

# THE MERSEY FOREST TEAM REPORT

## JULY 2015

### NEWS

Joining us is Tom Middleton who is the first of our Green Infrastructure Ambassadors. Tom Middleton, a postgrad student from MMU is working with the team over the summer to explore the potential for Crowd Funding of projects. Katharine Hassall has also joined the team to work on media and project archiving over the summer.

The team organised a successful conference at the Maritime Museum in April which looked back at ten years of green infrastructure planning in the North West. Over a hundred and twenty delegates discussed future delivery and the maintenance of existing green infrastructure.

### BIG TREE PLANT

The four year Defra-funded Big Tree Plant finished in March this year. The project was managed through Community Forest Trust and has exceeded targets across all four years, with the final year achieving the planting of 23,750 trees against the target of 12,171. The Mersey Forest planted 17,234 and Red Rose Forest 6,516.

Over the four years 94,726 trees were planted (against a target of 83,147) trees. This equated to the Mersey Forest planting 6% of England's total Big Tree Plant target of 1 million trees, with 62,336 trees. Across The Mersey Forest and Red Rose Forests over 30,230 people have been involved in the planting of trees, and many more were involved with their ongoing management.

### CATCHMENT RESTORATION FUND - ALT RESTORATION PROJECT

*Realigning and de-culverting of part of the River Alt to improve water quality, reduce flood risk, and enhance biodiversity funded by the Environment Agency.*

Work is almost complete in Liverpool on this £1.7 million project in partnership with the Cass Foundation. Community Forest Trust has acted as the accountable body for the Catchment Restoration Fund grant of £970,000, with staff from the Mersey Forest team helping to evaluate the scheme and managing the finances. The project has been a great example of public and voluntary sector partnership.

## COLLIERS MOSS

A two-year, £111k proposal to WREN to support the enhancement and protection of biodiversity on the site has been successful. There are several areas of sub-regional significance, including lowland bog and reedbeds, which will require management to safeguard their future.

Work started in January to thin vegetation alongside access routes, opening up sight-lines and encouraging more people to Colliers Moss. Groundwork has carried out this initial phase of work. Its 'Green Energisers' team has worked with the Build Team to cut back overhanging trees and shrubs. This is the first part of the £50k access improvement programme funded by Cory Environmental Trust in Britain.

The team has been awarded just under £10k from Awards for All to carry out a feasibility study that will assess the best ways of engaging local people in the development of the site. Results from the study will inform future funding bids. Funding is also being sought from Coalfield Regeneration Trust to involve local young people in collecting data about the current and potential uses of the site.

An application has been made to the Forestry Commission for funding to support the production of a woodland management plan for the site.

## FOREST SCHOOL

Liverpool children's centres and schools have received a boost to developing Forest School with Early Years children. Smurfit Kappa, an international packaging company, has committed funding to developing the project over the next 12 months.

One of the first two schools to benefit includes Kingsley Primary, Toxteth, with 30 children enjoying weekly forest school sessions from May to November. The children are from Reception and Year 1 classes, and sessions are being carried out within a newly planted area funded last winter through Big Tree Plant.

Garston Primary are also benefitting too with Forest School sessions being held at Enterprise South Liverpool Academy. A series of family events to encourage natural play will run alongside the scheme.

## FUNDING

*Developing new funding bids to provide money and support for project delivery*

- A grant of £419K has been awarded from the Big Lottery's Reaching Communities for a three year project using the natural environment to reduce health inequalities in targeted communities in Liverpool, Sefton and St.Helens, amongst other areas that will be confirmed in the coming months. The project started on 1 July and will be completed in 2018.

