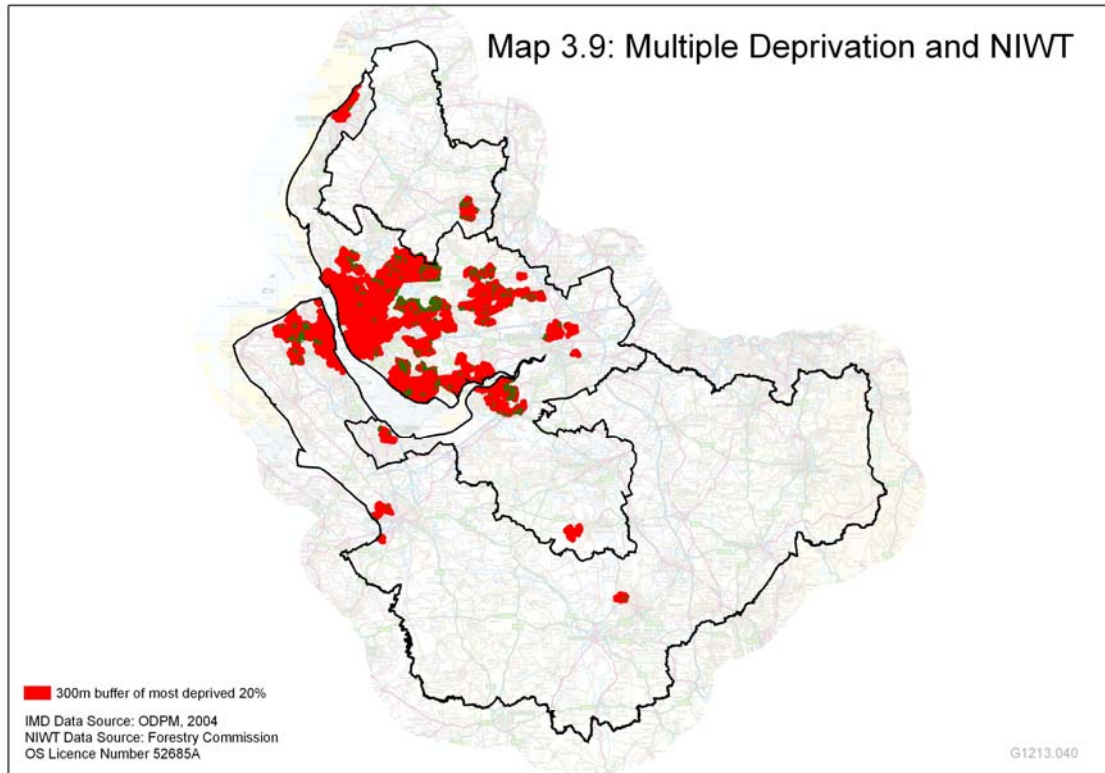
\* TMF = The Mersey Forest

3.49 These figures can be further refined to consider only those woodlands accessible to such communities<sup>17</sup>:

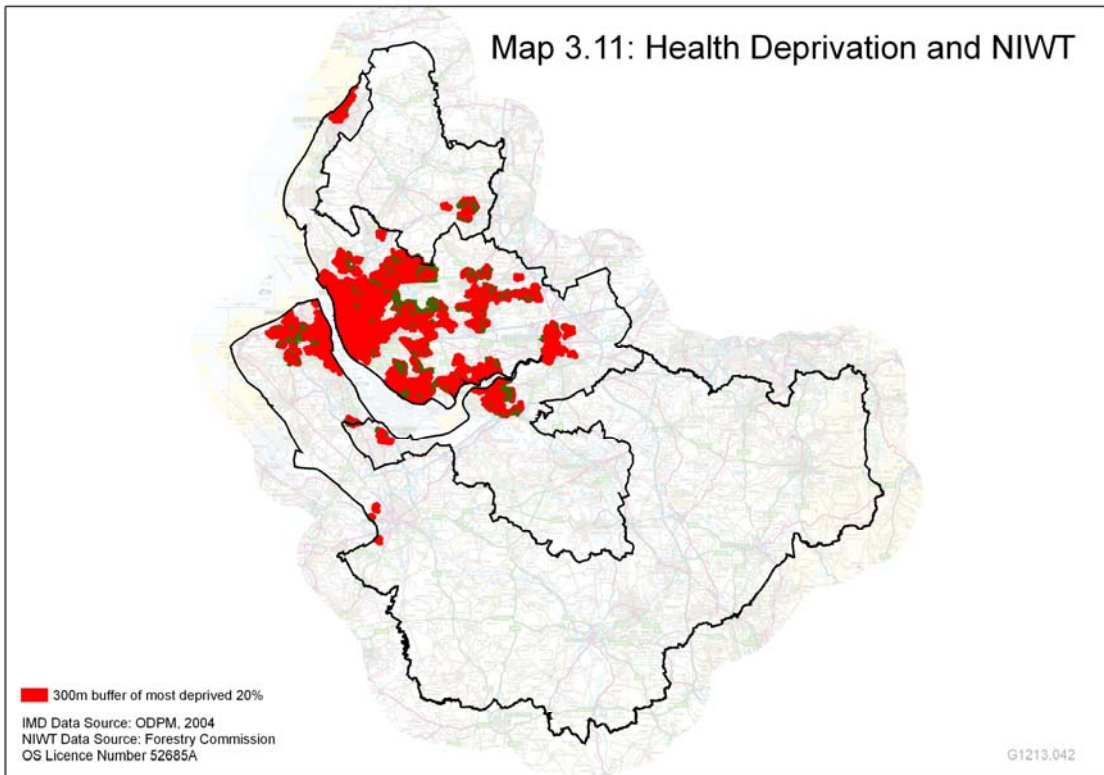
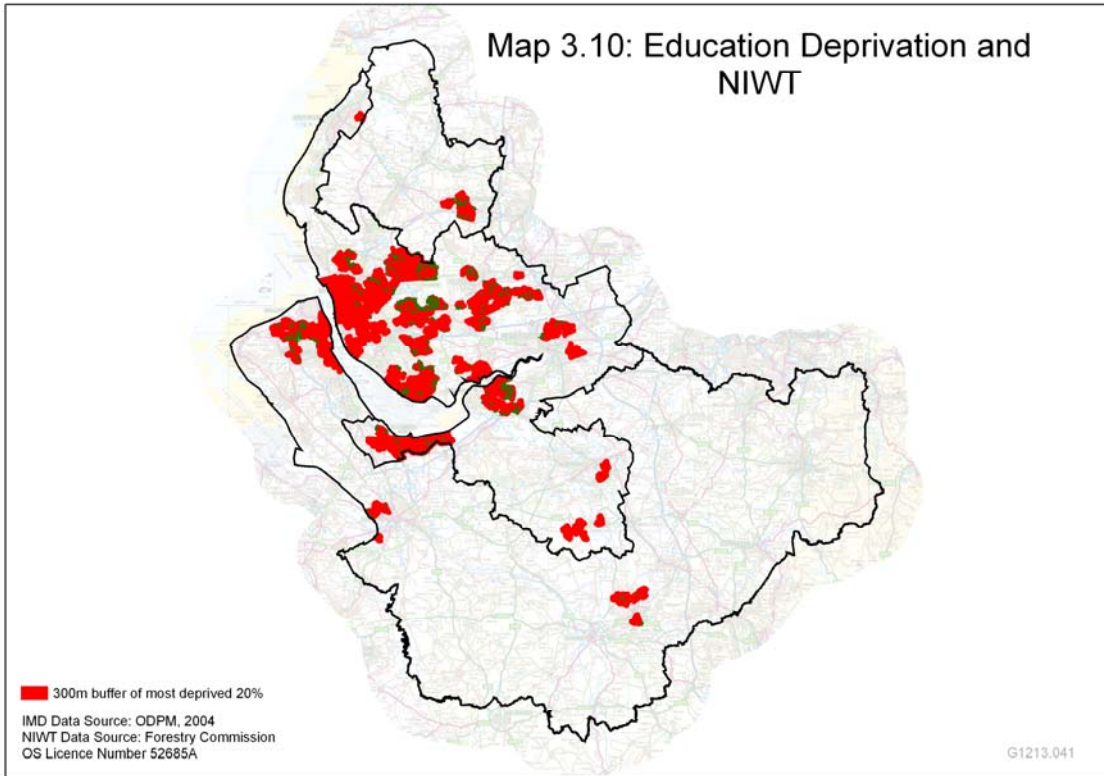


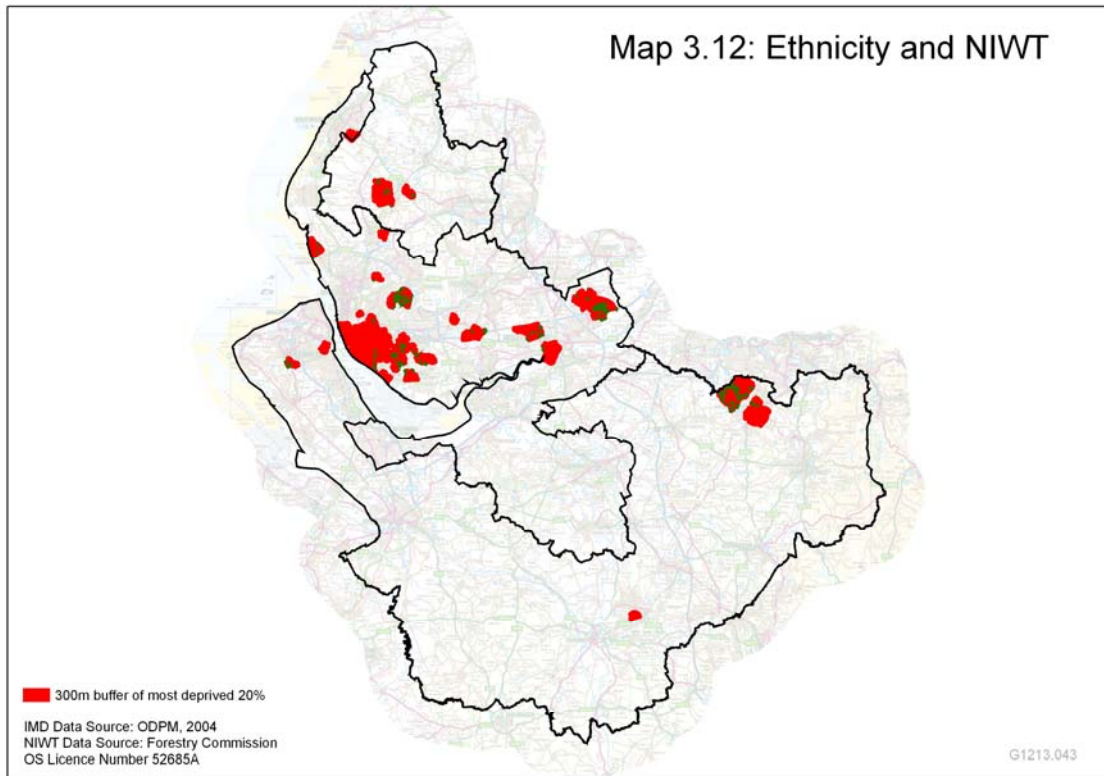
<sup>17</sup> As defined by the Woodland Trust

3.50 Clearly, the Forest Partnership's work has successfully targeted deprived communities through increased woodland cover, with substantial increases in both accessible and wider woodlands since its implementation, and greater co-incidence between deprived / minority communities and woodlands within the Forest area when compared with outside (using the National Inventory of Woodlands and Trees):









- 3.51 What this analysis does not tell us, however, is the quality of those woodlands or the benefit of the woodlands to the communities, and further study would be needed before any such conclusions can be made.

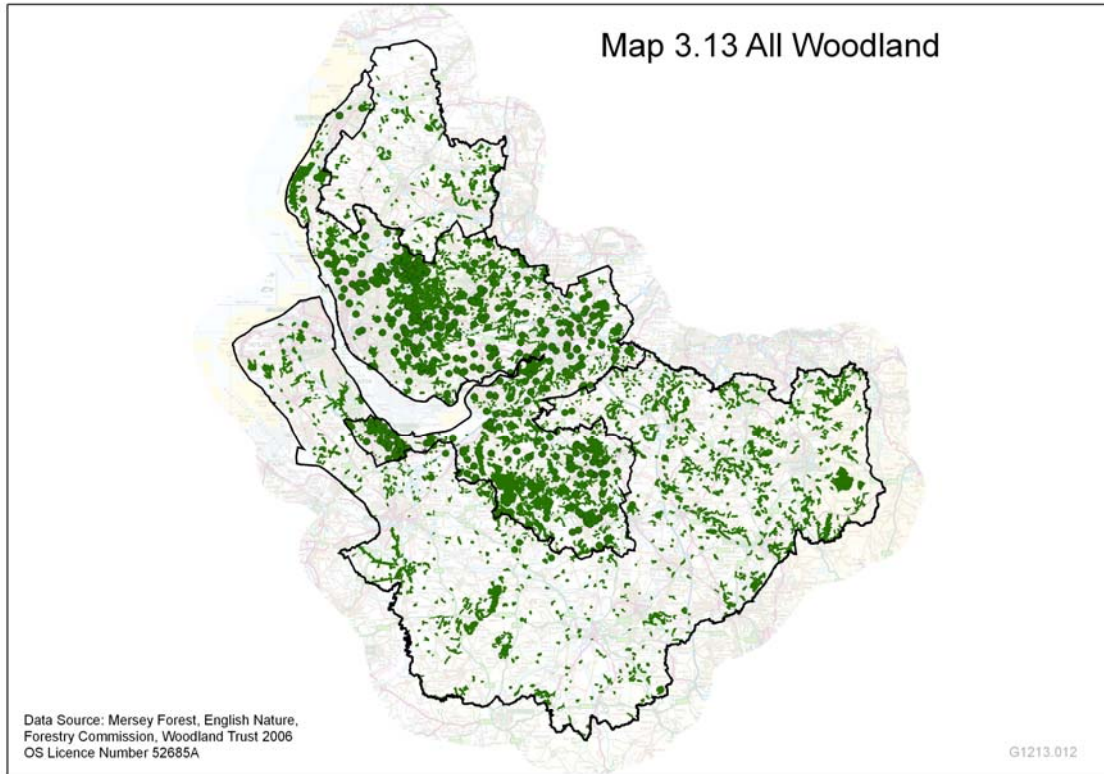
### Environmental Illustrations

- 3.52 The environmental criteria focused primarily on woodlands – specifically the extent of woodland cover, area planted with new woodlands and woodland management. However, the creation of non-woodland habitat – as an essential component of the community woodland ‘green mosaic’ – was also considered.

