

THE MERSEY FOREST TEAM REPORT

JANUARY 2016

NEWS

Suzanne Londra has joined the team as our Nature4Health Officer. Suzanne previously worked at Mersey Care and comes with a wealth of experience around engaging hard to reach groups.

COLLIERS MOSS

Lancashire Wildlife Trust won the contract to carry out a programme of access and biodiversity work on Colliers Moss. Work started late November last year and will continue in 2016. The mossland scrub clearance work at Burtonwood Moss is almost complete, as is the vegetation management of key access routes within the site.

The next phase of works to be undertaken includes improvements to the main entrance ways into the site and reed bed clearance in the lagoons. The team is also working with St.Helens Borough 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 including heathland restoration, lowland bog and reed bed management which is incorporated into the works.

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. Just under £10k from Awards for All was granted and results from the study will inform future funding bids.

FOREST SCHOOL

Funding has been awarded from the Ernest Cook Foundation to complement the Smurfit Kappa funded Forest School Project over the next 12 months, this funding will cover the Liverpool area.

The Ernest Cook Foundation monies will help support the preparation of Forest School areas in schools as well as providing mentoring for school staff through running sessions with children from the schools.

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 Team support is complete. For instance, at Kingsley Primary School the team will be supporting a trainee Forest School Leader

to become fully qualified, and both the school and children's centre who share the site are keen to get two new members of staff trained.

GREEN STREETS NESTON

The team is delivering a street tree planting programme in Neston working with Cheshire West and Chester Council and Neston Town Council along with local residents.

LANDOWNER SUPPORT

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

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. An application masterclass was held in December at Risley Moss which invited local businesses and landowners to hear about the current funding streams available through the Rural Development Programme. Representatives from both the Cheshire West and Warrington and also the Cheshire East LEADER programmes and the Forestry Commission also provided information and assistance for their schemes which opened last year.

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

The Forest is continuing to work alongside the Stobart Group, as part of the successful £5.5M Regional Growth Fund bid, to identify under-managed woodland and assess their potential for biomass supply. Individual meetings with partner local authorities have taken place in order to include local authority woodlands within the 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.

LIVERPOOL CITY REGION GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE PROPOSALS

Together with Arup, the team has completed a Green Infrastructure Prospectus for Liverpool City Region LEP. This sets out a pipeline of commissionable projects in both green infrastructure and renewables at Strategic Investment Areas and brownfield land sites.

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. 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.

Similar evaluations are being proposed for the Nature4Health programme as part of a PhD with Liverpool John Moores University. Students from MSc Health Psychology, Sport Psychology and Public Health will also evaluate these services. This will investigate the benefits of 'green' therapy and 'green' exercise further.

NATURE4HEALTH

The project is now up and running and gathering speed. The Nature4Health Officer has been appointed, starting in post at the end of October 2015. A successful partnership event was held in early January with a focus on effective delivery, academic research and engaging hard to reach participants. The first activity of 2016 commenced the next day with TVC's Green Gym at the Countess of Chester Health Park; more activities are scheduled over the coming months.

NEW DISCOVER THE MERSEY FOREST

The Discover The Mersey Forest website (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) 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.

NORTHWICH BID GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN

The team is now working on significant revisions to the green infrastructure plan for the Northwich Business Improvement District. It will recommend 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.

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.

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 of Ancient Semi Natural Woodlands and Local Wildlife Sites working alongside Cheshire Wildlife Trust in delivering this element of work. Sites are currently being visited within the Saltscape area to provide advice to the landowners and to assess the potential for improvements.

SEFTON COAST

The team have completed delivery of a programme of community activities as part of the Sefton Coast Landscape Partnership Project funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund. The aim was 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.

Wood allotments are being set up to utilise the resources of the coastal woodlands, with training courses held in November to introduce people to cutting wood for domestic use.

The team submitted a bid for £10k from DCLG to support the development of the Sefton Coast Partnership Community Team – this has been approved.

SUPPORTING GROUPS AND NETWORKS

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

- **Friends of Anderton and Marbury** in Northwich, Cheshire have just printed and distributed their popular Event Programme for 2016.
- **Friends of Marshall's Arm**, Northwich have been preparing a programme of future activities.
- **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.
- **Friends of Mill and Alder Woods** group in Liverpool are planning activities to deliver their five year action plan, looking to deliver a fishing programme in partnership with local anglers, funded by the local housing association.
- **Friends of Clinkham, Moss Bank and Carr Mill.**

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.

SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT ENHANCEMENT PACKAGE AND SUSTAINABLE URBAN DEVELOPMENT (SUD)

Mersey Forest is delivering complementary tree planting programmes alongside LCR partner deliveries as part of the STEP Programme. We have 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.

TOTAL ENVIRONMENT

As part of the broader collaboration with Cheshire West and Chester Council’s Total Environment team, the Forest team is helping to develop an Ecological Network for the Council area, to be incorporated into the Local Plan.

URBAN ECOSYSTEM SERVICES ASSESSMENT TOOL (SPADES)

This year-long partnership project, led by eCountability Ltd and funded by Innovate UK, is now into its second quarter and has been named ‘SPADES’. It will develop an urban ecosystem services assessment tool for businesses and local authorities. The Mersey Forest 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.

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.