

The Mersey Forest Delivery Plan

 2009 - 2014

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MORE FROM TREES

For every £1 invested in The Mersey Forest, £8 of outputs is generated.

Since 1994 over 6,000 hectares of new woodland and improved habitats have been achieved, bringing social, environmental and economic benefit to 1.5 million people. 70% of the area's woodlands have been brought into management to secure their long-term future. And more than 100,000 members of the community have got involved.

This Delivery Plan is about how we build upon these achievements. It sets out The Mersey Forest's objectives for the next five years and our actions for 2009/10, showing:

- What we want to achieve
- How we will achieve it
- How partner organisations' own targets can be met as part of this work to create The Mersey Forest

In 2009 we reach the half way point in the delivery of the 30-year Mersey Forest Plan; a good time to take stock and ensure that we are both delivering the Plan's objectives effectively and also to make sure that the Plan itself remains relevant to today's key issues.

There is increasing recognition at a strategic level that green infrastructure, including trees, woods and forests are fundamental to society, providing benefits that we rely on for our health, well being, quality of life and prosperity. The Mersey Forest is recognised as an early and continuing champion of this agenda.

Key issues facing the region, and the organisations working within it, are being tackled through the Forest, including how we:

- Adapt to climate change - through reducing urban heat island and flood impacts, providing local opportunities for recreation and leisure
- Improve health and well being - through meaningful community involvement and engagement, encouraging greater use of Forest sites leading to greater levels of activity
- Provide a sustainable foundation for future economic growth, even in times of economic difficulty, by providing benefits such as improved image and quality of life

The Mersey Forest Plan has always been delivered through an effective and supportive partnership. The delivery of the objectives and actions set out in this Delivery Plan relies on that continued and effective partnership.



£1.2m Through the gearing up of partner contributions, the projected direct spend through The Mersey Forest Team for 2009/10 is £1.2m, delivering projects and programmes that support key partner objectives.

8,000 hectares We remain on target to transform over 8,000 hectares of land to community woodland and associated habitats over the 30 years of The Mersey Forest Plan.

95% Public surveys show that 95% of residents support the work of The Mersey Forest, with 62% identifying a positive environmental improvement through the work of the Forest Partnership in their area.

Award-winning excellence The Forest Team continues to work to improve the quality of service provided. This has been recognised in both positive feedback from partners and in the Team's award as finalists in the North of England Business Excellence awards in both 2007 and 2008.

1 WHAT IS THE MERSEY FOREST?

The Mersey Forest is a growing network of woodlands and green spaces spread across 465 square miles of Cheshire and Merseyside.

The Mersey Forest Plan sets out a 30-year vision to transform the landscape of the area, through the creation of new community woodlands in and around our towns and cities, to provide economic and social benefits from environmental regeneration - delivering 'more from trees'.

The creation of the Forest is driven by a partnership between seven local authorities in Merseyside and North Cheshire and the national bodies Natural England and Forestry Commission. A wide range of public, private and voluntary organisations and individuals are involved as partners in delivering The Mersey Forest. The Partnership has put in place a dedicated Forest Team whose role is to support and drive forward the delivery of The Mersey Forest Plan.

The Mersey Forest area



What we want to achieve



2 AIMS OF THE MERSEY FOREST PARTNERSHIP

The aim of the Forest Partnership is to create 8,000 ha of new community woodlands and a wide range of associated environmental, economic and social benefits through sustainable landscape improvements to The Mersey Forest area over the 30-year period of the development of the Forest.

2.1 Our goals

Our goals for the five-year period to 2014 are:

Goal 1: Working in partnership The Mersey Forest will provide opportunities for organisations and individuals to work together to deliver the common vision captured in The Mersey Forest Plan

Goal 2: Transforming landscapes The transformation of The Mersey Forest area will be brought about through the continued creation of a natural, well wooded landscape involving a range of site-based activities and protecting and improving biodiversity

Goal 3: Delivering sustainable economic benefits Sustainable economic benefits will be realised through the creation and management of The Mersey Forest resources to assist in the process of generating and safeguarding jobs, markets and assets

Goal 4: Engaging people The creation and management of The Mersey Forest resources will generate sustainable social benefits through the facilitation of people's involvement in health, leisure and environmental activities

2.2 How our goals complement partners' targets

The Forest Team monitors progress made in the activities that help to deliver The Mersey Forest Plan.

