

THE MERSEY FOREST TEAM REPORT

SEPTEMBER 2015

NEWS

The team has hosted a recent visit of Japanese academics, led by Professor Tomoko Miyagawa, from the University of Wakayama. Prof. Miyagawa has been undertaking research on the work of the Forest for more than ten years – with papers published about the forests in St. Helens and Northwich. This year the focus of their visit was the value of the green space and industrial heritage around Northwich and how this benefits the economy, tourism and residents of the town. Part of their visit was spent discussing future funding collaborations.

Tom Middleton, the first of our Green Infrastructure Ambassadors, has been working with the team over the summer to explore the potential for “crowd funding” of projects as part of his Masters dissertation.

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 now complete in Liverpool on this £1.4 million project in partnership with the Cass Foundation. Community Forest Trust acted as the accountable body for the Catchment Restoration Fund grant 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

The tender for the access and biodiversity work has been added to the Chest procurement portal, with a closing date of 16th October. It is anticipated that work will start in early November, once a contractor has been appointed, and continue over the winter months.

The work will include enhancement of entrance ways and vegetation management along key access routes in order to make the site more inviting for users.

Natural England has been advising the team on the biodiversity works including heathland restoration, lowland bog and reed bed management which will be incorporated into the works.

Over the summer 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. 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.

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 in Toxteth, with 45 children enjoying weekly Forest School sessions from May to March 2016. 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 30 children benefitting from Forest School sessions being held at Enterprise South Liverpool Academy. A series of family events to encourage natural play is running alongside the scheme.

FUNDING

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

Bids recently approved include:

- Proposals for the Sustainable Transport Enhancement Package (STEP) in Liverpool City Region will provide £70k to establish existing greening along LSTF routes and develop new greened routes alongside STEP Capital schemes.
- Coastal Communities Team – part of a programme under DCLG £10,000 grant towards development of Sefton Coast Community team.
- LIFE+ £250,000 grant towards progressing urban catchment forestry

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. The contract value is £50k to support 55 businesses across the country.

Two events, in conjunction with the Forestry Commission and Local Actions Groups from West Cheshire and Warrington and Cheshire East, are to be held to provide landowners and business with advice and support for applications to the various rural funding streams including LEADER and Countryside Productivity. The events will be held on 12th November and 1st December.

The new Countryside Stewardship Scheme (CS) jointly run by Natural England, Forestry Commission and the Rural Payments Agency opened on 1 July. 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 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. Sites within the Mersey Forest area have already had some sample inventory work carried out, with detailed management planning work on a smaller number of sites due to happen this month.

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 GI and renewables at Strategic Investment Areas (SIAs) and DUN sites.

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 to employment along these greened routes. 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.

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. The Forest School research is been prepared to be submitted to Children's Geographies - a peer-reviewed journal.

Similar evaluations are been proposed for the Nature4Health programmes across Liverpool, Sefton and St Helens 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 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 team has now almost completed the development of a green infrastructure plan for the Northwich Business Improvement District. It recommends 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.

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.

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 includes over the next few weeks 12 Forest School sessions with Crosby and Southport schools at Ainsdale, and sessions with uniformed groups (Beavers and Cubs). From mid-July there was 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 are being set up to utilise the resources of the coastal woodlands, with training courses 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 was approved in July.

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 celebrating the renewal of their Green Flag award in October and have a well prepared plan of activities developed for 2016.
- **Friends of Marshall's Arm**, Northwich have been preparing a programme of future activities
- **Friends of Owley Wood**, Weaverham, Cheshire are planning their next phase of works linked in with the Wildlife Trust's Natural Futures Project
- **Friends of Church Wood**, Whitegate in Cheshire, have a full programme for the winter with some thinning works, removal of squirrel damaged trees and fencing works.
- **Friends of Mill and Alder Woods** group in Liverpool are currently updating their five year action plan, looking to deliver a fishing programme in partnership with local anglers, funded by the local housing association.

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 URBAN DEVELOPMENT (SUD)

The team has 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 GI projects in the City Region as part of the European Structural and Investment Funds.

URBAN ECOSYSTEM SERVICES ASSESSMENT TOOL

This year-long partnership project, led by eCountability Ltd and funded by Innovate UK, is now underway. 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.