#### *i. Woodland cover*

- 3.53 The Mersey Forest Team and Partnership hold an up to date, comprehensive database of woodlands within the Community Forest boundaries, including woodlands of less than 1 hectare in size, while the data for woodland cover outside the community forest area is largely not available on such a fine geographic scale, or is as current. As a result, mapping these sets of data appears to show that there is significantly more woodland in the Mersey Forest area than in those areas immediately surrounding it:

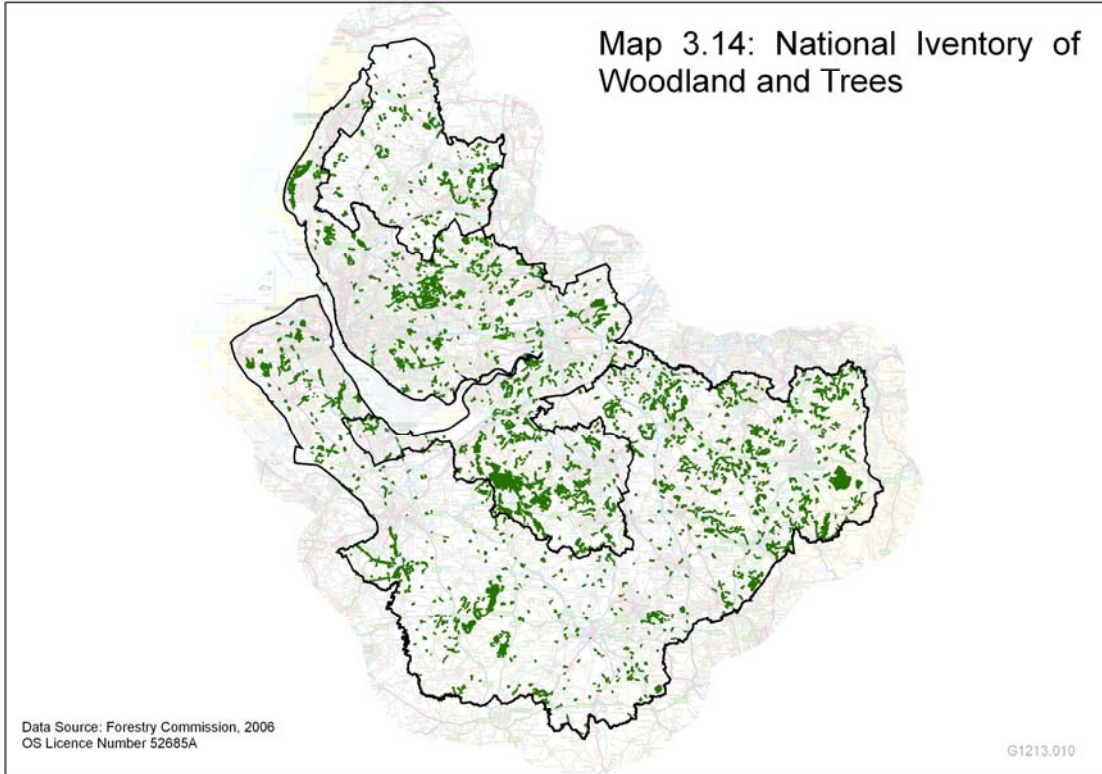




3.54 While it is true that the higher levels of woodlands may be a result of the Partnership's planting and management activity, in the absence of detailed data outside the Mersey Forest area a fairer comparison of woodland cover can be made using a standardised dataset derived from the National Inventory of Woodlands and Trees (NIWT<sup>18</sup>), which records woodlands of over 2 hectares in size:

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<sup>18</sup> Forestry Commission



3.55 If we consider the data used to create the two different maps (all woodland and NIWT), the gap in available information outside of The Mersey Forest can be clearly seen, with the available additional data showing over 3,400 hectares more woodland cover than the data available through the NIWT for outside of the community forest area is able to show. Further, we can also get an indication of how woodland cover within the Mersey Forest area compares with immediately surrounding areas and the region as a whole:

	Total area	All woodland		NIWT	
		ha	%	ha	%
Inside TMF	106,209	8,919	8.4%	5,507	5.2%
Outside TMF	225,785	8,760	3.9%	8,225	3.6%
NW Average	1,416,518	n/a	n/a	96,171	6.8%

3.56 Although the Forest area appears to fare badly against the regional woodland cover percentage, this most likely reflects the urbanised nature of much of the community forest area (another reason for The Mersey Forest's creation), particularly when considering the rurality of Cumbria, Lancashire and parts of Cheshire.

- 3.57 In fact, The Mersey Forest is over 66% **urban** compared to 24% of the region as a whole<sup>19</sup>, meaning that woodlands within the Forest area are by definition likely to be smaller and opportunities for woodland creation less likely to arise. In addition, the change in woodland cover over time indicates that achievements within the Forest are outperforming the national average – with UK woodland cover increasing by just 3.3% between 1924 and 2004, while TMF areas have seen an increase in woodland cover of 2.5% since its inception in 1994<sup>20</sup>. This is reinforced when the levels of new woodland planting are considered (presented as the next criteria).
- 3.58 Despite the disparities in information availability, both of the datasets and resultant maps clearly show that there is a significantly higher proportion of woodland cover in the Mersey Forest area than outside – which suggests that the Forest Partnership’s activities have made a direct contribution to increasing woodland cover in the community forest area.

***ii. Woodland planted***

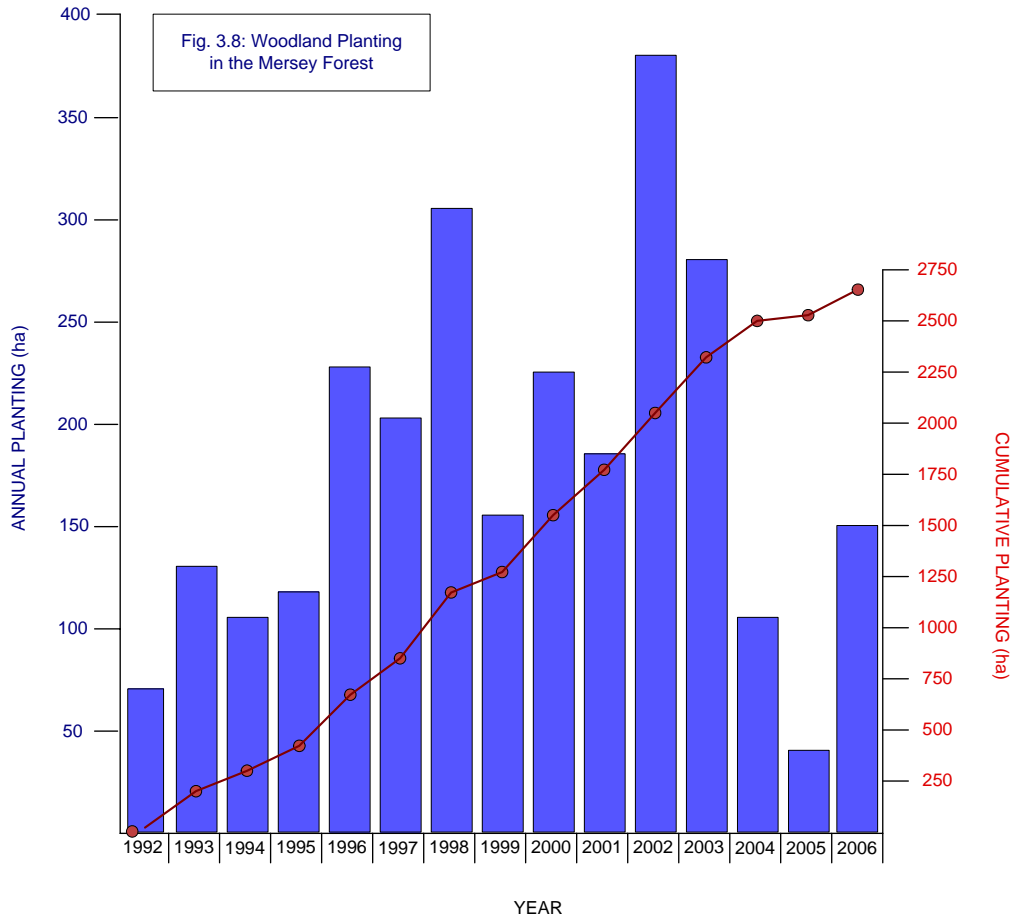
- 3.59 Annual monitoring of the Community Forests across England, carried out on behalf of the Countryside Agency<sup>21</sup>, appears to show the strategic and planned nature of activity within The Mersey Forest, particularly in terms of woodland planting. When compared with other Community Forests, it is taking a lead role in planting adjacent to development, as part of access networks and on reclaimed land.
- 3.60 Data held by the Forest Team shows that planting since 1991 has topped 2,500 hectares, with a peak in planting in 2002 (comparatively low levels of planting in 2004 and 2005 largely reflect the withdrawal of WGS funding, and the hesitance of landowners to commit to land use change while amendments to agricultural support mechanisms are undergoing change):

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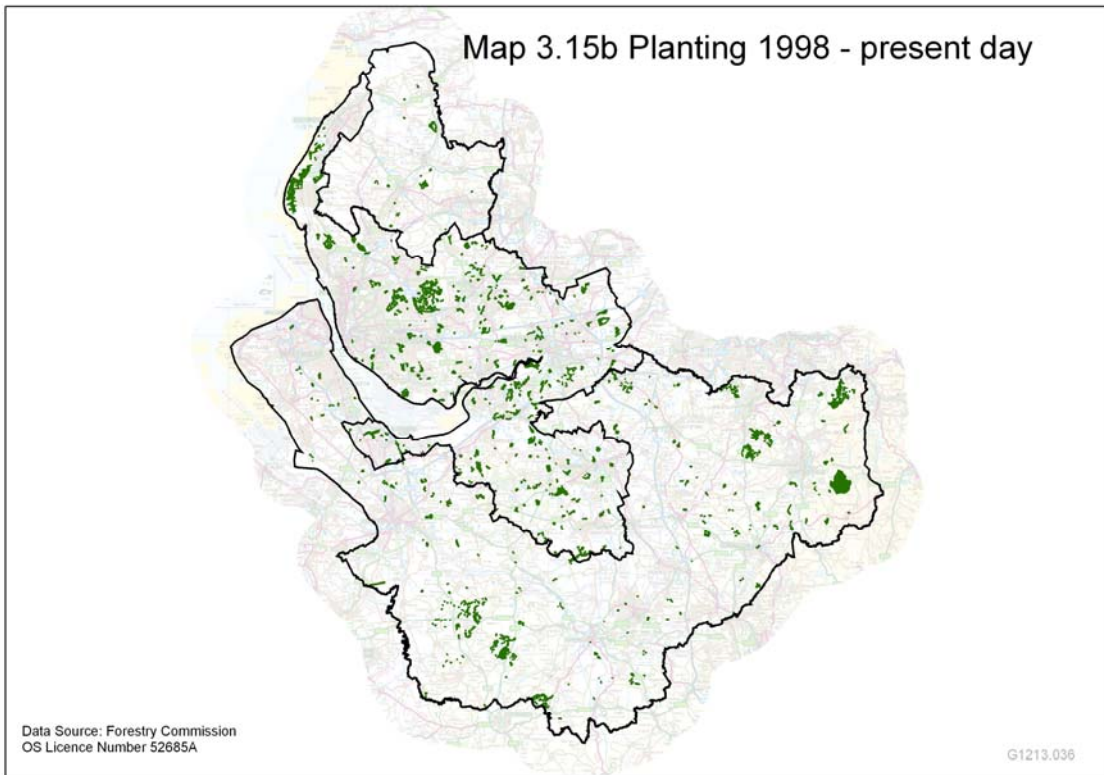
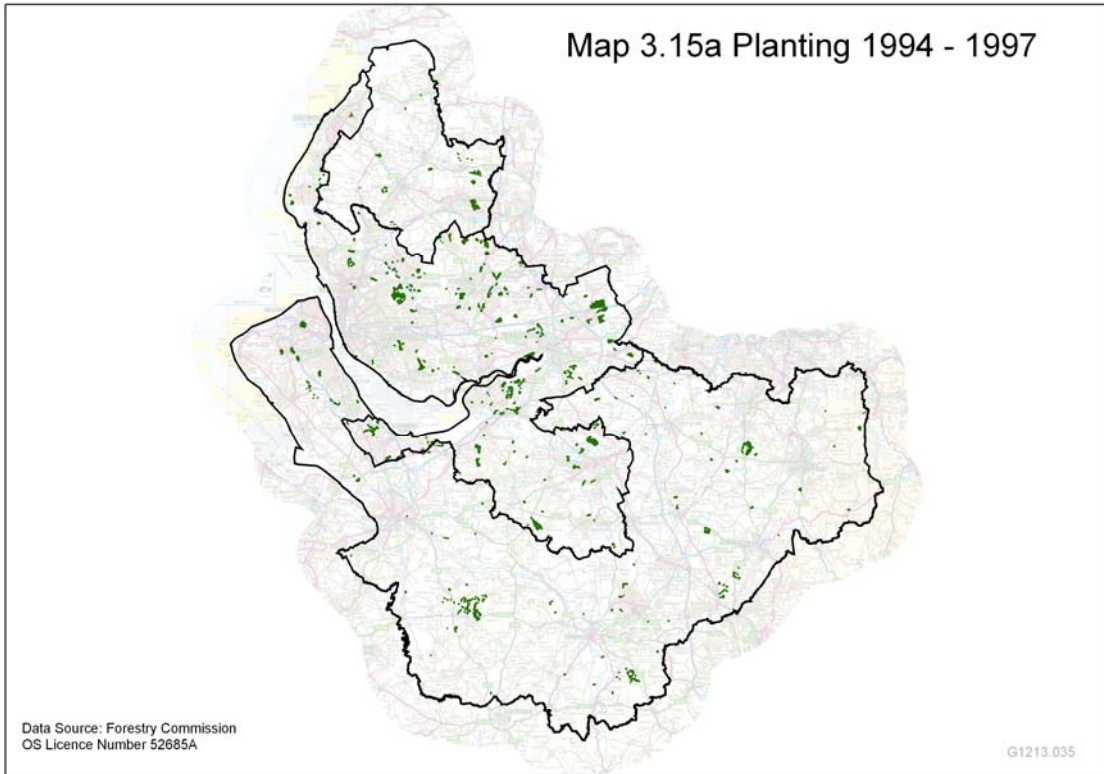
<sup>19</sup> Using Defra’s rural classification

