

# THE MERSEY FOREST TEAM REPORT

## APRIL 2016

### NEWS

#### BREAKING NEWS – LIVERPOOL BID

The Team are currently working with the Liverpool Business Improvement District (BID) on a green infrastructure audit. The Team commissioned a questionnaire with the great news that 92% of businesses agreed that green infrastructure would enhance the BID, and nearly 70% saying it would benefit their business.

The top three benefits identified were:

- Increased footfall
- Attracting new business
- Increased spending levels

In order to take this forward, three out of four businesses said that would like to become a member of a task group enabling the planning of the greening of the BID.

#### PUBLICATIONS

In collaboration with Liverpool JMU and the Forest Schools Association, Clare Austin and Jo Sayers have contributed to a major new reference work focusing on Forest School and natural play. The chapter is entitled 'Play and learning outdoors engaging with the natural world using Forest School'. The work is part of a new book, Geographies of Children and Young People by Springer Press.

Susannah Gill discussion on the terms ecosystem services and green infrastructure planning are part of a major new reference book. Susannah outlined the two concepts, their background and how they are both used within the Routledge Handbook of Ecosystem Services. The handbook aims to provide a comprehensive reference text on ecosystem services, integrating natural and social science (including economics).

Clare Olver has been named co-author on a Japanese academic paper, which has now been accepted into the Japanese Landscape Institute Journal. The paper tells of the role of partnerships in the transformation of Northwich Woodlands from derelict land into a vibrant community asset. This follows on from work the Team have been doing with Japanese

academics for many years, including their visit last September. There is also a second paper in the pipeline, around the story of Cheshire's salt industry and how it has shaped the landscape, local people and economy.

## EVENTS

The largest ever England's Community Forestry Conference took place in Birmingham last month, bringing together over 80 representatives from across the forestry sector. The day was chaired by Sir Harry Studholme, Chair of the Forestry Commission, and speakers included Beccy Speight, Chief Executive of The Woodland Trust.

## EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES

### SUPPORTING GROUPS AND NETWORKS

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

- Friends of Anderton and Marbury in Northwich, Cheshire will be holding their popular AGM and quiz night on Monday 16th May.
- Friends of Marshall's Arm, Northwich will be running a dawn chorus walk on 16th April from 7-9am.
- Friends of Owley Wood, Weaverham, Cheshire have detailed plans for site improvements with applications of funding to be submitted to Woodland Trust and Saltscape.
- Friends of Church Wood, Whitegate in Cheshire are continuing with regular woodland management activities and they have supported the launch of the Woodland Network.
- Friends of Mill and Alder Woods starred on BBC Radio Merseyside breakfast show last month and were featured in the Liverpool Echo. They used the opportunity to promote their work, encourage new members and support the launch of the Woodland Trust's Woodland Network which provides grants for groups managing woodlands.
- Friends of Clinkham, Moss Bank and Carr Mill. The annual woodland cup will take place on Friday 24th June 2016 at Windermere Playing Fields, adjacent to the wood.

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

## GREEN STREETS NESTON

The Team has successfully delivered a street tree planting programme in Neston working with Cheshire West and Chester Council and Neston Town Council along with local residents.

## WILDLIFE

### COLLIERS MOSS

Lancashire Wildlife Trust has been undertaking a programme of access and biodiversity work. The contract started November last year and the majority of on-site works are due to complete by the end of April, with a remaining package of work being allocated to early September in order to avoid disturbance to breeding birds and damage to wetland habitat. Reed cutting has taken place in the lagoons by a specialist contractor with work approved by Natural England.

The Team has been working with St. Helens Council to assist in the upgrading and enhancing of some of the Public Rights of Way on site.

Natural England has been advising the Team on the biodiversity works and the Forest hosted a visit for ten of their staff in March looking at providing an overview of the site in relation to Bold Forest Park, and looking at opportunities for management. Options for Countryside Stewardship are currently being explored for the continuing management for some areas of the site.

An event to celebrate the new access works, supported through Cory Environmental Trust, will be held on Saturday 14th May at 11.30am and opened by the Mayor of St. Helens.

Over the past few months the Team has been carrying out consultations with individuals and organisations to assess the best ways to develop Colliers Moss for the benefit of the local community.

### ECOLOGICAL NETWORK - CHESHIRE WEST

As part of the broader collaboration with Cheshire West and Chester Council's Total Environment Team, the Forest Team has helped to develop Ecological Network mapping for the Council area, to be incorporated into the Local Plan.

## WOODFUEL AND FOREST INDUSTRIES

### WOOD ALLOTMENTS

The project has been awarded a grant by the Ashden Trust to develop the programme following a successful pilot in Northwich Woodlands. It has been 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, and recent discussions have been held with partners about how Wood Allotments can be rolled out further.

## LANDOWNER SUPPORT

As part of the Forest Advisory Consortium England (FACE), the Mersey Forest representing the Community Forest Trust have completed the second Forestry Commission contract for forestry business support and will continue to assist some local businesses by working with the respective LEADER programmes in Cheshire and Warrington and in Merseyside. The FACE consortium is currently exploring further funding opportunities.

Countryside Stewardship is currently open for Higher Tier applications. This closes on 30th April 2016 for non-woodland options and 31st May for schemes which support woodland options only.