We can also show how these activities help to deliver partner targets including:

- **Public Service Agreement 28** - Secure a Healthy Natural Environment - for Natural England and Forestry Commission
- **Local Area Agreement** - National Indicators 197 on biodiversity and 188 on adaptation to climate change
- **Local authority health, education and regeneration strategies**
- **Regional Forestry Framework** - all five action areas
- **Regional Spatial Strategy** - EM1 B Natural Environment, EM1 D Trees, Woodlands and Forests, EM2 Contaminated land, EM3 Green Infrastructure
- **Regional Economic Strategy** - Transformational Actions 24 Develop and implement a Regional Climate Change Action Plan, 84 Develop new uses for brownfield land - including housing and the creation of greenspace, 113 Develop the economic benefit of the region's natural environment through better alignment of environmental activities and economic gain, 117 Implement the Regional Forestry Framework, 119 Invest in quality public realm, green space and environmental quality focused on the Cities (City regions) of Liverpool and Manchester

2.3 Key Forest Plan targets

Table 1 below provides information on our output targets. The table shows:

- The target for 2009
- The target for the next five years
- Progress to date

Table 1 - Key Forest Plan Targets

Target Description	Unit of Measure	Target		
		Target for 2009	Target for 2009-2014	Achieved to date
Woodland creation	Hectares	75	500	2,777
Management of existing woodland	Hectares	200	450	3,070
Creating or re-opening good quality walking / cycling networks	Kilometres	10	120	703
Community engagement - measured by events	Number	140	3000	32,000
Training and skills development events	Number	10	120	750
Funds	£	£1m	£7m	£31.7m
Gearing of funds	Return on Partner LA funding ratio	7:1	7:1	8:1
Non-woodland habitats created or managed ¹	Hectares	75	500	3388
Creating new jobs in Forest related companies	Number	4	175	160
Team Gross Value Added (GVA) ²	%	2% real increase	10.4%	N/A

¹ Our Biodiversity Action Plan is available at www.merseyforest.org.uk

² New measure

2.4 Action Plan 2009/10

Our detailed action plan is supported by an objectives hierarchy that is made up of long, medium and short term objectives - all leading to the overall aim of The Mersey Forest.

The full version of this objectives hierarchy appears on our website www.merseyforest.org.uk

The key activities are summarised in Table 2 below. Whilst the table cannot capture all activities of the team, it gives an indication of the scope and scale of the main projects.

Delivering The Mersey Forest's Goals

Project	Goal 1 Working in Partnership	Goal 2 Transforming landscapes	Trees and woodland and other habitats	Individual trees	Goal 3- Delivering sustainable economic benefits	Businesses and jobs	Goal 4 Engaging People	No. of events
Delivery of English Woodland Grant Scheme and other planting schemes	In conjunction with Forestry Commission	Creating new woodland	40 ha					
		Managing woodland	100 ha					
Alder Hey	Support the partnership that is helping inform the redevelopment of the new hospital through green infrastructure planning	Habitat management	2 ha					
Setting the Scene for Growth	Planting of derelict land	New woodland	10 ha					
Sefton Coast Forest Plan	Coordinate delivery of the Sefton Coast Forest Plan	Managing woodland	400 ha					
Section 106 projects	New woodland	1						
Timber Network	Co-ordinating The Mersey Forest Timber Network				Support development of low carbon economy	25 businesses		
Biomass and renewable energy					Support development of low carbon economy	5 businesses		