<sup>20</sup> A Review of Progress (October 2005) The Mersey Forest

<sup>21</sup> Community Forests Monitoring Report 2002/3



3.61 Using WGS woodland creation data from Forestry Commission, the maps clearly illustrate how significant planting activity has been and how it has increased with time, comparing the Mersey Forest area with the area immediately outside:

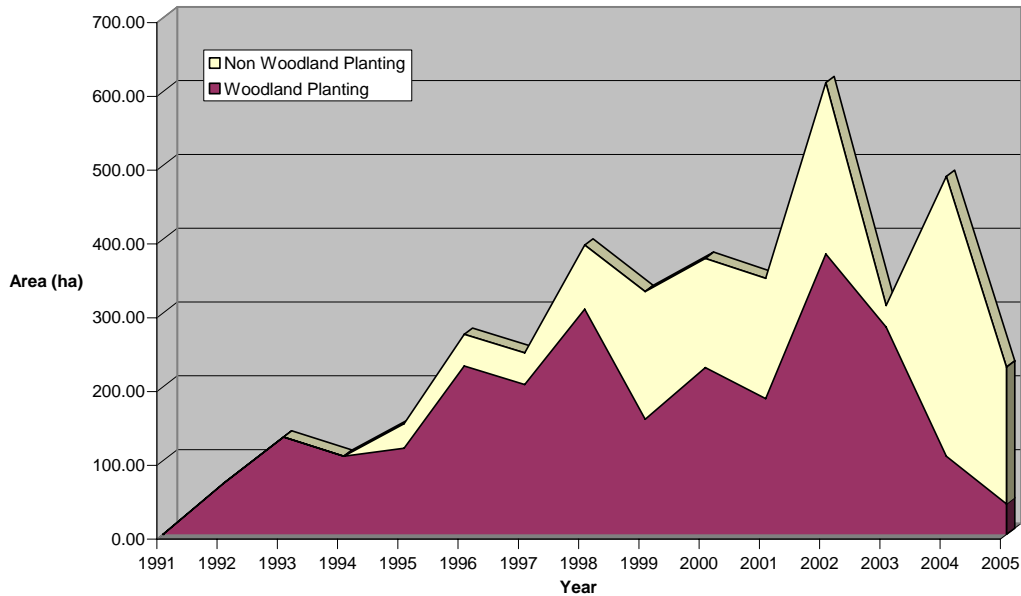


**iii. Non-woodland habitat created**

3.62 The Forest Partnership’s activities do not focus solely on woodlands, rather they encompass other non woodland habitats – linked to the developed of a Mersey Forest Biodiversity Action Plan. Non woodland habitat creation within the Forest area amounts to 1,786 hectares, plus 5,579 km of linear non woodland habitats (for example, along rail lines or river banks)<sup>22</sup>:

3.63 Indeed, this area of the Partnership’s work has increased year on year, with non woodland planting actually exceeding woodland planting:

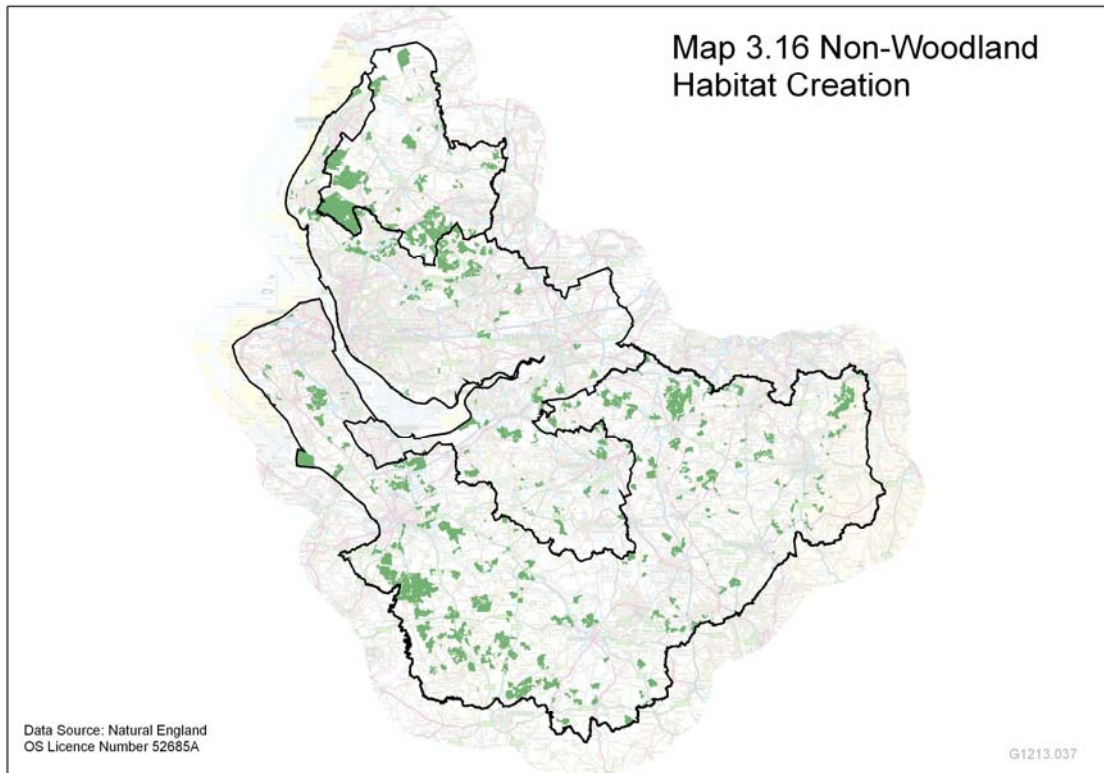
**Fig. 3.9: Woodland and non-woodland planting in The Mersey Forest**



3.64 Information on non-woodland creation outside of the Mersey Forest area is not available from any single source. Instead, individual agencies and organisations hold their own data on their own projects and programmes – which sometimes overlap in multiple partnership projects. However, it was felt that land under management agreements within Countryside Stewardship could provide as suitable proxy for non-woodland habitat creation.

<sup>22</sup> Data provided by The Mersey Forest team



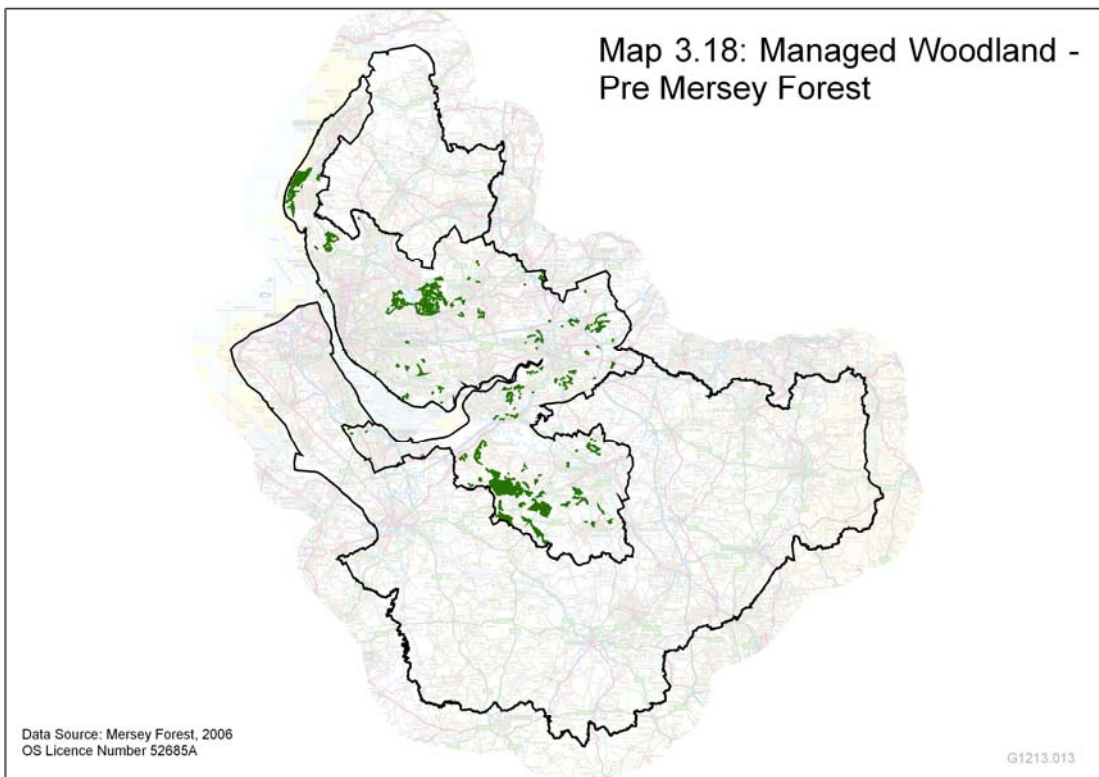
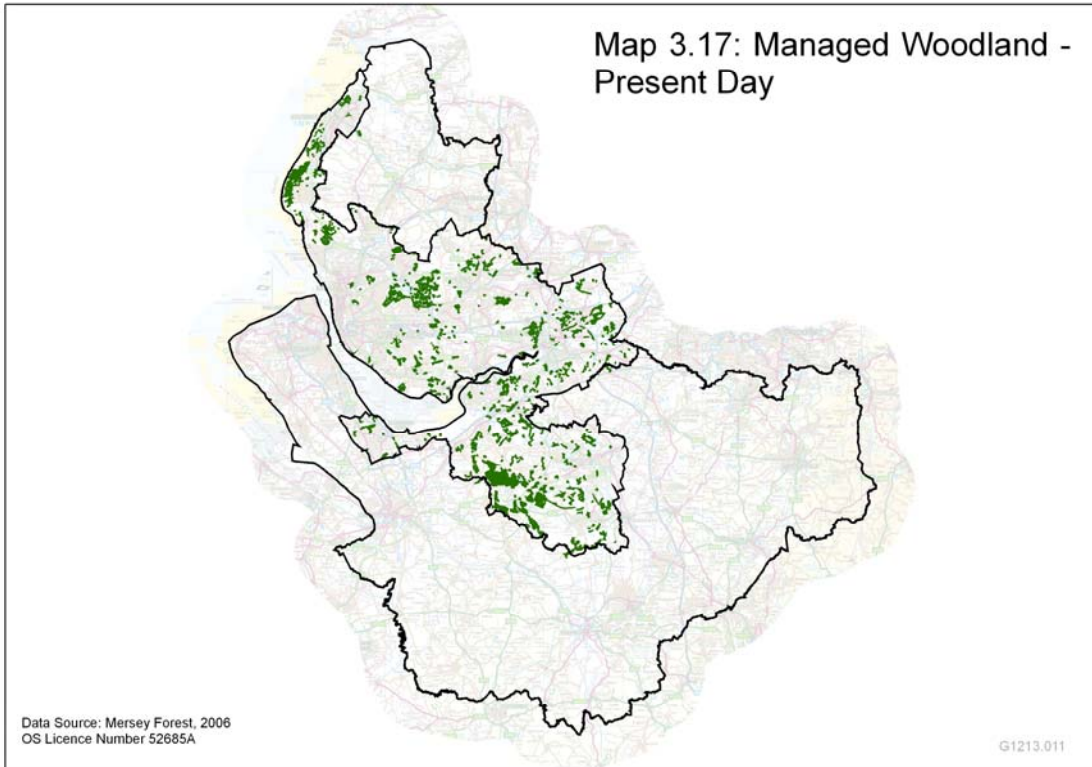


3.65 As the map indicates, there is significantly more land under Countryside Stewardship agreements outside the Forest area than inside (22,607 ha / 10% outside compared with 5,502ha / 5.2% inside). However, that is likely to relate to the amount of available land for Stewardship: in terms of land area, the Mersey Forest area is only 43.6% rural and so is likely to have much less agricultural land than outside the forest area at 81.8% rural.

3.66 Since Stewardship is only available to agricultural holdings, the lower levels of uptake are therefore not surprising, although it should be noted that an analysis of uptake against available (rural) land as opposed to total land indicates that within the Forest area 11.9% of available land is under a Stewardship agreement, compared to 12.2% outside the Forest area – a fairer comparison when its highly urbanised nature is considered.