## BIOMASS

The Forest is continuing to work alongside the Stobart Group, as part of the successful Regional Growth Fund bid, to identify under-managed woodland and assess their potential for biomass supply. Following meetings with partner Local Authorities regarding an initial assessment of timber availability for the supply to the new CHP plant being built in Widnes, further discussions have also included the potential to include waste wood/arboricultural arisings as part of a supply contract.

Stobarts are currently recruiting for four woodland surveyors and a forestry planning manager to build on their current programme of work with the first area being Cheshire West and Chester.

## WATER MANAGEMENT

### URBAN CATCHMENT FORESTRY

This Team are about to commence work on a three year LIFE+ project. Working with colleagues at Community Forest Trust, the project will focus on the use of Urban Catchment Forestry to deliver multiple ecosystem services in urban areas.

## RECREATION AND SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL

### NEW DISCOVER THE MERSEY FOREST

The Discover The Mersey Forest website ([www.discoverthemerseyforest.co.uk](http://www.discoverthemerseyforest.co.uk)) is a popular source of information on walks, cycling routes and woodlands to visit. However, it has ceased to work in the latest version of Internet Explorer and is increasingly dated in its appearance and functionality. Furthermore, there would be important benefits from incorporating it into the main Mersey Forest website ([www.merseyforest.org.uk](http://www.merseyforest.org.uk)) rather than keeping it separate.

The Team has therefore initiated a project to build a new version of Discover The Mersey Forest that is incorporated into the main website. This will be funded from Nature4Health and STEP.

### SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT ENHANCEMENT PACKAGE (STEP) AND SUSTAINABLE URBAN DEVELOPMENT (SUD)

The Team is delivering complementary tree planting programmes alongside Liverpool City Region partners as part of the STEP Programme. The Team has also been involved in developing the SUD Strategy for Liverpool City Region, which incorporates green infrastructure and sustainable travel. If approved, around €2M will be available for green infrastructure projects in the City Region as part of the European Structural and Investment Funds.

### KNOWSLEY

The Team is working with partners on a project to explore alternative management and funding models for Knowsley MBC's public parks and green spaces.

## HEALTH AND WELLBEING

### NATURE4HEALTH

The project has made a very promising start with 11 community-based delivery partners, delivering 15 activity programmes across Liverpool, Sefton, St. Helens, Warrington and Cheshire West & Chester. Plans are already underway to extend this to Knowsley too. Jo Sayers is a Nordic Walking leader and is running weekly walks at Whitby Park, Ellesmere Port and soon at Risley Moss.

Work is about to commence on a bespoke database and NHS Information Governance compliant social prescribing software. Social Return on Investment will also be embedded within this to enable us to continuously monitor value for money.

The first wave of participants has also had the opportunity to opt into the research study with LJMU which will measure personal development and resilience gained during activities. A second study with The University of Liverpool, The Richmond Fellowship and Liverpool Recovery & Resilience is also just about to start.

As the tranche of 12 week activity programmes come to a close, work around developing an active Participation Panel will begin. As service users who have experienced what is on offer, it is hoped their input will be a valuable contribution to future programme development.

## PLAY AND EDUCATION

### FOREST SCHOOL

Funding has been awarded from the Ernest Cook Foundation to complement the Smurfit Kappa funding. The Ernest Cook Foundation monies will help support the preparation of Forest School areas in school grounds, as well as providing mentoring for staff. Funding has also been confirmed for Forest Schools in St. Helens sponsored by NGF.

In order to ensure sustainability, the focus is on ensuring members of staff become trained at the target schools to ensure Forest School continues after the funding comes to an end. For instance, at Kingsley Primary School the Team are supporting two trainee Forest School Leaders to become fully qualified. The Team will also help to deliver OCN Level 3 Forest School Leader Training in June.

## CULTURE AND LANDSCAPE

### SALTSCAPE

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 Saltscap area for providing further support in managing their woodlands. The work will focus on the areas of Ancient Semi Natural Woodlands and Local Wildlife Sites working alongside Cheshire Wildlife Trust in delivering this element of work.

Further site visits have taken place including discussions for management with the Woodland Trust and Friends of Owley Wood.

### SEFTON COAST

A Forest School programme is being delivered at the Woodlands Primary School. Sefton Coast Rangers are running Forest School sessions at Formby, and Valewood Primary School is looking to use the Pinfold Lane Site in the future following site set up by the Team.

Wood allotments are being set up to utilise the resources of the coastal woodlands and introduce people to cutting wood for domestic use.

The Team submitted a successful bid from DCLG to support the development of the Sefton Coast Partnership Community Team.

## GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE PLANNING

### NORTHWICH BID GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN

The Team has finalised a green infrastructure plan for the Northwich Business Improvement District. It recommends a series of 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. Feedback from the Business Improvement District Board is anticipated shortly.

### SPADES (URBAN ECOSYSTEM SERVICES ASSESSMENT TOOL)

This year-long partnership project, led by eCountability Ltd and funded by Innovate UK, is now into its third quarter. The prototype urban ecosystem services assessment tool for businesses and Local Authorities is now under development. The Forest Team is leading on two work packages: one researching flooding and climate models and the other applying the prototype tool to a case study in Liverpool. The case study will be the Liverpool Business Improvement Districts. A first version of the tool should soon be ready to apply.

### ECOSYSTEM SERVICES OF PRIVATE GARDENS

The Team is working on a NERC project which assesses the contribution of private domestic gardens to ecosystem service provision in Manchester. This is with Manchester Metropolitan University and the University of Leicester. The project will gather information by crowd sourcing, using an online survey to be developed by The Mersey Forest Team.