Project	Goal 1 Working in Partnership	Goal 2 Transforming landscapes	Trees and woodland and other habitats	Individual trees	Goal 3- Delivering sustainable economic benefits	Businesses and jobs	Goal 4 Engaging People	No. of events
Skills and training	Working with partners to identify key skills and training needs				Improving skill levels to enable more effective land management	50 organisations	3 workshops - Managing fires in urban woodlands, woodland management, urban tree specification	3
Natural Play project	Coordination of project						Increasing use of natural environment in school curriculum	2
Community Contracting Initiative	Support the 11 CCI groups						Continued support for CCI groups in the management of community woodlands	150
Schools	Working with schools and local authority partners	School ground improvements	1 ha				Schools in the TMF School Grounds Project	15
Green Streets	Working with local communities and other partners	Urban tree planting		400			Communities engaged	10
Events and campaigns - Walk in the Woods, Forest Fever, National Tree Week							Community engagement at all levels	50
Community development	Working with a wide range of partners to deliver health, education and capacity building programmes	Habitat creation and management	1 ha				Community events linked to specific sites	10
Forest Parks	Working with local authorities and other partners on five Forest Parks	Holistic development of clusters of woodlands			Boosting visitor economy: improving infrastructure, branding & access		Increasing use of Forest Parks among public	

Project	Goal 1 Working in Partnership	Goal 2 Transforming landscapes	Trees and woodland and other habitats	Individual trees	Goal 3- Delivering sustainable economic benefits	Businesses and jobs	Goal 4 Engaging People	No. of events
Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)		Habitat creation and management	1 ha		Working with business on CSR projects	3 businesses assisted	Events	3
The Mersey Forest - general	Supporting the partnership and the projects listed							
Merseyside Green Infrastructure Plan	Developing partnership green infrastructure plan						Consultation and future project plan	5
Cheshire green infrastructure	Developing partnership and green infrastructure plan						Consultation and future project plan	5
Liverpool Knowledge Quarter	Developing action plan for the area						Consultation and future project plan	4
Interreg ForeStClim	Transnational partnership project						Consultation and project report	4
Interreg WaterProof	Transnational partnership project						Consultation and project report	2
Critical Green Infrastructure	In partnership with Natural Economy North West						Consultation and project report	2
NW Climate Change Action Plan	With Community Forests North West						Consultation and project report	3
Natural Economy NW	Continue to a member of steering group and develop legacy programme for NENW							
Forest Partnership - Partnership Agreement							Consultation	5

In addition we will continue to deliver our funding and communications strategies to support this activity.

2.5 Budgets

The budget for 2009/10 is set out below.

Table 3

Expenditure	Core	Projects	Total
Staff	£220,573		£220,573
Premises	£13,687		£13,687
Transport	£10,967		£10,967
Services	£78,805		£78,805
Projects		£878,227	£878,227
Total	£324,032	£878,227	£1,202,259

Income	Core	Projects	Total
Local authorities	£-163,813		£-163,813
Other contributions	£-36,886		£-36,886
Forestry Commission (through SLA)	£-80,000		£-80,000
Interest	£-12,060		0
Project fees	£-31,273	£-878,227	£-878,227
Total	£-324,032	£-878,227	£-1,202,259

Through the year the team works to increase this base level of activity and also to develop income for future years.

How we will achieve it



3 ROLE OF THE FOREST TEAM

The Mersey Forest Team's roles in the delivery of the targets above are:

Table 4

Mersey Forest Team Roles	
Role	Example
Coordination and communication	Steering, working and action groups, newsletters
Fundraising and resource distribution	Lottery, landfill tax, etc - then distributed to individual schemes often managed by partners
Working with landowners	Day to day contact with farmers and a wide range of other landowners to provide advice, information, etc
Managing specific projects	WRAP, Community Contracting Initiative (CCI), Healthy Soils, Timber Stations, Certification
Monitoring and evaluation	Annual monitoring round with partners and delivery plan
Marketing and publicity	Press, radio and TV coverage for Mersey Forest activities
Involving people	Through promoting consultation, events and campaigns, CCI, talks and fielding calls about The Mersey Forest
Influencing and advocacy	Input into regional documents, hosting events to highlight the work of the Forest Partnership
Research and development	Developing new ideas to implement The Mersey Forest, carrying out practical research to assist future delivery
Internal support	Provided by administration staff within the Forest Team to enable all the above to happen