- A grant of £35k has been received from Smurfit Kappa Foundation for Forest School activity in Liverpool over the next 12 months. There may be scope for continued support in the future.
- A bid as part of a consortium led by eCountability Ltd to **Innovate UK** has been successful. The project will develop an urban ecosystem services assessment tool for businesses and local authorities.
- An award worth £4k has been approved from **BIG Assist**, to support the development of a marketing and fundraising strategy for Mersey Forest products and services.
- A joint consultancy bid with Gyron LLP and Brilliant Bioenergy to **Cheshire & Warrington LEP** has been successful.
- A joint consultancy bid with MD<sup>2</sup> to **Newcastle under Lyme Council** is currently being considered.
- News is expected soon on the outcome of Stobart's £5.5m bid for the **Regional Growth Fund** (Round 6).
- A revamped bid to the **SIB Investment and Contract Readiness Fund** to develop the Natural Health Service as a commercial enterprise is being submitted with support from Cogent Ventures.
- £9.9k from **Awards for All** to carry out a social impact study aimed at assessing the best ways to engage local people in the development of Colliers Moss in St.Helens.
- A bid to **WREN** to enhance and protect biodiversity on Colliers Moss was successful with £111,000 of funding over two years.
- Bids recently submitted include:
  - £986k from **Our Environment, Our Future (Big Lottery)** – for the 'Our Urban Eden' project supporting young people to be champions for urban green infrastructure across The Mersey and Red Rose Forests.
  - £50k from **CLARHC** to fund an evidence synthesis to identify the relationship between green space inequalities and mental health inequalities.
  - £18k from **Ernest Cook Trust** to support educational work.
  - £10k from **DCLG**, to support the development of the Sefton Coast Partnership Community Team.
  - £56k from **Erasmus** for Forest School activities for children with additional needs.

- **£116,000** from H2020 for work to develop the Green Infrastructure Valuation toolkit
- As part of the Forest Advisory Consortium England (FACE), the Mersey Forest representing the Community Forest Trust area, has been successful in winning the **Forestry Commission** contract to provide support to landowners/businesses who may wish to access rural funding streams to help develop their forestry business. The contract value is £50k to support 55 businesses across the country.
- Recent unsuccessful bids include:
  - £13k from **Natural England** to deliver green infrastructure in Bold Forest Park
  - £50k from **WREN** to develop a community orchard in Griffin Wood
  - Two £67k bids to the **Catchment Restoration Fund** to support Urban Catchment Forestry. We were particularly disappointed about these being turned down as they were second stage bids that we were asked to develop.

### **GIFT-T!**

*Transnational work developing green infrastructure approaches funded by EU Interreg.*

Most of the outputs by the team have now been completed including the refreshed Forest Plan and Delivery Plan for 2014-2019. The final conference took place in Brussels in May.

### **GLAZEBURY NATURAL PLAY AREA**

*Creating a new natural play area*

A four year project has transformed an empty piece of land in Glazebury, Warrington into a natural, interactive play area and community space for the residents. The play area now includes climbing and seating areas made from giant logs, a willow tunnel, den-building areas, a community orchard and wildlife-friendly hedges, trees and wildflowers. Jo Sayers from the team played a really big part in organising the project with support and funding from Bents Garden & Home, Big Tree Plant, Culcheth and Glazebury Parish Council, Cory Environmental Trust in Britain, Eric Wright Civil Engineering, Lloyds Bank, Taylor Business Park, The Conservation Volunteers, United Utilities and Warrington Borough Council.

Work is now complete and the new Mayor of Warrington Councillor Geoff Settle, Mayoress Mrs Jean Settle and local children formally opened a new village play area in early June. A community event was held the following weekend.

## ILCHESTER PARK FOR ALL

*Improving the park as a green “hub” to complement Setting the Scene for Growth funded by Landfill Communities Fund*

The transformation of Ilchester Park has seen lots of improvements made over the past year. New paths have been constructed around the park, to allow better access. Large trees have been planted to create shade and shelter from the wind, as well as provide interest. Climbing boulders and logs provide alternative ways to play for children using the park and are proving popular. Local school children and community groups have been helping to sow wild flowers and plant bulbs, which emerged in spring to provide swathes of colour to the park. The changes to the park are being funded by Veolia Environmental Trust with complementary funding from Setting the Scene for Growth.

Julian Dobson, director of Urban Pollinators, wrote an article in the TCPA journal in February 2015. In his article he looked at how the inclusion of green infrastructure within regeneration activity in Birkenhead and Wirral Waters has improved local environments and helped to lay the ground for further investment.

## LANDOWNER SUPPORT

*Providing advice, guidance and support to landowners who wish to deliver aspects of The Mersey Forest Plan*

It was also announced in the same week that both West Cheshire and Warrington Local Action Group and Cheshire East Local Action Groups were approved by DEFRA. The team will continue to inform landowners of the opportunities which will emerge with the new programmes of funding.