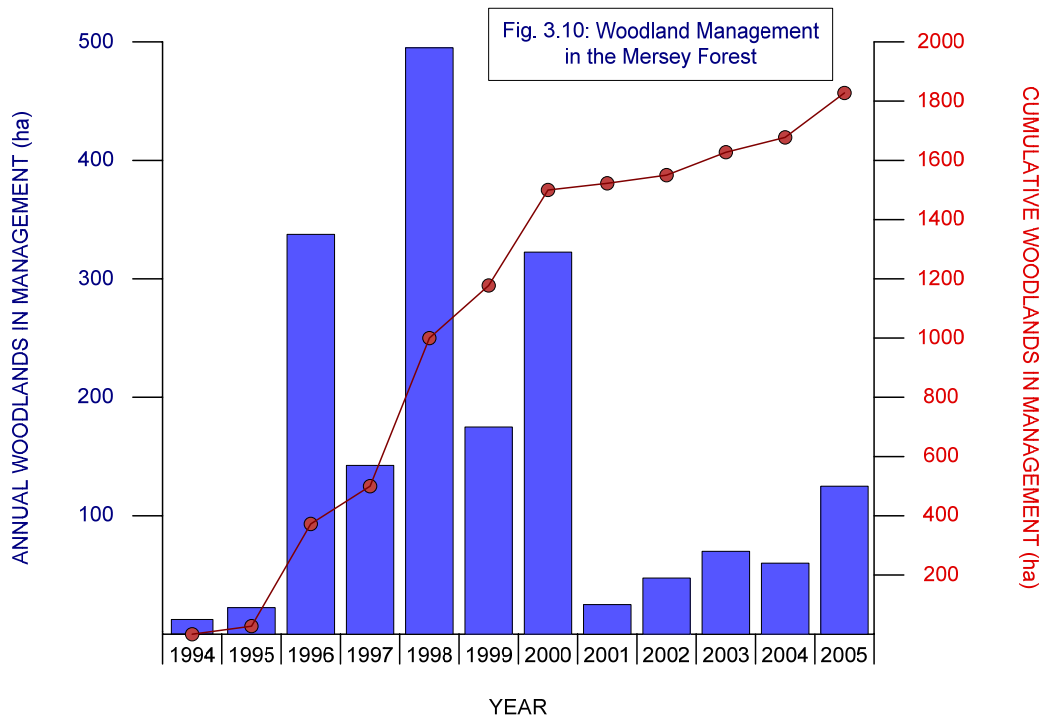
#### ***iv. Woodlands under management***

3.67 The maps below give an immediate visual indication of how woodland management has increased in the Mersey Forest area since its inception, with more than 1,400 ha of woodlands coming into management.





3.68 If the data is presented in a chart, the increase in managed woodlands in the Forest area is even more easily seen:



3.69 Again, in comparison with other Community Forests, the Forest Partnership performs particularly well in woodland management, having the highest number of hectares under management for both accessible woodlands and woodlands without access. However, there is not any data available that allows a comparison with those parts of the study area outside of the Forest area, so a comparison is not possible.

**Cross-cutting Illustrations**

3.70 The cross-cutting criteria consider wider impacts and issues, particularly in relation to the catalytic nature of the Forest in generating funds and initiating or enabling new projects.

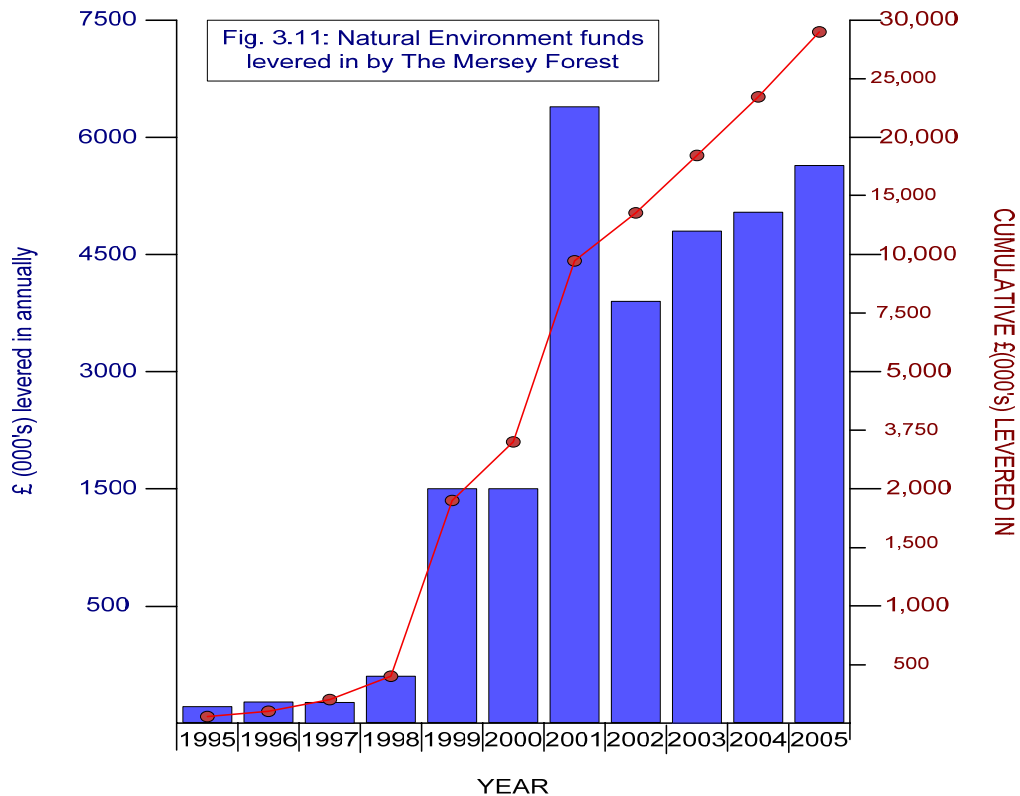
***i. Natural environment funds levered in***

3.71 A comparison between funding generated by the Forest Partnership and that generated by other Community Forests<sup>23</sup> shows that again Mersey Forest is leading the way with the highest level of funding overall in both 2002/3 and 2003/4:

<sup>23</sup> Using data from the 2002/3 and 2003/4 Countryside Agency Monitoring Reports

Community Forest	2002/3		2003/4	
	£	%	£	%
Avon	1,971,034	7.9	1,006,950	5.3
Gt. West	1,545,837	6.2	1,459,510	7.7
Thames	2,677,543	10.8	1,803,930	9.5
Watling	158,902	0.6	145,450	0.8
Marston	621,802	2.5	3,423,600	18.0
Greenwood	560,046	2.3	3,232,190	17.0
Mercia	742,538	3.0	443,950	2.3
S. Yorkshire	2,786,093	11.2	1,234,340	6.5
Red Rose	5,141,576	20.7	2,082,000	10.9
<b>Mersey</b>	<b>5,266,859</b>	<b>21.2</b>	<b>3,725,400</b>	<b>19.6</b>
Gt. North	299,805	1.2	318,570	1.7
Tees	3,103,566	12.5	157,110	0.8
<i>Total</i>	<i>24,875,601</i>		<i>19,033,000</i>	

3.72 The Forest Partnership's success in levering in funds is evident throughout its history, securing funds and enabling gearing to a total of more than £29m in the 11 years between 1995 and 2005:



- 3.73 Obviously, this is an impressive performance, demonstrating the huge financial value of the Forest to the local environment. Unfortunately, similar levels of data are not available for comparison with areas outside the community forest – recording and data collection tends to be uncoordinated and unrefined to reflect only environmental investments.
- 3.74 For example, if we consider Lottery funding (an area where the Forest team itself tends to be relatively unsuccessful in gaining grant support), the information on awards made is available by Local Authority area, but is presented only by “good causes” and so is not sufficiently refined to identify which elements of the investment were actually allocated to environmental projects. However, as an indicator of investment, it is useful to consider.

<b>Health, Education &amp; Environment ‘Good Cause’<sup>24</sup></b>			
Within TMF	Number of projects	802	
	£ total	£90.3m	
	Average £ per project	£112,600	
<i>Outside TMF</i>	<i>Number of projects</i>	<i>520</i>	
	<i>£ total</i>	<i>£35.8m</i>	
	<i>Average £ per project</i>	<i>£68,800</i>	
<b>BIG Lottery – Fair Share: Transforming Your Space<sup>25</sup></b>			
Within TMF	Knowsley	£1.8m	Total £4.1m
	Sefton	£1.3m	
	St Helens	£900k	
<i>Outside TMF</i>	<i>West Lancashire</i>	<i>£385k</i>	<i>Total</i> <i>£1.6m</i>
	<i>Wirral</i>	<i>£1.2m</i>	

- 3.75 Although it is impossible to identify the proportion of the health, education and environment good cause awards that was actually invested in environmental projects, and the nature of the Fair Share projects is not known, it is clear from these figures that Local Authorities inside the community forest boundaries benefit from significantly higher levels of investment than neighbouring areas outside the community forest boundaries – although funding returns for the Forest Team would indicate that little of this funding is being used directly on or for Mersey Forest projects.

<sup>24</sup> From [www.lottery.culture.gov.uk](http://www.lottery.culture.gov.uk)

<sup>25</sup> A programme to improve local environments and the quality of life of communities – from [www.biglotteryfund.org.uk](http://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk)

3.76 While there is no clear link between this investment and the Mersey Forest, the catalytic effect of the Forest Partnership and its activities (particularly when considering its strengths in community engagement) could play a strong role in generating ideas and opportunities and enabling projects that subsequently result in successful funding applications.

***ii. Development of new projects / initiatives***

3.77 The strong focus on partnership working within The Mersey Forest has enabled a wide variety of projects and initiatives to be developed and implemented in the community forest area, delivering multiple benefits across the social, economic and environmental sectors. While projects delivered by similar organisations (such as Groundwork and BTCV) tend to focus on localised improvements even for larger programmes, Mersey Forest projects tend to be more strategically focused, looking to influence and being influenced by regional policy.

3.78 The strategic nature of many projects within The Mersey Forest can be demonstrated through the Green Infrastructure Planning and the North West Cheshire Forest Strategy projects. The Forest Partnership is taking a lead role in championing the GI agenda in the Northwest, working with partners to promote and enable the strategic planning of green infrastructure in the region and embedding GI in regional policy. Equally, the Forest Strategy demonstrates how local initiatives can also be strategic – identifying and planning for the development of 10 key strategic sites for landscape and environmental improvement, as well as encouraging inward investment, enhancing quality of life, and empowering local communities.

3.79 This holistic approach is similar to that taken at the sub regional level in the Lancashire Woodland Vision – a strategy to guide the development of woodlands and associated businesses in Lancashire. The Mersey Forest Plan acts as the Woodland Vision for Merseyside, and includes green infrastructure as one of its ‘key issues’. GI development is also a target for 2007/8 within the Northwest Forestry Framework, and it is likely that TMF will take a leading role in its delivery.

3.80 The Partnership’s ability to actually deliver local benefits through wider strategic programmes is demonstrated through the Integrated Countryside and Environment Plan (ICEP), a partnership led and delivered by the community forest team.

- 3.81 ICEP focuses on rural opportunities, providing advice and support for rural businesses across Merseyside. The knowledge and expertise of partners within The Mersey Forest (and its partner in Community Forests Northwest, the Red Rose Forest) has also been instrumental in the delivery of Newlands, a £23m NWDA funded and Forestry Commission managed project to regenerate derelict land to woodlands across the Mersey Belt.
- 3.82 Although other, similar programmes have since been developed, Newlands was groundbreaking as the first of its kind, focusing on the strategic impact woodlands could make on the region's image. Programmes in Lancashire and Cheshire (REMADE and REVIVE respectively) have a similar strategic ethos and purpose to Newlands, but are smaller in scale and scope<sup>26</sup>.

### **Summary**

- 3.83 Clearly, the Mersey Forest Partnership and its activities have had a significant impact in social, economic and environmental terms.
- 3.84 Socially, the study focused on two general areas: participation and ownership, and woodlands as a vehicle to address social exclusion and deprivation.
- 3.85 Awareness raising is a strong focus of the Partnership's work, as enabling and encouraging community involvement in its activities is crucial to its success, and while the Area Profiles data is not the most favourable illustration, the more detailed survey results are much more positive.
- 3.86 A result of this active awareness raising may be the significant increase in the number of community activities and events delivered by the Forest Partnership through its lifetime. The (limited) data available indicates that residents within The Mersey Forest have more opportunity for becoming involved and engaged, and taking ownership of 'their' woodland than those outside the area – particularly with the support of organisations such as BTCV, Forestry Commission and Groundwork.

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<sup>26</sup> Newlands is a £23m programme to regenerate 435 ha of land to community woodlands; REMADE has a value of £21.6m and a target of 300ha, and REVIVE 290 ha – but has yet to be fully implemented.

- 3.87 The assessment of planting and management of woodlands demonstrates the Partnership's success in delivering where it is needed most: in close proximity to communities that face health, education and multiple deprivation, and where there are minority communities – as indicated in the illustrations of woodlands in these localities both pre Mersey Forest and in the present day, and in comparison with areas outside the community forest.
- 3.88 In economic terms, perhaps the greatest impact is on image. Activity to regenerate DUN land to community woodlands and the huge performance in greening major transport corridors and strategic routes (substantially outperforming neighbouring areas) help to create areas that people want to live and work in – indirectly contributing to economic performance by providing areas that people want to live and work in, as demonstrated in the evaluation of property values on one previously DUN site pre and post regeneration to community forest.
- 3.89 The availability of environmental data outside of the Forest area was a particular issue. The Mersey Forest Team and Partnership hold extensive information on their activity and outputs over time that are simply not available to the same level of detail and over equivalent time scales elsewhere.
- 3.90 However, using the comparable data that is available, significantly higher levels of natural resource creation and protection are shown within the Forest area than outside, with (woodland and other) habitat creation and management all increasing steadily to substantially higher levels than prior to the Forest's inception. This achievement is perhaps even more impressive when the predominantly urban nature of the Forest area is compared with surrounding areas.
- 3.91 The Mersey Forest has also acted as a catalyst in two areas: in generating new projects and initiatives and in leveraging in natural environment funding. Although again data availability outside the Forest was an issue, a simple review of the level of funds the Partnership has levered in over its lifetime, and the range and strategic nature of Mersey Forest partnerships and projects, demonstrates the impact the community forest has had.