3.1 Our values

In achieving our aims, our values are important. The role of The Mersey Forest Team is to enable and coordinate the delivery of The Forest Plan. In doing so, we have a number of key partnership values that underpin our work:

- Our focus is on delivery - action on the ground, supported, enabled and facilitated by The Forest Team
- We try to find ways to say “yes” rather than reasons to say “no”
- The Forest Team sits in the middle of an expanding and dynamic network of landowners, groups and organisations providing a wealth of knowledge and experience to draw on - The Forest Team has a role as a hub; putting people who need information in touch with those who have it
- We have a focus on trees and woodland as the most flexible habitat for delivering sustained multiple benefits - but we also have a goal to create a mosaic of habitats that will provide ecological networks and an attractive landscape
- Our aspirations are for long term community involvement and to develop a sense of place for the Forest.

3.2 Our responsibilities

The Forest Team co-ordinates much of the activity of the Partnership, and is sometimes seen as the face of The Forest. It is important that we try to ensure that we act responsibly not just with our land, business and community based activities, but also in the way in which we conduct our own business.

Whilst we do not have the resource to be able to carry out a full audit and produce a Corporate Social Responsibility report, we can start to look at how “fair” we are to those in The Mersey Forest Partnership. We focus on six key areas of our work:

Table 5

Categories	Values
Suppliers	Treating suppliers with respect and understanding their business needs.
Employees and their families	Employees really are our only asset. We respect the need for a work-life balance and work to create an environment in which people can thrive.
Our wider network	The Forest Team aims to provide the same high quality, professional service to the whole Forest network, from community groups to regional bodies.
Funders	The Forest Team aims to produce high quality funding applications and then deliver high quality projects for funders, to deliver the Forest Plan.
Partners	Partnership is the basis for the work of The Forest Team. The Forest Partnership put the Team in place to help them deliver The Mersey Forest.
Environment	We are mindful of the impact that we have on the wider environment and want to reduce the pressure that we place on the environment in our work.

A full assessment is available at www.merseyforest.org.uk.

3.3. How the Forest Team operates

Over the last two years the Forest Team has been recognised at North of England Business Excellence awards demonstrating that the Team endeavours to deliver high quality projects and value for money for partners through effective organisation processes and a culture of improvement.

The team works at several levels:

Table 6

Level	Activity	Reason
National	Promoting The Mersey Forest, lobbying for resources	To keep the work of the Forest Partnership in the view of national bodies, promoting the Forest as an effective delivery mechanism that is achieving activity on the ground
Regional	Promoting The Mersey Forest, lobbying for resources, linking to regional policies	Increasing focus on regions has meant that we have to try to show how The Mersey Forest continues to deliver key regional priorities and is an effective delivery mechanism for policy and strategy implementation
Forest Wide	Within and with partner organisations, making sure that we are delivering their priorities and aspirations for The Mersey Forest, supporting and co-ordinating the partnership	The main reason for having the Team in place was/is to provide this co-ordinating and supporting function for the Partnership, carrying out activities that individual members of the Partnership have decided are best done through the Team - working with landowners, supporting communities and timber business, developing projects, bidding for resources, promoting the Forest, etc
Community	With individuals and local groups who wish to help create The Mersey Forest	Providing support, guidance, advice, resources to help achieve activity on the ground, providing links to organisations who can implement a project where needed

The activities detailed in the table above can be categorised to show the general roles of the Team.

The skills or competences needed to undertake these roles are:

Table 7

Competences	
Skills	Summarised as...
Developing and delivering programmes and projects, providing excellent service to funders and beneficiaries to deliver outputs on budget, on time, so that the team is seen as a 'safe pair of hands' for project delivery.	Project management
Providing, advice, guidance, contacts and information, supporting projects and finding ways to overcome barriers or difficulties that may stop good Community Forest projects happening.	Facilitating and enabling
Keeping all members of the Partnership informed, broadening understanding and highlighting progress	Communicating
Being aware of what is happening in the area and what outside factors are influencing us, informing others about what we do	Networking
Developing new ideas, looking to try new ways to deliver the Forest Plan more effectively and seeing if they work - not being afraid to make mistakes	Innovating and evaluating
Building confidence, skills and aspiration to help deliver the Forest Plan	Capacity building
Providing the detailed expertise to enable people to make good decisions about their Community Forest project. Developing and managing projects and funding for the partnership.	Technical and specialist skills
Creating the best political environment for the Forest and getting the best results for the Forest Partnership	Influencing and negotiating

These competences form the basis for our team training and development plans.