Together with Arup, the team is working to develop a **Green Infrastructure Prospectus** for Liverpool City Region LEP, having been successful in the tender for this work.

The team has supported the creation of the **Kirkdale Country Garden at Rotunda** in Liverpool. £35k was successfully won from Biffa Award and match-funded from perfumer Jo Malone London. This is one of only four gardens around the world supported by Jo Malone and joins those created in London, Edinburgh and New York. The garden was especially designed in the style of a traditional English Country Garden by BCA Landscape Architects and has four main areas. It was formally opened on 19 June.

## LOCAL SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT FUND

*Large scale tree planting along key routes to promote active travel to employment funded through the Department for Transport.*

Street tree planting is now complete in all LSTF areas. A post project evaluation survey engaging residents in Knowsley, Sefton, Speke, St. Helens and Everton will determine attitudes to the changes and to walking and cycling along these greened routes to

employment. Additional attitudinal questions will determine levels of interest in Colliers Moss and Northwich woodlands. To follow the latest news a blog has been set up: [www.greenroutestojobs.blogspot.co.uk](http://www.greenroutestojobs.blogspot.co.uk).

A follow up programme is being developed through the STEP, working with Liverpool City Region partners.

### NATURAL HEALTH SERVICE

*Developing this in line with its Business Plan, working closely with health commissioners*

Over the last two years the team has been developing a proposal to move from health projects to a commissioned service from the NHS. Pilots are being developed across the Forest. Clare Austin has started her PhD supported by The Mersey Forest and Liverpool John Moores enabling the continued development of an evidence base for the Natural Health Service. Study 1 of 4 is currently gaining qualitative data from Sector Experts regarding outdoor interventions.

Initial findings on a Halton pilot have now been released on the effectiveness of four interventions: Green Gym, health and nature walks, horticultural therapy and Forest Schools for physical and mental wellbeing. The Forest School research is being prepared to be submitted to Children's Geographies- a peer-reviewed journal.

Similar evaluations are being proposed for areas including Knowsley, Cheshire and Wigan as part of a match-funded PhD with Liverpool John Moores University. This will investigate the benefits of 'green' therapy and 'green' exercise further.

### NATURE4HEALTH

The application to the Lottery's Reaching Communities Fund for 'Nature4Health' has been successful and £419K has been awarded for a three year project using the natural environment to reduce health inequalities in targeted communities in Liverpool, Sefton and St.Helens, amongst other areas that will be confirmed in the coming months. The project started on 1 July and will be completed in 2018.

### NORTHWICH BID GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN

The Mersey Forest has been commissioned by Northwich Business Improvement District to develop a green infrastructure plan for the area. This will recommend ten key interventions, with the central aim being to unify the town and its attractions as a visitor destination, and thereby increase footfall in the town centre.

## PLANNING AND FORESTRY NETWORK

*A network promoting the use of the planning system to increase the quantity and quality of tree and woodland planting and management*

The team is keeping the Planning Hub updated despite the Forestry Commission funding coming to an end.

## RESEARCH

*Continuing action-led research to improve the way in which projects are delivered*

- The team has been asked to contribute to a paper on the regeneration of brownfield land into Northwich Woodlands. The lead author is Prof Tomoko Miyagawa, professor of Engineering from the University Of Wakayama, Japan. Over the past ten years or more, Tomoko has formed a close collaboration with the Mersey Forest and the team will host a visit of Tomoko and other international academics in September.
- Tom Butlin has given a talk at the IALE Thematic Workshop on Urban Forestry in Slovenia. The talk focussed upon lessons learnt from application of The Mersey Forest's green infrastructure mapping method.

## SALTSCAPE

*Landscape-scale programme of activity engaging communities in the landscape of the Weaver Valley*

This three-year project has received a grant of £886,500 from the Heritage Lottery Fund to conserve and restore important features connected to the salt landscape in Cheshire. The Mersey Forest is working alongside a range of partners. Work has started on identifying woodlands and landowners within the Saltscape area for providing further support in managing their woodlands. The work will focus on the areas Ancient Semi Natural Woodlands and Local Wildlife Sites working alongside Cheshire Wildlife Trust in delivering this element of work. As the full details of the new Countryside Scheme have been recently announced, site visits are now being undertaken with woodland owners within the Saltscape area.