#### **4. Strategic Impact Analysis**

- 4.1 To further demonstrate The Mersey Forest's relative and contemporary value, the results of the analysis are assessed against the objectives and targets of the key strategies active in the North West, identifying where – with the right partnerships and funding put into place - activities can potentially contribute to delivering those high level agendas, specifically:
- The Regional Economic Strategy (NWDA, 2006)
  - The Regional Spatial Strategy (NWRA, 2005)
  - The Regional Forestry Framework (NW Regional Forestry Framework Partnership, 2005)
- 4.2 This value analysis will also consider the findings of the State of Region report<sup>27</sup>, identifying those themes and indicators which Community Forestry and Mersey Forest specific activities can contribute to.
- 4.3 A table detailing all of the objectives and actions The Mersey Forest contributes to (as discussed here) is included as Appendix 1.

#### **The Regional Economic Strategy (RES)**

- 4.4 The RES, prepared and managed by the Northwest Regional Development Agency (NWDA), is the key strategy for guiding the economic development of the North West, setting a framework for regional, sub-regional and local action. It identifies 5 themes under which the actions required to achieve the Strategy's vision are grouped:
- Business
  - Skills & Education
  - People & Jobs
  - Infrastructure
  - Quality of Life
- 4.5 Whilst these may not seem to be immediately or significantly relevant to the Forest Partnership's work, there are in fact some strong links and key areas where community forestry activity can directly deliver against targets and actions across the RES's 5 themes.

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<sup>27</sup> 'State of the North West Region – Vital Signs 2005' Regional Performance Indicators Group

**Business**

- 4.6 The Mersey Forest initiative has created over 150 jobs and supported over 750 businesses in its time, and the ICEP (Integrated Countryside and Environment Plan) project actively encourages and enables business development and creation in the woodland and land based industries. Further, the woodland and greenspace resources provided via activity within the Forest contribute to the recreational and visitor facilities the area has to offer (for example, the management of the Sefton Coast pine woods).
- 4.7 These activities contribute to two areas of the Business theme, firstly through the *Enterprise* stream, where actions include providing support to businesses in the rural economy and to under performing sectors including Knowsley and St. Helens (two Local Authority partners within The Mersey Forest). Secondly, the recreational and visitor facilities could play a part in the growth and innovation in the tourism sector – an action under the *development of internationally competitive sectors* objective.
- 4.8 The Mersey Forest Partnership has also developed a range of research projects, as well as a cluster of organisations that have an international standing in brownfield regeneration to community woodland.
- 4.9 Activities within the Forest could also contribute to the RES objective of developing resource efficiency through the planting of trees as biomass – an alternative and renewable source of energy that could contribute directly to achieving the Regional Climate Change Action Plan.

**Skills and Education**

- 4.10 The community involvement opportunities offered through the Forest Partnership, and associated volunteering and training opportunities, can help to develop skills and abilities that can enhance individuals' employability and thus reduce worklessness. Further, again through the ICEP project, specific training and skills development is supported for the rural sector.
- 4.11 While the RES's objectives and actions are high level and very specifically targeted, the approach of providing such opportunities for all helps to overcome skills disparities in minority and excluded groups – an action under the '*investing in workforce development*' objective.



- 4.12 Equally, the rural market targeted by ICEP directly contributes to developing the skills of the rural workforce for business diversification and development – an action under the ‘*meet the skills needs of sectors and growth opportunities*’ objective.

***People & Jobs***

- 4.13 Forest activities touch on a number of actions under the People & Jobs theme, particularly in relation to the *local employment* and *health objectives*.
- 4.14 The rural elements of Forest activities will contribute to the delivery of the Regional Rural Delivery Framework, and thus contribute to the RES action of *ensuring growth in the rural economy* as part of the RRDF. Similarly, the Forest’s core work of providing and managing quality woodlands and greenspaces will provide local (residential or business) communities with opportunities for recreation and physical activity, helping to achieve the RES action for promoting *access to physical activity to improve health and fitness*.

***Infrastructure***

- 4.15 Although the Infrastructure theme concentrates primarily on transport infrastructure and the built environment, this is an area where the Forest Partnership can significantly contribute.
- 4.16 The land use stream seeks to secure new uses for brownfield land, specifically including the *creation of new strategic greenspace* – clearly involvement in programmes like Newlands and in the Northwest’s Green Infrastructure Think Tank will contribute to this RES action.
- 4.17 Further, activities relating to biomass and woodfuel as *alternative energy sources* could contribute to outcomes in the Northwest Energy Strategy, the development and implementation of this featuring under the RES energy objective.

***Quality of Life***

- 4.18 The objectives and actions under this theme resonate most strongly with The Mersey Forest, and aims of creating woodlands that bring benefits to people, wildlife and the economy and engaging with local communities to identify and strategically re-model areas of land in need of environmental improvement.

- 4.19 As well as contributing to *sustainable communities* and reductions in social exclusion (through its programme of and approach to community engagement), the Forest Partners actively promote and enable ‘*clean, safe, green*’ principles to be embedded in local community plans and development – both actions under the Community stream.
- 4.20 Improvements to the environment generated via Partnership activities significantly reflect the objectives and actions under the Environment stream. Its physical improvement works contribute to the transformational action for investment in *quality public realm, green space and environmental quality*, as well as 4 of the 6 actions under the RES objective for realising and nurturing natural assets:
- Developing the *economic benefit of the natural environment* - specifically developing a green infrastructure / transport corridors strategy (a transformational action);
  - Creating and managing *Regional Parks* - Mersey Waterfront, Weaver Valley and Northwest Coastal Trail are relevant to The Mersey Forest;
  - Implementing the *Regional Forestry Framework* – in which the Forest Partnership will have a crucial role
  - Promote *sustainable farming and food*, and its environmental asset management role – through ICEP in particular.

**Summary - RES**

- 4.21 This analysis has clearly shown how activities within The Mersey Forest are already actively delivering outputs and outcomes against targets within the RE, and how community forestry activities can contribute to the high level economic agenda set by NWDA, demonstrating how environmental outcomes can and do act as a catalyst for economic - and social – development across the 5 themes in the RES.
- 4.22 It has also demonstrated how these activities can impact on and help deliver other regional strategies, specifically:
- The Sustainable Communities Plan;
  - Northwest Energy Strategy;
  - Regional Rural Delivery Framework;
  - Regional Tourism Strategy;
  - Regional Forestry Framework (see below).

**The Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS)**

- 4.23 The North West Regional Assembly (NWRA) has prepared the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS), which incorporates the Regional Transport Strategy and provides a framework for the physical development of the North West region over the next fifteen to twenty years. The vision of the RSS is:  
*“By 2021 we will see a North West that has realised a higher quality of life for all citizens through improved prosperity, embracing the principles of sustainable development, thereby reducing economic and other disparities within the North West and the UK as a whole.”*
- 4.24 One of the predominant areas of work of community forestry is improvement of quality of life within the forest area, particularly in relation to disadvantaged communities. As such, The Mersey Forest objectives and actions demonstrate strong links to the RSS and activity can directly deliver against the key headline themes.

***Working in the North West – Achieving a Sustainable Economy***

- 4.25 Since the Forest’s inception, 4000ha of land have been transformed into community woodland with a large proportion of this activity being undertaken on Derelict, Underused and Neglected Land (DUNL). These derelict areas are often located in centres of high population providing accessible natural greenspace for local communities reducing the need to travel by car.
- 4.26 This reclamation activity has captured and harnessed the potential of otherwise underused sites to provide a valuable natural tourism facility which is visually exciting and functionally diverse - thus contributing to the RSS action of increasing the North West *market share of attractions and improving the region’s overall tourism offer*, and contributing to *sustainable tourism* .
- 4.27 Community forestry contributes to a number of *Regional Parks* (specifically Mersey Waterfront, Weaver Valley and NW Coastal Trail in the Mersey Forest area), and, although the Parks are still at an early stage of delivery, it is not unreasonable to assume that the Forest Partnership’s activities will contribute towards the delivery of the Regional Parks and their development as a *tourism destination* as identified in the RSS.

***Transport in the North West – Connecting People and Places***

- 4.28 Good quality access promotes increased usage of sites, particularly within the urban-rural fringe.
- 4.29 By October 2005 600km of new access routes had been created within the community forest area, a five-fold increase over the predicted baseline for access provision had The Mersey Forest not existed. These provide a beneficial resource for all people and make a direct contribution to RSS target to *develop an integrated network of continuous, attractive safe routes which capitalise on the potential social, environmental and health benefits.*

***Enjoying and Managing the North West – Environmental Enhancement and Protection***

- 4.30 The Mersey Forest Partnership makes a direct contribution to the promotion and delivery of *green infrastructure*, the ‘network of greenspaces and natural elements that intersperse and connect our cities, villages and towns’. The Mersey Forest is a founder member of the Green Infrastructure Think Tank (GITT) for the North West and has been instrumental in the delivery of the North West Green Infrastructure Guide - complementing the Regional Spatial Strategy and acting as a general guide to key stakeholders within the region.
- 4.31 From 1999 there has been a ‘step change’ in the activity within the Mersey Forest. In early years initial focus was on increasing woodland planting however, emphasis has now moved towards the development of a landscape mosaic of differing habitats, as reflected in the Community Forest Biodiversity Action Plan (a joint plan with the Mersey and Red Rose Forests). This wider understanding of ecological functionality allows for the development of a landscape-scale approach to planning - effectively *delivering regional biodiversity targets* as identified with the RSS. Mersey Forest Partners are also involved in the development and *delivery of Local Biodiversity Action Plans* - a target within the RSS.
- 4.32 As the issue of climate change continues to rise up the political agenda, a greater emphasis has been placed on the delivery of *sustainable energy solutions* for the North West. Mersey Forest have been involved in a number local interventions related to the provision of renewable energy sources, and have continued to work alongside Government Office North West towards a regional biomass needs initiative.

- 4.33 The imminent publication of the North West Development Agency's Climate Change Strategy in November 2006 will hopefully clarify the position of the North West in relation to climate change and give further political weight to the development of a robust and sustainable renewable energy sector within the region.
- 4.34 The benefits derived from Forest Partnership activity in relation to *climate change and flood amelioration* will also be a contributing factor towards the attainment of the targets within the North West's Climate Change Strategy.
- 4.35 Under this theme, Regional Parks are identified as a specific objective. The Mersey Forest area includes the Mersey Waterfront, Weaver Valley and Northwest Coastal Trail Regional Park Areas of Search, and the Partnership will have a critical role in their development and delivery.

#### **Summary RSS**

- 4.36 Analysis of the RSS clearly demonstrates that The Mersey Forest can make a significant contribution to its key agendas and objectives and in particular to those within the Environmental Enhancement and Protection Theme. Forest Partners are already working towards the delivery of a number of these objectives and will continue to contribute to the delivery of the RSS.

#### **The Regional Forestry Framework**

- 4.37 'Agenda for Growth' is the Regional Forestry Framework (RFF) for England's North West, a strategy to guide and shape woodland and forestry activity in our region for the next 20 years. The Framework represents the regional expression of the England Forest Strategy, and is complemented by 'The Agenda for Growth: Making it Happen 2006 – 2009', a 3 year Action Plan for delivery of the RFF.
- 4.38 The Framework provides a dynamic and action-orientated approach to the delivery of woodland activity within the region. However, focus is not placed solely on woodlands - the aim is to demonstrate the wider public benefits that woodland intervention can deliver e.g. economic value. The framework is based on six 'action areas':

- Action Area One: *Enterprise and Industry*
- Action Area Two: *Regional Image*
- Action Area Three: *Biodiversity and Landscape*
- Action Area Four: *Health, Well-being and Quality of Life*
- Action Area Five: *Climate Change and Energy*
- Action Area Six: *Supporting and Resourcing the Sector*

- 4.39 Action Area One focuses on *Enterprise and Industry*, developing and supporting our woodland and forestry businesses. Community Forests Northwest (CFNW) is identified as the lead body in relation to Action 6: *to deliver two events to bring more national timber promotion events to the North West and serve to raise the profile of the sector.*
- 4.40 The work of CFNW has made significant improvements in relation to the image of the North West Region, facilitating a change in the perception of the region from tired and degraded to a vibrant and thriving with a quality environment. As such, Action Area Two, *Regional Image*, identifies CFNW as delivering against 6 of the 7 actions under this theme. The community forests are also considered a key component of the Capital of Culture showcase for the forestry sector in the region and The Mersey Forest Partnership would be the lead delivery body.
- 4.41 Action Area Three priorities aim to *maximise the benefits that trees and woodlands can bring to our regions biodiversity and landscape.* CFNW are identified as a key partner to increase tree planting within urban areas.
- 4.42 The focus in Action Area Four is on using woodlands to improve health, well-being and quality of life, and CFNW banner is recognised as a delivery agent for several actions, with a direct reference to The Mersey Forest as the lead body in delivering skills and capacity development activities under Action 31.
- 4.43 It is likely that Mersey Forest Partnership will contribute both directly and indirectly to activities throughout the Action Plan, even when not specifically identified, because of their holistic approach to project development and management.

**RFF Summary**

- 4.44 The RFF provides strategic regional guidance to activities across The Mersey Forest, with a number of specific responsibilities identified within the Action Plan that are either completed or underway. The social, economic and environmental value of woodland promoted via the RFF is fundamental to the Forest's work and the Partnership will continue to deliver against these three agendas in line with sustainable development principles.

**Vital Signs: State of the Region Report 2005**

- 4.45 Vital Signs provides a single holistic perspective of the North West region's performance, identifying the strengths and weaknesses assessed as trends over time and in comparison to other regions. The report aims to harmonise the key headline indicators of the three regional strategic framework documents (the Regional Economic Strategy, Regional Spatial Strategy and Action for Sustainability) into an integrated set of indicators that can be used as one regionally agreed document to reflect the region's 'performance'. This regional evidence base will be used to help inform policy and strategy considerations at a local, sub-regional and regional level.
- 4.46 Activities within the Mersey Forest Partnership already or could contribute to 14 of the 42 indicators identified within the Report, in particular:
- Non-Car Trips
  - Air Quality
  - Derelict Land
  - A 'Good Place' to Live
  - Access to Greenspace
  - Participation
- 4.47 Forest Partners continue to be heavily involved in the soft-end reclamation of *derelict land*. Their long-standing record of success within this field means they now provide an invaluable knowledge base for other organisations looking to undertake land reclamation schemes. However, although a number of sites totalling 645ha have been reclaimed within the Forest area, the stock of derelict land within the region remains relatively unchanged, since new sources of derelict land continue to contribute to the existing stock and reclamation activity has not been undertaken at the same rate as derelict land 'creation'.