4 KEY ISSUES

4.1 Local Government Reorganisation

The new employing body for some members of The Mersey Forest Team will be Cheshire West and Chester. For the last 18 years Cheshire County Council have provided an excellent service to the Partnership and the Forest Team will need to build up the same level of relationships and joint work with the new authority.

A recent report looking at potential alternative employing mechanisms for the Forest Team stated that whilst there are many alternative mechanisms, the advantages offered by a local authority employing body were significant and were not outweighed by the alternative options such as a development company or trust.

Whilst not a re-organisation, the development of the Liverpool City Region will mean that The Mersey Forest Partnership needs to try to embed green infrastructure and the Forest Plan into the new arrangements to ensure support for the work of the Forest within the new City Region structures.

In 2009/10 a key issue for the Partnership will be the negotiation and agreement on a new Partnership Agreement.

4.2 Funding

Funding for environmental projects and programmes has dropped significantly with the loss of Objective 1 and 2, and with the North West Operational Programme focusing its resources on direct job creation and Gross Value Added (GVA), rather than on the underlying green infrastructure and quality of life issues that support economic development.

Funds are now more tightly focused and that means that the Forest Team has to be even more aware of local circumstances, and work to bring together a range of funding sources to target at a project.

In order to secure resources the Team has to continue to deliver projects efficiently and effectively, show good value for money and be innovative in the way that we approach businesses and the public sector. These are all issues highlighted in our Balanced Scorecard approach.

4.3 Green Infrastructure

The Mersey Forest Team is at the forefront of championing the concept of green infrastructure planning. Green infrastructure planning is becoming increasingly familiar to a wide range of professionals involved in economic and land use planning.

The Forest Team needs to maintain its lead role in this area and also to provide support to partner organisations in their development of green infrastructure strategies, frameworks and plans. Key actions in 2009/10 will be to:

- Develop the Green Infrastructure Unit
- Complete the Merseyside Green Infrastructure Framework and initiate the Cheshire and Warrington version
- Deliver the Critical Green Infrastructure study and continue our work on green infrastructure and climate change.

4.4 England's Trees, Woods and Forests

The new Defra strategy for England's Trees, Woods and Forests provides the national policy context for community forestry. There is an opportunity to highlight to Defra, through Forestry Commission and Natural England, how we are helping to deliver this strategy. In addition, the Regional Forestry Framework is due to be revised this year. The Mersey Forest Partnership again needs to ensure that the framework recognises the importance of community forestry and the ability to deliver a range of economic and social benefits through environmental improvements.

4.5 GVA and wellbeing

In 2009/10 and beyond we will continue to develop the way in which we are able to assess Mersey Forest projects' ability to deliver against economic targets such as Gross Value Added (GVA) and the emerging targets around well being. This will enable us to more effectively align our outputs and outcomes against the monitoring frameworks of partners and funders.

4.6 Education

Over the last 15 years the Forest Partnership has worked with over half of the schools in the Forest area. We will continue this award winning work to improve the quality of outdoor play in schools, with its benefits for health and learning. We are also looking to work with partners to ensure that schools have the greatest opportunity to use the outdoors for formal learning. The Forest Schools programme is being trialled this year as one possible mechanism to enable this.

4.7 Health

Late in 2008, the Directors of Public Health across The Mersey Forest agreed to work on a more strategic basis with the Forest Team, in order to try to maximise the health impacts of projects and programmes and also to ensure that experience and contacts made during projects are not lost but become the basis for improving future work. We plan to initiate this joint work in 2009/10.

5 CONTACT

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Photo: Mike Roberts



THE MERSEY FOREST

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