## SEFTON COAST

The team are currently involved in delivering a programme of community activities as part of the Sefton Coast Landscape Partnership Project funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund. The aim is to encourage the public to celebrate the natural and cultural heritage of the Sefton Coast and discover a different side to the Sefton Coast Woodlands.

The programme will include Forest School sessions with schools at Ainsdale and Formby, and sessions with uniformed groups. From mid-July until September there will be a series

of walks and talks about the people who planted them, the wildlife that inhabits them, the products that come from the woods and the skills needed to manage them now and in the future.

Wood allotments will be set up to utilise the resources of the coastal woodlands, with training courses to introduce people to cutting wood for domestic use.

Information about the events is available from:

<https://forestplan10yearreview.wordpress.com/>

## SETTING THE SCENE FOR GROWTH

*Large scale urban tree planting around the Wirral Waters development in Birkenhead funded Department for Business, Innovation and Skills*

Over 900 trees have now been planted over 10km of routes in streets, green spaces and gardens, as part of a three year programme to link residential areas to places of work, education and training. Phase 3 the final year of the programme has been completed and evaluation of the programme will follow during the summer.

## SUPPORTING GROUPS AND NETWORKS

*Supporting community groups which are delivering aspects The Mersey Forest Plan*

- **Friends of Anderton and Marbury** in Northwich, Cheshire have now completed footpath works on the approach to the Arboretum, interpretation panels and species posts are completed. The work has been carried out by FoAM volunteers, the rangers and supported by INEOS Enterprises through the Landfill Communities Fund secured and managed by the Forest Team.
- **Friends of Marshall's Arm**, Northwich are preparing a programme of activities as well as applying for funding for interpretation panels.
- **Friends of Owley Wood**, Weaverham, Cheshire are planning their next phase of works to include boardwalk repairs along the riverside trail
- **Friends of Church Wood**, Whitegate in Cheshire will meet with the team in early July to plan the next series of work parties and discuss future funding requirements.
- **Friends of Woolton Woods**, Liverpool are still negotiating options regarding recent plans proposed to rebuild St Julies School on the main field off High Street.
- **Friends of Clinkham, Moss Bank and Carr Mill**, Funding secured through the St Helens Landscape Fund is being used to support the annual Woodland Cup which takes place on Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> July. The Woodland Cup is made from timber, cut from Clinkham Wood, turned into a trophy that is awarded to the winning team at a multi sports day involving local schools.

There are two **Local Nature Partnerships** (LNP) within The Mersey Forest: Cheshire and Warrington and the Liverpool City Region LNP. The latter is known as 'Nature Connected'. Mersey Forest Team provides the secretariat support for the group.

## **WOOD ALLOTMENTS**

*Developing community led woodland management to produce firewood*

The project has been awarded a grant by the Ashden Trust to develop the programme following a successful pilot in Northwich Woodlands. It is being used to develop a handbook to guide landowners through the process of setting up a wood allotment. Wood allotments have been showcased in a Department for Climate Change guide.

## **WOODLAND MANAGEMENT AND PLANTING**

*Working with landowners*

The new Countryside Stewardship Scheme (CS) jointly run by Natural England, Forestry Commission and the Rural Payments Agency opened on 1 July. Expressions of interest for Higher Tier agri-environment options are required to be submitted by the 15<sup>th</sup> July and draft applications for Woodland options to be submitted by 31<sup>st</sup> July. Terms and conditions for the new scheme are due to be available by August and the full CS manual can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/countryside-stewardship-manual>

Woodland Creation is currently closed and will re-open in 2016, however applications for Woodland Planning Grant are open all year round. A woodland plan is a pre-requisite for an application for CS.

The Forest is working alongside Stobart group, as part of the Regional Growth Fund bid, to identify under managed woodland and assess their potential for biomass supply. Sites within the Mersey Forest area have already had some sample inventory work carried out, with detailed management planning work on a smaller of sites due to happen this month.