- 4.48 600km of new high quality access routes have been created which serve to promote and encourage the use of other forms of sustainable transport and increase the number of *non-car trips*. The increased use of sustainable transport methods coupled with the enhanced levels of woodland planting within the forest area particularly along strategic transport corridors will serve to make a significant contribution to the improvement of *air quality* within the region.
- 4.49 New footpaths are also created ensure sites are accessible to local communities enabling their interaction and participation with nature. Community consultation is a crucial component in site design and creation and provides an invaluable opportunity for social interaction and cohesion, thus making the area a 'good place to live' - further reinforced by aesthetic improvements that TMF activity has on the local landscape.

***Vital Signs Summary***

- 4.50 Activity within the Mersey Forest contributes strongly to some of the State of the Region indicators and there is potential for them to increase their input into the delivery of other indicators, further reinforcing their regional role as a key partner and delivery agent within the region.

**Strategic Impact Analysis: Summary**

- 4.51 Clearly, The Mersey Forest can and does have a strong role in the delivery of these key regional strategies, not only in terms of environmental enhancement but also in wider social and economic terms.
- 4.52 Despite the predominantly economic focus of the RES, the Partnership is able to deliver against actions (including some transformational actions) across all 5 themes, reflecting the community forest's holistic and empowering approach to local environmental improvements. Equally, this wide ranging approach will contribute towards actions under the RSS sustainable economies, transport and environmental enhancement and protection priorities.
- 4.53 Mersey Forest, in its own right and as a part of CFNW, is considered a key partner in the delivery of the RFF in the Northwest, and will take direct responsibility for several actions outlined in its 3 year action plan as well as contributing to the achievement of some other actions. It also clearly has a continuing active role in contributing to improvements the 'State of the Region' indicators.



## **5. Conclusions**

- 5.1 This comparator study has sought to identify the difference The Mersey Forest has made in the community forest area, over time and in comparison with neighbouring areas.
- 5.2 The study has found that activity within the Forest has had a significant impact, but it has been difficult to carry out a complete analysis because of the lack of comprehensive, co-ordinated and up to date data and information outside of the Mersey Forest area. However, it has been possible to draw some conclusions:
- Activities within the Forest are responsive to the particular needs and characteristics of the community forest area;
  - The Forest contributes to the social, economic and environmental quality of the community forest area through targeted provision of woodland and other natural / greenspace resources;
  - Local Authority areas within the Mersey Forest area benefit socially, economically and environmentally, frequently outperforming neighbouring Local Authority areas in the criteria assessed within this study;
  - The Forest's activities are strategically relevant, and can contribute to the delivery of key regional strategies' objectives and targets.
- 5.3 In this part of the analysis, we attempt to identify whether such activity has been 'good' or has had a 'transformational' impact in active areas. In reviewing the data we do have available, we can make an assessment of whether such results have been transformational in three ways<sup>28</sup>:
- Comparison of results against baselines;
  - Comparison of areas within the Mersey Forest area to adjacent areas;
  - Comparison of pre Mersey Forest with the present day.

### ***Results against baselines***

- 5.4 Baseline figures provide an illustration of what would have happened had The Mersey Forest not been implemented - environmentally in relation to woodland planting, woodlands under management, and creation of non woodland habitats, and the number of community activities / events in social terms.

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<sup>28</sup> Assessments cannot be carried out on all comparator criteria because historic data or data for outside of the Forest area is not reliable or is unavailable

- 5.5 Although the earlier figures in chapter 3 clearly demonstrated the Forest Partnership's achievements in these areas, when compared with the baselines it is clear that such activities have had a transformational effect on the environment and for communities within the community forest area:

		<b>Baseline ha / n°.</b>	<b>Actual ha / n°.</b>
<b>Planting (1992 – 2005)</b>	Cumulative	232.4	<b>2,534.4</b>
	Average / year	16.6	<b>158.4</b>
<b>Woodlands managed (1994 – 2005)</b>	Cumulative	240.0	<b>1,812.8</b>
	Average / year	20.0	<b>151.0</b>
<b>Non woodland habitats created (1995 – 2005)</b>	Cumulative	260.0	<b>1,515.3</b>
	Average / year	20.0	<b>137.7</b>
<b>Community activities / events (1995 – 2002)</b>	Cumulative	3,520	<b>31,495</b>
	Average / year	500	<b>3,937</b>

**Results against adjacent areas**

- 5.6 In comparing performance within the Forest against neighbouring areas, some measure of its relative impact can be made. Using the woodland cover datasets (maps 3.12 and 3.13), there appears to be a significant difference within as compared to outside the Forest's boundaries:

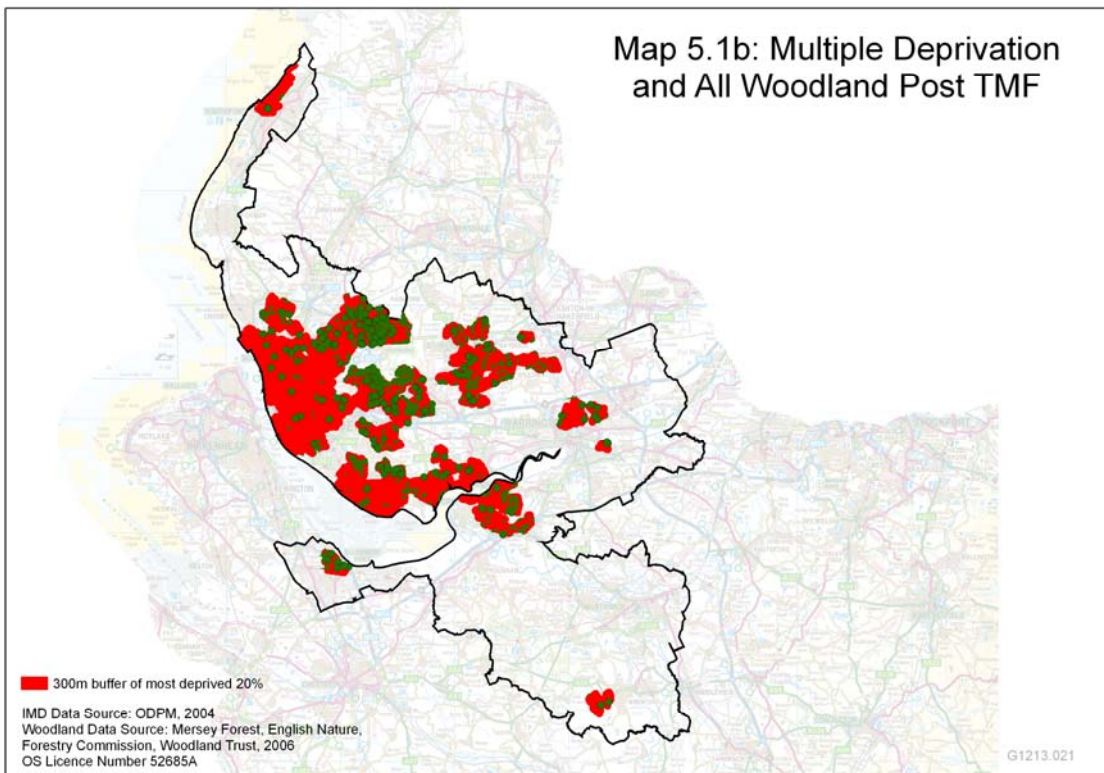
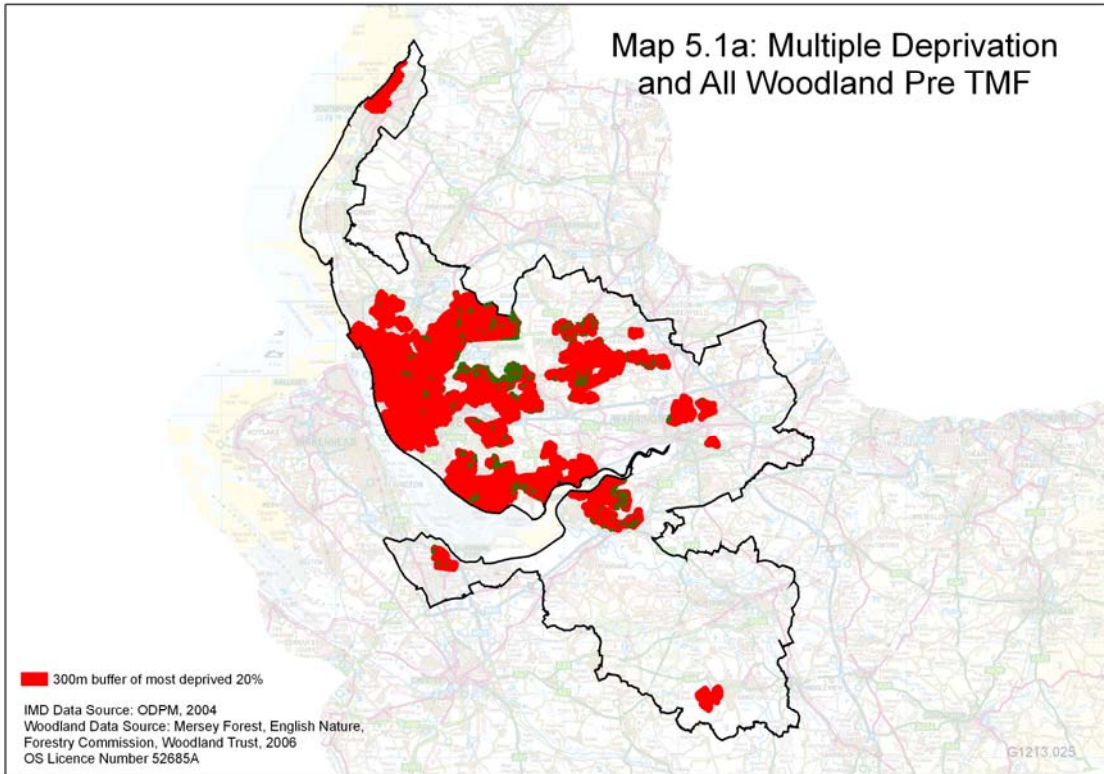
	<b>Study area</b>	<b>Within TMF</b>	<b>Outside TMF</b>
<b>Total area (ha)</b>	334,335	<b>106,209</b>	228,126
<b>Woodland area (ha)</b>	15,684	<b>7,085</b>	8,599
<b>Woodland area (%age)</b>	4.69	<b>6.67</b>	3.77

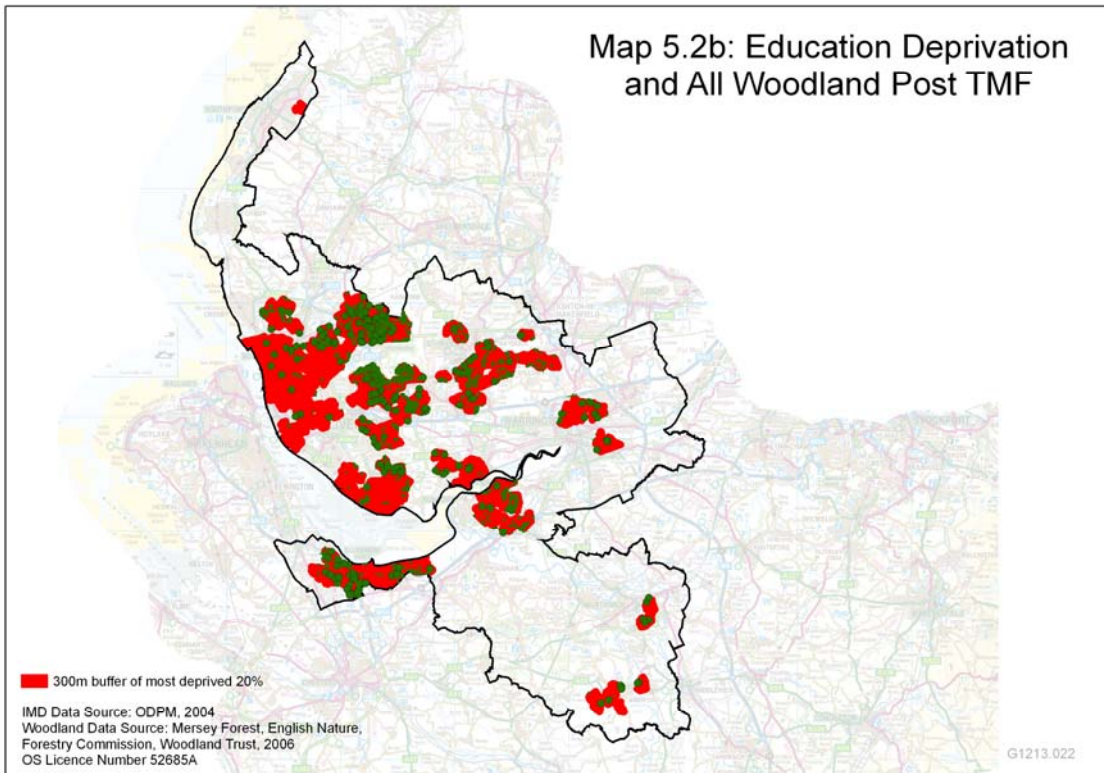
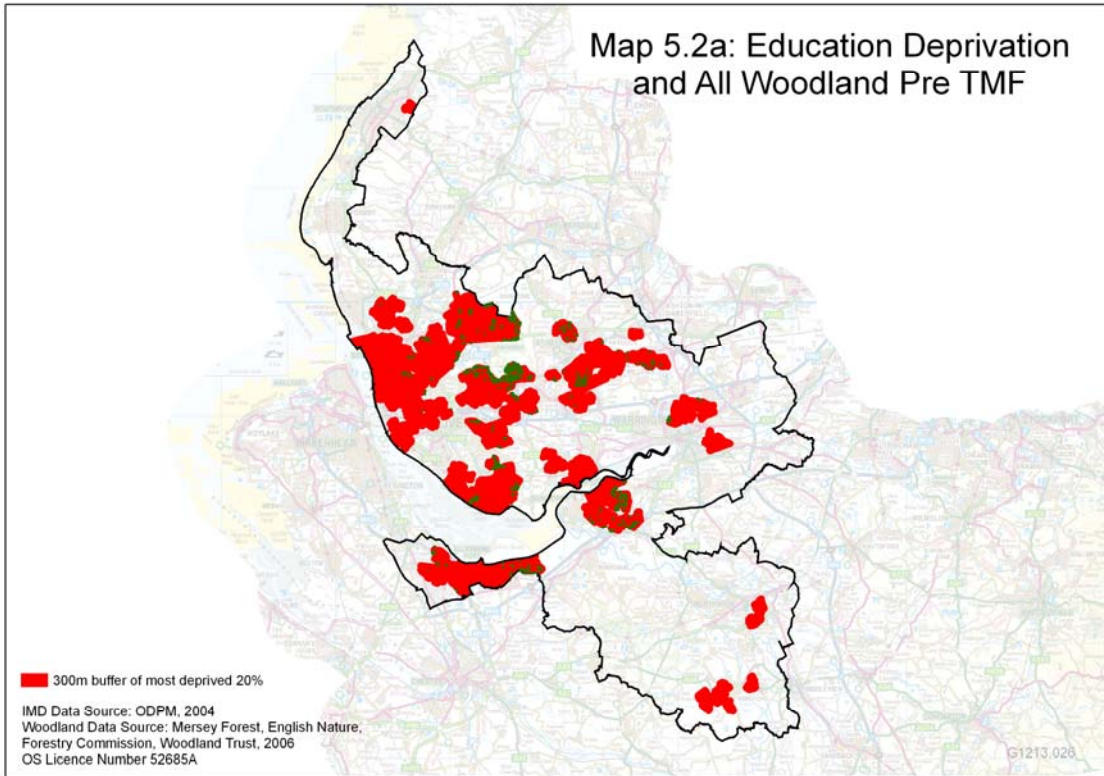
- 5.7 These figures show that the community forest area equates to less than one third of the study area, but contains almost half (45%) of the study area's woodland. Again, it is not unreasonable to consider TMF's activity to achieve such an output as transformational – which is further enforced when figures from pre Mersey Forest are compared with the present day (below).

**Results: pre Mersey Forest against present day**

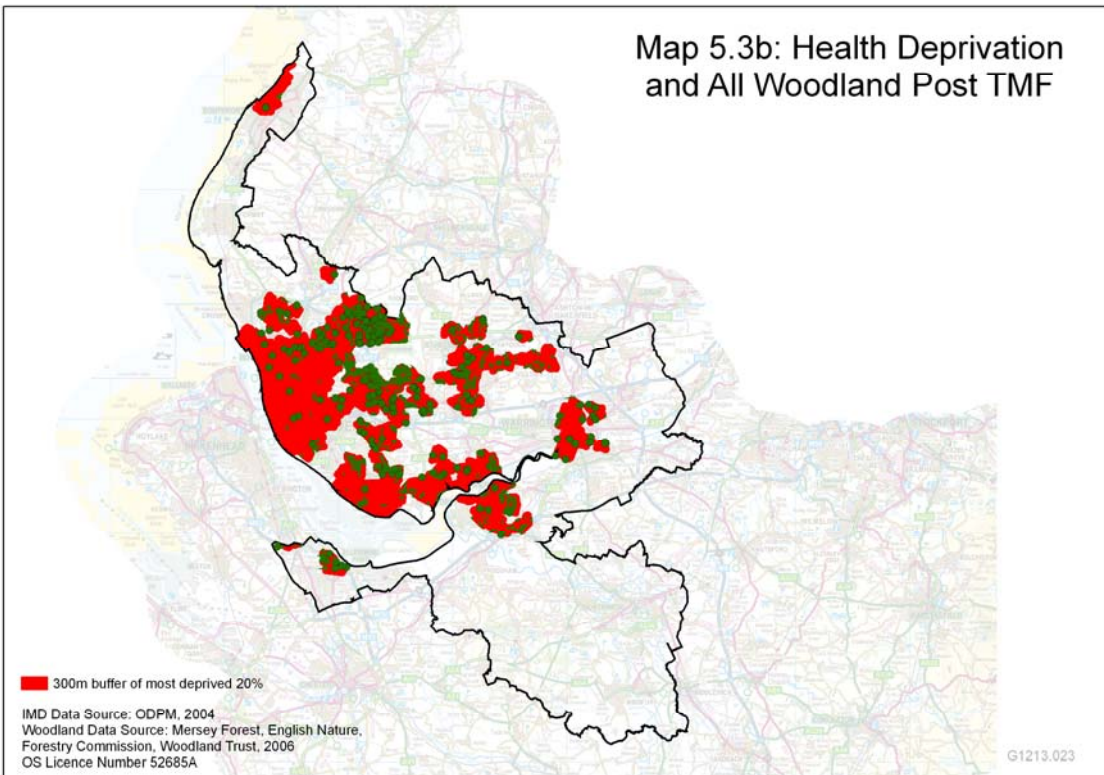
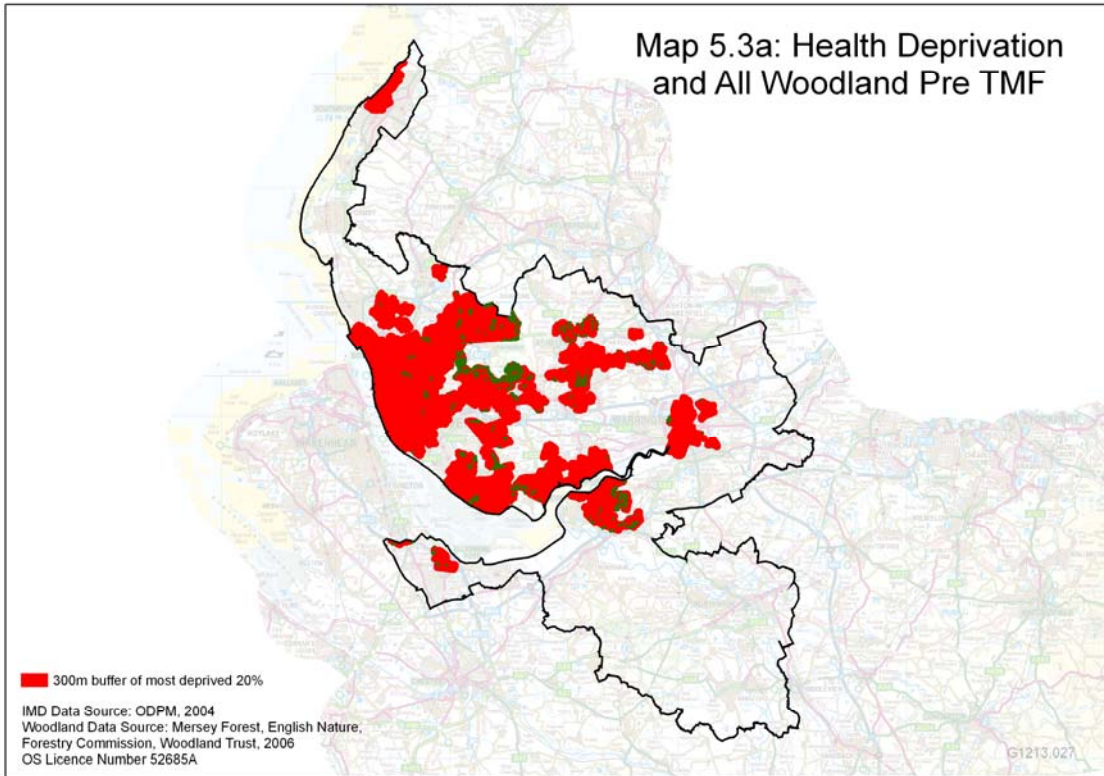
- 5.8 The socio-economic impact of activities within the Forest area are demonstrated when data from prior to its existence are compared with the present day.

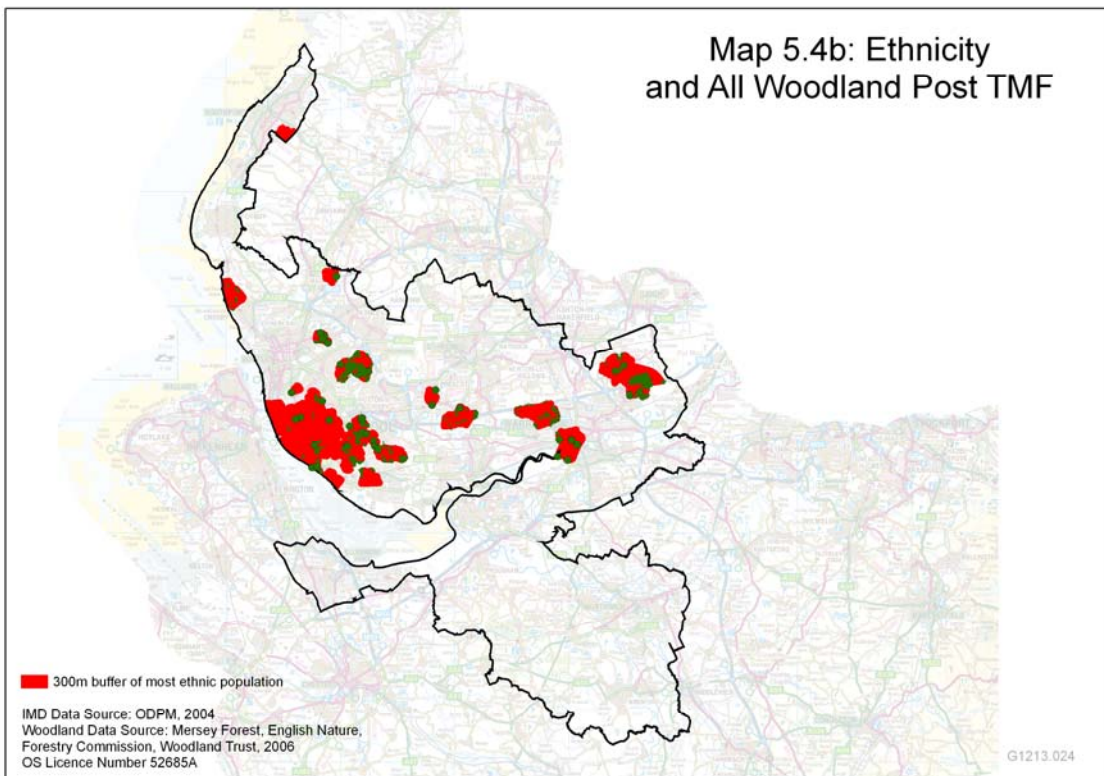
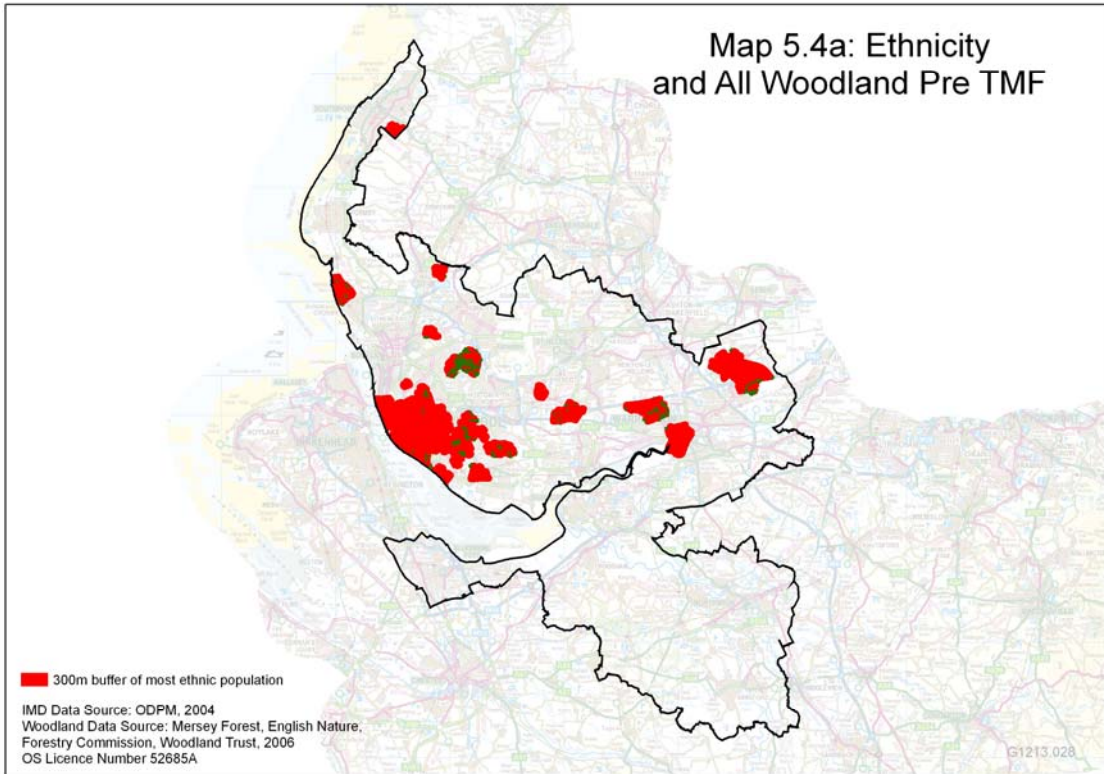
- 5.9 The spatial targeting of activity has largely been in areas with the greatest need for intervention, and the series of maps below provide a good visualisation of how priority communities (i.e. those experiencing multiple, education and health deprivation, as well as ethnically diverse communities) have been aimed at in relation to woodland expansion.
- 5.10 Clearly, either directly or as a catalyst, The Mersey Forest is having a significant impact on the social, economic and environmental quality of life of these key communities. Such a significant increase in woodland provision in and around priority communities, together with the number of community activities and events, demonstrates that the many inherent benefits of woodlands and community forestry are by definition being delivered to those with particular socio-economic needs. Not only do these woodlands and green spaces create visual interest and attractiveness, they are also contributing to improved health and well being of local communities, and vitally are providing the green infrastructure that complements, promotes and sustains community and economic development - stimulating the local economy by boosting tourism and creating jobs.
- 5.11 However, these maps do not reflect the quality, purpose or levels of use of any of the woodland, and while the data and illustrations point towards it, it is not possible to say that the socio-economic impact of The Mersey Forest has been transformational without a more detailed analysis of patterns of use and local perceptions.













- 5.12 In economic terms, the targeting of transport corridors for woodland planting within the Forest area has produced significant results, and will have made a major and likely transformational contribution to improving the image of the community forest area since its inception:

		<b>Pre Mersey Forest</b>	<b>Present Day</b>
<b>Motorways*</b>	ha	325	<b>983</b>
	%	3.4	<b>10.3</b>
<b>Primary Routes*</b>	ha	921	<b>2,173</b>
	%	2.9	<b>6.9</b>
<b>Railways*</b>	ha	1,055	<b>1,985</b>
	%	4.1	<b>7.7</b>
<b>Planting on Brownfield sites**</b>	ha	-	<b>228</b>
	%	-	<b>7.8</b>

\*ha and %age figures show woodlands within a 300m buffer of the transport corridor

\*\*present day figures show WGS planting on brownfield sites since 1998, pre figures unavailable

- 5.13 Whilst it is obvious that transport corridors, key strategic routes and previously brownfield sites across the area will have been visually improved, and the links between improved image / environment and increased levels of investment are known, this study in itself cannot prove the actual economic uplift TMF's activities have generated and as such an assessment as to whether this activity has had an *economically* transformational effect cannot be made – although the Partnership's central role in the Capital Modernisation Fund and Newlands projects would suggest that the economic effect of the Forest has been significant and catalytic.
- 5.14 The wider impact The Mersey Forest has had and could in the future have on economic performance is discussed under chapter 4, particularly in relation to the RES and the transport objectives of the RSS. Clearly there already have been major achievements in this area (in terms of job creation and business support and development), although these areas are outside the remit of this study and an analysis of the degree of impact cannot be made.

**Summary**

- 5.15 It is clear that The Mersey Forest has made a major contribution to the area, both when compared with adjacent areas and when the present day is compared with data from before the Forest's inception, delivering social, economic and environmental benefits in line with the key strategic priorities for the region, as determined by the RES, RSS and the RFF.
- 5.16 However, the limitations encountered in this study in sourcing appropriate data outside the Mersey Forest area have meant that a full comparative assessment has not been possible, although it is clear that – where data is available – the outputs and benefits delivered are far more significant than outside the community forest boundary.
- 5.17 Equally, while some actions can be demonstrated as 'transformational', the remit of this study does not extend far enough to be able to assess or make judgements on all of the comparative criteria in this way. That said, it is without doubt that The Mersey Forest has transformed environments (through extending woodland cover, habitat creation and woodland management), local image (planting on DUN land and around strategic routes), communities (providing green spaces 'owned' by local – particularly deprived - communities), and lives (providing volunteering opportunities, generating jobs and supporting businesses), delivering against regional strategies to provide real results for the community forest area.



**Appendix 1**  
**Strategies Review: Objectives & Actions**

## Strategies Review: Objectives and Actions

<b>Regional Economic Strategy</b>
<b>Theme: Business</b>
<i>Key Factor:</i> Enterprise
<i>Objective:</i> Improve the formation, survival and growth rate of enterprises
<p>3. Ensure that business start up and survival provision is targeted at the following under-performing sectors of the region:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High growth knowledge based start ups</li> <li>• Women, BME communities, disabled entrepreneurs, social enterprise</li> <li>• Barrow, Blackpool, <b>Knowsley, St. Helens</b>, Wirral</li> </ul>
<p>4. Review business support needs of, and focus support on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Priority sectors</li> <li>• Potential high growth knowledge based companies</li> <li>• Medium sized companies</li> <li>• <b>Businesses in the rural economy</b></li> </ul>
<i>Key Factor:</i> Regional Sectors
<i>Objective:</i> Develop key internationally competitive sectors
<p>10. Develop growth and innovation in the <b>tourism</b> sector through the continued implementation of the <u>Regional Tourism Strategy</u></p>
<b>Theme: Skills &amp; Education</b>
<i>Key Factor:</i> Skills & Education
<i>Objective:</i> Meet skills needs of sectors and growth opportunities
<p>30. Develop a skilled workforce in <b>rural areas</b> to enable businesses to diversify and expand</p>
<i>Objective:</i> Invest in workforce development
<p>34. Develop provision to overcome skills disparities experienced by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>BME communities</b></li> <li>• <b>Women</b></li> <li>• <b>Disabled people</b></li> <li>• <b>The over 50's</b></li> </ul>
<b>Theme: People &amp; Jobs</b>
<i>Key Factor:</i> Local Employment
<i>Objective:</i> Support and sustain conditions for growth in areas with strong economic drivers
<p>56. Implement plans to ensure ongoing growth in the rural economy as part of the <u>Regional Rural Delivery Framework</u></p>
<i>Key Factor:</i> Health
<i>Objective:</i> Improve the health of (potential) workers and reduce the number of incapacity benefit claimants
<p>59. Promote access to sport and physical activity to improve health, employee fitness and increase productivity</p>

<b>Theme: Infrastructure</b>
<i>Key Factor:</i> Land Use
<i>Objective:</i> Secure new uses for brownfield land
84. Develop new uses for brownfield land – including housing and the creation of <b>new strategic greenspace</b>
<i>Key Factor:</i> Energy
<i>Objective:</i> Develop appropriate energy policies and supplies
91. Develop and implement the <u>Northwest Energy Strategy</u> with a focus on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promotion of energy efficiency</li> <li>• Energy as a market</li> <li>• Alternative sources of energy</li> </ul>
<b>Theme: Quality of Life</b>
<i>Key Factor:</i> Community
<i>Objective:</i> Support cleaner, safer, greener communities
106. Deliver the following to support cleaner, safer and greener communities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regional Reducing Re-offending Action Plan</li> <li>• Initiatives to reduce the level of alcohol related crime and violence in towns and cities</li> <li>• Support for masterplans and local businesses to incorporate “<b>clean, safe, green</b>” and “secure by design” principles</li> <li>• Business Improvement Districts and Green Business Park</li> </ul>
<i>Objective:</i> Develop community cohesion
107. Implement the <u>Sustainable Communities Plan</u> and develop the skills of regeneration professionals and leaders to support <b>sustainable communities</b>
<i>Key Factor:</i> Environment
<i>Objective:</i> Realise and nurture the natural and built heritage assets
113. Develop the economic benefit of the region’s natural environment through better alignment of <b>environmental activities and economic gain</b>
116. Create and manage the following <u>Regional Parks</u> : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mersey Waterfront</li> <li>- Weaver Valley</li> <li>- Northwest Coastal Trail</li> <li>- East Lancashire</li> <li>- Ribble Estuary</li> <li>- Wigan Greenheart</li> </ul>
117. Implement the <b><u>Regional Forestry Framework</u></b>
118. Promote <b>sustainable farming and food</b> production and its role in the management of rural environmental assets
<i>Objective:</i> Improve the physical environment
119. Invest in <b>quality public realm, green space and environmental quality</b> focused on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The cities of Liverpool, Manchester and Preston</li> <li>• Tourism “Attack Brand” and “Signature Project” locations and key arrival points</li> <li>• HMR and URC areas</li> <li>• Key Rural Service Centres</li> </ul>

<b>Regional Spatial Strategy</b>
<b>Theme: Working in the North West – Achieving a Sustainable Economy</b>
<i>Policy: W6 – Tourism and the Visitor Economy</i>
<i>Objective: Seek to deliver improved economic growth and quality of life, through sustainable tourism activity in the North West</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tourism activity related to Regional Parks should be promoted within the framework set out in relevant management plans</li> <li>• In rural areas, tourism development should support rural regeneration and diversification and be of an appropriate scale and be located where the environment and infrastructure can accommodate visitor impact</li> </ul>
<i>Policy: W7 – Principles for Tourism Development</i>
<i>Objective: Plans / strategies should ensure high quality, environmentally sensitive, well-designed tourism attractions, infrastructure and hospitality services</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve the region’s overall tourism offer, increasing the market share of attractions</li> <li>• Support the provision of distinct tourism resources that harness the potential of sites and their natural attributes</li> </ul>
<b>Theme: Transport in the North West – Connecting People and Places</b>
<i>Policy: RT7 – A Regional Framework for Walking and Cycling</i>
<i>Objective: Develop integrated networks continuous, attractive and safe routes for walking and cycling to widen accessibility and capitalise on their potential environmental, social and economic benefits</i>
<b>Theme: Enjoying and Managing the North West – Environmental Enhancements and Protection</b>
<i>Policy: EM1 – Integrated Land Management</i>
<i>Objective: Aims to deliver a ‘step-change’ increase in the regions biodiversity resources, by delivering regional biodiversity targets of the Local Biodiversity Action Plans</i>
<i>Policy: EM2 – Remediating Contaminated Land</i>
<i>Objective: Encourage the adoption of sustainable remediation technologies. Where soft-end uses are provided on previously developed land appropriate remediation should be considered.</i>
<i>Policy EM3 – Green Infrastructure</i>
<i>Objective: Plans and strategies should</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify, promote and deliver multi-purpose networks of greenspace, particularly where there is currently limited access to natural greenspace or where connectivity between these places is poor</li> <li>• Integrate green infrastructure provision within existing new development, particularly within major development and regeneration schemes.</li> </ul>
<i>Policy EM4 – Regional Parks</i>
<i>Objective: Three areas of search for Regional Parks have been identified</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The North West Coast</li> <li>• The Mersey Basin</li> <li>• East Lancashire</li> </ul> <p>All plans and strategies should have regard to the strategic frameworks and should secure successful delivery and management arrangements.</p>



<b>Policy EM6 – Managing the North West Coastline</b>
<i>Objective:</i> Plans and strategies should take a strategic and integrated approach to the long-term management of flood and coastal erosion risk.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make provision for mitigation of and adaptation to natural coastal change and the predicted effects of climate change over the medium to long-term (100 years and supporting a ‘whole shoreline approach’ being taken</li> </ul>
<b>Policy EM7 – Minerals Extraction</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure sensitive restoration and aftercare of sites including improved public access where they are of amenity value</li> </ul>
<b>Policy EM15 – A framework for sustainable energy in the North West</b>
<i>Objective:</i> Plans and strategies should promote sustainable energy production and consumption in accordance with the principles within Regional Sustainable Energy Strategy
<b>Policy EM17 – Renewable Energy</b>
<i>Objective:</i> In line with the North West Sustainable Energy Strategy, by 2010 at least 10% (rising to 15% by 2015 and at least 20% by 2020) of electricity supplied in the North West should be provided from renewable energy sources

## Regional Forestry Framework

### Action Area One: Enterprise and Industry

*Aim:* Developing and supporting our woodland forestry and business

*Actions*

6. Work with national wood promotion bodies to bring more national timber promotion events to the North West and identify opportunities for joint activity

### Action Area Two: Regional Image

*Actions*

10. Develop links to Liverpool Capital of Culture (CoC) 2008
11. Continue to deliver Newlands and ensure that this approach is seen as a significant regional delivery mechanism for land regeneration to woodlands
12. Input into the Green Infrastructure Guide
13. Key facts for developers and planners toolkit
14. Support development of a network of expertise in land reclamation
15. Identify potential for forest parks in the future that have the ability to serve as visitor destinations

### Action Area Three: Biodiversity and Landscape

*Actions*







19. Increase tree planting in urban areas









**Action Area Four: Health, Well-being and Quality of Life**

*Actions*

- 25. Map all woodlands against 'need and opportunity' including existing programmes, accessibility and barriers (to include hospitals and healthcare establishments)
- 26. Targeted woodland creation and management using mapping above which will identify gaps and priority places and people
- 28. Promotion of woodlands as a resource to deliver existing health, sport and physical activity schemes
- 29. Advocacy and influencing decision makers
- 31. Meet those involved in current projects related to worklessness to review skill / capacity building schemes. Consider the development of an environmental escalator, incorporating several levels of engagement

**Vital Signs: State of the North West Region Report**

Indicator	A year on...	
Work Age Employment Rate	Recent improvement has stabilised rather than continued – the overall employment rate is similar to that in VS2004	
Net VAT Rates per Registration Stock	As with VS2004, the most recent data suggests that the region is out performing England as a whole despite an overall decline in rates	
Business Survival Rates	Although growth in survival rates appears to have stabilised after a long period of improvement, there has been a slight decline in the most recent data	
Non-Car Trips	There has been a marginal increase in the proportion of non-car trips over the last year	
Air Quality	The proportion of higher / moderate level pollutant days is reported to have declined in 2005, when compared to the high levels recorded in 2003	
Derelict Land	The stock of derelict land has remained broadly stable from levels reported in VS2004	

Indicator	A year on...	
Bird population Indices	Whilst construction of this index has changed, the evidence suggests a year-on-year increase in the bird population	
Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) Condition	North West performance continues to improve	
North West Share of Tourism	The North West's profiles for both domestic and overseas tourism are slightly down on VS2004	
Out of Season Tourism Activity	Out-of-season activity revived in 2004 from a decline in 2003	
A 'Good Place' to Live	Analysis of the year-on-year trend is not currently available, awaiting the outcome of the most recent MORI survey	
A 'Good Place' to do business	Analysis of the year-on-year trend is not currently available, awaiting the outcome of the most recent MORI survey	
Access to Greenspace	The indicator was originally included in anticipation of the release of a new dataset 'Access to Greenspace' however, this has not occurred. A suitable replacement indicator will be sought for future additions	
Participation	Evidence for arts participation has shown improvement in the North West. No additional information is available for sports participation.	



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